

# Male and female shopping strategies show evolution at work in the mall

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Male and female shopping styles are in our genes---and we can look to evolution for the reason. Daniel Kruger, research faculty at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, says it's perfectly natural that men often can't distinguish a sage sock from a beige sock or that sometimes women can't tell if the shoe department is due north or west from the escalator.

From an [evolutionary perspective](#), it all harkens back to the skills that [women](#) used for gathering plant foods and the skills that men used for hunting meat. The contrast emerges because of the different foraging strategies for hunting and gathering used throughout [human evolution](#).

Sex-specific strategies can be seen in the modern consumer environment, according to Kruger's new study, "Evolved foraging [psychology](#) underlies [sex differences](#) in shopping experiences and behaviors," scheduled for the December issue of the *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, & Cultural Psychology*.

The study examines shopping through the framework of evolutionary psychology to understand why so many more women enjoy spending a day picking through racks of clothes with friends, while most men can't get out of the mall fast enough.

"We have evidence that the kind of skills, abilities and behaviors that are important for hunting and gathering in current foraging societies emerge predictably in our modern consumer environment," said Kruger, who

decided to conduct the study after a winter holiday trip with friends across Europe.

After exploring sleepy little villages and reaching Prague, the first thing the women wanted to do was shop, Kruger said, and the men couldn't understand why.

"But that is not so unreasonable if you're thinking about a gathering strategy," Kruger said. "Anytime you come into a new area you want to scope out the landscape and find out where the food patches are."

Kruger said that gathering edible plants and fungi is traditionally done by women. In modern terms, think of filling a basket by selecting one item at a time.

Women in foraging societies return to the same patches that yield previous successful harvests, and usually stay close to home and use landmarks as guides, he said. Foraging is a daily activity, often social, and can include young children, if necessary. When gathering, women must be very adept at choosing just the right color, texture and smell to ensure food safety and quality. They also must time harvests and know when a certain depleted patch will regenerate and yield good harvest again.

In modern terms, women are much more likely than men to know when a specific type of item will go on sale. Women also spend much more time choosing the perfect fabric, color and texture.

Men, on the other hand, often have a specific item in mind and want to get in, get it and get out, Kruger said. It's critical to get meat home as quickly as possible. Taking young children isn't safe in a hunt and would likely hinder progress.

Of course these behaviors aren't genetically determined and don't apply to everyone, but there are consistent broad themes, he said. So why is this important?

"The value is in understanding each other---both your own [shopping](#) strategy and the strategy of the complimentary sex," Kruger said. "It helps demystify behaviors---guys, myself included, have been puzzled by why women shop the way they do."

And women can have a hard time understanding a man's aversion to it, he said.

Source: University of Michigan ([news](#) : [web](#))

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