

Happiness and impulse buying: An exploration into the perceptions of female consumers aged between 18 and 35 in Germany

Anja D. Siekmann (2009)

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Happiness and Impulse Buying:
An Exploration into the Perceptions of
Female Consumers aged between
18 and 35 years in Germany

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Impulse behaviour in general and impulse buying in particular have a long history of negative associations in research. Consumers are advised by the popular press to refrain from impulse buying. Marketing practitioners, on the other hand, strive to further increase consumer impulse buying expenditures, which have already been on the increase for decades. This may be an indication that impulse buying makes consumers feel happy. Although the topic happiness has received considerable attention in various fields of research, there is little evidence of an in-depth empirical exploration of the role of happiness in impulse buying, which was addressed by this study.

This thesis was based on the phenomenological paradigm and adopted a subjective stance, exploring happiness in female consumers' impulse buying experiences. In this inductive exploratory study, qualitative data were collected from focus groups and individual interviews with female consumers aged between 18 and 35 years in Germany. This research sought to investigate how happiness evolves over the impulse buying experience, which was addressed by the longitudinal nature of collecting data over a period of three months in weekly individual interviews. The empirical evidence showed that the pursuit of happiness is one of the major motivations for impulse buying and the subsequent evaluation of the purchase. For instance, the presentation of a newly acquired item to other people with the intention of receiving positive feedback is one of the eight themes which emerged from the iterative process of data analysis. The findings indicate that impulse buying is often appreciated by consumers as an enjoyable experience which may yield positive emotions even after careful reflection some time after the purchase. Impulse buying should not generally be devalued as the dark side of consumption. This research underlines the complexity of impulse buying and indicates overlaps and interdependencies with planned buying. Suggestions for marketing practitioners and retail managers on how to increase impulse buying activities are implicit in these findings.

Acknowledgements

I survived my PhD.

This would not have been possible without the care and ongoing support of numerous people who looked after me in a medical, academic, and social sense. For surviving my PhD in the actual meaning of the word I am most grateful to my medical doctors Dres. Björn Kahoun, Sommer, Augschöll and Ritzmann for their outstanding competence, wise decision-making, and empathetic care. In the academic world, my supervisory team with Professor Dr Denise Skinner, Professor Dr Jillian Farquhar and Mr Chris Blackburn saved me from drowning by providing invaluable support. Thanks for helping me overcome a 'possibly' too structured mindset for this kind of research.

Thanks need to go to the participants of the focus groups and case studies: without their voluntary participation and willingness to open up and share personal insights and experiences about shopping this research would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my parents and my brother Bernd who were very understanding in all those years when I went home for a relaxed visit but instead spent my time locked up in my bedroom with a dozen files littered on the floor.

I had to defend my thesis from day one. The very supportive camp one was led by my biggest cheerleaders and friends Stephen Christie - "your studies come first" - and Claudia Volk with whom I spent hours having fun conversations about impulse buying experiences. Camp two included my dearest friend Petra Zach who was in the beginning not quite convinced that studying for a PhD makes sense at all. Petra relentlessly challenged me, for example: "But this is common sense. I could have told you all this." The experience was at times great fun.

Was it worth it? No doubt. I was utterly convinced that I would regret one day if I had not tried to earn myself a PhD. It is a dream come true.

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¹ Bummeln [bʊml̩n] verb. German term for window shopping, explained in Chapter 5.8.2.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the twenty-first century happiness is still considered as “one of life's continuing mysteries” (Bloch, 2001, p.A4). Yet, there is common agreement that happiness is associated with a positive emotion throughout most of history and in today's life. Impulse buying, on the other hand, being associated with impulsive behaviour has a long history of negative associations (Böhm-Bawerk, 1959; Scherhorn et al., 1990; Valence et al., 1988). Most recently, impulse buying has been characterised as a problematic consumer behaviour, emphasising its connection to negative emotions and potentially leading to harmful consequences due to its occasionally compulsive nature (Silvera et al., 2008). Does the impulse buy of an item make female shoppers feel happy? The literature also provides a number of contributions in support of positive aspects of impulse buying, including feelings of pleasure and happiness (for example Dittmar et al., 1996; Hausman, 2000; Rook, 1987; Wood, 2005). Yet, the degree of understanding happiness in the context of impulse buying remains limited.

1.1 Background to Study: Academic Perspective

Consumer researchers have only given comparatively little attention to investigating impulse consumption as observed by Dholakia (2000). The work on impulse buying has mainly concentrated on measuring and providing definitions and thereby neglecting an investigation of the factors influencing our tendency to buy on impulse (Youn and Faber, 2000). With regard to happiness, Bagozzi et al. (2002) suggest that in addition to post purchase satisfaction, which has already become a central topic, consumer researchers should give more attention to other positive and negative purchase emotions including happiness.

Although the interest in researching the pursuit of happiness has been increasing in recent years (for example Hsee and Hastie, 2006; Myers and Diener, 1997; Strongman, 2003), there is little evidence of an interdisciplinary approach with an integration of findings from different fields. Yet, cross fertilisation could advance our knowledge about happiness. Similarly, previous models of impulsive buying in economics, consumer research and psychology show little evidence of cross-fertilisation (Dittmar and Drury, 2000). Limited evidence exists of any particular research into the connection between impulse buying and happiness with a

combined analysis from a marketing perspective on consumer research as well as from a psychological behavioural point of view.

The stigma attached to impulsive behaviour in general is also associated with impulse buying in particular. Articles in the popular press (for example Evening Chronicle, 2005; Klein, 2008) shed a negative light on impulse buying and provide advice on how best to avoid it. Some researchers refer to impulse buying as the dark side of consumption with an emphasis on the predominance of negative aspects (for example Mick, 1996; Rook and Fisher, 1995). On the other hand the retail and marketing literature design strategies to encourage in-store buyer decisions for unplanned buying (for example Wood, 2005), which marketing practitioners apply for example at the point-of-sale (Dholakia, 2000). If impulse buying experiences were overwhelmingly leading to regret and guilt it is difficult to understand why the number of impulse purchases has been growing since the 1940s. Previous research reveals only little evidence of the effects of an impulse buy on happiness. Rook and Fisher (1995) demand that we need a more detailed understanding of how, when and to what extent judgements about the appropriateness of impulse purchases actually occur. Much of the previous work emphasises the short-term gratification of impulse buying (for example Youn and Faber, 2000), but provides little evidence of longer term impacts. There is little evidence of an in-depth exploration of the intensity and duration of feelings of gratification or happiness in this context. It remains largely unanswered how a positive or negative initial evaluation of an impulse buy evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience once the initial euphoria of the purchase has disappeared. Previous analyses of the underlying reasons for impulse buying have been rather broad, covering a whole range of motivations, however with limited regard to a detailed investigation into particular motivations, namely happiness.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of this research on 'happiness and impulse buying' is to increase understanding as to whether impulse buying makes female shoppers feel happy. This study sheds more light on the role of emotions attached to impulse buying experiences, namely happiness, as demanded by previous research (for example Bagozzi et al., 2002). The approach of this study will integrate and cross-fertilise findings from different fields about happiness on the one hand and impulse buying on the other hand. Among others these fields comprise psychology, sociology,

philosophy, and marketing. Another contribution to knowledge is the exploration of the stigma of impulse buying or 'dark side'. This will be investigated with particular regard to the impact of impulse buying on the consumer and their evaluation after the purchase. The current lack of research on long term impacts of impulse buying will be addressed by a longitudinal data collection approach. The data will be collected over a period of three months during which time the participants talk about their latest impulse buys on a weekly basis. This approach enables an immediate feedback with the buyer still recalling details and providing an accurate narrative of the experience while possibly still experiencing emotions attached to this particular purchase. In addition, this longitudinal approach provides an exploration on how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience and thereby contributes to knowledge.

There are several reasons for exploring the perceptions of female consumers only, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.4. One of the reasons is that compared to men, female consumers tend to buy more often on impulse (Dittmar and Beattie, 1998; Dittmar et al., 1995, 1996; Verplanken and Herabadi, 2001), which makes them more likely to experience a number of impulse buys over the period of three months of this study. Another reason is that women, more so than men, recall more often and more intense emotional experiences, including being sensitive to their feelings, being anxious, sad and happy (for example Feldman Barrett et al., 1998; Grossman and Wood, 1993; Kring et al., 1994). Therefore it appears that they can provide more detailed insights into emotions attached to their impulse buying experiences compared to men.

This research investigates the age group of female consumers from 18 to 35 years in Germany. The study was limited to one country because this study did not aim to compare consumer experiences across countries. Age was chosen to delimit the scope of this study because it is considered as one of the most important demographic characteristic in consumer marketing and research and plays a central role in determining consumer behaviour (Mitchell, 1995). Details on focussing on the age group 18 to 35 years will be discussed in Chapter 2.4.

The overall aim of this research is to increase understanding as to whether impulse buying makes female shoppers feel happy. Through an in-depth analysis of impulse buying experiences of female consumers aged 18 to 35 years in Germany, this research specifically pursues the following research objectives:

- To understand the role of happiness in impulse buying
- To explore how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience
- To assess impulse buying as the 'dark' side of consumption

For this exploratory study an inductive approach based on the phenomenological stance appeared appropriate to explore motivations for and impacts of impulse buying with particular regard to the role of happiness. This was coupled with a qualitative methodology, which was justified because it generates rich descriptions and remains flexible for the emergence of new themes. On the contrary, previous research has explored impulse buying in a number of quantitative studies, for example measuring precursors of impulse buying (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998) or normative influences on impulse buying behaviour (Rook and Fisher, 1995). Telephone surveys (for example Wood, 1998a), lab experiments (for example Adelaar et al., 2003; Luo, 2005), deductive, quantitative studies with collecting data on questionnaires (Silvera et al., 2008) and positivist approaches with surveys and questionnaires (Verplanken et al., 2005) are popular data collection methods in investigating, respectively, measuring impulse buying. For the purpose of this research, however, the chosen research methodology and research design appeared more appropriate.

In this research, the collection of data from focus groups and individual interviews from several cases coupled with a longitudinal approach offered the depth and breadth of insights and allowed sufficient opportunity for a detailed description of emotions attached to the impulse buying experience.

1.3 A Personal Story: A Question for you

In addition to the academic perspective, a personal observation made me become interested in further exploring the role of happiness in impulse buying.

Are you happy?

You say you are doing everything possible to pursue your own personal happiness. I know you do. You say that this is the only thing that counts. So, it must be important, right? The choices you make are sometimes seemingly senseless, impulsive, on the spur of the moment without any consideration of future consequences. You act on impulse, follow your gut feeling and your hedonic

desires to satisfy your wants and needs. At times other people advise you to reconsider your impulse decision. But in that moment it appears to be the best choice for you to gain happiness. Are you happy for long? You take the risk of feeling guilty and full of regret. You say you are pursuing happiness. Does this make you feel happy?

For the same topics in question the choices you make are sometimes thought-through in much depth, carefully planned ahead, considering all potential consequences, taking a long term perspective into account and above all other people. Are you happy for long? You take the risk of feeling regret one day. You say you are pursuing happiness. Does this make you feel happy?

I am puzzled. I start reading. Aristotle (Aristotle, 2000) speaking of man achieving happiness only through virtuous activity. But do you really act virtuously to become happy? I carry on reading. During the time of the Reformation the pursuit of personal happiness was of no particular importance during one's lifetime and instead postponed until one's afterlife (Hills, 2001). But we met before and I know you never waited that long, or should you? I have to look for another explanation. In modern industrialised countries the consumers strive for happiness and consume for pleasure rather than need (Gabriel and Lang, 2006). Impulse buying is capable of generating feelings of euphoria in you. True, this is you. I know you, I have met you before. You are called the consumer.

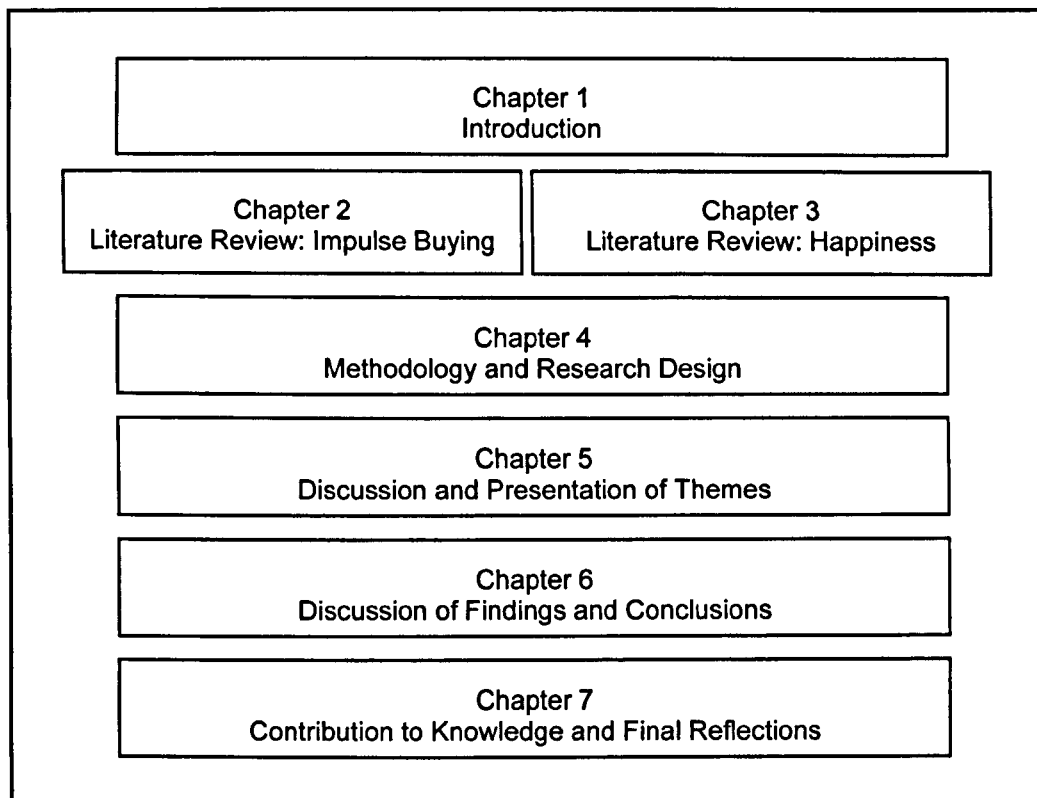
Since Socrates and Aristotle much has been written about happiness. Yet, this and further exploration of the literature about happiness only yields limited insight of its role in impulse buying. Similarly in the research on consumer behaviour, emotions such as happiness have been neglected until relatively recently (Bagozzi et al., 2002) providing an insufficient understanding of the role of happiness in consumer behaviour and in particular impulse buying.

My questions to you remain largely unanswered.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The chapters are structured in detail as illustrated in Figure 1.1:

Figure 1.1: Structure of Thesis



Chapter 1 introduces the academic background and presents the research aims and objectives. It also provides the personal motivation for this research.

Chapter 2 comprises current views on the characteristics of impulse buying and introduces the perception of impulse buying as the dark side of consumption. In addition, the key motivations in impulse buying are identified. This chapter also includes an evaluation of consumer decision-making and involvement. It concludes with evaluations of the experience after the impulse buy. Chapter 2 and 3 set the broad framework for the empirical study highlighting the gaps in the literature.

Chapter 3 explores important contributions to the topic happiness from Socrates to the current quality of life research. The meaning of the term happiness, its etymological roots and language and cultural differences between the German and English languages are discussed. Moreover, a chosen subset of emotion theories with a relation to impulse buying is introduced. Finally, this chapter explores the conditions of happy people.

Chapter 4 comprises the methodology and the research design of this study. This includes a discussion of the ontology and epistemology chosen for this study as well as their impact on the quality of this research. Furthermore the role of the researcher is critically evaluated. Finally the appropriateness of diverse methods of data collection and analysis is assessed in view of this study.

Chapter 5 deals with the analysis of data collected in focus groups and individual interviews with female consumers in Germany aged between 18 and 35 years. In addition to the discussion of the collected data itself, the findings are evaluated in the context of existing literature. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Chapter 6 builds on the emergent themes described in Chapter 5 and evaluates them in view of the research questions and the overall research aim. Answers will be provided on the research aim whether impulse buying makes female shoppers feel happy. The role of happiness in impulse buying will be evaluated from different angles. A longitudinal view on how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience will be presented. The section 'Out of the dark: The Bright Side of Consumption' refers to the research objective of exploring how 'dark' is impulse buying? Finally, the overall conclusion of the thesis will be provided by reviewing each research question.

Chapter 7 highlights the original contribution of this thesis to the existing knowledge. The implications are discussed and recommendations for further research are given. The study concludes with final reflections on the experience.

Chapter 2: Impulse Buying

2.1 Introduction

Impulsive behaviour has attracted the interests of philosophers, theologians, economists, psychologists, medical researchers and criminologists for many years. It has a long history of negative associations, being linked with immaturity and foolishness, weak willpower and lower intelligence, and even social deviance and criminality (Böhm-Bawerk, 1959; Scherhorn et al., 1990; Valence et al., 1988).

In consumer behaviour research, impulse buying is generally referred to as an emotional buying activity with limited or no regard to financial or other consequences (for example Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Rook and Hoch, 1985). Articles in the popular press shed a negative light on impulse buying (for example Evening Chronicle, 2005; Klein, 2008; Young, 1998), attracting readers with headlines such as 'Rubbish impulse buys' (Ehrlich, 2008). Some of these articles provide advice on how best to avoid impulse buying as described in the article 'Alvin Hall's Top 10 Tips for Sensible Spending' (Hall, 2004). On the other hand the retail and marketing literature design strategies to encourage in-store buyer decisions for unplanned buying (Wood, 2005). Marketing practitioners have been aware for a long time that impulsive consumer actions can be profitable and accordingly design store and web site layouts, product packaging as well as in-store promotional activities to foster impulsive purchases (Dholakia, 2000). Regarding these contradictory views on impulse buying, it is one of the objectives of this research to explore: how negative or 'dark' is impulse buying?

In the 1990s impulse buying accounted for up to 62 percent of supermarket sales and 80 percent of all purchases in certain product categories (Abrahams, 1997; Smith, 1996). Another study of in-store decision-making indicates that 53 percent of mass merchandise store purchases are unplanned (Point-of-Purchase Advertising Institute, 1995). According to a Danish study 90 percent of all consumers did not plan one third of their shopping (Warner, 1996). In the US approximately 85 percent of sweets and chewing gum, 75 percent of oral hygiene products and 70 percent of cosmetics are unplanned purchases (Warner, 1996). This indicates that impulse buying constitutes a noteworthy part of turnover in the retail environment. For years, the amount of impulse purchases has been increasing (Dittmar and Drury, 2000) and in recent years has been accelerated by

e-commerce, television shopping channels and the ongoing shift towards consumer-oriented societies around the world (Kacen and Lee, 2002). This trend may be affected by the current economic recession which may have an impact on the impulse buying behaviour. This would be interesting to investigate in future studies.

While some products are more frequently purchased on impulse than others, there are only a few types of products which remain unaffected by impulse buying (Bellenger et al., 1978; Dittmar et al., 1996). The most typical goods bought on impulse by female consumers include clothing, magazines, and recorded music as opposed to the least often impulse buys of kitchen equipment and furniture (Dittmar et al., 1995). Dittmar and Drury (2000) criticise previous models of impulsive and excessive buying in economics, consumer research and psychology in so far as they have been separated theoretically and methodologically to a large extent. Despite an increasing focus on the interdependencies of emotion and cognition in the consumption process, research is scarce regarding an integrated view of emotion or affective components and cognitive components in impulse buying (Youn and Faber, 2002).

Although impulse buying has been researched since the 1950s and passed the initial stages of merely listing typical impulse purchased products, the study of impulsive purchasing behaviours has not received much attention by consumer researchers (Dholakia, 2000). As a consequence there is only limited understanding about the impulse buying process and its underlying motivations as criticised by Beatty and Ferrell (1998). With this study, a contribution will be made towards gaining a deeper understanding of drivers and effects of impulse buying with particular regard to happiness. More specifically, in this context the role of happiness in impulse buying will be explored as well as how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience.

This chapter starts with an outline of the history of impulse buying and the development of a framework of this phenomenon. Particular regard will be given to the emotional aspects of impulse buying with a focus on female consumers. This will specifically be explored in the section about gender. The stigma attached to this consumer behaviour will be discussed, including avoidance strategies as well as contrasting positive views. This will be followed by a depiction of the consumer decision-making process and involvement. Motivations and drivers for impulse buying will also be discussed in this chapter. The latter includes insights into the

characteristics of a typical impulse buyer. This chapter concludes with an evaluation of the impulse purchase provided by consumers after the experience as discussed in previous literature.

2.2 History of Research on Impulse Buying

The early studies in impulse buying in the 1950s focussed on the product rather than the consumer (for an overview see Table 2.1). A number of studies investigated the frequencies of unplanned 'impulse' buying in view of different product categories (Applebaum, 1951; Clover, 1950; Katona and Mueller, 1955; West, 1951), and in different retail settings (DuPont Studies, 1965). This resulted in lists of products with impulse and non-impulse categories (for example Kollat and Willet, 1969; Stern, 1962). West (1951) found that 37 percent of all purchases made in a survey of Canadian shoppers qualified as impulse purchases in the sense of an in-store buying decision in addition to those products which the shopper had originally planned to buy. Applebaum (1951) was the first who suggested that impulse buying may result from being exposed to an in-store stimulus. This was extended to research on effects of the retail shelf location and amount of shelf space on impulse buying (for example Cox, 1964; Patterson, 1963).

The DuPont Consumer Buying Habits Studies (1945-1965) found that impulse purchases in supermarkets increased from about 38 percent to 50 percent of total consumer purchases over this period of 20 years. These early studies equated impulse buying with unplanned purchases, which was later on criticised by economists and psychologists (for example Dittmar et al., 1996; Rook and Gardner, 1993). For instance, from this early point of view any purchase is an impulse buy if it is not written on one's shopping list (Rook and Hoch, 1985). In the 1960s, impulse or unplanned buying was generally referred to as the difference between purchase intentions and actual purchase outcomes (Kollat, 1966; Kollat and Willet, 1967; Patterson, 1963).

Table 2.1: Overview of the History of Research on Impulse Buying

Timing	Important Contributors, for example	Important Contributions, for example
1950s	Clover (1950), West (1951), Applebaum (1951)	Focus on product rather than the consumer resulting in lists of products with impulse and non-impulse categories In-store stimuli for impulse buying
1960s	DuPont Studies (1945- 1965), Stern (1962), Kollat and Willet (1967)	Considerable increase of impulse buying in supermarkets since 1940s Classification of impulse buying into four categories Impulse buying equated with unplanned purchases
1970s	Shapiro (1973), Prasad (1975), Hoepfner (1975), Bellenger et al. (1978), Dahlhoff (1979)	Theoretical lists of impulse buying products Indications that any product could be bought on impulse Store environment and product variables with major impact on unplanned buying Impulse buying not equated to unplanned buying because impulse buying is thoughtless and quick
1980s	Weinberg and Gottwald (1982), Rook and Hoch (1985), Cobb and Hoyer (1986), Rook (1987), Hoch and Loewenstein (1987), Gardner and Rook (1988)	Emotional aspects in impulse buying Frameworks of impulse buying Not all unplanned purchases based on impulse decisions
1990s	Abratt and Goodey (1990), Piron (1991), Dittmar et al. (1995), Rook and Fisher (1995), Beatty and Ferrell (1998)	Research on cognitive and emotional reactions to impulse purchases Motivations and normative influences on impulse buying
Since 2000	Dittmar and Drury (2000), Dholakia (2000), Verplanken and Herabadi (2001), Youn and Faber (2002), Kacen and Lee (2002), Silvera et al. (2008)	Hedonic consumption and emotional motivations main drivers for impulse buying

In the early 1960s, Stern (1962) made a significant contribution towards a better understanding of impulse buying by classifying impulse purchases into four broad categories: Firstly, 'pure' impulse buying includes purchases which are outside the normal buying pattern, satisfying an immediate desire based on an emotional trigger. Secondly, 'reminder' impulse buying means that a shopper sees an item and remembers that the stock at home is exhausted or low or recalls an advertisement. Thirdly, in 'suggestion' impulse buying a shopper sees the product for the first time and imagines a need or application for it. The items purchased can be entirely rational or functional purchases as opposed to the emotional appeal which is associated with the 'pure' impulse purchase. Finally, 'planned' impulse buying occurs according to Stern (1962) when the purchase was not intended but the shopper has some specific purchases in mind and buys the product because of its price or product features.

In the 1970s the consumer and marketing literatures remained centred round the development of theoretical lists of goods which are likely to be bought impulsively (for example Bellenger et al., 1978). Contrary to the mainstream approach Shapiro (1973) suggests that any product could be bought on impulse with no particular types of products being impulse items. Situational variables such as store-environment and product variables were identified as affecting unplanned buying more than shopper characteristics (Prasad, 1975). In the late 1970s the Popai/Du Pont Consumer Buying Habits Study classified buying decisions into four categories, for example unplanned purchasing refers to the purchase of an item that was not planned at all (Point-of-Purchase Institute of the United States of America, 1977). Equating impulse buying with an unplanned purchase as in previous research (for example Bellenger et al., 1978; Kollat and Willet, 1967; Stern, 1962) appeared no longer sufficient as some authors devalued impulsive buying as a thoughtless and quick activity stimulated by a strong motivation to overcome restraints (Dahlhoff, 1979; Hoepfner, 1975). This reflects the overall stigma which had always been attached to any impulsive activities and which was transferred to impulse buying.

The 1980s increased the scope of research by including internal psychological states such as emotional aspects in impulse buying studies. Consumer behaviour researchers considered it increasingly important not only to understand the consumer's thoughts but also his emotions and feelings (Lutz, 1981). Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) suggested that impulsive buying decisions are based on affective, cognitive, and reactive aspects of consumer behaviour. In this regard the

consumer has little intellectual control over buying decisions and the behaviour is to a large extent automatic and activated by a stimulus (Weinberg and Gottwald, 1982). Contrary to previous research Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) claimed that not all unplanned purchases are based on an impulse decision. Other researchers (for example Rook, 1987) agreed that impulse buying needs to be differentiated from unplanned buying. Unplanned purchase decisions may be entirely rational which, in addition to the lack of control, indirectly implies a connection between irrationality and impulse buying (Weinberg and Gottwald, 1982). Studies in the 1980s (Cobb and Hoyer, 1986) confirmed previous research which had found that unplanned purchasing is not limited to a particular type of product or retail setting. According to Cobb and Hoyer (1986) impulse purchases occur without any prior intention to buy a specific brand or product category before entering the store. The focus of early research on the product was increasingly shifted towards the consumer with an emphasis on the cognitive and emotional aspects of impulse buying. This is also indicated in the distinction of five central elements in impulse buying:

- "1) a sudden and spontaneous desire to act;*
- 2) a state of psychological disequilibrium;*
- 3) the onset of psychological conflict and struggle;*
- 4) a reduction in cognitive evaluation;*
- 5) lack of regard for the consequences of impulse buying."* (Rook and Hoch, 1985, p.23)

Based on this definition, the following understanding of impulse buying has received broad acceptance until today:

"Impulse buying occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately. The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and may stimulate emotional conflict. Also, impulse buying is prone to occur with diminished regard for its consequences." (Rook, 1987, p.191)

Once the impulse is triggered an immediate action follows and without much if any consideration for potential realistic consequences (Rook, 1987). Other researchers (for example Hoch and Loewenstein, 1987; Jones et al., 2003) agreed with this explanation and emphasise on the unreflective nature of impulse buying leading to hasty decision-making with a short time span between spotting an item and the actual purchase. Another important contribution was made by Hoch and Loewenstein (1987, p.492) who referred to impulse buying as "time-inconsistent preferences" resulting from an internal struggle between willpower and desire. As a consequence an item may be a temporary choice on one occasion whereas the

same item may be rejected another time. Further research investigated the effects of impulse purchases on consumers' mood states after the purchase (Gardner and Rook, 1988).

Studies in the 1990s included research on emotional and cognitive reactions to impulse purchases (for example Piron, 1991) and investigations of the relationship between consumers' antecedent mood states and their impulsive purchase behaviours (Rook and Gardner, 1993). Several studies identified factors which foster unplanned purchasing, such as in-store stimuli, for example shelf location (for example Abratt and Goodey, 1990). It was found that normative influences affect impulse buying (Rook and Fisher, 1995). There have been ongoing difficulties in comparing findings from different studies on impulse buying due to the missing agreement on the meaning of impulse buying as criticised by Abratt and Goodey (1990). This missing definition of impulse buying was addressed by Piron (1991, p.512) who concluded that impulse buying has three main characteristics: "1) unplanned, 2) the result of an exposure to a stimulus, 3) decided 'on-the-spot'."

There has been little research on investigating the reasons behind preferring some items as impulse buys, for example fashion clothes, compared to others, for example basic kitchen equipment (Dittmar et al., 1995). Consequently, Dittmar et al. (1996) investigated motivations for impulse and compulsive buying and summarised four psychological buying considerations, namely mood, ideal self, self-expression, social standing and two functional buying considerations, which are price and usefulness. Dittmar and Drury (2000) suggest that survey research cannot easily measure the meanings behind impulse buying behaviours. Based on previous research (for example Cobb and Hoyer, 1986; Rook, 1987), Beatty and Ferrell (1998) emphasise that an impulse buy is not only unplanned but also includes the urge to buy. They characterise impulse buying as a spontaneous purchase following an urge to buy with limited reflection and a lacking of prior purchase intention. This excludes simple 'reminder' purchases of items which are out-of-stock at home as well as planned tasks, such as gift buying. Impulse buying is widely regarded as a sub-form of unplanned buying, with little, if any, overlaps with planned buying. For instance, Sheth et al. (1999) describe unplanned purchases as those purchases for which the customer had no buying intention prior to entering the store while planned purchases had been intended prior to entering the shop.

Research on impulse buying from the year 2000 onwards has been closely connected to hedonic consumption and emotional motivations as main drivers for this buying behaviour. This is reflected for example in the definition provided by Kacen and Lee (2002, p.163) who describe impulse buying behaviour as

"a sudden, compelling, hedonically complex purchasing behaviour in which the rapidity of the impulse purchase decision process precludes thoughtful, deliberate consideration of all information and choice alternatives."

Psychological factors leading to the consumption impulse and its following rejection or enactment are investigated in a model by Dholakia (2000). The likelihood of engaging in impulse buying may be assessed by a newly developed Consumer Buying Impulsivity scale as a framework for analysing impulse buying (Youn and Faber, 2002). Cognitive and affective aspects of impulse buying tendency were measured by Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) who found a strong relation between personality and impulse buying tendency. Similarly, Silvera et al. (2008) investigated cognitive and affective facets of impulse buying in the context of subjective well-being and social influence.

Considering the contributions made since the beginning of the research on impulse buying, the following common elements can be identified in the literature: little or no planning, making a decision 'on the spot', the presence of a heightened emotional state or conflict, limited consideration of any consequences, social influence, and possible dissatisfaction or regret after the impulse buy. In the next section an understanding of the term impulse buying for this study will be developed.

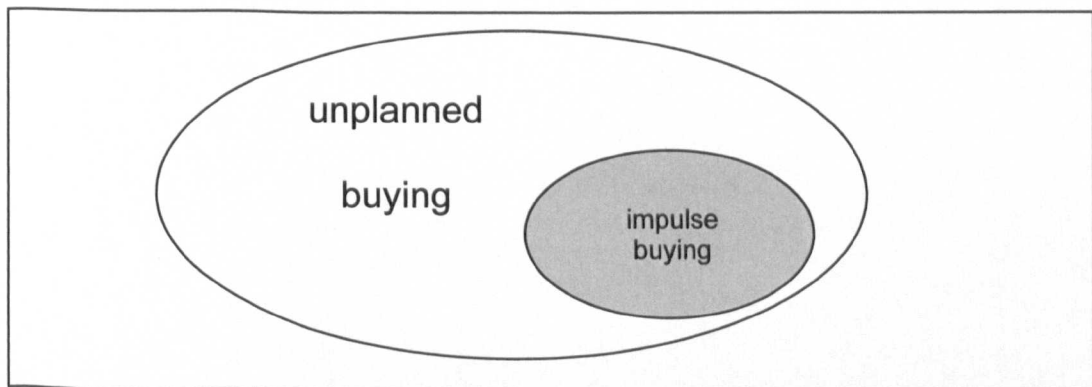
2.3 Understanding Impulse Buying

Periodicals in the retail industry as well as specialised management periodicals advise professionals how to increase unplanned and impulse buying with the terms 'point of purchase', 'impulse' and 'unplanned' buying often used interchangeably (Wood, 2005). This reflects the earlier definitions in the consumer research literature (for example Clover, 1950; DuPont Studies, 1945-1965; West, 1951). As discussed earlier, today the consumer behaviour literature differentiates impulse buying from unplanned buying (Wood, 2005).

2.3.1 Planned, Unplanned and Impulse Buying

Planned purchasing is associated with rational decision-making, an intensive search for information as well as careful price and quality comparisons (Dittmar and Drury, 2000). There is wide agreement that a planned purchase results from a buying intention formed prior to entering the store (for example American Marketing Association, 2007; Piron, 1993). Unplanned buying usually occurs without a prior buying intention (Engel et al., 1978) and may include trying out a new item (American Marketing Association, 2007). Contrary to planned buying, unplanned buying may be triggered for example by the exposure to an advertisement (American Marketing Association, 2007) or according to Piron (1993) could be decided at a later time and possibly away from an exposure to the product stimulus. As illustrated in Figure 2.1, unplanned buying is not necessarily an impulse buy but an impulse buy is usually unplanned as argued by some researchers (for example Arnould et al., 2002; Sheth et al., 1999).

Figure 2.1: Impulse Buying as Part of Unplanned Buying



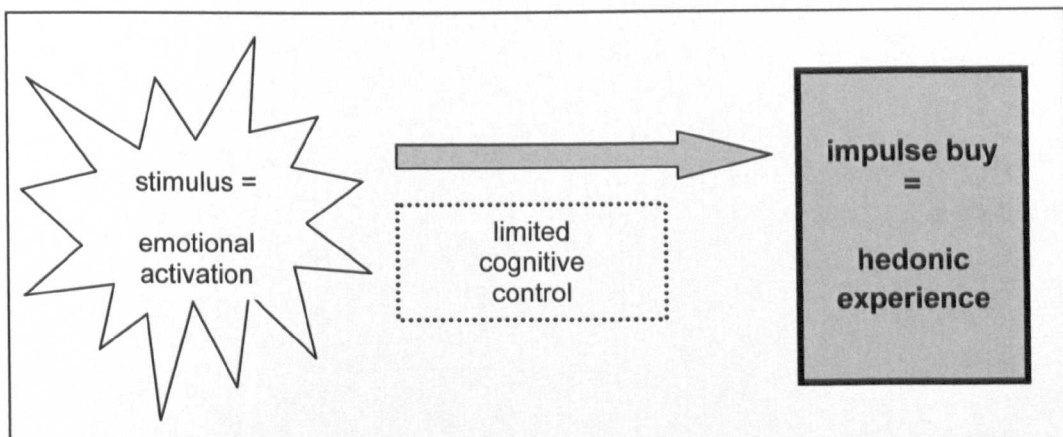
As illustrated in Figure 2.2, Sheth et al. (1999) distinguish between three types of unplanned purchases, which remind us of the classifications in early research, namely the categorisation of impulse purchases by Stern (1962): Firstly, restocking unplanned purchases of items that have been used regularly but with no intention to purchase the item on this occasion. Secondly, evaluated new unplanned purchases refer to items the individual requires but had not recognised before this buying occasion. Thirdly, impulse purchases represent the extreme end of unplanned purchases meaning the spontaneous and unpremeditated purchase of items. Impulse purchases occur suddenly and without considering a need.

Figure 2.2: Framework of Unplanned Purchases

Source: Adapted from Sheth et al. (1999)

Previous research suggests that contrary to the unplanned purchase, the impulse buy is a sudden irresistible desire to purchase, driven by a feeling of helplessness (for example Piron, 1993; Rook, 1987; Rook and Hoch, 1985). In a more general sense this means that impulse buying can be understood as an affect-driven hedonic experience characterised by an intense emotional activation and limited cognitive control (Arnould et al., 2002; Barrett and Patterson, 1983; Evans et al., 1996) as depicted in Figure 2.3:

Figure 2.3: Impulse Buying as a Hedonic Experience



2.3.2 Impulse Buying in this Study

In this study, the understanding of impulse buying is broader compared to most current contributions. A broad understanding is required because it is not the researcher who sets the clearly defined theoretical boundaries of impulse buying but the focus is on the consumers who report about their impulse buying

experiences. Firstly, consumers are unlikely to distinguish between different kinds of unplanned or impulse buys. Secondly, narrowing down impulse buying to limited cases and strictly distinguishing it from unplanned buying as is the understanding in the current literature (for example Hoyer and MacInnis, 2001; Piron, 1991; Rook, 1987; Sheth et al., 1999), hinders further exploration of the actual buying experiences made by the consumers. A broader framework provides the opportunity to gain a better understanding of impulse buying experiences from the consumers' perspective.

The framework of impulse buying in this study includes 'pure' and 'suggestion' impulse buying as suggested in early research (Stern, 1962). In addition, novelty purchases are included, which break the normal buying pattern and are emotionally stimulated in order to satisfy an immediate desire (Dittmar et al., 1995; Stern, 1962). Impulse buys may follow the sudden urge to buy a good or service with limited reflection of the consequences. This may include the general pre-shopping intention to buy the specific product category 'one day' in the sense of having a product or product category 'at the back of one's mind' such as 'I always wanted to get the item and suddenly I came across it, I liked it, and I bought it there and then'. The understanding of impulse buying in this study also takes into consideration the cognitive and emotional responses of consumers during an impulse buying situation which is characterised by a limited consideration of the consequences and following an urge to buy as suggested by Rook (1987). The understanding of impulse buying in this project excludes the requirement of an explicitly 'sudden' impulse act in the sense of spotting the item and buying it straight away. Instead of associating 'suddenly' with the immediate purchasing act, in this study the term 'suddenly' is associated with something unexpected. The buying decision is not necessarily made on the spot. In this study, impulse buys may include a time delay between spotting an item and the buying impulse, respectively, the actual acquisition of the good or service. This time delay between the buying impulse and the actual purchase, even though implying a short duration, was already observed by Rook and Fisher (1995, p.307):

"Yet there is typically some temporal delay between a buying impulse and an impulsive purchase, and the rapidity with which such transactions typically occur does not preclude the likelihood that consumers are still thinking, feeling, and evaluating various retail stimuli, if only for a few seconds."

This observation from Rook and Fisher (1995) had not been given much attention in subsequent research. In this research, self-gifting or gift buying, provided it is not based on a planned task, qualifies as an impulse purchase, which is in disagreement with Beatty and Ferrell (1998). The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and emotional conflict may occur. Hedonic aspects will be included in the framework used in this study following suggestions from Kacen and Lee (2002) and Rook (1987). This study clearly distances itself from compulsive buying, which is a deviance of the normal shopping behaviour and a clinical disorder (DSM-IV-TR) expressing itself in an addiction (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

2.4 Gender and Age in Impulse Buying

The popular literature (for example *Mademoiselle*, 1992) recognises that the majority of young women aged between 20 and 34 years enjoy shopping for any kind of products as a leisure activity, want to have fun and are indulgent with particular regard to small inexpensive luxuries. In fact, the current academic literature acknowledges that women can justify shopping more easily than other leisure activities to themselves and important others in terms of spending time, money and effort (Eccles and Woodruffe-Burton, 2000).

Based on the understanding of gender roles in the 1960s, Kollat and Willet (1967) claimed that gender does not affect unplanned buying behaviour. In the 1980s, Bowlky (1981) assumed that it is common sense that shopping appeals more to women than to men. A few years later, Jansen-Verbeke (1987, p.72) argued that women evaluate shopping as a "legitimate activity, belonging to their gender role as housewives and therefore not necessarily experienced as a leisure activity". Although since the 1990s the once close connection between gender and consumption has become weaker (Firat, 1990), female consumers tend to engage in impulse buying significantly more often than men and purchase different products on these occasions (for example Dittmar and Beattie, 1998; Dittmar et al., 1995, 1996; Verplanken and Herabadi, 2001). Campbell (2000) suggests moving shopping from a merely legitimised, acceptable activity within a work frame towards a leisure frame as women contrary to men tend to view shopping with browsing and social interaction in a positive light. Because of their personal interest in shopping, women compared to men might recall in more detail their impulse buying experiences and might give more attention to the emotions attached to it.

It was shown in previous research that women refer to themselves as more affectively intense than men do and recall more often and more intense emotional experiences, including being sensitive to their feelings, being anxious, sad and happy (for example Feldman Barrett et al., 1998; Grossman and Wood, 1993; Kring et al., 1994). Contrary to men, women are mainly concerned with emotional and relationship-oriented aspects in impulse buying (Dittmar et al., 1995). Since the exploration of emotions in impulse buying experiences is the prime interest of this study, it appeared to be more appropriate to focus on women to gain detailed descriptions of impulse buying experiences. In addition to being more sensitive to both positive and negative emotions, women compared to men reflect and share them more with other people (Brody, 1999; Brody and Hall, 2000; Feldman Barrett et al., 1998). Women may therefore feel less inhibited to talk about their emotions during impulse buying experiences and willingly share detailed insights for the purposes of this study.

For women the main driving forces for impulse buying decisions are psychological buying considerations with mood considered to be more important than ideal self, self-expression, and social standing taken together (Dittmar et al., 1996). Women may use shopping for mood repair (for example Woodruffe, 1997), which is a socially accepted alternative instead of drinking alcohol as more often practised by men (Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Elliot, 1994). Shopping for mood repair can be another motivation for impulse buying and will be further explored in the context of the role of happiness as well as with regard to the dark side of consumption. Women buy symbolic and self-expressive goods on impulse, such as clothing, which convey emotional and appearance aspects of self (for example Babin et al., 1994; Dittmar and Beattie, 1998; Dittmar et al., 2004). The role of this social dimension in impulse buying, as shown by previous research (for example Luo, 2005; Wakefield and Inman, 2003), will be further explored in this study.

Overall, for the purpose of this study with its focus on exploring happiness in the context of impulse buying, it appeared adequate to focus on female consumers for a number of reasons. Previous research has shown that shopping has always played a greater role for women than for men. Women were chosen for this study because they regularly experience impulse buying situations and are concerned with emotional aspects of impulse buying. With particular regard to the data collection over a period of three months it was assumed that the female consumers, other than their male counterparts, would experience a number of impulse buys during this period of time. In addition, female consumers were

investigated in this study because of their general willingness to talk about emotions. It was therefore assumed they will be willing to share detailed insights of lived experiences in the context of impulse buying.

The focus of this study is on female consumers between 18 and 35 years as outlined in Chapter 1.2. This research comprised consumers from the age of 18 years because they are adults who have full responsibility for their own outgoings, savings or overdrawing their accounts. In the context of impulsiveness being related to emotional arousal, research on trait impulsiveness reveals that older individuals demonstrate more self-control, are more likely to be able to control their emotional expression and act less impulsively than younger people (Eysenck et al., 1985; Kacen and Lee, 2002; McConatha et al., 1994). Since this study aims to explore emotions namely happiness, it appeared to be more appropriate to gain in-depth insights from younger people. They may be less inhibited disclosing their emotional expressions and more willing to talk about feelings behind visible buying behaviours compared to older people.

Wood (1998a) found a slight increase for consumers between the ages of 18 and 39 and a decline thereafter in view of their impulse buying tendency. This is consistent with Bellenger et al. (1978) who found that shoppers under 35 were likely to buy more on impulse than those over 35 years old. The age group between 20 to 34 years, referred to as “twentysomethings” by Leeming and Tripp (1994, p.37), have a “live for now” attitude, looking for achievable goals and gratification. Choosing the age group from 18 to 35 years in this study is therefore also likely to yield insights into hedonic motivations of impulse buying. This contributes to addressing the research question of the role of happiness in impulse buying. Since the interest of this study is to explore motivations for impulse buying, the age group was chosen which regularly experiences impulse buying and can relate to recent experiences. Choosing an age group beyond 35 appeared to be less appropriate for this study considering they buy less often on impulse and may therefore be less able to talk about recent impulse buying experiences. With particular regard to the longitudinal approach of data collection, this might have generated only few examples of impulse buys.

2.5 The Dark Side of Consumption

2.5.1 Impulse Buying and Rational Buying

The research on impulsiveness in the field of psychology might be the root cause for the predominantly negative evaluation of impulse buying as Hausman (2000) assumes. In general, impulsive behaviour is considered as normatively wrong (for example Cobb and Hoyer, 1986; Rook and Fisher, 1995), irrational, risky and wasteful (Ainslie, 1975; Rook and Fisher, 1995) and a sign of immaturity (Solnick et al., 1980). Impulsive buying behaviour has been widely contrasted to rational buying in the literature, for example Rook and Hoch (1985, p.24) claim that "impulsive consumption is the antithesis of classical models of 'economic man' as a rational expected utility maximizer". However, they hold the view that this behaviour does not stand for a mindless, low-involved consumer. In fact, the theory of the economic man which characterises the consumer as a rational decision maker with perfect and total knowledge of the market has been criticised for being unrealistic and only exists in theory (for example Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Wood, 1998a). Nonetheless impulse buying is often regarded in a negative sense and referred to as the dark side of consumption (Mick, 1996). For example Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) showed that individual consumers assume that other people view impulse buying in a negative light. Evaluations for impulsive behaviour being

"more spontaneous than cautious...more emotional than rational, and it is more likely to be perceived as 'bad' than 'good'" (Rook, 1987, p.191)

with the impulse buyer feeling more likely to be out of control than the planned buyer reflect its predominantly rather negative evaluation. The impulse buy may occur because the shopper falls "in love" with an item and is "grabbing" (Rook, 1987, p.191) it instead of choosing it.

On the contrary, the planned buyer is considered to be more in control and pursues a cost-benefit approach with considerations about function, price, or usefulness and shops around for the best value for money (for example Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Dittmar et al., 1996; Thompson et al., 1990; Youn and Faber, 2000). These characteristics of a planned buyer could also imply that impulse buying is an irrational activity which lacks consideration and sense. In addition to the general claim that potential negative consequences of the impulse buying decision are often ignored (for example Hoch and Loewenstein, 1991; O'Guinn and Faber,

1989) more recent research found that impulsiveness even occurs if the decision maker predicts long-term consequences which undermine their well-being (for example Kivetz and Simonson, 2002; Strack and Deutsch, 2004).

The search for immediate gratification is important for customers with high impulsiveness who may feel emotionally attracted to the object rather than reflecting on their decision (Hoch and Loewenstein, 1991; Thompson et al., 1990). This may lead to negative consequences, including regret after the purchase, which shed a negative light on impulse buying (for example Hausman, 2000; Wood, 2005). Based on previous research including the notion that impulse buying may be used to overcome unpleasant mood states (for example Baumeister, 2002; Dittmar et al., 1996) and emphasising compulsive traits in impulse buying (for example Dittmar and Drury, 2000; O'Guinn and Faber, 1989), Verplanken et al. (2005) assume that there may be darker motives behind the seemingly light and fun character of impulse buying. This is supported by a recent study from Silvera et al. (2008).

Some researchers assume that consumers may try to suppress their natural impulsive behaviour because it is conceived as opposing to societal norms and the impulse buyer fears to be seen as immature or irrational (for example Crawford and Melewar, 2003; Hausman, 2000). Normative evaluations as suggested by Rook and Fisher (1995) may moderate impulse buying behaviour and represent one potential strategy for impulse resistance. These will be further explored in the next section.

2.5.2 Strategies for Impulse Resistance

Psychological conflict is a typical characteristic of impulsive consumption and is based on the gap between emotional and cognitive preferences in terms of immediate desires as opposed to evaluations of long-term consequences (Emmons et al., 1993; Rook, 1987). From the point of view of psychoanalytic psychology Freud (1911) refers to impulses as the result from two competing forces: the pleasure principle (the id) and the reality principle (the superego). While the pleasure principle strives for immediate gratification, the reality principle encourages rational deliberation (Freud, 1911). This means that arousal and emotions, which could trigger impulse buying, need to be controlled by cognitive forces.

Constraining factors may include a lack of time or money, or the imagination of post purchase effects. If constraining factors can be determined, the consumer experiences a conflict or a dissonant consumption impulse condition (Dholakia, 2000; Rook, 1987). This hints at a thorough evaluation of the impulse buying consequences. This moves the consumption process away from a hedonically based mode to a more evaluative behaviour including resistance strategies. Previous research shows that during impulse buying situations the consumer often engages in a serious inner dialogue and is looking for strategies to repress the urge to buy on the spot, for example through a cost-benefit analysis, by walking away, or buying a small reward instead of the bigger purchase (Rook and Hoch, 1985; Weinberg and Gottwald, 1982).

The potential buyer may also conceive of feelings of guilt which may arise because spontaneous buying behaviour has a negative reputation. Similarly but in a more condensed way, Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) distinguish two self-control strategies: firstly, the attempt to directly reduce desire and secondly to try and overcome desire through a variety of willpower tactics. They developed the model of a time-inconsistent choice which means the choice would have been rejected if it had been considered from a more distanced, less involved perspective. Dholakia (2000) notes that this phenomenon of impulse resistance has not received much attention so far, which means that there is a lack of understanding at which point and how the consumer rejects the impulse to buy. Bearing in mind the research on resistance strategies, previous research has neglected to explore the role of happiness in impulse decision-making, which is the central concern of this research.

2.6 A Positive View on Impulse Buying

In the 1990s some researchers started to evaluate and highlight the positive aspects attached to impulse buying (for example Bayley and Nancarrow, 1998; Hausman, 2000). In this study, the effects of an impulse purchase on the buyer will be investigated in more detail to gain a better understanding of positive and negative aspects of impulse buying.

For centuries there has been a debate on the relationship between cognition and reason on the one hand versus emotion and irrationality on the other hand (Beckmann, 1999). However, the occurrence of emotions does not have to be

equated with irrationality and exclude reason. In this context Thompson et al. (1990) argue that while impulse buying is more associated with emotions than intellectual activities, it still may be a reasonable action and does not necessarily imply irrationality. This is in line with early findings from Stern (1962, p.62) who suggested that

"marketeers should dispense with the idea that this type of buying is basically irrational and, therefore, impossible to influence."

The predominance of emotional factors, the lack of advance planning and the urge to consume as characteristics of impulse buying (Peterson et al., 1986; Tsiros and Mittal, 2000) result in a high-involvement buying behaviour according to Rook and Hoch (1985). This distinguishes impulsive behaviours from automatic or mindless behaviours (for example Bargh and Barndollar, 1996) and implies that impulsiveness stands for cognitively alert consumers who are prepared to process information and are well aware of positive and negative consequences of their decision, including pleasure and guilt (Emmons et al., 1993; Rook, 1987).

Positive aspects attached to impulse buying include various hedonic and affective, non-economic reasons, such as buying for fun, fantasy, an increased excitement and social or emotional gratification (Hausman, 2000; Piron, 1991; Rook and Fisher, 1995; Thompson et al., 1990). Impulse buying can be fun because of the freedom of having money to spend for oneself or as a gift (Wood, 2005). Considering the hedonic components, impulse buying may be regarded as an enjoyable pastime compared to the mere acquisition of goods (Hausman, 2000). Similar positive results were found by Wood (1998b), that is nearly 20 percent of his experimental sample opted for an increase of their impulse buying if they were in a situation allowing them to change their shopping habits. Some participants even felt regret that they usually restrain themselves.

Hausman (2000) argues that the benefits of impulse buying are usually disregarded in calculations of consumer utility and disagrees to consider impulse buying behaviour as normatively wrong. Instead, rational decision-making is not necessarily more accurate and more satisfactory than impulse buying (Hausman, 2000). For instance, Rook (1987, p.195) report that 41 percent of his respondents felt that impulse buying involves "hedonic elements" in terms of feeling "good", "happy" or "satisfied". Malter (1996) argues that although the spontaneous and seemingly choiceless impulse buying behaviour appears to be highly irrational, the

individual consumer may evaluate his or her purchase as rational. For instance, planned buying involves a time-consuming search for information (Piron, 1991), may overload and frustrate consumers (Bettman et al., 1991), and increase feelings of anxiety and unpleasantness (Herbig and Kramer, 1994). The additional time investment and the increased information complexity and overload may eventually reduce the accuracy of the final buying decision (Bettman et al., 1991; Herbig and Kramer, 1994). Despite substantial efforts to make the most accurate decision, the consumer may eventually make worse decisions. Besides, previous research suggests that most consumers do not intensively search for any pre-purchase information, mainly due to time constraints (for example Beatty and Smith, 1987). In accordance but from another perspective Thompson et al. (1990) argue that further information is not even required to be collected before the purchase because the consumer feels strongly attracted to the product and is convinced of its rightness. Therefore in total, impulse buying may prove to be a rational alternative.

2.7 Consumer Decision-Making and Involvement

The complexity of consumer behaviour and the variety of factors to be taken into account have resulted in different models of consumer decision-making, for example models from Nicosia (1966), Howard and Sheth (1969), or Engel et al. (1995). For impulse buying the predetermined sequence of actions towards the purchase, the predominance of cognition, the neglect of the social component and the lack of emotional involvement as suggested in these models are not appropriate. Evans et al. (1996) suggest to distinguish impulse buying from ordinary customer buying decision-making and reject the three classical phases of consumer decision-making, which are pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase phases.

Previous literature indicates that involvement plays an important part in the buying decision-making process, in particular in the intensity of information search (Laurent and Kapferer, 1998). Involvement can be referred to as the intensity of the consumer's interest in a particular product, category, or related marketing activity (Pinson and Jolibert, 1998). Consumer involvement is a multidimensional motivational variable and relates to a specific product or a purchasing situation. It may have consequences for example on cognition, affect or behaviour and can be permanent or temporary (Pinson and Jolibert, 1998). Whereas the cognitive aspect

reveals the consumer's consideration of utilitarian needs, the affective component implies the satisfaction of emotional needs by the product (Pinson and Jolibert, 1998). A low-involved customer may decide immediately and unconsciously and react automatically. Chaudhuri (1997) provided evidence that emotional factors are closely related to perceived risk: positive emotions being negatively related to perceived risk whereas negative emotions, such as fear, anger or sadness, being positively related to perceived risk. As early as the 1960s it was found that risk is one of the key determinants for a consumer to buy or reject a product (Bauer, 1960). According to an early study by Jacoby and Kaplan (1972) a prospective purchase may create one or several losses, for example a social loss meaning that the product may have a negative impact on other people's perception of the buyer. Potential losses which may be triggered also by an impulse buy are summarised in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2: Potential Losses due to a Purchase

Potential loss	Cause for potential loss
financial	Consumer loses money, e.g. equivalent product is cheaper
psychological	Adverse effect on buyer's self-image
social	Adverse effect on how other people think about buyer
time	Waste of time, e.g. due to repair or return
performance	Product does not perform as expected
physical	Product is unsafe or harmful

Source: Adapted from Jacoby and Kaplan (1972), Yates and Stone (1992)

A financial loss may occur for example because an equivalent product is cheaper somewhere else. The buyer's self-image and social image can be perceived as being at risk due to a purchase. Further potential losses could occur for example if the product performance lags behind expectations or the product being unsafe. As a consequence of these potential risks attached to a buying decision, the consumer may choose problem solving activities which can be classified as extended, limited or routinised (Howard, 1989; Howard and Sheth, 1969). As depicted in Table 2.3, limited problem solving behaviour means low involvement and a low motivation for searching information (Engel et al., 1990). This stands in contrast to extended problem solving in which the customer feels highly involved and searches extensively for information (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Extensive thought and time is given to the choice and search activities for more expensive, infrequently

purchased and rather unfamiliar products where the consumer is usually highly involved (Solomon, 1996).

Table 2.3: Purchase Decision Process Behaviour

Source: Adpated from Engel et al. (1990)

Jones et al. (2003) suggest that a consumer who is highly involved in a product category is more likely to be an impulse buyer. As depicted in Table 2.3 high involvement implies extended problem solving. However, most researchers claim that neither an extensive search for information nor their detailed evaluation with multiple criteria typically occur in impulse buying (for example Jones et al., 2003; Kacen and Lee 2002). Therefore Solomon (1996) associates impulse buying with limited problem solving behaviour, which means that the consumer's decision is based on prior learning on how to respond to environmental stimuli. This implies that impulse buying could be understood as a routinised, automatic activity. However, Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) argue that impulse buying is often accompanied by excitement and emotional responses, which are inconsistent with low involvement purchases.

Impulse buying does not appear to fit the classification of existing models of consumer decision-making, for example in view of low versus high involvement. This indicates that impulse buying is multidimensional and requires an exploration from a broader perspective and not just the sudden purchase on the spot with limited consideration of any consequences as widely argued in the literature.

2.8 Motivations in Impulse Buying

2.8.1 Overview

Motivations in impulse buying are diverse. Although a number of different motivations for impulse buying can be found in the literature, Dittmar and Drury (2000) criticise that there is still a lack of research into the underlying motivations for impulse buying. This study will attempt to shed more light on these underlying motivations with particular emphasis on the role of emotions, namely happiness.

Shopping motivations can be grouped into different categories. The literature suggests for example a distinction into internal and external cues, with internal cues referring to emotions, feelings, or moods and external ones being centred round the shopping environment controlled by the marketing practitioner (for example Wansink, 1994; Youn and Faber, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the classification into the utilitarian, social and hedonic dimension (see Table 2.4) as suggested by Rintamäki et al. (2006) appears to be suitable.

Table 2.4: Dimensions and Shopping Motivations

Source: Adapted from Rintamäki et al. (2006)

The distinction from Rintamäki et al. (2006) enables a detailed evaluation of shopping motivations and therefore sets the ground for the discussion in this section. This section is structured accordingly and deals with the shopping motivations of each dimension in separate sub-sections below.

Previous research agrees that hedonic and social aspects as well as the overall shopping experience yield important benefits in impulse buying (for example Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Sheth, 1983). They contribute to the total customer

value of an impulse buy, which exceeds the mere acquisition of physical products or services. The presence of one or more of these dimensions to a sufficient degree may be perceived by the consumer as a shopping motivation and may lead to the formation of the consumption impulse. If the antecedents are strong enough, the consumption impulse cannot be blocked from occurring (Isen and Diamond, 1989).

2.8.2 The Utilitarian Dimension

In the utilitarian perspective the consumer is characterised as a Homo Economicus, meaning the consumer is a rational problem-solver or utility calculator who emphasises the functional aspects of a product and gives particular attention to money involved in the buying process as illustrated in Table 2.4 above (Bettman, 1979; Chandon et al., 2000; Rintamäki et al., 2006). Additional aspects include time (one-stop shopping), place, availability of required products, quality and function (Rintamäki et al., 2006; Sheth, 1983). In this context "it is interesting to note that the impulse purchaser valued quality almost as much as did the planner" (Cobb and Hoyer, 1986, p.407).

Situational factors such as time and money available are important psychological aspects in impulse buying and may considerably affect shopping behaviour (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Dittmar and Drury, 2000). According to previous research (Iyer, 1989; Park et al., 1989), time pressure negatively affects the amount of unplanned purchases whereas time availability is positively related to the search activity in a shopping environment. This was confirmed in more recent studies, for example Zhuang et al. (2006) showed that the likelihood to make an unplanned or impulse purchase is higher, the more time the consumer spends in a shopping centre. Similarly Beatty and Ferrell (1998) proved the positive relation between one's impulse buying tendency and time available with in-store browsing, which in turn positively affects positive feelings and the urge to buy on impulse. The same was found for the availability of money, which generated positive feelings and is positively related to impulse buying activities (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998). According to Crawford and Melewar (2003) holidays and airport shopping are typical impulse buying situations because the higher disposable money than normal and the excitement reduce the usual inhibitions. While spending more time in a shopping centre may lead to an increase of impulse buys as shown by previous research,

this does not necessarily prove that limited time available has detrimental effects on impulse buying decisions.

2.8.3 The Social Dimension

In addition to time and money available, social factors may considerably affect the individual's sensitivity to product prices as well as shopping motivations (Wakefield and Inman, 2003). As depicted in Table 2.4 above, the social dimension of shopping is centred round symbolic meanings, relationships, and the consumer's self-identity and self-esteem enhancement (Chandon et al., 2000; Rintamäki et al., 2006). Going shopping may be motivated by the individual's need for attention, socialising with peers or spending leisure time (Tauber, 1972). Social factors which may affect the buying decision of an individual include the family background, the current, aspirational or dissociative reference group, as well as roles and status (Adcock et al., 2001). Questions such as 'how does the social visibility of a prospective purchase affect buying behaviour' will be part of this study. In this study the role and influence of social relationships will be analysed in view of the entire impulse buying experience.

The theory of reasoned action proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) assumes that behaviour among others is the result of other people's expectations based on social desirability and the individual's intention to comply with these social norms. In a shopping context this could mean that a consumer justifies his or her own buying behaviour with other people's and thereby reducing any inhibitions about the purchase. For impulse purchases Rook and Fisher (1995) propose that normative evaluations occur as an alternative to the subjective norms of the theory of reasoned action. They observed that there is typically a time delay between the buying impulse and the actual purchase, during which even impulsive people may experience encouraging or discouraging normative evaluations. As a consequence

"even impulsive buyers seem able to reject making an impulsive purchase when negative normative evaluations reach some critical level." (Rook and Hoch, 1995, p.311)

According to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) social influence is one of the factors which affect a person's intention to carry out an action. This theory adds the element of perceived behavioural control to the theory of reasoned action. This means that the beliefs about the opinion of other people regarding a certain

action, for example a purchase, affect this person's behaviour (East, 1997). The individual's personal beliefs and attitudes towards a product may either correspond to or conflict with assumed normative beliefs of important others. The individual evaluates how overall these outside influences approve or disapprove of the purchase. There is the threat that the purchase decision may be evaluated in a negative light by others leading to negative emotions in decision-making and implications on one's self-esteem (Luce et al., 2001). Omar and Kent (2001) found in the context of impulse buying in international airports that only little attention has been given in prior research on how and when normative evaluations occur as well as to what extent. In this study, normative evaluations will be investigated further.

Other people may not only affect decision-making in impulse buying by their presence but also through the phenomenon of social comparison. Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) for example suggest that consumers rationalise their purchases in terms of feeling entitled to acquire a certain product. This may include social comparison. Similarly, consumers often buy on impulse in order to boost their self-image and compensate for any shortcomings compared to other people (Dittmar et al., 1996). This

"might be particularly important when people engage in non-planned 'spur of the moment' purchases. Such impulsive buys, without careful deliberation and prior intent, may well be regretted later." (Dittmar and Drury, 2000, p.110)

The role of regret will be investigated further in this study.

While the presence of friends or relatives may play an important role in the consumer's purchasing decisions, their impact on impulse buying may be both either positive or negative. It appears to be necessary to distinguish between the different influences of different people, for example peers versus relatives, because each reference group may have different normative expectations. This was shown by Luo (2005) who found in two experiments that the urge to purchase is increased by the presence of peers and decreased by the presence of family members. Compared to family members peer groups are relatively more receptive to the buying urge, consider impulse buying to be desirable and exert less pressure to monitor one's purchases (Childers and Rao, 1992). Family members on the other hand may have monetary concerns about impulse buying being wasteful and extravagant (Abrams et al., 2000; Baumeister, 2002). Forsyth (2000) argues that

the attractiveness of the group to its members, i.e. group cohesiveness, may increase the individual's motivation to comply with its values and norms.

The findings from an international study in shopping centres in the US, China and Hong Kong indicate that overall the "different impacts offset each other and leave social companions showing no significant effects on buying decisions" (Zhuang et al., 2006, p.35). As a result, Zhuang et al. (2006) claim that the total expenditures in impulse buying are not affected by other people as some purchases may not take place while others are supported. This study will examine the possibility of diverse influences by different people during the impulse buying process.

Multiple research indicates that the impulse buying tendency is a consumer personality trait (for example Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Verplanken and Herabadi, 2001; Weun et al., 1998). Mooradian and Olver (1997, p.390) found that

"gross personality traits do affect more specific consumer behaviors through their impact on emotional response systems."

Personality such as extroversion can be related to positive consumption-based emotions whereas neuroticism typically has a negative effect (Mooradian and Olver, 1997). In the context of impulse buying Lin and Chuang (2005) found that adolescents with high emotional intelligence showed less impulse behaviour than their low emotional counterparts. People with emotional intelligence are able to perceive and understand emotions in the self and other people (Caruso et al., 2002).

The impulse buying tendency may depend on the susceptibility to influence, which means the degree to which an individual is willing to accept input from other people about buying decisions (Bearden and Etzel, 1982). In this context Triandis (1995) assumes that social patterns and culture affect impulse buying behaviour. Contrary to Rook and Fisher (1995) who generalise for all shoppers on the likely detrimental effects of social visibility on impulse buying, Triandis (1995) differentiate between individualist and collectivist personalities. People who are more individualist rely on their own preferences whereas people who are more collectivist are closely connected to their group and their behaviour is often motivated by group norms and expectations (Triandis, 1995). Qualitative research for example from Kacen and Lee (2002) demonstrated the influence of culture on impulse buying behaviour, namely, that an individualist orientation increases impulse buying. This means that

the impulse purchase of products for one's personal use occurs more often than of collective-use products (Mai et al., 2003). One of the reasons for this may be an increased risk of getting negative feedback about an impulse buying decision if it affects other people. Potential unfavourable feedback may affect the emotional state, in particular the level of happiness, of the impulse buyer. This will be further examined in this study.

2.8.4 The Hedonic Dimension

Hedonic consumption is widely condemned and rejected as the least appealing feature of Western society as criticised by O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002). From an etymological perspective the word hedonism is derived from the Greek *hedone*, meaning pleasure, enjoyment or delight (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002). Hedonic consumption follows the pleasure principle and is a main motivation in impulse buying (for example Baumgartner, 2002). Impulse buying is considered as a hedonic purchase behaviour characterised by affective, low-effort decision-making and psychological motivations rather than thinking, cognitive processing and considering functional benefits (Baumgartner, 2002; Hoyer and MacInnis, 2001). 'Non-rational' reasons are often cited as motivations of impulse purchases, such as to overcome a depressed mood or just for fun and enjoyment (Engel et al., 1990; Sheth et al., 1999; Verplanken and Herabadi, 2001). Instead of purchasing because of utilitarian values, the consumer follows his senses and wants and focuses his hedonic consumption motives on the three F's - fantasies, feelings and fun (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Verplanken et al., 2005). Arnold and Reynolds (2003) suggest six dimensions of hedonic shopping motivations: adventure, gratification, role, value, social, and idea shopping. According to Dittmar and Drury (2000) the psychological motivations in impulse buying, such as desire, want and treat outweigh financial implications. In this context, Wood (2005, p.274) notes:

"The purchase of a good or service for motives of novelty, excitement, fashion, status, escape from routine, entertainment or other 'hedonic' motivations must count as one of the main and most important types of unplanned purchase."

Hedonic motivations for shopping include the search for novelty and keeping up with new trends, the satisfaction of curiosity and the reduction of boredom (Scitovsky, 1992; Sheth, 1983). Boredom can be a motivation for impulse buying

as it may be perceived as an undesirable mood state the consumer intends to overcome. Various research studies have shown the important role of mood in impulse buying (for example Rook and Gardner, 1993; Schwarz and Bohner, 1996; Thompson et al., 1990). A mood can be described as a short-lived temporary state which individuals experience as positive or negative and with a more pleasant or unpleasant disposition (Oliver, 1997; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003). Moods are induced by external stimuli as well as by our thoughts on past or future events (Sheth et al., 1999).

Rook and Gardner (1993) showed that negative mood states, such as boredom and frustration, make it significantly more likely for impulsive people to buy on impulse. The link between shopping and compensation can also be referred to as retail therapy, using consumption as a means for mood repair (for example Woodruffe, 1997). As various studies suggest consumers try to overcome their feelings of depression and low self-esteem through the emotional lift, excitement and momentary euphoria of impulse shopping (for example O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Scitovsky, 1976). Impulse buying can induce the following mood changes as experienced by a participant in a study from Thompson et al. (1990, p.356):

"It's a high. It occurred to me that if I get depressed, then I want to go shopping. It's a thrill. It gives you a lift to buy something fun. Grocery shopping doesn't do that."

Impulse buying in the sense of self-gifting can be induced for example by the novelty of the brand and can have a therapeutic role to cheer oneself up, rewarding oneself or celebrating the relief of stress (for example Mick et al., 1992; Mick and DeMoss, 1990).

A current positive mood state can affect impulse buying by increasing the willingness to accept risk and reducing the systematic processing of information (for example Schwarz and Bohner, 1996). However, this does not mean that positive affect, such as feeling happy, leads to superficial information processing and irresponsible, inefficient decision-making (Isen, 2000). People who are in a positive mood may want to reward themselves more generously and thereby try to extend the duration of this currently enjoyed positive mood state (Isen, 1984; Rook and Gardner, 1993). In the retail context, an approach behaviour implies the desire to stay in the shop and possibly buy the product, whereas avoidance describes the opposite (Chebat and Michon, 2003). Shoppers who are in a positive mood tend to buy more on impulse than those who experience a negative mood (Rook and

Gardner, 1993) although impulse buying may occur under both a positive and a negative mood (Clark and Isen, 1982).

Another hedonic motivation for impulse buying can be seen in the shopping environment. The shopping environment in particular in-store promotional activities, the store atmosphere and the way the products are presented can trigger emotional responses and modify buying behaviour (for example Babin and Babin, 2001; Donovan et al., 1994; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). A pleasurable store environment appears to have a strong positive impact on the consumer spending additional time and more money than originally intended (Donovan et al., 1994). In practice, retailers are continually trying to support impulse buying through, for example, store design and layout, congruent ambient scent and music, product displays and package design which can positively affect impulsive shoppers (Mattila and Wirtz, 2001; Morrin and Chebat, 2005).

In-store browsing for recreational or informational purposes with no immediate buying intention (Bloch et al., 1986) is a form of on-going search and a major component in the impulse buying process (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998). In order to shift from in-store browsing to shopping, the consumer first needs to overcome a mental hurdle (Dhar et al., 2007). Once this is crossed, further purchases are more likely to happen. Lately, the term "shopping momentum" was brought up in research in the context of impulse buying, which means that an "initial purchase provides a psychological impulse that enhances the purchase of a second, unrelated product" (Dhar et al., 2007, p.370). 'Shopping momentum' stands in contrast to rational behaviour which is based on costs and benefits. This is in line with Gollwitzer's (1990) theory of implementation and deliberation mind-sets. This theory is based on the proposition that 'shopping momentum' occurs because the initial purchase shifts the buyer from a deliberative to an implemental mind-set. Thereby subsequent purchases are triggered. The deliberation mind-set evaluates the pros and cons of an action whereas the implementation mind-set, which is concerned about the correct timing of activities, leads to achieving a goal.

2.9 Evaluation of the Impulse Buying Experience

After the acquisition of a product, the consumer decision-making process concludes in the evaluation of the purchase which may affect future purchase decisions (Foxall, 2003). The most central theory in post-purchase evaluation is

Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. In buying situations cognitive dissonance occurs when the actual performance of the acquired good or service differs from one's expectations. Doubt, or negative cognitive dissonance, can be resolved by upgrading the evaluation of the purchase, while the rejected alternatives will be devalued (De Mooij, 2004; Earl and Wicklund, 1999; Sheth et al., 1999). In this study the impact of impulse buying on the consumer will be addressed, including positive as well as negative experiences after the purchase, such as regret and the role of guilt. These will be introduced in this section.

2.9.1 Regret and Guilt

There is substantial research on regret in decision-making (for example Loomes and Sugden, 1982; Starmer and Sugden, 1998), but with particular regard to the role and scope of regret in impulse buying there has been a lack of research (Beatty and Ferrell, 1996; Dittmar and Drury, 2000). The evaluation of a purchase may have different outcomes. They are illustrated in Table 2.5. The effect of the mood state on the evaluation of the purchase (right column of Table 2.5) will be discussed in section 2.9.2.

If the actual performance of a product meets expectations, the customer may experience a neutral feeling after the purchase (see Table 2.5). Cadotte et al. (1987) claim that customers are likely to be satisfied after the purchase if the performance of the product exceeds their expectations. This might not necessarily be the case as according to Festinger's (1957) theory dissonance occurs, which could lead to both satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The discounting model has been the standard explanation of impulse buying (Strotz, 1956). This model assumes that the impulse buyers discount the future at too rapid a rate, which means that the benefits of the desired object shortly before the purchase outweigh the future problem of paying for the item. These temporary preferences switch when paying the bill and regretting the purchase (Dittmar and Beattie, 1998).

Dittmar and Drury (2000) expect regret to occur more often in the context of impulse than planned buying, because the latter had been considered in more detail prior to the buying decision. Most impulse buyers in their study expressed regret while some others were pleased with their impulse buying decision or did not experience regret provided their impulse buy was inexpensive (Dittmar and Drury, 2000). Impulse buying specifically has been linked to result in financial problems,

Table 2.5: Evaluation of a Purchase

Source: Adapted from Cadotte et al. (1987), Dawson et al. (1990), Mackie and Worth (1989)

product disappointment, guilt feelings, and social disapproval (Rook, 1987). Rook and Fisher (1995) claim that 80 percent of impulse buyers remembered some negative experiences with impulse purchases, which may also include regret. However, the experience of regret is not one-dimensional, for example

"the very same impulse purchase can simultaneously be regretted on some dimensions (e.g. money spent) and not regretted on others (e.g. liking the good)." (Dittmar and Drury, 2000, p.127)

Similarly, Thompson et al. (1990, p.359) observed that participants

"while usually 'loving' an impulsively purchased product, they also expressed concerns over spending too much money, not really needing the item, or simply feeling that they should have waited before making the purchase."

On the other hand, consumers also report negative feelings after their decision not to purchase a desired object as reflected in the model from Hoch and Loewenstein (1991). Their model of time-inconsistent preferences assumes that prior to the actual purchase the consumer conceives of owning the item and feels deprived if the purchase is eventually not made. There is evidence that the powerful urge to buy particularly aims to avoid the pain of foregoing consumption than to search for pleasure (Silverstein, 1976).

In view of the determinants of guilt Izard (1977, p.423) states that “usually people feel guilty when they become aware that they have broken a rule and violated their own standards or beliefs”. In the shopping context Burnett and Lunsford (1994) suggest that consumer guilt is a negative emotion leading to a potential loss of self-esteem due to a violation of one’s values or norms. Burnett and Lunsford (1994) propose to classify consumer guilt into four types as illustrated in Figure 2.4:

Figure 2.4: Consumer Guilt

Source: Adapted from Burnett and Lunsford (1991)

Moral guilt for example may occur with regard to societal norms, and social responsibility guilt refers to not fulfilling one’s social obligations. The self-scripts of impulse buyers in a study by Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) indicate particularly in view of non-necessary items a sense of confession and guilty feelings among the participants. Similarly the study from Gardner and Rook (1988, p.128) shows that 38 percent of the sample reported feeling “somewhat to extremely guilty” with their impulse buys. On the other hand, over 90 percent of this sample were falling in the “somewhat to extremely happy range” (Gardner and Rook, 1988, p.128). These figures suggest that a large number of consumers associate impulse buying as a means for immediate gratification. This study will further analyse the notion of guilt and regret in the context of evaluations of impulse buying experiences.

2.9.2 A Positive Experience

Wood (1998a, p.298) asks:

"Does lack of planning necessarily entail an unsatisfactory purchase - a purchase that a consumer will judge as wasteful and later regret? - The general answer must be no."

Although Wood (1995) found that the majority of participants in his sample generally wish to decrease their impulse buying habits, he argues that consumers may nonetheless experience more satisfaction with a particular impulse purchase than with a planned buy (for example Brinley, 1989; Smiley, 1995). As discussed earlier, previous research widely agrees that impulse buying involves a hedonic component, fulfils needs for fun and novelty and can make the impulse buyer feel uplifted and full of joy (for example Cobb and Hoyer, 1986; Hausman, 2000; Ramanathan and Menon, 2006). There exists compelling evidence for any kind of product that satisfaction with a consumption experience is not only based on the cognitive appraisal but also on consumption-based emotions (for example Mano and Oliver, 1993).

Gardner and Rook (1988) found that almost 80 per cent of the moods after an impulse buy classify as a positive mood. These findings were supported by a sample which, after reflecting on a previous impulse buy, confirmed that 75 percent of the participants feeling better after the purchase than before, while only 8 percent felt worse (Gardner and Rook, 1988). Faber and Christenson's (1995) study brought similar results. The majority of consumers in their study perceived a better mood after an impulse buy. Drawing on these findings Beatty and Ferrell (1998) conclude that impulse buying can yield positive experiences after the purchase. As illustrated in Table 2.5 above (right column), positive evaluations after the purchase may also depend on one's mood. Mackie and Worth (1989) found that a positive mood state distracts processing of information. Therefore Dawson et al. (1990) argue that a consumer in a positive post purchase mood may be less critical, evaluate a purchase in a more positive light and is therefore more likely to claim that expectations have been met compared to a neutral or negative mood state.

2.10 Summary

Despite the stigma attached to impulse buying and its ongoing devaluation as the dark side of consumption (for example Mick, 1996; Silvera et al., 2008), there are contributions in more recent literature which shed a brighter light on impulse buying (for example Hausman, 2000). Existing models of consumer decision-making do not appear to be appropriate for impulse buying, as was shown in the context of consumer involvement. Motivations for engaging in impulse buying are diverse and range from social and utilitarian aspects to hedonic reasons. Particularly female shoppers resort to impulse buying as a therapeutic means for mood repair (for example Woodruffe, 1997).

The intention to gain a better understanding of impulse buying experiences from the consumers' perspective requires a broad understanding of the notion of impulse buying. In this study, the framework of impulse buying includes 'pure' and novelty as well as 'suggestion' impulse buys (Stern, 1962). Contrary to most previous research the impulse buy does not have to be induced by a sudden urge with limited consideration of any consequences but may include a time delay between the buying decision and the actual acquisition of the item. Instead of a sudden execution of the urge to buy, the understanding of 'sudden' refers to the quick decision-making.

The literature on impulse buying, however, constitutes only one pillar of this research. For an exploration of the research questions with the overall aim to investigate whether impulse buying makes female shoppers feel happy, a second pillar is required. This is the literature on happiness. Intending to emphasise the multitude of facets and complexity of happiness, the next chapter first of all sets the general background of happiness studies by touching on various fields of research. This is followed by exploring happiness in the context of impulse buying.

Chapter 3: Happiness

3.1 Introduction

Starting from a purely philosophical perspective with Socrates and Aristotle first mentioning the concept of happiness, happiness has been investigated in a multitude of disciplines, in particular in the social sciences (Sarot, 1996). Research may be hindered by the lack of an agreed meaning of the term happiness and the broad scope of happiness (Averill and More, 2000). In recent years, however, there has been growing interest in researching the pursuit of happiness (for example Hsee and Hastie, 2006; Myers and Diener, 1997; Strongman, 2003).

Not everybody may accept the utilitarian axiom that the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people (Vesey and Foulkes, 1990) is the only and ultimate value but there is hardly any doubt about the desirability of happiness (Telfer, 1980; Veenhoven, 2000). For instance, if there was a choice between wealth, fame and happiness, the latter would be chosen by most people (Averill and More, 2000). If greater happiness should be created for a greater number of people, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the determinants of happiness and the reasons why happiness occurs.

In consumer behaviour research, emotional aspects have been neglected until relatively recently and Bagozzi et al. (2002) demand that purchase emotions such as frustration, disappointment and happiness should receive more attention in addition to the currently central topic of post purchase satisfaction. With particular regard to impulse buying as one kind of the consumption experience, there is little evidence of any particular research into its relationship with happiness with a combined analysis from a psychological behavioural point of view as well as from a marketing perspective of consumer research.

While in the last 25 years the underlying reasons for impulse buying have been increasingly researched, these analyses have been rather broad, with limited regard to a detailed investigation into particular motivations. Despite happiness being mentioned as one possible motivation for impulse purchases, there is little evidence of any in-depth exploration of the intensity, duration and timing of happiness in the context of impulse buying. It remains largely unanswered how the positive or negative attitude towards an impulse buy evolves over the course of the

buying experience. The increased tendency towards impulse buying in the Western society of pleasure-seekers would be an illogical consequence if the guilty conscience in impulse buying should be predominant. Rook and Fisher (1995) propose that we need a more detailed understanding of how, when and to what extent judgements about the appropriateness of impulse purchases actually occur.

It is the intention of the present study to bring more clarity to the mystery of happiness in the consumption experience, in particular in the context of impulse buying. In this chapter, happiness will be explored from different angles: starting with the history of happiness studies and theories of emotion, it will be attempted to provide an understanding of happiness in general with particular regard to cultural and language differences. The characteristics of happy people and how to manipulate happiness will also be discussed in this chapter. This chapter will conclude with the emergent themes regarding happiness and impulse buying.

3.2 History of Happiness Studies

Happiness is a broad concept which has been researched since ancient Greek times and has been considered from various different points of view. Disciplines which deal with the phenomenon of happiness include diverse subjects, such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, politics, religion, economics, retail and marketing. Three ideals of happiness can be broadly distinguished: Firstly, the Ancient Greek Philosophy, mainly the views from Socrates, Aristotle, and Epicurus. Secondly, Moral Philosophy, in particular the Utilitarian ideal. Finally, the current Quality-of-Life research.

3.2.1 Happiness in the Ancient Greek Philosophy

Three aspects were considered by Socrates (470-399 BC) as requirements for a meaningful life: these were virtue and knowledge, closely linked with happiness (Aristotle, 2000; Vesey and Foulkes, 1990). Aristotle (384-322 BC) was the first person who systematically examined the notion of happiness (Barrow, 1980). In particular, the *Nicomachean Ethics* as one of his most central works had a major influence on the development of concepts of happiness (Barrow, 1980). Aristotle identified the pursuit of happiness as a central concern in the life of a human being

and the highest good which can be achieved by effort (Aristotle, 2000). This can be exemplified by a statement in the Nicomachean Ethics:

"Of all the good things to be done, what is the highest. Most people, I should think, agree about what it is called, since both the masses and sophisticated people call it happiness...[But] they disagree about substantive conceptions of happiness." (Aristotle, 2000, Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1, Chapter 4, 1095a)

The Greek term 'eudaimonia' is conventionally translated into 'happiness' but this term does not appear to correspond in all respects to the concept of eudaimonia (for example Barrow, 1980; Telfer, 1980). Instead the Greek idea of 'eudaimonia' can be understood as "truly fortunate" in the sense of an individual is happy as he has something which is "worth desiring or worth having in life" (Telfer, 1980, p.37). This indicates that eudaimonia is a more objective evaluation compared to hedonistic happiness (Telfer, 1980). Sarot (1996) translates the characteristics of the old term 'eudaimonia' into the modern ideal of self-actualisation or self-fulfilment, which reminds of Maslow's (1967) hierarchy of needs.

In Aristotle's view 'eudaimonia' can be achieved through virtuous activities and a moral life, friendship and the pursuit of intellectual challenges (Barrow, 1980; Hills, 2001). Aristotle argued that the achievement of one's major goals in life is central in order to achieve eudaimonia (Barrow, 1980; Telfer, 1980). Happiness is considered as something self-sufficient and the end of what is done instead of being a means to an end (Aristotle, 2000). Happiness consists of more than pleasure alone and striving for happiness is a life-time's goal which can only be measured after a full lifetime, that is with regard to a long duration "for one swallow does not make a summer" (Aristotle, 2000, Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1, Chapter 7, 1098a).

Epicurus, in contrast to Aristotle, very strongly connects pleasure with happiness (Barrow, 1980). The hedonistic philosophy of Epicurus (341-270 BC) is generally devoted to pleasure, comfort and a kind of luxurious life. Friendship is of vital importance in the pursuit of happiness according to the Epicurean philosophy (Carlo, 1998).

The investigations of the ancient Greek philosophers about the concept of happiness form the basis of our contemporary understanding of happiness. Subsequent philosophers after the third century BC were largely disinterested in any further examination of the concept of happiness. For instance, during the time of the Reformation, happiness was dealt with in projections into the afterlife,

“earthly pleasure, if not happiness itself, was to be avoided” (Hills, 2001, p.6). The emphasis towards the pursuit of happiness on earth instead of focussing on the afterlife began to shift through the works of John Locke (1632-1704) and Montesquieu (1689-1755) as well as through the Utilitarian ethics of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).

3.2.2 Happiness in Moral Philosophy

The British empiricist John Locke held the view that “man by nature cannot but pursue his happiness” (Barrow, 1980, p.41). Montesquieu evaluated individual happiness in comparison with others:

“if we only wanted to be happy it would be easy; but we want to be happier than other people, which is almost always difficult, since we think them happier than they are.” (Barrow, 1980, p.33)

Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) was the first who brought up the doctrine that “the good is to be found in the greatest happiness of the greatest number” as a principle of moral and political action (Vesey and Foulkes, 1990, p.43). The Utilitarian ethics of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) evaluate actions purely in terms of their consequences: if the consequences of an action are good, so is the action and vice versa (Vesey and Foulkes, 1990). These ideas led to the Principle of Utility:

“the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question (is) the only right and proper and universally desirable end of human conduct.” (Scruton, 1995, p.224)

The utilitarian ideals have a meaning for modern politics of the 21st century. For instance, Layard (2005a, p.5) reminds of Jeremy Bentham who proclaimed that “the best society is one where the citizens are happiest”. Similarly Veenhoven (1988, 1989) suggests that the 19th century Utilitarian moral philosophy forms the ideological basis of the 20th century welfare states. John Stuart Mill proposed that there are different types of happiness which vary but according to Layard (2005a, p.23) “was wrong to argue that some types of happiness are intrinsically better than others”.

Veenhoven (1988) notes that many people in the 19th century possibly considered happiness even as harmful because happiness “turns people into ‘contented cows’ and undermines social bonds” (Veenhoven, 1988, p.333). In the 19th century it was believed that enjoying life results in idleness, thus discontinuing the search for a better life and leaving room for political manipulation and a society of egoists preoccupied with individualism (Veenhoven, 1989). This exemplifies that over the centuries the pursuit of happiness has increasingly become an issue in other disciplines than the field of philosophy, for example politics, economics, or the welfare state. With regard to happiness as a central concern in politics, the American Declaration of Independence¹ proclaimed in 1776 guarantees of the right to pursue happiness.

After another period of neglected activities on dealing further with happiness, towards the end of the 19th century more disciplines other than philosophy and politics developed an interest in the notion of happiness, namely the field of psychology. The psychologist Freud (1856-1939) considered the human desire for pleasure through its demand for immediate satisfaction to be the major motivation of our actions and therefore the main driving force of the unconscious Id or pleasure principle. According to Freud (1911) a mental malfunction may develop if pleasure is missing in a person’s life.

3.2.3 Current Quality-of-Life Research

Much of the modern scientific writing on happiness can be found in different disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, sociology, politics, and economics. With the launch of the Journal of Happiness Studies in 2000, Veenhoven aims to structure this so far rather uncoordinated quality-of-life research. The current quality-of-life research includes among others the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology, a recent movement led by the psychologist Martin Seligman, concentrates research on affirming positive emotions instead of adding even more to the research of negative emotions. Positive emotions are also central in the modern experience economy in which consumption is associated more with

¹ “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” (Declaration of Independence, 1776)

hedonic pleasure than with the satisfaction of a need. The topic happiness has also entered modern politics. The economics of happiness was the new 'big idea' at the turn of the century, challenging traditional politics and being discussed in governmental units and on conferences, such as the American Economists Association (Bunting, 2001; Solomon, 1996).

3.2.3.1 Positive Psychology and the Experience Economy

Reminiscent of the Greek eudaimonia, Maslow (1967) claims that a person may grow towards self-actualisation through a combination of joy, peak experiences and happiness. Happiness can be associated with feelings of perfection and include values of truthfulness and beauty (Atkinson et al., 1990; Maslow, 1967). Supporting this positive view on happiness, cognitive psychology claims that a positive self-attitude can buffer stress by understanding stressful situations as a challenge rather than a threat (Veenhoven, 1989). Veenhoven (1989, p.3) suggests that these positive evaluations of happiness "suggest that humans function best when they take pleasure in life. Hence happy people make for a sane society".

The central idea of positive psychology is that individuals should focus on their strengths. In his contribution to the BBC Two series 'The Happiness Formula' Seligman (2006) stated on television that "there is good evidence that simple exercises increase happiness and decrease depression". He claims that the unchangeable biological set point of well-being does not appear to exist. According to Seligman (2006) the formula for happiness in positive psychology can be described as follows: Happiness = pleasure + engagement + meaning (Seligman, 2006). This formula reflects an observation from earlier research by Lasch (1984) which highlighted that the consumer society of pleasure-seekers focus on pleasure as a means to achieve happiness instead of associating happiness with achievement, success or virtue as in the Greek philosophy. More recent research confirms that the current consumer culture has an increasingly materialistic value orientation characterised by pursuing money and acquiring material possessions with the aim to increase personal happiness, image and status (Dittmar, 2004; Kasser and Kanner, 2004; Richins, 2004). As pleasure resides in attracting any desirable objects, both goods and human beings may be treated in a similar way (Gabriel and Lang, 2006). In the modern experience economy consumers do not consume to survive or for need but for pleasure, which resides mainly in the total emotional experience (Gabriel and Lang, 2006; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Possibly

impulse buying is one of these positive emotional experiences in the consumption process.

3.2.3.2 Politics and the Economics of Happiness

The economist Andrew Oswald claims in an interview that

"we're now so rich in historical terms that for the normal man or woman, more BMW's or beefburgers are not going to transform the quality of their lives. Material things don't make a difference. Over [the period of 30 years] our living standards have increased dramatically, but it hasn't made us happier." (Bunting, 2001, p.17)

Layard (2005b, p.26) praises Bentham's utilitarianism of the 19th century and suggests it as "an increasingly practical yardstick for public policy". Following the basic principle of the American Declaration of Independence Layard (2005a) argues that public policy of today should be judged in terms of their capacity to increase happiness and decrease misery. This is in line with Veenhoven (1989) who suggests that governments need to set the grounds for a 'livable' society which enables people to enjoy life. Regular quality-of-life surveys initiated by a number of governments include data on the levels and distribution of happiness or life satisfaction (Veenhoven, 1989). The results can be used in social policy to devise measures to improve happiness. With Layard's (2005b) demand for an explicit focus of politics on happiness, he alludes to the utilitarianism with its belief that a good society consists of many happy people.

Currently happiness is not measured and recorded every year in similar terms as inflation or gross domestic product (GDP)¹. This allows the conclusion that politicians appear to believe that an increase of a nation's happiness is less important than parameters such as the growth of the GDP. However, the considerable cost of unhappiness for the macroeconomy through illnesses and work-absenteeism has alerted economists to take happiness seriously (Bunting, 2001). Neither personal income increase nor a growing economic welfare since the 1950s appear to influence positively our happiness levels. A rising income only increases one's chances of happiness if everybody else's income remains

¹ As an exception, the Kingdom of Bhutan introduced Gross National Happiness in 1998. Gross National Happiness is a more important goal for the government than Gross National Product. In Bhutan, happiness has been given precedence over economic prosperity. (Thinley, 1998)

constant, meaning that the relative income matters in a rich country (Easterlin, 1974; Scitovsky, 1976). Despite an ongoing growth of our economic welfare and a doubled buying power, society is no happier than in the late 1950s (Myers, 1998).

The British government under Blair afforded a strategy unit for the topic 'happiness' (Jasner, 2003). This unit was led by the adviser to the Prime Minister, David Halpern (1989), who said in an interview with the New Scientist: "My guess is that, yes, we will see the emergence of 'lifestyle politics' " (Bond, 2003, p.40). Three years later Halpern reiterated in an interview in the BBC series 'The Happiness Formula'

*"that within the the next 10 years the government would
be measured against how happy it made everybody."
(Rudin, 2006)*

The paper published in 2002 by this strategy unit outlined policies to contribute to higher levels of happiness for the British people. While the American Declaration of Independence only includes the pursuit of happiness without devising any measures how to achieve this goal, this paper suggests political activities to gain deeper insights into the determinants of happiness and their interdependencies within the economy.

Public opinion seems to support the demand for an overall happier society and would prefer a government to focus on increasing general happiness rather than wealth. This was shown in an opinion poll by GfK NOP for the TV series 'The Happiness Formula' on BBC (Easton, 2006) asking "Should the Government's prime objective be to achieve the greatest happiness of the people or the greatest wealth?" 81 percent of the participants of the survey wanted 'greatest happiness' as the government's prime objective compared to 13 percent who preferred 'greatest wealth'. The topic 'happiness' seems to be of ongoing interest to everyone. For instance, newspapers, including the yellow press such as the German Bild Zeitung (Reichelt, 2005) published a series about happiness. Similarly, women's magazines, for example the German women's magazines Laura (2008) or Frau im Spiegel (2003) take an ongoing interest in writing about this topic. One of the research aims is to gain clarity on the impact of impulse purchases on an individual's happiness. The next section will investigate happiness as a basic emotion with particular regard to the role of emotions in impulse buying situations.

3.3 Emotions

3.3.1 Understanding Emotions

There exists a broad variety of frameworks describing emotions, for example one list of definitions of emotions reached a total number of 22 items and, as yet, no consensus has been achieved (Frijda, 1998; Van Brakel, 1994). Nonetheless considerable overlap can be found in a number of listings of basic emotions. Typically they include: joy or happiness, sadness or distress, disgust or aversion, as well as fear and anger (Frijda, 1999; Oatley and Johnson-Laird, 1998).

Based on Frijda's (1986) psychological research on emotions, Oatley and Jenkins (1996) suggest the following understanding of emotions, which seems to be gaining acceptance: an emotion can occur in case an event is evaluated as relevant to a personally important concern or goal. An emotion occurs after the cognitive appraisal of an event, is connected with physiological and sometimes physical processes, such as gestures, facial expressions and may result in specific reactions (Lazarus, 1991; Oatley, 1992). Arousal is considered to be a necessary part of emotions (Bagozzi et al., 2002). In an impulse buying context with a readiness to act it can be easily imagined that emotions could play a distinct part.

Emotions encompass more than feeling states, which are "intraindividual states of conscious awareness" (Frijda and Mesquita, 1994, p.51) and may remain an internal state within the individual's mind without interacting with the environment. Emotions on the other hand relate to the environment and are an affective response to events occurring in the environment which are perceived as relevant to the individual's concerns (Frijda and Mesquita, 1994). Emotions are intensive affective states which can be explosive (Derbaix and Pham, 1990), induce action (Luce et al., 2001), are tied to a specifiable behaviour (Clark and Isen, 1982) and therefore shorter in duration than moods as suggested by Ekman and Davidson (1994). The term emotion is typically used for states that last between a few minutes up to a few hours (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996) or even days (Scherer et al., 1986). Happiness being an emotion may therefore be perceived as an intensive affective state of short duration and with the capacity to induce an action. With regard to the buying context, this means that happiness could induce impulse buying actions.

Moods on the other hand tend to be less intense than emotions (Clark and Isen, 1982). While some researchers suggest that moods are generally of shorter duration (Clark and Isen, 1982), others assume that the starting and end points of moods may be unclear and moods may last for "hours, days, or weeks, sometimes as a low-intensity background" (Oatley et al., 2006, p.30). Marketing practitioners try to influence mood states in the consumption environment. Consumers who are in a good mood are more confident in buying and more willing to tolerate things such as queuing (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003). Retailers play music to improve the store atmosphere or train staff to put the shopper into the right mood as a bad mood makes buying behaviour less predictable (Gardner, 1985; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003).

3.3.2 Theories of Emotion

More than one hundred theories of emotion have been developed (Strongman, 2003). Recent theories focus on the physiological (neuroscience) or the biological (evolutionary) approach (for example Berridge, 2003; Burgdorf and Panksepp, 2006). Neuroscience emotion theories assume that emotions are based on brain mechanisms. Evolutionary emotion theories argue emotions are adaptive reactions in order to survive (Strongman, 2003).

Transferring some of the theories of emotion to an impulse buying situation, Plutchik's (2001) psychoevolutionary approach could mean that an impulse buy consists of a defined sequence of reactions. This would be starting with the conscious recognition of an item, followed by the cognitive evaluation for example of its usefulness and triggering physiological changes. The individual may get excited and feel aroused. This process may culminate in the desire to carry out the impulse buying action. According to Lazarus' (1991) theory emotional reactions occur at an even later stage: Depending on the personal significance of an item, the emotional reaction such as happiness would only occur as a result of the impulse buy instead of arising before the purchase. In a similar way Arnold (1970) connects appraisal, memory and emotion. Memories of past experiences are transferred to the current situation. In view of Arnold's theory a shopper would therefore first consider previous impulse buying situations and only after careful reflection and consideration of the past experiences evaluate the current purchasing situation. This appears contradictory to the understanding of impulse buying in most previous research (for example Piron, 1991; Rook, 1987) which

claims impulse buying happens all of a sudden and without spending much time on reflecting about the purchase. Based on this understanding of impulse buying, it would be unlikely that an impulse buy may be associated with a thoughtful reflection of possible outcomes as suggested in Damasio's (1994) theory of emotion. In this respect it appears equally unlikely that an appraisal of the emotional meaning and a judgement of the potential emotional outcome of an impulse purchase could occur prior to the actual impulse purchase as described in Frijda's (1993) theory.

The neurophysiological approach of LeDoux (1993) and LeDoux et al. (1990) may be applied more easily to the shopping context. Their applied theory could mean that an emotionally significant impulse purchase of an item may trigger the physiological response of an increased heartbeat. Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1998) add the social component and link subjective experience, bodily changes, planned action, and social relating. They propose in their theory that an emotion such as happiness occurs when progress is made towards the successful achievement of the final goal. Possibly the impulse buy of an item may be considered as the achievement of a goal and thus be related to happiness. Happiness will be explored in more detail in the next section.

3.4 Understanding Happiness

3.4.1 Etymological Meaning

The word 'happiness' has roots in the Greek and Latin languages. In Latin, 'felix' means happiness. In ancient Greek, 'eudaimonia' means happiness is the highest good (Sarat, 1996) and has connotations of being favoured by the gods (Barrow, 1980). The Greek term 'eudaimonia' is composed of 'good' and 'daimon' (Sarat, 1996). Human beings should aim "to eu prattein, live or fare well, and thus experience eudemonia" (Barrow, 1980, p.16). Telfer (1980) distinguishes hedonistic happiness from eudaimonia with the former meaning a sense of being pleased with one's life and the kind of life one personally wants to pursue and the latter being a kind of objective valuation. This means that a person is happy because he has got what is worth desiring in life. In this sense eudaimonia can be translated as "truly fortunate or truly well-off" (Telfer, 1980, p.37). However, happiness is a broad concept, a vague and abstract term, which cannot be

identified with a single sensation or feeling, nor in terms of being fortunate or well-being alone (for example Barrow, 1980; Strongman, 1996).

'Hap+-y' has its roots in early Middle English¹ and was adopted from the noun 'happ' standing for 'good luck' used in Old Norse, meaning the term originates from the North Germanic and Scandinavian languages (Chambers 21st Century Dictionary, 1996; The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998; The Oxford English Dictionary Vol. VI, 1989). The predominant modern meaning "highly pleased or contented" (Ayto, 1990, p.273) dates back to the 16th century. 'Happ', also 'hap', 'happe', or 'hape' refer to a chance occurrence, which may be a fortunate, for example having a good 'hap', or an unfortunate event, mishap, or mischance (The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998; The Oxford English Dictionary Vol. VI, 1989; The Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 1996). 'Hap' is giving us such words as 'happenstance', 'hapless', 'haphazard', and 'perhaps' (The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998; The Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 1996). It describes a lack of intention with regard to a particular event, which shows a commonality with the basic characteristics of impulsivity (The Oxford English Dictionary Vol. VI, 1989). Moreover, the lexical definition specifies that chance or fortune may act as the main trigger of events (The Oxford English Dictionary Vol. VI, 1989). Transferred to a shopping scenario, this may hint at the possible role of happiness as a motivation for and trigger of impulse buys.

In modern contemporary dictionaries the lexical meaning of the adjective 'happy' is associated with feeling or causing a great pleasure, joy and contentment (The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998; The Oxford-Duden German Dictionary, 2001; The Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 1996) due to a satisfaction with one's circumstances (Herbst et al., 2004). In a weakened sense 'happy' means being glad or pleased (The Oxford English Dictionary Vol. VI, 1989). The meaning of the term 'happy' can range according to the context. An individual can be very happy at something in the sense of being pleased about it, happy with something in terms of being satisfied or content about it, or happy to do something, meaning this person is quite willing to do something (Herbst et al., 2004). The adjective 'happy' involves good fortune and luck and is used for example in the context of 'happy ending' in a novel or a play, meaning that the characters for example get married, do not die or acquire money (The Oxford English Dictionary Vol. VI, 1989). Another example is the 'happy hour' signifying a period of time during which for example bars sell

¹ Middle English words are traceable to the period 1150 - 1500.

drinks at reduced rates (The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998). In the context of greetings 'happy' can mean full of joy, for example 'Happy birthday'.

The noun 'happiness' can be used in the sense of cheerfulness (The Blackwell Encyclopedic Dictionary of Business Ethics, 1998; The New Collins German Dictionary, 1999). 'Happiness' can be defined as "the state of pleasurable content of mind, which results from success or the attainment of what is considered good" (The Oxford English Dictionary Vol. VI, 1989, p.1097). Transferred to a consumption context, the use of the term 'happiness' may therefore be appropriate if a shopping trip is successful and leads to the acquisition of a desired item, with an overall evaluation of the purchase as 'good'.

The adverb 'happily' sums up the meanings under the headings: contentedly, fortunately, appropriately, gladly, aptly, and harmoniously, felicitously (The Oxford-Duden German Dictionary, 2001; The New Collins German Dictionary, 1999). In conclusion, in its colloquial modern day usage the term happiness is used in the context of a positive mental condition, well-being and a positive general attitude.

3.4.2 Happiness as a Positive Experience

Happiness is a positive pleasant emotion which can only be experienced by living beings with consciousness as they can evaluate a situation from the outside and imagine that things could have gone differently (Barrow, 1980). Happiness is not the entire opposite to unhappiness or simply the absence of negative emotions, such as pain and suffering (Argyle, 1987; De Bono, 1977). Happiness can be described as a continuum ranging from low levels of activation as in contentment, tranquillity or peacefulness to high levels of activation, such as joy and ecstasy (Averill and More, 2000). Pride can be connected to happiness. For instance, previous research found that participants call it a 'happy encounter' with someone when they were able to report about a positive experience in which they played a role to be proud of (for example Hensher, 1990). Davitz (1970) notes that people

have a clear understanding when to use phrases such as 'I am happy' and never refer to

"measures obtained from an electroencephalogram or a galvanometer. It was in terms of the experience of happiness, the experience of sadness, hate, or love, that informants defined the meaning of these words."
(Davitz, 1970, pp.251-252)

The experience of happiness could therefore be made in any context, for example in connection with an impulse purchase. While one intention of a purchase may be to acquire a certain product, happiness could be a by-product of this process. Lazarus (1991) is convinced that happiness is never a goal but rather the by-product when achieving other goals. Telfer (1980), on the other hand, does not believe that it is impossible to pursue happiness for its own sake. Instead Telfer (1980, p.30) argues that "there is no necessary connection between having wanted a certain situation and being pleased with it once one gets it". This could also reflect the reality in an impulse buying context where a product may be originally strongly desired but may not fulfil prior expectations.

3.4.3 Duration

Research uses the term happiness for positive emotions and generally distinguishes two dimensions of happiness, that is the cognitive and the emotional side. The cognitive side addresses a longer period of time and describes a positive evaluation of one's life in terms of being contented, satisfied, feeling fulfilled and peace of mind. The emotional dimension refers to a fairly short time of happiness and implies feeling in a good mood in terms of enjoyment, pleasure and having fun (Argyle, 1987). Lewinsohn et al. (1991) use happiness more exclusively for an emotion or feeling state whereas satisfaction refers to the cognitive dimension. An impulse buying experience as analysed in this study may involve immediate emotional reactions and turn out to be pleasurable and fun.

People who are asked what happiness means to them usually provide two kinds of answers: a) the experience of any kind of positive emotional state, such as joy or b) satisfaction with one's entire life or parts of it (Argyle et al., 1995). Most researchers use the term happiness with regard to a relatively long period in the sense of life satisfaction based on a reflection of the subjective enjoyment of one's life and the frequency and intensity of positive emotions (Argyle, 1987; Diener and

Diener, 1996; Veenhoven, 1997). Seidlitz and Diener (1993, p.654) refer to happiness as the “average levels of positive and negative affect considered over a long time period”. More specifically, Averill and More (2000) compare the duration of happiness to the duration of grief or love and acknowledge that the time span of episodes of happiness may range from a few days up to years. In his extensive studies on happiness, Veenhoven (1991a, p.2) applies the notion happiness in view of one’s entire life and defines the term as “the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life favorably”. Social psychology as well as recent philosophical studies on happiness often use the terms life-satisfaction and subjective well-being (SWB) interchangeably with happiness (for example Diener and Diener, 1996; Veenhoven, 1989).

In this study happiness is investigated in view of a particular shopping experience without regard of life satisfaction and SWB. Veenhoven (1991a, p.30) acknowledges that “short-lived states of euphoric delight are also called happiness”. According to Sumner (1996) ‘feeling happy’ and ‘being happy/having a happy life’ can be connected to the duration of happiness with ‘feeling happy’ also referring to a short-lived moment. According to Sumner (1996) feelings of happiness do not describe settled judgements about the quality of our entire life but are associated with time-limited episodes in our lives, moments, hours, or days and may change every day. Since impulse purchases are time-limited and only cover a short moment in our lives, a positive emotion for a short moment due to an impulse buy may therefore be called happiness. Feeling happy tends to be short-lived in the sense of “right here, right now you have it all - nothing is lacking” as Sumner (1996, p.144) argues. Buying an item on impulse implies this sudden action of ‘right here, right now’ and may create intense feelings of happiness.

3.4.4 Ambiguity of Happiness

Pleasure, excitement, enthusiasm, joy, interest, and relief can all contribute to happiness, but an individual may feel happy without experiencing any of these feelings (De Bono, 1977). Similarly, Barrow (1980, p.66) states that

“being happy does not necessarily imply that he [man] is specifically ecstatic or satisfied or delighted.”

Satisfaction can be distinguished from happiness as the result from an evaluation between expectations of a purchased good and the actual outcome in terms of

fulfilment of needs or wants (Parker and Mathews, 2001). Sumner (1996) argues that feelings of joy or bliss are not necessary for happiness. They are related to happiness in so far as they usually contribute to one's happiness in life (Sumner, 1996). Lazarus (1991, p.269) summarises common synonyms for happiness as

"blissful, cheerful, euphoric, joy, overjoyed, enjoyed, satisfied, contented, gratified, pleased, enthusiastic, amused, glad, gay, jolly, delighted, ecstatic, and triumphant."

Lazarus (1991) comments on this list that the alternative terms for happiness sometimes vary in intensity and meaning nuances, for example blissful and ecstatic allude to a much stronger reaction than being amused and content. This indicates that clear distinctions between happiness, joy and elation are missing (Strongman, 1996) and the term happiness itself is ambiguous:

"if contentment is happiness, it is a mild and unarousing variant, whereas joy, which I suppose extends to ecstasy, is powerful and all consuming." (Lazarus, 1991, p.265)

However, according to Lazarus (1991, p.265) joy implies "a more acutely intense reaction to a more specific event" and Power and Dalgleish (1997) note that positive emotional terms such as joy, being glad, pleased or satisfied are a more specific emotional appraisal than happiness. This is in line with Barrow (1980, p.82) who observed that the word pleasure is used "more specifically and to refer to something more immediate and concentrated" than the term happiness.

Overall, happiness is widely accepted as a subjective emotion and an individual matter and may involve feeling contented or other feelings but cannot be identified by one particular feeling (Barrow, 1980; Sarot, 1996). This means what feels beneficial towards happiness for one person, may not be optimal for someone else. Therefore this study does not challenge the individual's subjective evaluation of feelings if a person claims to perceive happiness or any kind of positive emotion in an impulse buying context. An additional complexity is added when exploring the meaning of the term happiness in different languages as will be done in the next section.

3.5 Happiness in the English and German Language

In this study the data for investigating happiness in impulse buying were collected from German native speakers in their mother tongue. Thus the relevant data and the findings had to be translated into the English language. According to Usunier (1998) any comparison across cultures requires attention to the language itself in order to avoid biased findings. Lexical and grammatical translation differences as well as cultural translation issues indicate the unique spirit of a language (Usunier, 1998).

3.5.1 Cultural Similarities and Differences

There are cultural differences in view of the expressions of emotion and judgement because they are learnt behaviours (De Mooij, 2004). Culture affects what people say, feel and think and how they express their emotions (Lazarus, 1991). Linguistic investigations have shown that happiness is considered a universal emotion which can be accessed through any language (De Mooij, 2004; Wierzbicka, 1992). Culture and language are interdependent with culture being reflected in language, which in turn expresses values. These values vary depending on the language used (De Mooij, 2004). For instance Americans associate the achievement of goals with happiness whereas Danes achieve greatest happiness when they spend time with family and friends (De Mooij, 2004). Contrary to Western cultures, some cultures perceive the pursuit of happiness and joy as less socially acceptable, or even associate happiness with a negative emotion like the Ifaluk¹ (Power and Dagleish, 1997). The Ifaluk understand happiness as the tendency for the individual to put his needs first ignoring the needs of others or the social group (Power and Dagleish, 1997).

The majority of emotional terms in most languages refer to one of the four basic emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. Instead of happiness, Wierzbicka (1994) suggests the term 'joy' (with equivalents such as 'Freude' in German, 'joie' in French or the Italian 'gioia') may be more suitable from a cross-cultural perspective. However, in the American culture the term happiness plays a more significant role than joy (Wierzbicka, 1994). Language differences cannot be

¹ Ifaluk, also spelt Ifalik, is an atoll in the State of Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia. It is also one of the state's municipalities.

singled out as the only reason why data on life satisfaction reveal large differences across nations, for example more than 60 percent of the Danes are 'very satisfied' compared to around 13 percent of the Italian population (Oswald, 1997). Possibly these two countries and cultures vary according to their inhabitants' different expectations from life, that means that maybe the Danes are satisfied more easily than the Italians. Oswald (1997) believes that these differences are partly due to translation difficulties because terms such as happiness, contentment and satisfaction have "subtle distinctions in English, and in other languages" (p.1819). However, language is not the only reason for differences in life satisfaction as shown by Inglehart (1990) with regard to tri-lingual Switzerland: compared to native Germans, French and Italians the German-speaking, French-speaking and Italian-speaking Swiss all scored higher satisfaction levels. This indicates that language and translation issues may only be in part responsible for the challenges in the cross-national comparison of happiness levels. The reasons for these different results in Switzerland and across Europe may be rooted in cultural differences between the countries, different outlooks on and expectations from life. In addition, economic wealth and standard of living may play a role in life satisfaction, respectively, the use of the term 'happiness' in different countries.

3.5.2 Particularities of the Languages

In the American culture positive feelings play a central role, which is also reflected in the importance of the adjective happy in American conversations. Here the adjective 'happy' is "widely used as a yardstick for measuring people's psychological well-being as well as their social adjustment" (Wierzbicka, 1994, p.184). Baranczak (1990) assumes that the term happy is possibly the most often used word in Basic American:

"It's easy to open an English-Polish or English-Russian dictionary and find an equivalent adjective. In fact, however, it will not be equivalent. The Polish word for 'happy' (and I believe this also holds for other Slavic languages) has a much more restricted meaning; it is generally reserved for rare states of profound bliss, or total satisfaction with serious things such as love, family, the meaning of life, and so on. Accordingly, it is not used as often as 'happy' in American common parlance." (Baranczak, 1990, p.12-13)

In order to reach lexical equivalence between two languages, the back-translation technique could be employed (Campbell and Werner, 1970). The source language

is translated into the target language, which is then translated by another translator back into the source language and compared. With this method potential translation errors can be detected but at the same time translation mistakes can occur in either direction (Usunier, 1998). Deutscher (1973) warns that back-translation could pretend a kind of lexical equivalence which in fact might not exist. Lexically equivalent words do not necessarily have the equivalent meanings in both languages (Usunier, 1998). Since the first cross-national comparisons of happiness levels, all research studies have proved that average happiness differs considerably across nations (Veenhoven, 1997). Veenhoven (1997) found that differences in language do not undermine comparison, as for example words like 'happiness' and 'satisfaction' have the same or similar connotations across different languages. While this shows that the general meaning associated with the notion 'happiness' is similar across countries, it does not mean that there is one exact translation of the word 'happiness' from one language into another. In an interview with the New Scientist (Bond, 2003, p.41) Veenhoven admits

"interpreting the data can be a great problem. The word 'happiness' has no precise equivalent in some languages. Even in English it means different things to different people."

This study investigates happiness in view of a short-term experience. While the term 'happiness' may be used in a similar manner across nations in view of overall satisfaction with life as Veenhoven (1997) had shown, this term may be applied differently across nations in view of single short term experiences. This becomes apparent with the translation of the abstract term happiness from English into German, which reveals various different meanings in the German translation. In the first instance, though, The New Collins German Dictionary (1999) and the Duden Oxford Großwörterbuch Englisch (1990) translate happiness into German 'Glück'¹ and happily into 'glücklich'².

Happiness is translated into:

1. Glück, Glücksgefühl (luck, luckiness)
2. Beglückung (bringing happiness to someone)
3. Fröhlichkeit (being cheerful)
4. Zufriedenheit (contentment)
5. Heiterkeit, Fröhlichkeit (cheerfulness)

¹ Glück [glʏk]

² glücklich [glʏklicʰ]

The adjective happy can be translated into:

1. glücklich (joyful, glad)
2. erfreut (being very pleased)
3. erfreulich (causing joy)
4. fröhlich (cheerful)
5. zufrieden (contented)
6. etwas gern tun (glad to do something)

The adverb happily means:

1. glücklich (happily)
2. mit Vergnügen (gladly)
3. gut, treffend, passend (aptly)
4. glücklicherweise (fortunately)

(Duden Oxford Großwörterbuch Englisch, 1990; The New Collins German Dictionary, 1999)

While this indicates that the term 'happy' appears to be closely connected to the German term 'glücklich', the phrase 'to be happy about something' is translated into 'mit etwas zufrieden sein' (being contented) (Pons Collins Großwörterbuch für Experten und Universität, 1999) and the phrase 'to feel happy about something' carries the German meaning 'über etwas erfreut sein' (being pleased) (Leo Deutsch-Englisch Wörterbuch, 2009). It is significant to notice that the English 'happy' is an adjective while its closest equivalents in other European languages are verbs, for example 'sich freuen' in German and 'se réjouir' in French (Wierzbicka, 1994). These verbs emphasise on the temporary occurrence while the adjective 'happy' refers to a long-term state (Wierzbicka, 1994). This, however, appears to stand in contrast to the observation from Baranczak (1990) about the frequency of using this term in Basic American as mentioned above.

Translating from German into English results in different possibilities. The German term 'Glück' has many translations into English. In alphabetical order 'Glück' can mean:

1. auspiciousness
2. bliss
3. felicity
4. fortune
5. happiness, meaning 'Freude' and 'Hochstimmung'
6. luck, luckiness

The corresponding adjective 'glücklich' can stand for:

1. advantageous, fortunate (vorteilhaft)
2. auspicious (günstig, vielversprechend)
3. being fulfilled with deep pleasure, being extremely pleased, happy (von tiefer Freude/Glück erfüllt, beglückt)
4. contented (zufrieden)
5. happy (froh, selig, erfreulich, von Glück erfüllt)
6. happily (vorteilhaft, zufrieden)
7. lucky, fortunate (erfolgreich, vom Glück begünstigt)

(Langenscheidt Muret-Sanders Großwörterbuch Englisch Teil II, 2004; The New Collins German Dictionary, 1999; The Oxford-Duden German Dictionary, 2001).

Based on these translations of the terms 'happy, happiness' respectively the German 'glücklich, Glück' it can be assumed that the central concept of happiness is very similar and largely overlaps across the two cultures. However, the terms are not equivalent or interchangeable between the two languages. Each language has got its own cultural uniqueness which could support the view that as many foreign terms as possible should remain in the source language (Usunier, 1998). This concept of untranslation due to cultural differences is based on the view that translation should be avoided if the meaning of a word would be "fundamentally altered by the translation process" (Usunier, 1998, p.142). Instead of translating the original term into the target language, it is kept unaltered in the original source language. Alternatively, the word is translated into the target language but a note of the original meaning is kept if the meaning is slightly changed.

In this study, this concept of untranslation does not appear to improve the understanding of the concept of happiness nor solve the language issue. As stated above, the concept of happiness is similar in the German and the English language with overlapping meanings. There is no single term in the German language that equates the English term 'happiness' or 'being happy'. In this study it will be assumed that a German native speaker perceives the feeling of being 'happy' or speaks of 'happiness' without necessarily explicitly using the German term 'glücklich' but when the following is experienced:

1. the person perceives a positive emotional state. With regard to impulse buying this is experienced in the context of acquiring a much-longed for non-material or material good, similar to 'a smile on a person's face'
2. the person is extremely pleased with or about something or someone and may be using for example the German terms 'Freude' or 'sich freuen'
3. the person explicitly states that a particular experience made him or her feel 'happy' by using the German term 'glücklich'

Bearing the lexical meaning and cultural differences of the terminology in mind, the next section sheds light on what makes people feel happy.

3.6 Conditions of Happiness: Happy People

Research on conditions for happiness was "in its infancy" (Veenhoven, 1991b, p.16) up to the early 1990s but has received more attention since. However, there are minimum levels of material preconditions for happiness, for example Veenhoven (1991a, p.32) emphasises that happiness is incompatible with "chronic hunger, danger and isolation". Social activity, a social network and working relationships with friends, family and partners are the most important sources of happiness and in the US and in Europe given priority over income (for example Diener, 2006; Myers, 1999). Similarly, in a happiness opinion poll by GfK NOP broadcast on BBC (Boniwell, 2006), the participants were asked to provide their personal definition of happiness and most of them involved social relationships, family and friends. Determinants of a happy personality are not only an outgoing personality but also feeling good about oneself (Argyle and Martin, 1991; Lazarus, 1991). The condition of happiness is a socially attractive emotion which attracts other people to get in contact whereas mixing with unhappy people is less desirable (Lazarus, 1991). Social relationships may play a decisive role in an impulse buying situation, for example during decision-making or by providing feedback. This study will further explore the interdependencies between other people and their influence on the individual's state of happiness in impulse buying.

Happy people preferably recall happy events and may even distort reality in their favour (Argyle, 1987). A shopper who does not recall any negative but rather positive buying experiences may be less hesitant to buying another item, which may entice this person to making impulse buying decisions. Depressed people on the other hand have the tendency to reward themselves less often (Argyle, 1987).

Previous research generally agrees that there is a positive but in most countries only a weak relationship between subjective happiness and socio-economic status, for example income, occupation or social class (for example Argyle, 1987; Myers and Diener, 1996). Although the literature agrees that wealth is no guarantee for happiness, it is still favourable for enjoying diverse leisure activities, taking advantage of a better education or affording better health care, which can overall positively influence happiness (Wortman et al., 1992). On the other hand, a number of surveys on happiness or satisfaction have found that in most industrialised countries age and education or intelligence are only weakly related to happiness (for example Diener, 1984; Veenhoven, 1984). Argyle (1999) suggests that happiness may slightly change depending on age: Older people are slightly happier and more satisfied than younger people as the former experience negative emotions less often and emotions are generally perceived less intensive. Positive emotions and pleasant activities, however, may be enjoyed less often by older people according to Argyle (1987). This study will explore if this could be applied to an impulse buying situation by investigating in this context the impact of age.

From a gender perspective, women tend to show more intense feelings and more negative affect than men (Argyle, 1987), the latter being traditionally task-led instead of being social-emotional leaders like women (Fordyce, 1972). Social and interpersonal contacts play the most significant role for a woman to gain happiness (Fordyce, 1974). Social interaction could play a role in women's impulse buying and will be considered in more detail in this study. Previous research (for example Lazarus, 1991; Myers, 1999; Telfer, 1980) indicates that happiness occurs when people feel in control of their lives and make reasonable progress towards realistic goals and the fulfillment of desires. Feedback from other people about the progress towards the achievement of a realistic goal or a desire can be an important contribution to happiness (for example Bandura, 1997; Locke and Latham, 1990). In this regard, an impulse buy might fulfil a desire and thus contribute to a person's happiness, in particular if the feedback from other people is favourable.

3.7 Manipulating Happiness

Many researchers doubt whether happiness levels can be manipulated or changed at all due to the variable and elusive nature of happiness (Veenhoven, 1991b). There is a widely accepted view that human beings are born with a happiness quotient, which the psychologist David Lykken explains to be a set point of

happiness determined up to 90 per cent by our genes (Bond, 2003). The feeling of well-being at a particular point of time depends by half on what is happening in our lives at that particular point of time and by half on this set point of happiness as Lykken argues (Bond, 2003). Although a dramatic positive, for example winning the National Lottery jackpot, or negative event, for example a severe illness, may temporarily change one's mood, once adaptation to the new situation is complete and the situation is stable again, an individual returns to his set-point level of happiness (Bond, 2003; Layard, 2005a).

The zero sum and the fixed trait theories, however, reject any chance to improve one's happiness. The zero sum theory claims that happiness is cyclical with happy periods being followed by unhappy ones. Over time these shifts neutralise each other (zero sum). The zero sum theory is contradictory to Aristotle's view that happiness can be achieved and worked at and is opposed to the happiness formula within the field of positive psychology. So far there is a lack of evidence for the zero sum theory (Fordyce, 1972; Veenhoven, 1991b). The fixed trait theory claims that levels of happiness are constant throughout life without any variation even in the short run. Veenhoven (1991b) argues that while happiness remains generally constant throughout adulthood unless drastic life changes occur, the attitude towards life in the years of adolescence and young adulthood are likely to change. Therefore "rather than saying happiness 'is' fixed, we should say it 'tends to get' fixed" (Veenhoven, 1991b, p.18). This may apply to happiness defined with regard to an evaluation of one's entire life as favoured by a number of researchers.

If the zero sum and the fixed trait theory could be applied to impulse buying situations, the shopper's level of happiness would need to remain unaffected by the purchase. However, happiness can be influenced if defined with regard to a short duration, that means 'happy moments' as is the focus of this study. In this context De Bono (1977) proposes that it is impossible to enforce happiness by an effort of will nor advisable to wait passively for happiness to occur. Instead, an individual can actively generate or choose circumstances which themselves can generate happiness. Provided there is a link between impulse buying and happiness this could mean that an individual may acquire an item on impulse because he or she assumes that the purchase triggers feelings of happiness. Training and development measures, which require "only simple attitudinal and behavioural changes" (Fordyce, 1977, p.521), may encourage individuals to become aware of available measures for actively influencing happiness.

3.8 Happiness and Impulse Buying: Emerging Themes

The variety of meanings of the term happiness in common language, its abstract nature and the breadth and depth of the meaning of happiness makes it more difficult to explore than most other more specific emotions (Averill and More, 2000; Sarot, 1996). In line with this Sumner (1996, p.139) notes:

"About the only thing everyone agrees on is that happiness is a complex and multi-faceted notion, one not easily reduced to a formula or slogan."

In this research on happiness and impulse buying, happiness is evaluated with regard to a shorter duration, possibly seconds, minutes or hours of happiness, triggered by an accumulation of positive emotions. Happiness can be experienced as an intense feeling of pleasure or joy and can occur all of a sudden. The understanding of happiness in this study takes into consideration its roots in the Latin and Greek languages with its meaning of being fortunate and incorporates a positive mental condition, which is more than mere contentment, pleasure or satisfaction. The concept of happiness in this research is based on the subjective evaluation of impulse buyers of their feelings of happiness. This means that this study will rely on the participant's own evaluation of happiness and it will be accepted that an individual who claims to be happy, is happy.

While happiness is generally associated with a positive experience, impulse buying tends to be seen in a negative light by previous research due to its connection with impulsiveness and lack of control. Impulse buying has often been devalued in previous literature for being wasteful, risky and irrational. The stigma of impulse buying together with the number of avoidance strategies suggested in the literature appear to make a positive impulse buying experience an exceptional case. It seems that impulse buying is more likely than planned buying to generate negative dissonance, leading to regret and guilt. However, if impulse buying experiences were overwhelmingly negative it is difficult to understand why the number of impulse purchases has been growing since the 1940s. It is therefore important to explore if impulse buying predominantly generates feelings of guilt and regret. If this was the case, the measures taken in marketing and retail to support impulse buying would need to be rejected for being immoral and possibly harming ethical standards as they would be counterproductive to the overall aim of mankind to pursue happiness. This research intends to contribute to knowledge by assessing how dark impulse buying actually is, which is one of the research objectives.

As indicated in Chapter 2 impulse buying can also be associated with positive aspects. Generally, shopping or being in a retail environment are capable of providing genuine pleasure. More specifically, some motivations for impulse buying can be associated with positive feelings, including happiness. For example one motivation for impulse buying can be found in generating a positive mood state. Some shoppers deliberately buy on impulse for mood repair and those who are in a positive mood may wish to reward themselves and try to extend the duration of their current mood. The originally positive mood state may stem from an initially planned purchase, eventually triggering a subsequent impulse buy. This 'shopping momentum' (Dhar et al., 2007) hints at a link between planned buying and impulse buying on the one hand, and the role of happiness in impulse buying on the other hand. This role of happiness in impulse buying will be further explored in this study. Another motivation for impulse buying can be seen in other people, who may contribute to feeling happy in the impulse buying experience. Although there is substantial research on the importance of social interaction in impulse buying, the role of other people, in particular in the evaluation of the entire impulse buying experience and their impact on happiness, remains underresearched. There are questions to be tackled, such as: does the shopper actively look for feedback after the purchase? Whom does the shopper preferably turn to? What is the effect of negative feedback from important others on the individual's evaluation of an impulse buy and her feelings of happiness? These emerging themes indicate that in fact we know little about the role of happiness in impulse buying. While the overall aim of this research is to increase understanding whether impulse buying makes female shoppers feel happy, one of the research objectives is to gain a better understanding of the role of emotions, namely happiness, attached to impulse buying experiences.

So far, most research has generated insights into impulse buying in quantitative studies for example with collecting data on questionnaires (for example Silvera et al., 2008) or in lab experiments (for example Adelaar et al., 2003; Luo, 2005). The qualitative approach with focus groups and individual interviews in this study allows the emergence of deep insights into motivations behind visible behaviours, internal states, and feelings attached to impulse buying experiences. This also allows new themes to emerge. In addition, possible qualitative differences of the perceptions of participants with different socio-demographic backgrounds may occur.

Although some qualitative research with open-ended interviews was executed in the context of impulse buying (for example Dittmar and Drury, 2000), these studies

usually cover those buying experiences which occurred some time in the past but lack the immediateness of feedback as in this study. Contrary to reflecting on experiences which occurred some time in the past as in most qualitative and quantitative research or the artificial lab environment in experiments imitating real shopping situations, this study investigates most recent impulse buying events. They only occurred within the past seven days prior to the individual interviews. This yielded an immediateness of data on the actual experience and therefore a chance to considerably increase the level of detail and reflectivity in the participants' feedback. As a consequence, the risk of distorted memories was reduced.

The initial positive feelings or euphoria immediately after an impulse buy, which some previous research has acknowledged (for example O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Scitovsky, 1976), may persist over a longer period of time, disappear soon thereafter, or turn into feelings of guilt and regret. There is a lack of research on a more detailed understanding of the female consumer's evaluation of her impulse buys. Similarly, an in-depth exploration of the intensity and duration of happiness is missing in this context. One of the contributions to knowledge of this study is to address this gap in previous research and investigate how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience. Unique to this kind of qualitative enquiry in the context of impulse buying is the longitudinal aspect of collecting data over the period of three months. This provides sufficient opportunities for participants to reflect over their impulse buys and evaluate them both right after the purchase and in retrospect up to three months later.

The research methodology with a qualitative approach, combined with data collection in focus groups and individual interviews, was appropriate to address the research objectives of this study. The rationale for choosing this particular methodology and research design will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design

4.1 Introduction

The decisions concerning the research methodology are central to any research project regarding the questions of how to describe, explore and explain the phenomenon of interest (Gummesson, 2000). Choices depend on the research questions as well as the researcher's own personal stance and existing knowledge. In this chapter the available choices in the context of research methodology are investigated and decisions are discussed.

The structure of this chapter follows the development of thinking and decision-making regarding the research methodology in this project. The logic of enquiry starts with fundamental decisions in view of the research purpose. It is vital to follow a coherent line of argument, which ensures that research philosophy, approach, and research design 'fit' and are appropriate in view of the initial research questions. These choices determine the data collection and analysis stage as well as the eventual findings. The criteria for assessing the quality of the research are explored in this chapter. In this context, the role of the researcher will be discussed as well as the choice of participants in this study. The advantages and limitations of diverse methods of data collection and analysis are evaluated towards the end of this chapter.

4.2 Research Methodology

4.2.1 Research Purpose

The objectives of this study include gaining a better understanding of the role of happiness in impulse buying and to explore how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience. Moreover, this research aims to assess impulse buying as the dark side of consumption. Bearing these research objectives in mind, one of the first decisions to be made in a research project is to determine the purpose of the whole project. Although a particular study can pursue more than a single purpose, Robson (2002) argues that usually one will predominate. For instance, the main purpose of research could be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive. In this study, the descriptive approach appeared appropriate in the

initial stage to describe and document an accurate picture of individuals and their impulse buying experiences (Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Robson, 2002). In addition, the limited knowledge of the relationship between happiness and impulse buying and their underlying motivations favoured an exploratory research. In the next section the different beliefs in the nature of reality and its relationship to this research will be discussed.

4.2.2 Research Philosophy

The choice of the philosophical research paradigm is fundamental in the field of social science as it reflects a set of the beliefs of the nature of reality. There is a dichotomy regarding the belief in the objective single reality with causal relationships and the belief in the subjective understanding of the world with multiple truths. It can be found in a variety of paradigms which are essentially reflecting a similar distinction: positivism and phenomenology (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Remenyi et al., 1998), positivism and constructivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1998), realism and constructivism (Blaikie, 1993), or positivism and interpretivism (Carson et al., 2001). The key features of the positivist and phenomenological paradigms can be summarised as illustrated in Table 4.1.

The answers to the (1) ontological, (2) epistemological and (3) methodological questions outline the beliefs and values of each paradigm: (1) What are the basic beliefs and the nature of reality? (2) What is the relationship between reality and the researcher? (3) Which methods can help the inquirer to find out more about a phenomenon? (Guba and Lincoln, 1998; Perry et al., 1999). Positivism is an epistemological position that argues that methods from natural sciences can be applied to social phenomena (Bryman, 2001). Science aims to develop objective causal relationships by the verification of hypotheses, which leads to law-like generalisations (Guba and Lincoln, 1998; Remenyi et al., 1998; Riege, 2003). However, the psychological literature emphasises that individuals do not act according to scientific laws or as profit-maximisers as believed for a long time by economists (Furnham and Argyle, 1998).

Table 4.1: Key Features of Positivist and Phenomenological Paradigms

	Positivist paradigm	Phenomenological paradigm
Ontology >> <i>Basic beliefs...</i> >> <i>Nature of the world...</i>	Realism The world is external and objective Observer is independent Science is value-free	The world is socially constructed and subjective Observer is part of what is observed Science is driven by human interests
Epistemology >> <i>Relationship between reality and research...</i> >> <i>Researcher should...</i>	Focus on facts Findings are true Look for causality and fundamental laws Reduce phenomena to simplest elements Formulate hypotheses and then test them	Focus on meanings Try to understand what is happening Look at the totality of each situation Develop ideas through induction from data
Methodology >> <i>Preferred methods include...</i>	Operationalising concepts so that they can be measured Verification of hypotheses Taking large samples Mainly quantitative methods	Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena Small samples investigated in depth or over time

Source: Adpated from Carson et al. (2001), Easterby-Smith et al. (1991), Guba and Lincoln (1998)

The positivist approach with its exploration of facts or causes of social phenomena pays only little attention to the individual's experience (for example Welman and Kruger, 2001). Thus it has its limitations in projects like this study where the research aim is to explore motivations behind behaviours. In this study an objective value-free view of the phenomena as assumed by the positivist paradigm is unrealistic. On the one hand, those who are researched are individuals with subjective experiences and evaluations of their behaviour. On the other hand, the interaction between them and the researcher is likely to influence the whole process of data collection and analysis. The inflexible and artificial design of the positivist method characterised with its a priori hypotheses and generalisations may render it less appropriate to understand how people experience impulse buying situations. When evaluating the characteristics of the positivist stance, it becomes evident that an alternative research philosophical approach seems to be more appropriate for this study.

Looking at the opposite end of the pairing, the phenomenological tradition seeks an understanding of social and psychological phenomena from the point of view of the individuals involved (Bryman, 1988) and thus focuses on their subjective experience, beliefs and values (Darke et al., 1998; Robson, 2002). As this study seeks to explore an emotion (happiness) in impulse buying situations of consumers, its focus is on subjective experiences. For this study it is advisable to accept a subjective view of the world and to be aware of the effect of the researcher's own involvement and values on the recognition of facts and their interpretation. The phenomenological approach also accounts for the author's personal interest in gaining a deep understanding of happiness and impulse behaviour as described earlier. In this sense "the puzzlement is autobiographical, making memory and history essential dimensions of discovery" (Moustakas, 1994, p.59). A thorough understanding of the complex phenomena of this study may be more realistically gained through an in-depth investigation of individual experiences of a manageable number of cases. Another strength of the phenomenological approach is to enable the researcher to observe and evaluate change processes over a period of time (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002), which supports the research aim to explore how impulse buyers perceive happiness changing over time. This may contribute to the generation of new theories.

Schein (1992) notes that the phenomenological point of view supports the comprehension of values and behaviour, including the discovery of underlying assumptions which might influence the individual's perception of and thinking about issues. For example in the article 'Off to the shops: why do we really go shopping?' Eccles and Woodruffe-Burton (2000) collect data in interviews with female shoppers and thus gain a phenomenological understanding through an exploration of lived experiences and the meanings that emerge from them. As this study aims at exploring exactly these underlying motivations in the context of consumer impulse purchases, this is another reason for the phenomenological stance being appropriate in this study. With the reasoning for this choice in mind, the research approach for this study will be discussed in the next section.

4.2.3 Research Approach

The choice of the research approach affects the whole design of the project. Some researchers suggest that phenomenological studies such as this study tend to be inductive (for example Carson et al., 2001; Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). In

particular for interpretive research projects it could be adequate to balance both inductive and deductive reasoning (for example Carson et al., 2001; Trochim, 2000) because as Perry (1998, p.788) argues a pure inductive approach is "starting from scratch with an absolutely clean theoretical slate". There is a fear that the inductive researcher might not take advantage of existing theory, whereas the deductive researcher might not develop new and useful theory (Carson et al., 2001). Yet, this study does not support this line of argument. An inductive approach does not mean that the project cannot incorporate prior theory. In the context of an inductive approach and in line with Richards (1993), Saunders et al. (2002, p.394) argue that "qualitative analysts who use such an approach do not 'jump' into a subject area without a competent level of knowledge about that area."

Based on a prior theoretical knowledge, a few assumptions were made at the beginning of this project, for example about a possible relationship between impulse buying and socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. If a genuine mix of deductive and inductive approach had been applied in this project, then the starting point of the research project would have been the formulation of detailed hypotheses and as in a deductive approach to be tested in due course of the study (Blaikie, 1993). The data collection aiming to verify or falsify these hypotheses may enable generalisations to a broader context (Baker, 2001; Blaikie, 2000; Carson et al., 2001; Robson, 1993; Trochim, 2000). However, generalising to a broader context as in the deductive approach is not the focus of this study but rather gaining a thorough understanding of individual experiences. Due to the predominantly exploratory research purpose of this study, which supports the open-ended inductive approach as argued by Trochim (2000), detailed information about the phenomena in question need to be collected first before well thought out hypotheses can be developed or a theory can be generated. For gaining an in-depth understanding, the inductive approach does not require large samples for statistical generalisations as typical of the deductive approach but rather small samples as in this study.

Instead of striving for a statistical generalisation, analytical generalisation appears to be more appropriate in this study. This enables a generalisation of a particular set of results in view of a broader theory (Yin, 1994; Yin, 2003) rather than to a population, as in statistical generalisation. Following the advice from Riege (2003) analytical generalisation in this study was achieved by a joint discussion of the contributions from those focus groups and cases which had similar socio-demographic characteristics and provided similar findings.

At the beginning of a project it needs to be considered whether to pursue a qualitative or a quantitative approach. Qualitative and quantitative research rest on opposing paradigms which go beyond the differences between research strategies and data collection procedures. The exploratory nature of this study favours a qualitative research approach as it is well-suited for purposes such as a preliminary exploration, screening of new ideas, investigating complex behaviours, generating an understanding of a concept or devising explanatory models of behaviour instead of measuring or quantifying a problem (Baker, 2001; Trochim, 2000; Zikmund, 2000).

Supporters of the quantitative approach argue that their data are 'hard', 'rigorous', 'credible' and 'scientific' whereas the qualitative researchers describe their data as 'sensitive', 'detailed' or 'contextual' as stated by Trochim (2000) in his web-based research methods knowledge base. In his article 'Qualitative data as an attractive nuisance: The Problem of Analysis' Miles (1979, p.590) warns that data collection and analysis are time intensive but praises qualitative data for being "rich" and "full". Qualitative research is built on a close relationship and dialogue between the researcher and the participants of a study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). This allows the inquirer to be as close as possible to the mind of the research subject to view events, actions and values from their perspective in order to generate a deeper social understanding (Bryman, 1988; Kvale, 1996; Lofland and Lofland, 1995). This corresponds with this research because it aims to understand the perspective of the consumer, her motivations and feelings such as happiness behind visible impulse buying behaviour. Contrary to the qualitative approach, the quantitative approach keeps the contact between the researcher and the subjects of the study "fairly fleeting or even nonexistent" (Bryman, 1988, p.95), which does not appear to be appropriate to gain a deep insight into the subjects' perspectives and consequently is not in line with the purpose of this research. Similarly, this study is in disagreement with the statement from Silverman (1998, p.3):

"I reject the fashionable identification of qualitative method with an analysis of how people 'see things', preferring to focus instead on how people 'do things'."

The nature of this research project quite clearly necessitates recognition of both perspectives, that is how consumers 'see' or evaluate their impulse purchases before, during and after the purchasing process as well as how they 'do things', that is what affects their impulse buying decisions, for example they go shopping with someone else who may persuade them to buy an item. The qualitative

research approach in this study supports gaining an understanding of events and behaviours in their context by yielding rich descriptions while its flexible approach allows unexpected topics to emerge. The findings of this phenomenological, qualitative and inductive study can be generalised to a theory meaning that some evidence is generated that may not yield the definite proof of a theory but supports a theory (Firestone, 1993).

Based on the discussion of the methodological approach in this section, the next section deals with determining the research methods and explaining the choices made for this study.

4.3 Research Methods

In this section the chosen research methods will be discussed as well as the reasoning behind selecting participants for the data collection in this study. The choices made for this study are based on the subjective evaluation of happiness.

4.3.1 Subjective Evaluation of Happiness

There have been ongoing discussions in the last century if and how happiness can be measured. While subjective happiness is based on the personal evaluation of each participant regarding how happy he or she is, objective happiness is the result of measurements against predefined rules over a certain period of time (Kahneman, 1999). Objective indices to derive levels of happiness preferably cover quantitative aspects, such as consumption and life expectancy (Sumner, 1996). It is questionable, however, if these quantitative objective measures could usefully contribute to answering the qualitative research questions in this project. Instead, the subjective evaluation of one's happiness appears more appropriate for this study.

Generally, consumer research self-report questionnaires are a popular method to measure an emotion by asking participants questions, for example how happy they are (Magill, 1996). Likert-type rating scales in self-reports, as for example used in the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills, 2001), could be applied as behavioural measures of happiness. In this study these measures do not appear to be useful because the research does not develop hypotheses to be tested. Instead, the focus

lies in exploring the role of happiness in impulse buying and trying to understand and explain the motivations behind these buying acts. Nonetheless, the subjective evaluation of one's happiness could be suitable for the aims of this study, however, applied in a different sense than described above. If the "standard for happiness is subjective" as argued by Sarot (1996, p.4), there does not exist one single ideal kind of happiness because the perception of happiness varies from one person to another. In this context, previous research criticises the absolute standard in Aristotle's work on happiness, for example the claim that neither a slave nor physically or mentally handicapped people can be happy (Kraut, 1979).

This study follows current research which allows individuals to understand happiness in their own terms meaning that if someone claims to be happy, it has to be assumed that this person actually is happy (Averill and More, 2000; De Bono, 1977). This subjective evaluation of happiness remains true even if common sense would describe this person's situation as miserable. It also applies in reverse: someone's life may appear to be desirable and fortunate but no-one may call this person a happy person because he might not be contented with his life (De Bono, 1977). Averill and More (2000, p.668) observed that current investigations refer to happiness more subjectively in the sense of "what is optimal for one person, and hence conducive to happiness, need not be optimal for another".

4.3.2 Focus Groups and Individual Cases

An exploratory research adopting an inductive approach as in this study aims for a better understanding of this underresearched phenomenon instead of verifying or falsifying a preconceived hypothesis. The group discussion in the focus groups – or "an aggregation of individuals sharing some general social features or experiences" (Hydén and Bülow, 2003, p.307) – is a particularly appropriate procedure to use when the goal is, as in this study, to explore the individual's feelings and perceptions of their experiences told in their own words (Morgan, 1998; Zikmund, 2000). The focus groups in this study were interactive group discussions about the specific topic of impulse buying and happiness and focussed on people's views and experiences with particular regard to the reasons and motivations behind these thoughts and actions (for example Bryman, 2001; Carson et al., 2001; Hydén and Bülow, 2003; Morgan, 1988). In comparison to group interviews or individual interviews, the interaction in focus groups is a significant strength (Carson et al.,

2001). This interaction generated synergy effects which provided a broader picture of the research topic than the sum of individual interviews (Morgan, 1996).

Threlfall (1999) suggests that collecting data in focus groups is particularly useful in initial research stages of a project before leading in-depth interviews. Thus a range of experiences and perspectives was first collected in the focus groups before adding greater depth in the individual interviews (Morgan, 1996). These focussed interviews were based on individual cases in this study. Herewith it was sought to gain an understanding of behavioural and emotional processes in real-life impulse buying contexts. The interview method allowed individuals to talk in detail about their personal experiences of impulse buying situations, explain their feelings and focus on what they personally perceive as most important (Denscombe, 1998; Kvale, 1996). In the context of case studies Robson (1993) suggests that they are particularly useful for finding answers to the questions 'what?' and 'how?'. This can be transferred to the individual interviews in this study. For instance, in addition to the 'why?' question behind impulse buying decisions, the individual interviews explored 'how' do the shoppers feel some time after a particular impulse buy. This generated a deep understanding of the personal views, circumstances and experiences of individuals. The major advantage of these interviews is "the 'richness' of the communication" (Gillham, 2000, p.62) between researcher and interviewee.

One major limitation of most previous studies on impulse buying can be seen in collecting data from participants only once at one particular point of time. For instance Rook (1987) assumes that one limitation of his study is that the participants were asked to recall a recent impulse buying experience. Rook (1987) assumes that they may have recalled a particularly memorable impulse buy which was possibly more expensive and more involving. In order to overcome this limitation and to answer the research questions, a longitudinal approach was chosen in this study. The duration of data collection over a period of three months with weekly one-to-one individual interviews made it possible to follow up responses and investigate underlying motivations shortly after a particular impulse buy as well as over the course of the impulse buying experience. This longitudinal study of individual cases yielded data on a number of buying occasions spread over a period of time and thereby delivered a different type of information compared to a snapshot study (Bryman, 2001; Dilulio, 1994). The nature of this research project enabled the observation of happiness changes over the course of the impulse buying experience.

Multiple cases appeared to be more appropriate for this study as they can often produce more compelling or robust evidence compared to a single case (Cousin, 2005). Moreover, the diversity of cases covered different socio-demographic characteristics, which would not have been possible solely with a single case. In this multiple case framework, each single study was used as an instrument to allow deep insights into an issue. The case itself was of minor interest. The comparison and integration of data from several cases provided the intended depth and breadth for providing answers to the research questions in this study.

4.3.3 Selection of Participants

For this study, the population to be investigated was defined as female consumers aged between 18 and 35 years. The participants were selected "as a matter of judgement" (Blaikie, 2000, p.205) as in purposive sampling without aiming for being statistically representative. This rationale for selecting the participants was not only supported by the size of the population but mainly by the chosen research methodology. The composition of the sample is of particular importance for data analysis at a later stage (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

It was ensured that none of the participants of the focus groups participated in the individual interviews. This was done for several reasons: firstly, it increased the overall number of participants in this study and thereby enlarged the potentially different point of views, perceptions and evaluations regarding impulse buying experiences. Secondly, it avoided potential bias based on the prior group discussions. Thirdly, criteria would have been required for deliberately choosing some group participants and not keeping out others for the individual interviews. In addition, those group participants which would not have been asked to participate in the individual interviews might have felt discriminated against. Since a number of focus group participants knew each other this could have caused negative feelings for those left out. It might have given the impression to some focus group participants that some contributions were better than others, which is an evaluation in contradiction to this research.

4.3.3.1 Focus Groups

Gatekeepers or intermediaries from different socio-economic and socio-demographic backgrounds and in different regions of Germany (North, South, East, West) were purposely defined and contacted. It was anticipated that different socio-demographic backgrounds, such as age or marital status, could have an impact on expenses for impulse buys and the willingness to make impulse buys. In addition, differences in economic prosperity, unemployment, and cultural background, for example with regard to East Germany might have resulted in different impulse buying behaviours.

Contacting the gatekeepers happened prior to the actual recruitment of focus group members. Thus it was possible to gain access to a broad range of members in the target population and avoid an over-recruitment of any subgroups which could be accessed more easily as Trochim (2000) warns. Care was taken to ensure that one focus group was heterogeneous to another one to cover a variety of socio-economic and socio-demographic characteristics while the individual focus groups were homogeneous in themselves. The focus groups were composed according to the following criteria of the participants: age, marital status, highest qualification, current job and the area or region in which the participants currently live. The composition of the focus groups is illustrated in Table 4.2. The intention was to gain an understanding of the potential impact of these criteria on the impulse buying experiences of female consumers.

Table 4.2: Composition of Focus Groups

FG ¹	Group members	Age ²	Marital status/ children ³	Highest Qualification ⁴	Current Job	Region in Germany
1 Pilot group	Office staff in IT Company Total: 4	19-23, 34 (mixed age)	Married (1x)	Mittlere Reife (3x), Abitur (1x)	PA, Sales Assistant, Office Trainees (2x)	South
2	Students for Business Studies in chemical company. Total: 5	21+22 (young)	n/a	Abitur	Business Students	North-West
3	Trainees for PA ⁵ in chemical company. Total: 4	18- 21 (young)	n/a	Mittlere Reife (2x) Fachabitur (2x)	Office Trainees	North-West
4	Students for Business Studies in chemical company Total: 7	19-21 (young)	n/a	Abitur	Business Students	North-West
5	Students for Business Studies and trainees in Office Admin ⁶ in chemical company Total: 7	20-22 (young)	n/a	Abitur	Business Students (3x) Office Trainees (4x)	North-West
6	Students for Business Studies and trainees in Office Admin in chemical company Total: 7	18-23 (young)	n/a	Mittlere Reife (3x) Fachabitur (1x) Abitur (3x)	Business Students (3x), Office Trainees (4x)	North-West
7	Group of friends Total: 6	18-23 (young)	n/a	Mittlere Reife (4x) Abitur (2x)	Pupils in their final year before Abitur (3x), Office trainees (2x), Law student	North
8	Group of friends Total: 5	26+27, 32+33 (old)	Married with child/ren (2x), Married and pregnant (1x)	Abitur (2x), Diplom (3x)	Housewives (2x) IT Consultants (2x), Product Manager FMCG	West
9	Group of Nurses Total: 5	25-29 (old)	n/a	Mittlere Reife (4x) Abitur	Nurses	South
10	Group of friends Total: 6	30-35 (old)	Single mums (3x), divorced (1x)	Mittlere Reife (5x) Abitur	Police officer (2x), Bank officer, Lab Worker, Social Worker, Job searcher	East

¹ FG stands for focus group in this study

² Young and old in brackets refers to classification into younger and older participants in this study

³ In brackets: number of participants to whom this applies. N/a refers to singles and those in a relationship

⁴ Qualifications in Germany and their UK equivalent: Mittlere Reife ~ O'levels, Fachabitur ~ slightly below A'levels, Abitur ~ A'levels, Diplom ~ Masters Degree

⁵ Auszubildende zur Kauffrau für Bürokommunikation

⁶ Auszubildende zur Industriekauffrau

In a face-to-face meeting or telephone call the gatekeepers had been provided with an outline of the study and the required general characteristics of the potential participants for this study. Gatekeepers were for example HR managers from companies with whom I had previous business relations because they have easy access to a large variety of potential participants, such as trainees. Other gatekeepers included a former school teacher as well as friends of mine.

For the recruitment of the actual focus group participants, the snowball or network sampling technique was chosen. The gatekeeper – either a participant or an intermediary - identified a number of potential participants for the study and established contact with suitable participants within their social network provided the potential participants met the required characteristics of the target group (Bloor et al., 2001; Burton, 2000). The gatekeepers identified the potential participants for inclusion in the sample, for example their acquaintances, friends, colleagues at work, or employees. The intermediary then provided names and addresses to the researcher who eventually contacted and recruited the participants. As illustrated in Table 4.2 a total of 56 participants took part in the focus groups. In this study the participants aged between 18 and 23 years will be referred to as 'the younger participants' and thereby distinguished from 'the older participants' from 24 to 35 years.

The snowball technique was beneficial to gain access to pre-existing groups, locate friendship networks and recruit homogeneous groups because "once contact is made with one member of the network, that person can be asked to identify other members and their relationships" (Blaikie, 2000, p.206). Similarly, in the recruitment phase for the cases this method proved to be useful for gaining access to potential participants. Traditionally, focus groups were composed of strangers because group participants who are familiar with each other might feel inhibited to air their views or share their experiences (Bloor et al., 2001; Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1998). However, Morgan and Krueger (1993) call it a myth that a focus group needs to consist of strangers. In fact, the initial 'warm up' phase in the focus group might take longer with strangers and their drop-out rate is likely to be higher compared to people who know each other (Bloor et al., 2001). Moreover, discrepancies in the socio-economic factors or a diverse lifestyle may have a negative effect on group interactions (Morgan, 1988). These negative group dynamics may be avoided if recruiting homogeneous groups as in this study "with the hope that there is sufficient attitude diversity" (Montoya-Weiss et al., 1998, p.715). The literature generally advises to recruit homogeneous groups with

members who share a similar culture, background and experience (for example Fallon and Brown, 2002; Krueger, 1994). The snowballing technique in this study proved to be suitable for recruiting homogeneous focus groups with most participants knowing each other. These groups may generate information in greater depth than heterogeneous groups as Knodel (1993) argues.

Recruitment via using friendship networks had the obvious advantage in this study to reduce recruitment effort, as 'cold calls' are generally less successful than recruiting participants via existing relationships as Morgan (1998) notes. Since the groups consisted of individuals who had a social relationship outside the context of the research like in this study, the cancellation rates were successfully kept to a minimum as there might have been a joint sense of obligation to attend (Bloor et al., 2001). Moreover, attendance may have appeared less daunting to some participants. In fact, before the group took place the participants in the majority of focus groups double-checked whether they knew the other participants and if not, they insisted to be assigned to another group of people they knew beforehand. It was deemed important in this study that participants "feel sufficiently comfortable in their groups to disclose their opinions willingly" (Fallon and Brown, 2002, p.197). This might have also stimulated the participants in this study to talk about shared experiences with other group members which triggered further discussion and debate. Furthermore, cancellations were successfully kept to a minimum.

There were a number of potential risks with using an intermediary in the recruitment process. Burton (2000) for example warns that the gatekeeper may misinterpret the research aims and objectives and may affect the study in terms of excluding certain members of the group from participation (Bloor et al., 2001). In addition, the loss of goodwill or enthusiasm of that person might have jeopardised the existence of the entire focus group. These risks were addressed by carefully choosing the gatekeepers, informing them about the required characteristics of the participants and screening all potential participants before finally recruiting them.

Screening interviews were carried out by telephone or e-mail with potential participants of focus groups. There were three overall aims for the screening procedure: Firstly, to ensure that the individuals chosen met the recruitment criteria age, marital status, highest qualification, current job and the area or region in which the participants currently live (see Table 4.2 above). As discussed earlier, the intention was to ensure homogeneity within the group and heterogeneity between them.

Secondly, the screening process aimed to build up a direct contact between the researcher and each participant. When contacting the individuals a screening questionnaire (see Appendix A) was either sent by email or discussed on the phone depending on the preferences of the gatekeepers and their willingness to provide email addresses or telephone numbers. In case no internet connection was available or the participants preferred to be contacted on the phone only, the screening questionnaire and a short introduction of the researcher, the topic and the format of focus groups were discussed on the phone. When email contact was possible, the screening questionnaire together with a short introduction of the researcher, the topic and the format of focus groups was provided in a written format (see Appendix B). The screening questionnaire was not meant to collect data for a statistical evaluation but proved to be useful as a means to build up a contact between researcher and participant and to introduce the topic of the study. The questionnaire was used as a starting point to get in touch with the participants instead of relying on the gatekeeper only. Morse (1991) characterises a good informant as a person who has some experience of the topic, is willing to share his or her thoughts and reveals some interest in contributing to the project. The contact with each potential participant prior to the focus group also contributed to break the ice and get the participant's commitment and motivation for actually attending the group. This personal contact may have contributed to keeping the drop out rates to a minimum with mostly none or a maximum of one participant per group not attending the group sessions. Based on Morgan's (1998) suggestions for recruiting, two days before the group took place a friendly reminder email was sent or a telephone call was made with the gatekeepers. This further personalised the research and may have contributed to the low drop out rates.

Thirdly, the direct contact through the screening process made it possible for the participants to ask questions for clarification before the start of the group session and thus also addressed research ethics. It was an ideal way to sensitise participants to the topic in question and reduce their apprehensiveness concerning 'academia'. This made the contact very personal, which is important for the success of focus groups, as Morgan (1998, p.110) suggests "the person-to-person interaction is at the heart of focus groups". In addition, the participants' questions for example regarding the focus group format, the topic of the study, and the use of the data could be answered. The process of prescreening reduced the risk of including reluctant individuals who only felt obliged towards the gatekeeper to participate, which could have had an impact on the quality of the data generated (Bloor et al., 2001). In case the potential participants were recruited by the

gatekeeper but were unwilling to return the questionnaire by email or were reluctant to answer the questions on the telephone, they could easily drop out and withdraw from the study at a very early stage. Also, the personal contact made it possible for the participants to get back directly to the researcher after the study in case of any concerns or questions, which also addressed research ethics.

The plan was to contact directly each participant of the focus groups. However, in reality this was not possible in some cases where the gatekeeper did not provide any contact details of the participants. As the gatekeeper was the only point of contact to the participants, the risk had to be taken that the identified volunteers actually met the recruitment criteria. This was also clarified in the introductory round of each focus group where each participant answered questions, for example regarding age, job, education, or marital status. For all groups it turned out that the gatekeepers had been reliable and adhered to the original briefing when identifying the participants. Some gatekeepers, in particular employers, only provided information about the current job of the identified participants. Additional information was not to be expected due to reasons of confidentiality of personal data. Since these were apprentices or trainees, their age was to be expected between 18 and 23 years and thereby being classified as 'young' for this study. This assumption was verified during the focus groups, which underlined the reliability of the gatekeepers. The recruitment process of focus group participants in this study can be subdivided into individual steps as suggested by Morgan (1998) and depicted in Appendix C.

When starting with data collection in this project, it was not predetermined how many focus groups would be eventually required. Less important than the actual number of focus groups was the sense of having fully covered the scope of the study and its recruitment criteria. New groups were recruited and moderated until the contributions became repetitive (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). Once this point of theoretical saturation or redundancy was reached, there was little to be gained by doing more groups (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Morgan and Scannell, 1998). Although previous research agrees that there exists no ideal number of focus groups, usually the literature suggests a range between four to 12 groups (for example Hedges, 1985; Miles and Huberman, 1994). In accordance with these suggestions, this study covered ten focus groups in total until the point of theoretical saturation was reached.

Smaller groups allowed each participant to contribute more to the discussion but, as Morgan and Scannell (1998) warn, may be more demanding. These groups may be dominated more easily by one extrovert person who may impose her opinion on less outgoing personalities while larger groups may have the disadvantage to intimidate some group members (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Generally, the number of participants in focus groups is advised to be between six and 12 members (for example Krueger, 1994). Due to cancellations and people not turning up, the pilot group in this study was the smallest with four members. Having experienced this as a too small a group size for a lively conversation to develop, the following groups consisted of six or seven members to generate data for this study. Larger groups would have reduced the number and depth of the individual contributions and would have made it difficult to handle the discussion for one single researcher.

4.3.3.2 Individual Cases

Based on the initial findings from focus groups, individual interviews were conducted. It did not appear that the geographical location of the groups in different areas of Germany played any role in their impulse buying decisions and experience of happiness. Therefore geographical factors were not further considered in the recruitment process for the interviews. Factors such as age, marital status and children appeared to have some influence in the initial focus group analysis and laid the basis for the selection of participants for the interviews. As illustrated in Table 4.3, the age range 18 to 35 years was covered. The recruitment criteria included age, marital status and number of children, highest qualification and current job. Married women were recruited as well as singles or cohabitating women. Concerning education, the cases included a mix of female consumers with different qualifications. All cases were anonymised.

Table 4.3: Overview of Cases

FG	Participant	Age	Marital status/ children	Highest Qualification ¹	Current Job	Living with...	Gatekeeper
1	Nicole	young (21)	boyfriend	Abitur	Trainee in Admin/IT ²	parents	HR department
2	Natascha	young (20)	boyfriend	Abitur	Trainee in Admin/IT	parents	HR Department
3	Diana	young (19)	boyfriend	Fachabitur	Trainee in Technology ³	parents	HR department
4	Nadia	young (19)	boyfriend	Fachabitur	Trainee in Technology	parents	HR department
5	Rebecca	old (24)	boyfriend	Mittlere Reife	Personal Assistant	living alone	none
6	Carmen	old (30)	married	Mittlere Reife	Office clerk	partner	none
7	Lena	old (35)	married, one child	Diplom	Finance Manager part-time	family	none
8	Laura	old (31)	married, one child	Diplom	Housewife	family	friend of mine
9	Brigitte	young (19)	single, one child	Abitur	Student, internship	parents	colleague
10	Susanne dropped out due to illness	old (30)	partner	Mittlere Reife	Job searcher	partner	none

Corresponding to the sampling process in the focus groups, the cases were mainly recruited via gatekeepers through the snowball technique. Gatekeepers, such as acquaintances or the HR department of a company, were contacted to gain access to individuals who met the recruitment criteria and came from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds. The gatekeepers played an important role in gaining access to a diversity of cases. The gatekeepers were briefed and contacted potential volunteers. For example, one of the gatekeepers was an HR manager

¹ Qualifications in Germany and their UK equivalent: Mittlere Reife ~ O'levels, Fachabitur ~ slightly below A'levels, Abitur ~ A'levels, Diplom ~ Masters Degree

² Auszubildende zur IT-Systemkauffrau

³ Auszubildende zur IT-Systemtechnikerin

with easy access to a specified group of people and was therefore asked to look for individuals among their female trainees aged between 18 to 23 years who would belong to the 'younger' participants. Some participants who were friends, acquaintances or colleagues of the researcher were contacted directly.

After the gatekeepers had provided the email addresses or telephone numbers of the potential participants, an initial contact between them and the researcher was built up. If the initial contact details only included the email address, the potential participant was contacted by email (see Appendix D), outlining the study, the topic, the process of data collection and the duration. Each participant was asked to provide their telephone number in order to talk through the screening questionnaire as a warm-up (see Appendix A). In addition, the recruitment criteria had to be verified and there was room for any questions of the participant. Due to the duration of the study over a period of three months, it was explained to each potential participant that their ongoing support was essential for the success of this project. Apart from showing a general interest in the research topic and their dedication to contribute by sharing their impulse buying experiences, the participants had to be available for ten to 15 minutes once a week either for a face-to-face meeting at their convenience or for a phone call. None of the volunteers had planned upfront to go on vacation for more than three weeks during that period, which would have led to exclusion of this person from the study. Even in case of illness and weeks without going shopping, three months appeared long enough to give the participants sufficient opportunities for a number of impulse buying experiences. Also, this period of time appeared to be limited enough without running a too high risk of volunteers losing interest and dropping out.

Nonetheless the ongoing participation of the cases over the entire period of the investigation remained a challenge. Extending the study beyond a period of three months was considered jeopardising the ongoing support of participants and increase the drop out rate at some point of the study, for example due to loss of interest or ill-health. In addition, a potential conditioning effect could have occurred whereby the participants' behaviour might have become affected by the duration of their participation (Bryman, 2001). In total, a number of ten cases were selected with an expected drop out of a maximum of 30 percent due to the longitudinal nature of the study. In fact, only one participant dropped out within the first two weeks due to a severe illness. The number of participants was considered to be adequate to yield sufficient insights to address the research objectives in this study.

4.4 Quality of the Research

There remains the challenge of the accuracy of the data provided in any kind of self-report on emotions (for example Mesquita and Frijda, 1992). This means that apart from being willing to observe and talk about their emotions, participants need to have the ability to do so. The quality and rigour of a research study can be evaluated by several kinds of criteria and with using different terms, for example validity, generalisability, replicability, and reliability (Mason, 1996).

The origin of terms such as validity or reliability is quantitative social science (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Although some researchers try to apply these measures to both quantitative and qualitative research (for example Kirk and Miller, 1986; Peräkylä, 1997), others (for example Marshall and Rossman, 1999) propose that these terms correspond poorly to qualitative research, respectively, non-positivist paradigms and propose a set of different terms for judging the quality of an inquiry. Guba and Lincoln (1998) for example suggest the use of the following constructivist criteria for the existing positivist criteria:

- the term credibility for internal validity
- the term transferability for external validity
- the term dependability for reliability
- and the term confirmability for objectivity.

These terms following the constructivist criteria have received wide support (for example Hirschman, 1986; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The reasoning for using the terminology as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1998) for the purposes of this study can be explained for instance in view of the criteria validity. The term validity is described by Kassirjian (1977, p.15) as “the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure”. Other researchers equate validity with truth and the extent to which a social phenomenon is accurately reflected (Hammersley, 1989).

The epistemology of this study strives to develop an understanding of an impulse buying situation through the induction from data as discussed earlier. In strong disagreement to using different terms in quantitative and qualitative research, Morse et al. (2002, p.1) argue that in qualitative research both reliability and validity remain appropriate concepts for methodological rigour and “make a plea for a return to terminology for ensuring rigor that is used by mainstream science”.

Similarly, Morse (1999) warns that qualitative research could be considered as not being reliable or valid if reliability and validity were assumed not to be relevant to qualitative inquiries. Despite the ongoing debate on the use of terminology and the different perspectives of quantitative and qualitative research, the concern is similar – both deal with the quality of a research study. It appears unlikely, however, that the choice of terminology for judging the quality of an inquiry leads to a reduction in the quality of a qualitative research. For reasons outlined above, the terminology as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1998) is used in this qualitative study. The techniques for establishing quality are summarised in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Criteria and Techniques for Establishing the Quality of Research

<i>Traditional criteria for the quality of research</i>	<i>Corresponding criteria for the quality of research</i>	Techniques applied in this study for establishing the quality of research
External validity	Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analytical generalisation • Compare evidence with extant literature • Thematical analysis across focus groups and cases
Internal validity	Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within-case, respectively, focus group analysis, then cross-case and focus group pattern matching • Identify empirical evidence and build explanations • Assure internal coherence of findings
Reliability	Dependability	For all focus groups and individual interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot studies • Question guideline • Tape-recorded data • Verbatim transcripts • Monitoring of researcher bias
Construct validity	Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of multiple sources of evidence with focus groups and cases

Riege (2003) for example associates the chain of evidence with the concept of confirmability of a study whereas for example Yin (2003) or Darke et al. (1998) apply the audit trail or chain of evidence technique to demonstrate the dependability, or in their terminology reliability, of the research design. In sum, however, all techniques provide a useful contribution to the quality of a research project regardless of their preference towards a particular concept. Following the structure provided in Table 4.4, in the next sections each quality criteria will be discussed in more detail.

4.4.1 Transferability

In this exploratory research project, the central purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of motivations and complex behaviours behind impulse buying decisions and to explore feelings of happiness associated with these experiences. The construct of transferability requires the researcher to demonstrate that the findings can be applied to other contexts and are useful in the investigation of similar research questions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Following the discussion in section 4.2, the application of findings relating to other contexts requires an analytical generalisation (Yin, 2003) .

Techniques that were applied in this research to enable transferability include the comparison of findings of the study with existing literature as indicated in Table 4.4 above. This was done during the data analysis phase. The literature review chapters provide detailed information of research findings in both consumer buying experiences as well as happiness studies, which are compared with the findings of this study. In addition, similar to suggestions from Miles and Huberman (1994) in the context of case studies, the data were thematically analysed across cases and across focus groups in order to support the transferability of findings.

4.4.2 Credibility

The credibility of qualitative findings refers to an accurate identification of the existing empirical evidence and theoretical framework as well as an in-depth description of the study in terms of the population and research setting (for example Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Marshall and Rossman, 1999; Remenyi et al., 1998). Credibility also involves the demonstration that the results of qualitative research are believable from the perspective of the participants in the research.

Threats to credibility lie in inaccurate or incomplete data, which mainly depends on the quality of a transcript or notes (Robson, 2002). Therefore interview sessions were without exception tape-recorded and tapes were transcribed in full length, irrespective of at first glance seemingly irrelevant data. As outlined in Table 4.4, further techniques for establishing credibility of this study were applied, for example using illustrations and graphical displays of data as well as applying a within-case, respectively, within focus group analysis and cross-case, respectively, cross focus group analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

4.4.3 Dependability

With regard to dependability of qualitative findings, the study requires to account for consistency. This does not refer to the possibility of repeating the results of a study (Bryman, 2001) but refers to the stability in the process of inquiry (Riege, 2003). Techniques to establish dependability in this study are summarised in Table 4.4. and included pilot studies as suggested in previous literature (for example Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994). Based on the pilot studies, all focus groups were established on the same question guideline. Similarly, the topic guide was identical for all individual interviews in order to address the research questions. Consistency was also achieved through tape-recording all focus groups and individual interviews, followed by verbatim transcripts. On one account, a participant (Lena) started talking right away about her latest impulse buying experience of a jug at Ikea when greeted with 'how are you' before there was a chance to switch on the tape-recorder. In order to ensure consistency, I asked her to halt for a second and start again after I had managed pressing the 'record' button. This contributed to monitoring closely researcher bias and reducing the influence of the researcher's own perspectives on the data. Instead of trying to reconstruct the general sense of an interview, I could rely on the tape-recorded data, which can be traced back by reviewers. The data show reality at the actual time of data collection and are not required to be replicable in this qualitative, phenomenological study (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

4.4.4 Confirmability

Confirmability was another criterion for assessing the quality of qualitative research (see Table 4.4). In this context it had to be investigated in this study to what extent the findings are supported by another similar study (Remenyi et al., 1998). Multiple sources of evidence during data collection were used as suggested by Yin (2003) to increase confirmability or as he terms it construct validity.

In this study, confirmability was established through collecting and analysing data from focus groups and individual interviews with impulse buyers. These two data collection methods yield different insights into consumer experiences. The comparison of the findings from the focus groups with the subsequent cases generated similarities and differences as well as inconsistent or even contradicting results. Thereby the findings from the cases were corroborating or questioning

initial interpretations based on focus group data. Convergence of information from a variety of sources thus strengthened the findings (Yin, 1994), which in turn increased the confirmability. While Mathison (1988, p.15) warns that several methods could result in “opposing views” and Robson (2002, p.370) understands conflicting results as an increase of “confusion and uncertainty”, this could also have a positive impact in particular in an exploratory study as this project. Multiple methods result in a more complete picture of the phenomenon compared to the data collection with a single method as Denscombe (1998) rightly suggests. In fact, the contradictory results both within and across focus groups and cases in this research positively added to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

4.4.5 The Role of the Researcher

Phenomenological, qualitative research with an exploratory and descriptive purpose implies that the researcher is not an uninvolved bystander but interacts with the social world of the participants. In fact, qualitative research “is very much influenced by the researcher’s individual attributes and perspectives” (Schofield, 1993, p.202). Following the opinion of Van Maanen (1988) it is assumed in this study that the personal experience of the researcher with impulse buying situations and happiness may be employed as an additional source for a better understanding of the data in this study. Regarding the emotional disclosure of the participants, the personality of the researcher might have exerted a positive influence on data collection. In this respect, some researchers (Dindia and Allen, 1992; Snell et al., 1989) indicate that women tend to be more willing than men to disclose their emotions to strangers and in particular to other women. In order to build up trust the age gap between researcher and participants was addressed through using the participants’ jargon as well as following Robson’s (1993) advice by adopting a similar style of dressing. Depending on the group or individuals in interviews, I either dressed down wearing a pair of trendy torn jeans or dressed up in those groups who were wearing business clothes to convey the impression ‘I am one of them’ and dissolve the gap between us.

The research process remained iterative throughout the project by moving back and forth between the different research activities and thus ensuring correspondence among literature, recruitment, data collection and analysis. Following the advice of Morse et al. (2002) who suggest a responsive attitude towards changing circumstances, the interview guides for focus groups and

individual interviews were kept as flexible and open as possible. Although during data collection some participants might have been more often personally addressed or probed more in-depth than others, the overall impact on the findings is insignificant and outweighed through the number of contributions from all participants in focus groups and individual interviews. The transcription of interviews and focus groups was done with a great deal of care through verbatim transcripts of tape recordings instead of trying to recollect the general sense of an interview. This ensured that no data were lost or changed before the data analysis started.

4.5 Data Collection

The data collection in focus groups and individual interviews includes the discussion of the choice of location and design of the focus group question guideline. Moreover, the challenges on moderating the groups will be looked at. Finally, the set-up of the weekly individual interviews and the interview question guideline will be explained.

4.5.1 Data Collection in Focus Groups

Concerning logistics of the focus groups, an adequate environment conducive to conversation had to be found for this study. Oates (2000) suggests choosing one that is suitable and quiet. Similarly, Fallon and Brown (2002) assume that the quality of data collected in focus groups can be maximised through providing refreshments to the participants and choosing a pleasant surrounding. In this study, the location was chosen according to each group. Either gatekeepers provided the meeting facilities, or they supported defining and booking an adequate location with easy access for all group members. For instance, the groups with apprentices at Cospharm plc were held in a quiet classroom or conference room on their premises with chairs arranged in a circle whereas the group of pupils (FG 7)¹ met at a local Italian ice-cream parlour in their home town. The latter proved to be ideal for setting a friendly and relaxed atmosphere as Zikmund (2000) suggests. Everybody was drinking a cup of cappuccino and some of them smoking their cigarettes. In comparison, the classroom at Cospharm, with no drinks allowed, was rather formal

¹ FG stands for focus group in this study

which made it more difficult to 'break the ice' at the beginning. On the other hand, the classroom was easy to find and convenient to access for everybody.

The group sessions started with me introducing myself to the participants, thanking them for coming, explaining to them the academic and non-commercial background of the study. Their permission to tape the conversation was gained and I assured anonymity and confidentiality. The discussion of the topic among themselves was encouraged in order to avoid a question-answer layout. With the intention of breaking the ice, some basic socio-demographic questions, such as age, current job and highest qualification were asked in a 'warm up' round at the beginning of the group session (see Appendix E). Usually this information had already been available prior to the focus groups. However, this 'warm up' exercise intended to encourage everyone to speak while making them feel more relaxed and helped by addressing people by their given names, for example in the group with pupils/freshers, or family names, for example in the group with apprentices at Cospharm. Also, it was useful to verify initial feedback by email or on the phone, and in those cases when this information could not be collected prior to the focus groups. Based on the focus group question guideline, which can be found in Appendix F, each focus group started with the following introductory question:

'When you think of your purchases, what kind of things do you remember buying on impulse? Any products or services.'

This introductory question aimed to initiate a general non-specific brainstorming of impulse purchases. The aim was to put the participants at ease by getting to know each other and their joint commonalities (Krueger, 1998) and initiating the group interaction. In addition, this collection of a variety of impulse buys could be used for further discussion later on during the focus group session.

The focus group question guideline enabled a flexible approach with no given rigid order of questions depending on the course of the discussion. The questions were used to trigger a stimulating discussion among the group members and as a mental note for the moderator. The questions were open-ended, for example: 'When you buy something on impulse, how does it make you feel?' Open-ended questions may encourage the participants to provide an extensive answer and "stimulate useful trains of thought in the participants that were not anticipated" (Knodel, 1993, p.36) so that unexpected ideas may emerge. In addition, the questions left room for probes and follow-up questions, for instance:

'You had spotted something in town and bought it on impulse. When you arrive home – how do you feel about the purchase?'

The follow-up question was to specify: *'How do you feel one week later?'*

There is general agreement in the literature that about 12 questions with additional follow-up questions are considered as adequate for a two-hours question guideline for focus groups (for example Carson et al., 2001; Krueger, 1993; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). In line with this, a total of 13 questions were prepared for this study, some with follow-up questions or probes, and the first question being an introductory brainstorming question. This led to a semi-structured approach which gave sufficient guidance for the group towards concentrating on the research topic instead of digressing too much from the topic. This semi-structured approach allowed the moderator to be in control of any dominating eloquent participants in some of the focus groups, who tried to impose their opinion on others and as a consequence could have jeopardised the group interaction, and encourage more introvert and quiet participants to contribute to the group (Brown, 1999; Carson et al., 2001; Morgan, 1996; Zikmund, 2000). It was ensured that everyone got a chance to speak, interaction was promoted and questions were asked to specify responses (Zikmund, 2000). Due to the interaction, comments triggered a chain of reactions, increased excitement and enabled spontaneous responses, which potentially generated more information than could have been achieved by other methods (Morgan and Krueger, 1993). The focus group atmosphere allowed participants to share their true feelings and air their opinions in their own words (Zikmund, 2000). The group discussions were stimulated by differences and similarities of experiences among the group members, "recall aiding" (Fontana and Frey, 1998, p.55) of previous buying experiences. The questions were tested in a pilot study to ensure that they yield the insights required for the research questions, are well understood and do not make the participants feel uncomfortable. Each group took between 60 to 75 minutes.

I was aware that my role as a moderator had an impact on the quality of the data collected. Robson (2002, p.287) recommends "a balance between an active and a passive role". While I tried to be the "catalyst for discussion" (Carson et al., 2001, p.122), generate an interest in the topic and foster the interaction of group members, I remained uninvolved in the group discussion and avoided leading the group as suggested in the literature (Sim, 1998). Group dynamics occurred inevitably, for example digressing and raising issues irrelevant to this research

study. Particular researcher skills were required and the question guideline was useful to return to those topics relevant for this study.

Several researchers claim that the gender of the interviewer and of the participant plays a role in gaining trust and as a consequence affects the success of a session (for example Fontana and Frey, 1998). In this project the participants willingly and quite naturally shared intimate stories of impulse buys even of personal items such as underwear, which might not have been the case if a male moderator had been present. At the end of each session, debriefing questions, such as: 'Is there anything else you would like to add? Have we missed anything?' concluded the discussion and any tentatively identified topics were summarised by the moderator. These were presented to the group for confirmation or clarification as suggested in the literature (for example Kidd and Parshall, 2000).

In line with Oates (2000) each focus group in this study was tape-recorded as it provided full verbatim transcripts and left the researcher free to moderate and concentrate on the group interaction. Tapes and verbatim transcripts offer several advantages compared with other kinds of qualitative data, for example they are a public record and tapes replay at any time the original sequences of conversation (Silverman, 2001). Recording was done with a small portable recorder, which was placed in the middle of the table and soon forgotten by the participants.

Although it was originally planned to take notes about the group interaction, mood, body language and facial expressions during the sessions, this proved to be unrealistic. In practice, two researchers would have been necessary in each focus group to cope with managing the group and taking notes at the same time. Instead, notes were taken shortly after a group session had finished and the tapes were transcribed as soon as possible as advised by Oates (2000). The summarised notes contained the interaction between group members, a short characterisation of the individuals and their most striking contributions and debated topics. The transcripts not only included the spoken words but also the notes taken during and shortly after each session. The aim for completeness of data, which may also include video recordings of facial expressions, is an illusion and unrealistic as Sacks (1992) notes. Based on the experience with the group and initial reflections on the data, the moderation of the focus groups and the guideline in terms of sequence of topics were not static but remained flexible and were constantly adjusted for the subsequent groups.

The data collection in the individual interviews was based on the experiences with the focus groups and their preliminary analysis and will be discussed in the next section.

4.5.2 Data Collection in Individual Interviews

Over a period of three months, the participants were asked each week in a ten to 15 minute focussed interview to talk about their latest impulse buying experiences. Based on the experiences with the focus groups, the interviews were taped on a recorder and transcribed verbatim. In case the participant had not bought anything in the previous week, for example due to illness, or could not think of anything to report about, I was sometimes informed prior to the meeting by email and asked to skip the meeting. Alternatively, I was informed at the beginning of an interview that no impulse buy had been made lately. Then it was jointly decided to skip that week's session. The Football World Cup that was held in Germany in 2006 created such euphoria among female supporters, including most participants in this study, that some meetings or phone calls were cancelled during that time. Most of the participants/supporters were busy watching football with no time left for going shopping or for reporting about their impulse buying experiences.

In order to achieve a maximum participation, the time and location of the weekly interviews or telephone calls was flexible and organised with a detailed schedule to best meet the requirements of the participants. The aim was to keep their time investment and efforts to a minimum. As Mann and Stewart (2000, p.21) suggest "venues for interviews need to be easily accessible to participants in terms of location, timing, lifestyle and physical access". Particular care was given to choose a friendly and informal, non-threatening environment for the interviews, such as a café or a quiet coffee corner in the office instead of a conference room.

Cicourel (1974) argues that it is necessary for the interviewer to build up trust with participants. In this respect, as with the focus groups, confidentiality was assured and there was informed consent. Trust was also built up for example by eliminating the potential hierarchy between researcher and participant with appropriate clothing in the face-to-face meetings, aiming to put the participant at ease with the situation, as well as with filling the first few minutes in the first couple of interviews with small talk. This also corresponds to the concept of qualitative interviews which do not strive to ask the participant a series of questions but resemble a dialogue,

which was felt best to be achieved in a more informal atmosphere. As already discussed in the section on the focus groups, the participants usually make judgements on trustworthiness about the interviewer from their first impressions (Jones, 1985). If they had a negative impression, they may deliberately misinform the researcher, avoid giving all the details and possibly make up shopping experiences to please the researcher. Argyle (1987) warns that the correct measurement of happiness in self-reports is affected by the general tendency of participants to give socially desirable answers and exaggerate their level of happiness. To avoid this each participant was explained the importance of their contributions to this project. In face-to-face meetings particular attention was given to signs of deception, for example "eye movements, discomfort, or general shiftiness" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002, p.90). During the process of the research, I gained the impression through participant feedback that they enjoyed contributing to this study and had no intention of providing deceptive information. After the course of several weeks and again at the end of the project, each participant was asked about purchases they had mentioned during the entire project. All participants were able to recall and reflect upon their previous impulse buys. It is unlikely that this would have been possible in that much detail if the experiences had been made up.

For this study, the semi-structured method was chosen as a compromise between the rigid structured interview and the informal, unstructured interview. Unstructured or semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method when "one aim of the interviewer is to develop an understanding of the participant's 'world' " (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002, p.87), which is entirely corresponding to this research. In the semi-structured interviews the interviewer let the conversation develop within a general area of interest. Rambling or going off the topic was often supported as it increased the understanding of the researched topic and provided rich and detailed insights. As Patton (2002) suggests the participants were asked questions on the same basic lines of inquiry and with a similar wording although the order and wording of questions could slightly differ (Robson, 2002). The necessary guidance, sufficient structure and a systematic approach was provided by the interview question guideline in order to focus on the research questions and to ensure that the participants more or less remained focussed on the topic (see Appendix G). Nonetheless, it left room for the participant to talk about experiences and possible underlying motivations and feelings related to the topic as well as enough flexibility for exploring and probing questions. This approach supports the exploratory nature of the research.

Contrary to the literature which suggests that question guidelines for interviews consist of

"some relatively closed identifying questions and a few (one to six) open-ended 'grand tour' questions, with associated prompts/probes and follow-up questions"
(Miller and Crabtree, 1999, p.96),

a multitude of questions were prepared in advance. This was required for interviews with those participants who were less talkative and required more guidance as well as additional probes and questions in order to get their full story. Also, it served as a useful reminder to focus on the data required for addressing the research objectives. Previous research found that often the participants do not tell all the things the interviewer may be interested in, either on purpose to deceive the interviewer as already discussed or because they leave out seemingly unimportant details (Becker and Geer, 2004). In the latter case the question guideline with a multitude of direct questions or probes steered the participants towards providing in-depth descriptions of their impulse buying experiences and attached feelings.

As depicted in Appendix G, the structure of the interview guide started with the introductory question: 'Did you buy anything on impulse last week? Please tell me more about it.' Some participants would then talk in detail about their latest impulse buying experience without the need for many further interruptions or guidance from the interview question guideline. Usually after the first few interviews, the participants were already familiar with the flow of each session and in most cases became more talkative and voluntarily provided more detailed insights into their impulse buying experiences. Therefore less interference was required and fewer questions had to be asked compared to the first weeks. Open-ended questions like the one mentioned above dominated the interview question guideline. This included possible probes and follow-up questions to seek an explanation where the meaning of the participant's contribution was not clear or to explore answers in more detail (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Hussey and Hussey, 1997). Open-ended questions have the potential to "elicit stories and case-oriented narratives" (Miller and Crabtree, 1999, p.93).

The guideline of questions in the focussed interviews with consumers was based on the preliminary findings of the focus groups. One of the aims was to enquire about more general contributions from the focus groups in more detail, for instance by asking: 'Talk me through your purchase in detail' (see Appendix G). Another aim

was to gain deep insights into those impulse buying experiences which occurred during the past seven days. Limiting the purchases to the last seven days only, aimed to optimise the recall process of the true feelings experienced. This stands in contrast to recalling a past impulse buy from years back as occurred in the focus groups leaving room for distorted memories or recall. In some of the interviews, the participants were still experiencing the feeling the latest impulse buy had triggered in them, which contributed to investigating the feelings attached to the purchase. In addition, the focus groups, being a one-off event, contributed only to a very limited extent to exploring the research question how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience. This could be evaluated in the individual interviews, for example with the question:

'Two weeks/one month/two months/three months ago you told me about the impulse purchase of xyz. Remember? How do you feel about this purchase today?' (see Appendix G)

During the interview sessions I tried to let the participant talk and keep the story flowing, which was done for example by an affirmative noise, such as 'uh-huh' or an attentive lean. From time to time it proved to be useful to summarise what has been said in order to check my own understanding, enable a clarification of open issues and to encourage the participant to provide truthful answers. The advice from Robson (2002) and Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) was followed in that interviewers need to be able to listen, and should refrain from imposing their own opinions or feelings into the situation to avoid creating bias in the interview (Oakley, 1981). In addition, I tried to

"act like a sponge, absorbing and drawing in information, maintaining a spirit of inquisitiveness, rather than a judgmental or evaluative manner." (Morse, 1994, p.28)

The interviews were natural and immediate narratives, similar to telling a story to a good friend instead of a formal report. This was supported by trying to adopt the following behaviour during each interview:

"The interviewer's manner should be friendly, courteous, conversational and unbiased. He should be neither too grim nor too effusive; neither too talkative nor too timid. The idea should be to put the participant at ease, so that he will talk freely and fully." (Selltitz et al., 1965, p.576)

After each interview session the participants were asked if they wished to add anything. As Miller and Crabtree (1999) propose I took five to ten minutes for small talk after each session in order to set good relations and gain a better understanding of the participant (Fontana and Frey, 2000). With particular regard to interviewing women, Oakley (1981, p.41) found that it is usually easiest to find out more "when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical". Therefore great care was taken to use the wording of the participant in any probing questions and thereby eliminating any potential jargon.

Previous literature suggests returning the transcripts to each participant for verification. If, however, as McCormack (2004) had observed the participants only improve on the messiness of the text for example deleting the uhms and grammar mistakes, it appeared to be of little use to improve on the overall data for this project. Instead, this research pursued the strategy to prompt each participant in their final interview sessions of this longitudinal project with each of her impulse buys. They were then asked to recall each impulse buying experience and reconsider it. This re-evaluation of the purchase yielded new insights from a different time perspective and the participants had the chance to correct or comment on their previous contributions. Also, this procedure both provided the participant with the certainty that her contributions were worthwhile for the study as well as ensured the best possible understanding of the participant's experiences while leaving room for clarifications.

4.6 Data Analysis

There appears to be no agreement in previous research about a standardised and systematic approach to qualitative data analysis. Stroh (2000) for example demands a rigorous guideline for an effective management of the amount of qualitative data. My experience resembled the warning from Miles and Huberman (1998, p.183) that "the quantity can be daunting, if not overwhelming". Analysing qualitative data is a creative activity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and the intention was to remain open to anything that might be found in the data. The transcripts from focus groups and individual interviews resulted in a vast amount of unstructured raw data, which had to be transformed into meaningful findings by the analysis.

For a first-run data reduction with basic information, I filled in a contact summary sheet after each focus group, respectively, individual interview (see Appendix H). Ritchie and Spencer (1994) suggest familiarising oneself with the data as a first step to qualitative data analysis. This was done by listening to tapes and reading transcripts and thus getting familiar with the data before beginning the process of sorting the data. In addition, initial codes and themes were scribbled on the margins of each transcript as suggested by Robson (2002). This, I felt, contributed to getting immersed in the data and in view of the participants “to get close to them and to feel part of them” (Stroh, 2000, p.226).

In the second stage, the general thematic framework was identified by writing down recurrent themes. Boyatzis (1998) suggests the process of thematic analysis for qualitative data as it encodes qualitative information as parts of linguistic data and verbal interaction and supports the recognition of patterns, which reflect themes (Kellehear, 1993). In this context Miles and Huberman (1994) distinguish between three classes of codes: broad descriptive codes, interpretive codes and explanatory pattern codes. In this iterative process, an initial code for a piece of text may first be considered in conjunction with other codes but eventually be placed in relation to other pieces of text. Dittmar and Drury (2000, p.119) comment upon thematic analysis with: “thematic analysis seeks to assess subjects’ feelings, perceptions and understandings of themselves and social relations”. This reflects the aim of this research and therefore appears to be appropriate to be applied. Interaction of group members, respectively, body language was not analysed separately but in conjunction with the spoken words during each focus group session and individual interview. Coding, meaning categorising and sorting data, prepares the data for the conceptualisation and was done with the aid of a specialised computer software for qualitative data analysis. The process of moving “data from diffuse and messy texts to organized ideas” (Morse and Richards, 2002, p.126) started with segmenting the text. The data were split into discrete parts and descriptive codes were applied. These are exemplified in Table 4.5, which depicts examples for coding data from the transcript to descriptive and interpretive codes in focus groups.

Table 4.5: Examples for Coding Data in Focus Groups

Original text in verbatim transcript, for example...	Descriptive codes	Interpretive codes
<p>"When I afford that day ticket to Hanover, or by car spending money on petrol, then I don't want to return home empty-handed." (FG 7)</p> <p>"I've got to eat at least an ice-cream. That satisfies me." (FG 9)</p> <p>"You return home with a better feeling. Not that much demotivated." (FG 9)</p>	Empty-handed	Motivation
<p>"What I really enjoy buying is gifts for someone else. When I walk along somewhere and spot something and it's a good price, kind of cheap, and I think that would really be nice for some friend of mine, then I simply get it. I really very much enjoy that." (FG 2)</p> <p>"When I spot something, even if it's a little something, then I just get it and say to that person: Got something for you. I know that this person will be happy about it." (FG 8)</p>	Gifting	for impulse
<p>Several quotations in verbatim transcript for each descriptive code</p>	Happiness Need Novelty Perfect fit Price Rationality/ makes sense Reward Treat Urge	buying

Particular care was given not to take words or single sentences out of the context and thereby distorting the meaning and possibly simplifying explanations. Kidd and Parshall (2000) believe that bias can be reduced if the coding is done arbitrarily by length according to each individual turn per speaker, that means everything that is said by one participant before another one speaks. They do not consider, however, that a participant may refer to several topics within one turn. Since a text passage

may contain different themes it was not always appropriate to attach one specific code to the entire passage. In this case it was split up into smaller segments. During the descriptive coding process, initial descriptive codes were developed based on the collected data (open coding). Descriptive codes do not aim to interpret the data but rather link a phenomenon to a segment in the transcript.

The data from focus groups and individual interviews were collected and transcribed verbatim in the German language, which then served as the basis for the subsequent coding process. Without exception open coding was done only in English in order to establish categories ready for further analysis in English. Mixing English and German codes at this stage was not considered to be useful when preparing the data for the final interpretation. Therefore in-vivo coding was mostly avoided, that is the text itself was not used as a meaningful name for a possible German code. When a passage repeated a topic which had already been coded earlier on, the function 'code from list' was used. The categories fulfilled the criteria of being internally homogenous and externally heterogenous as suggested by Patton (2002), which formed the basis to identify more complex themes during the later stages of analysis.

Following the advice from previous research (for example Miles and Huberman, 1994; Trochim, 2000) the data analysis process was accompanied by memoing, meaning the recording of thoughts and ideas emerging throughout the study. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest three kind of memos were used in this study: code notes, theoretical notes, and operational notes. Code notes comprised information relating to categories, while theoretical notes visualised associations among data and emerging concepts, and operational notes served as a reminder for the researcher about the next steps (Fielding and Lee, 1998). This is depicted in Table 4.6 which provides examples for memoing data, including codes, theoretical and operational notes in individual interviews.

were identified. During this inductive process, first patterns emerged from the data. Table 4.7 depicts examples for categorising data from descriptive to interpretive codes and emerging themes in individual interviews.

Table 4.7: Examples for Coding Data and Emerging Themes in Individual Interviews

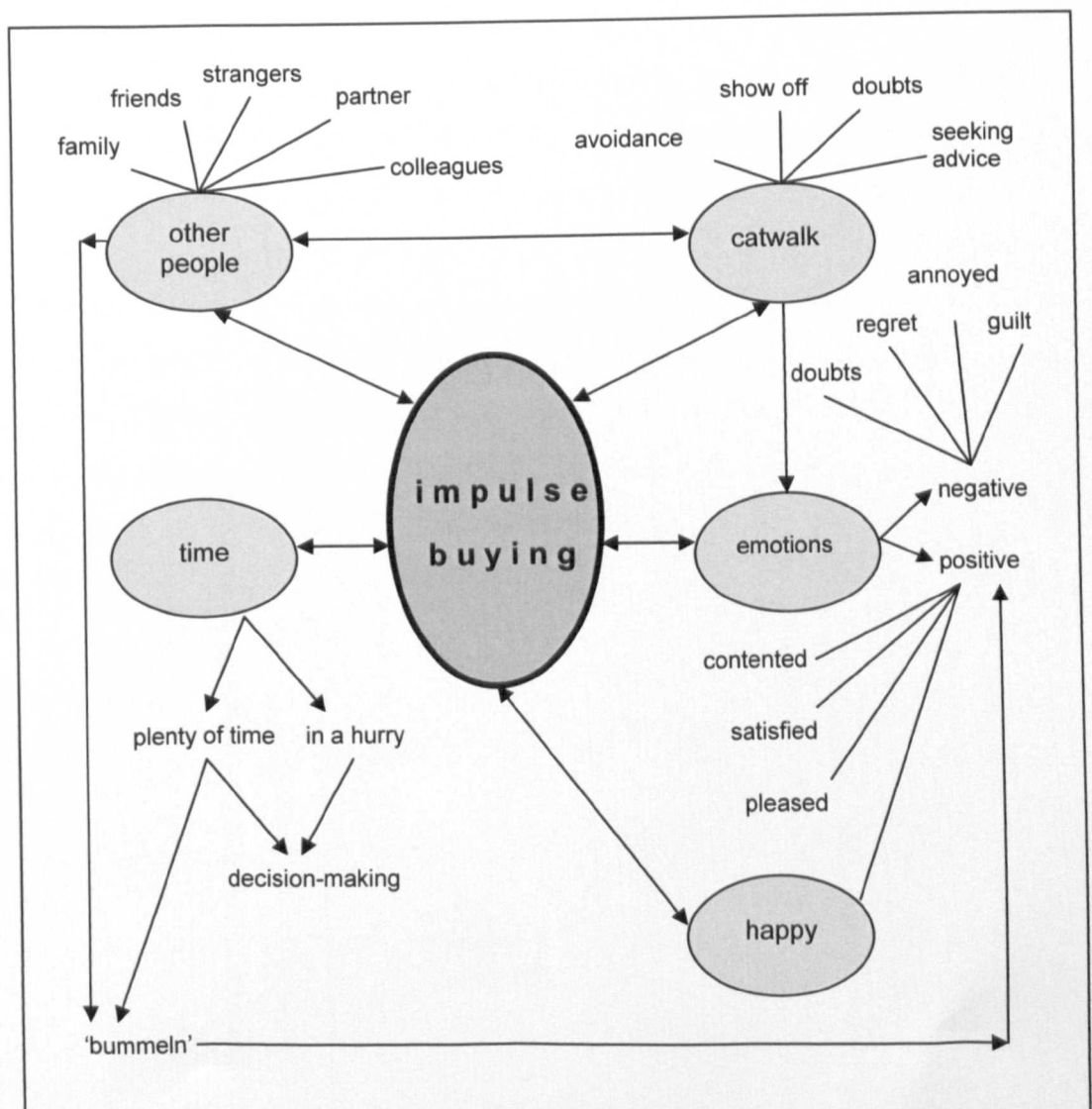
D e s c r i p t i v e c o d e s	Interpretive codes	Emerging themes
Admiration Asking for and getting advice Joint decision Catwalk: negative feedback Catwalk: positive feedback Catwalk: showing off Catwalk avoidance: negative feedback expected or cognitive dissonance* Catwalk avoidance: not important Deciding on my own* Motivate to engage in impulse buying Negative impact on impulse buying experience* Looking for reassurance after impulse buy Small talk* Stereotype Men Shopping with others vs on my own	Other people	The Role of Co-Shoppers Feeling forced to buy something Seeking advice A joint decision? Competing with other People The catwalk Small talk
Plenty of time 'Bummeln' ¹ Quick decision-making on the spot Time lapse: decision now but acquisition later but asap Time lapse: thinking time between spotting item and impulse buy Use: immediately after impulse buy Use: only some time later on	Time	In a Hurry or: On the Run Time on my hands or: Window shopping and 'bummeln' ¹ Decision-making on the spot Time lapse: Deciding on the spot, buying later Time lapse: Time for reconsideration between decision and actual purchase First use of the impulse purchase

¹ Bummeln: German term, explained in Chapter 5.8.2

* Memos, see Table 4.6

The process of coding was not straightforward in chronological order but experienced as challenging because of its iterative nature, which involved moving back and forth between the stages. This flexibility was necessary to question relationships among data, rearrange data and reinforce the credibility of findings. As the literature (for example Miles and Huberman, 1998; Robson, 2002; Ryan and Bernard, 2000) suggests visual data displays were used, such as tables or networks. Links and relationships between the data were visualised in handwritten, manual drawings and mind maps, which made me feel closer to the data. While initially mind maps were established for each focus group and each participant in the individual interviews, these were eventually merged into one mind map comprising the emerging themes and indicating connections between themes. An excerpt from this mind map is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Excerpt from Mind Map with Emerging Themes from Focus Groups and Individual Interviews



The mind maps proved to be useful to further describe, explore, and explain the data. Miles and Huberman (1998, p.188) emphasise that

"valid analysis is immensely aided by data displays that are focused enough to permit viewing of a full data set in one location and are systematically arranged to answer the research questions at hand."

This was followed by returning to the software programme and accordingly (re-) sorting the codes into categories.

Throughout the analysis, I tried to follow the advice of Strauss and Corbin (1998) to remain open and flexible to perceive emerging patterns. In order to avoid projecting or reading into a participant what is actually my own characteristic or emotion as Boyatzis (1998) warns, I re-visited the coding a number of times and consistently compared it to the original transcript and the context of the quote. Also, I tried to avoid the effect of fatigue as Boyatzis (1998) warns by coding no more than one individual case or one focus group a day and taking a number of breaks in-between. Staying mentally focussed on one group or one interviewee only, also helped me to get immersed in the data and relive the actual group or the personal experience of the participant.

As suggested in the literature (for example Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002), the emerging patterns and themes were first compared within each focus group, respectively, within each case before carrying out an analysis within each data collection method. Finally the findings across all focus groups and cases were discussed. The analysis within focus groups, respectively, within each case provided first insights and helped gain familiarity with the data in order to develop preliminary concepts (Eisenhardt, 1989). The ensuing analysis across focus groups and cases enabled a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and supported finding explanations (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The similarities and differences of findings across the cases were another way to corroborate the findings. I also looked for negative cases which did not support initial emerging ideas and enabled new connections within the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2000).

The emerging themes and patterns were compared with results from previous research, categories refined and relationships between the data identified. Following the advice from Gummesson (2005), this ongoing iterative comparison of data developed patterns into themes and concepts. Conflicting findings with the literature were considered and discussed. Similar findings helped to confirm the

findings of the study and possibly link different phenomena or fields of research, which may normally not be associated with each other.

4.7 Summary

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the underlying motivations of consumers regarding the topic 'happiness and impulse buying' it was decided to pursue a research strategy based on the phenomenological paradigm, which generated qualitative data and focussed on the subjective experiences of individuals. The limited existing knowledge of the phenomenon favoured an exploratory inductive research, based on a descriptive evaluation of current knowledge in happiness and impulse buying. This research methodology was deemed to be appropriate to investigate the overall research aim whether impulse buying makes female shoppers feel happy. Subjectivity during the data collection and analysis was addressed through several measures, which support the quality of this research.

As for the research methods, focus groups and individual interviews were chosen for this study. Looking at the topic from different angles enhanced the credibility and dependability of data and thus contributed to the overall quality of this study. These methods were expected to provide sufficient data to gain a better understanding of the role of happiness in impulse buying and to assess impulse buying as the 'dark' side of consumption. The longitudinal nature of the data collection was beneficial to explore how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience.

The recruitment of participants for both data collection methods was done via snowballing. Following the data collection, the data were first analysed within each method using the sorting, coding and retrieving functionalities of a computer software package. Manual coding and visual displays enabled to get closer to the data and identify broad themes. Emerging themes were then tested across the two data collection methods.

In the next chapter the findings from the in-depth data analysis of focus groups and individual interviews are presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Presentation of Themes

5.1 Introduction

This chapter starts by providing an overview of the emergent themes. When starting with analysing the data collected from female consumers in Germany aged between 18 and 35 years, it became evident that similar themes emerged in the ten focus groups and the nine individual cases. Therefore the entire data collected in this study were treated as one data set. The data set is discussed with regard to each theme. However, whenever differences between the focus groups and individual cases emerged, they were analysed separately and specifically highlighted. Each theme is discussed in detail in the subsequent sections, also with regard to existing literature. This chapter concludes by summarising the findings and highlighting the socio-demographic particularities in impulse buying experiences.

Eight major themes emerged from the iterative process of analysis of the contributions in this study. These themes are interrelated meaning that one single impulse buying experience of an individual may consist of several themes.

The eight themes are:

- Understanding of Impulse Buying
- Emotions in Impulse Buying
- Constant and Changing Emotions over the Course of the Impulse Buying Experience
- Hedonic Motivations for Impulse Buying
- Mood in Impulse Buying
- Behind the Scenes: The Inner Dialogue during Impulse Buying
- Time in Impulse Buying
- Role of Other People in Impulse Buying

Each theme presented here stands for one section which is broken down into further sub-themes with detailed discussions. The order of the themes is not incidentally but purposefully structured. First of all, the sections on impulse buying and emotions in impulse buying require this prominent position of attention as they reflect the topic and overall interest of this study. More importantly, however, the intention of this approach is to start with inner themes touching the self and finally

deals with themes emanating from the outside world and thereby affecting the individual. Based on this approach the first sections deal with the participant's understanding of impulse buying and a disclosure of her emotions while the final sections investigate time or other people affecting our behaviour. Wherever possible, the titles of the themes made use of the translated wording of the contributions of the participants in the sense of in-vivo coding. In most cases, the wording for the theme summarises the insights provided in the subsequent text.

5.2 Understanding of Impulse Buying

All purchases investigated in this study are impulse buys. The theme 'Understanding of Impulse Buying' investigates which goods and services are typically bought on impulse and provides insights on the particular characteristics of impulse buying, such as lack of intention and a lack of consideration of any consequences. Some participants in this study were in doubt regarding the meaning of impulse buying, asking themselves the question "*What is an impulse buy?*" (for example Lena, older participant). As discussed in Chapter 2, it is assumed in this study that a purchase is an impulse buy when the individual claims it was an impulse buy. This also hints at potential overlaps between impulse and planned buying which will be discussed in this section. This is followed by a consideration of the role of money and price in impulse buying. Impulse buying may be induced by preceding buys, also referred to as 'shopping momentum', which will be discussed in this section.

5.2.1 What is an Impulse Buy?

There are numerous definitions of the term impulse buy in the literature, most of them emphasising the immediate buying action on the spot, following an urge with little consideration of future consequences. When asked "Did you buy anything on impulse last week? Please tell me more about it" (see Appendix G, question 1), some participants claimed in the first few weeks of the longitudinal study to be unsure about the meaning of the term and offered an explanation of their understanding, such as:

"I'm always struggling what is meant by impulse buying. What's really on impulse then?...To me it is only on impulse when I'm in some shop, spot something and buy it although I hadn't planned to do so and had never intended to get it." (Lena, older participant)

As expressed by Lena and the following participant in FG 4 impulse buying is associated with an unplanned purchase and a lack of intent, which is in accordance with prior research (for example Piron, 1991):

"Simply when you pass it and then you'd spot it and before you had never thought, oh, I could do with that. And now you'd see it and think, oh yeah." (everybody is laughing) (FG 4, younger participants)

Despite the existence of a general purchase intention, the purchase may still be considered an impulse buy, as Laura's doubts illustrate:

"I bought those two ribbons for my pregnancy. Looking quite nice. I bought them on purpose. But I also went to that shop just to also have a look if they have anything for Kevin [her little son]. And then I bought more or less on impulse a hat for him. Well, I'm not too sure if this was really an impulse buy because I actually had intended to get something for him." (Laura, older participant)

Laura is unsure if the purchase was on impulse since she "more or less" had planned to buy something for her son. As Laura's contribution indicates, some participants and focus groups in this study struggled at times to differentiate between planned and impulse buying, which suggests that there may be overlaps between the characteristics of impulse and planned buys. When talking about impulse buys only, the participants in all groups appeared to have a clear idea of the meaning they attached to this kind of shopping. However, when trying to distinguish between impulse and planned buying, some groups were slightly struggling, for example in FG 2:

"When I plan to go shopping, it doesn't mean that the purchase is planned." (participant 1) - "Well, perhaps it is that I plan to buy a pair of trousers and spontaneously I find the one pair I fancy. Well, that's really difficult to differentiate." (participant 2) (FG 2, younger participants)

The contributions indicate that impulse buying may cover a broader spectrum than merely the extreme kind of unplanned purchases as suggested by Sheth et al. (1999). If impulse buying was an extreme form of unplanned buying, it would be

easy to distinguish it from planned buying. In addition, this would mean that it is very unlikely that some buying experiences may be considered to incorporate characteristics of both a planned and impulse buy. Rebecca captures some of these doubts:

"Well, I think Sarah's [boyfriend's little daughter] shoes were a planned buy. But at the same time you could say it was on impulse...It was on impulse because we didn't exactly know what kind of shoes to get for her. I feel that's often quite difficult to clearly differentiate between the two." (Rebecca, older participant)

As suggested in early impulse buying research and discussed in Chapter 2, Stern's (1962) categorisation of impulse buys into 'pure', 'suggestion', 'reminder' and 'planned' impulse buys appears to be useful.

Some contributions in this study indicate that the impulse buying decision does not necessarily occur rapidly:

"I'm not too sure if it was an impulse buy because I didn't buy it [the Software tutorial] straight away. Actually, I had never intended to buy it in the first place...Well, yes, basically I think it was an impulse buy although there was the one day in-between [spotting the item on the internet and ordering it]." (Natascha, younger participant)

It appears that Natascha at first associates impulse buying with an on-the-spot purchase. However, after giving some thought to it, Natascha eventually labels this purchase an impulse buy despite the time gap of one day between spotting the item and placing the order. The contributions in this study imply that impulse buying may cover more than a sudden urge to buy something on the spot. In fact, this rapid decision making is the predominant understanding of impulse buying in the literature (for example Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Kacen and Lee, 2002; Rook, 1987; Rook and Hoch, 1985). However, the time gap between spotting an item and the actual purchase appears not to rule out a purchase from being an impulse buy in the view of these participants.

The uncertainty about the meaning of impulse buying as stated by a number of participants in this study had to be accounted for. In fact, doubts mainly occurred in the first few interview sessions when the participants felt a desire for providing an abstract explanation of impulse buys to check their understanding. However, when they actually reported their impulse buying experiences, their doubts disappeared

in most cases and they usually clearly expressed and evaluated their purchase as an impulse buy. Nonetheless only those purchases are considered as an impulse buy in this study, if a participant clearly identifies a particular purchase as an impulse buy. If a purchase was not clearly identified by the participant as an impulse buy, this purchase was excluded from further analysis in this study, such as the above case of the purchase of a hat for her little son as described by Laura. Hereby it was ensured to limit the investigation to impulse buying experiences. The following tables provide an overview of the goods and services bought on impulse as mentioned in the focus groups (Table 5.1) and individual interviews (Table 5.2):

Table 5.1: Impulse Purchases mentioned in Focus Groups

Focus Group	Impulse Purchases of Goods and Services mentioned during the focus group discussion, for example...
1	Spare parts for DIY, manicure, pair of trousers, shoes, cosmetics, fingernails, handbag, hairdresser's
2	Thick table books, anything at the chemists, clothes such as a dress from Laura Ashley, underwear, postcards, posters, offers at Tchibo, going for a coffee on one's own, cinema
3	Shoes, pair of trainers, cosmetics, newspaper and magazines, take-away food and soft drinks, fashion jewellery
4	Underwear, postcards, sweets, food, tea, pair of trousers, pair of trainers, cosmetics, perfume, CDs, shampoo, shoes, ice-cream, fashion jewellery, hairdresser's
5	Rug from Ikea, facial cremes, cosmetics, shampoo, clothes, skin care, jumper, socks, alcoholic drinks, crisps, chocolate, yoghurt, little fluffy piglet, wine glasses from Ikea, napkins from Ikea, candles, T-shirt
6	Clothes, pair of trousers, tops, books, thick table books, fashion jewellery, cosmetics, lip stick, underwear, jacket, white Dockers, chocolate, magazine, cigarettes, cinema
7	Handbag, books, shoes, jumper, underwear, scarf, socialising and going for a drink with friends, going for a coffee on one's own, clothes, waistcoat on vacation, hairclips, seasonal parking ticket, cinema
8	Tools for DIY, shoes, books, baby and children's clothes, sweets, cosmetics, food, clothes, handbag, cinema, hairdresser's, going for a drink, going out for food/socialising
9	Clothes, handbag, furniture, short weekend break, shoes, cosmetics, sport equipment, home accessories, trainers, furniture from Ikea, anything from the market hall at Ikea, high heels, underwear, perfume, plants, shower gel, skin care, ice-cream, hairdresser's, going out for dinner
10	Shoes, leather jacket, T-shirts from Aldi, blouse, nappies, Wellingtons, earrings, fashion jewellery, underwear, furniture from Ikea, hairdresser's

Table 5.2: Impulse Purchases mentioned in Individual Interviews

Participant	I m p u l s e b u y s			Number of impulse buys
	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	
Nicole	T-shirt (England) Brown skirt Esprit Mascara Soft drink at fun fair	Bikini at New Yorker Spanish biscuits Doughnut	Hair ribbon Sneakers Cranberries at Aldi	10
Natascha	T-shirt Corsage Müllermilch in canteen Christian song book on retreat Contact lenses at Aldi	Sweets Ice-cream Tube top	Christian postcards (online) Software tutorial (online)	10
Diana	Jeans at Pimkie	Nail extension Pair of trousers (catalogue order)	None	3
Nadia	Mobile phone contract Chewing gums	Asian Take-away food Strawberries at Aldi Pair of linen trousers	Snorkling kit Tea set from Greece	7
Rebecca	Earrings	Top at Pimkie Ice gel for skin	Hairdresser's 2 bikinis on holidays Flip flops on holidays Deodorant	7
Carmen	Socks Handbag	Bed linen	Baby clothes Vase at Ikea Children's musical box	6
Lena	Pair of stockings for daughter Stool Yoghurt	T-shirt for daughter Hammock at Tchibo (online) Pyjama at Tchibo (online) Bed linen at Tchibo (online)	Soccer T-shirt for daughter T-shirt and trousers for daughter Jug at Ikea	10
Laura	Yoghurt Hat for son	Children's tent at Aldi Cuddly toy (bee) Hairdresser's	Melon Blueberries Children's magazine ('Bussibär') Battery-driven Hoover	9
Brigitte	Jumper Pair of trousers at Esprit Skirt at Esprit Children's tent at Aldi	Running shoes Toy for son White leather belt at Tchibo	Clay raven 3 pairs of shoes Jumper	10
T o t a l number of impulse buys				72

One of the most frequently mentioned impulse buys in all focus groups was underwear, usually triggering a passionate discussion:

*"you can hardly make a mistake with buying underwear."
(participant 1) - "Underwear is never wasted. You need to
have underwear anyway." (participant 2) (FG 4, younger
participants)*

This finding supports previous research from Bellenger et al. (1978) who found that nearly one third of all purchases of underwear were made on impulse. The impulse buy of goods and services as summarised in Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 is in line with previous findings regarding music, clothing, magazines, books, body care, cosmetics, and women's lingerie as typical impulse buys for female shoppers (Bellenger et al., 1978; Dittmar et al., 1995).

Dittmar et al. (1995, p.496) characterise female impulse buying as a "relationship-centred identity construction", which manifests itself in the impulse purchase of fashion and body care items often quoted by the participants in this study. While the contributions generally support the findings from Dittmar et al. (1995) that the choice of products reflects women's strong interest in their appearance and body-related concerns, a number of participants older than 30 years also bought on impulse *"furniture for our flat"* (FG 9, older participants) or tools and spare parts in the D-I-Y store (FG 8, older participants) (see Table 5.1). Going to Ikea often results in impulse buys in particular in their market hall:

*"At Ikea you always find something spontaneously. You
can always do with a rug." (everybody is laughing) (FG
5, younger participants)*

*"Talking of Ikea. I must have already spent a fortune
there. You never walk out of Ikea empty-handed."
(participant 1) - "That's true." (participant 2) (FG 10,
older participants)*

*"I plan to go to Ikea and want to buy a shelf. Fine, but
in the end my trolley is full of small items."
(participant 1) - "Yes, but at Ikea I think it's always
like that." (participant 2) (all other group
participants nod supportively) (FG 9, older
participants)*

Statements such as: *"Yeah, I don't think twice"* (FG 6, younger participants) indicate that impulse buying occurs with limited consideration of any consequences, which has been widely shown in existing literature (for example

Rook, 1987). Any possible doubts about an impulse buy often appear to be dismissed and replaced by an optimistic evaluation of the purchase:

"When you are in the shop, it really happens that you'd think oh my, do I really have to buy it? But that's usually no more than two seconds because then you'd think it will turn out all right." (FG 5, younger participants)

A generous return policy by retailers reduces the potential risk attached to an impulse decision. Therefore consideration of the consequences prior to the purchase becomes less crucial:

"Often I bought things like that and asked whether they'd return the money. And if they do return your money, then you might as well buy the item...Bought a pair of shoes...Bought them in two colours and checked out at home which one I liked better." (FG 5, younger participants)

In contrast to the younger shoppers, some of the older participants were more hesitant when spotting an item in the shop window. They considered the potential consequences of the impulse buy:

*"It may happen that I pass the shop a couple of times. Then you think, oh, no, I'd rather not...Maybe one day you may get it. You really think about it." (participant 1)
- "True, I may reconsider it then, well, if it's really worth me buying it on impulse." (participant 2) (FG 8, older participants)*

Interestingly, the participants in FG 8 agree that they may reconsider the purchase, yet it would still be an impulse buy to them. This implies that impulse buying may involve a certain reflection about the potential consequences of the purchase.

Services played a negligible role in the impulse buying experiences. There were only a few participants who preferred services over goods in impulse buying (for example FG 5, younger participants). Only a few participants appeared to have an understanding of the meaning of services and came up with an impulse buy of a service, mainly those focus groups of business students. In the majority of the groups the participants did not know the scope of what 'services' could include:

"Services? What exactly do you mean by services? A callboy? Sex?" (FG 10, older participants)

When generally given some examples such as hairdresser's or cinema, the participants then talked about their experience with services. The services mentioned included *"going to the hairdresser's"* (FG 4, younger participants), *"socialising and going for a drink with friends"* (FG 7, younger participants), and having a cup of coffee in town:

"Usually when I've been shopping in town. In Cologne there are two or three cafés, which I quite fancy anyway. I might pass them and think: Oh, yes, why not?" (FG 2, younger participants)

Going to the cinema was mentioned in some groups as an example for an impulse buying experience of a service. The majority of participants would not consider going to the cinema on impulse and therefore were in disbelief regarding the impulse buying experiences of other participants in their group:

"Well, once I spontaneously decided to take the train and go to the cinema. On my own." (participant 1) -
"Really?" (exclamation of all other group members) (FG 2, younger participants)

Overall, only a negligible number of impulse buying experiences were mentioned with regard to services.

5.2.2 Impulse Buying and Planned Buying

Despite some confusion about clearly differentiating between impulse and planned buying, the latter appears to be more associated with a clear intention to buy an item:

"I know right from the start, even before I go into town what I'd like to get." (FG 9, older participants)

This supports previous findings in the literature that planned buying is the result of a preceding firm decision and a clear buying intention (Dittmar and Drury, 2000). A number of focus groups associated impulse buying with a 'want' rather than a 'need':

"A planned purchase is when you need something. And if you buy on impulse then you'd spot something you fancy and you just get it." (FG 10, older participants)

Dittmar and Drury (2000) describe in this context planned buying as being more functional and typically done for goods needed while an impulse buy is often for non-necessity items. Special offers promoted by flyers or advertisements may entice the consumer to go shopping. In the opinion of some participants this cannot result in an impulse buy but rather a planned buy:

"Every week Tchibo has special offers...and then I'd go to the shop thinking, fine I'll have a closer look there and then decide about buying it...To me that's not on impulse because I had looked it up beforehand and read the flyer. If I just walked into the store like that, then it's spontaneous." (FG 2, younger participants)

Similarly, the existence of the shopping list appears to be an indicator for a planned buy. The shopping list typically includes regular household chores such as food purchases:

"I always buy food in the supermarket round the corner and always with my shopping list and always planned." (FG 10, older participants)

On the other hand

"for clothes I would never ever write a shopping list." (FG 2, younger participants)

As stated earlier, clothes are typically bought on impulse. This is in accordance with early research in impulse buying which proposes that any purchase is an impulse buy provided it is not written on a shopping list (Rook and Hoch, 1985). However, the evidence does not suggest that the non-existence of a shopping list is a clear indicator for an impulse buy. In fact, instead of writing a shopping list for planned items, the items may be only at the back of one's mind:

"When I plan to go shopping...I have all those items that I want to buy at the back of my mind." (FG 9, older participants)

In this case, the purchase is still seen as a planned buy by the consumer. This indicates that the intention to buy an item rather than the existence of a shopping list distinguishes a planned buy from an impulse buy. Most participants feel they have more luck in finding items spontaneously than planned because *"well, spontaneously you always find something"* (FG 6, younger participants). In addition these items purchased on impulse appear to be nicer and better liked compared to planned buys:

"Most often the items I buy on impulse fit much better...And if it's planned, oh, dear, you have got to find something in particular and then fair enough, it's not really perfect but I do need to get it now. So, okay, I'll get it." (FG 4, younger participants)

"I think you find the nicest things when you don't look for them." (FG 8, older participants)

Compared to their planned buys, consumers are usually more satisfied with their impulse buys (for example Brinley, 1989; Smiley, 1995). Instead of looking forward to acquiring the item, this expectation may result in feelings of frustration with planned buying:

"You don't find it anyway if you have this very precise pre-conceived idea and that's always really frustrating." (FG 6, younger participants)

Impulse buying *"that's much more fun"* (FG 8, older participants) compared to a planned buying trip. The participants do not expect this planned buying trip to result in the actual purchase of the planned item but instead require a compromise:

"If I need something and go shopping with an intention... then I won't find what I really like. Then I'll compromise on whatever I buy because I simply need it now...Right, therefore I always very much prefer impulse buying. Because then I only buy what I really like." (FG 10, older participants)

Since the impulse buyer does not go shopping with an intention, there is no risk that negative feelings may occur if expectations are not met. Impulse buying is typically not associated with a stressful experience because the shopper does not feel obliged to find a certain item:

"You don't have that stress with this immediate buy, this impulse buy. You buy something by chance, you don't look for anything. So, you save all that hassle and don't feel under pressure." (FG 1, mixed age group)

Compared to planned buying, impulse buying is enjoyed because there is *"absolutely no obligation"* (FG 8, older participants):

"If you don't look for anything, then you are much more relaxed, you are more open-minded and I believe more prone to make decisions." (FG 8, older participants)

"With impulse buying you'd start off with much more fun. If I have planned it beforehand... I won't find anything anyway. Then I'm frustrated even right at the beginning." (FG 9, older participants)

The contributions suggest that planned buying is usually associated with a buying intent. This may require a compromise if the desired item does not fully correspond to one's expectations. As a consequence the planned buyer may feel frustrated. On the contrary the impulse buyer does not feel obliged to make a purchase and perceives little or no pressure on her shopping trip.

5.2.3 Money Matters

The contributions in this study indicate that the price of an item has a considerable influence on impulse buying. In one focus group there was agreement that *"money available and the opinion of my best friend"* (FG 9, older participants) are the two main factors which could affect impulse buying. Most reported impulse buys in this study were less expensive products and money is spent

"rather for those small little somethings. Larger expenses, that's rather planned." (FG 2, younger participants)

*"I think I'd never buy a computer on impulse."
(participant 1) - "Oh, no. That's much too expensive."
(participant 2) (everybody is nodding) (FG 4, younger participants)*

The early research into impulse buying (for example Stern, 1962) assumed that some items such as cars do not come into consideration for impulse buys because of their price. It was claimed that impulse buying occurs only for less expensive items with low involvement (Assael, 1985), such as *"only smaller things, like magazines"* (FG 3, younger participants) or items at

"the chemist's, drugstores because if I buy something on impulse there and maybe eventually it's not what I'd really need, then it wasn't all that expensive in the end." (FG 2, younger participants)

Low-cost items at the chemists were mentioned a number of times as impulse buys. Even if these items turn out to be of no use, the money spent is within certain limits. As more money is at risk, it is assumed that a planned and well thought through purchase is more likely to come up to expectations.

In all focus groups a planned purchase was associated with careful reconsideration:

"Anything for our new house I usually do planned buys... That's different to deciding shall I get a dessert for lunch." (participant 1) - "There's a certain threshold, there are certain things." (participant 2) (FG 8, older participants)

Higher priced items and items which are kept for a longer period of time appear to carry a larger risk so that the buyer may prefer to think very carefully about the consequences of the purchase:

"My bicycle is broken and I'd like to get a new one...I like to talk things through when it comes to higher expenditures, things which I don't buy every week. ...Considering chances and risks. Yes, with a one-off purchase such as telephones, bicycles, or cars, well, with those more important and expensive items you should reconsider the purchase. I feel much better that way...because I know that I'm less likely to buy something by mistake." (FG 2, younger participants)

These contributions support Dittmar and Drury's (2000) findings that planned buying is characterised by a cost-benefit approach and is typical for functional products which are required. The authors propose that consumers in planned buying situations behave more like rational decision-makers, which includes shopping around for achieving best value for money with regard to their budgetary constraints (Dittmar and Drury, 2000). However, contrary to the majority of participants who associate impulse buying with inexpensive items or little expenses as described above, some participants decide on impulse to spend a day or weekend break somewhere else:

"Sometimes I spontaneously decide to go away on a short break. We'd jump into the car and go to Cologne [4 hours drive] or Lake Constance [2 hours drive]." (FG 9, older participants)

Provided that travelling and staying overnight somewhere generates costs for the impulse buyer, the contribution from FG 9 indicates that impulse buys may exceed little monetary expenses. In addition, the contribution implies that an impulse buy may be associated with a considerable expense of time. It appears that at first thought only cheap items are associated with impulse buys while after some more reflection some participants suggest to expand impulse buying also to more expensive items:

"Earlier on we said that you rather buy cheaper things on impulse but now giving more thought to it, I don't think that's true. Well, I find that out of a sudden you may also buy on impulse more expensive items. You see, I wouldn't limit impulse buying to cheap items." (FG 5, younger participants)

The diversity of impulse buys in this study supports earlier research, for example Nadia spending a few cents on chewing gum up to Lena ordering a hammock at Tchibo for a few hundred Euro. Rook (1987) suggests that impulse buying can cover a broad price range and also involve the purchase of more expensive items, such as an extra TV set or a holiday cruise. More expensive items may be paid for by EC card¹ instead of paying in cash, for example one participant (FG 8) associates impulse buying with the use of the EC card:

"I tend to pay by EC card when I don't have that much cash on me. Spontaneously. That's exactly why it's nothing but an impulse buy." (FG 8, older participants)

Previous research suggests that cash machines and the use of credit cards support impulse decision-making (Rook, 1987; Rook and Fisher, 1995). While impulse buying was associated with the EC card, the availability of cash was linked with planned buying in another focus group:

"When I have enough cash on me surely I've intended to go shopping, right? Surely you don't always take enough money with you so that you can buy a pair of trousers or a jumper? Well, at least I don't." (another group participant nods supportively) (FG 7, younger participants)

Paying by EC card makes the decision easier to buy on impulse as the payment is less visible and does not leave a visible hole in the wallet as the amount due will only be charged some time in the future:

"I very much enjoy paying by EC card or Credit card. I don't fancy at all paying in cash. I believe it's this feeling of guilt...with cash...the feeling that you give money away. I don't like that at all. I prefer the EC card because you have the feeling the money hasn't gone." (FG 2, younger participants)

¹ The EC card in Germany corresponds to the use of the Debit card in the UK. A number of shops in Germany do not accept credit cards. However, EC cards are usually accepted.

On the other hand, some participants shrink away from using the EC card. They are concerned about overspending when paying with their EC card, because it

"doesn't feel like having spent that much compared to handing over cash to the cashier." (FG 5, younger participants)

This highlights the risk of losing control of one's expenditures when using the EC card. Therefore some participants avoid using their EC card:

"I'm cured of using my EC card because you simply lose control of what you've actually spent. Well, you lose track of things. When your wallet is empty, then you know you need to think about stopping. That's what your EC card won't tell you that quickly." (another participant agrees) (FG 9, older participants)

The contributions indicate that there are differences between the participants with regard to the controlled use of the EC card. There is a tendency that participants with limited responsibility for other people and being single appear to spend money more readily with their EC card.

5.2.4 'Shopping Momentum'

Supermarkets, particularly Aldi, were often mentioned as typical shopping environments for preceding planned buys as a trigger for one or several impulse buys. In some cases the unintended impulse buy would not have happened without the originally planned purchase:

"Lately I bought loads at Aldi. I set off and only wanted to get some veggies and cheese. But then they had T-shirts in a double pack, really cheap, a special offer. So I bought them. I ended up paying 25 Euro although I only wanted to get cheese and veggies." (FG 10, older participants)

"Well, I didn't buy the bras on impulse. That was really planned and that was the reason why I went to Tübingen. But it wasn't planned and really it wasn't necessary to get that jumper...The shop where I bought the jumper was owned by the sister...of the shop owner where I had bought the bras...And when I noticed the shops carried the same name I thought, all right, I'll have a look inside... There was that pile of clothes and I found that jumper...I liked it and it only cost 20 Euro. So I got it... I think because I was so overjoyed that I had got those nice and cheap bras, too." (Brigitte, younger participant)

These excerpts indicate that there is a close connection between planned and impulse buying. Brigitte only entered the second shop because it belonged to the same owner as the first shop where she had already bought the planned item. Brigitte is even aware that the joyful experience with the initial planned purchase provoked her impulse buy.

Existing literature has largely ignored this potential interdependency between planned and impulse buys and rather concentrated on differentiating between the two. An exception is the recent study from Dhar et al. (2007) about the 'shopping momentum' effect. They found that once a shopper purchases the initial item after careful consideration of costs and benefits, this appears to trigger subsequent impulse buys. The theme of preceding buys as a trigger for impulse buys addresses this link in this study. In this context of the 'shopping momentum' effect, or, in a similar context according to Gollwitzer's (1990) theory of implementation and deliberation mind-sets, the consumer only needs to make the first purchase which then encourages further buys. 'Shopping momentum' may be closely related to being in a shopping mood as Laura observed with the impulse buy of a fluffy bee toy for her little son:

"The purchase that was more like me thinking it's [the fluffy bee toy] really cute...I must have been in a shopping mood because of the good deal at Aldi." (Laura, older participant)

While the findings of Dhar et al. (2007) were only based on the target purchase immediately following the initial purchase, Laura's contribution indicates that some time had elapsed between the purchase of the children's tent at Aldi, going home and the eventual purchase of the fluffy bee toy. While Brigitte's and Laura's impulse buys were in a related product category, that is clothes and children's toys, 'shopping momentum' may also occur in unrelated product categories, as the contribution above from FG 10 with the purchase of vegetables and a T-shirt illustrates. In fact, the initial planned buy does not even have to be carried out in order to induce an impulse buy:

"To me it's an impulse buy when I go into town with the aim to buy something and eventually got something different...So, whenever I'm somehow tempted to buy something in a different category." (FG 8, older participants)

"When I go into town stating that today I'd like to get a pair of blue trousers, then I know in advance that I won't find any...Then I return home with something I never intended to buy." (FG 2, younger participants)

Any kind of planned buying intention with or without the eventual acquisition of the item were often mentioned in this study to precede an impulse buy. The actual impulse buying decision may take place before the originally planned buy is carried out:

"So I quickly nipped into DM¹ because I wanted to get that hair shampoo. And then I rushed past the mascaras and then I thought, really, I could do with a new one." (Nicole, younger participant)

The Swedish furniture store Ikea was cited a number of times by various participants in the context of impulse buying occurring in their market hall, situated shortly before the check-out. The participants unanimously agreed that the original reason for going shopping at Ikea was usually to buy one or several planned items, often scribbled on a shopping list. In all reported cases these shopping trips of planned items eventually induced an impulse buy in the market hall:

"This week we went to Ikea and I bought something on impulse. They got those flowers in little vases...We had a shopping list because we required a couple of items for our flat. And we got nearly everything. And then we went downstairs into the market hall, that's where they do all those little somethings and junk, and we went through it and I didn't buy anything else there except this vase with the flower." (Carmen, older participant)

Without the prior intention for the planned buys as the reason for visiting the Ikea store, the impulse buy of the vase with the flower would not have happened. In addition to Aldi and Ikea, Tchibo was mentioned by a number of participants in the context of impulse buying. Similarly to planned buys connected with impulse buys as described by Carmen there is a link between an impulse buy triggering another impulse buy:

"So I went into Tchibo, straight to the shelf and bought that belt. It was an impulse buy. Then there was that bag I quite fancied, but it was too expensive for what it was. And then, oh, yes, I spotted those mints, mints for fresh breath and got them." (Brigitte, younger participant)

¹ DM is a German drugstore/chemist chain.

Brigitte's impulse buy of the belt led to the impulse buy of the mints and nearly also made her buy a bag. An impulse buy may not only affect one's own impulse buying behaviour but also affect someone else's impulse buying behaviour:

"My father spotted the snorkel kit in the supermarket...It was a good offer and I thought I cannot go wrong with it. So I bought it. And then we arrived at home and my boyfriend came to see me. Then he said, 'wow, that's really cool.' Then he and my father went back to that supermarket and he bought it, too." (Nadia, younger participant)

Nadia's impulse buy was a trigger for the impulse buy of her boyfriend. This indicates that in addition to one's own initial planned or impulse buys being related to one's own subsequent impulse buy, the connection may also be established due to other people's influence.

5.3 Emotions in Impulse Buying

Impulse buying was often reported to be accompanied by emotional reactions, which play a central part in this study and will be discussed in this section. This section starts with the discussion of feelings of happiness. Throughout this study, the participants interchangeably used positive emotional terms, which will be considered in this section. Examples will be provided regarding the use of the German term 'glücklich'. In the context of the buying experience, the impulse buyer may perceive feelings of success and surprise as well as anticipated happiness. This section concludes with those occasions when the impulse buyer may only give limited attention to the purchase and feel emotionally less involved.

5.3.1 Happiness and the Interchangeability of Terms

Happiness is described as an overwhelming and totally involved feeling which overshadows everything else in that particular moment. In this general sense of happiness, the participants used the German term "glücklich", which they explained with:

"Well, happiness [German: glücklich sein] means that I cannot think of anything else that moment. When nothing else matters to me any more."¹ (all other participants nod supportively) (FG 2, younger participants)

"Right, when I'm happy I'm usually going bananas, I'm beaming with joy, and talking rubbish...When I'm feeling happy I'd like to tell the whole world about my happiness."² (FG 1, mixed age group)

In this sense impulse buying emphasises in particular emotional and less intellectual aspects (Thompson et al., 1990). Happiness plays an important role in life as the following contribution exemplifies:

"Well, I define happiness [glücklich sein] as something very important, well, something you simply need in life."³ (FG 1, mixed age group)

Without exception happiness is perceived as a positive feeling by all participants. Happiness was not associated with any negative connotations. In a more specific sense, feelings of happiness in the sense of the German term 'glücklich' were also described to occur in the context of impulse buying:

"But it [the belt] fit right away and I was pretty glad that I bought it. And it looked nice, I liked it. Well, I was happy [glücklich] with my purchase."⁴ (Brigitte, younger participant)

Some participants perceived a feeling of happiness in the German sense of 'Glücksgefühl' when they bought something on impulse:

"That feeling of happiness [German: Glücksgefühl]. In that moment: Hurrah, I bought it."⁵ (FG 9, older participants)

¹ In German: „Also, glücklich sein, ist, wenn ich an gar nichts anderes mehr denken kann in dem Moment. Wenn mir alles andere egal ist.“ (alle Teilnehmerinnen nicken zustimmend)

² In German: „Also, wenn ich glücklich bin, spinn ich meistens rum, strahle ich die ganze Zeit, quatsch auch viel Müll raus...Wenn ich glücklich bin, dann möchte ich das am liebsten der ganzen Welt erzählen von meinem Glück.“

³ In German: „Also, ich definiere Glück schon auch als was ganz Wichtiges, also, was man im Leben einfach haben muss.“

⁴ In German: „Aber der [Gürtel] hat echt gleich gepasst und ich war dann ziemlich froh, dass ich ihn dann gekauft hab. Und es sah gut aus, hat mir gefallen. Also, ich war glücklich mit meinem Kauf.“

⁵ In German: „Dieses Glücksgefühl. In dem Moment: Juhu, ich habs mir gekauft.“

*"That feeling does not last too long with me. Oh, no. Even the impulse buy two weeks ago with all those clothes I bought. Okay, that feeling of happiness [German: Glücksgefühl] lasted a little longer than usual."*¹ (FG 10, older participants)

Rebecca talked about "feeling happy" [German: glücklich] about her impulse buy of a long-sleeved shirt at Pimkie's. When asked to explain her understanding of "feeling happy" [German: glücklich] she said:

*"You forget about your worries. You're happy [German: freust dich] about something nice you just bought, short-term, and you like it. You simply forget about everything else then."*² (Rebecca, older participant)

As indicated in the excerpts above (FG 9, FG 10, Rebecca), happiness in the sense of 'glücklich' is understood by a number of participants in this study as a worry-free state of mind lasting for a short period of time in the sense of happy moments. This is in accordance with Argyle (1987) and Barrow (1980) who claim that happiness can be experienced for a fairly short duration in the shopping context. Gardner and Rook (1988) found that impulse buying often leads to immediate gratification with over 90 per cent of the sample in their study feeling between somewhat to extremely happy after their last impulse buy. However, the contributions above in referring to happiness in the sense of a short period of time do not correspond to Veenhoven's (1997) understanding of happiness. As discussed in Chapter 3, Veenhoven (1989, 1991a, 1997) understands happiness with regard to the favourable subjective judgement of one's quality of life, also referred to as subjective well-being (SWB). This refers to a long period and the evaluation of one's entire life in the sense of life satisfaction. On the other hand, Veenhoven (1991a) acknowledges that also short moments of euphoria may be called happiness.

Happiness appears to be the most positive emotional experience and goes beyond satisfaction:

¹ In German: „Das hält bei mir auch nicht lange an. Nee. Selbst der Spontankauf mit diesen vielen Sachen jetzt vor zwei Wochen. Ja, da war dies Glücksgefühl, da war's mal ein bisschen lange.“

² In German: „Du vergisst dann deine Sorgen einfach. Du freust dich über eine Sache, die du jetzt einfach erworben hast, kurzfristig, und die dir auch gefällt. Dann vergisst du einfach alles.“

"I'm happy [German: *freue mich*] about something I bought on impulse. And I'm satisfied [German: *zufrieden*] when I got it right away, something I really need. But this doesn't make me feel really happy [German: *Freude*]."¹ (FG 4, younger participants)

"I'm happy [German: *glücklich*] when I've found a window that really fits well. That's not simply satisfaction [German: *Zufriedenheit*] but in that moment that's a real feeling of happiness [German: *Glücksgefühl*]."² (FG 1, mixed age group)

"Satisfaction [German: *zufrieden*] means to me when I go shopping and want to buy a suit and I find one. Because I need one for work, then I'm satisfied [German: *zufrieden*]...But I think you rather feel happy [German: *glücklich*] when you buy something on impulse, thinking, oh, great, found something nice. I should think that's more a feeling of happiness [German: *Glücksgefühl*]. So, these duty purchases rather provide a certain satisfaction [German: *Zufriedenheit*] and those impulse thingies rather give you that feeling of happiness [German: *Glücksgefühl*]."³ (FG 5, younger participants)

These contributions indicate that impulse buying can be closely associated with feelings of happiness in the German sense of "*glücklich*" and "*Glücksgefühl*" (FG 5) as well as "*glücklich*" (FG 1) and "*sich freuen*" (FG 4). The term satisfaction being described as less intense and emotionally arousing was preferably used in the context of planned buys while the term happiness referred to impulse buying as for example expressed in FG 5 above.

Although in one focus group there was agreement that happiness can be associated with "*pleasure or luxury buys*" (FG 5) compared to satisfaction standing for "*duty purchases*" (FG 5), the contribution in FG 1 refers to feelings of happiness in the context of buying windows for one's home, which may not necessarily be considered as a pleasure or luxury buy.

¹ In German: „Ich freue mich über was Spontanes. Und ich bin zufrieden, wenn ich das dann sofort habe, was ich auch brauche. Aber dies ist keine so richtige Freude.“

² In German: „Ich bin glücklich, wenn ich ein Glasfenster finde, was ganz toll passt. Das ist nicht nur Zufriedenheit, sondern das ist in dem Moment schon ein Glücksgefühl.“

³ In German: „Zufrieden würd ich sagen, ist, wenn ich einkaufen gehe, will mir einen Hosenanzug kaufen und finde einen. Weil ich den brauche für die Arbeit, dann bin ich zufrieden...Aber so glücklich ist man glaube ich eher, wenn man spontan kauft und denkt, oh, toll, hast was gefunden. Das würde ich eher sagen mit Glücksgefühl. Also, diese Pflichteinkäufe geben einem eine gewisse Zufriedenheit und diese Spontansachen dann eher das Glücksgefühl.“

Despite the general awareness of potential differences of meaning between the terms 'happiness' and 'satisfaction' when carefully reflecting about them as indicated above, the participants usually did not distinguish between these terms when referring to their actual impulse buying experiences. Throughout this study the terms for positive emotions, such as 'happy' [German: glücklich, sich freuen], 'satisfied' [German: zufrieden], 'glad' [German: froh], or 'thrilled' [German: begeistert] were most often used interchangeably as an expression of positive emotions. For instance, Carmen was asked how she felt about the impulse buy of her bed linen and answered:

"I'm satisfied. I'm happy [German: freu mich]."¹ (Carmen, older participant)

"I'm glad I got it [children's wooden toolkit]. Yes, certainly. I'm really satisfied." (Brigitte, younger participant)

"Especially when it comes to your hairdresser you can be very very happy [German: total glücklich] (all other group members nod supportively)...Then they made whatever [to my hair] and I was totally thrilled."² (FG 4, younger participants)

The impulse buyer may fall in love with the new item:

"My leather jacket. On impulse, cheap, and I love it more than anything." (FG 10, older participants)

A diversity of positive emotional terms were employed in the context of impulse buying, such as "Great. I'm beaming with joy" (FG 6, younger participants), "feeling good about it" (FG 3, younger participants) or "wonderful" (FG 2, younger participants) to describe positive feelings regarding an impulse buying experience:

¹ In German: „Ich bin zufrieden. Ich freu mich.“

² In German: „Gerade mit Friseur kann man doch total, total glücklich sein (Zustimmung von allen Teilnehmerinnen)...Dann haben die irgendwas gemacht, und ich war total begeistert.“

"Afterwards [after the impulse buy of a dress at Laura Ashley's] I felt like being the Queen. Absolutely. It was wonderful, it was superb. And that evening I showed it to my parents. They liked it, too. That was really nice...Every time I open my wardrobe I think it looks wonderful...but I have not once put it on over the summer." (FG 2, younger participants)

The comparison with feeling like being the Queen reveals an extraordinary and intense emotional experience which carries one of the highest values one could imagine with the highest possible status accompanied by the admiration of others. The interchangeability of positive emotional terms culminates in the contribution from Rebecca:

"When I put them on [the earrings], I'm happy [German: freu ich mich]...Well, I'm actually satisfied [German: zufrieden] with them. Entirely happy [German: wunschlos glücklich]."¹ (Rebecca, older participant)

Rebecca's use of the terms of being "happy" [German: sich freuen], "satisfied" [German: zufrieden] and "happy" [German: glücklich] in the evaluation of one single impulse buying experience signifies that the actual wording matters less than the overall positive emotion attached to an impulse buy. The contributions support previous research (Barrow, 1980; Strongman, 1996) that a single sensation or feeling may not be sufficient to describe the broad and abstract concept of happiness. In fact, there is still no clear distinction in the literature between happiness and satisfaction or other positive emotional terms. Consumers may feel "happy" or "lighthearted" after impulse buys (Lury, 1996, p.143), uplifted and energised (for example Cobb and Hoyer, 1986; Hausman, 2000). Overall the contributions in this study indicate that the etymological differences of positive emotional terms are often not regarded in everyday language. Interestingly, a few participants used the English term 'happy' in a German sentence to express a positive feeling:

„Schuhe. Gleich drei Paar, von denen ich nicht eines wirklich gebraucht hätte. Aber war happy.“² (FG 8, older participants)

¹ In German: „Wenn ich die anziehe, dann freu ich mich... Ich bin eigentlich zufrieden mit denen. Wunschlos glücklich.“

² In English: "Shoes. Bought three pairs in one go of which I didn't really need one. But I was happy."

It needs to be emphasised that this participant (FG 8) along with a few others in other focus groups mentioned the English word 'happy' in a German sentence when they referred to a positive emotional feeling of a short duration in the context of impulse buying. Once probed the exact meaning of the English term 'happy' used in the German sentence, the participants rejected the possible German equivalent 'glücklich' for use in the shopping context. Instead, the German term 'sich freuen' was used:

*"Well, I'm happy [German: freue mich] about items I buy on impulse...I'm simply happy [German: freu mich] when I've found something nice but it's not like being utterly happy [German: total glücklich]. I think that feeling happy [German: glücklich] is one step further. I wouldn't feel like that by going shopping."*¹ (FG 8, older participants)

As the contribution from FG 8 implies, some participants in the focus groups did not feel comfortable in using in a shopping context the word 'happiness' in the German sense of 'glücklich' and found this term inappropriate. Instead, they suggested using the German wording 'sich freuen'.

5.3.2 The German Term 'glücklich' in Impulse Buying

While some participants use the German term 'glücklich' [happy] in the context of impulse buying as captured in the sections above, others explicitly rejected the use of the German term 'glücklich' for happiness in any shopping context. To these participants, the German term 'glücklich' is unsuitable and inappropriate in impulse buying. Every aspect of one's life needs to be in perfect condition for justifying the use of the German term 'glücklich' [being happy] according to some participants:

¹ In German: „Also, ich freue mich dann über Sachen, die ich spontan kaufe... Ich freu mich einfach, wenn ich irgendwas Schönes gefunden habe, aber nicht, dass ich jetzt total glücklich wäre. Ich glaube, glücklich ist dann noch ne Stufe höher. Das würde ich auch nicht durchs Einkaufen werden.“

"When I'm happy [German: glücklich] it encompasses much more. Well, I can be satisfied [German: zufrieden] with something, for example with grades at school...but nonetheless I'm not happy [German: glücklich] because I might have some other worries. To me happiness [German: glücklich] means that simply everything is fine."¹
 (Nicole, younger participant)

When asked to explain their understanding of the German term 'glücklich' after they had used the term during the interview or group session, some participants used the noun 'Glück' [happiness]. These participants associated the noun 'Glück' with less material values in life than going shopping:

"Well, for me happiness [German: Glück] does not mean buying something."² (FG 1, mixed age group)

"It's nothing materialistic. Something you cannot buy. That's happiness [German: Glück] to me. A T-Shirt is nice but isn't happiness [German: Glück] to me."³ (FG 8, older participants)

These perceptions of happiness do not refer to one single event or a short moment but refer to a broader sense, which is in accordance with Veenhoven's (1997, 2000) understanding of happiness in terms of a person's overall quality of life. Instead of using the German term 'glücklich' for 'happy', a number of participants preferred using other German terms for 'happiness', such as *"ich freue mich"* (FG 1) or *"froh"* (FG 3) to express their positive evaluations of an impulse buy:

"I'm happy [freue mich] about having found something I really need. That's not a feeling of happiness [Glücksgefühl]."⁴ (FG 1, mixed age group)

¹ In German: „Wenn ich glücklich bin, dann bezieht sich das eher auf mehr. Also, ich kann mit einer Sache zufrieden sein, wie zum Beispiel mit Noten...aber trotzdem bin ich nicht glücklich, weil ich sonst noch irgendwelche Probleme hab. Und glücklich ist für mich so, wenn alles passt.“

² In German: „Also, für mich ist nicht das Glück, etwas zu kaufen.“

³ In German: „Ist halt nichts Materielles. Was man halt nicht kaufen kann. Das ist für mich halt Glück. Ein T-Shirt ist nett, aber kein Glück.“

⁴ In German: „Ich freue mich, was zu haben, was ich wirklich brauche. Das ist kein eigentliches Glücksgefühl.“

"I'd never say that a purchase makes me feel happy [German: glücklich]." (participant 1) - "Well, I think that the term feeling happy [German: glücklich] doesn't fit." (participant 2) - "I'm glad having found something, yes, satisfied...Feeling happy [German: glücklich] I'd never ever say this for this kind of purchase." (participant 3)¹ (FG 3, younger participants)

Some participants at first rejected associating impulse buying with happiness, yet after giving some thought to it, sometimes admitted perceiving feelings of happiness in the context of impulse buying:

"To me going shopping has nothing to do with happiness [German: Glücklichein]. Well, if I didn't go shopping, I'd still be happy [German: glücklich]...Actually, if I buy something really nice, then in that moment I sometimes have that great feeling of happiness [in German: tolles Glücksgefühl]." ² (FG 1, mixed age group)

The personal decision to buy on impulse and the positive feelings of being 'satisfied' may be devalued by the shopper herself:

"And when I just go into town, that's the way I see it, and find something, then in any case I'm very very satisfied [German: zufrieden]. That's terrible but true."³ (everybody is laughing) (FG 2, younger participants)

When probed why the participant from FG 2 evaluates her impulse buy as "terrible" she uses the term "happy" instead of "satisfied" as before:

"Well, in order to feel happy [German: glücklich] I'd go and buy some underwear or whatever. Well, I don't know." (participant 1) - "Yes, that really makes you feel happy [German: glücklich]." (participant 2) (everybody is laughing supportively)⁴ (FG 2, younger participants)

¹ In German: „Ich würde nie sagen, dass ich durch einen Einkauf glücklich bin.“ (Teilnehmerin 1) - „Also, ich finde, das Wort glücklich, das passt irgendwie nicht so.“ (Teilnehmerin 2) - „Ich bin froh, dass ich was gefunden habe, ja, zufrieden...Glücklich, würde ich auf gar keinen Fall sagen bei solchen Käufen.“ (Teilnehmerin 3)

² In German: „Für mich gehört das Einkaufen nicht zum Glücklichein. Also, wenn ich nicht einkaufen würde, wäre ich trotzdem glücklich... Also, wenn ich mir was Tolles kaufe, empfinde ich in dem Moment schon noch mal ein tolles Glücksgefühl.“

³ In German: „Und wenn ich einfach losgehe und dann, sag ich so, und wenn man dann wirklich was findet, dann ist das auf jeden Fall, dann ist man sehr sehr zufrieden. Es ist zwar schrecklich, aber wahr.“ (alle lachen)

⁴ In German: „Ja, um glücklich zu sein, geh ich mal eben Unterwäsche kaufen oder so. Also, weiß ich nicht.“ (Teilnehmerin 1) - „Ja, das macht echt glücklich.“ (Teilnehmerin 2) (alle lachen zustimmend)

The term 'terrible' may indicate her awareness of a normatively wrong behaviour and stigma attached to resorting to impulse buying for mood repair. The stigma is emphasised by the tendency of society to impose negative normative evaluations on impulse behaviour as Hausman (2000) observed. However, participant 2 agrees that impulse buying can make the buyer feel 'happy' in the sense of the German term 'glücklich'.

The disagreement of the participants in using the German term 'glücklich' for happiness and the interchangeability of positive emotional terms underline that there is so far a lack of consensus both in common language and in research (for example Averill and More, 2000; Veenhoven, 1997) about the meaning of the term happiness. Throughout this study, the participants predominantly used the German term 'sich freuen' when expressing feelings of happiness in the context of impulse buying. The German term 'sich freuen' was not challenged by any participant when it was used by someone else to refer to a shopping experience.

5.3.3 Success and Surprise

Impulse buys may occur in the context of getting a good deal, which was often perceived as a kind of success and triggered positive emotions. For instance, Natascha explains about the impulse buy of contact lenses at Aldi:

"I was pretty happy that I had bought them...Yes, it really was a jolly good deal."¹ (Natascha, younger participant)

Similarly, Rebecca enjoyed being successful in negotiating a discount:

"I really enjoyed that it was so easy to negotiate with her...One of the earrings was a bit twisted but you cannot really see it." (Rebecca, older participant)

Feelings of success may be related to the good deal and the actual item bought. Without regard to the price, Brigitte perceived her impulse buy as a success after having been struggling for some time to find a suitable pair of jeans:

¹ In German: „Ich war eigentlich ganz glücklich, dass ich sie gekauft hab...Ja, das war eigentlich voll ein Schnäppchen.“

"And the pair of jeans at Esprit...That was like, hurrah, I've made it! I've actually found a pair of jeans! And then it was all the same to me how much they were. I mean, the only thing that came to mind was, okay, now I've found a pair of jeans that I really really fancy and they fit and they suit me." (Brigitte, younger participant)

Feelings of success can also be about discovery:

"There is a huge difference. That's that feeling of success. It wasn't you who found it if it's been advertised in the newspaper...It's rather like coming across the item by accident. When you walk on your own through town and suddenly you spot something then you experience this feeling of success, of achievement and that it's me, I discovered it on my own and not in the newspaper." (FG 5, younger participants)

An impulse buy may yield a multitude of positive emotions with high emotional involvement of the buyer. This may include feelings of pride:

"That wasn't all that expensive. I got those two bikinis for about 70 Euro...Yeah, and I was really thrilled, I was pretty satisfied with it...We bought them on impulse because they fit perfectly. Then I was really so proud and I really liked them ever so much...And then we went for a coffee afterwards. Yes, because I was ever so happy [German: gefreut]. Me saying to him [her boyfriend], 'I get you a coffee. Let's go for a coffee'." ¹ (Rebecca, older participant)

Rebecca perceives her impulse buy as a success due to the good deal and the perfect fit of the bikinis. The immediate perception of positive emotions for the impulse buyer herself may culminate in a celebration of the successful acquisition of the item with someone else, for example as in Rebecca's case by taking her boyfriend for a coffee. In addition, her contribution re-iterates the interchangeability of positive emotional terms, such as "thrilled", "satisfied", "really so proud" and "ever so happy". Positive feelings attached to an impulse buy may also include feelings of excitement when spotting an item unexpectedly:

¹ In German: „Das war auch gar nicht so teuer. Also, ich hab die zwei Bikinis für rund 70 Euro bekommen...Ja, da war ich ganz begeistert, war ich ganz zufrieden damit...Wir haben ganz spontan zwei Bikinis gleich gekauft, weil sie am besten gepasst haben. Da war ich echt ganz stolz, und die haben mir auch ganz arg gefallen...Und danach sind wir noch einen Kaffee trinken gegangen. Ja, weil ich mich so gefreut hab. Ich zu ihm: ‚Ich spendier Dir noch einen Kaffee. Gehen wir noch einen Kaffee trinken'."'

"You haven't expected anything. You haven't had a goal on your mind. You found something you really, really fancy. That's a kind of surprise. That's so cool." (FG 6, younger participants)

This kind of surprise is seen as another positive aspect of impulse buying as the shopper set off with no prior expectations. This is in line with previous research which has found that enjoyment of the novelty and surprise play an important role in impulse buying (Gardner and Rook, 1988). This sudden feeling of happiness in the context of an impulse buying experience can result in visible bodily reactions such as:

"All way home I was smiling and I was feeling fine." (FG 9, older participants)

"I spot it and then my heart is beating quickly right away...it simply happens...Me going into the changing rooms and if it looks nice...then I'm extremely happy [German: total happy]."¹ (FG 9, older participants)

Another participant expressed her feeling of happiness by jumping up and down:

"It [the software tutorial] was delivered in a parcel. I was totally happy [German: gefreut], jumping up and down in the flat."² (Natascha, younger participant)

This reaction on the receipt of the impulse purchase illustrates an extraordinary excitement. Strongman (1996) acknowledges that some people express happiness through an aroused state like joy or elation, while others associate it with being silently satisfied and peace-of-mind (Averill and More, 2000). This emotional behaviour as exemplified in Natascha's contribution is typical for female impulse buyers who may experience an impulse buy "as giving a lift, buzz and thrill" (Dittmar and Drury, 2000, p.124). Typically the impulse buy is not expected to happen:

¹ In German: „Ich sehe das, dann krieg ich schon Herzklopfen...das kommt dann quasi...Gehe in die Umkleidekabine und wenn's dann auch noch gut aussieht...dann bin ich total happy halt.“

² In German: „Das kam als Paket. Hab mich voll gefreut, bin in der Wohnung rumgehüpft.“

"Two years ago I wanted to get those Dockers, these white ones...I was looking for them everywhere. Nothing available in my size. And I was ever so disappointed...and my boyfriend said, 'hey come on, just buy some other trainers'. The following weekend I...said, 'okay, fine I'll buy some other kinds of trainers.' There's me walking into Sevenmainstreet - what do I see? Loads of white Dockers! Aaah! (exclamation of delight. With a huge smile on her face this participant carries on:) That was absolutely great! They had those shoes even in my size...It wasn't planned at all. Well, after all I wanted to look for something different and me just looking around and? White Dockers! Do you understand? White Dockers!...That was really, really good. That was on impulse because I never ever expected that I'd ever come across them." (FG 6, younger participants)

As illustrated in this section, the positive attributes which may accompany the impulse buying experience are diverse and often result in an overall positive evaluation of one's own impulse buying activity.

5.3.4 Anticipated Happiness

The contributions in this study indicate that the anticipation of the forthcoming acquisition of the item or looking forward to its first use may stimulate positive emotions. With impulse buying some shoppers miss the anticipated positive feelings prior to the acquisition of the item. In planned buying the shopper may look forward to buying a particular item on a particular shopping trip:

"I prefer going shopping when I roughly know beforehand what I'd like to get. Then I'm looking forward to it." (FG 2, younger participants)

These feelings of anticipated happiness and the excitement of looking forward to the actual acquisition of the item is sometimes missed in the impulse buying experience as expressed by the older participant in FG 1:

*"When I know that tomorrow I may choose a bath tub, then I think that's superb. That's a kind of happiness [German: Vorfreude] prior to the purchase. Or, tomorrow I'll choose the tiles. That really makes me feel happy [German: glücklich] although I haven't even had a look at any yet. With the impulse buy, I'm missing happiness [German: Vorfreude] prior to the purchase. The feeling after the purchase is about the same...but with planned buys I can feel happy [German: freuen] even before."*¹ (FG 1, mixed age group)

However, these feelings of anticipated happiness prior to a planned purchase do not necessarily occur:

*"I never feel happy beforehand [German: Vorfreude] when I go into town and I know today I will buy whatever, a pair of shoes, trousers, a jacket. Then I won't even find shoes when I urgently need some. Well, it simply won't work. And very very rarely I feel some kind of happiness [German: Vorfreude] beforehand."*² (FG 8, older participants)

As outlined earlier, the majority of participants doubts whether they will be successful in finding the planned item. Anticipated happiness may also apply to impulse buying situations. It may occur in situations such as a catalogue order and online buying, which are based on an impulse buying decision with a time gap between ordering the item and looking forward to its delivery. For instance Diana spontaneously ordered clothes by catalogue and describes her feelings when she learnt the items had still not been delivered on that particular day:

"I wasn't disappointed. Not really disappointed but sort of...I don't know how to explain...Well, right, I wasn't utterly unhappy or anything. But sort of. Somewhere in between, I'd say." (Diana, younger participant)

This indicates that the feelings attached to an impulse buy range from the anticipation of the delivery of the item to some kind of negative feeling about the long waiting time. More specifically, these feelings may range from initial happiness about the purchase and eagerly waiting for its delivery to feelings of annoyance

¹ In German: „Wenn ich jetzt weiß, ich darf mir morgen ne Badewanne kaufen, find ich das super toll. Dann hab ich schon ne Vorfreude. Oder morgen darf ich mir Fliesen aussuchen, dann macht mich das vorher schon glücklich, obwohl ich noch gar keine angeguckt hab. Beim Spontankauf, da vermisste ich dann die Vorfreude. Da ist das Gefühl hintenweg eigentlich gleich bei mir...aber bei geplanten Käufen, da kann ich mich vorher schon freuen.“

² In German: „Da hab ich auch nie ne Vorfreude, wenn ich da losgehe und weiß, ich darf mir heute Schuhe, Hose, Jacke oder sonstwas kaufen – ist egal. Auch Schuhe finde ich dann einfach keine, wenn ich welche brauche dringend. Also, das klappt einfach nicht. Und selten auch ne Vorfreude.“

due to a delayed delivery, as Natascha describes regarding the online impulse buy of a software tutorial:

*"I was ever so happy [German: gefreut]. That was kind of an anticipation of the product until it was eventually delivered. What I didn't like was that it took ever so long. I ordered it on Sunday evening...I thought that I'd get it on Tuesday and it only arrived on Thursday. That really took a long time and I was a bit annoyed."¹
(Natascha, younger participant)*

The anticipation may not only refer to the receipt of the item but also to its first use as captured in the following contributions:

"I'm ever so much looking forward to the day I can put it [the top] on. Well, when it's getting warmer and then I can wear it for the first time, I'm really so much looking forward to that." (Nicole, younger participant)

"I was more looking forward to receiving the bed linen than the hammock...because of the flowers on the bed linen, the pattern. That makes me feel looking forward to the summer. Yes, I simply liked it." (Lena, older participant)

Looking forward to using an item may trigger positive emotions in the context of an impulse buy. Campbell (1989) suggests that the major pleasure of consumption resides in the power of imagination and fantasising about the anticipated new experience. While this study did not specifically examine if anticipation is the major pleasure of consumption, the evidence suggests that it plays a role in impulse buying.

The contributions in this section suggest that the anticipation of the acquisition of an item or its future use can generate positive emotions, such as feelings of happiness. It appears that there is a close connection between impulse buying and positive emotions. Impulse buying does not appear to be necessarily confined to an immediate occurrence of the purchase on the spot as largely suggested in the literature (for example Piron, 1991; Rook, 1987). These positive evaluations of impulse buying challenge existing research on impulse buying (for example Ainslie, 1975; Rook and Fisher, 1995) which refers to research participants who devalue

¹ In German: „Ich hab mich voll gefreut. Das war so eine Vorfreude auf das Produkt, bis es endlich kam. Was mir nicht gefallen hat, war eigentlich, dass das halt so lang gebraucht hat. Ich hab's am Sonntagabend bestellt...Dann hab ich gedacht, kommt Dienstag und es kam halt erst am Donnerstag. Das hat schon lang gebraucht, und das hat mich ein bisschen geärgert.“

their spontaneous activities for being irrational and bad. More recent studies (for example O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003) argue that in the buying experience both the rational and the emotional side need to be considered. The impulse buyer herself does not necessarily view her impulse purchase in an equally negative light but often perceives it as a rational alternative to more time-consuming search behaviours (Hausman, 2000). Similarly, Wood (2005) argues that research should acknowledge that consumers gain satisfaction from shopping activities and may not perceive buying goods as morally wrong but rather as a part of one's social life.

5.3.5 Involvement

The impulse buy of an item may not be an important event to the buyer but instead experienced as something hardly worth mentioning, unexciting, unimportant or possibly evaluated with a neutral okay. Lena for example perceived the impulse buy of a pair of stockings for her little daughter as:

"Normal, nothing special. Necessary after all." (Lena, older participant)

Similarly the impulse buy of a pair of socks did not generate any great feelings in Carmen:

"Nothing special, but I thought I could do with some. So I bought them...No particular great feeling. I simply bought those socks, that was that." (Carmen, older participant)

An impulse buy may be perceived as nothing important and the buyer may not give much thought about the acquisition of the item:

"I was at the bakery and simply bought them [the chewing gum]. There's nothing to tell. Simply got that chewing gum...If it hadn't been there on the counter, I wouldn't even have thought of getting any...They weren't expensive, so I really didn't give much thought to it...It was nothing special...I never thought about what to get at all. It was ever so spontaneous." (Nadia, younger participant)

If an impulse buy is deemed unimportant and of no interest to other people, the buyer may not mention the purchase to anybody:

"He [her husband] doesn't know about it [the yoghurt]. Sooner or later he'll look in the fridge. Tonight most likely. But usually we never talk about any food shopping. He might find it in the fridge and eat it or leave it. Whatever." (Lena, older participant)

These evaluations of impulse buys suggest that an impulse buy is not necessarily an exciting event triggering positive emotions but could be a boring occurrence which is not noteworthy. This stands in contrast to current literature (for example Beatty and Ferrell, 1998) where it generally comes across that the impulse buy is associated with the urge to buy the desired item, which implies some excitement. For instance, Rook (1987) suggests that only a few participants in his sample considered the impulse buy not to be important or exciting.

Slightly more attention was given to those impulse buys which were not merely devalued as unimportant but received a neutral okay by the participants in this study. Nonetheless the purchase appears unexciting to the buyer:

"It would have been even nicer if the flip flops had extra ribbons on the side. But it is okay as it is. Well, not really my dream pair of shoes. Just plain ordinary shoes." (Rebecca, older participant)

The impulse buyer may feel "quite good" about purchasing sweets:

"I felt quite good about the purchase. I didn't have a guilty conscience that I had bought those sweets. It was okay." (Natascha, younger participant)

Natascha appears to be aware that a guilty conscience and feelings of regret may be expected with this kind of impulse buy. This alludes to the predominantly negative perception of impulse buying. For instance, Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) suggest that consumers may expect other people to evaluate their impulse buy in a negative light (Crawford and Melewar, 2003; Mick, 1996). Despite the predominantly negative image of impulse buying in the literature, the perception of one's own impulse buys was positive for the majority of participants in this study.

5.4 Constant and Changing Emotions over the Course of the Impulse Buying Experience

Emotions may vary over the course of one single impulse buying experience starting with the initial perception of the item to a reflection about the purchase some time later. This study goes beyond the investigation of happiness right after the purchase. The longitudinal aspect of this study made it possible to shed light on how emotions change over the course of the impulse buying experience. This covered a period of three months. There have been a number of contributions in the literature about post-purchase evaluation (for example Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Fisher Gardial et al., 1994) which did not contain a sufficient consideration of emotional changes over a longer period of time. This section first deals with emotions remaining constant over the period of three months of this investigation. This is followed by considering changing emotions over the impulse buying experience.

5.4.1 Constant Emotions

In the majority of cases, the emotional evaluation of the impulse buying experiences remained more or less constant without major alterations. Three months after the impulse buy, some participants have not yet used the purchased item:

"I don't find the perfect opportunity to wear the top because I always think, well, other people may look at me...Well, I don't regret that I bought it although I've never worn it." (Natascha, younger participant)

In view of presents for someone else, emotions attached to the impulse buy remained constantly positive in all reported cases. For instance, Carmen was initially happy about the impulse buy of a present:

"Well, I'm happy [German: freu mich] to give a present to someone and when that person is happy [German: freut] about it."¹ (Carmen, older participant)

¹ In German: „Also, ich freu mich, wenn ich jemand was schenken kann, wenn der sich dann auch freut.“

When asked two months later, Carmen added the positive feedback from her mother about the present:

"This flower kept for quite some time. I think two or three weeks. I think that's great. Because, it was standing there, it looked nice. My mother was happy [German: gefreut]. I didn't regret it. It was superb."¹
(Carmen, older participant)

The feedback from other people as in Carmen's contribution can play a role in the evaluation of an impulse buy and may affect the emotional reaction of the buyer towards the purchase. Although positive emotions appear in nearly all reported impulse buys some time over the course of the buying period in this study, these positive emotions may change over time.

5.4.2 Changing Emotions

Positive emotions or the excitement about an impulse buy are not confined to the impulse buying act but may instead develop only after the acquisition of an item. When Natascha bought the Christian song book she describes her feelings at the check-out as:

"Nothing special at all. I got the song book and now hurrah? No, wasn't like that at all. Well, rather like, okay, I'm buying the book." (Natascha, younger participant)

Natascha's impulse buy started off as being non-exciting and *"nothing special"*. Shortly after arriving back home from the Christian event, Natascha felt a sudden increase in positive emotions:

"It would've been a real shame if I hadn't bought it...It was ever so nice to sing again the songs although we had already left the place." (Natascha, younger participant)

Three months later Natascha had been using the song book on a regular base and she is glad about the purchase. She would be sad if she had not bought the song book:

¹ In German: „Diese Blume hat sich ziemlich lange gehalten. Ich glaub, zwei oder drei Wochen. Das fand ich toll. Weil, die stand dann da, hat schön ausgesehen. Meine Mutter hat sich gefreut. Hab ich auch nicht bereut. War super.“

"I'm so glad I got it because it's something special, it's simply great that I got the songs with all the notes...and I can let my mind wander back to the time I had spent in that place. I think I'd be feeling pretty sad if I couldn't." (Natascha, younger participant)

Contrary to Natascha's first evaluation of the song book being *"nothing special"*, the song book has now reached the status of *"something special"* to her. Similarly, it may take the impulse buyer some time to enjoy the purchase if the item is perceived as expensive. This may be due to the stigma attached to impulse buying:

*"Right, once I bought a purple coloured long leather coat. And it was on offer but still f***ing expensive. And I really liked it and it was a perfect fit and it was superb. I've now had it for two years...But in the beginning I wasn't feeling happy [German: freuen] about it at all...because it had been so expensive...and I bought it on impulse...But now it was well worth it. But it took me over a week to realise."¹ (FG 4, younger participants)*

The initial guilty conscience right after the impulse buy due to the money spent may decline a few days later, for example due to positive feedback from other people. This increase in positive emotions over time was only observed, though, in a minority of cases. More typically the participants reported of positive emotions remaining constant over the course of the impulse buying experience. Furthermore, over the course of the impulse buying experience, initially positive emotions may decline. This does not necessarily mean the impulse buying decision was regretted later on. Positive emotions attached to an impulse buy may only last for a short moment when choosing the item:

"I was really happy [German: gefreut] when I found something [ice gel for body] relaxing for women. I was somehow happy [German: gefreut] for a short little moment. Once it was in the trolley, I had sort of forgotten about it."² (Rebecca, older participant)

¹ In German: „Also, ich hab mir mal einen lilanen Ledermantel gekauft. Und der war auch ziemlich runtergesetzt, der war aber immer noch scheißsteuer. Und ich fand den aber so toll, und der passte auch wie angegossen, und der war super. Das Stück habe ich jetzt zwei Jahre... Aber ich konnte mich da erstmal nicht drüber freuen...weil's eben so teuer war...und das war dann ganz spontan...Mittlerweile hat sich das schon gelohnt. Aber ich musste da erstmal eine Woche vergehen lassen.“

² In German: „Hab mich dann echt gefreut, irgendwas für Frauen zu finden, was auch relaxend ist. Hab mich eigentlich kurz drüber gefreut. Aber das war es dann auch. Wo es im Einkaufswagen war, war es auch fast schon wieder vergessen.“

A few months later Rebecca still thinks in a positive way about the item but she points out that the intensity of the positive feeling has weakened. The item is used less often and she appears to be less enthusiastic compared to the first time using it:

"I'd buy it again...Of course I don't use it as often as in the beginning, but it's really quite good." (Rebecca, older participant)

The intensity of a positive feeling might cool down once the new item has been used for some time and is taken for granted. When asked two months after the impulse buy at the end of the reporting period, Diana perceives a reduced intensity of positive emotions attached to the purchase of a pair of jeans at Pimkie¹:

"Not really exactly the same feeling as when I bought them, this ecstatic feeling of a high...sort of. Because I had always ever so much fancied a pair of jeans like them." (Diana, younger participant)

Despite the reduced intensity of positive emotions two months after her impulse buy, Diana's attitude towards her purchase is still favourable. In addition to the actual decline of positive emotions over time, Diana's contribution hints at a distorted recollection of past emotions. The initial emotions at the time of purchase may not be recollected correctly a few months later but perceived in an exaggerated positive way. Diana for example reported feeling *"I'm satisfied"* soon after the purchase but two months later thinks she recalls an *"ecstatic feeling of a high"* right after the purchase. This example of distorted memories indicates that positive emotions attached to impulse buying experiences are expected by the buyer to decline over time. This decline is sometimes perceived as major. Feelings of annoyance and guilt may occur some time after the purchase:

"After the first euphoria impulse buys usually end up in a guilty conscience after a while." (participant 1) - "Yeah." (participant 2) - "Because my financial situation simply does not allow it at the moment. With impulse buys it is rather that you're treating yourself to something but you don't really need it." (participant 1) (FG 9, older participants)

Nicole for example was originally happy about the impulse buy of biscuits for her boyfriend on her holiday in Spain:

¹ Pimkie is a retailer for fashion clothes.

"I was happy [German: gefreut] because I thought, hey, cool, they're doing those biscuits here."¹ (Nicole, younger participant)

However, this positive emotion was overshadowed by feelings of annoyance a few months later:

"I think it was one month later that my mum bought pretty much the same biscuits over here...at half price. And that really annoyed me ever so much afterwards. In particular, because they nearly tasted better than those I had brought back from Spain... Thinking back I shouldn't have bought them at all maybe. But you cannot know this beforehand." (Nicole, younger participant)

Although Nicole was annoyed, she did not blame herself or regret the purchase. Instead she was reassuring herself that it was none of her fault because it is impossible to foresee this happening. Initially positive emotions attached to an impulse buy may not only decline over time as described by Diana and her impulse buy of a pair of jeans, but turn into feelings of dissatisfaction as experienced by Nicole. Similarly, at the time of the online purchase of her Christian postcards Natascha positively evaluated her impulse buy:

"Those are nice postcards. They're really great...The pictures are ever so nice." (Natascha, younger participant)

Shortly after the delivery of the postcards, Natascha realises that she had not given enough thought about the purchase:

"I didn't even realise it said 80 [postcards], but I don't know what I thought about. Or did I think of anything at all?" (Natascha, younger participant)

Two months later she blames herself for having made an unfavourable impulse buying decision which made her feel annoyed:

¹ In German: „Ich hab mich gefreut gehabt, weil ich dachte so, ja, cool, hier gibt es die Kekse.“

"Complete non-sense that was. The purchase was ever so stupid...First of all it would have been sufficient if we [my sister and I] had bought one pack of postcards and shared. And secondly, I noticed...that I got loads of postcards that I had forgotten about...Then I was really in a rage because I will never ever use up those postcards...In particular, because I don't like the pictures or the verse underneath...Now they're somewhere in the drawer, waiting to rot away." (Natascha, younger participant)

As this contribution illustrates, impulse buys may occur as Rook (1987) argues with limited regard to the consequences and therefore carry a risk. As a consequence the purchase may be rejected for being unnecessary and wasteful, leading to dissatisfaction, or regret as experienced by Natascha. While past literature (for example Ainslie, 1975; Rook and Fisher, 1995) generally considers impulse behaviour as irrational and wasteful, these adverse effects of impulse buying were only observed in a minority of cases over the course of this study.

5.5 Hedonic Motivations for Impulse Buying

Hedonic motivations play an important role in impulse buying decisions in this study. Previous research has widely shown that impulse buying satisfies a number of hedonic desires (for example Hausman, 2000; Piron, 1991; Rook, 1987; Thompson et al., 1990). In this study they range from buying an item just for fun and mere desire to the excitement of trying out new items. Consumers are often excited by novelties or may want to reward or treat themselves. Some shoppers act on an urge to buy something on impulse. Hedonic motivations also include the behaviour of giving gifts with the intention to make someone else feel happy. Holidays often increase impulse buying activities. These motivations in impulse buying will be explored in this section.

5.5.1 Desire

The shopper may perceive a desire to buy on impulse because she likes an item. For instance, Nicole enjoyed choosing a new mascara and buying it on impulse in particular because there was no need for her to get it:

"The best thing about it was looking for the right one, comparing the different brands. I quite enjoy that. Knowing that I can choose one because I don't really need one. Otherwise it wouldn't be that much fun."
(Nicole, younger participant)

This lack of an immediate need does not only emphasise hedonic motivations but also links back to the characteristics of impulse buying discussed earlier. The literature (for example Hausman, 2000; Verplanken and Herabadi, 2001) acknowledges that impulse buying is often induced by non-rational reasons, including the desire to express one's identity and just for fun. This lack of an immediate need does not prevent a shopper from impulse buying:

"Actually I already got 1000 pairs of shoes. Really I don't need any new ones at all. So that wasn't planned at all." (Rebecca, older participant)

"I sacrificed the money that quickly although it wasn't all that important to get another jumper but simply because I liked it." (Brigitte, younger participant)

These contributions confirm previous research (for example Kavanagh et al., 2005) which suggests that desires are wishes to satisfy a want or to gain pleasure. This also becomes evident in the following excerpt when Rebecca (24) and her boyfriend passed some shops right after attending a musical:

"These earrings outside the shop caught my eye...then I bought them on impulse. Of course there was no need for me to buy any but I quite fancied them and wanted to get them." (Rebecca, older participant)

The contributions in this study do not support Hoch and Loewenstein's (1987) concept of time inconsistent preferences in impulse buying as discussed in an earlier chapter. In fact, the internal struggle between willpower to refrain from buying and the desire to acquire the item is not necessarily experienced in impulse buying. Despite, or as in Nicole's case, because of their awareness of the actual lack of a need, the consumers acquire the item on impulse. In particular, food purchases were mentioned by a few participants as hedonically motivated impulse buys:

"At Aldi. Well, at first I hesitated because most likely they [the strawberries] aren't even ripe yet or they are chemically treated. And then I just thought, so what? I fancy eating strawberries now, and so I bought them."
(Nadia, younger participant)

Spontaneous affect, such as someone fancies or likes an item, may stimulate immediate reactions to gain pleasure and take action (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003; Shiv and Fedorikhin, 2002). Nadia's desire for immediate consumption was more important to her than any concerns about health implications or the risk of being dissatisfied. During the reported period of three months only two impulse buys of the older married mothers were actually bought for their own exclusive use. This was not motivated by hedonic reasons to fulfil a want or desire but rather to satisfy a need:

"Usually they only do these together in a pack, long pyjama trousers and long-sleeved top. And that's no good for me. I need a short-sleeved top and long trousers...But only very rarely you get those pyjama trousers on their own and hardly ever with very thin garment...I only considered if I really need them. Didn't think of anything else." (Lena, older participant)

Similarly when Laura decided on impulse to have her hair cut the main reasons behind her decision were not fun or fancy but rather practical reasons:

"It's practical with short hair. And actually, short hair suits me better. And then there was the thought that you always lose so much hair after giving birth and it's not all that nice to have that hair lying around everywhere." (Laura, older participant)

Married mothers typically did not mention the impulse buy of items for fun, fancy or desire. Emanating from the general theme of desire to acquire an item on impulse was the theme of impulse buying being exciting and sometimes triggering an urge to acquire an item. This will be dealt with in the next section.

5.5.2 Excitement and Urge

After a few weeks of not going into town, some consumers miss the excitement of shopping:

"It particularly happens when you haven't been shopping for two or three weeks. Then it's like it all added up and oh, my God...I simply have got to go into town and then spend 150 Euro or more just like that. I don't know why, but it has to be that way." (FG 6, younger participants)

This is in accordance with previous research which has shown that impulse buying can be exciting and extraordinary (Rook, 1987). Excitement and being emotionally stimulated by the buying impulse makes it easier for customers to spend money (Rook and Gardner, 1993). Once the shopper has spotted a desirable item, this may induce a feeling of high involvement and preoccupy one's mind with the item in question:

"I think about the item the whole time...I perfectly know that I won't calm down until I have tried it on and realise, okay, it's not for me." (participant 1) - "I feel exactly the same way...I won't calm down until I have tried it on and realise that it really is not my style." (participant 2) (FG 2, younger participants)

This kind of excitement creates a tense feeling and urge to try out the item, which often occurs in impulse buying. Instead of applying resistance strategies, some participants give in to the urge to buy:

"Surely you could do without it for another week but there's this urge." (FG 4, younger participants)

This urge may be evaluated in a positive light by the buyer and trigger feelings of happiness:

"I really think the most satisfying that's impulse buying. Having the feeling, I simply have to get it. That's the thing that makes me feel happiest with shopping." (FG 2, younger participants)

This perception of an urge stands in contrast to explanations in the literature where the urge to buy is seen in a negative light and often equated with loss of control (for example Rook, 1987; Weinberg and Gottwald, 1982). On the other hand, following the urge to buy on impulse may lead to severe financial implications. Some of the younger shoppers appear to give less thought to spending money and regularly overdraw their bank account compared to their older counterparts:

"Every month I overdraw my account. Well, that are those items where I'd say you'll never again come across something like that. So, I buy it." (FG 6, younger participants)

"Right at the beginning of the month I've spent half my money on clothes. Now I have only 80 Euro left for the rest of the month." (FG 4, younger participants)

"I had to call my father...to get some money. 'Okay, it's for work, so we'll send you some money'." (she is laughing, everybody is laughing) (FG 4, younger participants)

The buyers in this study admit that they are less concerned about overdrawing their bank account compared to losing out on an item (for example FG 6). Even though money may be tight, the younger shoppers may still be able to claim the safety net of home and ask for some extra money as the participant in FG 4 reveals. The findings suggest that there is a negative relationship between age and impulse buying, meaning that the tendency to buy on impulse declines with increasing age. Dittmar and Drury (2000) warn that the desire for impulse buys as captured in the contributions above may outweigh financial consequences. Financial implications may play a negligible role when impulse buying is perceived as a fast experience:

"Rush into the shop and get it." (participant 1) - "Terrible! Lunatic!" (the others in the group in agreement with participant 1) (FG 6, younger participants)

The comments *"Terrible! Lunatic!"* imply that some buyers may disapprove of their own impulse buying in terms of too limited consideration of any consequences. The consumer literally grabs a product as Rook (1987) argues instead of carefully choosing it. This quick buying on the spot particularly applies to younger participants with regard to some of their impulse buying experiences. The older participants tend to be at times more hesitant with impulse buying and carefully re-consider the purchasing decision:

"To me a purchase needs to make sense...I need to know am I going to wear it, am I going to read it or use it...Just because hey, that's cheap, that's on offer, I'll just get it. No, that's simply not enough." (FG 8, older participants)

"At Ikea, if there's something I really fancy ever so much then I might think, okay, fine, I simply don't have that much room in my poxy little flat and I don't really want this to mess up my place. Or plants or some small little item...and then I really re-consider it." (FG 9, older participants)

These contributions suggest that some impulse buyers sometimes apply resistance strategies to prevent them from going ahead with an impulse buy. Older impulse buyers appear at times to be more hesitant about spending money and try to reconsider an impulse buy:

"Okay, really I don't have that much dosh, I might put it back on the shelf, reassuring myself, well really, I've got more than enough things at home. That'll be fine." (FG 9, older participants)

The tendency of the older shoppers to re-consider the financial implications may lead to a reduction in impulse buying. Some impulse buys might be rejected when shoppers think more carefully about the consequences. Previous research has found that with increasing age basic needs tend to be met and therefore materialism decreases while the main interest of consumers resides in the satisfaction of higher-order needs (Inglehart, 1990). The sense of responsibility of the more mature shoppers can also extend to the time in retirement:

"You have a different kind of responsibility...You are already thinking about your private pension funds and how to invest money for retirement...I know it's a long time to go but still you're already getting worried about it." (FG 8, older participants)

The older shoppers and those with children reveal that they are less independent and less spontaneous than younger consumers:

"Another problem is to fly away to some nice place for the weekend. You need to take off Friday or Monday and that isn't that easy...With your partner it's not that easy to be spontaneous and lots of things need to be sorted out first...After our baby was born...a certain degree of spontaneity got lost." (FG 8, older participants)

Taking over responsibilities often increases with age, which in turn may decrease the tendency to buy on impulse.

5.5.3 Novelties

Hedonic motivations for impulse buys include the desire to try out new items the shopper has not bought before or items which the impulse buyer believes not too many people in their area seem to own. In this study, only the younger participants were particularly interested in acquiring something new and tend to get more excited about novelties compared to older shoppers:

"Mine [my deodorant at home] wasn't empty yet at all. Well, actually, I somewhere got two or three of them anyway. But I thought I'll just try out something new." (Rebecca, older participant)

Findings in the literature indicate that younger people are often more materialistic, meaning they become excited simply due to possessing a new item (Belk, 1984; Myers, 2000). The hedonic motivation for Rebecca to buy a new deodorant on impulse was the excitement to trying out something new. This interest in trying out a novelty is also captured in the following contribution:

"Lately I went through Hip¹ and of late they opened up a small Sushi bar. I thought to myself, oh, I'll try it out." (FG 8, older participants)

The contributions in this study support a previous research undertaken by Iris and Context International (Brand Strategy, 2002) which suggests impulse buying differences by life stage and specifies that younger shoppers are more experimental, less experienced and more open for trying out something unknown. Instead of being loyal to a brand, the excitement for something new drives some shoppers to try out and compare different brands of the same product:

"When I go into DM and buy, whatever, a new shampoo that I haven't had before, yes, that feeling is nice. That's fun. Something new. I'm happy [German: freu mich] like a small little child when I have got something new."² (FG 2, younger participants)

"Twentysomething" (Leeming and Tripp, 1994, p.37) women enjoy experimenting and constitute the major target segment for new product introductions. Women in their twenties are considered to be in a transition phase of their lives with only limited brand loyalty (Leeming and Tripp, 1994). Trying out something new is perceived as fun and can induce positive feelings such as happiness as described by the participant in FG 2. While brand loyalty is limited, new items can excite and inspire the shopper's mind. Advertisements may direct the buyer's attention to novelties and make them interested in gaining new experiences:

"At New Yorker. Because not long ago they had that advert on television, with bikinis...And before I didn't even know they were doing bikinis at New Yorker. So I thought I might as well have a look." (Nicole, younger participant)

¹ Hip is the name of a supermarket.

² In German: „Wenn ich in den DM gehe und mir, ich weiß nicht, ein neues Shampoo kaufe, das ich noch nicht habe, und ja, das Gefühl ist schön. Das macht Spaß. Irgendwas Neues. Ich freu mich dann auch wie ein kleines Kind, wenn man dann was Neues hat.“

Her curiosity about the new product line of bikinis at New Yorker was the trigger for Nicole to visit the store. Advertisements may also entice the shopper to try out a new brand:

"And I went past the mascaras and then I thought, really I could do with one...So I thought, why not take one from one of those adverts [on television]?...I enjoy trying out different ones all the time. I hardly ever get one and the same...I thought, well, I have seen that one on television. That's for sure a good one." (Nicole, younger participant)

Despite their past experiences with new items not necessarily meeting their expectations, the shoppers nonetheless want to believe that this new item is worth trying out:

"Lately I saw an advert on telly: Proactive. That's something American. And there I was sitting in front of the telly for a quarter of an hour, looking at their lovely perfect skin. Really, I hate these shopping shows but then I was so thrilled and convinced [about the product] that I picked up the phone when my boyfriend woke me up: 'You are not going to order this now for 60 Euro, aren't you?'. But there was silly me dreaming of having nice skin." (she is laughing) (FG 9, older participants)

This is in accordance with previous research (for example Campbell, 1989) which suggests that the predominant value and most pleasure in consumption lies in fantasising in anticipation of the new or novel experience. As captured in the contribution from FG 9, other people such as sales people or boyfriends can have an impact on impulse buying decisions and either encourage or refrain the shopper from going ahead with an impulse buy.

A new item may lift the buyer's self-esteem as Brigitte reports: *"and you'd think when you see it all new, ah, now you look nice again"*. In this context Brigitte talks about the impulse buy of a jumper. She is

"glad having bought the jumper. Of course I could have put on something different for going out tonight, but I really like wearing something new." (Brigitte, younger participant)

This contribution suggests that an object may yield happiness for the impulse buyer just because it is something new, contributes to one's self-esteem and maybe receives positive attention from other people when presenting it. The curiosity of the impulse buyers to trying out something new and making new experiences is not

restricted to tangible goods but was also experienced in view of services in this study, as explained by Diana who tried out nail styling:

"Because if I hadn't tried it out, then I'd be thinking today why didn't I and then...I would have tried it out one day anyway." (Diana, younger participant)

Novelties particularly appeal to the younger shoppers in this study. Hedonically motivated purchases may also represent a reward or a treat to the impulse buyer, which is discussed in the next section.

5.5.4 Reward and Treat

A number of participants in this study rewarded themselves with an impulse buy for their work, for example:

"I only work for those impulse buys because otherwise I get money from my mother. She says that at the end of the month when I get paid, she says, 'go into town and get something nice for yourself'...Because she exactly knows that it's somehow stressful for me and that going into town and getting something for myself will do me good." (FG 7, younger participants)

"Well, we are heading towards our final exams and then some of us will be going to the hairdresser's because that's to reward oneself or I will go to all shops in Cologne because it's kind of a reward." (FG 2, younger participants)

As the contribution from FG 2 indicates, most participants did not need to be encouraged by someone else but deliberately reward themselves. This self-gift behaviour is considered to be one kind of personal and symbolic self-communication and for women this behaviour may particularly develop in personal situations such as significant life or work transitions and disrupted interpersonal relations (Mick et al., 1992). These rewards range from small expenses to larger ones:

"Those genuine impulse buys, I'll only buy rather inexpensive items on impulse, a small little reward in-between so to speak." (FG 7, younger participants)

"I'd be thinking I really deserve it [going on vacation] now. I need to go somewhere, I need to relax, I simply have to go. I don't care at all whether or not I have the money." (participant 1) - "No, then I'd rather stay at home." (participant 2) (FG 9, older participants)

While some shoppers as the participant in FG 9 appear to be prepared to spend beyond their financial means to reward themselves, others put the expense into perspective with their available income. In addition to rewarding oneself with an impulse buy for some achievement, some shoppers buy on impulse as a treat:

"After my shopping trip...I might spot a magazine I hadn't really intended to get but I'd think that sounds interesting. Then I'd get it and go to a nice café for a coffee latte. On my own in a café, I don't do that very often. I feel very special then. A very special feeling." (FG 2, younger participants)

As this contribution from FG 2 implies, giving oneself a treat can create "a very special feeling" and is something extraordinary one would not do every day. On the other hand, this kind of treat may also be considered as a reward for having completed one's shopping trip. During the three months of the individual interviews some participants talked about impulse buying experiences serving as a treat to themselves. While the participant from FG 2 was shopping on her own, the comparison to other people may also be stimulating to engage in impulse buying as Nicole explains regarding the impulse buy of a skirt:

"60 Euro. From Esprit. At Subway. And then I thought, okay, yes, so what? One has to treat oneself to something at times. The day before my mother bought ever so much and then I thought if mum can buy that much, then I might as well do the same...Yes, and then I went to the check-out." (Nicole, younger participant)

Nicole treated herself to a skirt from Esprit because she took her mother's spending as an example. This is an indication for the important role other people may play in impulse buying. This contribution also draws on feelings of entitlement which alludes to previous research from Hoch and Loewenstein (1991). In their view consumers attempt to rationalise the cost assessment because of feeling entitled to purchase an item in the sense of someone who works hard, deserves to play hard.

5.5.5 Gifting

Gifting provides pleasure to a number of participants in this study and was often mentioned as an hedonic motivation for impulse buys. Any planned gifts were excluded from this study. Gifts bought on impulse are often "sort of cheap" such as "a poster, a nice postcard, a booklet" (FG 2, younger participants). The price matters less than the motivation to make someone else feel happy:

*"Even if it's only some poxy little thing I'd say, look, I just brought a little something for you. So, I'll know that the other person is happy [German: freut sich] about it."*¹ (FG 8, older participants)

Gifting is closely associated with positive feelings and the intention to make someone else feel happy, which frequently also leads to one's personal happiness:

*"Superb. Then I'd think she'll really be happy [German: freut sie sich]. That's wonderful." (participant 1) - "Knowing that she'll be happy [German: glücklich] about it, yes, that's absolutely terrific."*² (participant 2) (FG 2, younger participants)

This kind of impulse buys provide happiness both to the recipient as well as to the gift buyer, which stands in contrast to impulse buying as the dark side of consumption. Regret was not reported with impulse buys of gifts:

"If I buy a present on impulse, then I'd never have any regrets because I know it's simply okay." (FG 8, older participants)

While treating oneself may be evaluated more critically and may cause negative feedback from other people, gifting is usually seen in a more positive light:

"At first he [her husband] looked at me, rolled his eyes, thinking it's for me. And then I said to him it's not for me but for my mother. And then he didn't object." (Carmen, older participant)

¹ In German: „Auch wenn's nur eine Kleinigkeit ist, dann sage ich, ich habe dir mal was mitgebracht. Also, dann weiß ich, der andere freut sich darüber.“

² In German: „Super. Dann denk ich da, dann freut sie sich bestimmt und so. Das ist herrlich.“ (Teilnehmerin 1) - „Zu wissen, dass sie dann glücklich drüber ist, das finde ich dann toll.“ (Teilnehmerin 2)

This contribution supports the view of Rook and Fisher (1995) that once an impulse buy is regarded as a virtuous behaviour, it is seen in a more positive light. In this study the majority of impulse buys are evaluated either normatively neutral or even seen as a positive behaviour. This stands in contrast to the research for example from Rook and Fisher (1995) who assume that a neutral or positive evaluation of impulse buying only occurs on a rare occasion.

Overall, the contributions indicate that gifting is perceived by all participants in a positive way. A gift bought on impulse may create feelings of happiness in both the gift giver and the recipient. Gift buying was mentioned a few times in the context of holiday souvenirs with the intention to make someone else feel happy. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

5.5.6 Holidays

A number of participants made impulse buys on holiday, which might not have occurred otherwise. The purchase might have been motivated for example by the special occasion 'holiday' or the intention to make someone else at home feel happy. For instance, Nicole bought on impulse biscuits from Spain for her boyfriend back home in Germany:

"because I knew I'll get them [the biscuits] as a present for my boyfriend. He'll be happy [German: freut sich] about them for sure."¹ (Nicole, younger participant)

The intention of this impulse buy on holiday was to make someone else feel happy. Crawford and Melewar (2003) suggest that gift giving is one of the key stimuli for impulse buying behaviour in the travel retail environment. This impulse buy of the holiday souvenir triggered positive emotions of happiness both for Nicole and her boyfriend *"and he was very happy [German: gefreut] about it"*² as Nicole reported a few weeks later. In addition to gift buying on holiday, impulse buying in general often occurs on holiday as the purchased item may keep positive memories alive:

¹ In German: „weil ich dann wusste, ach, die [Kekse] bringe ich meinem Freund mit. Der freut sich bestimmt darüber.“

² In German: „Und da hat er sich schon sehr darüber gefreut.“

"I've often bought items on holidays and I remember all of them where I got them from. When I see it, I can say, oh, yes, I bought it from there. You see that's a kind of memory, remembrance." (Nicole, younger participant)

The participants in FG 7 agreed that they feel a particular urge to buy something as a souvenir of their holiday:

*"On holiday I always have to buy something."
(participant 1) - "Exactly. That will always remind me of that shop where I bought it from." (participant 2) -
"Same with me. I can still remember that I bought this handbag on my holiday. Then you'd think that's a kind of souvenir. I bought it in Verona, nobody else has got it." (participant 3) (FG 7, younger participants)*

The item purchased on impulse during one's holiday is usually something unique and not deemed to be available at home as explained by participant 3 in FG 7. The impulse buy on holiday may not only remind the buyer of an enjoyable time but also preserve some of the atmosphere:

"Towards the end of the Christian event [in Poland] I enjoyed it so much and the entire atmosphere and then I bought it [the Christian song book], maybe to take home a bit of the atmosphere...It was ever so nice to sing again those songs although we weren't there in the camp any more. Really, it would have been such a shame if it hadn't been like that." (Natascha, younger participant)

Already at the time of the impulse buy of the song book Natascha appeared to have in mind to keep memories alive and to preserve some of the atmosphere. These impulse buys which bring back past experiences and memories appear to yield positive emotions in the buyer. Another kind of item stimulating an impulse buy can be seen in the purchase of those items on holidays which are not generally available at home:

"On my holidays I will surely buy a lot. Lots of rubbish probably...I'm buying a lot abroad because everything is so very different, because no-one else has got it. And because it's cheaper of course." (Nadia, younger participant)

Contrary to the younger participants such as Nadia, none of the older participants in this study reported any novelty purchases of trying out something new or deciding to buy an item on impulse because of the belief not many people in their area own the same item. Although the original buying intention of all participants is to positively remember having bought this particular item while holidaying,

participants varied in their evaluation of their impulse buy once they returned back home. Some shoppers report feelings of regret with their holiday impulse buys as they were only bought in the special holiday situation but are of no use at home:

"That was in Spain. The last day of my holidays. Oh, dear and I hadn't bought anything so far but I really fancied getting something. Whatever. And now I am so annoyed with me and really regret having spent that much money. I have never worn that pair of trousers again."
(FG 4, younger participants)

Other impulse buyers, though, may not feel disappointed later on if the item turns out to be of no use:

"I saw it, liked the colour. It was nice. I have only worn it once." (FG 7, younger participants)

When probed whether she has any negative feelings about this purchase she said with a shake of her head:

"No, I don't mind." (FG 7, younger participants)

Money allocated for the holiday time does not need to be saved for any other purpose but may be spent on impulse buys. One participant (FG 5, younger participants) suggested the term "holiday money" to refer to money ready to be spent on vacation:

"Well, on holidays everything is different. The rules are different, you don't have to save your money." (FG 7, younger participants)

"On holiday, you got your money for impulse buys. You got your 500 Deutschmark¹ for that week and you know that you could be spending those 500 Deutschmark." (FG 7, younger participants)

The next section look at different mood states, which may affect impulse buying behaviour.

¹ 500 Deutschmark equal about 250 Euro.

5.6 Mood in Impulse Buying

Impulse buying can occur during any kind of mood state. This does not only include the extremes of the shopper being in a positive mood or suffering from a bad mood and using impulse buying for mood repair. Impulse buying may also occur on any day, while feeling bored or being stressed out. A bad mood does not necessarily trigger impulse buys but instead may have an adverse effect on impulse buying behaviour. In line with previous research (for example Gardner and Rook, 1988), the contributions indicate that mood plays an extensive and complex role in impulse buying. The following contributions illustrate how participants in this study perceived their individual mood states during impulse buying.

5.6.1 Being in the Mood for Impulse Buying

The majority of impulse buys reported in this study occurred during positive mood states:

"The whole day I was in a good mood...When I'm in a bad mood, then I don't even want to go shopping. Not like some other people who go shopping just because of their bad mood." (Nadia, younger participant)

This is in line with the findings from Rook and Gardner (1993) in a lab-research experiment where 85 percent of their participants claimed they would buy on impulse in a positive rather than negative mood. As Nadia points out some shoppers deliberately use shopping for mood repair, also referred to as retail therapy (for example Woodruffe, 1997). In this study a good mood in the context of impulse buying was often associated with a special event, good weather or a holiday, for example:

"I can only go shopping if I'm in a good mood. And I cannot go shopping when it's raining cats and dogs because then I can't be bothered anyway." (participant 1) - "Same when it's too hot." (participant 2) - "True. I might be thinking that with this superb weather I should be relaxing at the beach or whatever." (participant 1) (FG 4, younger participants)

"It [the impulse buy of a T-shirt] happened shortly before the baptism...I was in a pretty good mood. And I was on a weekend break and the weather was nice. Pretty unusual considering we were in England." (Nicole, younger participant)

The phrase "*I can only go shopping if I'm in a good mood*" (FG 4) supports previous research in so far as mood is considered as the most important influencing factor in view of psychological buying considerations in impulse buying (Dittmar et al., 1996). Nicole might have been excited about being on holiday abroad and being invited to a baptism. As previous research has shown, excited consumers are more likely to spend money on impulse (Rook and Gardner, 1993). Particularly the availability of time and feeling relaxed was important for the older participants for being in a good mood, for example Lena bought on impulse a soccer T-shirt for her little daughter:

"My mood was good. We had this bridge day on that Friday. Then you feel a bit relaxed because otherwise you hardly get around going shopping." (Lena, older participant)

A good mood with very positive feelings of excitement and happiness may become overwhelming and could entice the participants to do impulse buys with little regard to the money spent:

"A bit excited...When I have stored inside myself those moments or feelings of extreme happiness [German: Glücksmomente] then I don't care about the money but just go into town and simply spend the money. Well, that's okay then. At first it's okay. But for sure a few months later this may not be okay any more. If this has gone over the top."¹ (FG 9, older participants)

The impulse buy may be used to extend the feelings of happiness for a longer time. As the contribution from FG 9 implies, financial implications may only be considered some time later. One participant used her positive mood and went shopping with the intention to buy just anything:

¹ In German: „Ein bisschen aufgedreht...Wenn ich diese Glücksmomente oder Gefühle gespeichert hab und das halt, dann guck ich nicht auf's Geld, sondern dann geh ich in die Stadt und geb einfach das Geld aus. Also, das ist dann auch okay. Das ist erstmal okay. Aber das kann sich dann natürlich Monate später als nicht mehr okay zeigen. Wenn das überhand genommen hat.“

*"At lunchtime I picked up my son from the kindergarden and took him to my grandparents. Then I straight went shopping and it was a pretty nice day anyway. Personally I was in a good mood and I was really pretty happy [German: gefreut] that now I (emphasised) go shopping for myself and well, somehow that was pretty good. Anyway, I said to myself, today, no matter what happens I'm going to buy something. Just anything."*¹ (Brigitte, younger participant)

Brigitte's contribution reflects that being in a good mood with experiencing positive affect, the shopper has a bigger tendency towards an approach rather than an avoidance behaviour. She appears to give herself a treat or reward while in a very positive mood. According to Isen (2000) positive affect increases the tendency for fun activities and enjoyment. This behaviour of rewarding oneself and possibly extending the duration of a good mood state is in line with previous literature (for example Rook and Gardner, 1993). Findings from laboratory tests suggest that positive moods induce consumers to strive for generous rewards, which may trigger behaviours striving to maintain the positive mood state (Cunningham, 1979; Isen, 1984). Since moods are usually short-lived (Sheth et al., 1999), impulse buyers such as Brigitte may use impulse buying as a means to prolong this state. A good mood, however, is not a precondition for an impulse buy. Impulse buys may also occur when the shopper is in no particular good or bad mood as the next section will illustrate.

5.6.2 A Day like Every Day

A number of impulse buys in this study happened on a day like every day. The shopper was in no particular good or bad mood but felt this was an average day, as for example Lena describes when she bought on impulse a pair of stockings for her little daughter. To the question: 'How was your mood when you went shopping?' Lena (older participant) answered: *"Average, nothing special"*. Similarly Laura remembered when she bought on impulse a children's tent for her son that her mood was

"somewhere between average and good. Well, not really extraordinarily but not bad." (Laura, older participant)

¹ In German: „Ich hab mittags mal meinen Sohn direkt nach dem Kindergarten zu meinen Großeltern gebracht. Bin dann eigentlich auch direkt einkaufen gegangen, und das war schon ein ganz schöner Tag auch. Ich war persönlich gut drauf und hab mich dann auch wirklich echt gefreut, so jetzt mal einkaufen zu gehen, so für mich nochmal und ja, irgendwie war das schon was. So, auf jeden Fall kaufst was heute. Irgendwas muss mit.“

Neither Lena nor Laura appear to be excited about the impulse buy. Interestingly, in both cases the items were bought for their children. This lack of excitement might be due to limited involvement and the lack of importance of the purchase to them. Similar to an average mood, boredom is a mood state which can neither be considered as a positive, desirable mood nor equated with a bad mood. Boredom can be another trigger for impulse buying:

"When I'm really bored then I think, okay, right, now I'll look through that catalogue and then put down on a list what I could do with, what I'd fancy...Basically, when I'm sitting at the table with my parents and nobody wants to talk, then I'll grab the catalogue and have a look." (Diana, younger participant)

Boredom is considered an undesirable mood state which could be overcome by getting busy with thoughts about acquiring an item, which eventually may induce impulse buying (Rook and Gardner, 1993). For instance, in a supermarket environment boredom may also entice the shopper to spend extra time on browsing the shelves as experienced by Rebecca on her impulse buy of a deodorant:

"I was feeling a bit bored. I was pottering around [in that supermarket], looked ten times at the same stuff and up and down the aisle...because I had plenty of time on my hands for browsing...I was leisurely walking along the shelves and bought this that and the other." (Rebecca, older participant)

Corresponding to previous research (Rook and Gardner, 1993) Rebecca overcomes her boredom with actively browsing the shelves and eventually buying items on impulse. In this study none of the older participants or those with children report boredom in the context of impulse buying. The next section is centred round the impact of a bad mood on impulse buys.

5.6.3 Bad Mood and Mood Repair

Buying an item on impulse does not only occur while being in a positive or bored mood but also while suffering from a negative mood:

"When I'm in a really good mood that day and I simply feel great and then I'm going shopping and I buy something then I'm feeling even better...It could be the exact opposite, though, if something went completely wrong that I'd buy something to comfort me." (FG 10, older participants)

This corresponds to previous research that both positive and negative affective states may induce impulse buying (for example Faber and Christenson, 1995; Rook and Gardner, 1993; Youn and Faber, 2000). The majority of consumers in this study feel better after an impulse buy:

"When I'm in a bad mood, then I go shopping...I feel better afterwards...Already while going shopping I'm feeling better. Actually, then you are already thinking of something nice. Nice clothes." (FG 3, younger participants)

"I was tired, in a mood, feeling low, moping around. Had to go to that date. Really felt embarrassed and I thought of not going at all. Shortly before the date I bought those shoes [she laughs]. In any case, I was ever so happy [German: glücklich] that I had found those shoes. That really saved the day even though I felt rotten after the date."¹ (FG 1, mixed age group)

This improvement of a mood state induced by an impulse buy is in line with previous research (for example Faber and Christenson, 1995; Gardner and Rook, 1988). Rebecca was the only participant who revealed in the individual interviews consciously employing impulse buying as a method for mood repair:

¹ In German: „Müde, nörgelig, määääh, deprimiert. Musste zum Date. War mir schon richtig peinlich, wollte echt da schon nicht hingehen. Da hab ich die Schuhe gekauft, kurz vor nem Date (lacht). Ja, auf jeden Fall war ich dann total glücklich, dass ich die Schuhe gefunden hab. Und dann war irgendwie der Tag gerettet, auch wenn's mir danach dreckig ging.“

"When I leave work in the evening being frustrated...and simply go home...then the complete evening is nothing special. But when you buy something you really fancy, really on impulse, in particular when you are so frustrated as a woman, then you're happy [German: glücklich] again...You forget all about your worries. You are happy [German: freust dich] about what you bought, short term, and something you really like."¹ (Rebecca, older participant)

Rook and Gardner (1993) speak of a therapeutic role of impulse buying when consumers like Rebecca are mildly depressed, strive for a mood lift and want to put their worries aside. Although Rebecca does not draw on a particular impulse buy in her contribution, she is aware of the potentially positive effects of impulse buying on her mood state. According to a research from Dittmar et al. (1996) this aim to use an impulse buy to improve one's mood characterises Rebecca as being focussed on materialism and self-discrepancies.

Overall, the contributions in this study support previous research (for example O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Thompson et al., 1990) that women who feel bored or depressed are aware that impulse buying could be a possible remedy for any kind of bad mood to regain happiness. In addition, previous research found that women consider shopping as a socially acceptable leisure activity for mood repair (Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Elliott, 1994). Impulse purchases can be employed for someone who is depressed, frustrated or bored as an effective tactic for overcoming an undesirable mood state and to cheer oneself up (Gardner and Rook, 1988; Mick and DeMoss, 1990). Those shoppers who use impulse buying for mood repair may do this with little regard to the usability of the item. The actual item bought on impulse *"no matter what it is, cosmetics or whatever"* (FG 1, mixed age group) appears to be less important than the positive experience with the impulse buy which could make the shopper feel happy. Buying on impulse merely with the intention to overcome an undesirable mood state may result in a loss of control and possibly regret after the purchase. The theme of negative feelings in the context of mood repair is reflected in the following contribution:

¹ In German: „Wenn ich jetzt aber hier [aus der Arbeit] gefrustet rausgehe...einfach nur nach Hause fahre...dann ist der ganze Abend, so, ja, nichts Besonderes. Aber wenn du dir dann was kaufst, was dir auch gut gefällt, so spontan, dann auch, gerade wenn du so frustig bist als Frau, dann bist du da schon wieder glücklich...Du vergisst dann deine Sorgen einfach. Du freust dich über eine Sache, die du jetzt einfach erworben hast, kurzfristig, und die dir auch gefällt.“

"That's rather unsatisfactory and annoying. I got annoyed about myself and because I thought with buying out of frustration oh, that suits me and that fits quite well and once at home I realised that it looked stupid and didn't fit at all...Why did you bother buying that rubbish at all?" (FG 9, older participants)

This kind of impulse buy with buying *"that rubbish"* (FG 9) out of frustration supports previous research that cognition and behaviour are strongly affected by one's desire to maintain a happy mood (Mann, 1992). Impulse buying for mood repair may trigger an uplifting feeling which, though, might not last very long:

"When I buy out of frustration, then I buy something because I want to feel happy [German: glücklich]. But that does not last long. It does not take long until I'm not feeling happy [Geman: glücklich] any more."¹ (FG 7, younger participants)

In this context some authors speak of 'retail therapy' as the link between shopping and compensation for a bad mood (for example Woodruffe, 1996; Woodruffe, 1997) or the deliberate attempt to lift one's mood (Mick and DeMoss, 1990). While there are impulse buys which occur as in Rebecca's case with the original intention for mood repair, a negative mood as Nadia reports is not necessarily the trigger for an impulse buy:

"I didn't fancy going shopping at all. I just went along because I had to get something, a couple of things [clothes]. Didn't fancy at all putting on anything. I just bought something, whatever, because I thought it might be comfy and then I'll wear it...I wasn't in the mood at all. I was hungry and we were out and therefore I just wanted to hurry, hurry." (Nadia, younger participant)

Nadia's bad mood is not the trigger for impulse buying. Instead it comes across that she carried out her impulse buy despite her bad mood, which did not improve after the impulse buy. This is in line with Nadia's attitude as indicated in a previous section that she does not enjoy going shopping at all when in a negative mood state. As Nadia's contribution exemplifies impulse buying does not necessarily result in an improved mood state. Instead of deliberately using retail therapy for mood repair, an uplifted mood state may be the positive consequence or a by-product of an impulse buy without any intention in the beginning:

¹ In German: „Also, wenn ich über Frust kaufe, dann kaufe ich dann, um mich glücklich zu fühlen. Aber das dauert nicht so lange. Aber das dauert dann nicht so lange, bis man wieder sich nicht glücklich fühlt.“

"I was ever so tired from work. But because of my boyfriend's birthday coming up, I had to go into town. So, really I was not in the best mood...rushing through the shops hoping to get home as soon as possible. But when I had found the pair of trousers for myself, my mood improved considerably because I had bought something for myself." (Diana, younger participant)

Although Diana did not have the intention to overcome her unfavourable mood with an impulse buy, her mood brightened up after the purchase. This supports findings in the literature that the majority of consumers claim to feel better after an impulse purchase, which also induced mood changes and may generate a feeling of a high (for example Faber and Christenson, 1995; Gardner and Rook, 1988; Thompson et al., 1990). However, some participants in this study do not consider impulse buys capable of mood repair but perceive the opposite effect of an unfavourable mood state:

"If I'm very stressed and worn out or if I'm not in a good mood, I wouldn't go shopping...because I'd be thinking I don't need this, I don't need that and then I'd leave...I wouldn't buy anything." (participant 1) - "But it can save your day." (participant 2) - "Going shopping?" (participant 3) (FG 1, mixed age group)

"I don't go shopping when I'm ill-tempered." (participant 1) - "What else do you do then?" (participant 2) - "Then I'd stay at home and lock the door." (participant 1) (FG 10, older participants)

The contributions show controversial discussions between the participants in the focus groups and reflect that impulse buying is not necessarily considered as a remedy for mood repair. In this context Clark and Isen (1982) found that the effects of negative moods on behaviour are unclear and could produce either the same or the opposite effect of positive moods. Instead of going shopping to overcome a bad mood, some participants prefer for example staying at home as captured in the discussion in FG 10.

5.7 Behind the Scenes: The Inner Dialogue during Impulse Buying

The contributions of the participants indicate that there is an inner dialogue, which may occur at any time during the entire impulse buying experience. The potential buyer may reflect on themes such as 'Do I really need the item?', which will be

discussed in this section. She may have further doubts about going ahead with the purchase and re-considers the price. Although the impulse buyer may reveal a guilty conscience, this seems more akin to a ritual than genuine feelings of guilt. This section also includes a discussion of feelings of dissatisfaction, which may be experienced by the impulse buyer. The inner dialogue explored in this section sometimes comprises the shopper's imagination regarding the future use of the item. Thoughts of previous purchases may occur in the context of an impulse buy. This section concludes with an evaluation of the shopper's concerns about going home empty-handed after a trip into town.

5.7.1 Do I really need the Item?

Before making the impulse buying decision, several participants reflected about the actual need for an item:

"And then those tops I ordered. Just spotted them [in the catalogue] and just took a note. I hadn't intended to get them. And that I actually need them? Well, what do you really need?" (Diana, younger participant)

Diana's contribution relates to the overall discussion in the literature of the differences between a 'want' versus a 'need' (for example Solomon et al., 1998). Impulse buying may be equated with the purchase of non-necessity items:

"Well, impulse buys that's more like you buy something as a treat. But you don't really need it." (FG 9, older participants)

This is in accordance with Gabriel and Lang (2006) who associate consumerism with enjoying life for pleasure rather than need, which stands for an absolute requirement (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003). The contributions in this study focus on need in the sense of a desire and pleasure:

"You very rarely say I need a new jumper because all of us we have plenty of jumpers anyway. It's rather I fancy that jumper." (FG 5, younger participants)

In this context, Dittmar and Drury (2000) suggest that impulse buying is rather associated with treats and luxuries rather than with necessities. As captured in the contribution form FG 5 a need for an item does not have to be a genuine need in

terms of being short of something or running out of something. Instead it may be considered in the sense of "fancy" (FG 5 above) or an enjoyable need:

"There are so many things I need, for example handbags. Okay, fair enough, I've got loads of handbags or loads of shoes. I simply enjoy buying them because I can use them. I need them but it's always on impulse." (FG 7, younger participants)

In this context one participant suggests the wording "pleasure buy" (FG 10, older participants) for impulse buys of non-necessity items. Strack et al. (2006) suggest that affect plays a significant role in the impulsive system and can trigger impulsive responses in the context of desire. With a more detailed view, Berridge and Robinson (2003) distinguish in this context between wanting and liking as two separate neurological mechanisms: whereas wanting is a non-hedonic state characterised by cognitive incentive goals, liking is an affective reaction and linked to conscious pleasure. The majority of the participants are aware that they are often looking for an "excuse" (FG 2) and "make-believe justifications" (FG 9) for their impulse buys:

"When you buy a new pair of shoes, then you got the excuse that you need a new pair of trousers and a bag and so on which go with them." (FG 2, younger participants)

"I always come up with good reasons why I simply need to buy this now...[for example] I got nothing I could wear at work. Of course, that's silly nonsense...I had to buy it right away, I simply cannot help. So, really these are all make-believe justifications." (participant 1) - "You justify your purchases?" (participant 2) - "Yeah." (participant 1) (FG 9, older participants)

As discussed earlier according to previous research, impulse buying is often associated with a stigma. Therefore the chain of argument in the contribution from FG 9 might be subconsciously felt to be necessary to justify the purchase in front of oneself and other people. In this context Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) suggest that consumers may resort to making various rationalisations which counteract any attempt of a rational cost evaluation and are centred around feelings of entitlement, such as "you work hard, so you deserve to play hard" (p.502). In fact, only a few participants in this study expressed a genuine need for items that might have got broken or are unusable and need to be replaced:

"One pair of my trousers were rotten and then I had a need for a new pair of trousers for everyday use. So that I...don't have to go in the nude to school or into college." (FG 7, younger participants)

When specifically asked what they take into consideration when deciding on buying an item on impulse (see Appendix F, question 7), the participants in all focus groups came up with a need as one of the motivations for an impulse buy:

"Then I'd be thinking do I really need it? If its clothes then I'd be thinking, am I really going to wear that? Or do I simply fancy it because it looks nice?" (FG 3, younger participants)

Lena for example remembers her string of thoughts about the actual need of a T-shirt for her daughter:

"The only thing you're thinking about is...in your mind you're thinking of your wardrobe, what's in there already? Do we really need a T-shirt and a pair of trousers?" (Lena, older participant)

These contributions allude to a utilitarian need, which makes the consumer consider objective, functional aspects of the product in question. Kacen and Lee (2002) suggest that the rapid decision-making in impulse buying does not allow a well thought through evaluation of alternatives and gathering of information prior to the purchase. However, considering Lena's contribution it does not appear that she is short of time and forced to make a quick decision, which would stop her from collecting information about possible buying alternatives.

If an item is of no use to the buyer, it may not be purchased. For instance, underwear was one of the most often mentioned impulse buys in all focus groups and there was agreement that: *"You always need underwear"* (FG 6, younger participants):

"Well, that's really terrible with underwear. My drawer is full of underwear but somehow I still feel I need some new. At least that's how I feel." (participant 1) (everybody supportively nods) - "Yes, that's true. Oh, I haven't got that colour or design yet. I could do with a different colour." (participant 2) (FG 4, younger participants)

The minority of participants rejected impulse buying for being a waste of money because the item proves to be unnecessary:

"I don't care much for impulse buying because I don't like wasting money when I buy things I don't need." (participant 1) - "I don't think so." (participant 2) - "I don't either." (participant 3) (FG 7, younger participants)

This is in accordance with some researchers (for example Solnick et al., 1980) who claim that impulse buying is wasteful and risky. Most participants disagreed with the negative view from the literature that impulse buying is a waste of money:

"It could be something useful. It doesn't always have to be the pink featherboa scarf." (FG 2, younger participants)

The majority of participants in this study argue that impulse buying does not mean buying senselessly:

"I wouldn't buy anything I couldn't make any use of. I wouldn't buy a one-wheeler if I couldn't ride one for example." (FG 10, older participants)

In fact, the marginal need for an item was already considered by early research (Stern, 1962) to be of major influence in impulse buying. While a genuine need for an item may currently not exist, there might be a future need for it. Therefore this item might be purchased on impulse when coming across it rather than looking for it on a planned shopping trip:

"I know whether or not I need it...If I need a new suit for work, then I'd get it when I spot one...Because often enough I've experienced something like oh, shit, now you've run through town for such a long time and you didn't find what you have been looking for." (FG 8, older participants)

This exemplifies that impulse buyers may also consider a potential future need for an item. It does not appear that the impulse buyer in FG 8 is out of control and prepared to take risky and wasteful decisions aiming for a short-term gratification as widely claimed in the literature on impulse buying (for example Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Rook, 1987; Rook and Fisher, 1995). In-store stimuli may remind the shopper of a latent need for an item as experienced by Lena who was shopping at Ikea:

"On the way to the check-out we spotted that jug and got it...I had wanted something like this for quite some time already. I never think about it when I'm shopping but whenever I make that vanilla sauce I never know where to put it." (Lena, older participant)

In line with Kollat and Willet's (1967) statement, actual or future needs may be remembered once the shopper is confronted with the in-store stimulus. Abratt and Goodey (1990) found that the reason for 25 percent of all unplanned purchases was a need for a product the shoppers remembered. Practical implications of the impulse buy played a role in Lena's considerations about her impulse buy:

"I only thought that the cupboard might be full and that nothing else fits into it unless I throw something...And then we [her husband and herself] said we'll find a space. That was it." (Lena, older participants)

Although the decision-making was not time consuming and did not include the evaluation of different alternatives, it still involved a certain consideration of potential consequences, such as practical implications. These experiences suggest that consumers may consider the need for an item also in impulse buying situations. This challenges prior research (for example Rook, 1987) that none or only a limited reflection is made regarding the consequences of an impulse buy.

5.7.2 What about the Price?

Apart from considerations about the need of an item and further thoughts about its practicality or storage place, a number of impulse buyers in this study reflected about the price:

"I'd be thinking, fine, one day I'll need the fret-saw...Maybe if it's on offer at the moment then I might say, okay, fine that's a good price, I'll get it." (FG 8, older participants)

It appears that impulse buyers may reconsider the expense of an item in terms of affordability and potential financial impacts and eventually refrain from making an impulse buy:

"I cannot just waste my money like that and go shopping and say, ah, well, I'll just get myself this or that. There are other things that need to be paid for, well, not just shopping goods. You need to think about what you do with your money." (FG 3, younger participants)

The majority of impulse buyers in this study appeared to be aware of possible budgetary constraints prior to the impulse buy:

"Those shoes, I need them, I required them. That was another 30 Euro. And usually I don't have an issue with money because usually I can manage with my money. But then I thought, right, only on Saturday I had spent 30 Euro and now another 30 Euro. So I thought, right, okay, fine, I'll get new money on Thursday. So it won't be a problem." (Natascha, younger participant)

Contrary to Rook (1987) who suggests that impulse buyers tend to feel more out of control than planned buyers and only pay limited regard to the consequences, the reflections and considerations of impulse buyers in this study convey the impression that they are in control of their decision-making. The considerations prior to impulse buying are opposed to Assael's (1985) assumption that impulse buying stands for low-involvement purchases of low-priced products or services. On the other hand Rook (1987) claims that any products may be bought on impulse including items that go up to or even exceed one's cash or credit limit. In this regard, however, the shoppers usually protect themselves from making an impulse buy and apply a resistance strategy:

"I don't even try it on. When I see it's let's say 500 Euro, then I'd think, no, wait." (FG 4, younger participants)

"I don't go into certain shops...I wouldn't go into a Gucci store to get something there. So, I do know my limits." (FG 7, younger participants)

This may be another hint that impulse buyers watch their credit limit and reconsider their purchase more carefully than anticipated in the literature. None of the participants in this study reported financial difficulties arising as a consequence of an impulse buy. Interestingly, once the shopper had decided against the impulse purchase due to the price, the central reason is sometimes not the affordability of the item but rather because the item does not come up to expectations and is not worth the money:

"Yes, it was simply too expensive...The item wasn't nice enough. Fair enough, if this was the item for which I had been looking and searching everywhere for years, fine, I would have given in and bought it. But other than that?" (FG 10, older participants)

As the item was too expensive possibly the shopper searches for explanations for rejecting the impulse buy with the intention to avoid negative feelings. Special offers attract impulse buyers and may be more important than an actual desire or need for the item:

"Once I bought a purple coloured shirt at Cooper. That was ever so ugly. Down from 200 Euro to 40 Euro. So I thought, might as well get it." (FG 5, younger participants)

"Even though it was not really sensible because I might not need it...but still there was a sense of rationality behind it because it was not as expensive as before. Maybe I can use it one day." (FG 2, younger participants)

A special offer is usually time-limited and may therefore entice the shopper to make the impulse buying decision on the spot to avoid missing out on a very good deal:

"Then I'd think you simply have to go for it because...when it's reduced then you have no idea how long it'll be left on the shelf." (FG 2, younger participants)

Losing out on this deal could trigger negative feelings. A low-priced item or an item on offer often stimulates the impulse buying decision because the potential risk appears to be limited:

"I don't feel obliged to read them [coffee-table books] from cover to cover because I'd think, ah well, it was so cheap, I just flip through it and read whatever I fancy." (FG 2, younger participants)

In this case the perceived risk, which describes the degree of loss due to the wrong choice (Sheth et al., 1999), is limited because of the low price. The low price of the item can make the impulse buyer feel relaxed and enjoy her purchase, which may generate positive feelings. On the other hand, Brigitte treated herself to a premium-priced brand of running shoes instead of going for the cheaper alternative:

"Those would have only cost me 70 Euro and I really favoured them, just moneywise. But the more expensive ones somehow convinced me...Fine, I'll spend another 30 Euro on top because it's a one-off investment I don't make every year." (Brigitte, younger participant)

Beyond the actual price of the item, Brigitte gave even more consideration to the future consequences of the pair of running shoes she was about to buy on impulse:

"Because when you want to go for a run you got really good running shoes and with my old ones I always had pain in my hips afterwards...now with these running shoes that puts your conscience at ease." (Brigitte, younger participant)

This contribution reveals that impulse buying may also include long-term consideration of the consequences instead of focussing solely on the short-term gratification. Dittmar et al. (1996) refer to price and usefulness as functional buying considerations in impulse buying. On the other hand, the impulse buyers may only pretend to consider long-term impacts as a means of justification. Nonetheless, the examples illustrated in this section indicate that impulse buying does not necessarily imply a sudden urge with limited regard to any consequences, or stand for immaturity and irrationality as claimed in the literature.

5.7.3 The Ritual of the Guilty Conscience

Impulse buying activities may appear in a negative light because the shopper perceives she has not given adequate consideration to the implications of the purchase. The purchased item may not be used in the end, which may generate a guilty conscience:

"With an impulse buy I mostly make mistakes and afterwards I don't like it anyway or it was too expensive in the end. Anyway, I have a guilty conscience when I bought something on impulse. It's because I don't really think about it long enough. Do I need it or not, am I really going to put it on? It might look quite nice as such but it might end up in my wardrobe without me putting it on." (FG 3, younger participants)

It appears that the shopper has doubts about her choice because she feels she has not given enough time on reconsidering the purchase. In the literature consumer guilt is referred to as a negative emotion which is triggered by a violation of one's values or norms through a purchase decision and may imply a decrease of the buyer's self-esteem (for example Burnett and Lunsford, 1994). The shopper appears to be steered automatically when surrendering to the buying impulse:

"That I was out of control that really annoys me. Really, I've done something I didn't want to do." (FG 5, younger participants)

"I'm feeling frustrated after the shopping trip because I've bought something on impulse." (FG 2, younger participants)

These negative statements about impulse buying do not appear to be based on an actual disappointment about the item bought on impulse, a quality issue, a lack of need, or being dissatisfied about the price. These contributions do not imply

feelings of genuine guilt or regret about the impulse buy. Instead they indicate that the shopper is aware of the stigma attached to impulse buying and appears to reject the purchase only because it was an impulse buy.

Some impulse buys may turn out to be *"any kind of rubbish I don't need"* (FG 7, younger participants). In this context some participants mentioned Ikea:

"At Ikea I always buy any kind of rubbish. Some napkins or just about anything." (participant 1) - "And it's soo cheap." (participant 2) - "Exactly. They're cheap, they go with that tablecloth...At home...you think, oh, dear now I bought the 50000th napkin and I'd put them into the drawer." (participant 1) (FG 5, younger participants)

These participants do not claim, however, to regret their impulse buys of the napkins. These contributions from FG 5 may be considered more as an excuse for buying on impulse than a feeling of guilt. This kind of ritual of a guilty conscience comes across in the following contribution:

"I only have a guilty conscience if I buy something for myself...Well, if I buy something for someone else, for my children some clothes or something for Daniel [her husband], then I don't have any regrets. The problem is that I'll ask myself do I [emphasised] really need that?" (FG 8, older participants)

Possibly this shopper in her role as a mother feels that she is expected to have a guilty conscience because she has spent some money on herself instead of her family. This contribution also implies that the shopper may be in doubt whether she deserves to buy something for herself. This kind of guilty conscience may occur in any situation where the shopper feels she does not put her family first. The guilty conscience may be a kind of ritual instead of being connected to the actual impulse buy. In the literature this kind of guilt is referred to as moral and social responsibility guilt (Burnett and Lunsford, 1994).

Feelings of a guilty conscience due to the money spent may be outweighed by the overall benefit of mood repair:

"One day I was feeling poorly. So I went to the hair-dresser spontaneously, then into the cinema, afterwards met up with a friend for a drink and then I was feeling really great. And afterwards I had kind of guilty conscience that I had spent over the limit of my financial budget but I don't do that every day." (FG 8, older participants)

Although the shopper may be pleased with the impulse buy, she appears to be aware that spending beyond one's financial means may not be perceived by others in a positive light. This may be the reason why she admits a *"kind of guilty conscience"*. She justifies the expense with the exceptional circumstance of a bad mood. In addition, overspending does not occur every day.

Some participants, as captured in the contributions from FG 8 above, appear to be aware of the stigma attached to impulse buying in terms of being out of control, following an urge and a potentially negative impact on satisfaction after the purchase. Traditionally the literature in psychology has associated impulsive behaviour with immaturity and limited intelligence (for example Böhm-Bawerk, 1959; Freud, 1911). This might be the reason why the shoppers provide unprompted explanations as to why they feel their particular impulse buy is justified:

*"There's me in those fitting rooms and everything fits perfectly and everything looks really nice. And there's me thinking, oh, please no!" (participant 1) - "S***, that looks so damned good, now I have to buy it." (participant 2) (everybody is laughing) (FG 9, older participants)*

The contributions of the two participants in FG 9 imply that they should feel guilty about spending money. However, they justify their decisions with the item itself being *"really nice"* and fitting perfectly that it would be wrong not to buy it on the spot. Their contribution implies that they expect everybody would give in to the buying urge. Less than a genuine guilty conscience, it appears that mentioning guilt is more an excuse for having done something unreasonable but enjoyable. Although the shoppers mention a guilty conscience, they still evaluate their impulse buy in a positive light:

"The best thing was that I found a pair of jeans that really fit me...I didn't really like that feeling of a guilty conscience because of the price when I was at the check-out." (Brigitte, younger participant)

Nicole bought a skirt at Esprit which she perceives as expensive but she still feels generally satisfied with the impulse buy:

"I'm looking forward to wearing it [the skirt]. True, it hurts a bit thinking that, well, it was quite expensive but really all in all I'm definitely satisfied." (Nicole, younger participant)

Junk food may be well liked, yet the money spent on it is regretted:

"Afterwards I always regret having had a take-away or eating out because I could have had food much cheaper at home...Well, I liked the food but there was no need for me to waste my money on it." (FG 3, younger participants)

In line with previous research (Dittmar and Drury, 2000) an impulse buyer may regret the purchase in some respect, while at the same time the purchase may not be regretted in others. Rather than the total amount of money spent on an impulse buy it may be value for money which more affects the evaluation of a purchase. Laura for example deems the expense of two Euro for blueberries pricey but her desire to buy the fruits outweighs her inhibitions about the price:

"Well, really two Euro for a hundred grams, that's really quite expensive. But, well, I don't know. I fancied them that second and so I bought them." (Laura, older participant)

There is little evidence in Laura's excerpt as well as in other contributions in this study of feelings of genuine guilt connected to impulse buying experiences. The overall positive experience with the impulse buy usually exceeds the negative side, including the money spent. Although non-required or extravagant expenditures may trigger negative feelings, the guilty conscience is more connected to a ritual than an actual feeling of guilt.

5.7.4 Dissatisfaction

Impulse buys may result in cognitive dissonance, meaning that expectations do not equate the outcome. Expectations may be higher or lower compared to the actual evaluation of the purchase. Cognitive dissonance may cause pleasant, unpleasant or neutral reactions. Despite the undesired outcome of an impulse buy, the shopper's overall evaluation may be neutral:

"I bought that deodorant but I have to admit that it's not my cup of tea and it leaves those white stains what I don't like...I'm not really satisfied. I think I won't use it any more and rather get a new one...Well, I wasn't really annoyed or anything. But I'm not thrilled either. Say, it's kind of a neutral feeling." (Rebecca, older participant)

Instead of blaming herself for having made the wrong buying decision, the impulse buyer may not perceive this negative outcome as her personal fault:

"We spotted the tent in the weekly flyer from Aldi. We went there and got that tent. That was pretty much on impulse. A few days later we put the tent together the first time and two parts broke. Then I was really annoyed. I wanted to return it but so far I hadn't come round to doing so." (Laura, older participant)

Laura expressed her feelings of anger and clearly blames the poor quality of the tent as the cause for her disappointment. This is in accordance with existing research that satisfaction is mainly determined by the performance of the purchased item (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Yi, 1990):

"Well, I should have bought another one [mascara]... because it smears...I didn't realise this. Well, the one I had before that was a pretty good one. Well, I think I should have bought that one but now it's too late...I was a bit annoyed because well, it was quite expensive for a mascara, since it didn't turn out the way I wanted it...It's not the end of the world and not all that bad but of course I'm dissatisfied a bit." (Nicole, younger participant)

When expectations are not met, the buyer may be dissatisfied. Similarly, the design of a product may not come up to expectations:

*"I bought those high heels, black ones. They really looked ever so cool, like trainers. Black with yellow stripes. And in that moment I really thought they are ever so nice, fantastic. And when I returned home I thought that I don't like yellow. So I painted it over with a black pen (everybody is laughing). Now it's turned into green which looks even crappier than before. So, they are now in my shoe shelf and I cannot wear them...The worst thing is and that really annoys me they were f***ing expensive. And that annoys me. I could have bought three pairs of shoes for that price." (FG 9, older participants)*

Although the shoppers may be annoyed or dissatisfied with the outcome of their purchase, this might have also occurred in a planned buying situation. In the literature the term 'regret' is generally used for describing disappointment because something was done or not done (Landman, 1987). Previous research suggests that this kind of regret or, as expressed by Nicole, dissatisfaction occurs because of the awareness that the foregone alternative would have performed better than the chosen one (for example Boles and Messick, 1995; Landman, 1987; Zeelenberg et al., 1996). If an item does not come up to expectations, this may be

considered as "no problem as I never spend a lot on those impulse buys" (FG 2, younger participants). However, a price which is perceived as cheap does not necessarily protect the impulse buyer from experiencing negative feelings:

*"I was in that cash and carry and saw some trainers, but they weren't Nike. I quickly thought which ones should I buy now and eventually bought the cheapies. Outside I thought why on earth did you buy these trainers for? I should have rather saved the money and then I could have bought the Nikes right away...I was really p****ed off."*
(FG 3, younger participants)

When the impulse buyer realises that the purchased item has never been used, feelings of frustration may develop:

"Three months later [after the impulse buy] I'd see it [the item], oh, it's still there. Okay, okay, I'll put it on next time. That's ever so frustrating, really."
(FG 6, younger participants)

"At first you're always happy but then after a week or so you'd start thinking why did you do it at all? You could have done anything with that money." (FG 6, younger participants)

Feelings of regret may be experienced when the item turns out to be of no use and is perceived as expensive:

"I think it's rather that afterwards I'd realise a) I don't need it and b) it was terribly expensive. That's when I'd say I regret the purchase." (FG 8, older participants)

Although shoppers may remember a negative experience with an impulse buy, this appears to occur on the rare occasions. The contributions do not support previous research which typically expects impulse buying to exert a negative impact on post-purchase satisfaction (for example Rook 1987; Rook and Hoch, 1985). According to Wood (1998a) impulse buying is frequently considered to result in dissatisfaction and regret. Rook (1987) found that over 80 percent of his sample reported negative consequences resulting from their purchases. It is argued that a majority of buyers would prefer to decrease their spending on impulse buys if they could change their shopping habits (Wood, 1995). However, the dissatisfaction revealed by the impulse buyers in this study is mainly due to quality and performance issues of the purchased item. The actual impulse buying experience is usually not blamed for causing negative feelings.

Feelings of disappointment appear to occur less often with increasing age as captured in the following contributions from younger and older participants:

"If you get 20 cheap items then you should have rather bought one or two really nice items where you perfectly know you're definitely going to wear it...I make the mistake again and again." (participant 1) - "Me too." (participant 2) (FG 6, younger participants)

"Maybe ten years ago...someone could easily talk you into something...but I think you get more self-assured with what you need and want...We've made our experiences with those one-off fashion items and that's not like that any more." (FG 8, older participants)

The shoppers try and recall previous experiences and re-consider the impulse buying decision more carefully. Reflecting on negative experiences appears to slow down an impulse buying decision and make room for reconsideration and possibly rather rejecting the impulse buy. Only on the rare occasion the older participants make impulse purchases which do not meet their expectations. For instance Carmen (older participant) estimates experiencing fewer than one regretful impulse buy per year:

"I bought something on impulse the day before yesterday in that baby store what I already regret. But that is for sure the only thing I regret having bought for more than a year. We looked for prams...but didn't find anything...And they sold those music boxes for babies and I bought one because I quite fancied it...I found it quite nerve-racking that it only played the first few tones but not the complete sleeping song...So I decided to take it back...I was disappointed but that's really within limits." (Carmen, older participant)

Possibly the inner dialogue of the more mature shoppers is more extensive as they are more experienced with impulse buying:

"It very often happened to me that I thought oh, shit what silly nonsense did I buy now...I've changed. These days I might find something spontaneously but I'd be reconsidering it at least ten times whether or not I should buy it." (FG 2, younger participants)

"When I was younger I bought loads of unnecessary things but over the years I passed that stage. And now, really with every single purchase, even if it's on impulse I still reconsider it before buying. Today I'm not totally unhappy with any of my purchases or about having spent so much money for it." (Brigitte, younger participant)

With increasing age and maturity, the impulse buy may be reconsidered more carefully and less often cause feelings of regret. In addition, impulse buyers may apply strategies to reduce or avoid feelings of disappointment. These include passing on an unwanted item to someone else (FG 4) or finding an alternative use for the item (FG 9):

"Cosmetics for facial skin care...Oh, and today you might as well try the one from Nivea and next day the one from L'Oreal and then you'd end up with five different cremes at home and you don't like any of them. And then you'd use them as body lotion. Or for your hands." (FG 9, older participants)

"Once I bought a blouse. I simply bought it and I really fancied it. But I've never worn it...It's been in my wardrobe for three years and now I've passed it on to my sister." (FG 4, younger participants)

Although these strategies for avoiding negative feelings were mentioned in the particular context of impulse purchases, they are triggered by the unsatisfactory outcome of the purchase. In this respect these strategies may also be applied to planned purchases.

5.7.5 A Vivid Imagination: The Future Use of the Item and Previous Purchases

Impulse buyers can have a vivid imagination when considering an impulse buy. This includes thoughts about the future use of the item and may also incorporate experiences with prior purchases. Impulse buyers appear to reflect more about their impulse buy and its consequences than generally expected. Natascha for example tries to figure out the perfect occasion to wear an elegant top:

"I thought of meetings or whatever. If it's too elegant or if it's just about right and then I thought that'll be all right. I can just wear this in the office." (Natascha, younger participant)

Instead of devising strategies for impulse resistance (for example Dholakia, 2000), shoppers such as Natascha imagine for example the future use of the item in question. A few participants in this study thought about their clothes at home and if the new item would go with it before going ahead with the impulse buy:

"Yes, I thought what T-shirts I got and if I got anything that goes with it. And actually I already got one [at home] that would go pretty well with it...And then I thought what shoes have I got that go with it?...And then I thought, ah, that colour - I don't have that colour yet and not even that style...And then I thought, well, the summer is approaching and in May I'm probably going on holiday for a week and then I thought, I could do with it." (Nicole, younger participant)

Nicole did not grab the skirt and made a hasty decision as the impulse buying literature suggests (Jones et al., 2003) but considered in much detail if it makes sense for her to buy this skirt. However, not all participants thought about their impulse buys in that much detail:

"I didn't think of anything. The approaching summer and that I can wear them in my spare time." (Nadia, younger participant)

Past experiences may play a role in impulse buying. For instance, Nadia's previous experience with goggles played a role when buying on impulse:

"Yes, I was thinking about my last holidays. Because in particular those particular goggles, they had been leaking all the time. Therefore snorkelling wasn't fun because the water always leaked in." (Nadia, younger participant)

Past memories associated with positive emotions and memories of her own childhood played a role when Laura bought on impulse a children's magazine for her son:

"Bussibär¹. That was quite spontaneous really. I was shopping as usual and this rack with magazines was shortly before the check-out. And then I thought, oh, he [her son] could do with a new magazine for reading and drawing. And then I saw the Bussibär magazine and I knew that one from when I was young...I used to like it quite a lot and he really looks cute. So, well, Kevin might like it, too. So I simply got it." (Laura, older participant)

Previous product experiences as in the case of Nadia and Laura but also previous experiences with shopping situations may be part of the impulse buying experience as reported by the majority of participants in this study. Nicole for example was reminded of her previous buying experience of a T-shirt when she considered buying a skirt on impulse:

¹ Bussibär is a German children's magazine with stories and adventures of a little bear called 'Bussibär'.

"The T-Shirt I was wearing then, that went so well with it [the skirt]. I bought it shortly before. I had been re-considering buying it for quite some time, shall I buy it or not? And then at first I didn't buy it. Went back a couple of days later, hoping it's still there. And only then I bought it. And therefore I thought I'll get the skirt straight away because when I fancy something and think about it for quite some time...usually I don't get it out of my system. And so now I thought, all right, I'll get it straight away and don't hang around." (Nicole, younger participant)

A previous experience with a different product might influence the actual impulse buying decision as explained by Nicole. This contradicts the assumption in the impulse buying literature regarding a lack of consideration of potential realistic consequences (Rook, 1987). The next section discusses the phenomenon of foregoing an impulse buy and returning home empty-handed.

5.7.6 Empty-handed

The majority of the younger participants in the focus groups remembered experiences that the item bought on impulse mattered less compared to the importance to avoid returning home empty-handed. Therefore anything may be bought, such as

"postcards or posters. Or just something from the bakery or whatever. The only thing that matters is to buy something." (FG 4, younger participant)

One motivation for impulse buying includes the fear of leaving town empty-handed. Taking something home from a trip into town visualises the success of the shopping trip:

"When I'm out shopping, and then I buy something on impulse simply because I didn't find anything else, of course that makes me feel happy [German: glücklich] because I can go home and so to speak have been successful on this shopping trip."¹ (FG 7, younger participants)

¹ In German: „Also, wenn man an sich beim Einkaufen ist und dann was spontan kauft, weil man nichts anderes findet, dann macht mich das natürlich glücklich, weil ich dann nach Hause gehen kann und sozusagen Erfolg bei diesem Einkaufsbummel hatte.“

Low-cost items such as *"those stupid socks"* (FG 5, younger participants), ice-cream, sweets (FG 9, older participants) or little toys (FG 5, younger participants) were mentioned most often as typical impulse buys when buying *"for the sake of buying"* (FG 5):

"Well, I don't need it but the other week I bought a little fluffy piglet (everybody is laughing)...Just for the sake of buying something. I was shopping all day and didn't find anything at all and then I said to myself, fine, I'll get this now." (everybody is laughing) (FG 5, younger participants)

Underwear was one of the most often mentioned impulse buys in all groups in order to avoid returning home empty-handed because it is always of some use:

"With me it's usually that if I don't find anything, then I always go into the underwear department and buy underwear." (FG 6, younger participants)

Going home empty-handed is associated with negative consequences and includes feelings of having wasted one's time and money spent on train tickets, petrol or parking:

"You pay your petrol money to get into town and pay for parking and then you'd want something back for this." (participant 1) - "I only got 10 minutes walking distance into town and I still have a bad feeling. See, without parking fee, without petrol money, without spending anything for getting into town. There's me in the city centre and I still have a bad feeling about going home empty-handed." (participant 2) - "But [the petrol money and parking fee] that's a good excuse for me." (participant 1) - "See, I don't have one." (participant 2) (FG 5, younger participants)

This discussion between the two group participants indicates that there seems to be general awareness among the shoppers to merely look for excuses to rationalise their impulse buy. However, participant 2 conveys the impression that the motivations for the impulse buy in this situation are rather psychological, similar to feeling an urge. Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) suggest that arriving empty-handed at home after a shopping trip feels like having wasted one's time and the desired boost of one's self-esteem is not achieved. The daunting thought of leaving the shop empty-handed might have encouraged Nicole to make a purchase:

"I was happy having found something. There were quite a few things I didn't like at all and then I was rather glad that I had found something [a T-shirt] I fancied. Because when you have a look round, you really want to find something so that you didn't go into the store all in vain." (Nicole, younger participant)

The contributions imply that an unsuccessful shopping trip, which means returning home without any purchase, might have a negative impact on the shopper. Some shoppers bought gifts on impulse to avoid going home empty-handed:

*"Going home without anything that's impossible."
(participant 1) - "Exactly. Even if it's just underwear. Or a little something or whatever. Or, I buy something for someone else." (participant 2) (FG 9, older participants)*

Although some older shoppers like in FG 9 were concerned about returning home empty-handed, the older shoppers in this study usually seemed to care less about going home empty-handed, for example:

"I had a couple of things on my shopping list but didn't find anything. It would have been okay if I hadn't bought anything." (Carmen, older participant)

In fact, the majority of those shoppers who participated in the individual interviews were not concerned about returning home empty-handed after a trip into town. For instance, when Carmen was asked how she would have felt if she had not even bought the pair of socks on impulse, she reiterated:

"Yes, yes. It would have been okay. Certainly. Well, I was contented. It wasn't like that I absolutely had to buy something." (Carmen, older participant)

It appears that Carmen did not intentionally buy the pair of socks in order to avoid returning home empty-handed. In a slightly different sense returning home empty-handed was an issue to some participants in the sense of spotting a desirable item without buying it:

"If I hadn't gone into Pimkie and hadn't spotted those trousers, then it wouldn't really matter. But seeing those trousers and then thinking, oh, no, won't buy them now, then I'd be ever so annoyed now because I didn't get them." (Diana, younger participant)

This feeling of annoyance may result in returning back to the shop later on:

"I think the evening with the musical would have been absolutely great anyway even if I hadn't spotted the earrings and if I hadn't liked them, then I wouldn't miss anything. But since I had spotted them, well, I think that if I hadn't bought them, I would have been wondering about them all the time, 'oh, dear, those earrings are soooo nice. I'd really like to get them. Come on, let's go back there again'. That's what I would have said to him [her boyfriend]." (Rebecca, older participant)

If a desired item had been spotted, the impulse buy of this item may avoid the occurrence of negative emotions as the buyer does not return home empty-handed and does not feel having missed out on something. Having spotted a desirable item preoccupies the mind of these shoppers on this item and often only the impulse purchase relieves this feeling. Returning home without having purchased an item may feel to some shoppers as having wasted her time whereas mainly the older shoppers remain unaffected when they did not buy anything on a trip into town.

5.8 Time in Impulse Buying

The theme of 'Time in Impulse Buying' explores the factor time from different angles: Firstly, the variable 'time' can play a role in impulse buying, for example being in a hurry or vice versa having plenty of time available and meandering round town may affect the decision to buy on impulse. Secondly, time is investigated in view of the required time for impulse buying. Finally the use of the item either right after the purchase or later on will be discussed.

5.8.1 In a Hurry or: On the Run

Being in a hurry and short of time may have different impacts on impulse buying behaviour. For some shoppers, being on the run has adverse effects on their inclination to buy on impulse:

"If I'm really rushed, then I don't even fancy going shopping. Not at all." (FG 4, younger participants)

Similarly, some shoppers talked about their dislike to rush into a shop whereas others do not mind buying something in a hurry:

*"Shortly before closing time I'd never consider to buy anything on impulse." (participant 1) - "I would walk into the shop nonetheless and I'd just hurry up."
(participant 2) (FG 1, mixed age group)*

An example for a purchase made on the run is the following impulse buy of a dress taking no longer than five minutes while on a school excursion:

*"He [our schoolteacher] showed us those old [Roman] town walls and on our way back there was that dress in the shop window at Laura Ashley...I still think it's wonderful. I asked my classmates to wait five minutes for me. I rushed into the shop. I put on the dress over my trousers and bought it right away. Right away."
(FG 2, younger participants)*

The quick decision-making described by this participant is characteristic of impulse buying. Previous literature claims that stress, for example due to extreme time pressure in decision-making, is likely to result in impulsive and risky decisions (Janis and Mann, 1977). Although this participant in FG 2 was in a rush, the lack of time did not appear to have a negative impact on her decision-making and she reveals that she still likes the dress and did not regret the purchase. Those shoppers who usually have less time available for shopping were mothers such as Lena who was in a rush when buying a stool on impulse:

"I was on my own. I only had five minutes time and I was on my way from work to pick up my little one from the childminder. And then I made a small detour to the Danish Shop because I had to get that birthday present for the boy from next door...I only remember that I had to be quick...And in-between there's really hardly any time left for shopping. Actually no time." (Lena, older participant)

On another occasion Lena bought leggings for her little daughter and again she was in a hurry:

"The trouble is that I'm always short of time." (Lena, older participant)

Participants like Lena who have children often report being short of time and may squeeze in an impulse buy between other duties:

"Shopping is something I'm doing in-between." (FG 10, older participants)

Inside the shoe store Brigitte was

"in the end sort of stressed because I was supposed to go home to do the cooking" (Brigitte, younger participant)

and bought on impulse three pairs of shoes. These contributions suggest that mothers, who tend to be generally short of time, do not appear to be negatively affected in their impulse buying tendency by this lack of time.

5.8.2 Time on my Hands or: Window shopping and 'bummeln'¹

In the majority of cases impulse buying was associated with leisurely walking through the shops instead of rushing. The majority of participants report they are more likely to buy on impulse when they have sufficient time available:

"It's simply time...If you haven't got the time and you are stressed and rushing quickly through the supermarket, then get your three items. Then you don't buy as much on impulse compared to when you've got time on your hands, walking leisurely." (FG 8, older participants)

Spending time for oneself going shopping with a relaxed attitude may be considered as something enjoyable and crucial in the impulse buying process and may eventually increase one's impulse spending:

"I went afterwards into the gym but I wasn't in a hurry or anything. I really took my time looking and comparing all different ones [mascaras], went back and forth, compared prices, just looking. It wasn't that I was in a hurry at all and rushed to get one. I really took my time." (Nicole, younger participant)

A number of participants specifically talked of 'bummeln' and having plenty of time available as a potential trigger for impulse buys:

¹ The German term 'bummeln' [bum|n] is a kind of window shopping, meandering through town with no particular buying intention, pottering around. 'Bummeln' means that people have plenty of time available for enjoying having a look round town, going for a coffee, often enjoying someone else's company.

"I enjoy 'bummeln' [window shopping], I enjoy just having a look. What I don't care much for is looking for something in particular because I then feel dissatisfied when I don't find it. Just simply going out, having a look, no particular goal and whenever anything crosses my way, right, then buying it. That's what I really enjoy." (Carmen, older participant)

'Bummeln' itself may provide a positive emotion as it is perceived as an enjoyable activity. An impulse buy may be the by-product of this trip into town. The major intention of 'bummeln' is spending a relaxing time without feeling pressurised as Carmen sums up:

"Just wait and see what happens. Just going out, just having a look. No stress, no pressure." (Carmen, older participant)

Often 'bummeln' was reported in conjunction with another person, for example husband or family:

"The weekend before this one we went to my parents in law and there we usually go shopping because we had plenty of time. Just a bit 'bummeln' [window shopping] with nothing particular on my mind...You're quite relaxed then because at home you have hardly time to go shopping, in particular because you always need to keep an eye on the little one...So we went into that shopping centre with absolutely no idea what we were actually up to...and then we bought little somethings. A football...we got one for Fiona [their little daughter]." (Lena, older participant)

Mothers appear to experience a more relaxed shopping mood when on holiday and then often buy on impulse because it provides them with extra time for browsing. Only one married mother experienced an impulse buy during a working week with plenty of time available:

"She was there [in the kindergarden] just for trying it out that day. That gave me two hours time. So, quite a lot of time." (Lena, older participant)

Unless being on holiday or having a childminder, it appears that mothers with small children often have only limited time for impulse buying and seem to be rushed:

"I'd really like to go 'bummeln' [window shopping] for the whole day. But that's out of the question because of the kids. When you take them with you, one child running here, the other one there." (FG 10, older participants)

Taken as a whole, 'bummeln' is associated with positive emotions and may result in making an impulse buy. The findings of this study suggest that impulse buying occurs both in a relaxed non-rushed mode as well as under time pressure. All participants in this study experienced that time pressure may positively influence an impulse buying decision just as much as having a relaxing time may trigger an impulse buy.

5.8.3 Decision-making on the Spot

The typical impulse buy appears to happen suddenly with no prior intention and the shopper comes across the item by surprise. The string of actions is visualised in the following contribution of a younger shopper:

"Lately I have been shopping at Minimal¹...Only wanted to get one can of Red Bull. Me looking at the right hand side and spotting that brownish coloured handbag, thinking, wow, I have to get it...That's a typical impulse buy to me. Me running into the store, not thinking about anything in particular, only wanted to get a can of Red Bull, spotting that handbag, thinking wow, grabbing it right away, rushing to the till...wow. To me that's impulse buying." (FG 1, mixed age group)

Some participants mentioned quick decision-making on the spot when referring to one of their impulse buying experiences:

"You switch off your brain and only see cheap, cheap, cheap, and buy." (FG 6, younger participants)

In previous research impulse buys are often associated with being a fast rather than slow experience with the impulse buyer typically grabbing rather than choosing an item (for example Rook, 1987). Some impulse buys in this study were triggered by this sudden, unexpected encounter with an item:

"We just went through the aisles and then it [battery-driven hand-held hoover] jumped at our eyes." (Laura, older participant)

The impulse buy may happen unexpectedly and suddenly without any prior intention to buy the item and without much deliberation (Dittmar and Drury, 2000).

¹ Minimal is a German supermarket chain.

The actual impulse buy occurring on the spot without spending time on reflecting on the purchase can be based for example on a visual trigger:

"Saw it [the bed linen] and put it straight into the trolley." (Carmen, older participant)

As Carmen's example shows the reactive response to a visual stimulus may occur rapidly. This is in line with Rook (1987) who suggests that the visual encounter with an item is likely to induce the sudden urge to buy. These contributions indicate that an impulse buy can be decided immediately on the spur of the moment as suggested in prior research (for example Piron, 1991; Rook, 1987). It is questionable, though, if this rapid decision-making can be interpreted as and equated with feeling out of control when making the impulse buy. Brigitte for example decides on the spot to get a pair of jeans:

"Within two seconds of trying them on...I'll get them. It was a lucky buy [German: Glücksgriff]."¹ (Brigitte, younger participant)

Did this "lucky buy" (Brigitte) only occur because the urge was irresistible and the impulse buyer was out of control because she bought on the spot? With regard to impulse buying previous research (for example Youn and Faber, 2002) speaks of an irresistible urge to buy based on a strong desire to give in to an internal impulse. In the contributions of this study there is no clear indication that this urge is irresistible and that the buyers lose control about their decision-making. Decision-making on the spot may be provoked, for example through time-limited offers at retail:

"Well, beforehand I didn't want to buy any dried fruits but I simply went there, spotted them and then I thought, all right, they're now available at Aldi. They don't do them every week, but they only do them once. And then I thought, fine, okay, I'll try them." (Nicole, younger participant)

The desire to try out something new may be an exciting experience generating positive emotions in impulse buying. As the contributions in this study indicate, impulse buys do not have to be decided on the spot. The next section investigates the time gap in impulse buying.

¹ In German: „Aber ich hatte wirklich die Hose auch zwei Sekunden an...die nehm ich mit. Das war wirklich ein Glücksgriff.“

5.8.4 Time Lapse

Impulse buys may occur with a time gap between deciding to buy an item and acquiring it later. For instance, spotting an advertisement in the newspaper, followed by the joint decision with one's partner to buy the item and then going to the retail outlet to purchase the item is referred to as an impulse buy by Laura:

"We [her husband and herself] saw the advert in the newspaper and then we said, all right, we'll get it [the children's tent]. Went there straight. I think that was pretty much on impulse." (Laura, older participant)

Although the actual impulse buy may not happen on the spot, the impulse buying decision itself happens suddenly as mentioned by Brigitte when she bought a belt at Tchibo:

"I think if it's an idea out of a sudden and then one hour later I'll get that stuff and therefore I especially go to the shop, that's on impulse to me...Simply that you decide spontaneously what could I do with? Going into the store and getting it." (Brigitte, younger participant)

The time gap may not just be one hour as in Brigitte's contribution but even stretch to a few days between deciding on buying an item on impulse and actually buying it. Natascha for example ordered postcards online together with her sister a few days after spotting them on the internet:

"Well, actually neither of us had any money in the bank account at that time. And then we had to wait for a few days until we had again some money. And only then we placed the order." (Natascha, younger participant)

Even more time went by between the decision-making and the eventual appointments in the following impulse buying experiences of services. Despite the time gap, both participants referred to these delayed purchases as impulse buys:

"I hadn't given much thought about having my hair cut...and that's exactly what's on impulse for me. Doesn't matter whether or not I then have to wait until that appointment. If it occurs to me, if it suddenly pops up in my mind, well, fine you might as well do it." (FG 4, younger participants)

"I decided on impulse to have my hair cut next Saturday, if that counts?...I mean, all right, it wasn't all that much on impulse because I had been thinking for quite some time now and again about it already. But then the actual decision, this came just like that, now, okay, fine, I'll have them cut. That was pretty much on impulse." (Laura, older participant)

These contributions indicate that decision-making may happen on the spot but the actual impulse purchase happens at a later stage. These participants emphasise the quick decision to make an appointment rather than the fact that the service will be executed some time later. Contrary to a number of contributions in the literature (for example Piron, 1991), the contributions in this study suggest that an impulse buy does not have to be carried out on the spot but should be considered in a wider sense. While the buying decision might be on impulse, the execution of the actual purchase might take place some time later. On the other hand, the actual impulse buying decision may be taken some time after spotting an item and reconsidering the potential purchase. For example, rather than making an immediate decision on the spot, two days passed before Natascha decided to buy a song book with Christian songs:

"I went past it [the song book] and I thought they got the same inside the church but you have to return them on leaving the church...Really I don't need it...I didn't really give much thought to it...And one or two days later I also bought the book...It was on impulse. Well, not very much on impulse that I go there, spot it and get it right away but I hadn't planned to get it for a long time. Well, I only thought shall I get it and would it be okay to do so. And then pretty much spontaneously I decided that I'd like to get it." (Natascha, younger participant)

Despite the time gap and the thinking time Natascha assumes that this purchase was an impulse buy because she had not intended to buy this book in the first place. Contrary to Natascha, Carmen is less hesitant in referring to the purchase of a handbag as an impulse buy despite the time gap between spotting the item and her actual buying decision a few hours later:

"Last week I was away for a few days in Oldenburg. I had planned to get clothes for my pregnancy and bought on impulse a handbag...We were on holidays and just 'bummeln' [window shopping] through town. I wanted to take my time, leisurely, and look for clothes but didn't find anything spontaneously...And then that handbag crossed my way. It was outside on the rack, in front of that shop. I spotted it, I kind of chose this one, it was a black one...But I left it there on the rack. I thought I'll have a look somewhere else instead of getting it straight away. Went along a couple of shops. Had a look at other handbags. But there was nothing that took my interest. Then we went for a coffee and on our way back to the parking lot, I bought that black handbag." (Carmen, older participant)

Carmen's impulse buying experience draws on several themes: The impulse buy occurred in the relaxed context of a holiday, being accompanied by someone else, in this case her husband. It links the positive emotions attached to 'bummeln' and having plenty of time available with an impulse buy that was carried out only after some time of re-consideration, comparing it with other handbags in different shops and spending time going for a coffee. It appears that the impulse buy was accompanied by positive emotions throughout. This contribution implies that in impulse buying the actual buying decision may occur some time after spotting the item and leaves room for reconsidering the purchase.

5.8.5 First Use of the Impulse Purchase

The course of the impulse buying experience includes the eventual use of the item. Some of the participants in this study ensure to use the item as soon as possible after the purchase:

"I returned home in the evening. Just for half an hour or so and I got changed. Of course, I put on the jumper [she had just bought on impulse] and then I was off to a birthday party. Actually, I put it on straight away." (Brigitte, younger participant)

With no further delay "of course" Brigitte has been wearing the new item on the very first occasion. Similarly, Nicole wanted to test the new mascara "straight away" after returning home:

"After the gym I had a shower and afterwards I went back home. Then I also went to the cinema that evening and then I tried it [the mascara] out. And I thought right away, I have to have a look if it's really that good. And then I tried it out straight away that evening."
(Nicole, younger participant)

Time constraints or the lack of the right opportunity may prevent the impulse buyer from trying out the item straight away:

"I haven't had much time. Basically I only left the shoe bag at home and then went to college and the following day I put them [the pair of shoes] on again...I hadn't even unpacked them." (Brigitte, younger participant)

Interestingly, only the younger participants were eager to try out the item straight away. In contrast, the older impulse buyers were not in a rush to try out the newly acquired item. They appear to be less concerned about the first use and may postpone it to a later time:

"I left the labels and tags and everything in the handbag because the handbag was of no use to me while we were on holidays. Only started using it at home. But the tags had gone, the filling material, got rid of that already. And when we arrived back home only then I started using it." (Carmen, older participant)

Possibly Carmen did not find the right occasion during her holiday to try out the handbag. On the other hand it does not appear that she was in a rush to look for a suitable occasion for using her new handbag. Throughout the study none of the older participants revealed having tried out the item as soon as possible after the purchase.

5.9 The Role of Other People in Impulse Buying

This section investigates the role and influence of social relationships in the context of happiness in the impulse buying experience. Martin Hayward, director of consumer consultancy at the Henley Centre and a social trendspotter, outlines the link between consumption, emotional satisfaction and other people:

"We are now entering a post-materialist phase. We've satisfied our material needs. Now, we want emotional satisfaction. And that takes other people." (Freedland, 2000, p.8)

This section starts with investigating the impact of other people on decision-making in impulse buying situations, turning to them for advice and looks at instances when impulse buying is based on a joint decision with someone else. Some impulse buyers have experienced a kind of competition for a good deal with other people. The theme 'The Catwalk' investigates the presentation of the newly acquired impulse buy to other people, similar to being on a catwalk of a fashion show. On some occasions the impulse buy was only mentioned as a part of small talk or even kept a secret as will be discussed towards the end of this section.

5.9.1 The Role of Co-Shoppers and Other People

Most impulse buyers experienced feeling encouraged or stimulated by other people to engage in impulse buying. Without this influence from other people, they might not have made an impulse buy:

"I assume if I'd been on my own I wouldn't have gone into the shop in the first place, let alone bought anything." (FG 7, younger participants)

"Originally we [my parents and I] wanted to buy food somewhere in a supermarket but then we went into that clothes shop...We had met our friend from Teneriffe and he had joined us and it was actually him who suggested to go into that shop...Therefore we went inside because he wanted to get something for himself." (Nicole, younger participant)

These contributions stand in contrast to the claim in previous research (Rook and Fisher, 1995) that shopping alone is likely to decrease the consumer's inhibitions about buying on impulse because of less visibility to other people. The contributions imply another explanation, though. Although shopping on one's own may be enjoyable and entice impulse buying as suggested by Rook and Fisher (1995), this appears to occur because of feeling free to care solely for one's own needs:

"I prefer going shopping on my own. Because then I can go into a shop and have a quick look round and...I am independent and don't need to hang around for anybody." (Carmen, older participant)

The risk of making the wrong decision at the point-of-sale can be reduced for example by the co-shopper's positive evaluation of the item, paying towards it, or keeping the price a secret:

"In December I made an impulse buy that made my stomach turn...I went into town with my auntie who said I need a handbag...That handbag, I liked it right away, looked at the price tag and I felt sick...My auntie said, 'oh, come on, get it, you never treat yourself to anything, it's about time. I'll give some money towards it'...Okay, and then I bought it...I have given the warranty details to my auntie, telling her, 'Please look after it carefully. My husband shall never ever know'." (FG 8, older participants)

This is in accordance with previous research (Nicholls et al., 1994; Nicholls et al., 1997) which claims that difficult buying decisions can be made more easily when supported by the co-shopper. The impulse buyer in FG 8 may have felt regret if she had not bought the desired handbag while the risk of overspending and her husband's anticipated critical response appeared to be less important. This is in accordance with Zeelenberg et al. (1996) who suggest that choice is more affected by the buyer's aim to avoid regret than the perception of risk per se. The positive verdict of the co-shoppers in the contribution above (FG 8) and below (FG 2) may be the cause for the impulse buying decision:

"My mum said she really likes it [the suit]...So I bought it and that's much easier and quicker when someone says to you that's really nice and it suits you." (FG 2, younger participants)

The contributions from FG 8 and FG 2 support the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) in terms of social influence possibly affecting the buying decision of impulse buyers. In this context, other people may for example stimulate a latent need for an item the shopper had been unaware of beforehand, with the impulse buy eventually resulting in positive feelings:

"Let's take for example again that eyeliner. I would have never ever bought one on my own. But my friend insisted that one day I will need one. So I bought it and yes, I put it on and I thought, hey, doesn't look too bad after all. Now I'm really glad that I bought it." (FG 4, younger participants)

Girlfriends as co-shoppers as captured in FG 4 might influence each other with regard to their impulse buying decisions possibly due to sharing similar interests and preferences. Co-shoppers may stimulate browsing and new shopping ideas might emerge. On the other hand, the influence of co-shoppers may result in deciding on unwanted items:

"Buying an unwanted item happens more often when you are out with other people...When I go shopping completely on my own, then I only buy those things which later on I really put on." (FG 5, younger participants)

Natascha was the only participant in this study who described this for some of her impulse buys. Instead of merely feeling stimulated, the female consumer may feel forced by her co-shopper to make an impulse buy. For instance, Natascha was talked into buying a top:

"She [my best friend] said I absolutely have to buy this top, 'suits you really well'. But I already knew it's not my style. I bought it but basically only because of her...But really I didn't want to buy it." (Natascha, younger participant)

When asked to reflect on this purchase a few months later, Natascha reiterated that

"I'm a bit annoyed about it because I was talked into buying it by my friend." (Natascha, younger participant)

Natascha eventually gave in to her best friend's advice and bought the item on impulse against her better knowledge. As this contribution illustrates, this kind of influence from other people may result in negative emotions in impulse buying.

Generally, going shopping with someone else appears to make oneself more adventurous, open for a new experience and encourages carrying on looking for things even though the planned purchase had already been completed. This may eventually result in making an impulse buy:

"When you go shopping on your own, you might find what you'd been looking for and then you wouldn't carry on looking for other things all on your own. But if other people are with you, if they'd say I'd like to have a look here or there, okay, then you carry on looking and you might find something in that time, too." (FG 4, younger participants)

Group euphoria about an item and possibly the feeling of group belonging may entice the individual to consider buying this item on impulse, too:

"At that time Michael bought his new mobile phone. Then I nearly bought one myself. Ever so much carried away by the euphoria of the group. But then I turned sensible again. But I bought it one week later." (everybody is laughing) (FG 2, younger participants)

"My best girlfriend, she's now got that brand new mobile phone. Loads of technical specs...Well, I didn't really think to get myself a new one because of her. But well, it's just because she's now got that new mobile phone with all those functionalities and then somehow I also fancied getting one." (Nadia, younger participant)

Social needs such as interacting and gaining approval from an important other or from the reference group as in the contribution from FG 2 can lead to impulse buying behaviour (Hausman, 2000). Socialising and peer pressure was mentioned mainly in the younger focus groups affecting the participants' impulse buying behaviour. Socialising may become the reason for making an impulse purchase:

"When we go out in Göttingen, we spontaneously go out in the evenings, I spontaneously get some money at the hole in the wall, and we spontaneously go for a drink and on parties in the evenings." (FG 7, younger participants)

In similar terms, the buying success of one's co-shopper on a joint shopping trip may encourage the shopper to look for opportunities for impulse buys:

"I was in there with my sister. She found those four items straight away...I'm always ever so frustrated when I don't find anything...Carried on looking. Then just in-between, by mere chance that was, well, I didn't really look for it. Found it just by chance, that tank top and a more elegant top...And my sister came out with five items later on and me only with those things I had never intended to get." (Natascha, younger participant)

Contrary to the above impulse buying experiences when other people stimulated impulse buying, there were also occasions reported in this study when other people negatively affected impulse buying decisions. For instance, other people may discourage the shopper from making an impulse buy:

*"It was a small, poxy shop. But the lady who was working there, she was standing outside, having a fag. And that took some time until she came in. Well, here we go, doesn't she want to sell anything?...I thought, brilliant. Well, if I had to wait a little longer, I would have been really p****ed off." (Rebecca, older participant)*

The negative impulse buying experience with the shop assistant triggered feelings of annoyance in Rebecca. Negative feelings may be experienced in view of the long waiting time and poor service as explained by Rebecca. Also, co-shoppers may have a restraining impact and prevent shoppers from going ahead with an impulse buy:

"That's not too bad if you go shopping with someone who tells you that you cannot afford it. Ah, well, I can pay for it. And then again they'd say, 'don't get it, you simply cannot afford it!' There's got to be someone with me." (FG 6, younger participants)

"He'd [boyfriend] say you have 100 items in your wardrobe. You've got 30 pairs of trousers and I always see you wearing the same stuff because you only wear whatever is brand-new. And he'd say just have a look at your bank account. You don't really need it." (FG 9, older participants)

The lack of affordability as captured in the contributions above was mentioned as one of the major reasons for co-shoppers to try and save the potential shopper from going ahead with an impulse buy. The contributions from FG 6 and FG 9 exemplify that going shopping with another person can prevent the shopper from overspending. In particular the contribution from FG 6 indicates that the buyer may be grateful for this control mechanism and acknowledge the benefit of the co-shopper. In the literature, impulse buying is among others seen as the dark side of consumption due to its potentially negative financial implications as Rook (1987) warns. Despite the co-shopper's efforts to prevent this shopper from buying on impulse, the shopper may circumvent this by deliberately turning to someone else who is likely to be more supportive of the impulse buying decision in terms of deserving a treat:

"[I'd] meet up with my girlfriend. She'd say, 'hey, come on, that's our hobby. You have to buy it and what else do you have in life. And you have to treat yourself.' Then I'd think, ah, well, yes, she's right. And then I'm in conflict. Well, yes, fair enough, I think I do buy too much but I simply cannot give up on this." (FG 9, older participants)

Usually it is the buyer's girlfriend who is likely to provide positive feedback on the item and typically supports the impulse buying decision as they usually share similar interests. Other strategies to circumvent other people's efforts to refrain oneself from making an impulse buy include to come up with a need for the item:

"Yes, that's my usual excuse. Yes, mother I need them [shoes] for work." (everybody is laughing and agrees) (FG 4, younger participants)

Even though the shopper may be on her own at the point-of-sale, she may anticipate the potential feedback from other people on her impulse buy and take this into consideration when making the purchasing decision:

"I think about it, would my boyfriend like it? Or could I wear it for work? Perhaps it's too overdressed or too sexy if it's got those slits." (FG 2, younger participants)

This is in line with the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) applied to the impulse buying context. The evidence suggests impulse buying decisions may be based on the beliefs of other people's expectations and the buyer's willingness to comply with them. As a consequence, the impulse buying decision may be affected by the beliefs of how other people may think about this purchase (East, 1997) as captured for example in the contribution from FG 2 above.

Shoppers with different interests such as boyfriends, fathers, male companions or female shoppers with a completely different taste, often create a negative shopping experience and might stop the shopper from browsing and impulse buying. Although the large majority of the participants perceive going shopping with someone else as a generally positive and enjoyable experience, they usually do not enjoy going shopping with their boyfriend or partner:

"It's really bad when you go shopping with your boyfriend. That's so exhausting...After five minutes in the Ladies' Department he'd start nagging, 'when can we leave'?" (FG 4, younger participants)

Going shopping with one's male partner often seems to prevent the female shopper from making an impulse buy.

5.9.2 Seeking Advice

Asking someone else for their opinion is important in impulse buying. Partly, this is because of the risks which may be attached to an impulse buy, including financial and social risks. These may be reduced by consulting other people for advice:

"You got your personal consultant with you, so you don't run the danger of getting something awful. I'm that kind of person who likes asking friends for their opinion. Do you like it?" (FG 4, younger participants)

The co-shopper, or using the terminology of the participant in FG 4 one's "personal consultant", may prevent oneself from making an unfavourable impulse buying decision. In the overall shopping context, Swenson (1990) found that women typically gather information and opinions from their peers and are more

relationship-oriented than men. Depending on the situation or in order to receive the best possible advice, different people in addition to family and friends might be consulted:

"Once I asked a customer in the changing rooms what she thinks about the item." (FG 2, younger participants)

"Originally I only wanted to have the tips of my hair cut. That was really an impulse decision changing the colour of my hair...Then she [the hairdresser] advised me against it because she said that particular colour doesn't go with my skin tone. And then she made a couple of suggestions...Yes, and then I decided on impulse to have it all [emphasised] done in the end. I'm totally satisfied I must say." (Rebecca, older participant)

Some participants argued they usually trust the opinion of others and an item may not be purchased on impulse if the other person does not support the decision:

"If she [my sister] had said it [the elegant top] doesn't look all that great or you look like squeezed in and you look really fat in it, then I wouldn't have bought it. Actually, I do care about what the others think about it." (Natascha, younger participant)

Shoaf et al. (1995) suggest in their comparative study that female adolescents rely more on the opinions of other people than their male counterparts. This may be the case because friendships and peer approval are particularly important to women (Shoaf et al., 1995). On the other hand, female shoppers may buy on impulse despite the negative verdict of other people because the item is well-liked or the shopper has already *"fallen in love"* with it:

"And then I had a couple of items the others didn't care much for. In that case it was all the same to me. I very much liked the items. I had already fallen in love with them." (participant 1) - "I simply don't care what others think. That's mine. And I fancy it and no-one can change my mind then." (participant 2) (FG 6, younger participants)

"Well, it would have been really strange if she [her female friend as co-shopper] had said anything about them [the pair of socks] at all. It has never happened to me that anyone told me that I don't need it and that I should leave it. Well, I never really thought about this. But, no, I don't think so. Whenever I fancy something, I simply get it." (Carmen, older participant)

This reduced dependency on other people's opinion was explained by one participant with an increase in age and maturity. With increasing maturity she observed that her need for advice from other people has been decreasing:

"Today you need less advice from a friend who goes shopping with you than when you were younger. Or even the salesperson's opinion." (FG 8, older participant)

Regarding the contributions from the participants in this study, it appears that the support from other people is particularly important to younger female shoppers as they tend to reconsider or in some cases even refrain from going ahead with a purchase if someone from their reference group does not support their buying decision. The way Carmen insists on making impulse buying decisions independently of other people corresponds with research by Rook and Gardner (1993). They suggest that someone with a powerful personality may act more autonomously and thereby reducing any potential buying constraints imposed by someone else. Possibly an older shopper may have a higher self-esteem and therefore feel less dependent on others.

Even though other people may be approached for providing advice, this does not necessarily mean they take a lot of interest in the impulse purchase. Some participants in this study experienced this with their male partner who appeared feeling forced to provide feedback and lacking an interest in further discussions about the item in question. This is captured for example in the answer provided by Lena's husband when asked whether she should buy a jug at Ikea: *"Yes, good idea. Get it. Done"* (Lena, older participant).

Rebecca's boyfriend was similarly disinterested in her flip flops and did not want to engage in lengthy discussions about the impulse buying decision:

"He [my boyfriend] liked them, too. 'Take them, take them.' Well, I'm usually spending hours looking for shoes. It must be terrible for men to hang around waiting all the time. Therefore, 'take them, let's move on'." (she is laughing) (Rebecca, older participant)

As illustrated in the contributions, in some instances partners as co-shoppers appear to try and cut a decision short, thereby avoiding any further discussions about the purchase:

*"I asked him what he likes better - short or long [hair]? And he said: 'Up to you. You know better than me. Your decision not mine.' So, really no big help."
(Laura, older participant)*

Seeking for advice from one's partner often results in not receiving much support and eventually leaving the shopper, such as Laura, alone in her decision-making.

5.9.3 A Joint Decision?

In the previous section the shoppers were asking other people for advice regarding items they would be using solely for themselves. This section investigates those impulse buys with items the female shopper would be using together with someone else or needs for her family:

*"So I had been thinking if we really need a second one [hammock] and if we're really going to use two at the same time. And I have been discussing this for quite a while with my husband. And then we came to the conclusion that a second one wouldn't be too bad."
(Lena, older participant)*

Other than suggested in the literature (for example Piron, 1991), a number of contributions in this study indicate that impulse buys are not necessarily decided on the spot, but may be the result of extensive discussions with a partner. Joint decisions may be taken when items are not only used by the impulse buyer herself but also by their partner. If the partner positively evaluates the item, initial doubts may disappear:

"I had been thinking shortly if you should buy something like this [a battery-driven hoover] on impulse. But my husband rejected all doubts because he said, 'it's no big deal and it doesn't cost all that much'...I had been thinking at first if we shouldn't get those test reviews to see if there are any recommended ones. But my husband said, 'you cannot really go wrong with these things'. And then it was all right." (Laura, older participant)

While the advice of a partner may be useful for decision-making, it may be also a fun experience, triggering positive emotions:

"We were in a good mood because I enjoy going into those shops anyway and in particular with Klaus [her husband] because you can discuss things, what shall we get? And there are so many more things [for our baby] we'll need. That's really fun buying things." (Carmen, older participant)

The evidence suggests that impulse buying decisions can be joint decisions. Other people are involved in the impulse buy, in particular, when the item will not exclusively be used by oneself or is required for another family member.

5.9.4 Competing with Other People

Competing with other people for a desired item and risking losing out on it plays an important role in impulse buying for some participants in the focus groups. This can put pressure on them to buy an item on impulse:

"This leather coat was fitting better and better and out of a sudden more and more items popped up in my mind that were in my wardrobe and would go with the new item. You become set on that item. The following day it would have been gone. For sure. And then I would have been very, very upset." (FG 4, younger participants)

Losing out on an item to someone else may cause feelings of annoyance:

"Because I hardly ever find a pair of jeans that really fit. And when I've found a pair and that's the last one they got, then I simply have to buy them. No matter what. Because I definitely know that they'll be gone in two days. Then I'd be ever so much annoyed." (FG 9, older participants)

"If in the end I don't buy it and I'm then going home, then you are even more annoyed compared to buying it and it doesn't really turn out to be that great." (FG 5, younger participants)

Even if the item eventually does not come up to expectations as explained by the participant in FG 5, the impulse buy may still be considered as the better alternative compared to the disappointment of not buying the item and 'losing' it to someone else. Putting off the impulse buying decision can therefore turn out to be a bad experience.

5.9.5 The Catwalk

After the impulse buy, most participants actively look for other people's feedback, usually as soon as possible after returning home:

"The first thing I need is the confirmation from all the others." (FG 4, younger participants)

The item may be presented at home to parents, partners, friends or

"I went over to my neighbour and showed her what I'd bought." (FG 10, older participants)

This presentation is described as a kind of *"fashion show"* by a number of impulse buyers in the sense of being on a private catwalk, looking for a positive confirmation for having made the right choice:

"First thing is unpacking it and then do a fashion show." (participant 1) - "'Look darling, what I bought'!" (participant 2) (FG 9, older participants)

"My father was at home and we [my mother and I] made a fashion show. My mother tried on what she had bought. Then I presented mine [new skirt]. My father liked both." (Nicole, younger participant)

Positive feedback may contribute to feeling happy with the newly bought item. The catwalk resembles a kind of celebration of the purchase:

"That's always a kind of happiness [German: Glücksgefühl] afterwards." (participant 1) - "Yeah, yeah." (the others in the group) - "When you found something and go home and then in the evening you'd show it to the others, look, what I bought." (participant 1)¹ (FG 6, younger participants)

The majority of impulse buyers in this study actively look for applause and positive feedback. This provides them with a positive feeling, such as *"feeling good"* (Nicole) or *"happy"* (Brigitte):

¹ In German: „Das ist dann immer so ein Glücksgefühl danach.“ (Teilnehmerin 1) - „Ja, ja.“ (die anderen Teilnehmerinnen) - „Wenn man so was gefunden hat und dann nach Hause geht und dann am Abend allen zeigt, guckt mal, was ich gekauft habe.“ (Teilnehmerin 1)

"Now I'm feeling good. Because everyone said it is nice and it suits me well...Now I know that I can probably wear it from Wednesday [on her holidays] onwards. So, no, I don't regret it." (Nicole, younger participant)

"They [my parents] liked the jumper. They really liked it. That makes you feel happy [German: freut] when other people think it's nice."¹ (Brigitte, younger participant)

In the literature impulsive buying behaviour is often considered to be 'bad' as discussed earlier. This is not only because of its potential negative impact on personal finance and the risk of being less satisfied after the purchase but also because of provoking negative reactions (for example Rook, 1987; Rook and Hoch, 1985). In more recent research, impulse buying is not necessarily considered as bad (for example Hausman, 2000; Wood, 2005; Wood, 1998b) and it is acknowledged that consumers often feel good about their impulse buying decision as supported by the evidence of this study. Instead of merely looking for a positive reinforcement of their impulse buying decision, some shoppers in this study enjoyed presenting their impulse buy to others with the intention of showing it off and creating envy:

"And then my sister came into my bedroom and I said, come here, look what I bought - contact lenses. She said, 'oh, yes, true, that was a real bargain.' And then I laughed at her, hahaha, I [emphasised] got them." (Natascha, younger participant)

Comparing oneself with less fortunate people can increase both one's satisfaction and contentment (Myers, 1998). In this respect some of the younger shoppers, who were convinced about their right choice of their impulse buy, seemed to be showing off. The comparison with other people's possessions is considered as one of the major influential factors in measuring self-reported wellbeing (for example Chen and Spector, 1991; Warr, 1980). Showing off with an impulse buy only happened in this study vis-à-vis those other people who take a similar interest in the product category:

"I showed it [the jumper] to my sister, I think the following day. Because she had seen that jumper in the flyer, too, and really fancied it like hell but in a different colour. And then of course there was this - 'well, look, I [emphasised] bought it'. I showed her it really suits me well." (Brigitte, younger participant)

¹ In German: „Die fanden den schön. Die fanden den echt schön. Das freut einen auch, wenn andere das schön finden.“

Newly purchased items may not only be actively presented to a private audience on the catwalk at home but also gain attention without any particular effort:

"And then there's that attention you are getting from everyone. 'Oh, that's new? Nice. Where did you get that from?' Really, that's not bad at all." (FG 5, younger participants)

"Yesterday I put on the skirt. Last night that is. First time. It was pretty nice, that skirt. And I was wearing it and then right away from everybody, 'wow, that really looks terrific'...So, yes, and then you're feeling so good wearing it...You also feel so reassured then." (Brigitte, younger participant)

This attention from other people and their favourable evaluation of the purchased item can create positive feelings in the shopper, such as *"feeling so good"* (Brigitte). While this additional attention is given to the actual item disregarding the fact whether this had been bought on impulse or was a planned buy, the buyer herself may still associate the positive feedback with her impulse buy. This positive feedback from other people may serve as a confirmation that the impulse buy was the right decision and other people might even envy oneself as the last contribution implies. Overall the catwalk was in the majority described as an enjoyable experience providing positive feelings including feelings of happiness. The catwalk may also prove to be useful for the shopper in case she should be unsure about her choice:

"When I tried it on, the bikini slip looked nice and the top was nice. Once I had bought it, though, I had my doubts. Well, with everything in my bag I then went to the gym and then I had been thinking all the time, right, should I have bought it or not?...No-one was at home when I returned. I unpacked the bikini and tried it on again. I had another look at it in front of the mirror. And it was only on Monday that I could show it to my parents. I tried it on once again and showed it to my parents. I think they liked it, too." (Nicole, younger participant)

Positive feelings may develop once the impulse buyer receives positive feedback from other people:

"So I bought it. That second I was feeling so sick, my stomach was aching...And I thought why did you buy it [the leather coat] in purple?...And when I got home and my mother liked it, and my boyfriend liked it, and my brothers and sisters liked it, everybody liked it. They all said to me, 'well done'. Then I was feeling much better." (FG 4, younger participants)

The feedback “*well done*” might feel like congratulations for an achievement or for having been successful, which is likely to induce a positive feeling in the impulse buyer. The impulse buyer feels reassured. The evidence captured in these excerpts from Nicole and FG 4 indicate that there is a connection between other people’s feedback and one’s own evaluation of an impulse buy. According to the literature happiness is affected by our ability to cope with worries or share problems with other people (for example Argyle, 1987). In this regard Nicole tries to overcome her doubts about her impulse buy of a bikini at New Yorker which remained until she received positive feedback from her parents. There remains the risk that the catwalk results in a negative feedback, which the shoppers are aware of:

“I only thought I really hope the tent is any good and that my dad doesn’t tell me off later on because the quality is so poor.” (Brigitte, younger participant)

“If they say, ‘are you completely mad to waste that much money’, then your doubts might increase. But if all of them show just positive reactions, ‘hey, that’s superb’ and ‘I like it’, then, yes, that gives you a more positive feeling.” (FG 5, younger participants)

Although the feedback from other people on impulse buys was generally positive in this study, there were critical voices. This sometimes caused feelings of uncertainty about the impulse buying decision:

“I showed it [the T-shirt] to my boyfriend...As said, I really like it. My boyfriend saying it doesn’t look nice at all. Now I’m feeling a bit unsure again when he said it looks like a tea towel.” (Nicole, younger participant)

Contrary to Nicole’s reaction, some impulse buyers claimed not to feel affected by the negative feedback about their purchase from other people:

“I told my boyfriend and my best friend about it straight away, me having signed that contract...My boyfriend said, ‘Well, why do you sign a contract, you don’t need to do that at all’? But he didn’t really enquire in detail what kind of contract it is. My best friend thought it’s great.” (Nadia, younger participant)

The evidence suggests that the negative feedback about an impulse buy from an important other person does not necessarily have to affect the buyer’s evaluation of an impulse buy. The impulse buyer devalues the negative feedback for example by claiming the person is unable to provide qualified feedback and lacks information

as captured in the contribution from Nadia. In order to avoid this risk of negative feedback, one participant reveals not to present the newly bought items to those people from whom she expects an unfavourable evaluation of her impulse buying decision:

"Of late I'm not doing it [the catwalk] any more. Of late I put the purchase away." (participant 1) - "Me too." (participant 2) - "And then one day he'd [her boyfriend] ask, 'But that's new, isn't it'? And then I'd say, oh, no! I've had it for a long time." (participant 1) (everybody is laughing) (FG 9, older participants)

"Well, I only show it to those people who give me positive feedback. And my boyfriend would be saying, 'oh no, not again'...And one day I decided, all right, I rather show it to my best (female) friend and that's fine then. She usually says, 'hey, that looks fantastic'." (FG 9, older participants)

As indicated by the first contribution from FG 9, the impulse buy may be kept as a secret by hiding the new item for example from one's partner. This may be done to avoid an anticipated negative feedback and as a consequence reduce the risk of having a guilty conscience. Instead, only those persons will be asked for feedback who are likely to be supportive. Some participants mentioned impulse buying experiences they neither showed to anybody nor talked about. They kept it a secret, for example because *"it's nothing special such a battery-driven hoover"* (Laura, older participant). Nicole did not share with anybody her experience with the new mascara because she feels no-one would take an interest:

"No, didn't even talk about it to anybody...But I didn't feel it was all that important that anybody could take an interest in it at all." (Nicole, younger participant)

In contrast to Laura who was satisfied with her impulse buy and did not feel it important enough to mention it to other people, Nicole revealed her dissatisfaction about this purchase:

"I should have bought another one [mascara]...I was pretty annoyed." (Nicole, younger participant)

Possibly rather than expecting other people being disinterested, Nicole's dissatisfaction with the impulse buy may be the cause for keeping it a secret. She may have deliberately chosen to refrain from showing the item or talk about it in order to circumvent negative reactions. The anticipation of negative feedback

becomes clear in the following contribution from Brigitte who did not mention to anybody the impulse buy of a pair of running shoes:

"It wasn't that kind of purchase you'd tell everybody at home about straight away. Haven't turned to each of them, hey, I got new runners, want to have a look? Well, I don't know but I didn't feel like showing them to anybody...Maybe really I was expecting this comment, 'ah, well, come off it, you don't go running a lot anyway'."
(Brigitte, younger participant)

By keeping the impulse buy a secret, potential negative feedback can be avoided although Brigitte herself is convinced about her right choice of the item. Only one participant (Natascha) reported that the anticipated negative feedback actually prevented her from wearing an item. Three months after the impulse buy, Natascha had not once worn the elegant top from H&M:

"I still haven't worn it...Today, well, it's short, I could wear it today but I always think that my colleagues will look at me with that strange funny look." (Natascha, younger participant)

The evidence suggests that if a shopper has made a negative experience with an impulse buy or expects negative feedback regarding the purchase, she may choose to refrain from showing or talking about it to other people. The anticipation of negative feedback may even lead to refraining from using or wearing an item. The impulse buy remains a secret.

5.9.6 Small Talk

Instead of presenting a new item to someone else and being interested in their feedback, some of the older impulse buyers may only casually talk about the purchase or merely inform other people about the acquisition of a new item:

"[Our parents] were in the garden with our little one. And then we came back in the afternoon, I think for having tea and coffee and we showed it to them. And everybody liked it." (Lena, older participant)

Lena took the opportunity to present the item when the whole family came together for tea-time but did not specifically gather for a kind of fashion show. This is opposed to the catwalk experiences described earlier on, which were set-up especially in order to present the new items. Disregarding the involvement in the

impulse buy or the importance of the item to the buyer herself, husbands or partners are typically presented the newly acquired item. Lena for example was asked if she had shown her impulse buy of pyjama trousers to her husband:

*"Yes, yes. But he isn't really much interested at all."
(Lena, older participant)*

This appears to occur rather for informative reasons and possibly out of a habit than requesting or expecting any feedback. The item does not have to be shown to anybody but possibly it is only talked about:

*"I told them [my relatives] that I had bought a handbag.
But I haven't shown it to anybody." (Carmen, older
participant)*

Talking about the item without showing it may indicate that the opinion from other people is not required to form one's own opinion about having made the right choice. In these cases the impulse buyer may not be looking for reassurance but uses this purchase as a topic for small talk.

5.10 Summary

Does impulse buying of an item make female shoppers feel happy? – The contributions indicate that the majority of impulse buys make female shoppers feel happy. Impulse buying can be a fun activity without any obligation to find a certain item and no need to make a questionable compromise. The impulse buyers feel relaxed and their EC card helps them to spend money with limited consideration of any consequences. This may eventually result in less positive feelings when overspending becomes an issue. At times impulse buyers miss the anticipated feelings of happiness prior to a purchase as may occur with planned buying. On the other hand this saves the impulse buyer from feeling disappointed if the desired item is not found. Anticipated happiness may still occur in impulse buying, for example when waiting for items from online orders or when looking forward to one's appointment at the hairdresser's.

The evidence suggests that there exists an interdependency and connection between planned and impulse buying with particular regard to 'shopping momentum'. This supports prior research that impulse buys can be induced by previous purchases. In line with previous research, impulse buyers often feel

uplifted and energised after a successful impulse buy. The purchase can make them feel alive and bring back joyful childhood memories. Also, the impulse buyer may anticipate positive emotions regarding the future use of the item, which may cause feelings of happiness. Different positive emotional terms were used interchangeably but all expressing an emotionally positive impulse buying experience. Some participants reject the use of the German term 'glücklich' for 'happy' in the context of impulse buying and use instead other positive emotional terms, such as 'sich freuen' [feeling happy]. Happiness is associated with pleasure or luxury buys whereas the term satisfaction was preferably used to describe duty purchases. Carrying shopping bags through town adds to feeling happy with one's impulse buy.

Impulse buying is at times an exciting experience adding to one's feeling of happiness and it may help to turn a state of boredom into feelings of excitement. However, impulse buying is not necessarily emotionally involving and full of excitement. Impulse buying may also occur if the purchase is considered to be unimportant and the shopper feels little involvement. In these cases emotional states may remain constant over the course of the experience. In contrast to the dark side of consumption, which widely associates impulse buying with being risky and wasteful, only a negligible number of impulse buys in this study were perceived in a negative way. Over the course of the impulse buying experience, emotions may vary. After the first euphoria, feelings of happiness may decline after a short time. Alternatively, happiness may only develop some time after the impulse buy or initially positive emotions may intensify with the use of the item. While shoppers usually expect initial positive emotions and excitement to decline over time, this does not affect their overall positive evaluation of their impulse buy.

The findings in this study support some of the recent literature which acknowledges that impulse buying may yield hedonic satisfaction. Impulse buyers satisfy their hedonic desires and express positive feelings, such as happiness, feeling great or glad. Rather than feeling an urge to buy an item on impulse, hedonic motivations such as fun, desire, fancy or treat often trigger impulse buys, particularly with younger participants. Younger shoppers enjoy being adventurous and are curious about novelties, which can motivate them to buy on impulse. Particularly these consumers appear to enjoy trying out new product categories and brands through impulse buying, which again emphasises the strong link between impulse buying and feelings of happiness. Female shoppers enjoy rewarding and treating themselves with an impulse buy. This usually creates a positive feeling, for

example feelings of happiness. Gifting was also mentioned as an hedonic motivation for impulse buys, usually leading to feelings of happiness in both the buyer and recipient. Buying on impulse while on holiday may also yield happiness for the female shopper in terms of reminding her of a particular holiday or wearing something unique in her social environment.

Impulse buying does not necessarily make the female shopper feel happy. Some shoppers referred to some of their impulse buying experiences as a waste of money. Also, some impulse buyers revealed overdrawing their account and spending beyond their financial limitations due to an impulse buy. Although it is questionable if quick decision-making is perceived as a loss of control, the shoppers appear to be aware of the stigma attached to impulse buying and have already experienced some kind of regret for an impulse buy in the past. This kind of regret is usually a feeling of dissatisfaction about the quality or performance of a product. In the minority of cases it is associated with the impulse buying experience itself but may apply to any kind of purchase behaviour. If the item does not come up to expectations but was perceived as inexpensive, this is usually not an issue to the impulse buyer. The purchase of an unnecessary item or the fact that the consequences of the purchase have not been considered in much detail, may cause feelings similar to a guilty conscience. Most consumers appear to be aware of the stigma of impulse buying and may perceive that other people expect them to have a guilty conscience. Therefore the guilty conscience mentioned by the participants in this study may be more a ritual than experiencing genuine guilt about the impulse buy. Negative feelings, such as a guilty conscience or dissatisfaction may be overcome, however, by alternative use of the item or passing it on to someone else. Some impulse buyers also learn out of a negative experience for future impulse buys.

A good mood such as feeling happy can increase one's tendency to buy on impulse. An impulse buy can preserve a good mood but also help to overcome a bad mood. There is an awareness among female shoppers that impulse buying can be capable of mood repair, that is shopping can have a therapeutic function. Most impulse buys mentioned in this study occurred during a good mood. Nonetheless impulse buys were also reported while the shopper was in an average mood, like every day. A good mood is often associated with excitement and fun by the younger shoppers and the availability of leisure time by the older impulse buyers. Impulse buying for mood repair was mentioned only by the minority in this study. An impulse buy may occur without the original intention to overcome one's

bad mood and result in lifting one's spirits, including positive emotions such as happiness.

Contrary to most prior research, impulse buying decisions appear to be often made with prior consideration of their consequences. The inner dialogue of the potential impulse buyer includes for example thoughts about the need for an item, its affordability and financial implications, and its future use. Often impulse items are inexpensive, which means that the shopper feels relaxed about her impulse buying decision due to the limited risk. It appears that the impulse buyer is looking to reduce the risk of negative implications of the purchase with the overall intent to ensure a positive impulse buying experience. These considerations stand in contrast to the stigma of impulse buying which assumes that shoppers buy on impulse with limited regard to any consequences. Particularly the older shoppers questioned the need for an item before buying it. Positive emotions such as enjoyment and fun were triggered when the potential impulse buyers were fantasising about the future use of the item. An impulse buy also contributes to feeling happy because the shopper does not have to go home empty-handed after a trip into town. The thought of rejecting an impulse buy and returning home empty-handed resulted in negative feelings for some younger shoppers. Therefore they may decide to buy some item on impulse, such as underwear which was often mentioned in this context. Contrary to younger shoppers, older shoppers usually do not seem to feel frustrated if they return home empty-handed.

Impulse buys may occur with or without the availability of time. All participants with children were often in a hurry but this did not prevent them from buying on impulse, though. Shoppers with plenty of time for window shopping or 'bummeln' enjoyed themselves during the course of their impulse buying experience, including feelings of happiness. Impulse buying decisions do not have to be taken on the spot but there may be a time gap between decision-making and the actual purchase. The consumer may also reconsider the purchase before eventually making the buying decision. The impulse buying decision is therefore not necessarily taken on the spur of the moment with the impulse buyer being out of control. Positive emotions may also occur with regard to the first use of an item. This was mainly reported by younger participants who were excited about trying out the new item as soon as possible.

Other people may considerably influence impulse buying and contribute to the impulse buyer's state of happiness. First of all, going shopping with someone else

may be an enjoyable activity leading to impulse buys as the co-shopper may stimulate a latent interest in a product category or entice oneself to try out something new. In addition, the buying success of the co-shopper may induce oneself to make an impulse buy. On the other hand, other people such as unfriendly store staff may negatively impact an impulse buying experience or even prevent the potential buyer from going ahead with the purchase, possibly resulting in feelings of annoyance. Negative feelings may also be caused when peer pressure triggers impulse buying.

After the impulse buy other people are often approached to provide their feedback on the newly acquired item. The impulse buyer often presents her new acquisitions to those people with whom she lives aiming to receive applause, show off or receive some reassurance about the successful purchase. This is often done on a private catwalk, which is perceived as an enjoyable activity when presenting the new item. This catwalk experience yields additional attention from other people and often generates positive feelings such as happiness or a sense of achievement. Certainly there is the risk of receiving negative feedback and criticism which would have a detrimental impact on one's happiness. However, this can be usually avoided by only requesting feedback from those people who are likely to provide positive feedback, for example one's best female friend who shares a similar taste and interest. Mainly the younger shoppers sometimes kept their impulse buy a secret. Instead of presenting their impulse buy on the catwalk, the older participants often merely talked about their latest impulse buy as part of small talk.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

The overall research aim of this study was to investigate if impulse buying makes female shoppers feel happy. In this chapter the findings from this study will be discussed, referring back to the eight themes presented in Chapter 5. The findings will be put into perspective with the literature on happiness and impulse buying, which were reviewed in Chapter 2 and 3. All quotations of contributions from participants refer back to Chapter 5 unless stated otherwise. The aim of this chapter is to provide answers to the research questions. Therefore the first part of this chapter is subdivided into three sections, each dealing with one of the research objectives:

- Assessing the role of happiness in impulse buying
- Exploring how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience
- Investigating impulse buying with regard to its dark side in consumption

The conclusions of this study with regard to each research question are drawn at the end of this chapter.

6.2 The Role of Happiness in Impulse Buying

In this section, the 'shopping momentum' effect will be discussed with particular regard to its link to happiness in impulse buying. This is followed by looking at the issue of returning home empty-handed. The impact of other people in impulse buying, for example through seeking advice, also needs to be accounted for. The section 'The Catwalk' is thematically related to other people and will be evaluated in terms of its contribution to the shopper's happiness. The concluding sections deal with the theme 'time' and its role in happiness and impulse buying.

6.2.1 'Extended Shopping Momentum'

The evidence from this study supports the 'shopping momentum' effect in terms of purchases working as a potential trigger for a subsequent impulse buy. 'Shopping momentum' arises when an initial purchase triggers a subsequent purchase of an unrelated item (Dhar et al., 2007). The shopper's mind-set switches from deliberation to implementation when the mental hurdle is passed from browsing to a buying activity with the initial purchase (Dhar et al., 2007). However, the findings from Dhar et al. (2007, p.377) indicate that the second purchase "immediately follows the first purchase" without explicitly highlighting that the elapsed time between the two purchases remained untested. Their expectations are that 'shopping momentum' quickly vanishes with intervening activities. The findings of this study indicate that 'shopping momentum' may not only be limited to an immediately following purchasing activity in terms of 'straight away'. Instead, 'shopping momentum' appears to remain longer than a short moment. The initial purchase may be experienced as a success creating a positive mood state or "*shopping mood*" (Laura, older participant). Being in a shopping mood indicates that the 'shopping momentum' effect may prevail longer than just for a short moment as indicated by Oatley et al. (2006) who claim that generally moods may last for weeks. There have been no indications in this study, however, that the shopping mood lasts for this period of time.

The evidence in this study goes beyond a deliberative effect of the initial planned or impulse purchase leading to the impulse buy of another unrelated item in terms of the interdependency of two purchases. In some cases the initial intention of a planned purchase may already induce the purchase of another unrelated item. On the way to carrying out the initially planned buy, the shopper may literally stumble over an unrelated item and make the impulse buy, which would not have occurred without the original planned buy. In the majority of contributions to this study, though, the planned buy is completed and precedes the impulse buy. The findings indicate that the planned purchase plays an underestimated yet significant role in impulse buying. These two can be closely interdependent. In particular, 'shopping momentum' could be observed in purchases at the supermarket chain Aldi, the coffee shop Tchibo and the furniture store Ikea and their market hall. It needs to be emphasised that these observations are based on the retail environment in Germany where supermarkets also sell non-food items. Once the initial purchase at these stores has been made, the shopper may be in a shopping mood and her attention may be attracted for example by special time-limited offers or items in the

market hall that can be of some use anyway. This often leads to an impulse buy on the spot as explained by the participants in this study. In addition, 'shopping momentum' induced by an impulse buy may trigger the impulse buy of an unrelated item, as for example illustrated by the impulse buys from Brigitte (younger participant): she had bought a belt at Tchibo on impulse, which triggered the impulse buy of some mints in the same shop with the intention of giving her brother a nice surprise.

The findings from this study support the assumptions from Dhar et al. (2007) who expect that utilitarian items instead of tempting products, such as tobacco or sweets, are more likely to induce 'shopping momentum'. The triggering item or "driver" as Dhar et al. (2007, p.370) describes the initially purchased item was in all reported cases in this study of utilitarian value, for example food (Laura, older participant). The subsequent target item, though, also included impulse buys of hedonic items, such as the children's magazine 'Bussibär' (Laura, older participant) intending to make this shopper's child feel happy.

Based on the findings, the term 'shopping momentum' could therefore be extended from the definition given by Dhar et al. (2007) to the following 'extended shopping momentum': an initial planned or impulse buy, even if only intended and not yet carried out, may put the shopper in a good mood or shopping mood, which not necessarily immediately but eventually leads to the subsequent purchase of an unrelated item. This implies that the effect of 'shopping momentum' creates a good mood in the shopper leading to positive feelings, possibly feelings of happiness. 'Extended shopping momentum' indicates that planned and impulse buying are more closely interdependent than previously anticipated and both contribute to a positive feeling, which may include happiness. This interdependency with potentially overlapping characteristics also becomes apparent in those cases where participants struggle to differentiate between the two.

6.2.2 Fancy going home empty-handed?

Returning home empty-handed was felt as a negative experience for some female shoppers in this study. The majority of the younger focus group participants actively try and avoid returning home empty-handed by making an impulse buy, while only after being prompted some shoppers reveal in the individual interviews being concerned about this. In particular, the younger shoppers in the focus groups

deliberately made impulse buys as an attempt to avoid negative feelings on going home empty-handed. Reasons behind these motivations for buying on impulse included that the shoppers equated a purchase with being successful on this shopping trip. If these shoppers had returned home without a newly acquired item, they might have perceived a sense of failure. As a consequence the shopper's self-esteem may suffer, which supports findings from Bayley and Nancarrow (1998). The effects on the shopper of returning home empty-handed from a trip into town have only received very limited attention in the literature. Whilst it may be possible that returning home empty-handed reveals the shopper's lack of imagination and decisiveness as claimed by Bayley and Nancarrow (1998), the findings of this study do not provide data on this.

The shoppers in this study who try and avoid returning home empty-handed were concerned about wasting time and money spent on train tickets, petrol or parking. These concerns may not necessarily be the root cause for the negative feelings triggered by returning home empty-handed. Instead, these materialistic rationalisations could conceal their original affective motivation for their impulse buy, that is to avoid negative feelings of having failed with the result of lowering their self-esteem. Feeling happy or the perception of a positive feeling therefore appears to play an important role in impulse buying. While the impulse buy itself does not necessarily make the shopper feel happy, it nonetheless is capable of protecting the shopper from the negative feelings of returning home empty-handed.

Underwear was often mentioned in the focus groups to be bought on impulse if nothing else was found because the shoppers felt it is always of some use. Interestingly, the impulse buy of underwear was not mentioned in any individual interview. This could be due to the fact that underwear is a very intimate personal item the shoppers chose not to talk about in the one-to-one sessions whereas the relaxed atmosphere in the homogenous focus groups might have been less intimidating to talk about these personal belongings. On the other hand, there were several impulse buys of similarly personal items, that is bikinis in several cases and the participants did not hesitate to talk about them.

In a slightly different sense of going home empty-handed, it was also reported that having spotted a desirable item, deciding not to buy it on impulse and deliberately returning home empty-handed may preoccupy the shopper's mind and lead to feelings of annoyance for having lost out on the item (for example FG 4, younger

participants). Hoch and Loewenstein (1991, p.494) sum up the feelings which may occur in these situations:

"Failure to purchase implies more than the foregone pleasure from consumption; the individual actually feels deprived."

As a consequence some shoppers in this study tried to avoid negative feelings through impulse buying.

6.2.3 Counting on Other People

There has been sufficient evidence in this study that other people play a significant role both in impulse buying in general as well as with regard to feelings of happiness in the impulse buying experience. In a broad sense the findings of the study are in accordance with previous research. The theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and other previous research (for example Rook and Fisher, 1995) has proposed that behaviour is affected by the social desirability and normative evaluations, which also applies to impulse purchases. In addition, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) acknowledges that behaviour is subject to social influence. It appears to be necessary, though, to look more specifically into this general impact of other people on impulse buying and happiness, for example social norms may be (cognitively) considered but do not necessarily affect individual behaviour.

Impulse buys with low involvement, such as the purchase of chewing gum (Nadia, younger participant), do not appear to be affected by the theory of reasoned action. This is due to the individual such as Nadia (younger participant) not attaching much, if any, importance to the purchase. On the other hand the theory from Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) applies to the impulse buy of high involvement items such as Rebecca's (older participant) new haircut, which carried a certain financial and social risk to the individual. In accordance with the theory of planned behaviour, other people may stimulate a latent need or encourage the shopper to make an impulse buy. Usually peers have a positive impact towards increasing one's impulse buying because they entice the shopper to try out something new or make them buy items in order to belong to a peer group (for example FG 2, younger participants; Nadia, younger participant). Trying out a new item can create feelings of happiness as reported by some participants in this study.

With regard to discouraging the shopper from going ahead with an impulse buy, some shoppers chose to comply with other people's opinion and acted accordingly whereas others remained unaffected. In particular, the younger shoppers appeared to be affected by other people. The younger shoppers revealed in the individual interviews (for example Natascha, younger participant) having a tendency to refrain from making an impulse buy if someone from their peer group is not in favour of the purchase. This supports the findings from Bearden and Etzel (1982) that an individual's impulse buying tendency is affected by the individual's willingness to accept input from other people. A potential explanation for the behavioural differences among the participants in this study could be found in the research from Triandis (1995) who differentiates between individualists who focus on their own preferences in contrast to collectivists whose behaviour may be more conforming with group norms and expectations.

Other people may be asked for advice to reduce the risk of making an unfavourable impulse purchase and thereby increasing the chances of feeling happy about a purchased item. Consulting other people for advice in impulse buying can have different impacts depending on their role in relation to the shopper. The findings of this study support to some extent previous research (for example Childers and Rao, 1992; Luo, 2005) that shopping with peers tends to have an increasing effect on impulse purchases (for example FG 7, younger participants), whereas shopping with family members may decrease impulse buying. This, however, only occurred in the minority of cases in this study (for example FG 4, younger participants). With regard to family members it needs to be differentiated between parents and partners. Partners or boyfriends in this study did not necessarily have a decreasing or negative impact on impulse buying. On the one hand, they sometimes intervened and tried preventing their girlfriend or partner from buying on impulse to save her from overspending or buying in their view an unnecessary item. This might protect the shopper from feeling regret after an impulse buy, for example the participant in FG 9 (older participants) was grateful that her boyfriend stopped her ordering the expensive skin care 'Proactive'. On the other hand, in most cases partners or boyfriends were predominantly disinterested in the shopper's impulse purchases and tried to avoid any discussions about the pros and cons of an item by simply showing disinterest, for example Rebecca's (older participants) impulse buy of flip flops. The findings reveal that shopping with one's male partner is usually not very enjoyable and does not provide feelings of happiness. This stands in contrast to shopping with one's best friend who often shares a similar taste and interest in shopping (for example FG 4, younger

participants). In this study the family, namely parents, often tried to talk the shopper out of buying an item on impulse, usually hinting at the shopper's budgetary constraints, the lack of a genuine need for an item or its poor quality. The findings of this study are in accordance with previous research (for example Abrams et al., 2000; Baumeister, 2002) which claims that family members emphasise monetary concerns and evaluate impulse buying as wasteful. As a result some shoppers would pretend to require the desired item for work in a deliberate attempt to justify the impulse buy (for example FG 4, younger participants).

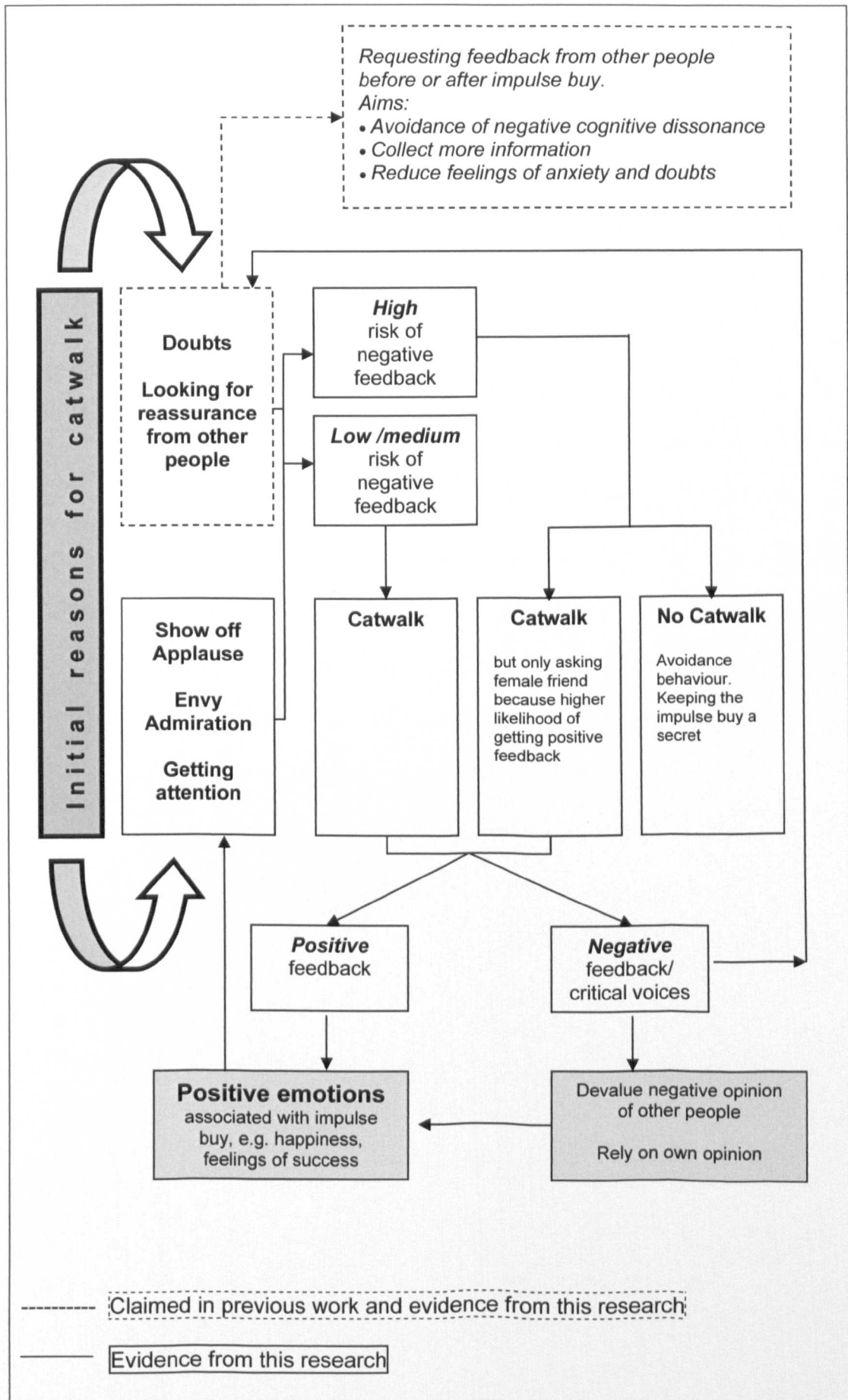
According to Rook and Fisher (1995) shopping on one's own feels less socially visible and therefore assume that this is likely to reduce the shopper's inhibitions about acting on impulse. The evidence from this study does not support this claim. While some shoppers in the focus groups and in the individual interviews enjoyed going shopping on their own and some of them preferred this over going shopping with someone else, none of the participants justified this with their impulse behaviour being less visible (for example Carmen, older participant).

Overall, other people can have a significant impact on impulse buying by encouraging or discouraging the shopper from going ahead with the purchase or providing general advice. Other people are often asked for advice in order to save the shopper from making an unfavourable impulse purchase and from regret and remorse after the purchase. Shopping with someone else can be an enjoyable social activity in itself and often creates positive emotions. Based on the findings of this study, other people can contribute to the impulse buyer's feelings of happiness.

6.2.4 The Catwalk

The majority of impulse buyers in this study actively look for other people's feedback and positive confirmation on their purchase. Therefore the newly acquired item may be presented on the private catwalk. The motivations for this private catwalk are summarised in Figure 6.1. They include actively showing off and looking for applause from other people, passively receiving envy and admiration, and getting attention. The findings indicate that showing off with the new item usually triggers positive emotions, including feelings of happiness. Gaining attention from other people creates positive emotions, such as feelings of happiness, and serves to reinforce the impulse purchase. An impulse buyer who

Figure 6.1: The Catwalk



looks for applause and enjoys showing off with a newly acquired item is not necessarily full of doubt or looking for reassurance as for example illustrated by Nicole's (younger participant) and her mother's private fashion show at home. In fact, some of the impulse buyers may have already received a confirmation during or shortly after the impulse buy from their co-shoppers as in Nicole's (younger participant) case.

On the other hand, the shopper may be in doubt about her impulse buy, which is another reason for going on the private catwalk as indicated in Figure 6.1. These doubts may persist until the buyer has presented the acquired item to other people on the private catwalk and received positive feedback (for example Nicole presenting her bikini from New Yorker to her parents, younger participant). The findings from this study support past research which claims that the impulse buyer looks for positive confirmation when evaluating the purchased item after its acquisition. For instance, in line with Sheth et al. (1999), the buyer may tell friends about the purchase with the intention of receiving a validation of the buying decision and praising the chosen product. Doubts can be overcome by a favourable evaluation so that the purchase meets or even exceeds expectations and thereby the shopper can avoid negative cognitive dissonance (De Mooij, 2004; Evans et al., 1996; Festinger, 1957; Foxall, 2003).

On the private catwalk, the impulse buyers mainly presented fashion items, such as the purchase from the shopper in FG 4 (younger participants) who bought an expensive purple leather coat and was feeling very unsure until she received positive feedback. The desire for reducing feelings of anxiety through positive feedback after the purchase mainly applies to expensive and infrequently bought items with a highly involved buyer where satisfaction with the purchase appears to be crucial. This supports previous research (for example Foxall, 2003). However, the findings from this study indicate that highly involved customers who purchased an expensive personal item, for example Brigitte (younger participant) when she bought a pair of running shoes, do not necessarily look for feedback from other people. Brigitte (younger participant) kept her impulse buy a secret possibly because she did not want to risk receiving negative feedback, which could have caused (negative) cognitive dissonance. On the other hand items with low involvement, such as the impulse buy of chewing gums as reported by Nadia (younger participant), were not even talked about to others, let alone presented.

The findings of this study indicate that the evaluation after the impulse buy is a central concern to the buyers and plays a significant role with regard to feelings of happiness after the purchase. The request for feedback carries the risk of receiving negative feedback, which triggered a feeling of cognitive dissonance in some shoppers, for example Nicole (younger participant) whose boyfriend devalued her new T-shirt from England, calling it a tea towel. Aiming to feel happy about the impulse buy, the buyers may try to overcome negative cognitive dissonance by devaluing negative feedback as inappropriate and claim the person lacks knowledge to be able to provide adequate feedback. In that case the impulse buyer's own opinion counts or alternatively she may request feedback from those people who are likely to provide positive feedback as illustrated in Figure 6.1. This is usually their best friend.

Overall, the importance of the catwalk to the female shopper indicates two aspects: Firstly, the importance for the female shopper to attach positive emotions to an impulse buy and feel happy about the item bought on impulse. Secondly, presenting a newly purchased item on the catwalk is in itself an enjoyable experience which generates additional attention and positive emotions, including feelings of happiness.

6.2.5 It's Time for Impulse Buying

The contributions (for example FG 8, older participants) indicate that the number of impulse buys increases with more time available compared to being in a hurry. This is in line with previous research which suggests that time exerts an important psychological impact on impulse buying with the number of impulse buys being positively related to the amount of time available (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Iyer, 1989; Park, 1989; Zhuang et al., 2006). However, the findings from this study suggest that time pressure does not necessarily have a detrimental impact on impulse buying. In particular in the individual interviews it was reported that impulse buying occurred while the shopper was short of time. Often mothers with children were in a hurry because of their childcare responsibilities and therefore often had to make a quick decision and buy on the spot. For example, Brigitte (younger participant) rushed through the shops as she had to return home to cook for her child. This makes shoppers decide on the spot instead of walking away or losing out on a good opportunity and thereby risking negative feelings to occur. This was also experienced on holidays when time was

limited. Therefore some impulse buys may not occur when the shopper has plenty of time available.

Feelings of happiness may occur about the actual item bought on impulse when being in a rush, for example the purchase of a dress at Laura Ashley as mentioned in FG 2 (younger participants). Being in a hurry, though, was not reported by any of the participants in this study as a positive experience in itself. On the other hand, the findings suggest that 'bummeln', meaning that plenty of time is available for having a look round town, is in itself an enjoyable activity which often creates feelings of happiness and can lead to an impulse buy. In line with previous research (Madhavaram and Laverie, 2003), recreational browsing is often triggered by a good mood. 'Bummeln' can be enjoyed as a social activity with one's partner or friend or as time for oneself. The older shoppers usually enjoyed 'bummeln' on holiday or weekend breaks when not stressed and when spending time with their partners.

6.2.6 Now or Later

Time plays an important role in the understanding of the term impulse buying. The buying impulse may occur rapidly when suddenly and unexpectedly coming across a desired item. For instance this comes across in Laura's (older participant) purchase of a battery-driven hand-held Hoover or in FG 1 (younger participants) when the participant talked about her impulse buy of a handbag when originally only planning to get a can of Red Bull. The findings from this study support the characteristics of impulse buying claimed by previous research in some respect regarding the sudden desire or irresistible urge leading to a hasty purchase on the spot (for example Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Jones et al., 2003; Kacen and Lee, 2002; Piron, 1991; Rook, 1987; Sheth et al., 1999; Youn and Faber, 2002). The contributions exemplify that impulse buys can trigger positive emotions such as excitement and a positive surprise or enjoying a feeling of success. In particular time-limited offers for example at Aldi or Tchibo make the shoppers decide on the spot and may be characterised as spur-of-the-moment reactions. This may trigger feelings of happiness by having saved money or not losing out on a good deal.

While Dholakia (2000) argues that only an extremely short time span can be observed between the consumption impulse and acting on it, Rook and Fisher (1995) claim that there is typically a time delay between the buying impulse and the

actual purchase which provides time for normatively evaluating the impulse buy. As for the duration of this time delay, Rook and Fisher (1995) do not provide an indication. The findings from this study support the claim from Rook and Fisher (1995) from two angles: Firstly, in so far as there may be a time lapse between deciding on the spot and the actual acquisition of the item some time later, which provides time for reconsideration or normatively evaluating the impulse buy and the actual acquisition of the item. This was experienced by some participants, for example by Natascha (younger participant) who reconsidered the impulse buy of a Christian song book and Carmen (older participant) who carried on 'bummeln' after having spotted a handbag and only bought it at the end of her trip into town.

Secondly, the claim from Rook and Fisher (1995) is taken further by this study in so far as after spotting an item there is often a time lapse between the impulse decision and the actual acquisition of the item or service. This was shown in a number of contributions, for example the decision to make an appointment at the hairdresser's may be made on impulse but the actual appointment is only a few days later (Laura, older participant; FG 4, younger participants). Beyond the assumption from Rook and Fisher (1995) this time lapse does not have to be used for considering normative evaluations of the impulse buy. Once decided to make an impulse buy none of the participants in this study then reconsidered the impulse buy before acquiring the item. For instance the delay may be due to the circumstances (for example the appointment at the hairdresser's, FG 4, younger participants), practical reasons (for example Laura's impulse buy of a children's tent and the time delay between reading the advert in the newspaper and getting to the retail outlet, older participant) or money available (for example Natascha when waiting for her salary at the end of the month for ordering the pile of postcards, younger participant).

Feelings of happiness in impulse buying are therefore not limited to buying on the spot with the immediate acquisition of the item but may also occur with a time lapse. This time lapse can induce feelings of anticipated happiness and looking forward to the actual acquisition of the item once the money is available, for example when leaving home for getting to the retail outlet or the approaching appointment at the hairdresser's. The risk attached to an impulse buy may be reduced by normatively evaluating and reconsidering the impulse buy.

6.3 Happiness over the Course of the Impulse Buying Experience

The longitudinal approach in this study allowed to explore how emotions evolve over the course of the impulse buying experience. The evidence from this study suggests that positive feelings in impulse buying, such as happiness, are not necessarily constant over the period of the impulse buying experience but are subject to change. The findings indicate that after the impulse buy feelings of happiness can (a) decrease, (b) increase, or (c) remain constant over time. While there has been previous research on the post-purchase evaluation of an impulse buy, this referred more to the immediate time after the impulse buy rather than the development and potential changes of the evaluation over a period of three months as investigated in this study (for example Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Fisher Gardial et al., 1994).

As the contributions from the participants in this study indicate, the impulse buy may initially induce positive feelings of euphoria, for example *"in that moment, hurrah, I bought it"* (FG 9, older participants) or the *"ecstatic feeling of a high"* (Diana, younger participant). The impulse buyers do not expect the initial intense feeling of happiness to *"last too long"* (FG 10, impulse buy of clothes, older participants). In the majority of impulse buys mentioned in the individual interviews, initially positive emotions decreased over the course of the study. This does not mean that these impulse purchases were necessarily regretted at a later stage. Instead they were possibly only evaluated as *"a neutral feeling"* (Rebecca, older participant). If the item did not meet expectations, for example due to a lack of quality, this may lead to feelings of disappointment *"but that's really within limits"* (Carmen, older participant). Positive emotions may decrease and convert into feelings of regret right after the impulse buy (FG 3, purchase of no-name trainers, younger participants) or *"after a week or so"* (FG 6, younger participants), or may cause feelings of guilt *"after a while"* (FG 9, older participants). Some impulse buyers (for example Natascha, younger participant, who bought Christian postcards; FG 9, older participants, with the impulse buy of expensive high heels with yellow stripes) who initially experienced feelings of happiness with the purchase eventually deemed this impulse buy as wasteful and irrational. Although some researchers (for example Ainslie, 1975; Rook and Fisher, 1995) generally consider impulsive behaviour as irrational and wasteful, this is not supported in this exclusiveness by the overall findings of this

study. The findings of this study do not support the practical implications suggested by Silvera et al. (2008) in terms of developing social marketing campaigns emphasising the link between negative affect and impulse buying.

The evidence suggests that negative emotions such as a guilty conscience at the time of the impulse buy or shortly afterwards may transform into feelings of happiness "*three days later*" (FG 4, younger participants). Similarly, positive emotions at the time of the acquisition of the item may increase over time. However, this increase over time could only be observed in the minority of the longitudinal cases, for example Natascha (younger participant) and her purchase of the Christian song book. With regard to the more immediate time after the impulse buy, positive emotions were amplified and increased within a short time when presenting the acquired item on the private catwalk. Based on the mainly positive feedback given on the catwalk, the initial doubts of the participants and therefore limited positive or unsure feelings about the impulse buy were dispersed, for example Nicole's (younger participant) purchase of a bikini. This caused positive feelings, including feelings of happiness or amplified already existing positive feelings about the purchased item.

In the majority of cases the positive emotional evaluation, including feelings of happiness regarding the impulse buying experience, remained more or less constant over time, for example Carmen's (older participant) impulse buy of bed linen. This may also have been supported by positive reaffirmation from the private catwalk. The continuous positive evaluation of one's impulse buy over time was also reflected by several contributions from the focus groups, for example in FG 2 (younger participants) the purchase of a dress from Laura Ashley.

Overall, happiness may occur any time during the course of the impulse buying experience. In the minority of cases, happiness increases over time. Usually, the positive feelings attached to an impulse buy remain constant or may decline some time after the acquisition of the item or service. This decline is usually expected by the impulse buyers. However, this does not affect the overall positive evaluation of the impulse buy and the feelings of happiness attached to it.

6.4 Out of the Dark: The Bright Side of Consumption

In this section impulse buying as the dark side of consumption will be assessed on the basis of the findings of this study. The consumer society with its hedonistic lifestyle and materialistic attitude is often associated by critics as the dark side of consumer marketing (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002). Impulse buying in particular is devalued as the dark side of consumption (Mick, 1996). Society tends to impose negative normative evaluations on impulse buying which is fuelled by the popular press (for example Evening Chronicle, 2005; Klein, 2008; Young, 1998).

The findings of this study bring forward evidence which associates impulse buying with happiness and thereby shifts the emphasis of impulse buying more towards the bright side of consumption. In this context it needs to be reminded that dysfunctional shoppers, including compulsive shoppers, were not the focus of this study. Although compulsive shoppers have not been pre-screened out of this study, they were not specifically recruited. This might have affected the perception and evaluation of impulse buying experiences.

In this section a distinction will be introduced between the terminology used to support the dark side and the terms highlighting the bright side of impulse buying. Motivations for impulse buys and their impact on the buyer will be explored with particular regard to feelings of happiness. The positive aspects of impulse buying, or the bright side of life, will be explored in more detail. This is followed by the section 'Underwear is never wasted', in which the topic of waste in impulse buying will be discussed. Finally, it will be looked at the theme of dissatisfaction, regret and the ritual of the guilty conscience as potential impacts of an impulse buy. This section concludes with an evaluation of the role of the inner dialogue.

6.4.1 Terminology of the Dark and Brighter Side of Consumption

Impulsive behaviour has a long tradition of negative associations and terminology, including foolishness, weak willpower and lower intelligence, and even social deviance and criminality (Böhm-Bawerk, 1959; Scherhorn et al., 1990; Valence et al., 1988). A similar dark picture is drawn by most previous research on impulse buying in terms of inconsistent behaviour and immediate gratification (Stigler and Becker, 1977), psychological disequilibrium with a sudden desire to act (Rook and

Hoch, 1985), and compelling purchasing behaviour (Kacen and Lee, 2002). Contrary to individuals being in control those who are prone to act on impulse are not only spontaneous but also supposed to be careless and reckless (Tellegen, 1982). Rook (1987) claims that the impulse buyer acts on a persistent urge and his or her behaviour is more likely to be perceived as bad rather than good.

While impulse buying, at a moderate level, can be a pleasant and enjoyable experience and relatively harmless, Silvera et al. (2008) argue that its dark side with a high impulse buying frequency can be problematic due to its potential connection to negative emotions and harmful consequences. As a consequence they suggest not viewing impulse buying as harmless fun but as a potential problem that requires control mechanisms. Overall, impulse buying is claimed to be irrational, risky and wasteful (Ainslie, 1975; Rook and Fisher, 1995) and a sign for immaturity (Solnick et al., 1980). Dittmar and Drury (2000) expect regret to occur more often in the context of impulse buying compared to planned buys.

The evidence from this study suggests to associate impulse buying with a stronger emphasis on the bright side of consumption as has been done by some research mainly since the 1990s (for example Hausman, 2000; Wood, 2005). These contributions provide evidence that impulse buying is not necessarily irrational (Malter, 1996; Thompson et al., 1990). Shopping in terms of retail therapy can be used as compensatory consumption behaviour, for example to make up for a lack of self-esteem, happiness or other emotional shortcomings (Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). Buyers do not view their impulse buys as wrong but may feel good or even happy about them (Dittmar et al., 1996; Rook, 1987). Gardner and Rook (1988) claim that impulse buying often leads to immediate gratification and 90 percent of their sample feeling somewhat or extremely happy. In a study from Thompson et al. (1990, p.357) some participants reported feeling thrilled about an impulse buy and "these exciting experiences were frequently described in druglike terms". Similarly impulse buying can make the buyer feel uplifted, enthusiastic, full of joy and can be fun (Cobb and Hoyer, 1986; Hausman, 2000; Wood, 2005). Hausman (2000) disagrees that impulse buying is normatively wrong and argues that hedonic aspects are important benefits of impulse buying, which can therefore be regarded as a valued pastime than a mere acquisition of goods. Campbell (2000) claims that women evaluate browsing and social interaction as part of their shopping activities in a positive light. The evidence from this study suggests emphasising more of the positive implications of impulse buying.

Beyond the claims from previous research the findings from this study suggest that most impulse buying experiences evoke positive emotions for the buyer. The terminology to describe these positive emotions was used interchangeably in this study, for example *"I'm contented. I'm happy [German: freu mich]"*¹ (Carmen, older participant) with the term feeling happy being most often used in individual interviews. These positive feelings may be feelings of success for example about a good deal (Natascha, younger participant) or having *"discovered"* the item (FG 5, younger participants). Moreover positive feelings such as being *"thrilled"* and *"proud"* (Rebecca, older participant) about the impulse buy may lead to celebrating the acquisition of the item. Feelings of anticipated happiness may occur when waiting for receiving the item, for example via catalogue (for example Diana, younger participant) or online order (Natascha, younger participant). Impulse buying can provide positive feelings, for example Nicole (younger participant) is *"rather glad that I had found something"*. Feelings of happiness may express themselves through bodily reactions, such as jumping up and down, *"I spot it and then my heart is beating quickly right away"* (FG 9, older participants).

With regard to the German language, the positive term 'sich freuen' [happy] was used more often and appears to be more suitable than the German term 'glücklich' [happy] or any other positive emotional expression to express feelings of happiness in the context of an impulse buy. Although a number of participants used the German term 'glücklich' [happy], some individuals (for example Nicole, younger participant) and focus groups (for example FG 3, younger participants) rejected the German term 'glücklich' for being unsuitable in the context of buying. Interestingly, the English term 'happy' was used in German sentences a couple of times. This term 'happy' was never explained and translated by the participants with 'glücklich' but replaced by other positive German terms, such as *"sich freuen"* (for example FG 8, older participants).

Previous research claims that planned buying involves a time-consuming search which can be frustrating and increase unpleasant feelings (Bettman et al., 1991; Herbig and Kramer, 1994; Piron, 1991). As a consequence Malter (1996) claims that impulse buying may appear rational to the consumer. The findings from this study support this claim in so far as planned buying is often associated with a frustrating experience (for example FG 7, younger participants; FG 9, older

¹ In German: „Ich bin zufrieden. Ich freu mich.“

participants) often leading to a compromise and sometimes ending up with no purchase. The findings suggest that impulse buying is perceived as more successful and yields better results, for example items bought on impulse were better liked (FG 8, older participants) or fit better (FG 4, younger participants). Overall the use of more positive terminology in the context of impulse buying in this study acknowledges that impulse buying can be associated with positive emotions, including feelings of happiness.

6.4.2 The Bright Side of Life

The findings indicate that fun, fancy, desire and novelty purchases out of curiosity are major hedonic motivations for impulse buying in particular for younger shoppers and induce positive feelings. In addition, there is evidence that the impulse buyer does not feel obliged to find an item (FG 8, older participants) but can be relaxed during her trip into town, which contribute to positive feelings attached to the impulse buying experience. This moves the impulse buying experience further away from being associated with the dark side of consumption. This is in line with previous research which argues that hedonic desires rather than utilitarian considerations are a main motivation in impulse buying (Piron, 1991; Thompson et al., 1990; Verplanken et al., 2005). At an affective level, impulse buying is claimed to provide high-emotional arousal such as pleasure and excitement and is associated with non-economic buying motives such as novelty, social or emotional gratification (for example Bellenger et al., 1977; Hausman, 2000; Scitovsky, 1992; Sheth et al., 1999; Verplanken et al., 2005; Wood, 2005). However, some researchers (for example Verplanken and Herabidi, 2001) call these motivations non-rational reasons in impulse buying, which alludes to the dark side of consumption.

The findings from this study indicate that impulse buying makes the shopper feel emotionally stimulated and excited, which makes spending money easier. This is in line with previous research from Rook and Gardner (1993). In the focus groups all participants, regardless of their age, were motivated by novelties to engage in impulse buying, whereas none of the older shoppers in the individual interviews were attracted by novelties to engage in impulse buying. Instead of being brand loyal, the younger shoppers enjoy trying out something new and get excited, which overall appears to cause positive emotions. In a similar way, surprisingly coming across a desired item can trigger sudden excitement and feelings of happiness (for

example FG 6, younger participants – purchase of white pair of Dockers). The anticipation of the acquisition of an item in impulse buying can sometimes create excitement and feelings of looking forward to the delivery of the item. This was mainly reported by younger shoppers, for example with online or catalogue orders. The findings from the individual cases (for example Diana, younger participant; Natascha, younger participant; Lena, older participant) suggest that positive emotions, including happiness, may occur at the time of placing the product order, while waiting for its delivery, on its receipt, or when looking forward to its first use. The evidence suggests that a perceived delay of shipment, however, causes negative feelings even if the initial excitement was high. The findings suggest that impulse buying and positive emotions attached to it are not confined to seeing a product and immediately making the purchase ‘on the spot’ as mostly claimed in the literature (for example Piron, 1991; Rook, 1987). Instead impulse buying should be considered in a broader time perspective between the buying decision and the eventual acquisition of the item.

Some participants treated themselves with an impulse buy intending to provide some pleasure (for example FG 2, younger participants - impulse buy of a cup of coffee). A number of participants in the focus groups rewarded themselves for some kind of achievement, for example for working hard. These rewards range from small expenses to significant spendings, such as going on a weekend break, which may even include spending beyond one's financial means (for example FG 9, older participants). Regarding holidays, Crawford and Melewar (2003, p.92) claim that impulse purchasing behaviour is increased by the “I’m on my holiday syndrome”. They claim this is characterised by high excitement and the availability of a higher than normal disposable income. The findings of this study support this claim that going on holiday constitutes a motivation for impulse buying, mainly to the younger shoppers. In line with the “holiday syndrome” (Crawford and Melewar, 2003, p.92) some participants in the focus groups (for example FG 7, younger participants) talked of “*holiday money*” being allocated to this particular stay and therefore available for being spent freely. The findings suggest that impulse buys of holiday souvenirs may be important to the holiday-maker for reminding them of this particular holiday (for example Nicole, younger participant; FG 7, younger participants) or preserve and bring home the special atmosphere from a place or an event (for example Natascha's purchase of a Christian song book on a retreat abroad, younger participant). These impulse buys on holiday can create and preserve positive feelings attached to holiday memories. On the other hand, impulse buys on holiday due to the ‘holiday syndrome’ may also lead to regret once

the buyer returns home and realises the item is of no use or not liked any more (for example FG 4, younger participants).

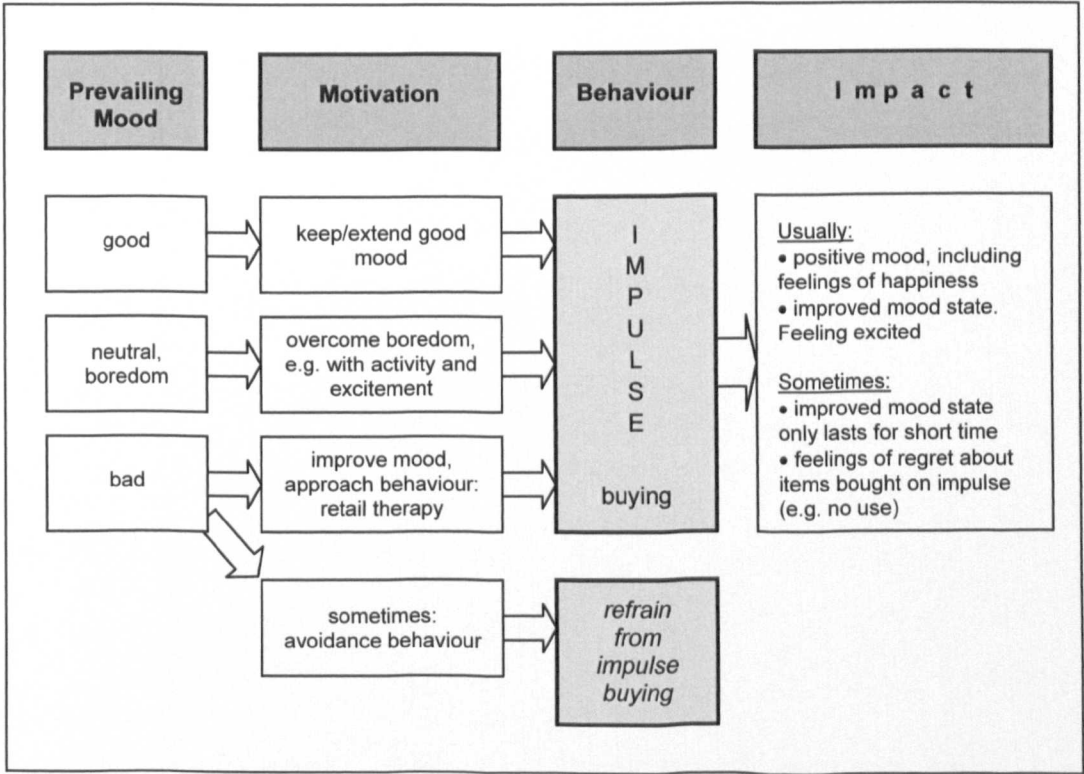
Rook and Fisher (1995) claim that gifting may have a positive impact on normative evaluations of an impulse buy because the motivation is more virtuous. This claim is supported by the findings in this study, for example the feedback from Carmen's (older participant) husband regarding her impulse buy of a vase at Ikea as a gift for her mother. Gift buying is a typical hedonic motivation for an impulse buy and often mentioned in this study. The evidence suggests that buying a gift on impulse is closely associated with positive feelings for both the impulse buyer and the recipient.

The majority of impulse buys mentioned in this study occurred during positive mood states. The findings support previous research that mood states play an important role in the psychological buying considerations in impulse buying (Dittmar et al., 1996). The evidence suggests a good mood, for example when feeling excited or when the weather is nice, can trigger an impulse buy. The older shoppers tend to associate a good mood with feeling relaxed, winding down, having spare time available and being free of stress, which amplifies their positive mood. The findings of this study are in agreement with Isen (2000) who suggest that positive affect increases one's engagement in enjoyment and fun activities. Previous research claims that people in a positive mood state are increasingly willing to accept risk, desire to extend the duration of their good mood and 85 percent of them would rather buy on impulse in a positive compared to a negative mood (Isen, 1984; Rook and Gardner, 1993; Schwarz and Bohner, 1996). In similar terms the psychological literature (for example Clore, 1994; Davidson, 1993; Fredrickson, 2002; Frijda, 1994) claims that not only positive emotions but also positive affective states, such as a positive mood, tend to induce an approach behaviour, which is supported by the findings from this study.

The findings of this research suggest that impulse buying can play a therapeutic role for putting worries aside or to overcome a neutral or bad mood characterised by boredom, temporarily feeling mildly depressed, or feelings of frustration (for example Rebecca, older participant; Diana, younger participant). Therefore women who are in a bad mood may deliberately resort to making an impulse buy with the intention to overcome an undesired mood state. This is in accordance with prior research, which suggests that impulse buying may be used as an effective tactic for mood repair and overcoming feelings of depression and low self-esteem

(Dittmar et al., 2007; Gardner and Rook, 1988; Mick and DeMoss, 1990; O’Guinn and Faber, 1989; Rook and Gardner, 1993; Verplanken et al., 2005; Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe, 1996). Verplanken et al. (2005) propose that impulse buying is predominantly driven by negative psychological states. For others the improved mood state may only be the by-product of the impulse buy but not the original motivation. In some cases, however, it can be observed that the motivation of mood repair can lead to impulse buys of non-necessity items which may be regretted later (for example FG 9, older participants) or the improved mood state may last only for a short time (for example FG 7, younger participants). On the other hand the findings also suggest that a bad mood does not necessarily trigger an impulse buy but may be, for some individuals, the root cause to discourage them from going shopping (avoidance behaviour).

Figure 6.2: Mood as a Motivation for Impulse Buying



Consumers in this study usually feel better after an impulse buy, which may also include feelings of happiness. Furthermore as illustrated in Figure 6.2 the evidence from this study suggests that this applies to all mood states, meaning impulse buyers who were initially in a good, neutral, or bad mood usually felt better or at least their good mood was preserved for a longer time after an impulse buy. With regard to consumers who suffer from high stress levels and anxiety, Youn and Faber (2000) suggest that their motivation for impulse buying is stress relief or the

desire to escape from their problems by prolonging a positive mood state. As summarised in a more general sense by a participant:

"Shopping has something to do with pleasure and enjoyment. Either you comfort yourself with the purchase because you are unhappy or you'd buy something and your good feeling or mood is even increased. That's kind of pleasure consumption...Shopping to cheer oneself up. It's an emotional amplifier." (FG 10, older participants)

The findings from this study are in accordance with previous findings that the large majority of consumers feel better after an impulse buy (Faber and Christenson, 1995; Gardner and Rook, 1988).

6.4.3 Underwear is never wasted

The minority of impulse buys in this study were evaluated as wasteful, for example the item turned out to be of no use or it was not liked later on. Examples include Natascha's (younger participant) impulse buy of Christian postcards or the purchase of high heels of a participant in FG 9 (older participants). In addition, some of the younger shoppers (for example Natascha, younger participant) may feel at times forced to make an impulse buy due to the impact of other people against one's own best instinct. This might entail wasting one's money on an impulse buy. As a consequence, negative feelings might occur, such as feelings of annoyance. Society tends to link impulse buying to social disapproval (Rook, 1987) and negative normative evaluations (Hausman, 2000). Overall, however, the majority of impulse buyers in this study do not perceive their impulse buys as wasteful and extravagant. Their experiences do not support previous research as discussed earlier.

In line with prior research it was found that often family members, in particular mothers or boyfriends, are concerned about the financial implications and may reject an impulse buy for being wasteful (Abrams et al., 2000; Baumeister, 2002; Rook, 1987; Rook and Fisher, 1995). Therefore the impulse buyer may not tell the truth about the impulse buy or may keep it as a secret (FG 8, older participants – the buyer's husband is not supposed to know about the purchase of an expensive handbag; FG 4, younger participants – impulse buyers pretend to require clothes for work to please their mothers). The reason why particular family members sometimes judge the impulse buy as wasteful may be found in the fact that they

are most often asked for feedback on the private catwalk. Contrary to non-family members, who may not be informed or feel allowed to talk about financial implications, they may dare to highlight financial constraints. Only some impulse buys of younger participants in the focus groups resulted in negative financial implications. These were usually solved by asking one's parents for money (for example FG 4, younger participants). If the item bought on impulse is not used straight away because of a lack of an actual need, the majority of participants argue not having wasted any money because they expect a future need for the item. For instance, the majority of focus groups talked about underwear in the sense of "*you always need underwear*" (FG 6, younger participants). In this respect, the impulse buy can serve a utilitarian need. Overall, the contributions in this study indicate that the consumers are pleased with their impulse buying experiences and can make use of the purchased item in the sense of "*underwear is never wasted*" (FG 4, younger participants).

6.4.4 Any regrets? The Ritual of the Guilty Conscience

The participants in the cases usually only felt moderate regret, such as "*a kind of neutral feeling*" (Rebecca, older participant) and feeling "*dissatisfied*" (Nicole, younger participant). Their emotional reactions were usually moderate and calm. The evidence from the cases suggests that older impulse buyers only rarely make purchases they regret later on. For instance, one participant assumes to feel regret about an impulse buy as seldom as once a year. Although the shoppers in the focus groups were able to recall a negative experience with some of their many impulse buys some time in the past, the evidence from the individual cases clearly indicates that feeling regretful about a particular impulse buy occurs only on the rare occasions. Negative feelings in terms of dissatisfaction may sometimes occur if the quality of the purchased product does not come up to expectations. These findings stand in contrast to previous work which claims that impulse buying often has negative impacts, such as feelings of regret and guilt (for example Dittmar and Drury, 2000). Dittmar and Drury (2000) argue that most impulse buyers in their study expressed regret, which apparently occurs more often than in planned purchases because the latter are thought through more carefully.

The findings from the focus groups indicate that the impulse buyers actively try to avoid a guilty conscience, for example by paying by EC card (FG 2, younger participants) or passing on an unwanted item to someone else (FG 4, younger

participants). In the individual interviews the participants talked about a guilty conscience mainly in conjunction with another positive feeling. This supports the findings from Dittmar and Drury (2000) who claim that the impulse buy may be regretted in terms of one aspect but not in terms of another one. On the one hand the impulse buyer may have been satisfied with the purchase and experienced a positive emotion, yet on the other hand she mentions having a guilty conscience due to the money spent (for example Nicole, younger participant and FG 3, younger participants). This kind of guilty conscience, though, needs to be put into perspective: the buyer's conscience may not necessarily be troubled by feelings of guilt. Instead, claiming a guilty conscience about an expense may be a ritual to put one's mind at ease or a statement in order to please other people who may expect the buyer to have a guilty conscience. In fact, it appears that older shoppers or those with children assume they are expected to have a guilty conscience when spending money on themselves (for example FG 8, older participants). This assumption is possibly due to the stigma attached to impulse buying. This kind of guilty conscience is more a ritual than a display of genuine feelings of guilt and remorse. The shoppers may only pretend to experience these negative feelings. This alludes to the predominantly negative perception of impulse buying. For instance, Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) suggest that consumers may expect other people to evaluate their impulse buy in a negative light.

Despite the predominantly dark or negative image of impulse buying in the literature, the perception of one's own impulse buys was positive for most participants in this study. None of the participants intended to avoid impulse buys in the future as a consequence of their impulse buying experiences. While negative feelings in the context of an impulse buy may occur, the evidence suggests that they only occur on the rare occasions and do not play a significant role in impulse buying. As a consequence, their detrimental impact on happiness in impulse buying remains limited. Impulse buying is usually perceived as a positive experience and tends to be associated with the bright side of consumption.

6.4.5 The Inner Dialogue

According to early psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1911), the Id or pleasure principle for immediate gratification is controlled by the Superego, which represents conscience, morality and other values. In-between there is the balancing force of the Ego which tries to consider the hedonic aspirations of the Id and the moral

values of the Superego. Applying this theory with the control mechanism of the Ego to impulse buying, it appears questionable how, if and when a buyer can feel out of control as claimed in previous research (for example Beatty and Ferrell, 1998).

Previous research associates impulse buying with an extreme kind of unplanned buying emphasising the speed of the impulse purchase, the lack of intention and consideration of any consequences, as well as limited reflection about a need (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Rook, 1987; Rook and Hoch, 1985; Sheth et al., 1999). The impulse buy is described as a fast process which does not allow for the collection and thoughtful evaluation of all information and potential alternatives (Kacen and Lee, 2002). This irresistible desire or urge is associated in the literature with a feeling of helplessness (Piron, 1993).

To some extent, the findings from this study support these claims from previous research. Impulse buying was described in the focus groups (for example FG 1, mixed age group) as fast and occurring on the spur of the moment, which is in accordance with previous research. Impulse buying is described by all focus groups and the participants in the longitudinal cases with close connection to a lack of intention. In addition particularly the younger shoppers in the focus groups revealed that impulse buying often occurs with limited consideration of any consequences (for example FG 5, younger participants). This supports previous findings on trait impulsiveness indicating that younger people act more often on impulse than older people and demonstrate less self-control (Eysenck et al., 1985; Lawton et al., 1992; McConatha et al., 1994; Rawlings et al., 1995). Kacen and Lee (2002) believe that consumers learn as they get older to be in control of their impulsive buying tendencies. The findings in his study support these claims in terms of older shoppers appearing to be more hesitant and preferring to take more time to consider the purchase (for example FG 8, older participants). In addition, the findings suggest that with increasing age and maturity the shoppers, sometimes because of negative experiences with previous purchases, recall these incidents in similar situations (for example FG 8, older participants).

Regarding the limited reflection about a need, the findings of this study question the claims provided by most previous research (for example Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Kacen and Lee, 2002; Rook, 1987; Rook and Hoch, 1985; Sheth et al., 1999). More in line with this study is the research from Strack et al. (2006). They proposed in their reflective-impulsive model that choice for example in consumer buying is influenced by the reflective and/or impulsive system. The reflective

system may be driven by reasoning and includes awareness of stimuli, cognition and conscious processing while the impulse system may be driven by habits and motivations and includes lack of awareness and affective processing of stimuli (Strack et al., 2006). The evidence from the focus groups and cases does not only support the impulse system but also the reflective system: The impulse buyer usually reflects about the need for an item, considers the price and value for money of the purchase. This need is usually rather a desire or want, something enjoyable and a pleasure buy instead of a duty purchase or a required item. In this context Dittmar and Drury (2000) argue that these psychological or hedonic motivations, such as desire, want and treat outweigh budgetary impacts. In addition, Gabriel and Lang (2006) claim that the root cause for consumption and enjoyment of life is pleasure rather than need. The impulse buyer may purchase due to an actual genuine need or even consider a future need. Considerations about the future use of an item may cause positive emotions. The findings indicate that the impulse buyer is unlikely to purchase an item she feels will be of no need or use at any time. Based on the findings of this study the claim about the limited reflection about an impulse buy cannot be generally supported and only applies to some impulse buying experiences.

Previous research (for example Rook, 1987) claims that impulse buyers are more likely to be out of control than planned buyers. Despite generally acknowledging the differences between impulse and compulsive buying, a recent study claims that these two buying behaviours "share the central feature of losing impulse control while shopping" (Silvera et al., 2008, p.26). Similarly, Wansink (1994) links impulsive with compulsive buying. In an article on the dark side of consumer behaviour Wansink (1994) contrasts purposeful consumer choice behaviour aiming to maximise consumer utility with the dark side of consumer behaviour, which is claimed to stand for addictive behaviours. In summary, in contrast to planned buying these evaluations associate impulse buying with negative connotations such as lack of control and limited regard to price, need and good value for money. While the focus of this study is not the investigation of the differences between impulse and planned buying, the findings only partly support these claims. In agreement with previous research it was found in this study that the reduced control may occur in impulse buying in terms of "*switch off your brain*" (FG 6, younger participants) and is often perceived in conjunction with the price. Reduced prices and items on sale attract impulse buyers even though the item may not be highly desired but bought only on the grounds of the large savings (FG 4, younger participants and FG 5, younger participants). Although these buying behaviours

may be considered as a loss of control, the findings suggest that taking advantage of a reduced price is usually associated with positive emotions. These often involve feelings of happiness about the successful deal. It remains questionable if this cost-benefit approach coupled with positive emotions should be devalued as a loss of control. Overall, only the minority of participants associate impulse buying with a waste of money.

The findings indicate that impulse buyers may not literally walk around comparing prices but they still tend to compare prices (for example Nicole, younger participant, when buying the Spanish biscuits) with price spots in their mind based on their previous experiences. As outlined in the paragraphs above the claim in previous research with impulse buyers shopping around less for best value for money can only partially be supported by this study. Moreover, the findings contradict a general feeling of being out of control in so far as the impulse buyer often deliberately seeks advice from other people prior to making the impulse buy in order to reduce the risk (FG 4, younger participants and FG 8, older participants). In this case the impulse buyer strives to reduce the risk in terms of financial loss because an equivalent product may be available somewhere else at a lower price (Jacoby and Kaplan, 1972). Feelings of happiness occurred for example for the impulse buyer in FG 6 (younger participants) who had fallen in "love" with an item. Instead of associating this with feeling out of control and drawing on the dark side of impulse buying, an impulse buy based on this motivation was typically described to entail positive feelings. This stands in contrast to previous research (for example Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Dittmar et al., 1996, Thompson et al., 1990; Youn and Faber, 2000) which claims that a shopper who falls in love with an item, feels out of control contrary to planned buying situations.

According to previous literature (for example Rook and Fisher, 1995) normative evaluations may reduce impulsive behaviour and constitute a strategy for impulse resistance to reduce impulse buying. This may include seeking advice from other people as indicated in the contributions of this study. Dholakia (2000) notes there is still a lack of understanding of the role of impulse resistance in impulse buying. On the other hand, it is questionable if the shoppers' intentions of seeking advice should be interpreted as a resistance strategy. Instead, this behaviour could aim to reduce the risk of making an unfavourable impulse purchase. The resistance strategies outlined above could possibly all contribute to reduce the risk of losing control during impulse buying situations. The findings, however, only give little

indication of resistance strategies contrary to previous claims (Rook and Hoch, 1985; Weinberg and Gottwald, 1982).

While it appears the impulse buyer engages in considerations about the potential impulse purchase, this resembles more an inner dialogue than an internal struggle as claimed by Hoch and Loewenstein (1991). Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) suggest apart from the model of time-inconsistent preferences two self-control strategies to reduce and overcome the desire to buy. They claim there is an internal struggle between the willpower to exercise control and resist the urge versus the desire to buy. The findings of this study indicate that the inner dialogue usually includes reflections about the price as one of the most influential factors in impulse buying and the need for an item. In line with the claim from Rook and Hoch (1985) shoppers may employ a cost-benefit analysis or a distancing strategy. As a consequence, they may not even enter a store like Gucci if it is deemed to be beyond one's financial means (FG 7, younger participants). The inner dialogue may be a short moment or stretch over a longer duration. In those buying situations where the buyer spots an item and shortly thereafter makes the buying decision and acquires the item, the inner dialogue may be rather superficial. On the other hand, impulse buying may occur with a time gap between spotting an item and the actual acquisition. This leaves more time for the inner dialogue, for example Carmen's impulse buy of her handbag after meandering through town and having a coffee.

Another risk in impulse buying can be found in the loss of control by using the EC card, which makes impulse buying easier as the payment becomes less visible and money (seems to be) available (for example FG 5, younger participants and FG 9, older participants). As a negative result of impulse buying this may lead to overspending as was shown in particular with some younger shoppers, for example: *"every month I overdraw my account"* (FG 6, younger participants), *"right at the beginning of the month I've spent half my money on clothes"* (FG 4, younger participants), or *"I had to call my father...to get some money"* (FG 4, younger participants). While mainly younger shoppers may overspend at times, this does not appear to be the rule of thumb for all impulse buyers. The majority of the contributions indicate that an impulse buy may often not be carried out if an item does not appear to be value for money or is beyond one's financial means (FG 3, younger participants). In addition, the financial risks that may occur in impulse buying are usually limited as more expensive items are preferably purchased on planned shopping trips (for example FG 4, younger

participants and FG 8, older participants). Vohs and Faber (2007, p.538) argue that basically everybody sometimes engages in impulse buying and that even identified impulse buying personalities “can and do control their impulses at times”.

Overall, there are situations where impulse buying can be associated with feeling out of control and possibly following an urge with, at times, limited consideration of financial consequences. However, most impulse buys appear not to entail any negative consequences and the shoppers tend to be in control of their buying intentions. Motivations for impulse buying usually do not cause the shopper to be out of control but are frequently subject to reconsideration in the inner dialogue. The findings from this study suggest that impulse buyers reflect more about the impulse buy than currently anticipated. This enables a positive impulse buying experience, possibly including feelings of happiness.

6.5 Conclusions: Happiness and Impulse Buying

The overall research aim guiding this study has been ‘Does impulse buying make female shoppers feel happy?’ More specifically, through an analysis of impulse buying experiences of female consumers, this research pursued the following research objectives:

- To understand the role of happiness in impulse buying
- To explore how happiness evolves over the course of the impulse buying experience
- To assess impulse buying as the dark side of consumption

The impulse buying experiences presented in Chapter 5 include the generation of empirical research evidence and their critical discussion with regard to existing research. The findings were discussed in detail in Chapter 6 with particular regard to the research questions and evaluated in the light of previous research.

6.5.1 The Role of Happiness in Impulse Buying

What is the role of happiness in impulse buying? In summary, the pursuit of happiness plays a central role and is one of the major driving forces in motivations

for impulse buying. The link between happiness and impulse buying has been shown in discussions and several illustrations throughout this chapter.

The concept of the 'extended shopping momentum' indicates that impulse and planned buying are closely related. The findings suggest that these seemingly contrasting buying behaviours are overlapping and interdependent, which takes the original research from Dhar et al. (2007) one step further. More importantly in the context of happiness in impulse buying, the 'extended shopping momentum' emphasises the impact and motivational role of feelings of happiness due to the original purchase on the ensuing impulse buy.

Happiness has been identified as one of the main driving forces in motivations for impulse buying. This was shown for example by the hedonic motivations as a trigger for impulse buying. Also, the impulse buy saves the shopper from going home empty-handed, which can make the buyer feel happy. The phenomenon of going home empty-handed had been largely ignored in previous literature with Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) being exceptions. Beyond using impulse buying as therapy for mood repair, it was shown that often a good mood plays a major role for triggering impulse buys. Although the desire for mood repair may be the trigger for impulse buys, this was less often mentioned by the participants in this study. This shifts the emphasis from the dark side of impulse buying motivated by negative mood states towards a more positive view.

Other people have been identified to contribute significantly to the buyer's feelings of happiness with impulse buying. This applies for example to socialising when going into town. Interestingly, this often does not apply to going shopping with male partners, unless being on vacation and having plenty of time available for 'bummeln' with one's partner. This study also shed light on the particular roles and impact of co-shoppers, peer groups or strangers in the impulse buying experience, for example in view of providing advice. By collecting advice from other people, the impulse buyer aims to make a good choice and to feel happy about the purchase. The pursuit of happiness also played a role after the acquisition of the item. It included the activities driven by the consumer to increase her happiness after the impulse buy. In this context this study has provided an understanding of the impact of the catwalk on the impulse buyer. It may affect the female shopper's feelings of happiness, her attitude towards the item or service bought, and her overall evaluation of the impulse buying experience.

The findings support prior research that impulse buying increases with more time available. The effect of 'bummeln' either on one's own or with someone else was identified as a major contributor to feeling happy during the impulse buying experience. However, time pressure does not necessarily have a negative impact on impulse buying. In fact, shoppers may be motivated by their time constraints to buy on the spot. In disagreement with most previous research the evidence suggests that impulse buying does not have to occur on the spur of the moment. There might be a time gap between the buying decision and the actual acquisition of the item or service. This provides the impulse buyer with time for reconsideration of the purchase or anticipation of the actual appointment, for example an appointment at the hairdresser's. The impulse buyer may look forward to acquiring the item or the service, which may generate feelings of anticipated happiness in impulse buying.

6.5.2 Happiness over the Course of the Impulse Buying Experience

Collecting data with a longitudinal approach over a period of three months made it possible to look beyond the immediate effects on an impulse buy right after the purchase and gain an understanding of how feelings of happiness evolve over the course of the impulse buying experience. Previous work has concentrated on the evaluation of an impulse buy right after the purchase or remained vague in terms of an evaluation some time after the impulse buy (for example Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Rook and Fisher, 1995; Thompson et al., 1990). Existing concepts such as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) provide a general framework for evaluations of decisions and are also applicable to impulse buying. This study has provided a more detailed understanding of how and when evaluations of an impulse purchase occur.

The majority of impulse buyers in this study felt happy at some point during the impulse buying experience. Feelings of happiness may change over the course of the impulse buying experience: usually they remain more or less constant over time. Increased feelings of happiness only occur on the rare occasions. In the majority of cases, the impulse buyer expects initial feelings of happiness to decrease some time later. Nonetheless the impulse buy is overall evaluated in a positive light. Although feelings of disappointment or regret may be experienced by the minority of impulse buyers, they tend to be caused by functional shortcomings and may similarly occur in planned buying situations. If impulse buying was harmful

as claimed by recent work (Silvera et al., 2008), feelings of regret or guilt in impulse buying would be likely to occur some time after the initial euphoria has settled about the newly acquired item. However, with the contributions from the participants of this study, these claims from previous research cannot be supported.

6.5.3 Impulse Buying as the Dark Side of Consumption?

Does impulse buying have to be associated with the dark side of consumption? – Not necessarily. While latest research from Silvera et al. (2008) emphasise the potentially harmful consequences of impulse buying, this study generated new positive insights. Contrary to the emphasis in the literature on the dark side of consumption, the data in this study provided evidence that impulse buying is often experienced as positive, including the generation of feelings of happiness.

Impulse buying is not necessarily irrational, can be used in terms of shopping therapy and often triggers positive emotions, including feelings of happiness. Often impulse buying occurs while the shopper is in a good mood. The terminology used by the participants in this study when referring to their impulse buying experiences often included terms such as contentment, happiness, a thrill, sense of success, or being proud about an impulse buy. The positive German term 'sich freuen' [happy] was usually used in this context to describe feelings of happiness. Hedonic motivations, such as fun, desire and novelty purchases, emphasise the bright side of impulse buying. This is also reflected in impulse buys which stand for a reward or special treat. The contributions in this study do not support the research from Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) who suggest that the impulse buy of non-necessary items often generates a feeling of guilt and confession. Only on the rare occasions an impulse buy is perceived as wasteful by the shopper herself. If the item is not used right after the purchase, it may be used some time later. In line with the stigma of impulse buying, however, other people such as family members sometimes devalue an impulse buy and emphasise the negative financial implications. Some female consumers assume that they are expected to feel guilty about an impulse buy. However, the guilty conscience of the impulse buyer does not necessarily display feelings of genuine guilt and remorse. With the ritual of the guilty conscience, the buyer may intend to conceal the positive feelings attached to the impulse buy. The evidence from this study suggests that negative feelings such as disappointment with the quality of the product or feelings of regret only occur in

the minority of impulse buying experiences. This study identified the existence of an inner dialogue in impulse buying. It implies that impulse buyers are usually not out of control and helpless. Instead they aim to reduce the risk of making the wrong choice and support the desire to feel happy about their purchase. The inner dialogue includes for example considerations of need, price, or usefulness of the item in question and indicates that more thought is given to impulse buying by the participants of this study than previously anticipated. In a nutshell: "*Underwear is never wasted*" (FG 4, younger participants).

In summary, the contributions from the participants in this study emphasise the positive aspects of impulse buying and therefore create a brighter picture of impulse buying than previously anticipated. Coming back to the overall research aim of this study 'Does impulse buying make female shoppers feel happy?', the answer has already been given. Happiness plays an important role over the course of the impulse buying experience and can make female consumers feel happy.

Chapter 7: Contribution to Knowledge and Final Reflections

The scope of the literature for this study was ambitious, in particular the literature available on the topic of happiness. This was not surprising considering one of the central aims of mankind is the pursuit of happiness, which had already been explored by Socrates and Aristotle. Regarding impulse buying, the literature in marketing consumer behaviour was a starting point. In addition, work from the following fields was incorporated to provide a background to the study, identify possible issues and contribute to exploring the research questions: retail, psychology, philosophy, sociology, linguistics, politics, history, and neuroscience. The main concern was to remain open to anything that was to be found during the data collection in the field. On the basis of the emergent themes and conclusions depicted in Chapter 6, this final chapter presents the contribution to knowledge. Based on these insights, recommendations for further research will be provided before reflecting on the process of this study.

7.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This research has generated several empirical contributions to increase our understanding of impulse buying. These are illustrated in Table 7.1. The foremost contribution of this thesis is the evidence of a close link between impulse buying and happiness. The pursuit of positive emotions, namely happiness, plays a decisive role in the impulse buying experience of female consumers.

One of the main contributions of this thesis resides in the longitudinal exploration on how emotions evolve over the course of the impulse buying experience. Both the immediate feedback on the latest impulse buy within seven days as well as a reflection on the same experience some time later provided a new perspective into exploring the role of emotions in impulse buying. This refers to the role of emotions both as motivation for impulse buying as well as in evaluating the purchase later on. It is argued in this thesis that previous conceptualisations of impulse buying failed to account for this longitudinal view on impulse buying. The approach chosen in this research generated an understanding of the multiplicity of factors affecting the evolution of emotions, such as happiness, over the course of the impulse buying experience. The shopper's emotions attached to a particular impulse

Table 7.1: Empirical Contribution to Knowledge

Themes	Evidence from previous work	Evidence found in this research
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Data collection only at one particular time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New perspective through longitudinal approach. Constant and changing emotions over the course of the experience• Immediateness of data through feedback about latest impulse buy within seven days
Characteristics of impulse buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Focus on impulse buying as the dark side of consumptiono On the spot, out of controlo Initial euphoria often replaced by regret and guilt soon after the purchaseo Hedonic motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close link between happiness and impulse buying. Dark side has been overstated. Focus on the bright aspects of impulse buying, including happiness• The inner dialogue• Time: Potential time lapse in decision-making or acquisition of an item• Anticipated happiness• The Ritual of the Guilty Conscience• Feelings of dissatisfaction• Hedonic motivations <i>with regard to age</i>• Impulse buying can mean low involvement
'Shopping momentum'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">o The second purchase <i>immediately</i> follows the first purchaseo Quickly vanishes with intervening activities	<p>'Extended shopping momentum':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The second purchase does not have to follow immediately after the first purchase• Shopping mood/good mood can make 'shopping momentum' last longer and induce impulse buys some time later• The initial buying <i>intention</i> is sufficient to induce an impulse buy
Mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Impulse buying often for mood repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impulse buying often during good mood
Empty-handed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Waste of timeo Lack of imagination and decisivenesso Boost of self-esteem not achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waste of time and money• Failure• Decision against impulse buy preoccupies mind• Avoidance of negative emotions as a motivation to engage in impulse buying
Other people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Different impacts on co-shopperso Advice seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Bummeln'¹• Feeling forced to buy something• Competing with others
	<p>Requesting feedback from other people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Doubtso Looking for reassurance	<p>The catwalk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Showing off, applause• Envy, admiration• Getting attention
Impulse and planned buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Different buying behaviours and decision-makingo Continuum between planned, impulse, and compulsive buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overlaps• Interdependencies• Role of planned buying in impulse buying

¹ Bummeln [bUmln] verb. German term for window shopping, explained in Chapter 5.8.2

purchase remain constant or vary over the course of the impulse buying experience. This detailed understanding of the evolution of emotions over the course of the impulse buying experience is not only difficult to achieve in quantitative studies. This also applies to qualitative studies with momentary one-off data collections from consumers recollecting impulse buying experiences as done in most previous research. Similarly, artificial lab situations may be capable of mimicking the shopping environment and collect immediate feedback but cannot replace the experienced emotions caused by an actual impulse buying situation.

One of the main limitations in most previous research in consumer behaviour is their focus particularly on negative outcomes of impulse buying, such as feelings of guilt and regret. This focus on impulse buying as the dark side of consumption creates in some recent research an association with compulsive buying. Happiness has been largely neglected in this context. Yet, there is evidence of the consumers' intention to pursue happiness and avoid negative feelings throughout the impulse buying experience. The evidence found in this research indicates that the strong emphasis in previous research on impulse buying as the dark side of consumption has been overstated. The findings have shown that impulse buying can make the female buyer feel happy. This is not limited to momentary feelings of euphoria but can be experienced over the course of the impulse buying experience. Even the ritual of the guilty conscience, as expressed by older shoppers or those with children, is not a revelation of genuine regret or guilt but hiding a positive impulse buying experience: these impulse buyers assume they are expected to have a guilty conscience when spending money on themselves. In fact, older consumers tend to feel less often dissatisfied with their impulse buy. The findings from this research with regard to socio-demographic characteristics are summarised in Table 7.2.

The findings of this exploratory study go beyond the immediateness of an impulse buy with a purchase on the spot. Instead they acknowledge the existence of an inner dialogue and a potential time lapse for reconsidering the impulse buy. In this inner dialogue the potential impulse buyer may question the need for an item or reconsider the price. The time lapse may occur between spotting an item and the actual purchase or between the impulse buying decision and the actual acquisition of the item. Similar to planned buying, the time lapse allows the impulse buyer to experience anticipated happiness prior to the acquisition of the good or service.

Table 7.2: Evidence with regard to Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Themes	Evidence found in this research	Socio-demographic characteristics
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New perspective through longitudinal approach• Evaluation of emotions over the course of the experience	All impulse buyers
Characteristics of impulse buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close link between happiness and impulse buying. Dark side has been overstated. Focus on the bright aspects of impulse buying, including happiness• The inner dialogue• Time: Potential time lapse in decision-making or acquisition of an item• Anticipated happiness• The Ritual of the Guilty Conscience• Feelings of dissatisfaction• Hedonic motivations <i>with regard to age</i>• Impulse buying can mean low involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All impulse buyers• All impulse buyers• All impulse buyers• All impulse buyers• Generally all impulse buyers. When spending money on themselves, older impulse buyers or those with children assume that other people expect them to have a guilty conscience• Older buyers tend to be less often dissatisfied with their impulse buy• Younger impulse buyers: more excited, less hesitant, less brand loyal, less concerned about overdrawing their bank account. Enticed to buy on impulse, e.g. on holiday, based on the belief that not many people in their area own the same item. Younger impulse buyers eager to try out new items• All impulse buyers
'Shopping momentum'	<p>'Extended shopping momentum':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The second purchase does not have to follow immediately after the first purchase• Shopping mood/good mood can make 'shopping momentum' last longer and induce impulse buys some time later• The initial buying <i>intention</i> is sufficient to induce an impulse buy	All impulse buyers
Mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impulse buying often during good mood	All impulse buyers
Empty-handed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waste of time and money• Failure• Decision against impulse buy preoccupies mind• Avoidance of negative emotions as a motivation to engage in impulse buying	Generally applies to all impulse buyers. However, younger impulse buyers are more concerned about returning home empty-handed
Other people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Bummeln'• Feeling forced to buy something• Competing with others• Advice seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Younger impulse buyers any time. Older impulse buyers: often in a rush and 'bummeln' often with partners and/or on holidays• Younger impulse buyers• All impulse buyers• Younger impulse buyers tend to rely more on the advice from other people
	<p>The catwalk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Showing off, applause• Envy, admiration• Getting attention	All impulse buyers
Impulse and planned buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overlaps• Interdependencies• Role of planned buying in impulse buying	All impulse buyers

In addition to previous research which indicated that hedonic motivations generally play an important role in impulse buying, the evidence of this research specifies age-related particularities. It was shown that the tendency to make an impulse buy declines with increasing age. Compared to their older counterparts, younger impulse buyers are more excited about impulse buys and feel less hesitant to buy on the spot even if this leads to overdrawing their bank account. Similarly, the younger impulse buyers appeared to be more excited about novelties, looking forward to receiving an item via catalogue order and are keen on trying out a new brand or item compared to the older shoppers. Younger consumers are enticed to buy on impulse, for example on holiday, when they believe that not many people in their area own the same item. They may be at times eager to use the item bought on impulse as soon as possible after the purchase. Most older shoppers appeared to be in no rush to put the new item into use. Impulse buying on holidays particularly appealed to younger shoppers. On the other hand, impulse buying is not necessarily exciting and highly involving as claimed in previous research. The evidence found in this research suggests that the impulse purchase may be an unexciting, unimportant occurrence with little involvement of the buyer.

Overall, the hedonic motivations caused positive emotions in the context of impulse buying, including feelings of happiness. One implication of the findings of this thesis on consumer theorists should be to adopt a multifaceted view on impulse buying evaluations, which includes positive aspects. By emphasising the importance of emotions in the impulse buying experience with the overall intention of the consumer to pursue happiness, we move closer to understanding impulse buying from the perspective of the consumer. Gaining the consumers' own understanding of impulse buying instead of aligning their experiences with given definitions also contributes to the furtherance of our understanding of the nature of impulse buying.

With the concept of the 'extended shopping momentum' additional evidence was contributed to previous research. After the initial purchase the second purchase does not need to follow immediately as previously anticipated. 'Shopping momentum' can last longer than previously anticipated and may induce the impulse buy some time later. The evidence suggests that even the initial intention to buy something is sufficient to cause 'shopping momentum' and trigger an impulse buy of another item. This thesis provides to consumer behaviour theorists interested in emotional marketing the acknowledgement that emotions, namely the pursuit of happiness, represent a strong motivation to engage in impulse buying. Although

impulse buying can be deliberately employed for mood repair, it usually occurs during a good mood with the intention to preserve this good mood for a longer time. Instead of triggering an impulse buy, a bad mood may discourage women from impulse buying.

The findings move beyond the traditionally modelled motivations for impulse buying (for example mood repair) by providing evidence that the avoidance of negative emotions also represent a motivation for consumers to engage in impulse buying. In this context, evidence was presented that shoppers may try and avoid returning home empty-handed after a trip into town as this may have a detrimental impact on their feelings of happiness. This study provided insights of additional impacts about returning home empty-handed and highlighted particularities of age groups. Compared to the younger shoppers, the older shoppers appeared to care less about returning home empty-handed. Possibly age and maturity as well as responsibility regarding their expenditures make most older shoppers generally feel hesitant to buy just anything. Also, their self esteem might be more advanced so that they do not feel like a failure when returning home empty-handed after a trip into town. In addition, owing to their general lack of time, spending time by themselves may already be enjoyable in itself. In particular the younger shoppers regret wasting time and money and perceive themselves as a failure when returning home empty-handed. In addition, if they decide against buying an item on impulse, this may preoccupy their mind.

'Bummeln' can be enjoyed on one's own or with someone else. Unlike the younger shoppers who usually have more time available, the older shoppers and those with children are often in a rush. Therefore they enjoy 'bummeln' mainly on holidays and often together with their partner. Younger shoppers tend to rely more on the advice from other people. Some of them may feel forced by their co-shoppers to make an impulse buy against their own best instinct, which may cause negative emotions. The evidence suggests that shoppers may perceive other people as competitors: the shopper feels motivated to buy an item on the spot in order to avoid negative feelings such as disappointment caused by losing out on an item to someone else. Other people also play an important role for creating positive emotions in the impulse buyer, including happiness, by giving positive feedback on the purchase. This may occur on a kind of private fashion show, called 'the catwalk' in this study. The evidence found in this research indicates that purchased items are presented to other people not only for overcoming doubts and feeling reassured but also for showing off, creating envy and gaining attention. This experience does not appear

to be confined to any particular age group investigated in this study. The findings go beyond evidence from previous work which anticipated that feedback is requested mainly in order to overcome doubts and to gain reassurance about an impulse buy.

Adopting the consumers' understanding of impulse buying in this study made it possible to detect overlaps and interdependencies with planned buying throughout this research, for example in the context of the 'extended shopping momentum'. This was also shown for example with the concept of the catwalk by looking for positive feedback from other people on impulse buys, which may also be applicable to planned buying. Similarly, an initially planned buy, which was eventually not carried out, may trigger an impulse buy to avoid going home empty-handed. This is another hint at the link between impulse and planned buying and the understanding that an isolated exploration of buying behaviours needs to be overcome. As has been clearly demonstrated in this thesis, research based on a broader understanding of impulse buying compared to most previous research opens new perspectives in emotional marketing.

7.2 Further Research

Overall, this study has attempted to further develop our understanding of the causes and impacts of impulse buying with particular regard to happiness. Although this research generated interesting findings of happiness in impulse buying, further research is required to increase the understanding of the phenomenon. Suggestions for further research are summarised in Table 7.3.

It would be worth exploring in future studies, for instance, if and how the current economic recession has an impact on impulse buying behaviour and feelings attached to it. This research based on the broad concept of happiness required to determine clear boundaries in order to remain manageable. This choice included gender (female consumers), age (18 to 35 years), and country (Germany). It would be interesting to investigate and eventually compare the findings with happiness in impulse buying of male consumers. In fact, all themes illustrated in Table 7.3 could be investigated with regard to other socio-demographic characteristics than chosen for this study. While the literature and the evidence from this study suggest that the buying behaviour of male consumers differs from female buyers, it is unclear to what extent this applies to the impulse buying context.

Table 7.3: Further Research

Themes	Evidence found in this research	Further Research
Other themes		Impact of economic recession
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New perspective through longitudinal approach• Evaluation of emotions over the course of the experience	<u>Applies to all themes*</u> : Extend study to male consumers (gender studies) Demographic shift: include old age pensioners Include other countries than Germany, compare and contrast findings Investigate in more detail impact of language and cultural differences Large sample for generalisations Alternative methodological approaches
Characteristics of impulse buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close link between happiness and impulse buying. Dark side has been overstated. Focus on the bright aspects of impulse buying, including happiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand on the bright side/on the positive aspects of impulse buying and provide additional evidence• See above*
'Shopping momentum'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Extended shopping momentum'	See above*
Mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impulse buying often during good mood	See above*
Empty-handed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waste of time and money• Failure• Decision against impulse buy preoccupies mind• Avoidance of negative emotions as a motivation to engage in impulse buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore additional underlying factors for avoiding going home empty-handed• See above*
Other people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Bummeln'• Feeling forced to buy something• Competing with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do male shoppers go 'bummeln' with their male friends and make impulse buys?• How do male shoppers accept advice from other people?• See above*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The catwalk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore feelings of buyers who keep their impulse buy a secret• See above*
Impulse and planned buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overlaps• Interdependencies• Role of planned buying in impulse buying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore overlaps in more detail, possibly include compulsive buying• See above*

With the demographic shift in Western Europe towards an ageing population and consequently a shift in spending power, an investigation of older consumers covering old age pensioners and their experiences with impulse buying could be useful. This would enable both marketing practitioners and retailers to gear their efforts more specifically to this growing consumer segment. From a psychological point of view, it would be interesting to gain an understanding if impulse buying could yield positive emotions, namely happiness also in this older age group, generate positive excitement and improve their overall quality of life. Finally, the data collected in this study are limited to Germany only. Extending the empirical research to other countries was out of the scope of this research but appears necessary for a more general application of the findings. This could also be interesting in view of the slight differences attached to the meaning of happiness according to the language and culture. Happiness studies in a broader context than impulse buying could also draw on the findings of this research. Researchers in the field of Happiness studies, who for example investigate happiness and its development over years and across countries on a world-wide scale, may want to consider in more detail the language and cultural differences when collecting and comparing data.

The participants provided a good variety in terms of socio-demographic differences. However, the deliberately limited number of participants in this study makes it inevitable to carefully reflect on the conclusions drawn from this data. Further research with a considerably expanded number of participants is necessary for generalisations and in order to be more specific on the socio-demographic differences. In particular, this appears necessary in view of the longitudinal evaluation of impulse buying experiences. Although the findings from this study indicate that negative emotions such as regret and guilt were not the predominant outcomes of impulse buying experiences, this should be further tested in future research. In addition, alternative methodological approaches could shed light on the phenomenon from a different perspective. Having said this, the approach chosen in this research provided in-depth insights into consumer behaviour and personal evaluations of impulse buying experiences. Several particular findings from this study should be explored in more detail:

Firstly, the topic of avoiding going home empty-handed after a trip into town is not well researched and requires more detailed attention. Some factors that induce this avoidance behaviour have been identified in this study and have been added to those identified by previous research (for example Bayley and Nancarrow, 1998).

However, it is likely that there are more underlying factors motivating the consumer to avoid going home empty-handed than currently anticipated.

Secondly, the phenomenon of 'bummeln' has been described as an enjoyable activity in the context of impulse buying. In the field of gender studies it could be of interest to investigate if men would equally consider going 'bummeln' with one of their male friends and how this is evaluated by other people. Similarly, it is questionable how men would go about seeking advice prior to the impulse buying decision and if they present their newly acquired items on the private catwalk as mentioned by female consumers in this study.

Thirdly, the concept of the catwalk has been identified and the findings have been discussed in this study. This concept should be explored in more detail. For example, it would be interesting to gain a better understanding how impulse buyers feel when they do not present their purchases on a private catwalk but keep the impulse buy a secret by hiding them from other people.

Fourthly, overlaps between impulse buying and planned buying were identified. As the focus of this research was on impulse buying, this overlap with planned buying was only given limited attention. However, this deserves further research, in which also compulsive buying could be included.

Overall, in addition to the contributions from this research and some previous work (for example Hausman, 2000; Wood, 2005), future research should expand on the positive side of impulse buying and provide additional evidence. So far the focus of the research on impulse buying had been mainly on dark aspects. The use of different methodological approaches and possibly larger samples to investigate the bright side of impulse buying, including feelings of happiness, could be beneficial for a more robust empirical evidence.

7.3 Reflections on the Experience

Looking back on the journey of this study, I must have been very naïve at the beginning to assume that studying for a PhD would be slightly more of a challenge compared to previous assignments. One of the major insights for me was that the process of writing a PhD thesis is indeed not in the least bit similar to any other kind of written work I had done so far. I learnt how to conduct comprehensive and

in-depth research, including reading and evaluating a vast amount of literature, collecting and analysing a wealth of data and discussing findings.

Right from the start I was looking for a topic in consumer behaviour because this had already fascinated me during my previous studies. Probably one of the main reasons could be the fact that as a consumer I have experienced buying situations myself. This particular topic in consumer behaviour was only partly based on a personal story as told in Chapter 1. Digging deeper into this topic, it became clear that it was a niche worth researching and thus making an original contribution to knowledge.

Reading the literature on happiness is most likely an endless story. The amount of literature on happiness and the number of fields dealing with this topic is summarised in one word - enormous. This made it difficult to remain focussed on the initial research question. Trying to distract myself from my studies proved to be equally challenging because I had to learn that we get confronted with the topic happiness basically everywhere and everyday. I remember going into town to give myself a break from studying and overheard an elderly couple's conversation about impulse buying:

"I simply know it'll make Sylvia happy [freut sich] when we get her that travel guide. I don't think we need to call her on her mobile and ask. Look, dear, it's on offer. Let's get it." (elderly woman with her male partner on a sunny Saturday morning in Reutlingen, South-West Germany)

Also, I noticed that all kinds of women's magazines appear to enjoy reporting about happiness and what makes women feel happy. – There was no escape for me.

I had expected to experience more difficulties in recruiting participants and higher drop-out rates. Originally I had anticipated a drop out rate of 25 percent but it turned out to be much lower with about ten percent, mainly due to illness. This recruitment success rate was possible due to a number of factors: Firstly, I used gatekeepers to recruit each focus group. Not only did they recruit homogenous groups, but also usually people who more or less knew each other from work or private. The implications were twofold: On the one hand the participants might have felt a kind of obligation towards the gatekeeper to attend the group and reduced their inhibitions to openly share their views. On the other hand, this might have limited the scope of contributions. Secondly, I tried to get in touch with each participant by email or telephone before the focus group interviews in order to

outline the topic and make myself as the researcher more approachable. For the longitudinal study, I talked to each volunteer on the phone in order to emphasise the need for their commitment for the duration of three months. Thirdly with regard to the individual cases, probably it also paid that I tried to accommodate the phone calls as flexible as possible at the most convenient time for each participant. This increased the organisational effort on my side considerably, but I felt I owed the most flexibility possible to their voluntary commitment for a period of three months.

With regard to moderating focus groups, I did not expect them to be that demanding. Although I had read up about how to run a focus group (for example Krueger, 1994, 1998) and had been a silent listener behind the mirror at some professionally organised focus groups at a market research institute, I found it very demanding to listen and moderate the groups and ensure that the discussion kept going. Also, it was challenging to balance out the focus groups in terms of some people being too dominant while others, who were less extrovert but with equally important contributions, had to be encouraged to speak up. In one focus group I gained the impression that one participant could possibly be a compulsive buyer before the other group participants openly suggested this, too. This was a difficult situation because neither myself nor the group were qualified to decide whether someone suffered from compulsive buying or not. Also, it was not the intention of this study to investigate compulsive buying let alone to make any one participant feel offended or feel worse after a session. Therefore I had to calm the situation down and try and protect the woman in question from being further interrogated by the others.

From a methodological perspective, this study emphasised a phenomenological approach aiming to gain a better understanding of the subjective experiences of female consumers with their impulse buys and explore their feelings of happiness in this context. This together with the semi-structured topic guide for focus groups and individual interviews provided rich, in-depth empirical findings, which confirmed the suitability of the methodological approach for answering the research questions. Although the literature on methodology had made me alert that this approach is capable of generating a large volume of open-ended, unstructured data, I did not expect to be eventually drowning in data. This was a drawback for analysing and interpreting the data. In particular in the focus groups the open-ended nature of the semi-structured interview guideline encouraged side-tracking stories about all kinds of purchases from some participants. While these were often interesting, they were not always relevant for the research itself. Reconsidering the

process I believe sticking to a structured interview guideline and reducing sidetracking both in focus groups and individual cases would have been beneficial for a simplified handling of the data in the later stages of the research. Thereby the lengthy process of sorting and labeling the data under headlines would have been reduced, possibly without losing depth in the analysis.

Initially, it was planned to extend the scope of the research to include the point of view from marketing practitioners in order to gain insights from a different perspective than only from the consumer. However, during the course of the research it was decided against this for several reasons. Firstly, the overall research aim was an in-depth understanding whether impulse buying makes female consumers feel happy. This explicitly puts the emphasis on the female consumer and their experiences. Exploring this underresearched area required an in-depth analysis of the collected data. Focus groups appeared to be a good and solid starting point but not sufficient for digging deeper let alone suitable for a longitudinal approach. Therefore it appeared more beneficial to add the individual cases to the focus groups, instead of staying at the surface by expanding the research and looking at impulse buying from a non-consumer perspective.

The subjective approach of this study means that the findings are inevitably influenced by the researcher. The choice of the research methods, the layout of the interview guidelines as well as the choice of gatekeepers were the result of my own preferences, beliefs and pre-understanding of the topic. In addition, the findings are influenced by my own interpretation of the data and their connection to existing research. Aiming to ensure credibility of the findings, I used two different methods of data collection, which were focus groups and individual interviews. In addition I looked at the data from different perspectives, that is cross and within focus groups, respectively, individual cases. This, I felt, has also reduced potential bias when discussing the findings.

The focus and the strength of this research approach was to explore an underresearched topic without testing pre-conceived hypotheses but remain open to the experiences told by the participants. At this point the findings from this exploratory research need to be looked at by further research possibly by using alternative research methodologies before any generalisations can be made. Hopefully, this research has represented adequately the experiences from the participants and that the interpretations of the data receive their own and their peers' confidence.

7.4 Final Thoughts

Being in favour of a structured and pragmatic approach, I was horrified at first when I experienced that the academic world can be so very much different. Eventually I had to manage with being overwhelmed with floods of chaotic data. I had to adapt to a process of analysis which was not in a given, predictable order but an iterative, back and forward process. Unstructured data providing no right or wrong answer were at first more than difficult to handle. And yes, I started this research with a strong bias. This encompassed a personal dislike of going shopping, equating impulse buying with wasting one's money on unnecessary items, and being a fervent supporter of planned buying. Over the years, I have personally become much more tolerant to all kinds of opinions, accept more readily ambiguity, have reduced my prejudices in several respects, and have become much more open-minded. I feel I have intellectually and emotionally grown and increased my research competence steadily over the years.

Finally, I have learnt to set priorities and become very strict about dedicating my time. I have thrown a lot of baggage over board over the past years. As a personal learning from this research journey I will ensure to decide more often on impulse – both in life and in view of my own buying behaviour.

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Appendix A: Screening Questionnaire for Focus Groups and Cases

Screening Questionnaire

1. Do you often buy spontaneously?

Often ☐
Sometimes ☐
Never ☐

2. Do you think that the actual buying experience is more important to you than using the item later on?

Often ☐
Sometimes ☐
Never ☐

3. How often do you buy something and eventually don't use the item or leave it wrapped in the original packaging?

Often ☐
Sometimes ☐
Never ☐

4. Imagine you come home with your shopping and show your purchase to your partner or family and friends. Are there any arguments about your purchases?

Often ☐
Sometimes ☐
Never ☐

5. If you spot something you'd like to have but can't really afford it. Would you buy it?

Yes ☐
Perhaps ☐
No ☐

Appendix B: Email to Focus Group Participants

RE: Research on “Women and Shopping”

Dear “Given name or Family name”,

Thank you for your interest in participating in the group discussion about the topic shopping.

My name is Anja Siekmann and I am a research student at Oxford Brookes University, England. Currently, I am writing a research project. I am interested in your personal experiences and opinions about shopping.

Before we meet up for the groups, could you please fill in the attached questionnaire and return it to me by email at least two working days before the group takes place. Please tick one box per question. All data of the questionnaire as well as in the group discussions will be anonymised and treated with confidentiality. The data will only be used for this academic purpose.

As already indicated by xx (name of gatekeeper), the group discussion about shopping will take about one hour. In case you should be unable to attend the group or have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by email.

Thank you in advance for your interest. I am looking forward to our group discussion.

Best regards,
Anja (or: Anja Siekmann)

Appendix C: Recruitment Process Focus Groups

Convey a sense that the research will be interesting and worthwhile.

->> *Short summary of what I am doing*

->> *Briefing gatekeepers*

Make the contacts personal.

->> *Telephone calls, emails*

Build on existing relationships whenever possible in contrast to cold calls.

->> *Use of gatekeepers*

Use appropriate screening criteria.

->> *Screening questionnaire*

Offer incentives.

->> *Participants learn from this experience*

Make participation as convenient as possible.

->> *Meeting at their workplace or in their preferred environment at their preferred time*

Follow up.

->> *Friendly reminder e-mail or telephone call 2 days before the group takes place*

At every stage, let them know that their participation is important.

->> *Here I was able to fall back on my professional experience as a Sales Account Manager*

Source: Adapted from Morgan (1998, p.110). Comments from the author in italics

Appendix D: Email to Individual Cases

RE: Research on “Women and Shopping”

Dear “Given name or Family name”,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. As outlined by xx (gatekeeper) I am a research student at Oxford Brookes University, England and writing a research project on shopping. In order to introduce the topic to you and talk through some more details with you, I would like to talk to you on the phone.

Layout of this project:

You will be asked to talk about your shopping experiences of the past week. Either by email, on the phone, or we meet up in person for a quick coffee, whatever suits you best. If you should not have bought anything during that week, that’s no problem.

Time required: about 10 to 15 minutes a week, depending on how much you would like to talk about.

Duration: 3 months.

Start: 1st April 2006.

All data will be anonymised and treated with confidentiality. The data will only be used for this academic purpose.

Could you please send me your mobile number or landline number so that we can talk about this in more detail? This will also give you the chance to ask any questions you may have. This phone call will take no more than 10 minutes of your time. Many thanks.

Best regards,

Anja (or: Anja Siekmann)

Appendix E: Basic Socio-Demographic Questions for Focus Groups

- (1) What's your name? (Given name or family name depending on the group)
- (2) What's your age? (I roughly knew their age beforehand)
- (3) What's your current profession? (I knew this beforehand via personal contact or information from HR)
- (4) What's your highest educational qualification at the moment?

Appendix F: Question Guideline for Focus Groups

1. When you think of your purchases, what kind of things do you remember buying on impulse? Any products or services.
2. In your view, when is a purchase an impulse purchase? What do you mean by impulse buying?
3. When you buy something on impulse, how does it make you feel?
4. What could have an influence on whether or not you buy something on impulse? Prompting: mood, weather, other people, sale, husband?
5. What do you like best and least about impulse buying?
6. You see this desirable object in the shop window. What do you do? Follow-up: What do you think of? How do you feel?
7. When you are standing in front of the item and consider whether or not to buy it, what do you think about? How do you feel? Follow up: do you rather buy just anything instead of going home empty-handed?
8. Is there anything that could stop you from buying it? Follow up: any doubts?
9. You had spotted something in town and bought it on impulse. When you arrive home – how do you feel about the purchase? Follow up: how do you feel one week later?
10. Do you think that an impulse purchase has anything to do with happiness? Follow up: what does happiness generally mean to you?
11. Next time when you are about to buy something on impulse, do you think of any previous negative experience with impulse buying?
12. Do you prefer impulse buying or planned buying?
13. Do you self-gift yourself?

Appendix G: Question Guideline for Individual Interviews

1. Did you buy anything on impulse last week? Please tell me more about it.
2. When did it happen?
3. Where did you buy the item? What do you think about that shop?
4. Why did you buy the item/the service?
5. Why do you think that this purchase was an impulse buy?
6. How did you feel when you were buying the item/service? What did you think about?
7. How was your mood? Your day? Were you on your own? Whom were you with?
8. Talk me through your purchase in detail. You went into town and spotted the item. What happened then? What did you think of?
9. What or who could have stopped you from buying the item?
10. Imagine you wouldn't have bought it and returned home empty-handed. How would you feel about this?
11. When you arrived at home how did you feel about the purchase? Did you show the item to anybody or talk about it?
12. How do you feel about the purchase today? Can you explain this a little more?
13. What did you enjoy most about this impulse buy? What didn't you like about it?
14. Did you think of buying something on impulse last week which you eventually did not buy? What was it? How do you now feel about it that you did not buy it on impulse?
15. When you bought xyz this week, did you think of the impulse buy from two weeks/one month etc. ago? In what respect?
16. Two weeks/one month/two months/three months ago you told me about the impulse purchase of xyz. Remember? How do you feel about this purchase today?

Appendix H: Contact Summary Form

1. Main issues
2. Summary of the information given on each of the target questions
3. Anything else that was particularly interesting, illuminating or important
4. What new (or remaining) target questions need to be considered in more detail in the next focus group/individual interview?

Source: Adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994)