

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, DOES ONE'S APPEARANCE MATTER AFTER ALL?

A STUDY OF MOTHERS SHOPPING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

by

ERIN TANKERSLEY

(Under the Direction of Jan M. Hathcote)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the type of relationship that existed between a mother's appearance, a child(ren)'s appearance and a child(ren)'s behavior in relation to the quality of customer service received when mothers took their child(ren) along on apparel shopping trips. Mothers living in the states of Georgia and Texas who ranged in ages from 24 to 42 participated in the questionnaire. A regression analysis was conducted and indicated that mother's appearance and child(ren)'s behavior did have a significant impact on the perceived quality of customer service given to mothers who take their child(ren) apparel shopping whereas child(ren)'s appearance did not have a significant impact on the perceived quality of customer service to mother's that take their child(ren) apparel shopping. Perception of the quality of the customer service received was not affected by the area in which the participants lived nor how often or likely a mother visits her favorite apparel store also referred to in this study as loyalty. Limitations and implications were discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Mother's, Child(ren), Apparel Shopping, Appearance, Behavior, Customer Service, Loyalty

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The service sector has dominated the United States economy in terms of the number of jobs generated over the last couple of decades (Darley, Luethge, and Thatte, 2008). One of the ways in which this sector has grown is through the new field of “service science” which “is a hybrid field that seeks to use technology, management, mathematics and engineering expertise to improve the performance of service businesses like transportation, retailing and health care...” (Lohr, 2006, p. C1). It is a well known fact that to be an active participant in the service industry, the initial service encounter, or the person-to-person encounter between a firm’s representative and a customer, is not only very important for sales but also greatly affects overall customer satisfaction (Söderlund and Julander, 2009). According to Gabbott and Hogg (2000), the attractiveness of the sales representative had a significant association with service satisfaction, therefore raising the question: do the attractiveness and appearance of a female customer, as well as the behavior and appearance of her child(ren), affect the service rendered by the sales representative?

In individualistic Euro-American cultures (Swami and Furnham, 2008), many individuals are concerned with attractiveness and physical appearance (Netemeyer, Burton & Lichtenstein, 1995). Due to the symbolic nature of a person’s dress, people react to it and infer messages about the wearer via their apparel (Forsythe, Drake & Cox, 1984). Everyone recalls the scene in

Pretty Woman when Julia Roberts is shamed out of the store on Rodeo Drive due to her attire, but then returns a few days later dressed in what the sales staff considers more appropriate clothing for their boutique, and they fall all over themselves in an effort to help her out. This is a remarkable example of “lookism”, defined by Söderlund and Julander (2009) as discrimination based on physical attractiveness.

There is a nearly automatic tendency to categorize a person as attractive or unattractive (Gulas and McKeage, 2000). This categorization consequently results in different brain activity depending on which stimulus is presented and then the perceived physical attractiveness of the face of the stimulus (O’Doherty, Winston, Critchley, Perrett, Burt, and Dolan, 2003). This difference in brain activity is measured by neuroimaging devices (O’Doherty et al, 2003). Once the physical attractiveness has been formed in relation to a particular person, and the outcome is that the person is considered attractive, several theories predict that this outcome will have a positive impact on the overall evaluation of the person (Söderlund and Julander, 2009). Physical attractiveness is positively associated with likeability (Söderlund and Julander, 2009) and is a variable that demands respect (Berscheid and Walster, 1974). As Koernig and Page (2002) state, physical attractiveness can be changed by hairstyle, cosmetics and clothing.

An individual’s sense of self is defined as the awareness of how different one is from their surroundings (Reed, 2002). Reed (2002, p. 20) states that, “socialization within a culture causes a person to become aware of an infinite number of social categories in the external environment.” These internal social categories are mental representations that can become a fundamental part of how consumers view themselves.

Rosencranz (1962) reports that the two characteristics that are the most noticed about a person during an encounter similar to a first impression situation are the person's physical body and the type clothing worn by the person. Make-over reality shows on television, such as *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*, try to prove that an updated wardrobe, professionally applied makeup, an attractive hairstyle and color that complements one's features as well as a possible nip and tuck here and there are within the average person's reach in their on-going effort to find personal happiness along with their optimum physical attractiveness. According to Chernin (1981), less than five percent of Western women are estimated to be born with the genetic predisposition to meet the modern ideal. Savacool (2009) states in her new book that this so called modern ideal is a compilation of marketing, trends and social status, no matter which culture one desires. Mehrabian and Blum (1997) prove that controllable aspects of appearance, such as make-up and grooming, are highly associated with overall ratings of physical attractiveness. Rumsey and Harcourt (2005) contribute that diet and exercise can also influence perceived physical attractiveness.

Regardless of culture, people adorn, shape, clothe, and decorate their bodies to create an appearance to present to others (Lennon, Rudd, Sloan and Kim, 1999). Cultural factors on the other hand, do impinge on how people assess their own as well as others' appearances. According to Reischer and Koo (2004), humans may be the only creatures that unfalteringly refuse to let nature alone dictate their appearance. Although the ways in which we alter our bodies are correlated to our culture, our self-modification and embellishments are crucial features of our humanity. Cosmetics have an expressive function, and thus may be more important for those who are attractive (Brown, Cash & Noles, 1986; Theberge & Kernaleguen, 1979). Adornment usage by less attractive persons may go unrewarded and thus diminish over

time (Bloch & Richins, 1992), therefore suggesting that, “making consumers feel physically attractive would encourage sales . . .” (Martin & Kennedy, 1993, p. 2). It has been proven that attractive men and women earn a superior income over time (Schwer & Daneshvary, 2000) therefore it stands to reason that if attractiveness can earn one a superior income, it can also influence customer service when one enters a retailer where salespeople naturally categorize and judge the intent of their patrons.

Mothers shopping with their child(ren), otherwise known as co-shopping (Grossbart, Carlson & Walsh, 1991), has become ever prevalent in our society. Due to the significant number of single-parent families, the number of women that work outside of the home as well as the vast array of knowledge in which the youngest of generations are exposed to via advertisements and marketing on television and the internet, children have become a very significant factor when it comes to shopping and subsequent purchasing power. Retailers who recognize the potential of a child(ren) as an influencer in purchasing offer child-directed ads to encourage in-store requests, interactive merchandise in which children can handle products with hopes of them showing it to their mothers and employ in-store promotions that appeal to both mother and child(ren) (Grossbart, et al, 1991). Although a small amount of research has been conducted that focuses on this ever growing group of consumers, little research has been performed in regards to the effect of not only the appearance but also the behavior of children on the amount of customer service that is given when they participate in co-shopping with their mothers.

Many mothers around the world get caught up in being able to get out of the house with the proper clothing on the appropriate child and lose sight of the fact that our “appearance communicates our social identities” (Johnson, Yoo, Kim & Lennon, 2008, p. 5). Westernized

society has been taught to negotiate and attach meaning to dress cues such that specific cues are linked with specific identities (Johnson, et al, 2008), which in turn may cause an unconscious bias when it comes to a service associate who is paid on commission. As Harp, Horridge and Strickler (1990, p. 87) conclude, “the potential exists for apparel to influence sales associate customer evaluations.” Their study found that a positive association exists between sales service and first impression.

Since the basis for all retail selling revolves around the different forms of communication (Lewison & DeLozier, 1986), it is of utmost importance for a customer to be able to establish a rapport with a salesperson (Harp, Horridge & Strickler, 1990). An example of non-verbal communication is appearance. A person’s appearance is a very powerful tool and has the potential to affect the way the wearer is perceived and communicate a person’s status (Harris, James, Chavez, Fuller, Kent, Massanari, Moore & Walsh, 1983). Creekmore (1980) states that clothing shows values, identity, attitudes or mood, and Hamid (1968) adds that clothing influences stereotypes more than facial characteristics.

Purpose of the study

Everyone has been in the uncomfortable situation where a child in their midst decides to throw a fit in a public place; an all out temper tantrum, tears, arms and legs going in all directions. It is hard to visit a mall or store of any type without seeing at least one of these episodes, and whether it is happening directly to one, or around one, how does one respond? Is the appropriate action to ignore the fit, walk around the poor mother who is nervously trying to quiet the youngster, walk out of the store with disgust with intentions of returning at a later time

or throw the mother a look of understanding as one continues on their way? How is the sales associate to react to the fit? Do they just walk away with their hands covering their ears? Are the same sales techniques used with this customer as with other customers? Does the mother get the same service that any other patron gets even though she may have a child(ren) in tow and may look a little bedraggled?

The purpose of this study is to assist marketing personnel, retail store managerial staff (in private as well as corporate chain retailers) and every mother who takes their child(ren) along when they go to the mall or their nearest retail venue to ways of increasing their patronage and store loyalty. The objective is to find out how the appearance of mothers and their child(ren), in regards to their dress and the child(ren)s behavior, affects impression formation by the sales associate and the level of service perceived by the mother, and whether this positive perception of customer service grants store loyalty. Also, taken into question was geographical differences and the importance of store attributes of consumers.

Since it has been demonstrated by previous research that dress affects behavioral responses (Johnson, et al, 2008), the results of this study will help retailers better prepare their sales staff to adequately increase their commission as well as customer base and store loyalty. This study also will help mothers' better express themselves through their physical appearance and attain the type of service they expect in order to get in and out of a retail environment before the next feeding, naptime or carpool. Lastly, this study will help marketing personnel to produce pitches, slogans, atmospheres, etc. that will aid in increasing their profit margin, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction as well as free advertising via positive word of mouth.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. To determine the impact that exists between a mother's appearance and perceived customer service.
2. To determine the impact that exists between (a) child(ren)'s appearance and perceived customer service.
3. To determine the impact that exists between (a) child(ren)'s behavior and perceived customer service.
4. To determine if a difference exists among the region in which one lives, their appearance and the perceived customer service.
5. To determine if appearance impacts store loyalty.
6. To determine if perception of customer service impacts store loyalty.

Hypothesis

- H1. There will be a relationship between a mother's appearance and perceived customer service.
- H2. There will be a relationship between (a) child(ren)'s appearance and perceived customer service.
- H3. There will be a relationship between (a) child(ren)'s behavior and perceived customer service.

H4. There will be a significant difference between region in which one lives, their appearance and the perceived customer service.

H5. Appearance will significantly impact store loyalty.

H6. Perception of service will significantly impact store loyalty.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been a large number of studies conducted in the area of customer appearance versus the services that are rendered by the sales associate, as well as how the appearance of the sales associate affects the customer. Yet, little research has been focused on mothers who take their child(ren) shopping with them and the appearance of the mother and that of her child(ren), and the type of service in which they receive due to their appearance. This study attempts to determine if discrimination exists when mothers take their child(ren) along with them when shopping for apparel.

Theoretical framework

Paulins (2005) explored the premise that customer appearance through dress influences customer service quality in retail store settings. Her findings were that store type, as well as appearance based on dress, did affect the level of customer service received by customers. Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) concurred with Paulins, as their study found that people who project a physically attractive self-image are perceived by others as having better lives, having more likeable personalities and being more competent and successful at their jobs. Loyal, repeat retail customers are a key factor in obtaining and maintaining a successful retail business. Since customers have a greater variety and more options in regards to types of stores to patronize than ever before, a key factor in conquering this objective is establishing and preserving the customer

service which the patrons are expecting and receiving. Beisel (1993, p. 501) defines customer service as, “an activity that supplements or facilitates store sales.” Examples of exceptional customer service includes, but is not limited to, gift wrapping, gift receipts, free parking, alterations and delivery to one’s home.

Gagliano and Hathcote (1994) defined “sales service” as the customer service offered by salespeople. Sales service is among the most difficult sectors of retailing to not only measure but also to control within the store. Sales personnel offer sales service, the most highly visible customer service aspect, through establishing interactive relationships with their customers. The findings of Lee and Johnson (1997) indicate that customers believe service quality depends on their dress. These findings supported Lennon and Kim’s (1998) investigation that concluded that well-dressed customers receive more friendly service, therefore supporting the theory that customer appearance is significantly related to the friendliness of salespeople in retail stores. In 2005, Lennon and Kim again found that variables that related to manner of dress such as attractiveness, fashionability and formality of clothing impacted friendliness and service promptness in specialty stores. Those customers who were pinpointed as being a “purchaser” versus being a “browser” typically experienced friendlier service solely based on their attire.

Dress and Categorizing

Roach and Eicher (1965) defined “dress” as the act of covering the body. The main components that unite to form an individual’s dress include accessories, makeup, hairstyles, clothing and personal hygiene. It has been proven that sales associates use a customers’ dress in order to pass a judgment and place them into a category. Retailers typically place customers into categories in order to organize their selling strategies in an effort to maximize their profits.

Hence, categorizing customers by dress typically results in outstanding levels of customer service for the correctly dressed customers (Roach & Eicher, 1965).

Dunne, Lusch and Gable (1995) categorized customers based on their appearance and behaviors as being either defensive, interrupter, indecisive, decisive, impulsive or sociable.

Sharma and Levy (1995) on the other hand, categorized customers as being either price/promotion conscious, need/product based, gift buyer, browser, needs and seeks sales help, negative labels, decision style/method of decision making and knowledgeable customer.

Regardless of which categorization method one chooses to follow, “customer categorization is an activity that involves making inferences about the customer and adapting salesperson behaviors to achieve the goal of selling merchandise” (Paulins, 2005, p. 347).

In order to make sure a transaction is executed, salespeople must adapt their selling technique appropriately to the customer category that is presented via the customer’s verbal and nonverbal cues. When implementing the before-mentioned categorizations, increased transaction productivity is the result, thus boosting retail sales. Retail stores are challenged to meet customer expectations with respect to the quality of customer service offered (Paulins, 2005). The outcome of Paulins’ (2005, p. 352) study proved that, “the less professionally customers dressed, the lower the level of customer service they received.” This finding is unfortunate due to the fact that in this time of economic turmoil, retailers cannot afford to pass judgment or disappoint customers by negatively reacting to their dressed appearance.

A consistent standard level of customer service must be attained, acknowledged and delivered to all customers regardless of the opinion of the customer’s value perceived by the sales personnel or the appearance and dress of the customer.

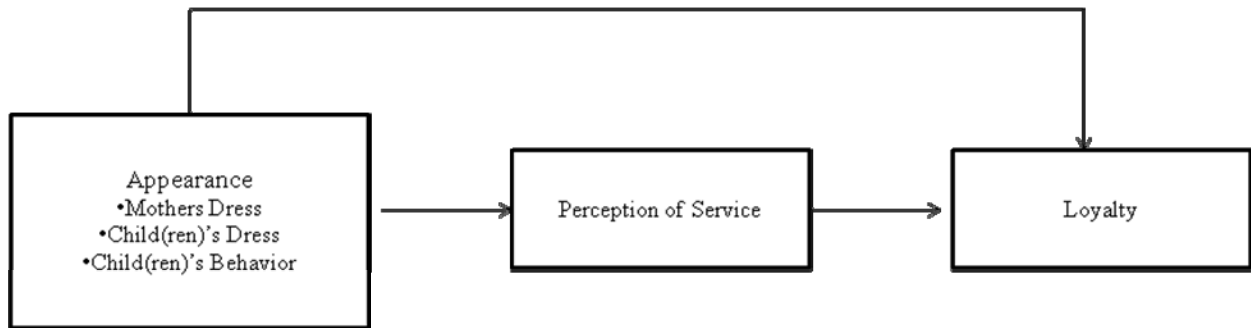


Figure 2.1: Proposed Model for Factors Impacting Customer Service for Mother’s Shopping with Children

Mother’s Appearance

Body image develops partly as a function of culture in response to cultural aesthetic ideals (Rudd & Lennon, 2001). As an example, in the United States and other Western societies, people tend to perceive thinness and attractiveness as desirable physical traits for women (Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986). These perceptions are most often unconsciously reinforced via evaluations by and comparisons to others, such as peers, family members, media images and classmates (Thompson & Stice, 2001). In agreement, Peck and Loken (2004), found that females of all ages show a variety of negative consequences associated with viewing unrealistic portrayals of women in advertising. Wang and Waller (2006, p. 669) state that, “the physical attractiveness stereotype (i.e., “what is beautiful is good”) refers to a social phenomenon in which physically attractive individuals are believed to have more socially desirable personalities and more favorable life outcomes.” Cherished cultural values such as internal control, competitiveness, self-discipline, and assertiveness have become symbolized in the United States by a socially desirable thin and toned body.

Child(ren)'s Image

What makes a child cute or attractive? According to a 2007 study conducted by Sforza, Laino, D'Alessio, Dellavia, Grandi and Ferrario, a great and prominent upper jaw, a large forehead and nose, a wider, less vertically developed face, a higher mouth with voluminous lips as well as a curving soft tissue facial profile constitutes an attractive child. Koyama, Takahashi and Mori (2006) found that a child's facial features, facial expressions and body proportions were factors of perceived cuteness. In past research a more babyish appearance received a higher assessment of cuteness and in 1982, Power, Hildebrandt and Fitzgerald concluded that smiling infants were cuter than crying ones. Koyama et al (2006) state four factors that determine an adult's perception of a child's cuteness which include: a child exhibiting childlike behavior, physical cuteness, a child pretending to be an adult, and lastly the protective feeling for a child that is suggested to develop once a person has their own offspring. According to the findings of the Koyama et al (2006) study, a child exhibiting childlike behavior evokes the strongest feeling of cuteness in adults for both male and female children, yet physical cuteness and the feeling of being protective appeared to be the most important criterion for the judgment of female and male children respectively.

Due to greater affluence, higher consumer socialization as well as greater independence, Lackman and Lanasa (1993) state that the, "influence of children in consumer decision making appears to be growing . . .," meaning that children are becoming more commonplace in the retail setting. In accordance to this, McNeal (1990) found that ten year old children averaged about 250 store visits per year. The findings of the Darian (1998) study concur that interaction between a parent and a child while in a retail setting suggests a positive outcome for the retailer. For

example, when one member of the party suggests entering a store, the other agrees 74.7 percent of the time, and when one member suggests trying on clothes, the other agrees in 51.8 percent of cases. The other influencer found by the Darian (1998) study was the behavior of the salesperson, “if the salesperson addressed the evaluative criteria mentioned by both the parent and the child, a purchase was more likely to be made 88.7 percent of the time... if the salesperson did not interact with them, 72.4 percent of the time” a sale was made (Darian, 1998). This shows that the retailer must train their sales staff to address the needs of both the children and the parents and aid them in resolving any differences that may arise. Service and merchandise promotions that appeal to both parents and children will increase the chance of a purchase and of the family’s continual loyalty to the store. It has been shown that if the shopping experience was unpleasant for the parent or the child, this will make it less likely for the parent to return to the store (Darian, 1998).

Store Attributes

Store attributes directly affect store preference. Paulins & Geistfeld (2003) state that the importance of a particular store attribute may vary by customer characteristics as well as by store type. As retail formats continue to evolve and change, it is more important than ever before for retailers to recognize and acknowledge what attributes attract customers to stores. Managing customer relationships is extremely vital to the success of many types of retailers (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). Customer service satisfaction depends on how well the service customers receive matches their expectations (Austin, 1992). Webster (1989) believes that many of these expectations are shaped by factors such as gender, age, income and ethnicity.

Satisfying a customer with good customer service is extremely important due to the possibility of significant short-term costs, such as a walkout, or long-term costs, such as customer defection, if one feels that they have experienced poor customer service. The results of the Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt (2000) study support the idea that a relative attitude is influenced by satisfaction as well as service quality which in turn influences the likelihood of recommendations to others. This also indicates that the key to customer creation and retention appears to be the nurturing of a favorable, relative attitude that can be created by satisfying the customer by improving service quality. This improved service quality increases the likelihood that consumers will recommend the store to others which results in increased repurchase intentions which foster store loyalty (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000).

Bloemer and Ruyter's (1998) study concludes that the amount of customer satisfaction has a positive effect on store loyalty, store loyalty is built through store satisfaction, and store satisfaction is built by store image. Store commitment is defined as, "the pledging or binding of an individual to his/her store choice" and "is a necessary condition for store loyalty to occur" (Bloemer and Ruyter, 1998, p. 500). Store satisfaction is, "believed to occur through a matching of expectations and perceived performance" (Bloemer and Ruyter, 1998, p. 501). Store image is the composite of a patron's perceptions of a store on different prominent attributes (Bloemer and Ruyter, 1998). Relationship marketability is defined by Reinartz and Kumar (2003, p. 77) as the, "establishment and maintenance of long-term buyer-seller relationships."

Target Market

Four areas in two different states in the United States were selected as the focus of this study. Austin and Houston were the cities selected from the state of Texas, and the counties of Gwinnett and Athens-Clarke in the state of Georgia. According to the United States Census Bureau website, these four areas have very similar average household sizes, as well as average family sizes. In the state of Texas, for the years 2006-2008, the city of Houston had an average household size of 2.66 and an average family size of 3.45; the city of Austin had an average household size of 2.40 and an average family size of 3.21 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). In the state of Georgia, for the years 2006-2008, the county of Gwinnett had an average household size of 2.98 and an average family size of 3.44; the county of Athens-Clarke had an average household size of 2.46 and an average family size of 3.11 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Table 2.1

Comparison of Four Sites in Terms of Average Household and Family Size from 2006-2008

| | Average Household Size | Average Family Size |
|---------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Houston | 2.66 | 3.45 |
| Austin | 2.40 | 3.21 |
| Gwinnett | 2.98 | 3.44 |
| Athens-Clarke | 2.46 | 3.11 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau @ <http://factfinder.census.gov>

The city of Austin in Texas and the county of Athens-Clarke in Georgia were very similar between the years on 2006-2008 in the fact that out of one thousand women between the ages of 20 to 34, eighty-four of those women had a birth within the past twelve months in Austin and sixty-one of those women had a birth within the past twelve months in Athens-Clarke county.

The city of Houston in Texas and the county of Gwinnett in Georgia were very similar between the years of 2006-2008 in the fact that out of one thousand women between the ages of 20 to 34, 109 women in Houston had a birth in the past twelve months and 118 women in Gwinnett had a birth in the past twelve months.

Table 2.2

Comparison of four sites in reference to number of births in the past 12 months for women 20 to 34 years old from 2006-2008

| Location | Number of Women 20 to 34 Years Old Who Had a Birth in the Past 12 Months |
|---------------|--|
| Austin | 84 |
| Athens-Clarke | 61 |
| ----- | |
| Houston | 109 |
| Gwinnett | 118 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau @ <http://factfinder.census.gov>

According to the United States Census Bureau for 2006-2008, the following information was found for the four sites being investigated in this study. In the city of Austin, Texas, there were 22,167 children over the age of three that were enrolled in nursery school, preschool or kindergarten. In the city of Houston, Texas, there were 68,133 children over the age of three that were enrolled in nursery school, preschool or kindergarten. In Athens-Clarke County in Georgia, there were 3,369 children over the age of three who were enrolled in nursery school preschool or kindergarten. In Gwinnett

County in Georgia, there were 29,468 children over the age of three who were enrolled in nursery school, preschool or kindergarten.

Table 2.3

Comparison of the Number of Children Over the Age of Three that were Enrolled in Nursery School, Preschool or Kindergarten from 2006-2008

| Location | Number of Children Over the Age of Three that were Enrolled in Nursery School, Preschool or Kindergarten |
|----------------------|--|
| Athens-Clarke | 3,369 |
| Austin | 22,167 |
| Gwinnett | 29,468 |
| Houston | 68,133 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau @ <http://factfinder.census.gov>

Another interesting finding according to the United States Census Bureau report shows that there seems to be a slight correlation between the number of persons under the age of five years old and the population percent change for two out of the four investigation cites. For the city of Austin, Texas, the percent of persons under the age of five years old for 2000 was 7.1% and the population percent change from April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2006 was 7.6%. For the city of Houston, Texas, the percent of persons under the age of five years old for 2000 was 8.2% and the population percent change from April

1, 2000 to July 1, 2006 was 8.8%. For the county of Athens-Clarke in Georgia, the percent of persons under the age of five years old for 2008 was 6.8% and the population percent change from April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2008 was 13.1%, almost double. For the county of Gwinnett in Georgia, the percent of persons under the age of five years old for 2008 was 8.8% and the population percent change from April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2008 was 34.2%, almost triple.

Table 2.4

Comparison of % of People under the Age of 5 and % of Population Change

| Persons Under the Age of 5 Versus Population Percent Change | | |
|---|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Site | % of Persons Under the Age of 5 | % of Population Change |
| Austin | 7.1%* | 7.6%** |
| Houston | 8.2%* | 8.8%** |
| ----- | | |
| Athens-Clarke | 6.8%*** | 13.1%**** |
| Gwinnett | 8.8%*** | 34.2%**** |

Note: * = 2000, ** = April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2006, *** = 2008, **** = April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2008

Source: U.S. Census Bureau @ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states>

The United States Census Bureau reports the following, in the city of Austin, Texas, for the year of 2000, females make up 48.6% of the population. In the city of

Houston, Texas, for the year of 2000, females make up 50.1% of the population. In the counties of Athens-Clarke and Gwinnett in Georgia, for the year of 2008, females make up 51.2% and 49.6% of the population respectively.

Table 2.5

Percent of Female Persons Living in the Sites

| Percent of Female Persons | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Athens-Clarke | 51.2% |
| Austin | 48.6% |
| Gwinnett | 49.6% |
| Houston | 50.1% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau @ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states>

According to the United States Census Bureau, the income per capita for all four investigated sites for the year 1999 were comparable. For the city of Austin, Texas, the income per capita was \$24,163. For the city of Houston, Texas, the income per capita was \$20,101. For

the county of Athens-Clarke in Georgia, the income per capita was \$17,123. For the county of Gwinnett in Georgia, the income per capita was \$25,006.

Table 2.6

Comparison of Per Capita Money Income

| Per Capita Money Income | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Austin | \$24,163 |
| Houston | \$20,101 |
| Athens-Clarke | \$17,123 |
| Gwinnett | \$25,006 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau @ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states>

Since the average number of women in the four investigation sites is about half of the population at 49.88%, it would be sensible that the stores, shops and retailers in these areas as well as across the country would take this influential group into account by focusing on this very profitable target market segment. A target market is defined as the customer group in which a retailer seeks to attract and satisfy (Berman & Evans, 1995). A market segment is defined as the group that a retailer chooses to zero in on (Berman & Evans, 1995). Therefore a target market segment is defined as the particular customer group in which a retailer focuses on in its efforts to

attract, please and gain patronage. A retailer that is focusing on market segmentation is typically near a small or medium population base, that promotes mostly by subscription to a catalog or direct mail and it offers a deep assortment of high quality or low-quality items as well as either a high or low price orientation (Berman & Evans, 1995, p.46). The strategy of a segmented market often involves one specific strategy directed at one limited group of specific customers.

Table 2.7

Strategic Implications for a Segmented Target Market

| Target Market Segment and Strategic Implications | |
|--|--|
| Retailer's location | Small or medium population base |
| Goods and service mix | Wide assortment of high or low quality items |
| Promotion efforts | Subscription or mail |
| Price orientation | Low or high |
| Strategy | A Specific strategy directed at a limited |

Source: Berman & Evans, p. 46, 199

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Sample

This study was based upon a convenience sample survey of mothers in the cities of Austin and Houston in the state of Texas and the counties of Gwinnett and Athens-Clark in the state of Georgia. These four destinations were picked out of convenience for the researcher.

Administration of the Instrument

Prior to the survey, a pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted with the University of Georgia staff, students and their family members in the spring semester of 2010. The questionnaire was handed out to mothers of young children who worked in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences. The pre-test was used to identify any problems that might arise from misinterpretation of the directions or wording of the questionnaire. Adjustments were made to validate the questionnaire.

The survey was comprised of five sections. In section 1 and 2, the SERVQUAL-revised instrument, which provides an expectations/perceptions format that was used to track the level of service provided by stores. SERVQUAL was chosen due to its excellent reliability, validity and broad applicability. The purpose of SERVQUAL is to serve as a diagnostic methodology for uncovering broad areas of a company's service quality shortfalls and strengths. There are five

sections for the expectations section as well as five sections of the perceptions section in the SERVQUAL-revised. The five sections that are included in the expectation as well as perception sections are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The tangibles section includes the physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel. The reliability section is defined by the ability of the staff to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. The responsiveness section includes the willingness of the staff to help customers and provide prompt service. The assurance section is defined as the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. Lastly, empathy is defined as the caring and individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

Section 3, the appearance section that used an adapted point allocation section of the Servqual-Revised (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, 1991) to address mothers dress, child(ren)'s dress, child(ren)'s behavior. The items were measured on a five point Likert type scale with "1" meaning "Loungewear" and "5" meaning "Well Dressed". Some examples of questions were, "*When shopping at the retail apparel store in which I frequent with my child(ren), the **pants** I typically wore in accordance to the above definition would be considered...*," "*When shopping at the retail apparel store in which I frequent with my child(ren), the way in which I style my child(ren)'s **hair** would most likely be considered which kind of apparel style in accordance to the above definition*" and "*When shopping at the retail apparel store in which I frequent with my child(ren), the way in which my child(ren) behave when they are hungry and /or tired effects the type of customer service we obtain.*"

For Section 4, the store attributes section, the researcher compiled comments from pretest participants that identified the importance of store attributes to create a Likert type scale with "1"

being “Not important at all” and “5” being “Very Important” with some examples being, *“The retail apparel store I frequent helps customers by providing prompt service and short check-out lines regardless of their appearance, the appearance of their child(ren) or the child(ren)’s behavior,”* *“The retail apparel store I frequent is child friendly by offering wide aisles, offering carts to push (a) child(ren) in and dressing rooms that accommodate a stroller/cart.”* and *“The retail apparel store I frequent with my child(ren) offer a restroom with a diaper changing area as well as accommodations for feeding.”*

Section 5 included both a loyalty as well as a demographics segment that was created by the researcher following Census standards with the participants selecting the descriptor that best described them and open-ended questions that took into account the participants age and the number of children in which they had. This portion of the questionnaire was developed by the researcher in order to measure the customer loyalty of mothers and to describe the participants (see Appendix A).

Once the pre-test was revised for corrections and ambiguous wording, 50 questionnaires along with a pre-paid return envelope was sent via the United States postal service to the two contacts in Houston and Austin, Texas. The distribution of 50 questionnaires was overseen by the researcher in Athens-Clarke County and 50 questionnaires were hand delivered to the contact in Gwinnett County to be administered. The mothers in all four locations were chosen randomly by the administrators’ in that area and were given the questionnaire by way of a hand-to-hand delivery. The mothers that agreed to take the questionnaire took the survey and the returned the completed questionnaire to the administrator.

Conceptual Definitions

Average Family Size- a measure obtained by dividing the number of people in families by the total number of families (or family householders). In cases where this measure is tabulated by race or Hispanic origin, the race or Hispanic origin refers to that of the householder rather than to the race or Hispanic origin of each individual. Average family size is rounded to the nearest hundredth. (Claritas on-line Glossary, 2009)

Average Household Size- a measure obtained by dividing the number of people in households by the total number of households (or householders). In cases where household members are tabulated by race or Hispanic origin, household members are classified by the race or Hispanic origin of the householder rather than the race or Hispanic origin of each individual. Average household size is rounded to the nearest hundredth. (Claritis on-line Glossary, 2009)

Expectations- what a customer feels a retailer has to provide or offer

Perception- how a customer, “attains awareness or understanding of sensory information. What one perceives is a result of interplays between past experiences, including one’s culture, and the interpretation of the perceived.” (Wikipedia.com, 2010)

Operational Definitions

Loungewear-clothing suitable for relaxation, comfort and leisure (that does not include sleepwear) (thefreedictionary.com, 2009)

Well-Dressed-having tasteful clothing and being scrupulously neat and well cared for in appearance (thefreedictionary.com, 2009)

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The objectives of this study were to determine the the impact that exists between a mother's appearance and perceived customer service, to determine the impact that exists between (a) child(ren)'s appearance and perceived customer service, to determine the impact that exists between (a) child(ren)'s behavior and perceived customer service, to determine if a difference exists among the region in which one lives, their appearance and the perceived customer service, to determine if appearance impacts store loyalty and lastly to determine if perception of customer service impacts store loyalty.

Respondent Demographics

A summary of the respondents' characteristics is shown in Table 4.1. One hundred percent of the respondents were females who were mothers to children ranging from newborn to the age of ten years old. All of the respondents ranged in age from twenty-four to forty-two years old. As seen in Table 4.2, thirty-four percent of the participants were twenty-four to twenty-nine years old, 59.5% of the respondents were thirty to thirty-nine years old and 5.8% of the participants were forty and forty-two years old. Surprisingly, there were no participants in this study that were forty-one years old. The highest percentage of respondents were those whom were thirty-one years old (13.3 %), and the lowest percentage of respondents were thirty-seven, thirty-eight and forty-two years old (0.5%). Nearly 12% (11.7%) of the participants were thirty

years old, 10.1% were thirty-three years old, 9.6% were twenty-nine years old, 9% were thirty-two years old, 8.5% were twenty-eight years old, 6.9% were thirty-five years old, 6.4% were twenty-six years old, 5.3% were forty years old, 4.8% were twenty-seven years old, 3.2% were twenty-four years old, 2.7% were thirty- four as well as thirty-nine years old and lastly, 2.1% were twenty-five and thirty-six years old, respectively.

Out of the 188 participants in this study, 52.6% of the mothers questioned were from Georgia while 46.8% were from Texas. From the state of Georgia, 26.6% of the respondents were from Athens-Clarke County and 26.6% were from Gwinnett County, a suburb of Atlanta. From the state of Texas, 22.9% of the respondents were from the city of Austin and 23.9% were from the city of Houston.

The majority of the respondents had two children (40.4%) with those having only one child coming in a close second with 39.4%. Those having three children were third (12.2%), those with four children came in fourth at 7.4% and only one person had six children measuring only 0.5% of the population that was surveyed. None of the respondents of this study had five children or greater than six children.

In regards to distance that the respondents traveled to visit their favorite retail apparel store with their child(ren), the majority of the respondents (36.7%) traveled anywhere from eleven to twenty miles. Nearly thirty-six percent (35.6%) of the respondents traveled less than ten miles to frequent their favorite retail apparel store with their child(ren) whereas 16.5% of the participants traveled more than twenty miles to visit their favorite retail apparel store with their child(ren).

Lastly, there was no difference that was found between the region in which one lived, their appearance and the level of customer service in which they received. This was somewhat of an unexpected finding since it had been hypothesized that region in which one lived would in fact have an effect on the level of customer service in which was received in regards to the appearance of the participants of the study.

Table 4.1

Profile of Respondents

| | | Number | Percentage |
|---------------------------|----------------------|--------|------------|
| State | Georgia | 100 | 53.2% |
| | Texas | 88 | 46.8% |
| City | Athens-Clarke County | 50 | 26.6% |
| | Austin | 43 | 22.9% |
| | Gwinnett County | 50 | 26.6% |
| | Houston | 45 | 23.9% |
| Age | 24 | | |
| | 25 | 6 | 3.2% |
| | 26 | 4 | 2.1% |
| | 27 | 12 | 6.4% |
| | 28 | 9 | 4.8% |
| | 29 | 16 | 8.5% |
| | 30 | 18 | 9.6% |
| | 31 | 22 | 11.7% |
| | 32 | 25 | 13.3% |
| | 33 | 17 | 9.0% |
| | 34 | 19 | 10.1% |
| | 35 | 5 | 2.7% |
| | 36 | 13 | 6.9% |
| | 37 | 4 | 2.1% |
| | 38 | 1 | 0.5% |
| | 39 | 1 | 0.5% |
| | 40 | 5 | 2.7% |
| 42 | 10 | 5.3% | |
| | 42 | 1 | 0.5% |
| Number of Children | 1 | | |
| | 2 | 74 | 39.4% |
| | 3 | 76 | 40.4% |
| | 4 | 23 | 12.2% |
| | 5 | 14 | 7.4% |
| | 6 | 1 | 0.5% |
| Distance traveled to Shop | <10 miles | 67 | 40.1% |
| | 11-20 miles | 69 | 41.3% |
| | >20 miles | 31 | 18.6% |

Table 4.2

Participant's by Decade

| Age by Decade | Number | Percentage |
|---------------|--------|------------|
| 20 to 29 | 65 | 34.6% |
| 30 to 39 | 112 | 59.5% |
| 40 to 49 | 11 | 5.8% |

Instrument Reliability

Reliability for this study was determined using Cronbach's Alpha. A summary of the findings are listed in Table 4.3. The calculation of Cronbach's Alpha was based on the number of questions in the questionnaire and the average inter-item correlation. The reliability for the expectations section of the questionnaire was .964 whereas the reliability for the perceptions section was .96. Section 1, the expectations section of the questionnaire, focused on what the participant would like to experience when apparel shopping with their child(ren). Section 2, the perceptions section of the questionnaire, focused on what the participant actually experienced

when apparel shopping with their child(ren). The reliability for section 3, the dress/behavior section of the questionnaire, was .87 and for section 4, the attributes section, was .71. The dress/behavior section of the questionnaire focused on the typical dress of the mother, the child(ren) as well as the behavior of child(ren). The store attribute section of the questionnaire focused on the importance of attributes such as prompt service, wide aisles and the convenience of a restroom when the participants evaluated the quality of customer service.

The reliability values of this study range from highly reliable (anything between 0.70 to 0.90) to extremely reliable (0.90 and above) due to the fact that each of the results is very close to 1.0 which is the declared indicator of being completely reliable.

The means and standard deviations for the four sections that were tested in the questionnaire are shown in table 4.4. The mean of the expectations section was 61.70 and the standard deviation was 10.38. The mean of the perceptions section was 44.87 and the standard deviation was 11.50. The mean of the dress/behavior section was 43.81 and the standard deviation was 8.86. The mean of the store attributes section was 24.89 and the standard deviation was 3.92.

Table 4.3

Reliability, Means and Standard Deviation

| Section | No. | Focus of Section | Cronbach Alpha | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------|------------|--|----------------|-------|--------------------|
| Expectations | E1- E14 | What would LIKE to experience | .964 | 61.70 | 10.381 |
| Perceptions | P1- P14 | What ACTUALLY experience | .960 | 44.87 | 11.495 |
| Dress/ Behavior | B1- B14 | Typical dress of mother & child(ren) as well as behavior of child(ren) | .866 | 43.81 | 8.858 |
| Store Attributes | A1- A6 | Importance of attributes when evaluate quality of customer service | .710 | 24.89 | 3.917 |

Regression Analysis

The gap score between the expectations section and the perception section is defined as the difference in the participant's expectation of the service they would receive versus the service they perceived that they received. The results of this study indicated that the participants in fact received better service than what they expected they would receive. Although there were a few negative responses, they were not statistically significant and did not impact the results of this study.

Table 4.4

Regression Analysis for Mother's Dress, Child(ren) Dress and Child(ren) Behavior

Dependent Variable: Service Perception
Independent Variable: Mother's Dress, Child(ren) Dress, Child(ren) Behavior
Analysis of Variance: (3,10.432)=, $p < 0.001$
R-Square: 0.145

| Variables | DF | β | t-values |
|-----------------------|----|---------|-----------|
| Constant | | | 10.161*** |
| Mother's Dress | 3 | 0.346 | 3.424*** |
| Child(ren)'s Dress | 3 | -0.108 | -1.074 |
| Child(ren)'s Behavior | 3 | -0.223 | -3.233*** |

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Using summed scores of service perception as the dependent variable and the average scores from the expectation section, mother's and child(ren)'s dress and child(ren)'s behavior. As independent variables, a regression analysis was conducted to measure the impact of each

independent variable. Results indicated that two of the three independent variables, mother's dress and child(ren)'s behavior, were significant. The R^2 or adjusted R^2 indicated that .145 of the variability was explained. The result indicated that 62.4% of the participants agreed that the perception of service in which they were given was based on the way in which they were dressed and how they presented themselves. The appearance factor was divided into these sections.

H1. There will be a relationship between a mother's appearance and perceived customer service.

When the results were calculated in regards to how the participants dressed when they went shopping at apparel stores with their child(ren), 57.4% of the participants felt that they exemplified the "well dressed" definition that was defined in the Free Online Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia and presented in the questionnaire as that "the participant had tasteful clothing", "presented themselves as being scrupulously neat" and "well cared for in their appearance" versus being clothed in the defined "loungewear" which was defined as clothing suitable for relaxation, comfort and leisure.

H2. There will be a relationship between (a) child(ren)'s appearance and perceived customer service.

The results for the children's dress section complimented the preceding results with 69.9% of the participants perceiving that the way in which they present their child(ren) would fall into the "well dressed" category.

H3. There will be a relationship between (a) child(ren)'s behavior and perceived customer service.

The child behavior section resulted in an 85.6% of the participants strongly agreeing that their child(ren)'s behavior effects the type of customer service they receive. The model used is significant in regards to the mother's dress, the child(ren)'s dress and the child(ren)'s behavior.

The regression analysis for the perceptions section was determined to be a solid scale. In regards to the regression that was used in this research, the factors of mother's dress, the child(ren)'s dress and child(ren)'s appearance are all significantly correlated. Surprisingly, child(ren)'s behavior and mother's dress were significant at 14% and 8.8% respectively whereas, child(ren)'s dress was found not to be significant. This result was somewhat unexpected since the child(ren)'s dress was perceived to have an impact on the perceived level of service of the co-shopping group; regression was then ran and it in fact did not have an influence at all. Regression was used to analyze this data due to the fact that this method estimates the conditional expectation of the dependent variable given the independent variables or in other words, the average value of the dependent variable when the independent variables are held fixed. Regression analysis is widely used for forecasting and predicting as well as to aid in understand which independent variables amongst the study are related to the dependent variables and then to explore the forms of these relationships.

H4. There will be a significant difference between region in which one lives, their appearance and the perceived customer service.

Where one lives is not significant in regards to this study and does not influence the service perception. Whether a person lives in an area with a smaller population such as Athens-Clarke County and Austin, Texas or one with a larger population such as Gwinnett County and Houston, Texas, this study indicated that these areas also were not significant factors when it came to type of service rendered. In addition mothers were asked about what helped to create and keep them loyal to their favorite apparel stores.

H5. Appearance will significantly impact store loyalty.

Another surprising result was that in regards to loyalty and taking one's child(ren) along on apparel shopping trips, the analysis did not indicate that there was significance in one's appearance in reference to how often the participants went nor how likely they were to go to their favorite apparel stores with their child(ren).

H6. Perception of service will significantly impact store loyalty.

There were no significant findings that related perception of service to store loyalty.

Table 4.6

Regression Analysis for Loyalty

| Dependent Variable: Loyalty Independent Variable: Perceived Service Analysis of Variance: (1,3.742)=, $p < 0.001$ R-Square: 0.020 | | | |
|--|----|---------|-----------|
| Variables | DF | β | t-values |
| Constant | | | 15.577*** |
| Service Sum | 1 | 0.140 | 1.934 |

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Store Attributes

Table 4.4 explains the results of this study with regards to the importance of store attributes in descending order of importance in accordance with the mean results. The participants were asked to use a likert scale ranging from “1” to “5” where “1” carried the meaning of “not important at all” and “5” meant “very important.”

Table 4.5
Store Attributes

| Store Attribute | Mean |
|---|------|
| Restroom with Diaper Changing Area & Accommodations for Feeding | 4.35 |
| Prompt Service & Short Check-Out Lines | 4.32 |
| Dressing Rooms that Accommodate a Stroller/Cart, Fair Return Policy & Rewards Program | 4.11 |
| Caring, Individualized Attention | 4.07 |
| Knowledgeable, Courteous Employees | 3.93 |

The most important attribute offered by apparel stores to mother's who shop with their child(ren) is having a restroom with a diaper changing area as well as accommodations for feeding which had a mean of 4.35 meaning it was very influential to the vast majority of the mothers questioned during this study. When asked of the importance of being provided prompt service and short check-out lines regardless of one's appearance, the appearance of their child(ren) or the child(ren)'s behavior, the mean score was 4.32 meaning that the participants' felt that these factors were also very important attributes of apparel stores in which they frequent. The third most important attribute is tied between the apparel stores being child friendly by offering wide aisles, carts to push (a) child(ren) in as well as dressing rooms that accommodate a

stroller/cart and the store offering a fair return policy and a rewards program that gives the patron special discount for being a member had a mean of 4.11 according to the results of this study. Caring, individualized attention regardless of one's appearance, the appearance of their child(ren) or the child(ren)'s behavior scored a mean of 4.07 and was also important to the participants when they were choosing apparel stores to patronage. Lastly, knowledgeable, courteous employees that help in locating the correct size/color needed, starting a fitting room, checking on one's progress while in the fitting room and holding items at the check-out until one is completed with their shopping regardless of one's appearance, the appearance of their child(ren) also was an important factor when one was frequenting apparel stores with their child(ren) where the mean score was 3.93.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

There are a few fundamental attributes that mothers typically look for when they decide on which stores to patronize. The researcher initially felt that the most important attribute would be whether or not a stroller could fit through the aisles of the store and amongst the apparel racks. Since it is not responsible behavior to leave one's child outside of the store or in the car, it is very important to be able to push the stroller freely throughout the store without the trip turning into a fiasco of stroller versus apparel racks. Yet, the results of this study show in fact that having accessible restrooms for diaper changing, toilet training and feedings is the most important attribute. Diaper changing, breast/bottle feeding, recovery from the ever prevalent "blow up" or "spit up" and the ever urinating potty trainer is something that all moms encounter multiple times a day.

Another important attribute when shopping with a young child would be the location of the store in regards to a major mall exit in case of an emergency, where one needs to run to the car to grab whatever may not have made it into the diaper bag, or for the convenience of being able to just pop-in and out of the store. Having a dressing area that accommodates the before mentioned stroller is also of importance since most stores do not provide childcare and yet again, it is not safe to leave a child unattended running rampant in a store.

According to the findings of this study, some other important fundamental attributes for mothers that go shopping with their child(ren) include a rewards program that encourages mothers to plan their next shopping trip and what they will buy with their reward dollars, therefore sealing the deal for a return visit. Always a warranted attribute is a fair return policy for those days when there are only a few minutes and there is not time to try on or hold up the apparel to the child or one's self. Kid- friendly stores that offer carts to accommodate the older youngsters are encouraged unless it is a company mission to not target the mother sector. Having a treat stand nearby to encourage good behavior while in the store is always a plus when it comes to mothers taking their babies along for a shopping adventure. Some days one must resort to bribery to get a mission accomplished, and a cookie or ice cream typically will do the trick.

Having a number of stores that are accessible and that have an equal amount of apparel choices for every family member can easily be a win-win situation for everyone involved. Sales associates that are helpful by starting a fitting room, helping look for a size, checking on the progress in the fitting room and holding the items that are to be purchased at the check-out are ways to ensure a sale, customer satisfaction and a return visit. Having a number of registers open to ensure a fast transaction, disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer are also great customer service oriented benefits.

A very interesting fact that was not initially taken into account was that many women are waiting until later in life to not only get married but also to have children due to women advancing their education and setting advanced placement career goals. According to a May 6, 2010 article in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Gumbrecht, 2010), 14% of births in 2008 were

to women ages 35 and over whereas in 1990, only 9% of births were to women of this same age range. Much of this ability to obtain late in life motherhood is accredited to fertility treatments and medical technology. This became somewhat of an issue in the beginning of the testing since the original age limitations for the mother's was focused on mother's between the ages of 25 and 35. Once the problem was recognized, it was then decided to open up the questionnaire to any mother that had a child that fell into the age group that was focused on in this study. Luckily, this was done as it ended up that almost 19% (18.5%) of the participant's surveyed fell into the 35 or older category. Also, it was interesting to note that 65.3% of the participants questioned fell into the 30 or older age category in accordance to having a child(ren) in the requested age range.

Whether one lived in a less populated metropolitan area such as Athens-Clarke County and Austin or a more populated metropolitan area like Gwinnett County and Houston, there was no significance found which is possibly due to the small sample size as well as the fact that all of the participants lived in the south or southwestern portion of the United States. Another limitation would be the fact that no men were included in this study. A vast majority of men are now taking on the role of being the parent that stays at home to raise the children. According to a June 2007 Washington Post (Shaver, 2007) article, an estimated 159,000 dads, almost 2.7% of the stay-at-home parents in the United States, are in fact the males of the household. This would be an interesting avenue to explore since it has become quite common that these stay-at-home dads would in fact be doing a higher percentage of the family apparel shopping, just as a typical stay-at-home mother has done in the past. Another interesting area of exploration would be the difference in ethnicities and how the minority classes of people feel that their customer service is affected versus those of the majority.

The purpose of this study was to find out the true perceived feelings of mother's in this day and age in reference to the type of customer service they receive based on their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance as well as their child(ren)'s behavior. The results of this study supported the hypothesis' stated by the researcher with an interesting fact being concluded in which a child's appearance does not have any effect on customer service whereas that of a mother's appearance and the child(ren)'s actual behavior while apparel shopping with their mothers does have a significant impact on the level of customer service in which one receives. Hopefully retailers will take this research into account and supply more child friendly restrooms, aisles and dressing rooms as they go forth with their store designs and efforts to encourage the ever prevalent focus group of mother's who take their young child(ren) along with them when they apparel shop.

The findings of this study supported the findings of many of the before mentioned studies. In the Paulins (2005) study, it was determined that customer appearance, based on dress, did affect the level of customer service received. The Paulins (2005) study supported this current study since it was found that a mother's appearance did affect the perceived quality of customer service. The Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1972) study found that those who projected a physically attractive self-image were perceived to have a better life, have a more likeable personality and to be more competent and successful at their jobs. This also supports the findings of this current study as it was concluded that the more "well dressed" customer perceived that they received better customer service than those not self-rated as "well dressed." Lastly, the Lennon and Kim (1998) study found that well-dressed customers received more friendly service and a better level of customer service. This too supports the current study as it was concluded that a mother's appearance does effect the level of customer service that she and

her child(ren) are given when shopping for apparel. It was interesting also to conclude that a child's appearance did not have a significant impact on the level of service rendered to a mother shopping with her child(ren). Rather, the child(ren)'s behavior had the biggest impact. This is an area that could use future investigation.

Limitations and Future Study

There are several limitations associated with this study.

1. Because a convenience sample of mothers in the states of Texas and Georgia was used for this study, the sample is not necessarily wholly representative of the total female population across the United States.
2. The study included less than 200 mothers, meaning that the sample size was considered to be small.
3. The study only included mother's in the study and not fathers. As previously stated, the percentage of fathers that are staying home with their child(ren) is on the rise, meaning that they too are more than likely now participating in a great deal of the apparel shopping.
4. The study did not take into account the different ethnicities of the mothers who participated in this study.
5. Questionnaire asked about clothing but did not take into account any other physical traits that may impact the perception of appearance.

Based on the limitations previously discussed, several suggestions for future study were identified. First, additional studies should be conducted in various regions of the United States rather than just in the South in order to determine if the results found in this study are consistent

when sampling mother's in different areas of the country. In addition, a larger amount of participants would be beneficial in order to get a better idea of how customer service truly is to mother's who take their child(ren) apparel shopping.

Future research should be conducted in regards to father's who are primary care givers or that take their child(ren) along with them when they go apparel shopping in order to compare the differences in perception when it comes to the quality of the customer service received, Lastly, the ethnicities of the mother's who participated in the study was not questioned. This demographic information could be not only interesting but also informative in regards to how mother's and father's perceive the quality of customer service they receive when they take their child(ren) along on apparel shopping trips.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM AND QUESTIONNAIRE



The University of Georgia

Hello,

Initially, let us thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in this questionnaire. Lending your hand to this research should take no more than 20 minutes. Let me tell you a little bit about myself as well as this research in which you are about to participate in.

My name is Erin Tankersley and I am pursuing a Master's degree in Textiles, Merchandising and Interiors at The University of Georgia in Athens, GA. This questionnaire is part of my graduate thesis work and I am very curious as to your responses!

The focus of this research centers around mothers between the ages of 25 and 35 that take their children on apparel shopping trips with them and the effects that not only the mothers appearance but also the child(ren)'s appearance and behavior has on the customer service that is given to them on their excursions. The thought process behind this research is to improve the customer service who mothers that take their child(ren) along on shopping trips receive from sales personnel regardless of the appearance of the mother or the child(ren) or the behavior in which the child(ren) may exhibit. When answering these questions keep these common scenarios in mind. We have all been there when either you or someone around you has a child that is having a meltdown, a temper tantrum or just testing their limits in a public space; so reflect on these moments as well as the angelic ones in which your child(ren) have been as good as gold. Also take into consideration the appearance you and your child(ren) presented during this excursion.

Please be assured, there are no right or wrong answers, participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Recall that honesty is the best policy because in the end, your honest answers are the only way in which we can pass on our findings to your favorite apparel store. All survey responses are anonymous and kept in a locked room in a locked filing cabinet that can only be assessed by myself and Dr. Jan Hathcote. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for participating in this research and by participating in this research you have the opportunity to make your shopping experiences at your favorite apparel store more pleasurable if retailers adopt the results concluded from this questionnaire. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University

of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu. Please feel free to contact us regarding this research at any time with questions or comments and thank you again for lending your time to this research,

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Directions: Based on your experiences as a mother that takes your child(ren) along to shop at apparel retail stores, please think about one particular apparel retail store that would deliver excellent (or possibly would not deliver) quality of customer service to you and your child(ren). Think about the kind of apparel retail store with which you would be pleased to do business. Please show the extent to which you think such a retail apparel store would possess the feature described by each statement. If you feel a feature is not at all essential for an outstanding apparel retail store such as the one you and your child(ren) visit most regularly, circle the number “1”. If you feel a feature is absolutely essential for excellent apparel retail stores, circle the number “5”. If your feelings are less strong, circle one of the numbers in the middle. There are not any right or wrong answers—all that we are interested in is a number that truly reflects your feelings regarding the apparel retail stores that would deliver excellent (or possibly would not deliver)quality service to you and your family.

I.Expectations Section: (This section focuses on what you would LIKE to experience)

E 1. When customers have a problem, excellent apparel retail stores will show a sincere interest in solving it regardless of the customers appearance, the appearance of their child(ren) or the behavior of their child(ren).

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E 2. Excellent apparel retail stores will perform the service right the first time regardless of the customers appearance, the customers child(ren)’s appearance or the child(ren)’s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E 3. Excellent apparel retail stores will provide their services regardless of customer appearance, the customers child(ren)’s appearance or the child(ren)’s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E 4. Excellent apparel retail stores will insist on making their customers shopping trips productive and enjoyable regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)’s appearance or the child(ren)’s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E 5. Employees of excellent apparel retail stores will tell customers exactly which extra services can be performed regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or the child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E 6. Employees of excellent apparel retail stores will give prompt service to customers regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or the child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E 7. Employees of excellent apparel retail stores will always be willing to help customers regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or the child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E 8. Employees of excellent apparel retail stores will never be too busy to respond to customer requests regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or the child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E 9. The behavior of employees of excellent apparel retail stores will instill confidence in customers regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or their child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E10. Employees of excellent apparel retail stores will be consistently courteous with customers regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or their child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E11. Employees of excellent apparel retail stores will have the knowledge to answer customer questions regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or their child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E12. Excellent apparel retail stores will give customers individual attention regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or their child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E13. Excellent apparel retail stores will have employees who give customers personal attention regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or their child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

E14. Excellent apparel retail stores will have the customers' best interests at heart regardless of their appearance, their child(ren)'s appearance or their child(ren)'s behaviors.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

Directions: The following set of statements relate to your beliefs about the service you receive in a retail apparel store you frequent with your child(ren). For each statement, please show the extent to which you believe the retail apparel store you frequent with your child(ren) have the feature described by the statement. Once again, circling a “1” means that you strongly disagree that the retail apparel store you frequent has this feature, and circling a “5” means that you strongly agree. You may circle any of the numbers in the middle that show how strong your feelings are. There are no right or wrong answers-all we are interested in is a number that best shows your perceptions about retail apparel stores you frequent.

II.Perceptions Section: (This section focuses on what you ACTUALLY experienced)

P 1. When you have a problem, the retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) show a sincere interest in solving it regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P 2. Retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) performs the service right the first time regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P 3. Retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) provides its services to you regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P 4. Retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) insists on making your shopping trip productive and enjoyable regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P 5. Employees of retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) tell you exactly which extra services will be performed regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P 6. Employees of retail apparel stores you frequent give you prompt service regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P 7. Employees of retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) are always willing to help you regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P 8. Employees of retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) are never too busy to respond to your requests regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P 9. The behavior of employees of the retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) instill confidence in customers regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P10. Employees of retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) are consistently courteous to you regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P11. Employees of retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) have the knowledge to answer your questions regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P12. Retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) give you individual attention regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P13. Retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) have employees who give you personal attention regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

P14. Retail apparel stores you frequent with your child(ren) have your best interest at heart regardless of your appearance, your child(ren)'s appearance or your child(ren)'s behavior.

1 2 3 4 5

“Strongly Disagree”

“Strongly Agree”

Directions: The following set of statements relate to how you and your child(ren) are typically dressed and the behavior of your child(ren) when you patronize the before mentioned retail apparel store you frequent. In the first section entitled “Dress”, circling a “1” means that you tend to dress yourself and your child(ren) more casually and relaxed in “loungewear”, and circling a “5” means that you tend to dress yourself and your child(ren) more “well-dressed”. You may circle any of the numbers in the middle that show how casual or well-dressed you and your child(ren) are typically dress . In the second section entitled “Behavior”, circling a “1” means that you strongly disagree that your child(ren)'s behavior does not affects the customer service you receive and circling a “5” means that you strongly agree that your child(ren)'s behavior does affect your customer service. There are no right or wrong answers- all that we are interested in is a number that best shows your perceptions about your attire, the attire of your child(ren) and the behavior of your child(ren) when patronizing a retail apparel store you frequent.

NOTE: for this questionnaire we are defining “loungewear” as clothing suitable for relaxation, comfort and leisure and “well-dressed” as having tasteful clothing and being scrupulously neat and well cared for in appearance.

III.

Dress:

B1. When shopping at the retail apparel store in which I frequent with my child(ren), the **pants** I typically wear in accordance to the above definitions would be considered...

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| “Loungewear” | | | “Well Dressed” | |

B2. When shopping at the retail apparel store in which I frequent with my child(ren), the **shirt** I typically wear in accordance to the above definitions would be considered...

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| “Loungewear” | | | “Well Dressed” | |

B3. When shopping at the retail apparel store in which I frequent with my child(ren), the **jewelry** I typically wear in accordance to the above definitions would be considered...

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| “Loungewear” | | | “Well Dressed” | |

B4. When shopping at the retail apparel store in which I frequent with my child(ren), the **shoes** I typically wear in accordance to the above definitions would be considered...

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| “Loungewear” | | | “Well Dressed” | |

B5. When shopping at the retail apparel store in which I frequent with my child(ren), the way in which I style my **hair** would most likely be fitting to which kind of apparel style in accordance to the above definitions.

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| “Loungewear” | | | “Well Dressed” | |

B6. When shopping at the retail apparel store in which I frequent with my child(ren), the **pants** in which I typically dress my **child(ren)** in would most likely be considered which style in accordance to the above definition?

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|----------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| “Loungewear” | | | “Well Dressed” | |

7. Where do you live? (Please circle)

Austin

Houston

Athens-Clarke County

Gwinnett County