EVALUATING GENDER IN RETAIL SERVICESCAPES: BEYOND THE HETERONORMATIVE BINARY APPROACH

BY

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THESIS
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ABSTRACT

For consumers who view gender and sexual orientation as fluid concepts, navigating and interpreting in-store atmospherics is a crucial step in their process of reaffirming gender identity, exploring their self-expression, and finding ways of fitting in. A non-binary individual who prefers a more gender-neutral look versus a female looking for something feminine, can be in the same clothing store but have two entirely different experiences in the same environment. As sociocultural concepts for gender continue to evolve beyond the binary gender system, the retail industry must keep pace in order to appeal to customers’ gender identities and sexual orientations. While retail literature has examined the effects of various atmospheric cues, there is a lack of research focusing on gender cues in retail settings or how people with varying genders or sexual orientations experience these environments. This exploratory study examines how the gender indicators (e.g., colors, products, etc.) in clothing stores are perceived and interpreted by consumers as they relate to their own gender identity and sexual orientation. Twenty virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted (eight individuals identifying as members of the LGBTQ+ community, seven heterosexual females, and five heterosexual males). Multiple rounds of coding using in-vivo and holistic methods led to emerging themes: the importance of mannequins, the positive and negative effects of store personnel, and extended perspectives on consumer shopping behaviors elicited through animal personae. Theoretical contributions include exploration of how consumers process brand personality information; interactions with sales associates are critical to consumers’ evaluation of fit; shoppers feel vulnerability to varying degrees in retail environments; and lastly, despite changes in sociocultural norms, retail continues to promote gender as a binary concept through advertising and store imagery.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................1

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .........................................................................................4

2.1 Servicescapes .........................................................................................................................4

2.2 In-Store Atmospherics ...........................................................................................................5

2.2.1 Visual Elements ............................................................................................................6

2.2.2 Auditory, Olfactory, and Haptic Elements .................................................................8

2.3 The Social Aspects of Servicescapes ...................................................................................10

2.3.1 Gender and Sexual Orientation in Retail .................................................................10

2.3.2 Beyond Commercial Purposes ....................................................................................12

2.3.3 Servicescapes and Consumer Effects ..........................................................................13

2.4 Servicescapes and Gender ....................................................................................................14

2.5 Research Purpose and Questions .........................................................................................16

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................18

3.1 Worldview and Approach ....................................................................................................18

3.2 Participant Recruitment .......................................................................................................18

3.3 Procedure .............................................................................................................................19

3.4 Coding and Analysis ............................................................................................................22

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS ..............................................................................................................24

4.1 Evaluating Gender in Retail .................................................................................................24

4.2 Gendered In-store Atmospherics .........................................................................................25
# Table of Contents

4.2.1 Mannequins and Products ................................................................. 25  
4.2.2 Design and Ambient Features .......................................................... 35  
4.2.3 Auditory and Olfactory Elements ..................................................... 38  
4.3 Gendered Stores .................................................................................. 41  
4.4 Sales Associates ................................................................................... 49  
4.4.1 Positive In-store Shopping Experience .......................................... 49  
4.4.2 Negative In-store Shopping Experience ........................................ 55  
4.5 Animal Shopping Traits ..................................................................... 64  
4.5.1 Dog .................................................................................................. 64  
4.5.2 Squirrel .......................................................................................... 65  
4.5.3 Animals of Various Speeds ............................................................... 67  
4.5.4 The Apex Predator Females .............................................................. 70  
4.6 Males and Shopping .......................................................................... 72  
4.7 Mapping the Animal Personae ............................................................. 75  

## Chapter 5: Discussion ............................................................................ 79  
5.1 Evaluating Gender, Meaning, and Interpretations ............................. 79  
5.2 Theoretical Contributions .................................................................. 81  
5.2.1 The Power of the Store Personnel ................................................. 82  
5.2.2 Shoppers and Vulnerability ............................................................. 84  
5.2.3 Beyond the Binary Gender System ............................................... 86  
5.3 Managerial Implications ................................................................... 87  
5.4 Limitations and Future Research ....................................................... 90  

REFERENCES ............................................................................................. 93
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In August 2015, U.S. retail giant Target Corporation announced that they would be removing gendered signs in children's toys and bedding as they deemed gender suggestions as “unnecessary” (Target, 2015). In March 2019, United Airlines became the first U.S. airline to offer non-binary gender booking (United Airlines, 2019). The Pew Research Center reports that four in ten individuals say forms should offer more than two gender options, and one in five U.S. adults know someone who goes by gender-neutral pronouns (Pew Research, 2019a & 2019b). With the current trends of U.S. culture and inclusivity, companies and organizations continue to make strides in creating inclusive environments and experiences for consumers beyond the binary gender approach. Conversations surrounding gender identity, the “innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.), and gender expression, the “external appearance of one's gender identity” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.) have offered more fluid terms for gender (Goldhammer, Malina, & Keuroghlian, 2018; Human Rights Campaign, n.d.; Thorne, Bouman, Marshall, & Arcelus, 2019).

In addition to the reconsideration of the binary gender system, diversity in sexual orientation has become more apparent in mainstream media and advertising to include members of the LBGTQ+ community (Nölke, 2018). While there are various definitions pertaining to gender identity, this thesis will define gender identity as a socially constructed concept that is an individual’s “innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.), and sexual orientation as the “inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).
One area which has continued to shape and reflect how gender and sexual orientation manifest themselves in materialistic ways is the retail industry. Past research has examined gender differences between male and female shoppers (Dennis et al., 2018; Jackson & Holbrook, 1995; Katrodia, Naude, & Soni, 2018; Kotzé, North, Stols, & Venter, 2012; Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015; Underhill, 2009) as well as the intersection of gender expression, sexual orientation, and shopping (Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). With sociocultural norms about identity continuing to expand and evolve, to what extent will retailers adapt to the changing demographics of gender diverse shoppers?

As staples of U.S. consumer culture, retail environments such as in-store settings and online stores can both dictate and reflect current fashion trends while also showcasing fashion targeted for certain gender roles or sexual orientations (Huxley et al., 2014). For example, in-store design elements such as mannequins, colors, and scent can all contribute to the curation of a gendered retail environment. Whether it is a pink theme, a woody scent, or hard rock music playing in the background, these carefully crafted design cues signal a store’s target shopper; however, it is difficult to understand how individuals perceive such cues and interpret their meanings in physical store settings. Coined by Bitner (1992), these design elements are part of the “manmade, physical surroundings” (p. 58) known as servicescapes in which customers experience a “built environment” (p. 58) that is created to appeal to consumers.

Research to date has mostly examined servicescapes and retail brand experiences through the lens of the binary gender approach, highlighting key differences between heterosexual male and female shoppers with limited studies focusing on shoppers from the LGBTQ+ community. Despite contemporary approaches to gender and sexual orientation, comprehensive consumer perceptions of changing retail spaces have not been explored. This thesis takes a novel approach
to retail environments by exploring how individuals from different genders and sexual orientations experience gender in physical clothing stores to better understand the ways that gender identity, sexual orientation, and cues intersect. Assuming a constructivist approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), the present study utilizes virtual interviews to explore participants’ “subjective meanings of their experiences” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) in depth and allow the researcher to observe body language, vocal patterns, pauses, and tone (Babbie, 2016).

Due to the limited amount of research on how gender is perceived in the context of retail studies, this study aims to explore how servicescapes can provide gendered experiences and in turn, how consumers interpret meaning from such indicators. Specifically, with a grounded theory approach, I will gain insight into how different individuals from three demographics (e.g., heterosexual females, heterosexual males, and members of the LGBTQ+ community) evaluate gender in servicescapes and navigate their own shopping experiences. The research will be guided by the following questions: a) what in-store atmospherics do consumers use to evaluate gender in retail settings?; b) what meanings do consumers interpret from in-store atmospherics?; c) how does gender identity relate to interpretations of gender in retail environments?

The next chapters provide an overview of relevant literature with a focus on servicescapes, in-store atmospherics, and the social aspects of retail environments. In Chapter three, I present the method of the study including participant recruitment, interviews, and the coding and analysis of the interview transcripts, followed by the findings in Chapter four, and finally, the discussion in Chapter five in which I summarize the major contributions of the study, limitations, and areas of future research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 SERVICESCAPES

In 2019, the U.S. apparel market amounted to 357 million U.S. dollars with 81% of sales generated offline (Statista, 2019). While online sales are projected to increase each year by approximately 6% over the next few years (Statista, 2019), it is clear that offline retail channels will continue to play an important part in the eyes of consumers and brands. As real-time representations of a brand, servicescapes (Bitner, 1992) provide a carefully crafted place for customers to interact with products and services. Beyond a physical location for shoppers, servicescapes can also have cognitive, emotional, and physiological effects on consumers and employees, which shape their behaviors and responses to in-store environments. As Bitner (1992) posited, servicescapes are processed holistically based on a number of dimensions including environmental, moderators, responses, social behaviors, and interactions, and these factors still play large roles in today’s customer experiences. Bitner’s framework for understanding environment-user relationships (1992, p. 60) paved the way for numerous studies within the marketing and retail literature and brought the servicescape into consideration as a complicated yet critical piece for retailers working to communicate their brand to consumers in physical environments. In the following sections, I will review the various ways that researchers have studied servicescapes to highlight how different in-store atmospherics can affect consumer responses and perceptions in retail settings.

Although many retailers offer online storefronts and smartphone apps, servicescapes offer experiential elements which cannot be found in virtual environments. As Underhill (2009) proposed, “virtually all unplanned purchases—and many planned ones, too—come as a result of
the shopper seeing, touching, smelling or tasting something that promises pleasure, if not fulfillment” (p. 172). Despite the increasing popularity and convenience of online shopping in recent years, customers are “sensual” (Underhill, 2009, p. 171) in nature and in-store experiences are still indispensable to any retailer as these environments permit customers to collect haptic information. Peck and Childers (2003) found that an individual’s ability to touch a product increased confidence in product evaluation; while the “need for touch” (p. 36) may vary among individuals, the more information (e.g., haptic, visual, written) available, the better the experience for the consumer to evaluate products. As such, physical retail stores provide valuable opportunities for shoppers to engage in unparalleled sensory experiences.

2.2 IN-STORE ATMOSPHERICS

In-store atmospherics have been studied throughout retailing and marketing scholarship and have focused on various attributes, particularly those relating to ambient, social, and design factors. For example, Grewal and Baker (1994) conducted an experiment where they simulated in-store shopping experiences with videos and provided multiple versions of high and low levels of ambient (e.g., lighting and music), social (e.g., salespeople), and design (e.g., color scheme, layout, organization) cues. After participants viewed a video of the simulated shopping experience, they were asked about their feelings regarding the $24 price of a picture frame. Overall, participants who had viewed the high levels of ambient, social, and design videos were more accepting of the picture frame price, which supported the researchers’ “notion that certain environmental factors influence consumer perceptions of the fairness or acceptability of a price for a gift product. In turn, price acceptability affects consumer purchase intentions” (Grewal & Baker, 1994, p. 112). Additionally, Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, and Voss (2002) found that
among the three distinct categories, design factors seemed to exhibit stronger influences “on consumer perceptions of the various store choice criteria than do store employee and music cues” (p. 136). Findings from their empirical study also showed that design cues were important in how merchandise was valued and that these design factors had a “significant, negative effect on time/effort and psychic cost perceptions” (Baker et al., 2002, p. 136) which contributed to a holistic processing approach to the servicescape environment.

Expanding on Bitner’s ideas about servicescapes, Roggeveen, Grewal, and Schweiger (2020) broadened the conceptualization of customer journeys to include in- and out-of-store retail experience. As a new way of evaluating the modern aspects of in-store and virtual shopping, the DAST framework provided a comprehensive approach to consider the multitude of in-store and out-of-store factors for brands and retailers to potentially control (Roggeveen et al., 2020). Specifically, the DAST framework explored the associated factors of design (e.g., in-store or online visual elements in retailer-controlled touchpoints such as store layout, website, flyers); ambient (e.g., physical background conditions either in-store or online); social (e.g., people in store, employees, or online reviews); and trialability (e.g., extent to which a customer can test products or services). As interactive elements, any and all combinations of these four distinct areas may influence any number of consumer decisions, including brand selection, store evaluation, and most importantly, shopping behaviors.

2.2.1 VISUAL ELEMENTS

Color, lighting, and efficient use of product placement and space have all been demonstrated as important factors for favorable responses from customers in terms of overall store aesthetics and prestige. Babin, Hardeysty, and Suter (2003) demonstrated the effects of
combining color selection, bright versus soft lighting, and item price. From their experiment, Babin et al. (2003) found that “consumers reacted more favorably to cool store interiors” (p. 549) when paired with low light and were more likely to purchase a clothing item than when shown an orange interior with bright lights. Cho and Lee (2017) revealed that their use of high-luxury colors (i.e., dark brown, brown, and ivory) in computer-generated store interiors led participants to report “significantly higher levels of perceived luxury” (p. 42) than low-luxury interiors (i.e., green, orange, and brown). Additionally, Cho and Lee (2017) emphasized the importance of interior design and its methods of communicating brands to consumers.

Beyond color schemes and decorative elements, in-store displays and the ways in which products are placed can play important roles in customer evaluations. The number of in-store shelf facings have been shown to impact visual attention and brand evaluation, whereas vertical, top shelf placement has increased the noting, choice, and brand evaluation among consumers (Chandon, Hutchinson, Bradlow, & Young, 2009). Chandon, Hutchinson, Bradlow, and Young (2009) found that “for the average brand and consumer, doubling the number of facings increased noting by 28%, reexamination by 35%, and choice and consideration by 10%” (p. 14) whereas “positioning the brand on the top shelf (versus the bottom one) increased noting by 17% and choice by 20%” (p. 14), and “placing a brand near the horizontal center of a shelf (rather than on either of its ends) increased noting by 22% and choice by 17%” (p. 15).

For individual products, package design has shown to hold more or less visual attention depending on its symmetry. In their eye-tracking experiment, Lacoste-Badie, Gagnan, and Droulers (2020) found that participants viewed asymmetric designs on the front of packaged food products for longer amounts of time as opposed to symmetric designs. While front of pack symmetry has been found to influence visual attention (Lacoste-Badie, Gagnan, & Droulers,
2020), increased interstitial space between products has been shown to result in an increased perception of store aesthetics and prestige (Sevilla & Townsend, 2016). Throughout multiple studies, Sevilla and Townsend (2016) showed that space-to-product ratios had positive effects on product evaluation, purchase likelihood, and product experience when the ratios were increased. Studies focusing on visual aspects of products and interior store design have stressed the significant roles these factors can play in a servicescape’s overall aesthetic. From selecting the right color scheme to positioning products on a shelf, visual cues can make small yet important contributions to a store’s strategic design and the ways in which consumers perceive retail space.

2.2.2 AUDITORY, OLFACTORY, AND HAPTIC ELEMENTS

Auditory and olfactory research has highlighted the effects of other sensory elements of servicescapes. Mattila and Wirtz (2001) found music and scent to aid in creating an ambient setting when matched to the store’s image. In their field study at a gift shop, Mattila and Wirtz (2001) altered conditions in a retail store to see how various combinations of music and scent affected consumers’ evaluations of their experience. Pairing a low arousal scent (lavender) or a high arousal scent (grapefruit) with classical music (either relaxing vs. energizing), the researchers revealed that “when the stimuli in the environment act together to provide a coherent atmosphere, the individual in the environment will react more positively” (p. 285). Similarly, Walsh, Shiu, Hassan, Michaelidou, and Beatty (2011) showed that in-store music influenced customers’ emotions (arousal and pleasure) which led to store loyalty, while aroma influenced satisfaction and indirectly, loyalty (p. 741). Throughout his company’s market research, Underhill (2009) noted the use of scents to appeal beyond consumers’ visual senses particularly in supermarkets (p. 174), spirits stores with scented air vents (p. 175), as well as appliance and
These studies have supported the notion that auditory and olfactory elements play important roles in creating store themes, which can then be processed holistically by consumers.

Helme Falk and Hultén (2017) investigated the effects of multi-sensory congruent cues in their field experiment with visual, auditory, and olfactory manipulations of a retail store. From their findings, there was “a positive effect of multi-sensory congruent cues on shopper emotions and purchase behavior in a retail setting” (p. 8). As the researchers found, adding visual cues to an already visually dominant store did not affect shoppers’ emotions or purchase behaviors; however, the addition of auditory and olfactory elements had positive effects on time spent and purchase intent. The findings from Helme Falk and Hultén (2017) reinforce the importance of non-visual sensory cues and the ways in which servicescapes impact consumers.

As noted in the discussion of the DAST framework (Roggeveen et al., 2020), there have been few studies examining trialability, such as touch (Peck & Childers, 2003), but as tactile creatures, humans have the tendency to touch items before purchasing (Underhill, 2009, p. 179) and are consciously and unconsciously affected by other haptics in an environment. More recently, Izadi, Rudd, and Patrick (2019) explored how sensory experiences of airflow direction can energize and influence creative engagement and found that frontal as opposed to dorsal or no airflow led to higher levels of energy and creativity. In their multi-study approach, Izadi et al. (2019) examined this atmospheric feature (“airflow”) previously neglected from empirical studies and suggested a link between airflow and its abilities to promote energy, particularly in a retail setting.
2.3 THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF SERVICESCAPES

2.3.1 GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN RETAIL

With target customers in mind, retailers often try to appeal to consumers by means of propagating styles specific to a shopper’s identities. In the context of this study, gender is considered a cultural or societal term referring to an individual’s “filter through which individuals experience their social world” (Bristor & Fischer, 1993, p. 519, as cited in Schroeder, 2006). Often dictated by sociocultural norms (Wood & Eagly, 2012), gender identity can be promoted and reinforced in retail environments (Filice, Neiterman, & Meyer, 2019; Gupta & Gentry, 2016). Masculinity, “the socially accepted way of being a man” (Tuncay, 2006, p. 313) has been studied to a limited extent within retail settings; however, as social norms evolve, the concept of masculinity has changed as well. In Western studies focusing on masculinity and retail, researchers have examined male shopping stereotypes, such as “grab and go”, “whine and wait”, and “fear of the feminine” described in Otnes and McGrath (2001). From the Western perspective, shopping has been considered a feminine activity (Dennis et al., 2018; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008); however, Otnes and McGrath (2001) posited the process of male shopping behavior as starting with a transcendence of gender role, fueled by a shopping to win mentality, and a focus on achievements (p. 128). As the researchers concluded, “a man must rise above culturally entrenched notions of masculinity and acknowledge that shopping is an acceptable activity” (Otnes & McGrath, 2001, p. 128). Taking a different approach, Frith and Gleeson (2004) used questionnaires to explore how men felt about clothing and body image, to highlight men’s relationship with clothing. Based on their findings, Frith and Gleeson (2004) revealed four key themes: many men viewed clothing as practical; some men did not care about their physical appearance; some used clothes to hide or conceal their bodies; while others used clothes to
adhere to a cultural ideal. Such findings demonstrated specific ways in which men consider clothing as tools for their physical appearance, thus contributing to the retail literature by extending Western male stereotypes and shopping.

More recent studies have reflected how societal norms and gender stereotypes have evolved. Funches, Yarber-Allen, and Johnson (2017) found that male Millennials enjoyed shopping more than their older counterparts and were interested in “engaging and entertaining shopping experiences (p. 107). Attributing these new preferences to redistribution of household roles and alternative family structures, the researchers proposed that male gender roles as well as the male mindset has experienced dynamic changes which extend into new avenues, including shopping. As societal norms and gender stereotypes evolve, the concept of masculinity has changed; ranging from utilitarian to aesthetic motivations. Ourahmoune (2016) observed and identified four distinctive male archetypes among French luxury shoppers, including traditional, melancholic, tough, and effeminate. Although all of these studies may vary in their methods and results, the findings have reflected changing sociocultural notions of Western masculinity.

As the concept of masculinity evolves, so too does the modern meaning of femininity. While femininity has often represented a direct contrast to masculinity, definitions of femininity are similar to those of masculinity due to their ambiguity. Defined as “behaviour or qualities regarded as characteristic of a woman; feminine quality or characteristics; womanliness” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.), femininity, like masculinity, remains to be a broad concept that is socially and culturally bound. Shopping has long been identified as a feminine activity (Dennis et al., 2018; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008) and there have been numerous studies on women and shopping as well as observable behavior (Goldsmith, Moore, & Beaudoin, 1999; Underhill, 2009; Underhill, 2010; Gupta & Gentry, 2016). However, there have been a limited amount of
studies looking beyond hegemonic femininity and masculinity in the retail and advertising world in an effort to diverge from binary perspectives. Studies of LGBTQ+ women and their experiences in retail environments have highlighted how binary approaches to shopping and store organization may have negative implications for shoppers (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). Boyd, Ritch, Dodd, and McColl (2020) explored consumers’ perceptions of gender and sexual orientation in retail brand representations and found progressive understanding among younger generations for diverse portrayals of people beyond stereotypical gender roles and sexual orientations. Although limited, studies extending beyond binary gender representations in retail and advertising have explored how sociocultural norms continue to shape, reinforce, and reflect more diversity in gender and sexual orientation.

2.3.2 BEYOND COMMERCIAL PURPOSES

While servicescapes can have commercial purposes, these spaces may also have communal or social functions for a variety of shoppers. Johnstone (2012) argued that “marketers need to recognise that place is a social construction; the servicescape is moulded by the very people who occupy it” (p. 1402) and that “one’s identity can be shaped by place if one feels that he or she belongs to that place” (p. 1413). In Johnstone’s study of women’s non-commercial relationships with servicescapes, the researcher concluded that some women utilize servicescapes for facilitating non-commercial relationships, social connections, and identity (2012). From the researcher’s interviews and photo-elicitation technique, Johnstone (2012) discovered that retail settings could provide places for women to “nurture non-commercial relationships (p. 1405) in a “third place” (p. 1408) which facilitated points of contact and connection with other people beyond commercial purposes. Johnstone’s findings also strongly
supported the notion of people shaping a place such that “the identity of place can also be shaped by the tenant mix, the staff, and the types of customers who patronize those stores” (p. 1410). Similar to the gendered and gendering effects of the ESPN Zone space as studied in Sherry et al. (2004), commercial spaces have the potential to shape and reinforce behaviors, identities, and social connections.

2.3.3 SERVICESCAPES AND CONSUMER EFFECTS

Servicescapes and their social effects—specifically environmental influences on consumers—have been explored throughout retail and consumer behavior studies. In her extensive ethnographic approach to Nike Town, Peñaloza (1998) noted how athletic consumers seemed to be “triggered” and experienced a “heightened awareness of moving one’s body...the thrill and satisfaction of physical accomplishment” (p. 385) due to visual stimuli in the store. Furthermore, Peñaloza touched on the social consumption behaviors of buying products based on self-identity, expression, affiliation, and motivation, and that “the dialectical relationship between consumers’ behavior and marketing practice was demonstrated in the provision of cultural consumption meanings by Nike and their subsequent reinscription by consumers” (p. 392). As such, Peñaloza’s thorough ethnographic approach to the Nike servicescape highlighted the complexities of environmental factors (e.g., design, atmospherics, people, etc.) and how an immersive experience can impact the consumer’s experience.

Similar to the effects of Nike Town, Sherry et al. (2004) observed how retail environments could provide stages for consumers to “both consume and produce culture” (p. 154) in terms of gender roles and self-expression. In their observational field study, Sherry et al. (2004) studied how a gendered commercial space, ESPN Zone Chicago, provided a sports-
themed male environment through the menu, the layout, and the games. According to their findings, Sherry et al. (2004) found that retail environments and gender roles had the potential to facilitate “gendered behavior” (p. 151) where consumers displayed “conforming and directing behaviors” (p. 152).

2.4 SERVICESCAPES AND GENDER

Retailers have continued crafting stores to tempt or dissuade certain shoppers (Underhill, 2004), which has ultimately led to curated spaces often gendered and designed with target consumers in mind. As physical spaces, servicescapes offer opportunities for consumers to interact with and experience products, but brands can also utilize these venues as demonstrations of social norms and aesthetic ideals which may relate to consumers’ personal identities and exhibition of the self (Goldsmith, Moore, & Beaudoin, 1999). Atmospherics such as music, scent, and colors have the potential to communicate a collective message to consumers about a store’s target shoppers, as do organizational signs denoting sections (e.g., men’s, women’s, children) and product selections.

Seemingly ingrained from childhood, women’s relationships with shopping evolve throughout their lives, and many women experience psychological and emotional effects that are often absent among men (Underhill, 2009), which may be related to their higher sensitivity to deciphering nonverbal cues (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015). Revisiting Johnstone (2012), female shoppers revealed non-commercial purposes of servicescapes, including relationship building (p. 1405); socialization in a “third place“ (“informal public places that host people beyond the realms of the home and work environment but are at the heart of a community’s social vitality”) (p. 1408); and self-identification (p. 1410), but it is possible that male shoppers or individuals
from the LGBTQ+ community could experience similar effects if given the opportunity. With younger generations open to the idea of gender and sexual orientation as fluid concepts, supporting brands that demonstrate these progressive notions (Boyd et al., 2020) and male Millennials expressing interest in shopping (Funches et al., 2017), servicescapes could explore new ways of creating environments appealing to more demographics.

While servicescapes have continued to profit off of both male and female shoppers, the binary approach that many retailers take to their in-store experience seems to not only dictate traditional societal gender norms but also have detrimental effects on consumers (Underhill, 2009) and even employees. For people who struggle to self-identify with traditional social norms pertaining to gender and sexual orientation (Wagaman, 2016), changes to servicescapes and customer service personnel may help various groups (Quach, Jebarajkirthy, & Thaichon, 2017; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). Quach, Jebarajkirthy, and Thaichon (2017) found positive effects on consumers’ intention to revisit a store based on the diversity of sales associates and the representative’s visible characteristics (e.g., age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity). While the results from Quach et al. (2017) did not guarantee sales, the implications from their study demonstrate a possible positive effect of increasing diversity in servicescapes.

Reddy-Best and Pedersen (2015) studied LGBTQ+ women and their shopping experiences and found that many shoppers felt varying degrees of frustration, alienation, and distress as a result of their shopping experiences. In particular, the researchers identified the strict binary organization of clothing labeled as men or women to cause issues with lesbian women who felt pressured by the lack of inclusivity and mixing of seemingly masculine and feminine clothing styles. Additionally, lesbian women felt that interactions with sales associates could
positively or negatively affect their shopping experience depending on the use of implied gender norms and clothing.

Gendered retail environments may also harm employees and the workplace. In Foster’s (2004) study of gendered retailing at a home improvement store, the researcher observed the presence of gendered imagery and employee assignments by gender. Male employees were often placed in more masculine sections of the store where “heavy” products were displayed (p. 444), whereas more feminine, “non-expert” (p. 444) decorative products were accompanied by female employees. In particular, Foster (2004) noted that “male customers were more likely to approach male staff for advice on technical aspects” due to their “perception that these staff had better knowledge” (p. 446) than their female colleagues. Although Foster’s findings were bound to a home improvement store, which has often been viewed as a male-dominated setting, the implications of this study highlight how service interactions can be key indicators to both customers and employees about gender roles, gendered work, and societal norms. The visibility of employees’ gendered work assignments to customers and employees was also cause for concern as the demonstrations of so-called “masculine” or “feminine” tasks reinforced and propagated binary gender social constructions.

2.5 RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

Whether it is a product display, a splash of pink, or a whiff of cologne, retailers use a variety of overt and subtle methods to shape curated experiences; in doing so, companies are able to showcase brands and products in ways that seem to fit seamlessly into each retail environment. Certain store brands are geared towards distinct groups, while others appeal to all demographics, but holistically speaking, what kinds of interpretations do consumers take away
from their retail experiences? What sorts of meanings do shoppers perceive regarding a store’s target audience, and what are their lived experiences in retail environments?

While there have been numerous studies on atmospheric design elements of servicescapes (Baker et al., 2002; Babin et al., 2003; Chandon et al., 2009; Helmefalk & Hultén, 2017; Izadi et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2011), there is limited contemporary research on how retail spaces can provide gendered experiences and how consumers interpret such gender indicators. With this study, I hope to gain insight into how consumers evaluate gender in servicescapes and how their interpretation affects their perceptions of the shopping experience. The following research questions will guide this exploratory study:

a) What in-store atmospherics do consumers use to evaluate gender in retail settings?

b) What meanings do consumers interpret from in-store atmospherics?

c) How does gender identity relate to interpretations of gender in servicescapes?
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 WORLDVIEW AND APPROACH

With the aim of working towards a better understanding of gendered servicescapes and consumer interpretations, I assume a constructivist worldview that focuses on the complexities of various perspectives, multiple realities, and social constructions surrounding these concepts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As a heterosexual cisgender female, I realize that people from other demographics (e.g., gender identity and sexual orientation) may have similar and/or different experiences and feelings surrounding retail, so I utilize a casual, semi-structured method for my study. My approach is to encourage or prompt stories and experiences rather than force participants to share their thoughts to capture authentic voices and diverse perspectives, and to increase trust and decrease social desirability bias. Assuming a constructivist worldview for this exploratory study, I utilize a qualitative approach to “allow for participants to respond in their own words” (Morrison, Haley, Bartel Sheehan, & Taylor, 2012, p. 30). Furthermore, the intention is to “keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 182). A qualitative approach also enables insight into participants’ perspectives and reasons behind their behaviors and experiences.

3.2 PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

After receiving approval from the university’s ethics office (see Appendix A), I utilized a variety of channels to recruit study participants. As an initial effort, I submitted an announcement
to the university’s weekly electronic newsletter; however, after limited participant interest, I solicited study participation through word of mouth and the local Reddit community. Prospective participants received a short email questionnaire containing screening items (see Appendix B) to ensure eligibility.

Striving for participant diversity, I used quota sampling (Babbie, 2016) with the intention of capturing the complexities and experiences of different genders and sexual orientations. As gender and sexual identities often intersect with self-presentation (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015; Underhill, 2009), three groups were included in this study, including heterosexual males; heterosexual females; and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) community. Several rounds of recruitment yielded twenty participants for the study (see Appendix C for participant profiles). I used twenty participants as my sample size as this is within the generally accepted number in other qualitative studies using interviews (15 in Huxley et al., 2014; 15 in Johnstone, 2012; 30 in Quach et al., 2017; 32 in Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015).

3.3 PROCEDURE

Originally planned as an ethnographic-style “shopping with consumers” study (Otnes, McGrath, & Lowrey, 1995; Lowrey, Otnes, & McGrath, 2005), the coronavirus pandemic altered the research design as in-person shopping experiences and face-to-face interviews were not feasible. In order to comply with social distancing guidelines and public safety precautions, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant using an online videoconferencing tool (Zoom). Interviews provided the opportunity to ask probing questions (Babbie, 2016) and dig deeper into individuals’ experiences beyond simple descriptions (Morrison et al., 2012).
Prior to each interview, participants submitted signed online consent forms which also permitted audio and video recordings for transcription purposes.

Interviews took place between August 2020 and December 2020. Following an interview guide (see Appendix D), I started each interview with open-ended questions pertaining to shopping habits, such as frequency and location, followed by a projective question (“If you were an animal as a ‘shopper’, what would it be and why?”) to allow participants the chance to start evaluating their own shopping behaviors and to build rapport (Babbie, 2016). Furthermore, the animal question provided an easy opportunity for “interviewees to overcome some of the common social barriers” and the fear of negative judgment from the researcher (Doherty & Nelson, 2010, p. 404).

After these introductory questions, I asked more personal inquiries about the participant’s gender and sexual orientation, self-expression (“How do you think your style aligns with your personal identities?”), and their take on gender in retail stores and online stores based on their own shopping experiences (“Can you think of any physical clothing stores that you would consider to be gendered?”). Following these insights, I requested participants to complete a sorting activity using company logos. Using the Zoom screen sharing feature, I provided participants with 15 retail brand company logos and asked them to categorize the logos into masculine, feminine, or unisex (“suitable or designed for both males and females,” Merriam-Webster, n.d.) genders based on their impression of the stores (Figure 1). Along with the sorting task, I also asked participants to share their thoughts about why they classified each choice into one of the three categories. If participants felt that they did not know enough about any of the companies included, we omitted it from the exercise.
After completing the sorting task and priming participants with thoughts of gender in retail environments, I asked participants about what factors they consider when evaluating the gender of a store. In an effort to hear more about their personal experiences, I invited participants to share any positive or negative in-store or online shopping experiences before moving onto an user experience online “shopping with consumers” task activity. Returning to the Zoom screen sharing feature, I asked participants to share their screen and navigate a website where they might shop for clothing. As participants shared their screen, I asked them questions about their feelings, website design, layout, imagery, and whether or how the website appealed to their own gender and sexual orientation. At the end of the interview, participants could choose to opt in for a chance to win one of two $25 Amazon gift cards. The interviews varied in length from 30 to 65 minutes.
After each interview, I reviewed my notes and worked on a first draft of the interview transcript with the audio recording. Throughout the interview period, I worked on finalizing the transcript with both the audio and video recordings to ensure accuracy. Names were omitted from the interview transcripts to ensure participant privacy, and for the purpose of direct quotations, pseudonyms were used. Final interview transcripts were stored in an electronic folder in a secure online storage site affiliated with the university. Interview recordings were deleted after all transcripts were complete.

3.4 CODING AND ANALYSIS

The 20 interviews resulted in 345 double-spaced pages of transcribed text. Due to limited recruiting yields, the 20 interviews sufficed on account of the inclusion of diverse participants, including seven heterosexual females, five heterosexual males, and eight members of the LGBTQ+ community. For first-cycle coding, I utilized in-vivo coding to preserve the participants’ voices and words, as well as holistic coding to summarize anecdotes and explanations (Saldaña, 2016). Using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Goulding, 2017), I wanted to be cognizant and inclusive of the multiple perspectives of participants and honor them as diverse actors (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). During an initial review of the transcript, I emboldened words that stood out during the interview, and in a second review, I highlighted words or phrases that captured the participants’ stories, with careful consideration of my handwritten notes taken during each interview. In a third review, I read through the transcripts again and inserted comments in the margins to summarize main ideas for later reference. An example of the electronic transcript mark-up with notes can be seen in Appendix E. After the third review, I re-read the transcripts and entered in specific words and key phrases into a code
log to provide an extensive overview of each participant’s responses. This comprehensive log served as a management system for easier handling of participants’ answers. Screenshot examples of the code log are included in Appendices F, G, and H.

For analysis, I returned to my research questions to guide my review of the transcripts, my handwritten notes, and code log. Guided by my question of what in-store atmospherics people use to evaluate gender in retail settings, I looked into the various factors within the code log (Appendix F) and focused on identifying the most commonly cited elements and reviewed transcripts for specific descriptions.

Furthermore, as I read through participants’ thoughts, I looked for indications of individuals’ interpretation of meanings behind certain in-store retail factors and allowed for new findings to emerge. The analysis process consisted of a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Based on prior studies surrounding servicescapes and relevant literature, I was expecting to find certain patterns and behaviors among participants depending on their gender; transcript reviews seemed to support what previous studies had uncovered, so I incorporated a top-down perspective in exploring in-store atmospherics used to evaluate gender in retail settings. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, I also used a bottom-up approach in interviews and throughout my reviews of the transcripts. During interviews, I listened to participants’ stories for new insights or interesting points and followed up with probing questions to prompt the participant to explain more. While reading transcripts and reviewing interview notes, I looked for new insights I might have missed during the interview, particularly with the animal question, sorting task, and personal shopping experiences.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

While retail companies will take considerable measures into crafting their in-store aesthetic, there is a limited amount of literature focusing on how stores communicate gender to consumers. With a multitude of available atmospheric cues, which in-store elements do consumers use to evaluate gender in retail settings? As consumers perform these evaluations, what meanings do consumers take away from these in-store cues, and how does an individual’s gender relate to their interpretations of gender in store environments?

4.1 EVALUATING GENDER IN RETAIL

When asked about how they evaluate gender in in-store environments, participants responded with a variety of factors ranging from visual to audio atmospherics. The top cited in-store atmospherics were all visual with product selection (12) as the most cited, mannequins (11) as the second, and colors and marketing tied for third (6). The list of in-store atmospherics for determining gender included layout (5), music (3), window displays (3), décor (2), and people, lighting, furnishing, scent, theme, and words were mentioned only once. A code log containing participant’s selection can be found in Appendix F.

While there was a general lack of consistency among the ways in which participants evaluated gender in stores, one finding that stood out was the extent to which LGBTQ+ females and non-binary individuals described indicators. While shopping has traditionally been seen as a feminine activity (Dennis et al., 2018; Jackson & Holbrook, 1995; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008), it is likely that non-binary individuals are sensitive to traditional gender roles, behaviors, and clothing (Feinberg, Mataro, & Burroughs, 1992; Wagaman, 2016; Wood & Eagly, 2012). LGBTQ+
members who are familiar with certain signifiers of sexual orientation may be aware of how to
interpret gender in retail settings more so than their heterosexual counterparts on account of their
own personal styles (Huxley et al., 2014; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015) and experiences.

As part of the interview, participants were asked to share their screen as they navigated a
retail website of their choosing. I asked participants about their typical online shopping behaviors
as well as to what extent the websites appealed to the participants on account of their gender and
sexual orientation. Due to the inconsistent findings and lack of novel concepts pertaining to the
websites’ designs, overall appearance, and navigability, I have omitted these results in my thesis.

4.2 GENDERED IN-STORE ATMOSPHERICS

4.2.1 MANNEQUINS AND PRODUCTS

As the most mentioned evaluative tools for determining a store’s gender, participants
shared that they utilized products and mannequins to gather information about the store’s target
shopping group. Mannequin displays helped participants quickly determine the kinds of genders
represented at stores prior to entering or during the shopping trip. For Jamie and Kennedy,
clothing provided contextual clues about a store’s target shopper (additional data focusing on
products and mannequin in the retail place are shown in Table 1):

I think of the clothing that they offer. And like, is it more feminine clothes? Or is it more
of a neutral unisex clothes? And maybe accessories too? Are they offering like, perfumes
and jewelry? Or is it more just clothes? (Jamie, female/lesbian)
What’s on the mannequin is it like a very, you know, like a very gendered outfit like a skirt or lingerie or something like that or a suit, you know, or something we really associate with one gender over the other. (Kennedy, female/heterosexual)

As Jamie and Kennedy both mentioned, mannequins have been observed as gendered displays of fashion (Chapin, Green, & Neuberg, 2019). Known for their “anatomical perfection” (Staiti, 2020, p. 407), mannequins have played vital roles in attracting customers throughout much of shopping history (Staiti, 2020). Another participant, Lorenzo, used clothing to determine gender but shared that he considered products and mannequins as contributors to a store’s overall “vibe”:

If they have men's clothes, women's clothes, or just one of them. And something vague about, I don't know, the vibe. Hard to say what it is, like the way the mannequins are set up or the layout of things. I'm not sure, but there's a, sometimes you walk into a place and you can kind of sense if there will be more, more men's or women's things. (Lorenzo, male/heterosexual)

Whereas Lorenzo saw mannequins as part of the store theme, Gwen described mannequins as being quick indicators of a store’s target demographic, similar to in-store billboards and “power displays” located in the front of stores (Underhill, 2009, p. 47):

If you look on the window, it's just a model like you walk into the store, the…you know the mannequins are there, but like, when you walk in and you look at the window, it's always models on the window and they're all, and then shit, most the models are white, to be honest, too, that is, also, doesn't help the case to their weight. They're skinny as hell. And they're really feminine, that you're like, huh. Okay, and it makes you kind of,
depending on how you feel that day, it does make you think twice like do I even feel welcome here, do I even want to go in here? (Gwen, female/heterosexual)

As noted by Gwen, the gendered aesthetic of the mannequin signaled feminine clothing but also communicated the store’s target shoppers while perpetuating unrealistic stereotypes. For Gwen, mannequins and models displayed in store windows were easy indicators for her to decide if she felt as if she would be welcomed in the store.

Table 1

*Additional quotes from participants regarding products and mannequins.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluative Aspect</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Verbatim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mannequins</td>
<td>Cameron, female/heterosexual</td>
<td>“I just when I go in, I already have an idea what they're gonna be, they have, like, clothes, girls...but I don't know how to phrase that...if I go into forever 21, I usually see like a lot of female mannequins, and a lot of jewelry, and the windows.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannequins</td>
<td>Kendall, female/heterosexual</td>
<td>“The style of clothing is probably the first thing that stands out to me. Um, the, yeah, just the products that they carry. I would say even though sometimes the decorations the way things are decorated, and the mannequins that they display the clothing that they're trying to sell and the, I guess the overall theme of the store, you know how some stores kind of have themes?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products</td>
<td>Blaine, male/heterosexual</td>
<td>“Like we walk into Macy's, right. At least for the Macy’s I've been into, you're usually walking through the women's section to get through the mall, or you're walking through the perfumes section, which is mostly feminine, for females, I would say 80% of it’s targeted towards females. So 20% is just sort of there so that you don't miss out on any male clients. So that is the first thing I noticed, right? Like, you can walk through it. You can, can walk through a Macy’s well enough and not see any male clothing at all.”</td>
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“Primarily, it would be what they're selling, which it sounds like a very basic thing, but like again taking Victoria's Secret as an example. They're not selling anything that I would buy for myself. For that reason, right away there's less of a reason for me, for me to go in there.”

“I think one store that's very obviously like feminine is like, like Francesca's at the mall, where it's very much like a, like a flowery like jewelry, like, sort of, boho like feminine aesthetic to it. And they don't even have any men's clothing in there. So it's one of those things where it's very obviously catered towards women and people who are like presenting as women.”

“Victoria's Secret doesn't have many options for men, so I can't see them really going, unless they're buying it for a woman or they could for themselves if they want to but the probabilities are much lower.”

Similar to Gwen’s observations, Elle shared how mannequins seemed to perpetuate unrealistic body types for both males and females:

And the shapes of...the mannequins too, like, there's some brands that like to make an effort to like include more like diverse mannequin sizes just like more people can get a better clothes to, like, how the clothes might fit on them. Whereas it’s like some brands are very much like, you know, like we expect you to be like size zero, and everything or like we expect you to be just like absolutely like ripped and have like six pack abs with huge biceps and stuff...those kind of...body expectations to set the tone. (Elle, non-binary transgender female/lesbian)

Both Gwen’s and Elle’s sentiments can be seen in research surrounding mannequins and concerns over body types, idealized images, and gender. According to a British study of
mannequin measurements, Robinson and Ayevard (2017) findings reflected that of the 32 female mannequins included in their study, all of them represented underweight body sizes; whereas only 8% of male mannequins represented underweight body sizes. Engdahl and Gelang (2019) considered shop windows as “microcosm[s] of consumer culture” (p. 21) in Sweden and monitored how male and female mannequins transformed from the 1930s and beyond. While fashion trends changed throughout the decades, the researchers noticed how male mannequins consistently assumed more postures of power and authority than their female counterparts; however, the researchers noted how more modern window displays have started featuring female mannequins in more assertive poses. Chapin, Green, and Neuberg (2019) surveyed museum professionals working in North America to gain insight into how mannequins function in museum exhibits and their take on gendered mannequins. Museum professionals working on fashion exhibits mirrored some of Gwen’s concerns about realistic bodies and representation, sharing that the majority of mannequins have “predominantly European facial features with youthful, thin, able-bodies that did not represent actual skin tones” (Chapin et al., 2019, p. 83). Additionally, the researchers asked respondents about presenting more unisex fashion on non-binary mannequins, with many museum professionals split on the idea due to the nature of the topic, controversy, sociocultural factors, and logistics (e.g., donations, availability, budget). While mannequins can be part of in-store experiences, their cultural influences on gender may signal complex messages to consumers beyond product selection.

Participants also shared their perceptions of the differences between masculine and feminine clothing, focusing on styles and materials. Masculine clothing was mentioned as being more utilitarian with durable fabrics as opposed to feminine clothing, which had several
references to lighter, more delicate materials (additional interview excerpts in Table 2). Noah, a heterosexual male, shared some key indicators about masculine clothing:

To begin with, I shop off the male side of the store, used to be what the clothing companies I engage with are putting out there as men's clothing. They follow some of the traditional American Western themes of pants. Shorts of a certain length, you know, at least a seven inch inseam. For instance, as a rule I have pockets everywhere. Pockets, for days. I don't wear cargo pants. But I do have, I do have hip pockets, which again, classic male look in the U.S., but in this day and age, typically, in terms of color palette, we'll get into your pinks, your bright greens, staying away from the yellows and orange, mostly for skin tone reasons. But certainly sport themed clothing, you know, as, as I understand it a little more prevalent on the gentlemen. And then yeah, just the classic, you know, male work uniform of the tie. You know, somewhat structured jacket.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Evaluative Aspect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine clothing</td>
<td>Noah, male/heterosexual</td>
<td>“…recently shopped at Columbia Outlet...Men’s section, the layout of the store, I'm walking into pants with inches measurements, and…men's shoe sizes and potentially, styles, colors…and you see more pinks and powder blues, and a variety of colors, off to the left, there right when you come in khaki, olive drab, navy, you know, more heavy, the cuts of clothing as well. So just both in general terms of the size, the amount of space given, you know, Columbia was an example of that.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feminine clothing</td>
<td>Cleo, female/bisexual</td>
<td>“But I think partly too because the cut of clothing there the women's clothing tended to be cut very small. The shirts were cut higher up from the bottom and lower from the top the shorts were in the same way. So the men's clothing just by volume, it felt like there was so much more of it.”</td>
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Echoing the functional aspects of masculine clothing, both Cleo and Elle shared that they saw differences in practicality and quality between men’s and women’s clothing:

I think…the textures that are sort of prominently on display. Things that are softer, things that seem to be of a thinner material usually read more feminine and that's just a weird quality standard that we have, or it's like a lot of men's clothing is designed to be a little bit tougher a little bit more durable it’s gonna hold up longer be more higher quality fabrics, a lot of times, whereas the women's clothing tends to be a little bit thinner. So sometimes that can be a signifier. (Cleo, female/bisexual)

But like a lot of woman's jeans tend to be built kind of like to be disposable…And just like masculine tastes, because, again, like that's kind of like the direction of like niche fashion for men, kind of built on like you know like idea of clothing as a utilitarian, just like buy it for life purchase instead of, with like a focus on quality and craftsmanship and like style, and those factors being secondary. There's nothing that really says that those factors have to be like exclusively marketed to men but for some reason, like that's how it's kind of how it ended up. (Elle, non-binary transgender female/lesbian)

As a non-binary transgender female, Elle described herself as a lesbian with a tendency to dress in a “tomboyish” and “close to butch” way. In particular, Elle shared that she had experienced a fashion transition and was well aware of the differences of dressing in a masculine versus feminine way:

When I was still identifying as a dude or like didn't realize I was…queer yet. I very much dressed in kind of like…what was just like popular among dudes at the time. Just like you know, like street wear. I guess…Yeezys, like Adidas, Nike collaborations, all
that stuff. Then, when I started transitioning that was kind of like a weird phase for me style-wise. Due to, you know, the amount of money I had to spend on everything. I ended up buying a lot of clothes that didn't end up fitting with my, like, end style like a pretty decent amount of just like button ups and like dresses and skirts and stuff and a lot of makeup that I just don't wear anymore.

When asked about whether she thought her personal clothing style aligned with her gender and sexual orientation, Elle answered that she believed they did and went on to share some styles she included in her own looks:

There are a lot of like little like queer signifiers that I kind of like work into my wardrobe, like I’m comfortable with them, the…eyeline with like a, statement earrings is a big one. Like unnatural hair color, I'd say like, like the whole blondes thing, and kind of just like the more androgynous style I kind, I kind of keep. Like, it's you know, it's very much like masculine clothing, with…androgynous cuts, like maybe…more form fitting, or the opposite where it’s very…baggy, and kind of more of a, indistinguishable silhouette and stuff, as well as, uh, I'd say that those are kind of like two I work in.

From Elle’s experiences, she was able to easily describe differences between masculine and feminine clothing. Similar to the findings from Huxley et al. (2014), Elle saw her physical appearance and clothing to be important signals to other females. Along these same lines, Lydia, who described herself as female and bisexual without a defined personal style, shared that she had been at odds with her wardrobe on account of the meanings related to skirts and dresses (Feinberg et al., 1992). Similar to Elle, Lydia navigated through gendered fashions as she experimented with fluid masculine and feminine looks throughout her life:
I mean, there are a lot of outfits in my wardrobe that are like button down blouses that are more masculine. I tried for quite a while to wear more masculine trousers. My exercise clothes for most of my life, were very, you know baggy t-shirt, baggy shorts kind of masculine. I've recently switched though and, you know, started doing the leggings and, you know shorter tighter, exercise clothes, just because they're more comfortable to work out and, but I think for a long time, especially when I was younger, now I'm more feminine, in terms of how I dress but especially when I was younger I was very averse and very anti-anything female or feminine. I hated skirts and dresses. I hated anything that was overtly girly or flowery. I really had a very strong aversion to anything that would outwardly identify me as female when I was young.

When asked about why she did not want to look like a girl, Lydia explained that she had had “a lot of internalized misogyny”:

I really despised anything, really any makeup…I was very much what people would call a tomboy. And I often think like, I do like the thought experiment, if I had been born now and knew that trans was a thing would I have been trans?...you know, so I do think that quite often, like, ‘oh, if I had known this was a possibility,’ is that something I would have done at a young age, because I really did abhor all things girly and feminine. And it's changed over my life like that is not, I don't know, now I definitely see myself as female, I definitely identify as female, I am bisexual but like I used to date girls quite a bit in high school and college. But I think I'm, you know I don't know I think, I think gender and sexuality are quite fluid and can change over your lifetime too, so, I mean...but I also, that’s interesting, I never thought about how gender or sexual identity
might have, that confusion might have led to some confusion in style in some senses to where I never really developed a sense of style. That’s an interesting thought…

While participants like Elle and Lydia emphasized the meanings behind their clothes (Feinberg et al., 1992) and used them as signals of their sexual orientation (Huxley et al., 2014), others focused on the overall *aesthetic* of feminine clothing. Participants shared how they thought feminine clothing was of lighter substance and included decorative elements such as sparkles or ruffles:

And you go into a store like Express, and you'll see more sparkly items on the feminine side of the store and smaller items and things of that nature. (Zvi, female/heterosexual)

Jocelyn described feminine style as “showing off curves and assets” before explaining her take on how some of her favorite stores were oriented towards females:

The [feminine] clothing is very well stylish but I mean, it's the flowers and ruffles, it’s the cutesy t-shirts, there’s jewelry on like every one of the mannequins or displays. (Jocelyn, female/heterosexual)

It depends on the piece of clothing, but a lot of times the [feminine] clothing is kind of, it's loose but loose in, like, in like an airy flowy kind of way. It has a flow to it. Sometimes it's sparkly, sometimes it's shiny, usually feels nice. (Kendall, female/heterosexual)

Kendall’s mention of touch supports what researchers have found regarding haptics in retail settings. Past studies have demonstrated women’s higher need for touch (Workman, 2010), as well as the enhanced experience for consumers with opportunities to feel products (Peck & Childers, 2003).
Many of the clothing styles (e.g., light, flowy, loose) mentioned by participants mirrored traditional appearances of masculine and feminine stereotypes, as perpetuated through evolutionary roles (Dennis et al., 2018); practicality and function of male clothing (Frith & Gleeson, 2004); and historical contexts (Atkins, 2020). While Feinberg, Mataro, and Burroughs (1992) found a connection between clothing, meaning, and identity, the relationship was difficult to pinpoint due to the subjectivity of the three concepts. After participants such as Elle and Lydia shared their experiences with masculine and feminine clothing, it was apparent that each individual had her own take on what gendered pieces meant. Revisiting Lydia’s white shirt which she deemed as masculine, as well as other light and flowy garments mentioned by others, white or light colors communicated a woman’s “beauty and purity, uprightness, even incorruptibility” (Atkins, 2020, p. 142). As a white blouse may appear to be another menswear-inspired garment today, the white blouse was a key symbol for women during the suffrage movement of the early 19th century and was part of the women’s signature look (Atkins, 2020). The flowy feminine looks of today were undoubtedly inspired by the lingerie dresses from the suffrage era (Atkins, 2020), finding their permanent locations in women’s wardrobe as feminine staples.

4.2.2 DESIGN AND AMBIENT FEATURES

Participants shared their take on gendered in-store atmospherics; however, responses were limited for unisex. Masculine and feminine store traits seemed to be on opposite sides of the design spectrum, particularly with visual elements such as color and products:

…an observation would be that most of the feminine stores usually have brighter colors, more colors, and more open spacious and feminine, the masculine ones that I think are
usually darker, more like compact stores like it's like a Nike store, like outdoor stores or like cluttered and a little bit darker colors, like the walls are usually dark. (Violet, female/lesbian)

Similar to Violet, other participants also noted the use of primary or dark colors in masculine stores versus lighter pastel colors and brighter lighting in feminine stores:

- I think a lot of men's stores have darker colors inside of their stores and women stores are either white or pastel or lighter, or they have pink, which is Victoria’s Secret, because Victoria's Secret is usually dark, but it has a lot of pink in there. (Cameron, female/bisexual)

- I think maybe you know you go into a store that’s a little more masculine, maybe the colors are more primary colors. So you tend to see reds and blues and navies and things of that nature. (Zvi, female/heterosexual)

- I would start with color, because I know a place like Victoria's Secret, or even like the American Girl doll store just is splashed with pink everywhere. (Kennedy, female/heterosexual)

- When I think of the stores I think it's like they've got a navy blue and a black. And it’s kind of that, blue is a male color and then pink that you would see in like the Victoria's Secret that's the girl color. You’ve got your girl store and your boy store. (Elle, non-binary transgender female/lesbian)
The more like masculine stores or whatever tend to have, I think darker colors, especially as decoration and that kind of thing. (Sloan, non-binary leans feminine/lesbian)

Whereas masculine elements included darker interiors and primary colors, participants considered feminine interiors to be well lit and soft or pastel colors:

But with a feminine store, there’s like, a lot of times a store will be like soft, so it’ll have like, not very bold color choices, and if they if they are bold, it will be more of like a very obviously like either like pink, purple or like that teal-ish like orange. Not orange teal-ish like blue color that they'll have like on the walls, it'll be very soft and like muted usually like on the walls or the floors. (Stella, female/pansexual)

It's very like bright, like there's almost no decoration, I seem, or like either there's almost no decoration, or the decoration is very like delicate. It's very, like, um, like small and like fragile looking kind of. But yeah, it's usually very like a lot more open, I guess, like feels like there's a lot more open space, I think. (Sloan, non-binary leans feminine/lesbian)

Despite changing gender norms, insights from these participants suggested that colors continue to be associated with gender and may influence how consumers perceive gender in a store and by extension, brands. In support of Machado, Fonseca, and Martins (2021), many of the participants saw color and lighting as indicators of gender, with darker colors (e.g., blue) and darker lighting as masculine and lighter colors (e.g., pink) and bright as feminine. These associations of color and lighting are indications of how stores have the potential to exhibit their own brand personalities and characteristics (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998; Grohmann, 2009).
4.2.3 AUDITORY AND OLFACTORY ELEMENTS

In addition to visual cues, participants noted the type of music in masculine versus feminine stores as being distinctly different, suggesting selections in music genre and singer. As music has been found to have emotional effects on consumers (Walsh et al., 2011), participants hearing a female voice may help create a female friendly environment:

The type of music that's playing, if it's a little brighter or a little bit more pop, more, more female voices in the music to signify more of a feminine environment, it's more...if the bass is higher, if there's more of a rock feel to it, if there's more male voices, it tends to read a little bit more male. (Cleo, female/bisexual)

It’s like the more feminine stores tend to play like more like like modern modern pop stuff like allow like female artists like, just like what's popular, from Rihanna, Ariana Grande, or like the other like big female pop stars. (Elle, non-binary transgender female/lesbian)

[Masculine stores] typically tend to have more...bass heavy music playing or like music that has a very clear beat to it or something that's playing a little bit louder than most stores usually have it...and more feminine stores, if they do have music playing, it's usually very soft. (Sloan, non-binary leans feminine/lesbian)

Guys’ stores, I don't think I really ever heard any guy stores with music in the background. I've actually walked into a guys and heard sports in the background like just
like a sports announcer. And it wasn't even like a sports store. So I don't know if that was just a choice of employees made. (Stella, female/pansexual)

Many participants mentioned differences in masculine and feminine stores depending on the way that the store smelled and whether or not the scent skewed as something more masculine or feminine. As Cameron put it: “This sounds silly but a lot of times like the way the store smells. If it smells like flowers, then it’s a feminine store, and if it smells like Axe cologne, then it’s a men’s store.” Other participants also shared similar thoughts, noting a signature feminine scent of Victoria’s Secret (Zvi) and a masculine scent “always sort of filtered through the space” (Cleo) at Abercrombie or Hollister:

I mean, you know, you go into a store like Victoria's Secret, the aroma. You're gonna have more floral fragrances that kind of smell. You know, they're trying to sell sexuality and all of that as well and Victoria's Secret so that's very evident there. (Zvi, female/heterosexual)

It's interesting, I just remember when I was younger, shopping at Abercrombie or Hollister would be like a scent, um, in your face, haha. Offensively scented, and it always seemed to be more of a men's cologne scent. But I was there as a teenage girl shopping for myself so I think that's interesting of like, they created this like male focused atmosphere, but had mostly female shoppers. (Kennedy, female/heterosexual)

Gwen shared how women’s perfume communicated a store’s target shoppers despite the store offering both men’s and women’s sections:
When you're going to the store and you're like by the female, like if you're walking in you know it's...a female store. It's always like this perfume that they spray or like the perfume is always right there like for example rue21 as soon as you go in, it smells like straight perfume, like legit straight perfume. And it kind of gives you that vibe, even though they are, like their stores, like split down the middle. It's like guys right here, like females right here, like it's split but it, automatically you walk in, it smells like perfume...but I feel like for the most part it's always just like it usually smells like perfume, like forever 21 I feel like all smells like perfume. (Gwen, female/heterosexual)

Noah, a heterosexual male, shared how scent in a feminine store could sometimes be a warning to avoid the store altogether: “potentially the smell, that smell of perfume testers, right near the front of store, for instance...and knowing that it’s not something I’m gonna purchase for myself, I’ll typically avoid it.” Even though some participants described a masculine smell as Axe cologne and feminine as flowery perfume, there seemed to be a general understanding of these gendered scents despite the lack of descriptive words. Nevertheless, scent and music, when matched with the store environment and not triggering sensory overload (Doucé & Adams, 2020), have been shown to not only help with creating a consistent ambient setting (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Underhill, 2009) but also enhance the retail experience leading to more favorable evaluations of a store, merchandise, and the environment (Spangenberg, Grohmann, & Sprott, 2005). Matched correctly to the store, its target consumers as well as the company’s or brand’s personality (Aaker, 1997; Grohmann, 2009), music and scent can appeal to other senses and envelop shoppers in an all-encompassing retail experience.
4.3 GENDERED STORES

The sorting task in which participants were asked to sort retailers into masculine, feminine, or unisex categories yielded a diverse range of classifications. Retailers considered to skew masculine were Ralph Lauren, Brooks Brothers, Nike, Adidas, Express, and Gap (Table 3). Feminine retailers included Victoria’s Secret, Zara, Kohl’s, Express, Macy’s, Nordstrom, J.Jill, Saks Fifth Avenue, Gap, and H&M. Retailers in the unisex category included Old Navy, Gap, Adidas, Nike, Kohl’s, H&M, Macy’s, Nordstrom, Ralph Lauren, Express, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Zara (Table 3). After reviewing participants’ categorization, no patterns based on gender or sexual orientation emerged from their responses (see Appendix I). With the exceptions of Victoria’s Secret and Old Navy, which were both unanimously feminine and unisex, respectively, there were conflicting ideas from participants about the stores’ genders.

Table 3

Classification of retailers by gender

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASCULINE</th>
<th>FEMININE</th>
<th>UNISEX</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>Retailer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph Lauren</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Victoria’s Secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks Brothers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Zara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nike</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kohl’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adidas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Express</td>
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<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Macy’s</td>
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<td>Gap</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nordstrom</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>J.Jill</td>
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Although there were disparities in the reading of gender for the majority of retail brands, the ways in which participants justified some of their selections reflected their dependence on advertising imagery. As one of two retailers to receive a uniform categorization among participants, Victoria’s Secret emerged as one with striking images of women:

Victoria’s Secret, let’s start there. Feminine…because when I walk up to that store when I walk past it in the mall, it says ‘Victoria’…I’ve seen the advertisements, I’ve been in the store, the imagery, the models are exclusively female in my memory. (Noah, male/heterosexual)

Echoing Noah’s sentiment, Cameron (female/bisexual), mentioned how she saw Victoria’s Secret as being feminine, due to the women in their commercials; she also saw H&M, Zara, and Express as feminine due to the same reason. Regarding unisex retailers, Cameron shared how she saw “equal parts” males and females in commercials for Gap, Macy’s, Old Navy, and Kohl’s which resulted in her labeling these as unisex retailers.

For Gwen (female/heterosexual), who categorized Kohl’s as feminine, she saw products, models, and her own experiences as shaping her perspective:

I feel like every time you see a Kohl's commercial, yeah, they have like families and stuff on there but I feel like it's more, there's more feminine stuff in there. I feel like it's more feminine-based like HomeGoods, all this stuff I feel like their men’s section isn't huge. I feel like I don't feel like they're all inclusive, either. I've never got that vibe when I went to Kohl's, and I really hate it when my mom would be like, ‘we’re going to Kohl’s,’ and I’d be like, ‘I don’t fucking go to Kohl’s.’
Similar to Gwen’s take, Lydia (female/bisexual) saw Kohl’s as feminine on account of their advertising: “Kohl’s I think is more feminine. I think their advertisements are more geared towards the mom crowd, but I know that they have, you know, stuff for everyone.”

Where Noah, Cameron, Gwen, and Lydia focused on products and models, James (male/heterosexual) noted how Macy’s advertisements seemed to focus on “the shopping experience” and “not necessarily” the clothing and categorized Macy’s as feminine. In contrast, Cleo (female/bisexual) focused on the product for categorizing Brooks Brothers as masculine, explaining, “I see Brooks Brothers in like suits. And I feel like most of their advertising that I’ve seen, most of their window displays, tend to be men in suits.”

When talking about how he saw Adidas, James shared that he thought Adidas was unisex as “they try very hard to advertise their sports stuff as being for anybody and everybody.” As for Nike, some participants found it difficult to categorize Nike on account of the company’s diversity in advertisements and overarching themes. Whereas Cleo, Lydia, and Jamie felt that Nike had a masculine feel to its advertising, Kennedy felt as if the advertising was appealing to all genders:

Nike, um, part of me wants to place them masculine but they do such a great job of incorporating women into their ads most of the time. I know I haven't been into a Nike…factory store, specifically. I don’t know, I keep leaning more towards masculine on it even though…I've seen a bunch of their ads that incorporate women athletes and try to, they try to…I feel like they strive to be more unisex but there's something about the energy of it. And it's weird, like Nike…was a female character in mythology but I don’t know, reads more masculinity to me. (Cleo, female/bisexual)
Despite the inclusion of female athletes, Cleo sensed a masculine “energy” from Nike advertisements, which suggests that even with imagery of sporty females, gender stigmas of male interests skewed her opinion on the Nike brand. Another participant, Lydia, saw Nike as masculine due to its athletic tendencies:

Nike factory store definitely masculine I think for a long time their advertisements were also very like male sporty oriented, kind of any sports store, I think there’s still that traditional idea of masculinity, that masculinity is athletic. (Lydia, female/bisexual)

Cleo and Lydia both touch on the effects of advertising imagery clashing with ingrained gender stigmas. Although female athletes appear in Nike advertisements, the prevailing gender stigma which associates males with active lifestyles seemed to override these perceptions of Nike with male “energy”. As a store offering athletic clothing and performance gear, Nike’s categorization as a masculine store supports past findings related to masculine portrayals in advertising (Sandhu, 2018; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004) as well as the early formed associations between gendered sports (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). For other participants, some saw Nike as unisex:

I see them as a pretty unisex company. Maybe airing towards masculine, kind of similar to Adidas, where it's like, when you have that sporty kind of marketing, it usually kind of airs towards masculine, but I see a lot of like, feminine Nike products, so I’ll, I’d put them in unisex. (Jamie, female/lesbian)

Nike, I would put as unisex. Just because they've done a good job I think in their advertising to both, to all genders. (Kennedy, female/heterosexual)
For Jamie and Kennedy, they both saw Nike’s advertising as being universally appealing and while Jamie alluded to gender stigmas, she resorted back to products which she saw as feminine, for balancing out the store’s gender.

For the top two unisex stores, the general consensus was that Old Navy and Gap had similar imagery. As Jamie explained, “Old Navy, I would put in unisex I think. I think they're pretty, I don’t know, I think of their marketing, it’s pretty unisex.” For Gap, James emphasized how Gap focused on families in their commercials and communicated their family-friendly product selection, while Blaine seemed to find it difficult to discern between the two companies’ strategies:

Gap, um, unisex, I believe they also market themselves very strongly in unisex. Old Navy, so that one’s a bit difficult I'd say they do market themselves as unisex, they do have clothing for both sexes…I just say that I've seen I think a majority of people there that shop are female, personally. So I would put unisex just because of the store environment but I don't see a lot of males shopping there so I don't know if that would make it feminine or not.

Due to the variety of answers available regarding advertising, it was difficult to determine how participants’ gender or sexual identities influenced their reception of retailers’ advertisements.

Two participants, Caleb and Angela, shared some general thoughts about how they evaluated gender:

Primarily, it would be what they're selling, which it sounds like a very basic thing, but like again taking Victoria's Secret as an example. They're not selling anything that I would buy for myself. For that reason, right away there's less of a reason for me, for me to go in there and there's also a lot less reason for me to feel comfortable in it. So for me...
it would be what they're selling you know and you know department stores sell a little bit of everything. So there's a place for everyone. Past that point there's probably also a marketing angle to it, where I have often seen commercials for stores but they're not commercials that are for me. If that, if that makes sense. Those I think are…the two main answers in terms of whether I subconsciously gender stores and what qualities of the store I take into account when doing so. (Caleb, male/heterosexual)

For Caleb, the process of gendering stores was a subconscious occurrence which seemed to be initiated and solidified through advertising. Commercials allowed Caleb to evaluate products, get a sense of the store, and in turn, make a decision as to whether or not a commercial was targeted towards him as a consumer. As past research has suggested, masculinity may be linked with consumer lifestyles (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004), so seeing advertisements which provide experiences relevant to Caleb’s life could provide critical gender cues to influence his sense of shopping interest (Sandhu, 2018). In short, advertising played a crucial role in Caleb’s behavior as a consumer.

On the other hand, Angela saw advertisements on social media which not only showed products but also highlighted different gendered clothing styles.

I guess what I typically see, like them, like people, I guess right now would be in the media since I'm in quarantine, but I guess like what I see, like, men and women in the media where like, maybe on my timeline. Like, I know, the man on my Instagram timeline, when they’re dressing up, they wear suits and the women wear dresses, at least on my field of view so I guess how I associated it…definitely advertisements, like, you know, when you see like posts that are boosted on Instagram, you know, you look at that, and you get an idea for it.
While not necessarily a true in-store gender evaluation, Angela’s use of social media advertising reinforces the importance of visibility and reaching consumers beyond the in-store setting. Pantano and Gandini (2018) viewed in-store shopping as a mixture of both in-person and social media interactions, with shopping transformed into a “networked experienced” (p. 691). In particular, the researchers acknowledged the social elements of shopping, including in-person interactions between shoppers and sales associates, as well as other online channels (e.g., peers, product reviews, influencers). In contrast, Pantano and Gandini’s analysis of their interviews revealed that online shopping activity served as “virtual window shopping” to aid with reviews, price comparisons, anticipation, documentation, identity, and aspiration. With the plethora of ways to connect, consumers can use social media to browse freely and preview what companies have to offer before setting foot in a store; brands can use these digital channels as additional brand touch points and provide gendered cues to consumers.

The masculine and feminine clothing constructions mentioned by participants also echoed how males and females are presented in advertisements. While the concepts of gender and sexual orientation may have become more fluid, imagery of men and females in advertising continues to reflect traditional gender roles. In their examination of advertisements from 2006 to 2016, Timke and O’Barr (2017) found that men and women still assumed traditional gender roles through attire, pose, activities, and settings. Aley and Thomas (2021) reviewed magazine advertisements and found that men were portrayed as dominant figures whereas women lacked power and authority. As advertisements provide strategic snapshots of clothing, often featuring targeted consumers, items can assume gendered identities and become associated with masculine or feminine forms of dress. In contrast to the advertising literature; however, Elle (non-binary transgender female/lesbian) noticed a trend among female brands:
One interesting phenomenon, I've noticed is that like female brands tend to be more like body diverse slash accepting I'd say in terms of like their marketing these days...like you do see like the example I can think of it is like, like walking past like the Aerie store, like they have like pictures of up wide variety of like woman, like all, you know, all like, race, like, you know, different races, ethnicities, like sizes, you know, plus size. Plus Size people, more petite people and tall, etc., etc., whereas like for the men's brands it feels like it’s, the expectations are more in terms of like the marketing…it doesn’t…say that it, doesn't like scream like you have to look this certain way, the way that like a lot of women’s brands do…a lot of men's brands still tends to fall under that assumption, like, you know, most young men interested in fashion are like relatively slim, athletic like vaguely athletic types, or for like the more like high fashion brands, it tends to be very like skinny supermodel, kind of like, like 60s and 70s rock star types.

Elle’s observations about female and male portrayals in advertisements touch on many dilemmas of today’s advertising world. With their own distinct personalities (Aaker, 1997), brands must decide how to connect to consumers who do not fit into stereotypes through multiple channels. Despite some of the progress Elle noted in retail, changes to the fashion industry, particularly in advertising of women’s clothing, have been slow (Pounders, 2018). While some companies have made efforts to feature more body diverse models (Pounders & Mabry-Flynn, 2019) and natural, Photoshop-free women in advertisements (Mabry-Flynn & Champlin, 2018), responses to such imagery were mixed. From appreciation and compliments to criticism and controversy, diverse depictions of women generated talk from both ends of the spectrum (Mabry-Flynn & Champlin, 2018; Pounders & Mabry-Flynn, 2019). Elle’s comments about male portrayals also mirrored the findings from Camerino, Camerino, Prat, Jonsson, and Castaner (2020). In their analysis of
sports advertisements from 2008 to 2018, Camerino et al. (2020) found that imagery mostly featured young athletic men who were presented as strong and able-bodied individuals, a common archetype for males in advertising (Aley & Thomas, 2021). Although more fluid and inclusive imagery of gender diversity may be on the horizon, research has shown that despite efforts to increase diversity in advertising, these efforts have been met with mixed reviews.

4.4 SALES ASSOCIATES

4.4.1 POSITIVE IN-STORE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

As part of the interview, participants shared positive and negative in-store experiences. Of the 18 participants who were able to recall a positive in-store shopping experience, nine participants shared about positive interactions with sales associates who added value to their in-store trip. Some stories exemplified excellent customer service and sales skills:

…this woman really sold me on it, the article of clothing I bought...and the woman was just like super nice and, like, she was like an employee or the person who owned it and she was like, it sounds like really vain to me, which is like complimenting me and I'm like, this feels nice because she's like complimenting me and she's saying, ‘oh this looks really pretty on you,’ and then she actually showed me. It was like a jacket she was trying to sell me and I actually still have it, even though it was like from years ago. And she showed me all the different ways it could be tied that would look cute, she tied it on me, she tied it on a mannequin, she showed me how cute it looks, she made me look at myself in the mirror wearing it on. And she's like, ‘look how cute this is! If you go with anything you can use it as like a, like a swimsuit cover you can use it as like a, like a thing to cover
your shoulders if you're wearing like professional clothing.’ And it was just a really positive experience; lady was super nice. (Stella, female/pansexual)

Stella’s story revealed the important nature of sales personnel, particularly with building rapport with the customer (Kim & Baker, 2019). Rather than taking a reactive role in Stella’s shopping experience, the sales associate gave Stella personalized recommendations and utilized props (e.g., mannequin, mirror) to help Stella envision how to wear the jacket and its value add to her wardrobe. Appealing to Stella’s emotions, the sales personnel tells Stella how cute the jacket is and how cute it looks on Stella, the sales associate inadvertently reinforced Stella’s identity as a female. This shared experience between Stella and the store employee demonstrated the fluid roles of sales personnel and how adaptation is key. As a store representative, the sales associate’s knowledge of products directed Stella to a jacket; as a salesperson, she demonstrated finesse and patience by showing Stella the jacket’s versatility; and lastly, as a shopping companion, helped reassure Stella of how nice the product was and how it was the perfect look for her. Similar to Stella’s experience, Jocelyn shared a similar account of receiving personalized attention and product recommendations:

Maurices is really good. Like, the ladies there, they're actually, you know they're not just sales people but they call themselves, um, you have your own personal fashion experience or whatever where they, I mean they, they literally help pick things out for you. Either based by looking at you or maybe you pick out a couple things or like, ‘oh, I saw you like this, you might like this shirt also,’ or something like that, or ‘I think these jeans would be a great fit for you, these style of jeans.’ So, I think they're extremely helpful in helping pick out clothes, things that I wouldn't think of necessarily. (Jocelyn, female/heterosexual)
Kendall shared how a sales associate delivered personalized service and adapted to her friend’s needs:

I want to say it might have been J.Jill. But we had, so I don't usually ask for help when I'm shopping I just look at things and I see that. [My friend] is not that way. She’ll start talking to the sales lady. She wants to know all about product and you know when it came out, what it’s made of, all kinds of different things. So it's totally a new experience for me but the woman at J.Jill was so helpful, she answered every question, she helped [my friend] look for the pieces of clothing that were within her price range, and that fit the specifications that she was looking for. She helped her with like bringing clothes to the fitting room and then she also took down her number so that she could call her when certain sales came in the future. So I was really impressed with her salesmanship. I had never seen anything like that before in a clothing store. (Kendall, female/heterosexual)

Kendall’s story demonstrated how the sales associate began interacting with Kendall’s friend as a store representative by answering questions about products. From here, the sales associate quickly transitions to a salesperson as she assists with a fitting room, and then switches to the companion role when she offers to contact Kendall’s friend about new products or sales.

Kendall’s account as an observer of her friend’s interactions with the sales associate demonstrates how even indirectly, observed exchanges may lead to a customer having a positive experience within the store.

Taking a more participatory role, Caleb shared how he and a male friend ventured into a store with an agenda of finding shirts:

I was in, I think it was a department store with a friend and we were shopping for slim fitted shirts. And we're doing so with the intention of buying them, so that we could wear
them that night at a party. So it was kind of like a pre party event, right. So it was already, the party had already started implicitly in the shopping experience. So, me and this guy, you know, picked out some shirts and went to the dressing room…and we were trying them on and, you know, commenting to what was good, what was bad about them, and at one point, you know, you leave the dressing room and you do the catwalk and there's mirrors and stuff. And the dressing room attendant was also like providing opinions, which I don't think we solicited but it, it happened. And I remember it being really funny and a really enjoyable experience, I did wind up buying a shirt…but, yeah, in that case it was a, it was an interpersonal experience, as well as a shopping experience, I guess.

(Caleb, male/heterosexual)

While it is not clear as to what the sales personnel said to Caleb and his friend, or what personnel role (e.g., store representative, salesperson, or companion) she or he played, the feedback helped create a fun and memorable experience for Caleb. In support of Kotzé et al. (2012), the store associate positively contributed to the entertainment factor of Caleb’s shopping adventure.

Other participants shared stories about how the customer service provided by sales associates created a welcoming environment where participants felt individually supported during their shopping trip. For Angela, a simple greetings was all it took to signal that the store was a friendly environment:

Positive would be this one time, I was at TJ Maxx looking at clothes and the employees came up and asked me if I needed any help. And one lady just came up, was saying hi, so that kind of friendliness I always like. (Angela, female/heterosexual)
Elle shared how feeling welcomed at a store meant that sales associates were either aware of how to interact with people beyond the binary gender system and individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ or identified as LBGTQ+ themselves:

If I felt like welcome at a store, or like the service, or it was clear that the service reps or were either like familiar with how to deal with queer people, like queer themselves, which is again like another thing that's very much like common in Chicago. Then, I'll be inclined to maybe like spend more money, spend more time, and be more inclined to just like ask for help, and like, maybe give them the opportunity to sell me on something that I might not have originally considered. (Elle, non-binary transgender female/lesbian)

When entering a store, Cleo shared how a greeting or attention from sales personnel not only made her feel welcomed but also helped to establish a connection with the sales associate (Kim & Baker, 2019):

It's a very fine line that a lot of in-store personnel walks where they want to be attentive to you without being sort of overbearing. So, I like that they've started doing as a fairly normal practice, now you know, ‘Can I get a fitting room started for you?’ and they'll, you know, take things from you and they have to ask your name so they know your room is and you know, it works for them because it frees up your hands to shop for more things. It also makes you feel like you’ve been acknowledged. I like having that mix of space to look around and kind of explore on my own, but I've had some sort of connection with someone so I do feel like if I need help, if I need help finding a different size or different style, I'm not just floundering on my own in the space. (Cleo, female/bisexual)
Noah’s story shared similarities with Cleo’s as he enjoyed being greeted upon entry and being asked questions about his shopping needs:

A welcome, a good positive shopping experience, I, a fellow named Daniel, I’m almost certain, it was some time ago, a now defunct store called Bergner’s, at the Market Place Mall in Champaign, Illinois. Walked in and he, he asked me some question that was in the form of ‘what are we shopping for today? How can we get you outfitted the way you need to be?’ Doesn’t that sound a little bit like a masculine thing?...like we’re going on a hunting trip or something? He didn’t say those words but he, it was something like that, and I explained my, my need, my situation, and he sized me up...he had one of those eyes, you know, measuring tapes for eyes so he, he had me in stuff that was flattering, it was professional, it was hitting the aesthetic, the aim I was going for, um, and just was very helpful...it was, it was a guided process. He made a good deal of money off of me that day, and I’m glad he did… if I can be guided through that and have some aesthetic judgment applied as well. That was the other thing at Bergner’s, the gentleman was like, looks at it and says that was not it or yes, this is, this is...when men who look like you, body type, sizes, wear something like this, this works, um, for the image you’re trying to project, I’ve seen it a bunch, this is working for you. (Noah, male/heterosexual)

Once again, Noah’s story echoes others’ experiences as Daniel’s transition from a store representative to salesperson to shopping companion made for a successful and memorable shopping experience for Noah. Similar to Noah’s story, James (male/heterosexual) shared a lasting memory of a major life event and how his positive interactions with a sales associate made for a good experience:
Yeah, so when I got married, I went around to a lot of places to find tuxedos and stuff like that. And I ended my search with Ducky's because I figured, that's where I was going to end up. I’ve had luck with them in the past for like proms and things, and the guy took so much time with us, asked us directly what we wanted, didn't try to push and say ‘oh no this would look better,’…or ‘you need to sign up for this, you know, email newsletter’ or whatever. He just really wanted us to get what we wanted to get. And it was so nice my wife ended up getting her wedding dress there, they were just so accommodating for what we were looking for.

Although James’ account does not outline all of the specific exchanges or highlight the dynamic roles of the store personnel, his interactions reflect how the sales associate provided him with excellent customer service and took the time to provide a personalized shopping experience.

Participant anecdotes reflected the significant difference sales associates can make for all shopping demographics. Whether through greetings or offers to start a fitting room, building rapport (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Kim & Baker, 2019; Underhill, 2010) remains a crucial piece of the shopping experience; store personnel can make an impersonal shopping trip feel personal through dynamic roles as a store representative, salesperson, and shopping companion.

4.4.2 NEGATIVE IN-STORE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

While 18 participants shared stories about negative in-store shopping experiences, 11 of them included negative interactions with sales associates ranging from bad customer service and unwelcoming behaviors to socioeconomic as well as racial profiling. Multiple participants from each of the three demographics shared stories about negative in-store shopping experiences. Noah shared an instance where he experienced poor customer service. Most notable was how he
mentioned that the lack of help he received navigating the sales floor left him feeling neglected in unknown territory:

I was at another store, the Macy’s actually…and I actually personally knew the person working there, it was a friend from outside of there. And they were kind, friendly, and completely unhelpful. They were sort of a, in general, over there…and I’m, I’m like, I’m left on my own here. I don’t know what you have in the back, I don’t know my way around your whole space, I am going to browse, I am going to hit everything, but like, you could’ve taken me point to point.

Another participant, James, recalled how he and his fiancée felt frustration after being refused service until signing up for the store’s newsletter:

At David’s Bridal they wouldn't help us until we signed up for their bloody newsletter. So we ended up just walking out because we didn't want to sign up for their newsletter. They just kept insisting that they wouldn't show us any, any suits or catalogs until we’d filled out the paper. (James, male/heterosexual)

Rather than focusing on helping James and his fiancée with wedding day attire, the sales associates fixated on their customer acquisition process which angered James and the bridal store ultimately lost their business.

In some cases, shoppers interpreted associates’ behavior as unwelcoming, neglectful, and judgmental either through body language or lack of acknowledgement. For Stella, a sales associate’s perceived attitude and mood can shape the store environment:

It does create like, a negative environment whenever employees look like they hate you. So like, they don't necessarily have to be like smiling or anything, but like, if they're checking you out, and then they're like, like, glaring at the clothing and they're like
moving around really harshly. I'm like, 'oh my gosh, like, I'm sorry I'm not meaning to bother you. Like I'll come back tomorrow if you want,' but just if, if someone actively seems like they really don't want to be there…it's really not a good experience for me as a consumer…I'm not one of those people who's like, you have to smile. But yeah, it's just a little scary sometimes. (Stella, female/pansexual)

For others, such as Cleo and Kennedy, sales associate attentiveness and efforts to acknowledge them as shoppers provided for negative shopping experiences. In Cleo’s case, feelings of being watched made her insecure and uncomfortable and led to her exiting the store (Underhill, 2010):

It can be tricky because if you are too attentive it can make people feel uncomfortable. So I had an experience where I went into one of my favorite stores, and the, it was pretty quiet in there and the three saleswomen, I felt like were kind of watching me, very closely, and you know they were checking in with me often. And I just felt really uncomfortable and I ended up leaving without shopping very long without buying anything like I just, I felt like, you know, I was dressed a little sloppily that day so I was like, did they, do they think I, you know, don't have money to buy things? Are they thinking I'm here to steal? Like it just felt like it was a different sort of attention. And it was probably all within my own head but it was just something about it was felt a little too attentive. Yeah, and also like instances where if you walk into a store and the employees are behind the counter and they sort of just call over to you and like, you know, let us know if you need anything, if they don't come out from the counter at any point, it feels a little weird…it doesn't feel like they're as engaged with helping you. (Cleo, female/bisexual)
Similar to Cleo’s experience, Kennedy noted how a lack of a standardized greeting or acknowledgment led her to feelings of insecurity and frustration which prompted her to leave the store:

I always don't want the people to bother me. But it's also nice to be acknowledged when you first go into the store. I don't want them to come over to me and like ask for help but just, just ‘hi, welcome’ something because they do that so often that if they don't do it for you, it, you can, might feel self-conscious, like you're not welcomed into the store like, ‘oh, I'm not dressed fashionably enough to shop in this store’ or whatever and I remember feeling that when I went into that Ann Taylor like, ‘oh, we don't think this woman will buy anything here,’ you know…I kind of continue to browse because I thought maybe somebody will come over…I gave them more time to see if somebody would come over and say hi, but they just like ignored me and it wasn't busy either…there was like one or two other women in the store, and they were saying hi to them and like asking if they needed help. And I was picking things up…so it was like a perfect opportunity for a salesperson to come over and say ‘oh, can I start a fitting room for you?’ or whatever and nobody ever did, and I was just so frustrated and so I just put my stuff away and I just left…I just didn't really go back in the store because I didn't want to deal. I always have this idea in my head of a scene in Pretty Woman when the sales people make the main character feel trashy or whatever. I always think like sometimes people who work at the mall, like, think that they're better than you, I wanna be like, you work at the mall right now, so it’s not like you’re working in the Gucci store on Rodeo Drive so you need to chill, so yeah. (Kennedy, female/heterosexual)
In contrast to these accounts of neglectful sales associates were stories in which store personnel exhibited aggressive behaviors ranging from policing to pushy selling tactics (Underhill, 2010):

This one person who was like really getting like really getting on my one friend because, so like my two friends, me and the other one are like, obviously, like females and the other one is a male, so like we were just kind of shopping together and like my one friend had clothes that she wanted to go try on and so we were both waiting outside the changing room but like, it was the female changing room and she was just like getting on him…she wasn't like being aggressive really but she was like, heavily implying that she wanted him to leave. (Sloan, non-binary leans feminine/lesbian)

As opposed to being a store representative, salesperson, or shopping companion, the sales associate in Sloan’s story took on the role of a hall monitor in her attempts to police Sloan’s friend. In Jamie’s case, the sales associate tried to push a product on Jamie to try, and while this may have been seen as a harmless albeit pushy sales tactic, the feminine scent of the perfume might have been undesirable to Jamie as someone who has had “a little shaky relationship” with her gender, and at the time of her interview, was “still figuring that out”:

I don't like when stores are really like, overbearing with their products. Does that make sense? Like, if I’m here shopping for clothes, I don’t want, I don’t like when there’s a bunch of like, perfumes and they’re trying to like, I have once, when I was checking out at some store, I don’t remember what store it was but I was checking out some clothes and they’re like, ‘here, sample this perfume,’ and I’m like, no thank you. Like, I’m trying to buy these clothes and like, as I’m checking out, she like whipped out a little perfume sampler and she’s like, ‘try this perfume’ and I’m like ‘no,’ haha, it’s not why I’m here. I don’t really like perfume, what was that?!! (Jamie, female/lesbian)
Having an aggressive salesperson push a feminine scent to a customer who is unsure of their gender identity might have been offensive on multiple levels and left a negative impression of the store and most likely, the product. In addition to being sensitive to shoppers’ identities, sales personnel also exhibited behaviors which were detrimental to the customer’s experience and psychological state.

So I went to a place to buy a pair of jeans and the whole place was just jeans. And I got a couple pairs that I wanted to try on. And they were a little bit on the pricey side. And I went to the changing room and tried them on. When I came out someone from the store had brought like three or four more pairs of jeans that I may want to try on, and I felt kind of pressured to buy things which made me really uncomfortable because I would have had a hard time afforded, being able to afford like one pair of jeans from that place, and I don't like the store people, expecting me to, to buy something. (Lorenzo, male/heterosexual)

For Lorenzo, a seemingly helpful sales associate came off as too aggressive, and as a result, he felt pressured to purchase and uncomfortable due to his limited budget. When asked about whether or not he purchased a pair of jeans that day, Lorenzo quickly replied with “No, got the hell outta there.”

Other participants shared personal experiences where they felt as if they were singled out and treated differently on account of their gender identity, expression, or race. In the case for Elle, a transgender female, she felt as if her physical appearance often confused sales associates and that many store personnel would try to overcompensate by treating her differently:

But that’s, like that kind of thing is kind of like iffy because like, you know…it's a whole difference between like casual natural allyship and just like kind of like a smothering one
where, you know, it’s weird, it’s a tricky balance to strive for, where if they're overdoing it, then it's just like, okay, I get where you're coming from but like again, like just treat me like any other customer for, for crying out loud…Sometimes it's clear that like they don't necessarily know what to do, or like, how, how to, how to act around someone who's like visibly queer I guess, which is again you know just like a product of people’s upbringings being in like a relatively like smaller area, etc., etc...For the most part of they have, for the most part it hasn't been like that bad like I can tell like they're probably well attempt, well intentions, they just like have no idea what's, what is considered rude or polite or not. But that kind of treatment kind of like has an inverse effect on your psyche. I’m just like, I just wanna get in and out here dude, just like, treat me like any other customer, you don't need to be as awkward, I guess. So, I don't know what could fix that. But like I said, it’s kind of like the product of people’s upbringings, and I feel like any training on that would be very much for like edge cases because like I mentioned like if I'm the only person like if they managed to get to adulthood and like, I'm the only queer person they've interacted at their job before.

Elle’s feelings of minority stress in binary gender retail spaces were similar to those felt by lesbians interviewed in Reddy-Best and Pedersen (2015). Similar to Elle’s feelings of being singled out, Gwen recounted negative shopping experiences as an African American female:

So, I feel like it depends on the store. But, me being black, I have experienced when I will go to the store, like the associate either following me or asking me too many questions like, ‘oh, do you need anything, do you need anything?’ It's almost like you're trying to keep an eye on me to see, make sure I'm not stealing or anything. And then when I did go to the store, one time, I had a lady who asked me, she told me I was three
months pregnant, she's like ‘you look like you're glowing, are you three months?’ and when I tell you I'm not, I've never been pregnant before, like I don't have a kid nothing. I'm like okay, cool, really, like I'm not pregnant I was just bloated. That like...so that, that's like to me those are negative experiences because like you just you're just going to a store you're just trying to shop like you don't want to be bothered. And then, the people bother you, because one they assume you're gonna steal because you're black. Two, you're assuming I'm pregnant and a mom even though I've never had a kid before. Like, so just those types of things that just ruin the whole experience.

Gwen also shared her feelings of frustration regarding how some sales associate may have made incorrect assumptions about her age and financial well-being:

I could still pass for a high school girl, in my outside, not work clothes and I put my makeup on and stuff like I look like a whole different person. But to them it's just like, oh she's here with her friends like they're probably gonna steal like, no, I don't have a credit card, I have three like I'm not going to steal your stuff I'm just trying to shop, especially when you go to a store like Zara that's a little bit more expensive or Acure is a good one to where there are more expensive things and then you have someone following you around because they're trying to make sure you're not gonna steal their stuff.

Furthermore, Gwen shared that she has felt as if sales associates follow her around, even while shopping with a friend. Gwen recounted their exchange with the sales associate:

I have said something once, I'm not really confident, looks, probably not really confrontational. I really just like positive vibes and I just like to just be free. So usually when I get that vibe, I'm like, you know, I just don't have to spend my money here, like I don’t have to give you my money, I don’t have to give you my money in person, I don't
want to give you my money online, like I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna deal with it. So usually it's just more of a leave thing. But there was one time. A, my friend was at the, my friend doesn't, she doesn't play that. So she was more so ready to be like no, we're not trying to like I see what you're doing like we're not trying to steal so it was more so kind of a little bit of an argument there 'cuz the lady was just like, ‘Oh, no, I'm not,’ but we're like, ‘But why are you, keep following us around everywhere?’ She's like, ‘I'm just trying to see if you need anything.’ We're like, ‘We don't need anything, like, we know we came there looking for yellow swimsuits. We're just looking for yellow swimsuits, we don't need your help, told you we didn’t,’ and they still keep badgering us about helping us like that, that's, that's annoying, and that tells us something else if that makes sense.

Unfortunately, multiple *shopping while Black* experiences, similar to Gwen’s, have been observed, studied, and brought to court (Gabbidon, 2003). Gwen’s interactions with sales personnel are similar to those explored in Pittman (2020) in which African Americans shared their U.S. shopping experiences. Many stories echoed Gwen’s, with instances of racial bias, overt and covert prejudice, being followed, assumptions of being poor, and insecurities about outfits as markers of socioeconomic status.

While positive interactions with store personnel can make for a warm and welcoming experience, negative interactions with sales personnel can ruin an otherwise pleasant shopping trip. Participants recounted experiences that included poor customer service, unwelcoming demeanors, negative body language, aggressive behaviors, racism, and the singling out of shoppers due to race, appearance, and perceived sexual orientation.
4.5 ANIMAL SHOPPING TRAITS

In order to gain insights into participants’ inner identities as well as shopping styles, I utilized a projective question (Morrison, Haley, Bartel Sheehan, & Taylor, 2012). When asked to personify their shopping traits in an animal, participants shared a variety of animals known for their scavenger behaviors, selective attention, and different levels of speed. The top most referenced animal was a dog (4) followed by a squirrel (2). All other answers had no duplicates: bumblebee, owl, jaguar, magpie, bear, vulture, sloth, crow, panda, lioness, cow, cat, jackal, and deer. These animals revealed how participants describe their shopping personae and provide valuable insight into their behaviors and motivations in retail environments.

4.5.1 DOG

Two participants felt that a dog best personified their shopping traits due to a dog’s quick excitement levels and likeability:

Sometimes I’ll go in and not really know exactly what I'm looking for. Once I find something I'm super excited about it. And then sometimes I just talk myself out of it by the time I get to the register I'm like, oh, I'm not interested in this anymore, like I'm super excited about it and then I'm like...so a lot of times when I do go to like stores a lot, but most of the time I don't walk out with much, or if anything at all, so I'm super excited for a short period of time get overly excited, and then I'm like I probably shouldn't have this, or, like I'm over a just like a, I guess, like my crazy dog is excited about one thing and she's super excited about it for like five minutes and then she's like over it. Next. (Stella, female/pansexual)
A dog because you know dogs go outside, they stay inside, outside, bark, up for shopping, outside. They're also classic and everyone loves dogs so I just like simple stuff that everybody likes. Nothing crazy, out of the ordinary. (Violet, female/lesbian)

While Stella and Violet saw dogs as excitable and friendly embodiments of their own shopping traits, Kendall and Elle focused on the quick decisiveness of dogs. Kendall chose dogs on account of their “sixth sense about things that are done, things that are not done,” while Elle said that she would choose a hunting dog on account of its selective attention:

A hunting dog, I’d say. Like, for the most part like I tend to be pretty selective, like I mentioned, like I tend to be kind of selective in terms of stuff that does fit me and fits with my style especially, but you know like, like everyone else, like, sometimes I do end up getting distracted by, you know, like a shiny like a, like, like something just because it's like on sale or something like that. And just buying on impulse.

The dog persona represented shoppers who saw themselves as being agreeable, energetic, and friendly; similar to how different breeds of dogs vary in their demeanor, female shoppers chose to describe certain traits which appealed to their shopper personality. From Elle’s focused hunting dog to Stella’s excitability, the dog personae seemed to be comprised of enthusiastic and traditionalist shoppers (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003) who saw shopping as an enjoyable and fun activity (Kotzé et al., 2012).

4.5.2 SQUIRREL

Squirrels were noted for their search and scurry behavior, quick thinking, and stocking up on items. Cleo mentioned the tried and true methods of squirrel routes being reflective of her shopping habits:
Like, it's gonna run…it goes to the place where it's like I know I have had success here before so I'm going to like look all around here and find this thing and then I'm going to hang on to it. And then I'm gonna like go back to that spot over and...there's sort of different little spots that you refer to, they go back to over and over again because you know that...that was a good spot, I'm gonna go there again...so it's like you go into one store, and then it's kind of what draws the eye so you go to the first spot and I'm one to sort of pick something up, and then carry it with me to the next place and pick up something else and I'll have like a nice big stack by the time I go to a fitting room or to look at things... (Cleo, female/bisexual)

Similar to Cleo’s squirrel approach, Kennedy mentioned a squirrel’s quick movements and collecting habits as ways of surviving and being prepared for the future:

Squirrel or some kind of little, little rodent like that just because they're very, they're quick. I don't really like to spend a whole lot of time doing it and they also are like always thinking ahead you know like squirrels are always kind of like, oh, let me get this, you know food store for winter, I know lots of animals do that but I do that too, like I'm, I used to be a very, like, when I was younger I would just buy random shirts because I thought they were cute and now I'm extremely pragmatic and I'm always thinking about how often I can wear something, how long it's gonna last, stuff like that, so I feel like squirrels have. (Kennedy, female/heterosexual)

Both Cleo’s and Kennedy’s squirrel persona shared the element of speed, but additionally, their reliance on their abilities to locate resources (clothing) and plan for the future seemed to reinforce traditional evolutionary roles (Dennis et al., 2018; Wood & Eagly, 2012).
4.5.3 ANIMALS OF VARIOUS SPEEDS

Besides dogs and squirrels, other participants shared animals based on attributes, habits and speed. Cameron expressed her shopping traits as those belonging to a bumblebee:

I like to look for a while, and I'll kind of like look at not each and every top, but I'll look at everything and kind of like hang around it for a little bit and be like, ooh like, what can I wear this with, what can I wear this for, kind of like how a honeybee would go from flower to flower and just kind of like, hang out and chill, and then kinds of…see what's going on there, maybe invite a couple of their bumblebee friends over.

In particular, Cameron mentioned how a bumblebee may alert fellow bees to a good find, which seems to reflect her inclination to partake in shopping as a fun social event in which she has the opportunity to reinforce connections with friends and affirm her identity (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Johnstone, 2012).

Similar to Cameron’s bumblebee approach, Sloan’s sloth reflected an easy-going shopping style in which she took her time browsing products (Dennis et al., 2018; Kotzé et al., 2012; Underhill, 2009): “…kind of like mosey around, more often than not…I'm not like very quick to make a decision I'm kind of like, do I, don't I, that kind of thing.” With Blaine’s lazy panda approach, he differentiated his shopping style with his friends:

And I guess it would have to be, the relationship to that would be something along the lines of me being very lazy. So when I go shopping with friends…they’ll try stuff on but that's not like, that's not really how I shop. I can just look around and see what stuff I like and only like selectively pick things to try on instead of trying a lot of stuff on and then selectively taking those so, uh, yeah, so something lazy, just laid back, but yeah, I only
buy stuff if I seem to think that it serves a very, like I'll use it a lot...right, so I don’t really like to buy a lot I guess you could say, so…

While Blaine cited laziness in his panda approach, Noah described his shopping habits similar to a cow on account of its thorough grazing: “Slow, plotting, gonna graze everything. I'm going to look at all the things, probably going to touch them. Gonna try on a bunch, we're experiencing the whole, a whole range, typically.” Both Blaine and Noah saw acquiring clothes as practical and as a way to adhere to cultural norms of looking like men (Frith & Gleeson, 2004).

As opposed to Noah’s broad grazing approach, Jamie described her more selective shopping as crow-like:

Maybe like a crow? You know how crows like to just kind of search around and find shiny things and collect them? Not necessarily shiny things, but like, I know what’s in my interests. And whenever I'm at a thrift store, I kind of or just any clothing store, I just kind of flock to the various like, I like jackets. I like flannels, that's I find myself gravitating towards that area. And I have to restrain myself, because I already have like 50 flannels and I can’t buy another one, haha.

Despite her confession of having a large collection of flannels, Jamie admitted to being drawn to such items in stores as her inherent nature as a gatherer (Dennis et al., 2018; Wood & Eagly, 2012) emerged.

Other participants selected animals known for their focused hunting skills and cautious behaviors. James shared that he considered himself to be a foraging shopper as a magpie: “I’ll pick up things that I don't necessarily need right away, and kind of stow them away for a later time when they'll be useful and have them.” With his hunter and gatherer approach, James’ take on shopping was similar to squirrel traits as described earlier; however, as a magpie, James’
confidence as an opportunistic bird suggests his unplanned shopping behaviors. Similar to James’ approach, Angela described her shopping persona as a cat due to her speed in addition to her decisiveness and caution:

I think I'll be like a cat, some sort of cat because cats are like, really like, we have these feral cats in the neighborhood and they'll be really, really quick. So I feel like when I'm going into a store, my objective is to get out the store, I don't know, I can't spend like all day in a store, like how other people can…also feel like cats are really cautious. I try to be cautious of like that price tag because like I say, you know, I just, I can't spend a whole bunch of money on a shirt or jeans. So I feel like I'd be cautious like that.

Although cautious, Angela’s cat persona seemed contradictory to studies pertaining to women and shopping (Dennis et al., 2018; Katrodia et al., 2018; Kotzé et al., 2012; Underhill, 2009; Underhill, 2010). As a heterosexual female, Angela may feel confident in her gender and sexual identities while shopping, which may explain her quick, cat-like shopping trips.

Similar to Angela’s cautious approach, Caleb told of his deer-like tendencies of being a cautious and timid shopper:

I would say, I tend to be shy about buying things, spending money on things, how that translates to an animal it’d be something that's very meek, and it's afraid to come out of hiding. I guess is what I would say. I'm having, I'm blanking on an actual animal that has that characteristic. Probably, okay, I got it, a deer. Flee at the first sign of trouble!

As a complete opposite to Angela’s focused cat, Caleb’s deer indicated that he did not feel completely comfortable in retail environments as a heterosexual male (Jackson & Holbrook, 1995; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008). Although a deer may be physically larger than other animals mentioned by participants, deer are often quiet and jumpy animals always on alert.
Other participants, such as Lorenzo and Jocelyn, mentioned animals particularly known for their speedy scavenging behaviors and highlighted this aspect specifically as part of their approach. Lorenzo shared about his jackal shopping behaviors of searching the sale section first:

Jackal! I go for the easy pickins first. Okay, so I almost always start looking for things that are on sale. Like if there's a pile of random clothes and random sizes. That's on sale. I will look there first and spend most of my time there, rather than going to the like the new clothes except the regular price that I might not do at all. Right, yeah. If I see a sale thing I go there.

Similar to Lorenzo's scavenging shopping habits, Jocelyn mentioned her split vulture and hyena approach to scouring clearance racks:

I half want to say a vulture because I go to the clearance racks, haha. You know I'm thinking through trying to find the scraps, I don't know. That sounds more like a hyena I guess, that’s really funny…trying to think of something also that like an animal that is like seasonal, or something like that I don't go that often it's just when I need…not a crow that goes after shiny stuff. I don’t know, haha, that’s the best I can do, a vulture, a hyena…

While some participants focused on animals of varying speeds, bargain hunters focused on animals with strong scavenging tendencies and it was apparent that the animal personae represented members of all demographics.

4.5.4 THE APEX PREDATOR FEMALES

Some participants focused on their individual goals and motivations as opposed to the retail environment and mentioned known apex predators. Lydia described herself as a shopper who emerged from hibernation to buy clothing in massive amounts to refresh her wardrobe:
What's an animal that comes out like an animal that comes out of hibernation and just gorges? Probably, so I'd probably be like a bear because I do like, I buy a shit ton at once, like I buy a whole new wardrobe at once. I’m not like, ooh I need a little piece here, I need a little piece there, I’m like, I go and buy whole new clothes, so probably a bear.

Such as a bear leaves its cave after a long winter’s rest, Lydia’s shopping style suggests that she is a motivated shopper with hopes for a high yield. Similar to a bear’s hunting style, Lydia’s intense shopping spree suggests that—while on the hunt—she is a force to be reckoned with.

Another apex predator, Elizabeth, described herself as a lioness while shopping due to her focused and practical approach: “…like a lioness, like you're out…looking for something very specific and like you're gonna go and you're gonna get it and you're not like, I'm not a, I don't linger.” Along the same line as Elizabeth, Gwen found that a jaguar best described her shopping style due to her ability to hunt quickly and find items that work for her:

I feel like I'm super aggressive with my shopping. I don't like to wait. You know how a jaguar, it's like, it might study its prey for a little bit, but after a while it's like, fuck it, I'm just gonna pounce on it! I think I'm like that, like I don't like to, you know, some people like for days are shopping around trying to find the right price and right fit, and I'm more like if I want it, I’m about to get it right now.

Elizabeth’s lioness persona and Gwen’s jaguar persona seemed to contradict findings regarding women as shoppers as Angela’s cat (Dennis et al., 2018; Katrodia et al., 2018; Kotzé et al., 2012; Underhill, 2009; Underhill, 2010). As true apex predators, however, the two heterosexual women’s big cat personae almost demonstrated more masculine shopping behaviors on account of their quick decisions and focused approach (Dennis et al., 2018; Kotzé et al., 2012; Underhill, 2009).
Lastly, rounding out the apex predators was Zvi, who felt that she had owl qualities when shopping. In particular, Zvi noted her wisdom and eye for deals:

I guess an owl. I feel like a wise, I'm a wise shopper. I don't like to spend a lot of money for clothes, but I like nice clothes. I have a good eye for nice things. But I'm also cheap.

So I will I will look around to find the best thing but it has to be quality.

Based on her experience as a veteran female shopper, Zvi regarded herself as a wise and frugal shopper who knew what she liked. As a heterosexual female, it is likely that Zvi had grown comfortable with her own identities, retail settings, and clothing items, and understood how the three intersect (Belk, 1988; Feinberg et al., 1992).

4.6 MALES AND SHOPPING

While shopping has been referred to as a feminine activity (Dennis et al., 2018; Jackson & Holbrook, 1995; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008) participants’ animal personae supported many already existing themes in retail and marketing literature. As an evolving concept, expanded masculine sociocultural norms were reflected with most of the men in this study and supported the findings and themes in Otnes and McGrath, 2001; Ourahmoune, 2016; Tuncay, 2006; and Tuncay and Otnes, 2008. The males in this study all had different animal personae (e.g., panda, cow, jackal, deer, magpie), and while it is difficult to draw conclusions from their personae, the support for new forms of masculinity is apparent.

The men also exhibited varying degrees of interest towards shopping. While James did not seem to be particularly interested in shopping, Lorenzo, Blaine, Caleb, and Noah demonstrated interest in the potential of fashion adding value to their lives. Lorenzo shared that he liked “the idea of finding something that will make [him] look good, feel confident,” while
Blaine and Caleb seemed to echo each other in sentiment regarding their expression of identity and quest for added value to their lives:

I like the idea of clothing as an expression. And, you know, it affords you the opportunity, buying clothing affords you the opportunity to at least for one day when you're wearing a certain thing that you buy reinvent yourself as a person you envision yourself to be or would like yourself to be if that makes sense. So I just think it provides a lot of a lot of opportunity, and a lot of opportunity to make yourself look good. There's definitely advantages to it. (Caleb, male/heterosexual)

So the idea is fashion…at least how I perceive fashion is a projection of my identity, right? Like, that's the first thing people see. Right? So how you dress sort of conveys who you are, to an extent…especially if they haven't met you a lot then they have a really small sample size, right? That sample size is maybe, that's the first sample. So that's why dressing nicely dressing sort of softer and more on the softer side, I’ve found has definitely changed relationships in the sense that new people I meet. It's easier to start conversations, it's easier to seem like a friend rather than a stranger...that's the idea. (Blaine, male/heterosexual)

Lorenzo, Caleb, and Blaine saw clothing as materialistic items that could be acquired to express their identity or be used as transformative objects to improve or maintain their physical appearance or look (Belk, 1988; Feinberg et al., 1992). For Noah, he saw shopping as an important chore to maintain his personal style, a look that he described as “10 years ago, Dad casual, slash business casual, comfortable, flexible in the spandex sense of the word.” When asked if he liked shopping, Noah answered, “I do not enjoy it. But I must do it. Um, I enjoy it to
an extent. It may be a two out of 10,” but he also acknowledged the practicality of clothing shopping and how his life usually dictated his purchases:

I should tell you...when I go shopping, I have something in mind. I’m going for a need...I’ve ripped some pants, I have finally worn through the elbows of that shirt, or they don’t fit...these are the reasons I buy clothing: to replace old stuff. Replace unwearable stuff. Occasionally, it’ll be occasional...something formal, maybe a job interview, maybe a wedding, God forbid, a funeral. Something like that, it’s a need based thing...I’m not interested in the whole Eddie Bauer line of clothing, I don’t care what they make, I don’t care about all of it. Every now and then, I’m not going to do this today necessarily, but every now and then, maybe in 1 in 10, 1 in 20 trips to something like this, especially if it’s like, oh I’m starting a new job, I need to up the, the business casual, spar-casual, did I, did I actually achieve those looks? I don’t know, someone else can be the judge.

Noah’s practical approaches to shopping as well as those heard from the other male participants supported the findings of past studies which have examined masculinity in retail environments (Dennis et al., 2018; Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Katrodia et al., 2018; Kotzé et al., 2012; Tuncay, 2006; Tuncay & Otnes, 2008). With a smaller sample size of five, it is difficult to generalize as to how today’s men think, feel, and act in retail spaces based on the variation of their animal personae and shopping styles; however, the findings suggest that there may be several new forms of masculine identities emerging in retail.

Overall, the projective animal question encouraged participants to reflect creatively on their own shopping approaches and experiences. The variety of animals demonstrated that there may be more diverse shopping behaviors than previously explored among males and females,
while also considering the addition of nonbinary individuals as well as members of the LGBTQ+
community.

4.7 MAPPING THE ANIMAL PERSONAE

The projective animal question yielded a variety of answers pertaining to an animal’s speed and foraging nature. Due to the eclectic selection, I created a quadrant based on speed (x axis) and foraging (y axis) in an effort to map the animals strategically (Figure 2). After reviewing each participant’s animal persona, I placed each animal into the appropriate quadrant position based on participant descriptions. If a participant shared a singular tactic for speed or foraging method for their animal, I marked the animal’s position with a circle. If a participant explicitly referred to an animal’s multiple speed or various foraging tactics, I utilized ovals to indicate flexibility in the approximated quadrant areas. For visibility and organizational purposes, I used different colors for each animal as well as specific labels for each participant’s gender and sexual orientation.

Animals such as cows, pandas, and sloths were mentioned on account of their slower speeds by participants who were self-proclaimed grazers (Noah), lazy shoppers (Blaine), or indecisive in their choices (Sloan). In contrast, other participants saw speedier animals as representative of their shopping persona, as with Cameron’s traveling bumblebee, Angela’s quick cat, and Elizabeth’s lioness.

Many participants selected animals based on their foraging style which fell into one of two broad categories: animals known for broad foraging or apex predators with targeted hunting. Broad foraging animals included slower shoppers (Noah’s cow), patient bargain hunters (Lydia’s...
bear, Jocelyn’s vulture/hyena), as well as faster shoppers on a quest to find a quick deal (Lorenzo’s jackal, Jamie’s crow, Stella’s dog).

Figure 2
Quadrant Map of Animal Shopping Speed and Search Approach

On the other side of the feeding spectrum, more targeted hunters such as Kendall’s sixth sense (dog), Elle’s hunting mentality (dog), strategic squirrels (Cleo, Kennedy) revealed their preference for productive and practical shopping experiences. As the most targeted and
aggressive predators, Zvi’s owl, Gwen’s jaguar, and Elizabeth’s lioness alluded to their keen sense of preference and decisive tactics in retail environments.

Based on my approximations of animal personae on the quadrant map (Figure 2), a few surprising patterns emerged from the participants’ responses. First, most participants (~15 people) described themselves as being speedy shoppers with only three sharing their slow speed and two alluding to it through sheer quantity (Lydia) and shopping style (Jocelyn). Second, out of the 20 animals, only four animals (e.g., owl, bear, jaguar, lioness) can be considered as apex predators; however, Lydia explained her bear persona for its hibernation and gorging behavior as opposed to its apex predator status. The remaining three apex predators were selected by heterosexual females. For those females, their certainty with both their gender and sexual orientation and the ways in which their personal styles aligned with those identities seemed to be reinforced by their animal personae in their shopping behaviors. As an owl pinpoints its prey, Zvi’s sharp eye expertly searches for a good deal while Gwen’s jaguar intuition leads her to pounce on a treasure and get it. Third, as opposed to the few apex predators, many participants mentioned animals with scavenging tendencies; as a vulture, hyena, or crow may search for carrion or scraps from other large animals, a broad foraging shopper may sift through sales racks and clearance bins looking for leftovers at discount prices. Although patience and persistence may be involved to some extent, the scavenger may ever be on high alert for other competitors or predators. Scavenging animal personae included participants from all demographics.

Lastly, the quadrant map reinforced and contrasted what research has shown among different demographics. While women have been observed to be slower shoppers than men (Katrodia et al., 2018; Underhill, 2009), many heterosexual and LGBTQ+ females chose animals based on speed (e.g., dog, squirrel, lioness) as opposed to slower animals, such as Blaine’s panda.
or Noah’s cow. These findings seem to contrast previous studies (Katrodia et al., 2018; Underhill’s market research (2009); however, the females may have selected these animals based on their self-perceptions of their shopping styles rather than observed or timed shopping trips.

Overall, the projective question provided valuable insight into how consumers saw themselves in retail settings. With a variety of foraging methods, speeds, and traits, animal personae reflected participants’ confidence in their approach to shopping. Many of the animal personae challenged previous findings in the retail field as some responses demonstrated how male and female shopping behaviors may be more complex than previously thought.

The following final chapter provides a discussion of the findings and research questions guiding this thesis. I also present the study’s theoretical contributions and managerial implications before concluding with the study limitations and possible areas for future research.
5.1 EVALUATING GENDER, MEANING, AND INTERPRETATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore whether or to what extent in-store atmospherics signaled gender to consumers in retail settings, the meanings which consumers interpreted from such indicators, and how gender or sexual orientation related to those interpretations of gender in retail servicescapes. To address the first research question of in-store atmospherics used for evaluating gender, findings from the 20 interviews revealed that visual elements were key, particularly product offerings and mannequins. With products as the main goal for most shopping trips, it is not surprising that products were used as gender indicators; however, gender evaluations using mannequins emerged as the second most referenced cue serving as a signal of the store’s targeted gender. As a staple of any clothing store, mannequins are simple, mobile, and versatile displays to showcase new products to consumers.

Although many participants were able to describe a variety of atmospheric cues which gave signs regarding gender in stores, none of the participants could provide an explicitly defined way of evaluating gender and the meaning behind their interpretations. While some participants could see masculine retail settings as being smaller, darker, and more industrial, collectively, their descriptions lacked definitive explanations as to what gendered servicescapes were; the look of a masculine boutique, the smell of a unisex retailer, or the theme of a feminine store remained elusive and undefined.

Within the existing body of retail literature, atmospheric cues, such as design (Babin et al., 2002; Chandon et al., 2009; Sevilla & Townsend, 2016), ambient (Doucé & Adams, 2020; Helmefalk & Hultén, 2017; Izadi et al., 2019; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Spangenberg, Grohmann,
& Sprott, 2005; Walsh et al., 2011), social (Foster, 2004; Johnstone, 2012), and trialability (Jha et al., 2020; Peck & Childers, 2003; Roggeveen et al., 2020; Workman, 2010), have influenced consumers’ behaviors in servicescapes (Bitner, 1992; Peñaloza, 1998; Sherry et al., 2004). The findings from this study support these ideas. While some atmospheric cues are in the forefront (e.g., product display), others contribute to the retail environment by altering the mood or theme of the store (e.g., scent, music, color), which can influence consumer attitudes and behaviors. Expanding on past frameworks for evaluating retail atmospherics (Bitner, 1992; Roggeveen et al., 2020), the findings from this thesis indicate that a multitude of in-store atmospherics can function as gender markers within retail environments. Additionally, the interviews reflected shoppers’ abilities to notice and interpret meaning from these cues and that such interpretations were shaped by their own gender identity and personal experiences.

Regarding the final research question guiding this study, gender identity relates to an individual’s interpretations in a complex way that may be influenced by any number of factors. A consumer’s own gender identity, past experiences with retail, and the extent that the store image differs from the self-image of that consumer all have the potential to influence how shoppers interpret contextual cues about gender. Individuals who have struggled with their own gender identity (e.g., Elle, Jamie, Lydia, Sloan), as well as those who have not (e.g., Caleb, Elizabeth, James, Kendall, Noah) may have all experienced similar feelings of discomfort when finding themselves in environments where they feel no sense of fit. Disconnected and unable to relate to a store’s energy, theme, or overall vibe may be rooted in an individual’s core identity (e.g., gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation). For the non-binary individual who wishes to explore a more gender-neutral look to the confident female looking for something fun, the same store may trigger contrasting reactions to the same atmospheric cues. Like gender, lived
experiences in retail settings are subjectively felt and each individual’s identity may shape their views on how masculinity, femininity, and unisex themes are both manifested and interpreted in retail settings.

5.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

For theoretical contributions, this study supports the existing body of literature surrounding brand personalities (Aaker, 1997) in its aim towards understanding how brand personality information is received by consumers. Based on the participants’ perceptions of gender in advertisements and stores, it was apparent that these two components could contribute to building brand personality. Advertising, as seen in the retail sorting task, appeared to reinforce traditional gender roles and serve as an influential method for retailers to broadcast their brand personality to consumers. Paired with advertising, retail servicescapes can function as real-time representations of a brand to provide shoppers with multi-sensory cues not only about a store’s target consumers but also important indicators of a brand’s personality. Thus, stores can be critical points of contact with consumers in establishing or maintaining a brand’s personality (Das, Guin, & Datta, 2013; Das, 2015). While gender (Das, 2015; Grohmann, 2009) has been shown to have effects on brand and store personality evaluations, advertising as well as in-store atmospherics contribute to brand personality. Through atmospheric cues and sales associate interactions, retail companies have the potential to create physical manifestations of their brand personality (Das et al., 2013). Such as Aaker (1997) identified five dimensions of brand personality, retailers can find ways to represent their brand personality through visual and other atmospheric cues to amplify their signature traits. A retailer looking to reinforce a sense of “ruggedness” (Aaker, 1997) may focus on displaying tougher looking fabrics on its mannequins.
and incorporating industrial-looking décor into its store plan; whereas another store may opt for more interstitial space between products and lower lighting to play up its “sophistication” (Aaker, 1997) factor. Through advertising and strategically designed stores, brands can communicate gendered personalities while targeting consumers.

On account of the exploratory nature of this study, the findings also uncovered three novel contributions to retail and marketing literature. First, interactions with sales associates are critical to consumers’ evaluations of fit within a store. Second, shoppers feel vulnerable in retail settings and experience vulnerability in various ways. Third, despite changes in sociocultural norms of gender, retail continues to promote gender as a binary concept.

5.2.1 THE POWER OF THE STORE PERSONNEL

Sales associates have the power to “make or break” the shopping trip as these interactions are key ways for stores and brands to appeal directly to consumers. The findings from this study build on and extend knowledge from previous studies on store personnel (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Kim & Baker, 2019; Quach et al., 2017) in that they reinforced the importance of building rapport with customers and interpersonal communication. This thesis is unique, however, in showing how gender identity and sexual orientation may frame or influence consumer perceptions of personnel interactions.

The inquiries about positive and negative in-store shopping experiences resulted in a total of 18 responses where 11 instances included negative interactions with store personnel. While a store’s product offering or atmospherics may set the stage for a shopping experience, even more so may be the customer’s interactions with store personnel. As if there were a script, many sales associates, as the key actors in the retail setting, initiate conversation with a new shopper as the
customer enters the store, or shortly after. With a quick greeting, store personnel can swiftly demonstrate their attentiveness and friendly demeanor to the customer by welcoming them in. Although some customers may immediately try to avoid engaging with store personnel, the absence of such standard greeting was troublesome among some of the participants. It was as if an imaginary timer started ticking upon their entry into a store, and if they went too long without the standard greeting, some participants, such as Cleo and Kennedy, both shared how it made them feel nervous and insecure about what the sales associates were thinking about them. In other cases, sales associates exhibited undesirable behaviors (e.g., negative body language, watching or following customers, aggression) that completely ruined the shopping experience. As a direct result of the store personnel behaviors, the participants experienced discomfort and left the store. Two of the most detailed accounts from Elle, a transgender female, and Gwen, an African American female, touched on foolproof ways of not only discouraging shoppers from returning but offending shoppers on more personal levels (Pittman, 2020). Collectively, these negative interactions with sales associates reiterated the importance of such in-store experiences, and provide real, lived experiences from certain demographics of shoppers who may feel ostracized in society at large. Negative experiences, such as Gwen being racially profiled as an African American, instilled such memories in which many of the participants could recall the exact store in which the incident occurred. While a single negative interaction may not deter a consumer from shopping at a particular store as in the case of Gwen, the severity and amount of such interactions has the potential to shape a consumer’s perception of how they feel that they fit in the particular store.

On the other side of the spectrum, stories of positive sales associate interactions (nine positive interactions in total), such as those from Kendall, Noah, and James, showed that an
outstanding salesperson can impress customers and leave them with memorable paragons of positive shopping experiences. Other positive interactions also reflected how sales associates made important contributions to shopping experiences such as greeting customers (Angela), providing suggestions (Jocelyn), starting fitting rooms (Cleo), or exhibiting open-mindedness and respect towards customers (Elle). Drawing from participants’ positive stories, it appeared that the role of the store personnel fluctuated depending on the type of support the customer expects or needs (Burns & Neisner, 2006). The three roles were store representative (demonstrated by knowledge of products, store layout, or brand); salesperson (demonstrated by the use of selling techniques or showing of products); and shopping companion (demonstrated by providing the customer with a temporary support network to appeal to their emotions through reassurance or compliments).

Overall, the findings regarding store personnel interactions reflect the importance of how such interactions or lack thereof has the power to significantly change the shopping experience and serve as gender indicators for consumers. As shoppers navigate the sales floor, they are also assessing their sense of fit within the store; positive personnel interactions can be reaffirming to people regardless of their gender identity, whereas negative interactions can be unfortunate signs that the store is not for them.

5.2.2 SHOPPERS AND VULNERABILITY

In their study of heterosexual male shoppers, Tuncay and Otnes (2008) considered men as vulnerable shoppers; however, in the context of this study, it appears that this vulnerability may extend to all demographics. Feelings of vulnerability—“a state of powerlessness that ‘arises from the interaction of individual states, individual characteristics and external conditions within
a context where consumption goals may be hindered and the experience affects personal and social perceptions of self” (Baker, Gentry, & Rittenburg, 2005, p. 134)—may arise when newcomers or shoppers navigate a “third place” (Johnstone, 2012) and feel as if they are “powerless, out of control, and dependent in a consumption situation that has negative ramifications on one’s identity” (Baker et al., 2005, p. 134). In retail settings, it is understandable that any combination of design, aesthetic, social, or trialability cues (Roggeveen et al., 2020) may influence or challenge an individual to question their own styles and preferences, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. For a heterosexual female, a fashionably dressed model sporting the latest menswear may inspire her to consider buying a suit as the store blasts trendy pop music; however, those same conditions may bring up insecurities in another woman as she reconsiders how she conforms to professional wear. For a heterosexual male, a pair of slim cut jeans on a wooden display may offer a real-life example of how slim pants can make him look leaner and taller, but another man may worry about sacrificing his signature masculine look. For a non-binary individual who leans towards feminine fashion, a poster featuring a bald model adorned with a statement necklace may catch their eye as the final piece to their favorite outfit; however, for another non-binary individual, the same poster may stir up anxieties about how retailers set guidelines for expressing their non-binary identity. While some shoppers may feel confident with their physical appearances and personal identities, being in retail settings where personal fashion choices are put into the spotlight may amplify individuals’ insecurities and feelings of vulnerability. To an extent, these negative feelings can be minimized through offering a variety of products and mannequins sporting a variety of clothes, as well as sales associates who can interpret and cater to shoppers’ animal personae; but even more so, welcoming and
inclusive in-store atmospherics may encourage safe navigation despite fragile feelings of controlling one’s own physical appearance through fashion.

5.2.3 BEYOND THE BINARY GENDER SYSTEM

While sociocultural norms continue to evolve and become more inclusive of gender diverse populations, retail continues to assume a more relaxed approach to instilling change in heteronormative approaches to gender identity, gender expression, roles, and sexual orientation. In the past, the U.S. advertising and retailing industries have promoted imagery and messaging from the binary gender perspective, with a focus on demographics for target audience. However, in doing so, traditional gender roles have become so entrenched in both industries that it is difficult to see progress in either area (Staiti, 2020). Despite a gradual increase of diversity in advertising, much of the content in circulation continues to promote heteronormative depictions of demographics beyond the traditional binary gender system (Aley & Thomas, 2021; Sandhu, 2018; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004; Timke & O’Barr, 2017). Among the fifteen retailers included in the sorting activity, consumers perceived Old Navy as the sole unisex brand with a strong appeal to diverse shoppers. The company’s brand personality has been perceived as sincere (Kim & Sung, 2013), which has been promoted through its seemingly inclusive advertising. However, as the only retailer receiving unanimous votes for unisex, it was apparent from participants’ sorting that advertising campaigns continue to strongly influence consumers’ perceptions of gender in retail. For today’s consumers who view gender and sexual orientation as fluid concepts, navigating and interpreting in-store atmospherics is a crucial step in their process of reaffirming gender identity, exploring self-expression, and finding ways of fitting in.
Past research has studied differences between male (Dennis et al., 2018; Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Otnes & McGrath, 2001; Underhill, 2009) and female (Goldsmith, Moore, & Beaudoin, 1999; Underhill, 2009; Underhill, 2010; Gupta & Gentry, 2016) shopping behaviors with males being categorized as faster, goal-oriented shoppers and females as slower shoppers who tend to be more comfortable in clothing stores than their male counterparts. While past studies in retail and consumer behavior have explored male versus female shopping behaviors, results from the animal projective question in this thesis generated a wider range of approaches and motivations for males and females than previously thought, in addition to hearing from members of the LGBTQ+ community (Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015). The animal personae varied in foraging methods, speeds, and traits, which mirrored participants’ take on navigating store environments. Where some were confident, others were alert and unsure, and these animal personae extend beyond the boundaries of gender and sexual orientation. Thus, these findings show a variety of differences as well as similarities between heterosexual males and females as well as LGBTQ+ individuals; and herein lie future opportunities to explore if gender and sexual orientation is related to an individual’s approach to shopping.

5.3 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Overall, research has shown the importance and effects of atmospherics in designing retail spaces (Baker et al., 2002; Chandon et al., 2009; Cho & Lee, 2017; Doucé & Adams, 2020; Helmfalk & Hultén, 2017; Sevilla & Townsend, 2016; Underhill, 2009). The findings from this study highlight the importance of these factors for signaling gender identity and sociocultural norms and trends to target consumers. While there were no definitive factors in evaluating gender in stores among participants, the variety of indicators (e.g., products, mannequins,
marketing, colors, scent, music, etc.) supports the notion that consumers process servicescapes holistically (Bitner, 1992). For retailers who struggle to attract certain demographics, reconsideration of product selection, advertising, mannequin displays, interior design, and sales associate training may be beneficial to appeal to new shoppers. For example, if a store wants to appeal to new demographics, they might consider changing outfits on mannequins or finding creative ways to display new products throughout the store (e.g., interesting use of patterns, color organization). Stores with clear gendered audiences may have difficulties convincing new shoppers to get past the door, but consistent messaging through advertising (both in print and online) that offers diverse perspectives and genuine stories might attract consumers’ interests. At a store’s physical location, window displays featuring outfits comprised of the latest products might prompt new shoppers to enter and explore. Window displays can be quick visual summaries of product offerings as they often reinvent or reinforce relevant styles to curious consumers (Engdahl & Gelang, 2019). As such, window displays can also serve as gender signals to help shoppers assess how they may *fit* with the store.

Customer service interactions seemed to make or break many shopping trips, so it remains crucial for retail companies to provide ongoing training for store personnel in sales, interpersonal communication, and nonverbal cues. Based on the emerging themes throughout participants’ experiences, many if not most of the negative shopping trips could have been significantly different had sales associates provided better customer service or been aware of how their own verbal and nonverbal language may have contributed to creating a welcoming or hostile environment for shoppers. Retail store personnel could borrow techniques from frontline employees giving tours at contested servicescapes such as the Gettysburg Military Park. Faced with a myriad of controversy surrounding historical facts and places, park employees developed
strategies for navigating contestation and other visitor concerns through simplification of information, adjustment of jargon, and validation, among others (Chronis, 2019). As the employees shared about the disputes between the two sides of the Civil War, these tactics for de-escalation, respect, and acknowledgement of visitors helped to provide helpful and memorable park experiences.

Furthermore, diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings specifically focused on racial profiling, personal bias, emotional intelligence, and LGBTQ+ topics could prepare store personnel for a variety of interpersonal interactions with consumers. While retailers will undoubtedly continue to target certain demographics, companies can benefit from providing a welcoming and inclusive in-store experience for any and all customers. Even though a store may offer a limited product selection designed with a particular consumer in mind, store personnel can exhibit sensitive and inclusive language when acknowledging customers or being quick to offer assistance. Small adjustments to personal pronouns (Goldhammer et al., 2018) and the use of neutral language could provide customers with subtle ways of communicating their style preferences, which may or may not align with how store personnel perceive their outward appearance. Additionally, avoiding the use of gender pronouns (e.g., between employees or during customer sales interactions) or gender-related words (e.g., “Hey, man”; “This would look good on you, girl!”) could signal to customers that sales associates are respectful of each individual’s gender identity and expression. Specialized training with a heavy emphasis on interpersonal communication among diverse groups would equip sales personnel with a more robust customer toolkit.
5.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There were several limitations to this study. The first limitation concerns the recruitment process as it took several rounds of outreach to get a diverse pool of participants during a global pandemic. As interviews were conducted from August 2020 and December 2020, it was likely that participant recruitment was hindered in part due to anxiety, stress, and exhaustion (e.g., Zoom fatigue) related to the coronavirus pandemic. As an initial outreach, a call for participation went out in a University weekly electronic newsletter, which garnered a few participants; however, additional recruitment announcements were posted on the local Reddit community and through word-of-mouth efforts from participants and the researcher. This recruitment strategy resulted in a participant pool comprised of Midwest participants who were educated college students or early to mid-career professionals with experience in higher education. Additionally, due to the relatively small sample size and participants’ own lived experiences, generalizability of the findings could be limited. Future research could recruit a more diverse group of participants in terms of age, education, gender, and sexual orientation. As the sample had a limited amount of participants identifying as heterosexual males and male members of the LGBTQ+ community, future studies could include more representation from these two groups. With the focus of this study being experiences in the U.S. retail industry, future research could explore multinational markets as gender identities and expressions may vary by country and culture.

Due to the broad, exploratory nature of this study, several in-store and online factors were discussed; however, interview questions did not probe on specific aspects of in-store and online retail environments. Refining the interview guide and including more targeted questions in a future study could expand the understanding of gendered servicescapes. Furthermore, simulated
shopping experiences or ethnographic shopping with consumers could be utilized to build better rapport with participants and experience real-time shopping trips. Altering certain atmospheric design cues such as product layout, mannequins, or colors could provide a more focused approach to differentiating between gender in stores. Additionally, having participants compare and contrast in-store experiences directly with online experiences could uncover ways in which retailers ensure consistent gender messaging across two retail forms. Experimental studies with scripted customer service interactions could shed insight into how such interactions create welcoming versus unwelcoming retail environments based on shoppers’ gender and sexual orientation. Researchers could manipulate mannequin gender, shape, and dress and see to what extent these changes alter the consumers’ assessment of ‘fit’ of the store and welcome.

Future researchers could conduct in-depth interviews or case studies to compare consumer perceptions regarding brands and genders. Out of the 20 retail companies used in the study’s sorting task, only two stores received unanimous votes: Victoria’s Secret as feminine and Old Navy as unisex. As a first step, it would be interesting to further explore specific tactics each retailer uses to be perceived as targeted for women and all demographics, respectively. For the remaining 18, there were no patterns in participants’ gender or sexual orientation and how retailers were categorized. As a follow-up study, it would be interesting to look at specific demographics based on gender or sexual orientation to see if patterns emerge in how retailers are perceived among groups (e.g., How does Old Navy appeal to different individuals of the LGBTQ+ community? What specific aspects of Old Navy are perceived to be LGBTQ+ friendly by LGBTQ+ individuals?).

To expand on some of the animal personae findings, future research could include further examination of these animal personae with a larger sample size or through a longitudinal study to
determine their longevity as static or dynamic identities. Would young college students who start off their shopping journeys begin as scavengers and end as apex predators, or is it a matter of nature versus nurture? Do other factors such as socioeconomic status, frequency, and mainstream media affect consumers’ confidence in retail settings? Multiple studies surrounding animal personae in different commercial settings (e.g., restaurants, home improvement stores, children’s stores) could uncover insights into consumer behavior and psychology as they relate to their gender and sexual orientations.

To conclude, as a fluid concept, gender continues to provide social instructions for appearance, etiquette, and dress, and thus plays an important part in any society. As diversity among gender identities and sociocultural norms continue to evolve and expand, the continued exploration of how retail and brands respond, reflect, and shape the marketplace offers ripe areas for future inquiry into how consumers navigate these changes.


   https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms


   https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms


APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL NOTICE

Notice of Exempt Determination

July 30, 2020

Principal Investigator    Michelle Nelson
CC                        Kirby Cook
Protocol Title            Defining and Understanding Gendered Servicescapes
Protocol Number           21067
Funding Source            Unfunded
Review Category           Exempt 2 (ii)
Determination Date        July 30, 2020
Closure Date              July 29, 2025

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) has reviewed your application and determined the criteria for exemption have been met.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing major modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

Changes to an exempt protocol are only required if substantive modifications are requested and/or the changes requested may affect the exempt status.
APPENDIX B

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to be eligible for this study, please complete the following at your convenience:

1. Gender Identity: Male / Female / Non-binary / Other (please specify):
2. Sexual Identity: Heterosexual / Homosexual / Other (please specify):
3. I am between the ages of 18 and 45 (yes / no)
4. I have lived most of my life in the U.S. (yes / no)
5. Availability (dates/times):
### APPENDIX C

#### PARTICIPANT PROFILES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Sexual Identity</th>
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<td>Heterosexual</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Jocelyn</td>
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<td>Heterosexual</td>
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<td>Heterosexual</td>
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<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Hetero Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Hetero Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Hetero Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorenzo</td>
<td>Hetero Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>Hetero Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Intro:** Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am researching in-store and online shopping to gain insight into how consumers perceive gendered retail environments. I would like to ask you some questions concerning your shopping experiences and how you personally identify yourself. If you have any concerns or questions during the interview, please do not hesitate to let me know. You are welcome to stop the discussion at any time if you so choose.

**Servicescapes:**
1) Under normal conditions (non-pandemic times), how often would you estimate that you go shopping in a physical clothing store? How often would you estimate that you go shopping for clothing online?
2) Where is your favorite place to shop for clothing?
   2a) Why is this your favorite? Tell me about the store layout.
3) If you were an animal as a “shopper” – what would it be and why?

**Identity & Expression (section adapted from Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015):**
4) How would you describe your own personal clothing style?
   4a) How would describe how your style has evolved to what it is today?
5) How would you describe your gender and sexual identities?
6) How do you think your style aligns with your personal identities?

**Shopping & Identity Expression:**
7) In general, what sections of clothing stores do you shop for clothing for yourself (e.g., men's, women's, kids)? In online stores?
8) Thinking back to your favorite physical clothing store and online store, how do you feel that the stores include clothing for your gender and sexual identities? If so, how?
   8a) How could the store do better? What would you do if you were the store manager?
9) Can you think of any physical clothing stores that you would consider to be gendered? For example, “masculine”, “feminine”, “unisex”, etc.? Online stores?

**Sorting Activity:** Now, I’d like to show you some logos for different clothing stores and ask for you to sort them into three categories: masculine, feminine, or unisex, based on your impression of their stores.

![Logo images of various clothing stores]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Unisex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Gender in Shopping & Store Evaluations:**

10) What factors do you consider when determining the “gender” of a store (e.g., color, clothing style, visuals, aroma)? What factors would you consider when determining the “gender” of an online store?

11) Would you mind sharing about a time when you had a positive shopping experience?

11a) Can you think of a time when you had a negative shopping experience? What made it a negative experience?

**Transition to “Shopping with Consumers”:** Now that we’ve talked about your own identities and shopping preferences, would you mind if we explored an online clothing store of your choice
together via Zoom screen sharing? I’d like to ask you to share your screen as you show me a clothing website where you’d typically shop. Would you mind going to the site’s main page and sharing your thoughts about the online store’s gender or sexuality? You can include any observations about the website’s physical characteristics you’d like.

12) How do you think the company appeals to your gender and sexual identities?
13) What could the company do to make their website more appealing to your gender and sexual identities, if anything?
14) Is there anything else that you would like to share about stores, your identity, or anything related to retail?

**Closing:** Thank you again for your time today and I appreciate your contribution to this research. If you have any questions or would like a copy of the final report, please feel free to email me and I'm happy to share the results with you after the conclusion of the study. Thanks again and goodbye.
APPENDIX E

FIRST ROUND CODING SAMPLE

Unknown Speaker: 4:46
I would say a Jaguar.

Unknown Speaker:
A Jaguar, okay, why?

Unknown Speaker:
Because I feel like I’m super aggressive with my shopping. I don’t like to wait. You know how Jaguar
it’s like it might study its prey for a little bit, but after a while it’s like fuck it. I’m just gonna pounce on
it. I think I’m like that like I don’t like to you know, some people like for days are shopping around
trying to find the right price and right fit and I’m more like if I want it, I’m about to get it, right now.

Unknown Speaker: 5:17
Okay, makes sense. Um so, thinking about your own style. How would you describe your own personal
clothing style?

Unknown Speaker: 5:32
I don’t know. I like just putting different pieces together from different stores. Things that people
would think would go together or they’re like, or you think it’s like super expensive but it’s not like I
like to look like it’s expensive when it’s really not that expensive. Like, I can find a banana republic
sweater from goodwill and put it together with Fashion Nova jeans that were like, marked down with
some Salvation Army pumps and look like a million bucks. Okay, so that’s kind of where me like I just
like putting different things together, like to look good but not spend an arm and a leg to look good
and no one will ever know though.

Unknown Speaker: 6:10
And so how would you describe how your fashion, your personal fashion style has evolved to what it is
today?

Unknown Speaker: 6:20
I would say like kind of like, like growing up and stuff like that like how I kind of connected to, I guess I
would say cuz my family. We grew up very frugal. My mom is like from an island on the coast to West
Africa she’s from ______, black’s girl she grew up really poor. So, when she came to America she was like
God you Americas are rich like goodwill to her is like going to Neiman Marcus, she’s like, whoa. So we
grew up like you know it’s nice to have good things but you don’t have to spend a lot of money to have
good things like you shouldn’t spend $1,000 on a Louis Vuitton bag if you can go to Goodwill and get like
a Michael kors or like 20 bucks or something like that. Kind of how I was raised like just you can get the
best of your buck, by just kind of, you know, not having it, you know, don’t be afraid to go to Goodwill.
Don’t be afraid to go to stores that people are like, ew, it’s goodwill like no you could still get the bang for
your buck, still look good, everybody doesn’t have to know where you shop. Honestly, I’m not afraid or
annoyed to say like yeah I got this Chanel bag at Goodwill because I’ve found that ______.
## APPENDIX F

### CODE LOG SAMPLE - IN-STORE ATMOSPHERICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Determining Gender in Store</th>
<th>Masculine Gender</th>
<th>Female Gender</th>
<th>Unisex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>color, products, decor, music</td>
<td>sports in background, cold, hard, merch soft colors, pink, purple, teal, orange, muted, bright clothing, expi soft, exposed wood, top</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>mannequins, colors, products, layout, social (who is there)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>more masculine smells, darker interior</td>
<td>mannequins, jewelry, windows, clothing selection, flowy smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>more masculine smells, darker interior</td>
<td>mannequins, jewelry, windows, clothing selection, flowy smell</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>layout, clothing sections</td>
<td>more primary colors</td>
<td>aroma, more floral scents, sparkly, smaller items</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>window displays, models, mannequins, racial portrayals, diversity</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>more primary colors</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>products, marketing, displays, advertising</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>clothing, products, decorations, mannequins, store theme</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>clothing is loose, airy, flowy, sparkly, shiny, feels nice</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>clothing comfort, colors, music, sales associate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>window displays, mannequins, clothing</td>
<td>mannequins, tougher, more durable clothi</td>
<td>softer, thinner textures, mannequins, pop music, female voices in</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>flowers, ruffles, style of clothing, mannequins, displays, clothing fit</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>neutral, wood, mannequins, product set colors associated with females (pink), fruity or floral scent, produc</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>lighting, color schemes, scents, furnishing, music, mannequins</td>
<td>cologne, industrial feel to interior, rock/mo set it, feminine fragrance, less rugged, smooth, modern, modern lot in common with femin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>products, colors, models, word choice (describing items)</td>
<td>darker colors, decoration, graphics, bass f soft music, bright, minimal decoration or delicate decor, small, fix</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>products, marketing images, and other patrons (masculine?)</td>
<td>sports, bright, polished, clean, feminine titles for products</td>
<td>clean, less polished, less</td>
<td>sell to everyone, both ma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>display, posters, marketing materials, mannequins, organization</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>color, products, cuts, posters, mannequins, displays, posters, fast pants with inch measurements, kholi, oliv</td>
<td>pastel pink or blue</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>window displays, products, men or women in marketing especially</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>products, vibe, mannequins, layout, menu ribbon for online websites</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>products, marketing, commercials</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX G

### CODE LOG SAMPLE - SALES ASSOCIATE INTERACTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Positive in-store</th>
<th>Negative in-store</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>sales associate interaction</td>
<td>sales associate body language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>product fit, was with friends</td>
<td>product not fitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>find a good deal</td>
<td>not finding anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>found shoes for good price; made her day; therapeutic</td>
<td>went into Target but couldn’t find anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>good flow at Goodwill, not being bothered, finding lots of</td>
<td>racial targeting from customer sales associates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>sales associate interaction</td>
<td>sales associate interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>sales associate interaction</td>
<td>shopping in Korea, sales associate interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>sales, product selection</td>
<td>Victoria’s Secret, did not like selection, didn’t fit in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>sales associate interaction</td>
<td>sales associate interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>sales associate interactions</td>
<td>not able to find something she is looking for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>finding plain items that she liked and inexpensive, shoppi</td>
<td>sales associate interaction at Ann Taylor loft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>sales associate interactions, don’t divide clothing into sections</td>
<td>sales associate interactions (overkill as they don’t know)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>sales associate interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>not as explicitly defined in gendered sections, able to find</td>
<td>sales associate interaction, body language from other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>finding style he likes in color he likes</td>
<td>store is clean, dirty, disorganized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>sales associate interaction (customized shopping experience)</td>
<td>sales associate interaction (being left on his own)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>sales associate interaction</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>success shopping outing by himself, sales associate left</td>
<td>went to buy jeans and sales associate tried to get him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>sales associate interaction</td>
<td>long line to try on something which didn’t fit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX H

## CODE LOG SAMPLE - ANIMALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>dog</td>
<td>excited, super excited, over it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>dog</td>
<td>classic, likable, simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>bumblebee</td>
<td>look at everything, check it out, hang and chill, invite friends over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>owl</td>
<td>wise, good eye, best deal for good quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>jaguar</td>
<td>aggressive, pounce, get it right now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>magpie</td>
<td>pick up things, stow them away, foraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>dog</td>
<td>decisive, sixth sense, knows what she likes/dislikes right away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>bear</td>
<td>comes out of hiding, gorges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>squirrel</td>
<td>look around, find this thing, hang on to it, go back to spot, moving around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>vulture</td>
<td>clearance rack, scraps,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>squirrel</td>
<td>quick, thinking ahead, storing things, pragmatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>dog</td>
<td>hunting dog, selective, distracted, buying on impulse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>sloth</td>
<td>mosey around, not quick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>crow</td>
<td>search, collect, jackets, flannels, knows what they like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>panda</td>
<td>lazy, laid back, selective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>lioness</td>
<td>selective, going to get it, not linger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>cow</td>
<td>slow, plotting, grazing, touching everything, try on a bunch of clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>cat</td>
<td>cat, really quick but really cautious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>jackal</td>
<td>easy pickins first, sale first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>deer</td>
<td>shy about buying things, spending money on clothes, meek, afraid to co...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I

RETAIL SORTING TASK FINDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Store</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lydia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cameron, James, Gwen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks Brothers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Noah, Cleo, Lydia, Elizabeth, Ella, Kendall, Zvi, Kennedy, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph Lauren</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Elle, Cameron, Angela, Blaine, Jamie, Jocelyn, Cleo, Kendall, Gwen, Cameron, Stella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nike</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Noah, Elle, Cleo, Lydia, Kendall, Violet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adidas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Noah, Elizabeth, Lydia, Kendall, Violet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femineine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H&amp;M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cameron, Cameron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sloan, Gwen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloos Fifth Ave.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jocelyn, Ella, Blaine, Elizabeth, Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Jill</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Zvi, Kendall, Cleo, Kennedy, Elle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordstrom</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cameron, Kennedy, Sloan, Jamie, Blaine, Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cameron, Kendall, Jocelyn, Kennedy, Elizabeth, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macy’s</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Violet, James, Cleo, Jamie, Blaine, Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohl’s</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Violet, Gwen, Kendall, Lydia, Cleo, Sloan, Jamie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Violet, Cameron, Zvi, Lydia, Kennedy, Elle, Blaine, Elizabeth, Angela, Noah, Angela, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria’s Secret</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Stella, Violet, Cameron, Zvi, Gwen, James, Kendall, Lydia, Cleo, Jocelyn, Kennedy, Elle, Sloan, Jamie, Blaine, Elizabeth, Angela, Noah, Angela, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unisex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cameron, Cameron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloos Fifth Ave.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Zvi, Cleo, Kennedy, Lorenzo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stella, Violet, Zvi, Cleo, Elle, Blaine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph Lauren</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Violet, Zvi, James, Lydia, Kennedy, Elizabeth, Noah, Lorenzo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordstrom</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Stella, Zvi, Kendall, Cleo, Jocelyn, Ella, Elizabeth, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H&amp;M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Stella, Violet, Zvi, Gwen, Lydia, Cleo, Elle, Sloan, Blaine, Elizabeth, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macy’s</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cameron, Zvi, Gwen, Kendall, Lydia, Jocelyn, Kennedy, Elle, Elizabeth, Noah, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohl’s</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Cameron, Zvi, James, Kendall, Jocelyn, Kennedy, Ella, Blaine, Elizabeth, Angela, Noah, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nike</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Stella, Cameron, Zvi, Gwen, James, Lydia, Jocelyn, Kennedy, Sloan, Jamie, Blaine, Angela, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adidas</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Stella, Cameron, Zvi, Gwen, James, Cleo, Jocelyn, Kennedy, Ella, Sloan, Jamie, Blaine, Angela, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Stella, Violet, Cameron, Zvi, James, Kendall, Cleo, Jocelyn, Kennedy, Elle, Jamie, Blaine, Elizabeth, Angela, Noah, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Navy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Stella, Violet, Cameron, Zvi, Gwen, James, Kendall, Lydia, Cleo, Jocelyn, Kennedy, Elle, Sloan, Jamie, Blaine, Elizabeth, Angela, Noah, Angela, Lorenzo, Caleb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>