

## Sad shoppers make bad shoppers, study says

Tuesday, March 23, 2004

By Teresa F. Lindeman, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Don't go shopping when you're sad.

Consumers have been told for years not to hit the grocery stores when they're hungry and the connection there is obvious. Even Spam starts to look good when you're starving.

But new research from Carnegie Mellon University finds people seem willing to pay more when they're sad, even though they were unaware of the emotion's impact. Subjects in the study, which looked at the impact of both sadness and disgust on consumer behavior, did not see any connection with how they felt and their shopping decisions, said **Jennifer Lerner**, an assistant professor of social and decision sciences and psychology.

**Lerner** co-authored the study with economics Professor George Loewenstein and Deborah Small, a doctoral student in the Department of Social and Decision Sciences. The results will be published in the May edition of Psychological Science, the journal of the American Psychological Society.

The researchers plan to further examine the impact of emotion on decision such as home buying, car shopping and even stock investments. "I don't think people have insights into how specific things affect them," said **Lerner**.

In this particular study, a group of participants was randomly divided into three sections.

One saw a scene from the film "The Champ" in which a young boy's mentor dies. Another group was effectively disgusted by the "Trainspotting" movie clip when a man uses an unsanitary toilet. The third group saw more neutral fare.

After individuals recorded their reactions, they were given the chance to either buy or sell sets of highlighters -- prized commodities on the CMU campus.

Disgust just made people want to get rid of things. They sold them for low prices but they didn't seem eager to buy them, either, lowering the amount they'd be willing to pay. That's fits with earlier research that indicated negative emotions impair buying.

But those who had felt sad not long before seemed to have a need to clear out the old and look for hope in something new. They sold low and bought high, paying more than they might have otherwise.

**Lerner** noted compulsive shoppers are sometimes treated with anti-depressants, which may have something to do with this connection between sadness and spending.

In the days of easily accessible Internet shopping and stock market trading -- with no enforced breathing space for second thoughts -- emotions may begin to play an even bigger role in economic choices, which is why Americans need to understand the impact better, **Lerner** said.

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