

CASE STUDY: CUSTOMER EVALUATIONS OF INTERIOR DESIGN ELEMENTS AND  
MARKETING FEATURES IN AN UPSCALE WOMEN'S APPAREL BOUTIQUE

By

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To my mother, Susan M. Beauchamp, for teaching me strength, wisdom, passion, leadership,  
and, most importantly - to love unconditionally

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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Women's clothing stores' annual sales are consistently increasing year after year, possibly indicating that the act of consuming clothing is also rising. With the growing number of 'virtual channel' retailers, it has become increasingly important for stores to uniquely differentiate themselves. Research has shown that differentiation can often be achieved through enhancing the physical store experience and implementing the correct marketing practices. This study examines shoppers' evaluations towards identified design elements and specific marketing features, as well as whether a relationship exists between those evaluations and customer loyalty. In addition to reviewing design and business literature, an observational procedure also informed the researcher of important design features to consider when redesigning an upscale women's apparel boutique. These design elements included 1) lighting, 2) color scheme, 3) atmospheric conditions, and 4) overall style/design. Another four non-design, but retail related elements were also examined to uncover shoppers' feelings towards the store's operative components 1) mood, 2) location, 3) product variety, and 4) customer service.

Considering the impact store image has proven to have on patronage, it is of increasing importance for retail designers and store owners to gain a comprehensive understanding of which

factors influence consumers' store selections, buying decisions, and loyalty considerations. Knowledge of which factors can positively influence a store's physical environment and what variations of these features encourage pleasurable reactions amongst shoppers will enable designers and retailers to have a more powerful repository of evidence-based design solutions. The three sectors that stand to benefit from this research are 1) the retail industry; 2) retail consumers, and specifically, boutique consumers; and 3) retail design professionals. The implications of specific design styles and merchandising techniques on shoppers' perceptions of total store environment can assist designers when specifying the appropriate features for a upscale, women's apparel boutique. Additionally, the shoppers' positive evaluations of alternative merchandising scenarios and unique product display techniques offer design alternatives to store planners and retail storeowners.

Apparel boutique shoppers were asked to evaluate store design and other various business operatives on a questionnaire. After the data was collected, descriptive statistics, correlations, and an ANOVA analysis were run. Positive evaluations were reported across all elements, but were not shown to be statistically significant, due to a small sample size and a lack of variation across the data. This skewed data was likely a result of a pre-existing, high-loyalty rating amongst all the participants, as they were to have visited the store prior to this experience in order to qualify to participate. As a result, it is postulated that these shoppers already had an affinity to the store because they came back. Despite the lack of variance, participants reported shopping mainly for leisurely intents and preferred shopping between the hours of 2–4pm. Additionally, it was found that those aged 31–40 were the most loyal customers in this case. Interestingly though, the vast majority of participants were aged 18–22.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Background**

The history of a typical American retail store dates back as far as the late 1700s (Jones, 1936). This classic retail store was commonly referred to as a general store that offered a variety of non-departmentalized goods, ranging from glassware and hardware to groceries and dry goods (Jones, 1936). As the U.S. population grew and the country became wealthier, a desire to improve the American home and lifestyle emerged. In response, American retailers began to specialize in certain products and services, enabling shop owners to offer consumers a more diversified selection of goods and services within a specific domain (Jones, 1936). Apparel retailers were no strangers to this growing market segment and followed suit when they began forming specialty shops in the 1850s with an emphasis on ready-to-wear clothing (Jones, 1936). One researcher (Jones, 1936) defined specialty shops as “retail stores that handle only one type of merchandise” (pg.134). Women’s contemporary clothing sold in an upscale boutique is an example of this form of specialty shop.

The U.S. Census Bureau’s 2005 Retail Trade Survey indicated that women’s clothing stores’ annual sales have increased 24% since 1998 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). This statistic inherently supports the notion that the act of consuming clothing has also risen. In today’s techno-savvy world, the shopping environment can entail more than a physical place making it increasingly difficult for retailers to differentiate solely on the basis of merchandise (Baker, Levy, & Grewal, 1992; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). Retailers and marketers are progressively exposing themselves to consumers through methods of Internet sites, television infomercials, telemarketing calls, and direct mails (Ng, 2002; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). Consequently, the convenience and variety offered through these ‘virtual channels’ might present a challenge to

storefront retailers who sell their goods solely through a physical location (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). Furthermore, it is likely these storefront retailers endure large overhead costs, as well as product selection limitations due to space and budget constraints. As a result, various researchers (Baker et al., 1992; Ng, 2002, Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003) postulate that by enhancing the physical store experience, storefront retailers can set themselves apart from their virtual competitors, as well as their physical store counterparts.

Several consumer behaviorists (Kunkel & Berry, 1968; Lindquist, 1974–5) regard the phenomenological concept of store image to play an influential role on customer patronage. Store image, as described by one researcher (Kunkel & Berry, 1968), is “the total conceptualized or expected reinforcement that a person associates with shopping at a particular store” (p. 22). Thus, it may be of increasing importance for storefront retailers to establish and maintain favorable total store image, and quite possibly, this positive reinforcement can begin with the design of the interior space.

### **Purpose & Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to test the impact of the physical environment on shopper perceptions, preferences, and behaviors. Also examined was the boutique’s current marketing strategy. Throughout history, the complex nature of store image and its affects on consumer behavior has churned much question; causing researchers to closely dissect and further examine the topic (Boulding, 1956; Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn & Nesdlae, 1994; Lindquist, 1974–5). As technology continues to grow and store image becomes even more challenging (i.e., retailers extending themselves to the World Wide Web), it has become increasingly important for physical stores to place a greater emphasis on the in-store experience in order to capture adequate market share (Howell, 2002). An example supporting this principle was revealed in a study that found consumers’ viewpoints regarding the physical appeal of a store had a greater

connection to patronage decisions than did the actual merchandise, price points, and product variety (Darden, Erdem & Darden, 1983).

Apparel industry specialists have often regarded fashion, specifically clothing, as a means of self-expression (Women's Wear Daily, 2006). Moreover, consumer behaviorists and research professionals have long suggested that a social meaning is associated with the clothing consumption process (O' Cass & Julian, 2001; Deeter-Schmelz, Moore & Goebel, 2000), and particularly so with women (Dowling, 1993). One researcher described consumption as "activities surrounding the purchase and use of commodities central to the lives of women and the constitution of femininity" (Dowling, pg. 295, 1993). Demographic reports of two Florida Counties - Alachua and Hillsborough - revealed that the largest percentage of consumer apparel expenditures was applied towards women's clothing (Experian/Applied Geographic Solutions, 2005). This statistic lends support to the notion that if informed design is implemented in a women's clothing boutique or other types of female based retail stores, it is probable that increased revenues can be earned.

A number of marketers and social scientists have emphasized that consumption often goes beyond merely acquiring commodities, but rather defines shopping as a means of expression and a tool for seeking pleasure (Fiske, 1989; Mort, 1989; Dowling, 1993). Previous studies (Dowling, 1993; Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000) have stressed the importance of the creation of place in which the goods are consumed or acquired. Ultimately, a social connotation becomes assigned to the place where merchandise is sold (Dowling, 1993). In essence, the store environment plays a critical role in defining the social meaning the shopper will likely attribute to their shopping experience in a given place. The creation of the store environment and its

ability to ascribe cultural meaning to the shopper's contextual interpretation may very well sculpt the retailers overall reputation and store image.

Considering the impact store image has proven to have on patronage (Dawson, Bloch & Ridgeway, 1990), it is of increasing importance for retail designers and store owners to gain a comprehensive understanding of which factors influence consumers' store selections, buying decisions, and loyalty considerations. Having knowledge of which of these factors can be influenced by the store's physical environment, enables designers and retailers to have a more powerful repository of evidence-based design solutions. The three sectors that stand to benefit from this research are 1) the retail industry; 2) retail consumers, and specifically, boutique consumers; and 3) retail design professionals.

This research utilized a multidimensional case study that examined the effects of total store environment on customer satisfaction in an upscale-women's apparel boutique. The study hypotheses are

- 1) the combination of eclectic and clean-lined interiors will evoke a positive psychological response from the boutique's customers;
- 2) the retail space redesign, which utilized informed design solutions derived from reviews of retail design literature and behavior mapping of the existing retail space, will provide a favorable backdrop against the contemporary styling of the clothing itself; and
- 3) there is a correlation between customer demographics and customer loyalty.

The expected outcome is to provide design recommendations of alternative store planning for boutique owners who target a similar clientele. The interior design elements of focus were 1) lighting, 2) color scheme, 3) atmospheric conditions, and 4) overall style/design.

### **Literature Review**

Extensive research has been conducted on the implications of store environments on consumer satisfaction and buying behaviors (Donovan et al., 1994); however, very little

literature exists on the impact upscale-boutiques' total store environments may have on customers' emotional responses and their prospective buying and loyalty decisions. The review of literature is broken down into five main parts relevant to consumers' evaluations of upscale store environments 1) female apparel boutique retailers/shoppers; 2) total store environment; 3) shopping experience; 4) consumer behavior; and 5) methodological practices.

### **Female Apparel Boutique Retailers/Shoppers**

A boutique, or specialty shop, is typically an independently owned store with an emphasis on product uniqueness and exceptional service (Bucklin, 1963). As an owner of a female apparel boutique, the current study's researcher describes the boutique philosophy as a retail business that targets a niche market of women who shop for recreational and pleasure-seeking purposes. The target audience of boutique retailers typically has a significant discretionary income and often associates a social meaning to the places in which they shop (Kincade and Moye, 2003). Additionally, the specialty shop customer generally desires a more sophisticated store environment than that of the mall or discount store shopper and prefers clothing that is current and fashionable (Kincade and Moye, 2003).

A study that examined store patronage and attitudes towards retail store environments among female apparel consumers revealed that clientele of this retail segment were considered to be more oriented with the community and were described as "more gregarious, likeable, and active participants of society" (Kincade and Moye, pg. 61, 2003). The study also found that customers falling under this niche-shopping category tended to be "competitive, venturesome and self-confident" (Kincade and Moye, pg. 61, 2003).

Kincade and Moye (2003) proposed that boutique customers are typically recreational shoppers who prefer a pleasurable store atmosphere with a vast selection of high-quality merchandise. In addition, this type of shopper is likely to consume less time pondering over

purchases; make impulse purchases based on desire versus need; and spend more time shopping even after purchases had been made (Kincade and Moye, 2003).

### **Total Store Environment**

The total store environment is multifaceted, entailing a large number of factors that include sensory cues (Ng, 2002), service quality, product variety, pricing, and image/social context (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss, 2002). In fact, in one study a researcher de-emphasized the individual components of a store setting and reiterated the importance of the overall design (Kotler, 1973). Marketing professionals and researchers have long employed the marketing mix approach (product, place, promotion, and price) when developing and promoting product, brand, or store images (Kotler, 1973; Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995). This technique has proven invaluable throughout history, but requires extensive amounts of time and exhaustive research practices. Due to the limited timeframe and narrow scope, the study will focus primarily on the ‘place’ aspect of the marketing mix theory.

**Store image.** Several definitions exist on the topic of store image. In 1974, *The Journal of Retailing* published a study by marketing professor, Jay Lindquist, entitled “Meaning of Image”. The study examined the variety of store image descriptions that have been recorded by several notable researchers (Lindquist, 1974–75). One researcher defined store image as “...the way in which the store is defined in the shopper’s mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes” (Martineau, p.47, 1958). Martineau’s definition suggests that consumers formulate an image of a retail store through functional properties (i.e., layout, merchandising techniques, prices, and other operational features), as well as psychological properties (Lindquist, 1974–5). For example, does the space promote feelings of friendliness, excitement, and comfort (Lindquist, 1974–75); or does it possibly even delineate a social class distinction?



Another researcher who studied the correlation between television viewing and the perception of store image and shopping frequency defined store image as, "...a complex of meanings and relationships serving to characterize the store for people" (Arons, pg.1, 1961). This assertion parallels consumer behaviorist, Kenneth Boulding's (1956), claim that the nature of humans is to assign symbolic interpretations to the vast complexity of values and meanings (Arons, 1961). In these descriptions, meanings are outlined as the attributes or dimensions, while relationships unify the various attributes together (Lindquist, 1974–5). In other words, an upscale boutique may want its individual attributes of store design, merchandise, service personnel, and pricing to collectively convey a store that represents sophistication, quality, exclusiveness, and high-social class. This relationship between separate components and their affect on the consumer's perceived value of store image will likely impact the shopper's evaluation of the total store environment.

A different study that examined behaviors and their relationships to store image found that image development occurs over time through the reinforcement of consumers' pre-determined criterion (Kunkel & Berry, 1968). Researchers, Kunkel and Berry, (1968) contended that "...retail store image is the total conceptualized or expected reinforcement that a person associates with shopping at a particular store" (pg. 22). While the development of a product or brand requires reinforcement and constancy (Kunkel & Berry, 1968), the creation of positive store image may also require the use of repetitive encouraging signals. It is then probable that the use of applied design solutions that have been implemented in successful high fashion retail settings may generate positive reinforcement signals and, consequently, facilitate a favorable boutique store image in the eyes of consumers.

The perplexing nature of store image and its phenomenological properties are so rigorous that the scope of the current study is far too limited to fully analyze the highly complicated topic. Effectively, several researchers have agreed that store image is the combination of environmental cues (functional attributes) and social cues (psychological attributes) that create consumer perceptions and beliefs about a particular store. These consumer viewpoints are created over time (Kincade and Moye, 2003); thus, they are often considered learned or conditioned responses.

**Store design.** One very significant aspect of the creation of store image is the interior design of the physical space (Baker et al., 1992). Sensory conditions, such as lighting, color, temperature, noise, accessibility, layout, and overall style/mood, have a substantial influence on the way a customer evaluates their experience and classifies the store image (Dowling, 1993). Environmental stimuli are said to have a profound influence on consumers' emotional states affecting their evaluation and acceptance of a particular retail setting (Baker et al., 1992).

Several studies have examined individual atmospheric elements and the affects they have on shoppers' moods and behaviors. For instance, one group of researchers (Bellizzi, Crowley & Hasty, 1983) studied the effects of color in store design. They found that certain colors attracted people to retail displays and point-of-purchase stands (Bellizzi et al., 1983). Because of the belief that color is exceptionally influential on humans' moods and actions, the Blackfair Bridge in England was repainted bright green from its original black in order to reduce the number of suicides that have been attempted from the bridge (Hattwick, 1950).

Areni and Kim (1994) examined the impact of lighting on purchase behavior. In their field experiment the researchers found that consumers were more likely to approach the merchandise when the in-store lighting was bright versus when it was soft (Areni and Kim, 1994).

Order and complexity are interior design elements that may impact shoppers' emotions and purchase intentions (Gilboa and Rafaeli, 2003). Environmental complexity often involves visual richness, ornamentation, assortment, and variety in an environment (Nasar, 2000). Complexity results when there are more variables and an increased amount of richness is present within the space (Nasar, 2000). Examples of complexity may include the implementation of an overall eclectic design style; a variation of scales and proportions; a combination of freestanding furniture and manufactured merchandise displays; or even a mixed use of materials. Alternatively, the order of an environment is represented by coherence, organization, appropriateness, and clarity (Nasar, 2000). Order within the retail environment may refer to the layout, aisle widths; merchandise displays, signage and the ability to navigate easily. Order is unique in that it has been shown to influence the human mind beyond that of complexity. For example, if a space is perceived as overwhelmingly complex, but has significant order, the overall evaluation is often positive (Berlyne, 1970). Whereas, a complex environment with little order typically results in a negative evaluation (Berlyne, 1970).

Another very important feature of retail design is the fixtures that display the merchandise (Kerfoot, Davies & Ward, 2003). A study that examined the creation of discernible retail brands through visual merchandising found that although displays may not necessarily guarantee purchase, they do make it four times as likely that a purchase will take place (Kerfoot et al., 2003). An additional case study, which examined records from Woodward's, a century old department store in Vancouver, found that visitors preferred simple and less elaborate fixtures (Dowling, 1993). Dowling (1993) uncovered that this highly successful department store "facilitated the creation of a clean, uncluttered, spacious and streamlined environment" (pg. 307).

The retailer intentionally manipulated the layout and merchandise placement in order to facilitate a certain mode of shopping (Dowling, 1993).

Architectural design is important to today's fashion savvy customer. Once famously quoted by the renowned fashion designer, Coco Chanel, "Architecture is fashion – it's a matter of proportions." Designs that are regarded as 'architecturally rich' typically contain a mixed use of sophisticated materials; lavish furnishings; sculpted spatial features; and a variety of pleasurable sensory cues (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). Therefore, when environments, particularly those involved in high fashion, are architecturally rich the retailer further conveys their commitment to beauty and originality to the consumer.

As the United States moved past the Edwardian society principles of opulence and grandeur, we shifted our expectations of beauty to something that reflected simplicity and functionality. In the 1930s, cleanliness became a very significant motif (Dowling, 1993); and unsurprisingly, this design feature still holds true in most retail stores today. Cleanliness lent itself to minimalism and eventually the architecture and furniture of the Mid-Century Modern era became a commercial space staple. This design era is most famously noted for its incredible blend of form, function, and the use of ordinary materials to make extraordinary things. A federal law during the early 1940s limited construction costs to two hundred dollars per year prompting designers to create modular products that offered users great flexibility (Whiton & Ambercrombie, 2002). Smooth surfaces, hard materials, neutral color palettes, unadorned furnishings, and spacious layouts are some examples of mid-century design features; many of which are frequently used in chic hotels and high-fashion retail stores today.

### **Shopping Experience.**

Over the past several decades, retail environments have become responsible for not only articulating the retailer's image philosophy, but now, must also present a value proposition to the

consumer (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss, 2002). Due to the variety of retailers consumers can now choose from, the importance of conveying value and reason as to why they should choose one store over another has escalated (Baker et al., 2002). Failure to implement these important steps may result in severe consequences for the retailer, such as lost business or inferior brand perception.

Many retailers are differentiating themselves by enhancing the in-store experience (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Howell, 2002). For years, psychologists have agreed that individuals have emotional responses to their physical environment (Ergolu, Machleit & Davis, 2001). Thus, the shopping environment directly affects the experience a consumer realizes in a particular store setting. Additionally, the shopping environment may profoundly influence consumers' feelings and emotional reactions towards a store, clearly impacting the patronage and loyalty decisions consumers may make (Ergolu et al., 2001).

Consumers engage in shopping activities for several reasons (Jones, 1936; Kincade and Moye, 2003). These reasons range from simply obtaining household commodities, such as food and cleaning supplies, to a more sophisticated process of acquiring luxury items not necessary to the fundamentals of life (Jones, 1936). Research has shown that quite often luxury driven purchases are facilitated through retail shops that evoke positive consumer emotions and include a desirable social class connotation (Bucklin, 1963; Kincade and Moye, 2003).

### **Consumer Behavior**

Researcher, Kenneth Boulding (1956), proposed that humans digest highly complicated ideas by reducing them into manageable portions. Thus, a customer's perceived store image of a particular boutique is likely to elicit certain behavioral responses. This is an example of the Mehrabian-Russell model used in a retail context (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). Effectively, a shopper interprets the store's environmental stimuli (physical features), develops emotional

states (pleasure or arousal) from these cues, and then translates their emotions into approach/avoidance behaviors, such as the willingness to buy (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982).

Pleasure induced by the store environment has been proven to have a positive correlation with consumer satisfaction (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). Favorable responses may include positive word-of-mouth, repeat visits, and an increased amount of time spent in the store, which research has shown often results in a greater likelihood to buy (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). Unfavorable responses may consist of negative word-of-mouth, lack of customer loyalty, and reduced amount of time spent in the store.

Donovan and Rossiter's (1982) study was fundamental to the retail environment's body of knowledge as it established validity in the connection between physical retail settings, emotional states, and behavioral intentions (Baker et al., 1992). However, their study didn't provide retailers with what specific environmental factors influence general levels of satisfaction or specific types of behaviors (Baker et al., 1992).

## **Theory and Methods**

A multi-method case study was used to examine the effects of an eclectic store design on customer satisfaction in an upscale-women's apparel boutique. There are several studies that have used the case study research design to examine the multitude of variables that impact consumers while shopping in the store environment. A variety of data collection tools were employed in these studies, including observations, prototypes/field experiments, surveys, and content analyses.

Observation is a widely used systematic application when dissecting a phenomenological incident and is often used by researchers who study organizations they are affiliated with (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). One example of a case study that used observational data collection is Douglas's (1949) examination, which determined that the general retail market of a

community is largely dependent upon the citizens of that society. Douglas (1949) attempted to reduce confounding variables by using a multi-method approach, which involved the review of several documents including merchant records to track customer addresses, merchant bank deposits from a week of business, and the city's population distribution. Additionally, the researcher observed traffic flow of passengers and applied Reilly's law of retail gravitation (Douglas, 1949). Consequently, the researcher was able to ascertain that similar and dissimilar stores within a specific geographical area tend to have comparable target audiences indicating that consumers have a tendency to follow patterns which reflect socially determined behavior (Douglas, 1949). In other words, humans will likely gravitate towards the 'ideal' or socially approved town centers, malls, and supermarkets.

Store design decisions are formulated using a variety of different methods. The store prototype or field experiment is often used, although it can be very expensive and quite time intensive (Baker et al., 1992). Large retail corporations, such as The Limited or The Gap, utilize this type of research tool for testing customers' responses towards a new store design before rolling it out throughout all their subsidiaries (Baker et al., 1992). It makes sense that this type of implementation occurs in geographies that can be generalized across the store's national target audience. The current study included the development of a store prototype that could be used as a model for other boutiques that sell contemporary women's apparel to fashion conscious shoppers in mid-sized communities.

An atypical example of a retail prototype is BigHorn Center – Phase III. This retail building in Silverthorne, Colorado is one of the United States' first examples of a retail building that accurately integrated natural ventilation cooling systems and daylighting in a retail space (Hayter and Torcellini, 2000). The center's design team used environmental simulation tactics to

ensure energy optimization would be achieved before actually constructing the building. This tactic is especially beneficial when accuracy and precision is important, but time is not an issue (Groat & Wang, 2002). A combination of architects, engineers, and designers developed a simulated environment which incorporated the criterion necessary for meeting ASHRAE energy optimization standards, as well as the environmental sensitivities of the project owners, themselves (Hayter and Torcellini, 2000). At the conclusion of the project, Hayter and Torcellini (2000) closely examined the effects of the building and found that its lighting loads decreased 79% from the original two buildings (Phase I and II). Additionally, the researchers estimated that the anticipated energy cost savings would be close to 62%, exceeding the original project goal of 60% (Hayter & Torcellini, 2000). It is assumed that the success of this building will act as a benchmark for other design teams aiming to achieve similar results.

O'Cass and Julian (2001) studied the effects of materialistic values and self image on fashion clothing consumption. The researchers developed and distributed through the postal system a self-administered survey in which 450 questionnaires were returned. The survey was analyzed using modified measures that had been used by previous researchers, as well as a measure that was developed specifically for their study (O'Cass & Julian, 2001). By creating a tailor made measurement tool the researchers were able to find a correlation between two variables that, until this study, no previously developed measure had identified (O'Cass & Julian, 2001). O'Cass and Julian (2001) also found that high fashion customers have historically held significance for fashion marketers and researchers because "they are seen as drivers, influentials, and legitimists of the fashion adoption process" (O'Cass & Julian, pg. 3, 2001).

In another study that investigated consumer preference of retail stores as it pertains to consumer perception, the researchers established a linkage between consumers' emotional



responses and physical aspects of their environment (Thang and Tan, 2003). Thang and Tan (2003) administered a questionnaire and found that certain store attributes will influence the proclivity of consumers for certain stores over others (Thang and Tan, 2003). A five-point Likert Scale was used to evaluate the composite measures of store image attributes merchandising, store atmosphere, in-store service, accessibility, reputation, promotion, facilities, and post-transaction service (Thang and Tan, 2003). The Likert Scale has a proven record for accurately measuring attitudes (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). The Likert Scale was also used in a study that investigated the effect of consumer perceptions of store attributes on apparel store preference (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). Paulins and Geistfeld's (2003) methodologies and findings are most relevant to the current study. The investigators surveyed research from the past 25 years to develop a list of store attributes applicable to apparel retailers (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). They found that attributes of importance differ across types of stores, as well as customer characteristics (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). For this reason, it is not relevant to examine all aspects of the store environment if they do not pertain to the store's target market or type. Additionally, customer demographics, such as age, income brackets, levels of education, and reasons for shopping affected store choice and the amount of time spent shopping (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). Paulins and Geistfeld (2003) studied 13 stores (7 of which were specialty shops/boutiques) in a midwestern city that is home to a medium-sized university. A questionnaire was developed using a five-point Likert Scale to evaluate specific store attributes the researchers had chosen from previous store attribute studies (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). Similar to the current study, Paulins & Geistfeld (2003) handpicked those attributes that were most significant to that of the store types they were evaluating. Some of these attributes included advertising, appeal of clothing, displays, dressing rooms, location, service, hours of operation,

and prices/promotions. Comparable to the current study nearly half of the respondents were between the ages of 18–23 (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). This may indicate that young women make up a large part of apparel retail revenue when the store is located in a college town. Results of the study revealed that consumers are most critical of department store attributes and amenities and feel that appealing merchandise is the key to being a desirable place to shop (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003). Furthermore, the findings showed that as customers' educational levels increase so does their standards of store attributes (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003).

## CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

### **Case Study Research**

This research study is an example of a multi-method case study. A case study is a thorough analysis of a social phenomenon pertaining to one individual condition (Kumar, 2005). Such a method has been employed by various environmental psychologists to help explain why certain effects result in particular built-environments (Kincade & Moye, 2003; Hayter & Torcellini, 2000). In general, a case study is a thoroughly examined scenario that allows researchers to make generalizations towards other similar types of situations (Kumar, 2005).

Due to the multifarious nature of determining the effects of store environment, the case study design enables retailers and marketers to take a holistic approach towards the research (Kumar, 2005). There are several advantages to using the case study method in behavioral sciences; some of which are listed below (Sommer & Sommer, 2002):

- Greater depth within a particular topic.
- The ability to capture readers' interest.
- Often regarded as enjoyable and entertaining reads.
- Enhanced sense of recall through vivid details.

Limitations of the case study include the inability to support or reject a hypothesis, as well as compromised generalizability due to the individualized basis in which each case is built upon. However, if multiple cases within a specific domain are combined then the external validity is believed to increase (Sommer & Sommer, 2002).

### **Variables of Interest**

This research study will evaluate shoppers' penchant for the total store environment of a women's apparel boutique. Additionally, the study will take into account how customer demographics of shopping intentions, preferred time of day to shop, social influences, and age

correlate with overall customer loyalty. Research has shown that the combination of a store's physical features and non-design factors significantly contribute to shoppers' assessments of total store environment and should be considered when determining consumers' overall image of the business (Moore & Fairhurst, 2003). Because of the changing nature of apparel and footwear, researchers and marketing strategists have long encouraged fashion retailers to grow their businesses by subscribing to marketing practices that appropriately target the 'trendy' customer (Moore & Fairhurst, 2003). For that reason, this research project, which initially planned to examine only physical design features, extended its analysis to include non-design retail business components. The research will focus on four physical design elements 1) lighting, 2) color scheme, 3) atmospheric conditions, and 4) overall style/design, as well as four non-design elements 1) mood of shopper, 2) location of store, 3) merchandise variety, and 4) service quality.

### **Observation**

Observation is a method used for collecting data and is considered to be very effective when attempting to ascertain how people interact with their physical environment (Kumar, 2005). There are two forms of observation: participatory and non-participatory. The former of which the researcher participates in the activities with the group being observed and the latter is when the researcher draws conclusions through passive observation (Kumar, 2005). Observation enables the researcher to gather natural reactions from a population that may otherwise be construed if participants are directly asked questions (Kumar, 2005). On the other hand, if the population becomes aware that they are being observed they may alter their behavior to suit the situation, known as the Hawthorne Effect (Kumar, 2005). Additionally, observer bias can sometimes occur which causes data inaccuracy to be reported (Kumar, 2005).

Behavior mapping is a form of observation that records people's behavior in a physical environment (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). Two types of behavior mapping are commonly used

when determining how humans interact with their surroundings – place-centered and person-centered (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). Place-centered maps reveal how people position themselves within a space, whereas person-centered maps concentrate on people's movement and behavior over a period of time (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). Continuous observations record activities over time in a given location and can often reveal problems that occur in that particular setting (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). Furthermore, this form of observation can reveal social and psychological behaviors, as well as provide insight to the relationship between participants and the environment (Zeisel, 1981). Limitations of behavior mapping include a need for additional forms of data collection in order to support the observed findings and, if there is more than one observer, data collection consistency can be compromised (Sommer & Sommer, 2002).

Behavior mapping was used in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how shoppers reacted to the boutique's existing design, and specifically the layout. A footprint drawing of the original layout (Appendix A) was created using AutoCAD 2004, a widely accepted computer aided design program used by most design professionals. The map was structured similar to a zone-blocking diagram in that it listed different areas of merchandise by purchasing nature. In general, retail merchandisers and strategists encourage product placement to correspond with shoppers' intentions to buy. Consequently, impulse purchases are typically located near the front of the store and close to the point-of-purchase stations, while demand products are positioned towards the back of the store. This product placement methodology is believed to draw the customer through the entire store while encouraging them to pass by convenience goods that have been placed in the center section of the space. The boutique's present merchandising style employed this type of strategy; therefore, by using the behavior mapping technique the researcher was able to investigate if the store's current merchandising

tactics were effective, as well as whether or not this type of shopper responds positively to the industry's 'suggested' merchandising approach.

Additionally, there was an area on the mapping tool allotted for recording and describing shoppers' behaviors at different increments of time. Each behavior was assigned a number that was plotted on the footprint to show where the shopper was positioned at the time they carried out the activity. Arrows were also used to track the sequential movement of the shopper. The observation form noted if the shopper purchased anything and if so, the dollar amount and number of items that were bought.

Findings from the behavior-mapping tool informed the researcher of layout and merchandising techniques that were currently effective, as well as the strategies that were not so effective. This information was then used for determining appropriate design solutions for the boutique's redesign experiment.

### **Experimental Study.**

Another behavioral research approach that has proven effective in retail environments is the experimental study which implements a change then studies how that change effects its population (Kumar, 2005). Experiments can be conducted in a 'controlled' or 'natural' environment (Kumar, 2005). In a controlled environment, the study population is in a restricted environment, such as a room where all subjects are analyzed under the same conditions (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). Alternatively, the 'natural' environment allows the respondents to be exposed to an intervention in its natural environment (Kumar, 2005).

A natural environment was chosen whereby a redesign of a boutique's interiors occurred in the shop's actual space. A solid repository of store redesign ideas was built using the information gathered during the observational procedure, as well as design solutions that extant literature revealed as being successful in other upscale retail environments. Based on the

combination of this data, the designer/researcher chose to make several changes to the existing space (Appendix B).

Existing merchandising strategies that remained constant were the utilization of wall space for displaying items; the recognized product placement strategy of impulse-convenience-demand goods; and the location of the service areas, including the fitting rooms and the point-of-purchase zone. Furthermore, the raised elevation of the window display was maintained, however the materials used in this location were modified. Space planning began by field verifying the dimensions of the entire selling area - approximately 1200 sq/ft. AutoCAD drawings were constructed reflecting the existing floor plan and elevations of four walls. After determining the amount of linear feet that were needed to appropriately display the shop's fluctuating inventory, the trips to flea markets and home improvement stores began. The boutique's new style was to be eclectic – a marriage of urban industrialism and feminine finesse.

The designer was tasked with creating a new store image and an effective working environment using \$5000 and one week to complete the project. All the materials and furnishings were purchased over a one-month period prior to the actual construction. Before the process began, the merchandise was removed from the store and placed in a twenty-foot moving van for temporary storage. Outdated adjustable shelves, fixture brackets, and waterfall hooks were dismantled from the black-laminated slatwalls. This conventional display equipment was donated to the Salvation Army for use in their local retail outposts. A departure from standard merchandising techniques and department-store features went underway. A shelf that sat at eight feet high and ran along the store's entire perimeter was also dismantled. This shelf contributed little to the space by imposing an interruption on the wall plane and as a result, caused the ceiling to feel as though it was low and intrusive. The odd obstruction also cast shadows over most of

the items that sat on the walls and provided no effective use because it was too high to be utilized for merchandising purposes. Soiled carpet was pulled up and tack strips were removed exposing the concrete slab foundation. Applications of Spackle and sandpaper repaired the wall surfaces where deconstruction had occurred. Fixture heads were dismantled from the track lighting strips and tape was applied to all exposed electrical fittings. Windows were tapped off and the walls were prepped for the painting process that was to occur the following day. Industrial Kraft paper was rolled out over the entire floor so as to protect the raw surface from paint and debris.

The ceiling and walls were coated with an ultra-white paint, enhancing the size and brightness of the interior space. A flat finish was chosen in order to disguise any small imperfections on the surface. Galvanized pipe assemblies were used for the wall fixtures that hang clothing. The fabrication of customized shelves also took place using one-inch thick, two-by-four boards that had been cut to various lengths and then stained to a deep walnut finish. A clear, lacquer was applied over the double-coated stain in order to make the surface more resilient to wear, as well as easier to clean. The track head lighting which underwent an easy, yet effective transformation was reinstalled. By simply repainting the vanilla cans with a vibrant white lacquer spray, the fixtures looked as if they were brand new. A damask vinyl wall covering was hung on the back wall. This decorative feature not only tied in the green and gold color scheme while adding a dose of femininity, but also drew the shopper to the rear of the store. It enabled what was otherwise a very open, austere space to have a sense of enclosure and a feeling of hominess. When the time came to seal the floors, a thick, viscous solvent was rolled out to create a smoother surface that would be impervious to imbedded dirt, as well as offer a shiny, more reflective finish.



Eventually the merchandise was returned to the store, and, in addition to receiving a fresh, new look for her boutique, the owner was given a unique opportunity to conduct a systematic and exceedingly thorough physical inventory check. As each item was taken off the truck, it was entered into the computer and verified as on-hand inventory. Although tedious and time-consuming, this process was invaluable to the business operator by enabling every article to become accounted for that may have otherwise been overlooked if conducted in a fully stocked store. A physical inventory assessment is necessary in all retail environments due to the unavoidable nature of stolen goods and mislabeled units. It is typically performed on a quarterly and year-end basis.

Rugs were strategically laid to designate certain zones and furnishings were placed to denote dwelling areas. Demarcation of these zones was carefully considered during the conceptual phases of design. The designer was fully aware that these areas must have a logical orientation for both the user and the service providers. Additionally, these designated zones should integrate seamlessly across one another and read as one whole unit – in this case, a sophisticated-fashion house. The intent was to create an environment that had meaning or an emotional significance to its users. Incorporating a sitting area made up of furniture commonly seen in residential environments supported this notion. A Victorian tufted sofa upholstered in a golden-green silk damask fabric offset two occasional chairs. A once shabby table was refinished to resemble an Art Deco period piece and was placed in the middle of the furniture pieces adding further sophistication and grandeur to this newly assigned social zone. Other freestanding furnishings were placed around the space with the intention of deliberately guiding shoppers through various parts of the store in an unobtrusive and natural manner. The new layout was designed to be open and spacious while still effectively promoting fashion and style

ideas. For example, two antique birdcage stands were used as mannequin stands displaying full outfits hung on body forms. As with most of the new furniture/display elements, these stands can be repositioned in the store at anytime offering a more versatile and flexible approach to merchandising. The cash wrap or the purchasing area was devised using a small dining table. Two dining chairs that were reupholstered in a vinyl fabric (for durability purposes) sat on either side of the desk – one for the cashier and the other for the shopper or guest. This intimate arrangement was chosen to encourage the shopper to feel like a friend of the boutique, not merely a paying customer.

Curtains with small chains looped through grommets of triple-ply white, polyester-crepe were hung in front of the fitting rooms. The chains extended 10” below the door header as to allow natural light to filter in above the enclosure. Moreover, the snow-white color of the fabric transmitted ancillary light into the fitting room space, while the three layers of fabric provided the shoppers with necessary privacy. The curtain panels were cut extra long in order to create a billowing effect on the floor. This technique juxtaposed the delicacy of the curtains against the raw, edginess of the concrete floor reemphasizing the intended feminine-industrial design scheme. The window display was created using two traditional cloth covered body forms hung from the ceiling with s-hooks and heavy-gauge chains. Several rows of wooden discs sporadically knotted on natural twine were suspended from the dropped ceiling that surrounds the window stage. This beaded curtain backdrop enables outside viewers to articulate the window presentation as a composition, while never compromising their ability to view the rest of the store. It also allows natural light to flood into the main portion of the interior space, whereas a solid backdrop may limit daylighting accessibility. Plants, candles, fashion

magazines and other decorative features were placed throughout the store and the boutique was ready to make its official debut (Appendix C).

### **Data Collection Tool**

The data collection tool for this study was a questionnaire divided into three parts (Appendix D). The first section asked questions involving reasons for shopping, preferred time of day to shop, social influences, and age. The shopping intentions category is divided into five parts being leisure, special occasion, having a sale, general clothing needs, and other.

Respondents preferred time of day to shop is broken down into five, two-hour segments. Four two-hour modules consist of the store's eight-hour business day beginning at 10:00am and ending at 6:00pm. The fifth option is 'other' enabling the respondent to express business hours beyond that of the boutique's current operating hours. It is possible that if enough respondents shop at times other than those presently offered it might be a sensible business decision to modify or extend current operating hours. Social influences are defined in this context as methods in which the shoppers learned of the boutique. These mediums included friend/relative, The Gainesville Sun - a local newspaper, radio advertisement, magazine, and other. The age category was also classified into five groupings 1) under 18, 2) 18–22, 3) 23–30, 4) 31–40, and 5) over 40.

The remaining fourteen questions focused on the respondents' opinions towards the boutique's various environmental elements. In the first grouping respondents were asked to record the extent of their attitudes to nine statements on a five-point Likert-Scale. The rating scale ranged from Very Bad to Very Good in which a check was placed in the box that most appropriately matched her feeling for each statement. The remaining five statements asked respondents to record their extent of agreement on a Likert-Scale that ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Again, the participant was to check the area that most appropriately

matched her belief. Both groupings of statements encompassed design and non-design related factors, including the shopper's mood at the time of the survey administration, her attitude towards the overall shopping experience, and her willingness to purchase environmentally sensitive clothing. In the same way green practices have become a near standard within the construction and design arena, they are also gaining momentum in the apparel industry as witnessed by such labels as Edun, Loomstate, and American Apparel. Although the latter is not entirely relevant to the current study, it is of personal interest to the researcher to examine the study population's general opinion towards environmentally safe clothing.

### **Likert-Scales**

The Likert Scale is a valid tool for accurately measuring attitudes (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). A collection of various ideas and beliefs on a certain topic are collected. After eliminating all viewpoints that don't have a distinctively favorable or distinctively unfavorable estimation, the statements are then positioned on a survey next to a degree of agreement continuum (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). The respondents record their level of concurrence by marking the category (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) that most appropriately fits their opinion (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). It is important that the statements distinguish between a positive and negative perspective in order to analyze the results accurately.

### **Participant Sampling**

The study population was gathered by approaching female shoppers as they came into the boutique. Before requesting that the shopper participate in the study, she was asked if she had visited the store in the past. Because some survey questions assumed the respondent had made previous visits to the boutique, only those shoppers that had been to the store before were eligible to participate. Qualified participants were then informed of the study's intent to examine

shopper's evaluation of the total shopping environment. A total of 40 shoppers participated in the study. Each participant was requested to read and sign an informed consent document (Appendix E). The consent form was collected by the researcher and placed in a box separate from that of the survey so as to further ensure confidentiality of respondent's answers. Each participant was also given a copy of the consent form for her personal records. All participants were ensured that their answers would remain strictly confidential. The Institutional Review Board of the University of Florida has determined that this study posed no more than minimal risk to participants (Appendix F). In accordance with the shop owner's permission, a 20% discount coupon was given to each respondent for participating in the study.

### **Summary**

In summary this research is an example of a multi-method case study. Information that had been gathered from observational procedures was used to inform a field experiment. The experiment was then tested by a convenience sample's response through a survey. The intent was to examine shoppers' evaluations of a newly designed apparel boutique, as well as their overall level of customer loyalty.

## CHAPTER 3 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter, the quantitative results describing the customers' perceptions and reactions to the store are discussed. First, the procedure used to collect the data and characteristics of the respondents are examined, followed by a review of the methods used to analyze the data. Finally, the results of the analysis are explained.

During the time period between February 1, 2006 and March 31, 2006, a random selection of the boutique's customers was asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix D). The questionnaire assessed the demographic information about the respondents and their attitudes toward the store. The responses to the survey were entered into an Excel spread sheet and exported to SPSS, a statistical analysis software package, for analysis.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics were run on the raw data collected from the sample. This type of data classification is used in order to summarize the quantitative figures into manageable portions (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). It is a way of assigning numerical descriptions to a sample and is typically performed against categorical and interval measures (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). Categorical measures contain variables that are discrete. A question that asks a respondent to explain his/her hair color and then offers blond, brown, red, or gray as options is an example of a categorical measure. Interval measures involve variables that have a variety of levels along a continuum. A question containing a degree of agreement scale generates interval data.

### **Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample**

A greater part of the sample (67.5%) fell into the age category of 18–22. This statistic did not come as any surprise due to the typical demographics of a large state-university based town.

There were no participants under the age of 18 years. Seven of the participants were between 23 and 30, while six shoppers fell into the 31–40 age category.

Table 3-1. Demographics - Age

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 18–22	27	67.5	67.5
23–30	7	17.5	85.0
31–40	6	15.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

The largest majority of the participants (57.5%) stated they shopped for leisurely purposes, while another 30% said they shopped with leisurely intents combined with general clothing needs, special occasions, and/or ‘other’ reasons. This did not come as surprise as it has been shown that young consumers are more likely to have a greater tendency to shop for recreational purposes (Boedecker, 1997). Both, special occasion and the ‘other’ category were 2.5% of total respondents’ reasons for shopping. Alternatively, special occasion was listed 32.5% of the time when combined with leisure, general clothing needs, and/or ‘other’. Five-percent of the participants declared general clothing needs were their main motive for shopping whereas 20% of shoppers included general clothing needs as one of several reasons for shopping.

Table 3-2. Demographics – Shopping Intentions

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Leisure (1)	23	57.5	57.5
Special occasion (2)	1	2.5	60.0
General clothing needs (3)	2	5.0	65.0
Other (4)	1	2.5	67.5
1,2,3,4	7	17.5	85.0
1,2	2	5.0	90.0
2,4	1	2.5	92.5
1,2,3	1	2.5	95.0
1,2,4	2	5.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

Seventeen of the forty participants preferred shopping between 2–4pm; eleven between 4–6pm; six between 12pm–2pm; one between 10am–12pm; one in the ‘other’ category; two between 12pm–4pm; one between 2pm–6pm and one respondent did not answer the question.

Table 3-3. Demographics – Preferred Time of Day to Shop

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	10am–12pm	1	2.6	2.6
	12pm–2pm	6	15.4	17.9
	2pm–4pm	17	43.6	61.5
	4pm–6pm	11	28.2	89.7
	other	1	2.6	92.3
	2,3	2	5.1	97.4
	3,4	1	2.6	100.0
	Total	39	100.0	
Missing	System	1		
Total		40		

Almost 80% of the respondents had heard of the boutique through a friend or a relative. This statistic may imply that a majority of these customers were driven through word-of-mouth, providing useful insight to a boutique storeowner for selecting various forms of advertising mediums. Another 18% chose ‘other’ as to how they were informed of the boutique, including two ‘drive by’ responses and five responses that involved familiarity with neighboring businesses and/or the plaza in which the boutique is located. Only one individual stated—The Gainesville Sun—a local newspaper, while one respondent did not answer the question at all.

Table 3-4. Demographics – Social Influences

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Friend/ Relative	31	79.5	79.5
	Gainesville Sun	1	2.6	82.1
	Other	7	17.9	100.0
	Total	39	100.0	
Missing	System	1		
Total		40		



To examine how the perceived characteristics of the store affected shoppers' overall attitudes toward the store, a composition measure of overall attitude to the store was formed by averaging the responses to the questions assessing satisfaction, shopping frequency, and recommendations to a friend. This composite measure is typically used by market research firms to measure the overall loyalty of customers based on the contention that devoted customers shop in the store frequently, are satisfied with their shopping experience, and recommend the store to friends. The mean for this measure among the sample of customers was 4.18.

Table 3-5. Customer Loyalty Composite

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	3	7.5	7.5
	1.33	10	25.0	32.5
	1.67	13	32.5	65.0
	2.00	4	10.0	75.0
	2.33	4	10.0	85.0
	2.67	3	7.5	92.5
	3.00	2	5.0	97.5
	3.33	1	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

### Evaluation of Store Environment

Contingency tables for each measure pertaining to store attributes were formed. For every question, the table's cells contained the frequencies of occurrence, indicating how many times each option was preferred by the respondents. Using this information, the mean was computed giving the average response for each category. This average is known as a measure of central tendency. Central tendency is a number that most appropriately distinguishes the sample population as a whole (Sommer & Sommer, 2002).

Majority of the shoppers or 48.7% rated their mood as good with 33.3% having been in a neutral mood and 17.9% in a very good mood. One individual did not answer the question.

Using a rating of 5 as being very good, respondents' evaluations of their mood on the day they participated in the study had a mean of 3.85.

Table 3-6. Shopper Mood Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	7	17.9	17.9
	Good	19	48.7	66.7
	Neutral	13	33.3	100.0
	Total	39	100.0	
Missing	System	1		
Total		40		

Over half of the participants felt the location of the store was good, while one participant felt it was bad. Fifteen-percent considered the location to be very good and another 27.5% believed it to be neutral or just okay. Using a rating of 5 as being very good, respondents' evaluations of the boutique's location had a mean of 3.82.

Table 3-7. Store Location Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	6	15.0	15.0
	Good	22	55.0	70.0
	Neutral	11	27.5	97.5
	Bad	1	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

A generous 72.5% of shoppers rated the store atmosphere as very good, while the remaining 27.5% considered it to be good. With a score of 5 measured as very good, the store atmosphere mean was 4.72.

Table 3-8. Store Atmosphere Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	29	72.5	72.5
	Good	11	27.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

Twenty-six participants evaluated the store design as very good, while another twelve individuals deemed it as good. One respondent felt the design was somewhere between very good and good, whereas another considered it to be neutral. Using a rating of 5 as being very good, respondents' assessment of the boutique's design had a mean of 4.64.

Table 3-9. Store Design Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	26	65.0	65.0
	Between good and very good	1	2.5	67.5
	Good	12	30.0	97.5
	Neutral	1	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

A majority of the shoppers regarded the color scheme to be very good, while another 30% rated the color selections as good. Only one respondent felt the assortment of colors was neutral. The mean across opinions was 4.65, having used 5 as a rating for very good.

Table 3-10. Color Scheme Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	27	67.5	67.5
	Good	12	30.0	97.5
	Neutral	1	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

Thirty-one of the forty respondents evaluated the lighting in the main shopping area to be very good, while the other nine respondents assessed it to be good. Using a rating of 5 as being very good, the general store lighting had a mean of 4.77.

Table 3-11. General Store Lighting Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	31	77.5	77.5
	Good	9	22.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

Eighty percent of shoppers felt the lighting within the fitting rooms was very good. Seven participants determined that the fitting room lighting was good and only one assessed it as neutral. The mean across evaluations was 4.77, using a rating of 5 as being very good.

Table 3-12. Fitting Room Lighting Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	32	80.0	80.0
	Good	7	17.5	97.5
	Neutral	1	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

The variety of product was considered by 52.5% of participants to be ‘good’, while another 37.5% rated the merchandise assortment to be ‘very good’. Four individuals assessed the collection as neutral. The combination of all the participants’ product variety evaluations resulted in a mean rating of 4.27, using a ‘very good’ rating of 5.

Table 3-13. Product Variety Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	15	37.5	37.5
	Good	21	52.5	90.0
	Neutral	4	10.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

Thirty-five respondents reported that customer service was ‘very good’, while another four felt it was ‘good’. Only one woman rated the customer service as ‘neutral’. Using a rating of 5 as being very good, the overall customer service evaluation was a mean of 4.77.

Table 3-14. Customer Service Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Good	35	87.5	87.5
	Good	4	10.0	97.5
	Neutral	1	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

The last section of the survey asked participants to rate their opinions toward five statements on a 5-point Likert-Scale. If given a rating of a five, the statement was strongly agreed with, while given a rating of one, the statement was strongly disagreed with. When asked whether respondents were satisfied with their shopping experience, 55% ‘strongly agreed’, 42.5% ‘agreed’, and just one individual (or 2.5%) had a ‘neutral’ opinion. Using a rating of 5 as being strongly agree, the overall mean of shopping experience satisfaction was 4.52.

Table 3-15. Shopping Experience Evaluation

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	22	55.0	55.0
Agree	17	42.5	97.5
Neutral	1	2.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

Fourteen participants marked ‘agree’ as to whether or not they would purchase environmentally sensitive clothing, with thirteen each reporting ‘strongly agree’ and ‘neutral’ as their clothing type propensity. The mean across responses was 4.00, with a rating of 5 as ‘strongly agree’.

Table 3-16. Propensity to Buy Environmentally Sensitive Clothing

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	13	32.5	32.5
Agree	14	35.0	67.5
Neutral	13	32.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

The majority (or 37.5%) of respondents ‘agreed’ that their shopping was frequent at the boutique, whereas another 30% believed their shopping frequency to be ‘neutral’. Another five respondents (or 12.5%) ‘strongly agreed’ that they shopped frequently at this particular boutique.

The combination of all the participants' levels of shopping frequency opinions resulted in a mean rating of 3.35, using a 'strongly agree' rating of 5.

Table 3-17. Shopping Frequency at the Boutique

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	5	12.5	12.5
	Agree	15	37.5	50.0
	Neutral	12	30.0	80.0
	Disagree	5	12.5	92.5
	Strongly Disagree	3	7.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

Interestingly, five respondents reported a disagreement when asked if they purchased more clothing when items were discounted - one 'strongly disagreed', while four others 'disagreed'. Another twelve respondents were neutral towards the question. Fifteen 'agreed' that they buy more when products are discounted and just five 'strongly agreed' with the discount notion. A mean of 3.82 resulted, using a 5 rating as 'strongly agree'.

Table 3-18. Purchase Volume of Discounted Product

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	12	30.0	30.0
	Agree	15	37.5	67.5
	Neutral	8	20.0	87.5
	Disagree	4	10.0	97.5
	Strongly Disagree	1	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

Twenty-nine respondents reported that they 'strongly agree' with the statement that asks whether they recommend the boutique to friends. Another nine selected 'agree', with the two remaining respondents indicating that they were 'neutral' to the question. Using a rating of 5 as being 'strongly agree', the overall customer service evaluation had a mean of 4.67.

Table 3-19. Boutique Recommendation to Friends

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	29	72.5	72.5
	Agree	9	22.5	95.0
	Neutral	2	5.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	

## Correlation

Correlations between the independent variables of customer attitudes towards store attributes and the dependent variable of overall customer loyalty were determined in order to measure the impact of each factor on overall customer loyalty. A table detailing these results is listed below.

Table 3-20. Correlations – Store Attributes and Customer Loyalty Composite

Store Attributes	Customer Loyalty Evaluation
Mood	.153
Location	.183
Store Atmosphere	-.064
Store Design	.083
Store Colors	.460
General Lighting	.242
Fitting Rooms Lighting	.029
Product Variety	.045
Customer Service	.183

The statistical analysis revealed that none of the store attributes had a significant effect on overall customer loyalty other than the color scheme. It is postulated that the lack of significance may have occurred due to the small sample size and an overall pre-existing high loyalty rating amongst the participating shoppers. Basically, because the respondents were to have previously visited the store in order to qualify for the study, it is likely that the data is skewed towards an existing high loyalty towards the store regardless of the environmental changes that occurred. This dynamic created a ceiling effect, whereby there was no variation in the data.

## Analysis of Variance

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) enables researchers to compare more than two means and is often used to understand how the dependent variable is affected by the independent variables (Sommer & Sommer, 2002). By averaging the satisfaction of current shopping experience, boutique shopping frequency, and recommendation of the boutique to friends, the dependent variable of overall customer loyalty was formed. This overall evaluation was then compared against each of the individual categorical means in questions one through four in order to determine whether a relationship exists between overall customer loyalty and 1) shopping intentions, 2) preferred times of day to shop, 3) social influences, and 4) age. The ANOVA test revealed whether the respondents' characteristics affected overall customer loyalty. It is important for business owners to uncover these relationships because it can inform them of their current market's demographical characteristics and personality traits. Understanding these factors not only enables retailers to better accommodate their existing clientele, but also allows them to analyze their current marketing strategy.

Table 3-21. ANOVA – Respondents' Shopping Intentions Effect on Customer Loyalty

	N	Mean
leisure	23	1.8261
special occasion	1	3.0000
general clothing needs	2	1.8333
other	1	2.0000
1,2,3,4	7	1.7619
1,2	2	1.6667
2,4	1	2.3333
1,2,3	1	1.0000
1,2,4	2	1.5000
Total	40	1.8167

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.637	8	.330	.977	.472
Within Groups	10.463	31	.338		
Total	13.100	39			



Table 3-22. ANOVA – Preferred Time of Day to Shop Effect on Customer Loyalty

	N	Mean
10am–12pm	1	1.6667
12pm–2pm	6	1.5556
2pm–4pm	17	2.0196
4pm–6pm	11	1.7273
other	1	1.6667
2,3	2	1.6667
3,4	1	1.6667
Total	39	1.8205

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.309	6	.218	.593	.733
Within Groups	11.768	32	.368		
Total	13.077	38			

Table 3-23. ANOVA – Social Influences Effect on Customer Loyalty

	N	Mean
Friend/Relative	31	1.8387
Gainesville Sun	1	2.3333
Other	7	1.5714
Total	39	1.8034

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.696	2	.348	1.033	.366
Within Groups	12.130	36	.337		
Total	12.826	38			

Table 3-24. ANOVA – Age Effect on Customer Loyalty

	N	Mean
18–22	27	1.7901
23–30	7	1.7143
31–40	6	2.0556
Total	40	1.8167

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.435	2	.217	.635	.536
Within Groups	12.665	37	.342		
Total	13.100	39			

The results of the ANOVA analysis revealed that the most loyal customers appear to shop from 2–4pm (Table 3-22) and are 31–40 years old (Table 3-24). Additionally, these loyal shoppers selected special occasion (Table 3-21) as their main motivator for shopping; however, none of the results qualify as statistically significant due to the marginal differences in the means of the customer loyalty composite measures for shopping time of day, customer age, and source of information about the store. This was the result of the lack of variation across a small sample size

## CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION

Though, the analyses performed on the collected data produced statistically insignificant results, it is improbable to assume that the experimental store environment had no effect at all on its customers. Effectively, the lack of variation across respondents' scores created a ceiling effect, skewing the data and concluding that it could not be considered statistically relevant. On the other hand, the exceedingly high number of positive evaluations may suggest that the business owner is, indeed, appropriately hitting her target market. Very often, people who possess similar demographics also tend to hold comparable social values and associate comparable meanings with personal belongings and environmental surroundings (Luomala, 2003; Lindquist, 1974–75). Although the sample in this case was statistically too alike, it may be reasonable to consider that these respondents may be indicative of 'typical' apparel boutique shoppers in large university towns. Consequently, this sample's partiality towards specific boutique design features may parallel those of specialty store shoppers in other college towns.

Despite the statistical results, the study proposes multiple design solutions and various marketing techniques that may prove instrumental to designers within the retail arena. These professionals are presented an opportunity to implement similar strategies and are encouraged to further build upon the ideas presented here. This chapter will review and discuss each of the design and non-design elements that were examined, as well as report some noteworthy demographical relationships.

### **Evaluation of Design Elements**

Based on the major design changes that were made, the space was broken down into four design evaluation categories 1) atmosphere; 2) style/design; 3) color scheme; and 4) lighting. Atmosphere included smell, temperature, sound, and touch. Style and design described the

overall theme of the space (i.e., contemporary vs. traditional; open layout vs. controlled, etc.), while the color scheme consisted of the color palette and material selections. Lastly, lighting pertained to the general shopping area and within the fitting rooms. Shoppers were asked to evaluate their individual perceptions of the store's specific features, and then record their feelings on a 5-point Likert Scale.

### **Atmosphere**

Atmosphere generally pertains to the arousal of sensory cues within an environment. The designer/researcher incorporated atmospheric components that were believed to connect with the target market's lifestyle. A clean, pleasant smell was easily maintained through frequent cleaning and the use of fresh scented plug-in deodorizers. Achieving suitable temperature conditions was far more challenging. The dated building had inadequate insulation, which frequently caused temperature extremes to occur. In efforts to improve such conditions, quick fix-its that conveyed a more pleasurable setting were implemented. For example, during the cooler winter months, candles were lit and hot beverages were often served in order to promote warmth and coziness. In temperate conditions, propping the front door open allowed oxygen-filled air and outdoor breezes to enter, while in the hotter seasons, it is suggested the front door remain shut with oscillating fans placed around the space and the thermostat set at a moderate position. Shoppers may feel a sense of coolness just by experiencing the hum of fans and the movement of air.

After the renovation, the store encompassed more hard surfaces and an increase in spatial volume. The sound absorption capacity of the space was reduced through the extinction of fiberboard slat-walls along the periphery, and the removal of merchandising floor fixtures. Although intended, these renovations, as well as the newly exposed concrete flooring condition reverberated sound greater than before. The new acoustic characteristics of the space were

reminiscent of an old factory warehouse, reinforcing the urban-industrial theme. A well-composed sound quality was achieved through the placement of rugs, furniture, and other soft goods. The merchandise also significantly contributed to overall noise control by increasing the space's absorption capabilities.

A shopper's ability to see merchandise may possibly be the most important sensory cue to consider when designing a fashion boutique. A business that survives on selling unique and often expensive items must be able to adequately showcase product in a visibly sensible manner. Moving most of the merchandise to the outer perimeter of the space created an open layout and enabled the center of the store to be used for socio-petal arrangements. Such arrangements are recommended by behavior psychologists to facilitate conversation and a sense of community within a public space (Bechtel and Churchman, 2002). This newly designed sitting area not only gave the eye a break from sensory overload, but also presented shoppers with a panoramic view of the shop as they immediately entered the space. Wall fixtures were hung at 4'-6" with shelves placed at 5'-0". These heights were selected according to industry professionals' recommendations to hang fixtures between 3'-6" and 5'-6". Lighting was adjusted to achieve desirable brightness and accurate color rendering.

Another key element to an apparel store's sensory stimulation is touch. A tactile-rich environment was presented using a mixed material palette comprised of soft/hard, shiny/matte, and textured/smooth surfaces. Additionally, the extreme juxtaposition of opposing materials imparts the business's easygoing disposition and artistic nature. The mean evaluation rating for atmosphere was 4.72 out of a possible 5. In fact, all forty respondents felt that the new store atmosphere was either good or very good. These results indicate that the sample is satisfied with the various atmospheric components that were selected for the space.

## **Style/Design**

By the very nature of a retail store, there are several constituents that will tell the story of one entire space. As explained by Rengel (2003), order in a space is achieved when several functions come together to form a cohesive understanding of the space's intention. These groups include harmonious arrangements amongst physical features, organizational methods that facilitate natural progression, and interpretation of a space as one single unit (Rengel, 2003). The shelving units and plumbing assemblies that made up a majority of the new merchandising displays were designed to provide functionality, but also to establish a sense of order and balance within the space. Equilibrium was accomplished through placement of several pipes hung consecutively in a row down the two main walls. Shelves that hung above every two pipe groupings unified the composition, while furthering the functionality and overall visual complexity. It was crucial that all the fixtures were reinforced by load bearing construction or wall studs because of the merchandise weight that would be supported by these key components.

A marriage of opposites, the store encompassed everything from old and new to rough and smooth resulting in a style that is often typified as eclectic. The general feel is urban and citified, embracing the familiar theme of 'less is more'. Minimalism and clean lines were stressed through the use of simplistic fixtures; an open layout; a soft color scheme with a white back drop; and the repetition of elements. All, but one participant regarded the style/design as good or very good, resulting in a mean of 4.64. This assessment lends credibility to the consideration of eclectic style with an urban focus when designing a high-fashion women's boutique that caters to a trendier audience.

## **Color Scheme**

Color of a space can be defined through several mediums. Commonly, paint and fabric selections come to mind first, however innovative material usage can also have a tremendous

effect on a space's color impact. A predominantly neutral color palette with touches of pistachio green and golden yellow was selected for this project. Using a neutral backdrop of fresh, white walls symbolizes perfection and purity (Digital River GmbH, 2005). The colorless background suggests simplicity, lightness, and is regularly associated with lower-fat/healthy entities (Digital River GmbH, 2005). For contemporary clothing stores, where the target audience is between sizes 0-12 and often strives to maintain a healthy lifestyle, this subconscious 'health' impression could have positive psychological effects. Research also suggests that green often symbolizes growth, freshness, and harmony, while yellow indicates joy, energy, and honor (Digital River GmbH, 2005). Success and money is synonymous with green, establishing an association with business 'richness' (Digital River GmbH, 2005). Green is believed to be the most restful color to the human eye becoming an ideal balance for energy stimulating yellow. With an ability to evoke pleasant and cheerful feelings, yellow is often used for product promotion and is commonly aligned with items pertaining to leisure (Digital River GmbH, 2005). The combination of respondents' color scheme evaluations yielded a 4.65 mean. Once again, thirty-nine of the forty respondents felt the colors of the store were good or very good, signifying that the neutral backdrop with hints of soft greens and yellows was a favorable palette for this particular audience.

## **Lighting**

Compact florescent bulbs substituted the once energy-robbing, incandescent bulbs in order to extend the life cycle of the lamps and improve efficiency, but not compromise the color rendering qualities of the space. The model and brand selected was a Sylvania "Energy Star" lamp which was designed to cast a warm, gentle glow, rather than the harsh brightness that fluorescents are typically known for. Ideally, the lighting system would have undergone a major overhaul, however budget and time limitations prohibited this. Instead, the new lighting scheme

was primarily designed to serve as ambient illumination for general tasks and orientation. In designated areas, track heads were pointed directly on special displays to provide accent illumination or key light. This type of lighting feature is often used in retail environments for dramatizing key items and was completed only after the displays were put into place and the merchandise was returned to the store. One hundred percent of respondents felt the general store lighting was at least good, with 77.5% scoring it as very good. Having knowledge of the lighting complaints customers had delivered in the previous space, this favorable result was slightly unexpected. As mentioned, few technical modifications had been implemented; therefore, it may be reasonable to assume that the overall positive evaluation was the result of several constituents coming together to create one cohesive design. The combination of lighting (artificial and natural), color, and material choices shed new light on the revamped space.

Although the fitting rooms' pre-existing small chandeliers emitted minimal light, the owner wished for them to stay. The brightness was increased slightly by removing the beaded shades and increasing the bulb wattage, but the real impact came from the natural light that was able to cross over the dropped curtain panel. Evaluations of the fitting rooms had the same overall mean of 4.77 as the general lighting assessments did, revealing that it is possible to achieve satisfactory lighting conditions by manipulating related design components beyond that of the fixtures themselves.

### **Evaluation of Non-Design Elements**

Four non-design, but retail related elements were examined to uncover shoppers' feelings towards the store's operative components 1) mood, 2) location, 3) product variety, and 4) customer service. Although mood is not an actual business element, it is believed to have a noteworthy impact on people's perceptions of their surroundings. Any combination of these elements can play into the overall effect that store environments have on shoppers; thus, it may



be of considerable importance to convey this information to various retail professionals for further use.

### **Mood**

Mood has a profound effect on evaluation outcomes. Often, we perceive things as wonderful and pleasurable when we are personally feeling positive and happy and, vice-versa. The survey asked respondents to indicate their mood so that, if relevant, correlations between mood and various elements could be made. Due to the results of the study, the need to further isolate a variable and correlate with mood was unnecessary. A mean of 3.85 indicated that the sample's overall mood was neither extraordinarily high nor low, providing reasonable assurance that the shoppers' perceptions of the store were not notably impacted by the moods they experienced at the time of the study.

### **Location**

Location was an element that could not undergo any physical alterations. However, by including this component on the survey, the owner was provided with a quantitative assessment of how her customers perceive the store's location. This information is very helpful to a retail business owner. Although a majority of the respondents evaluated the location as good, eleven specified it was neutral and one even felt it was bad. Another six respondents reported the location was very good resulting in a range of opinions. This may imply that the location is currently acceptable, but could possibly work better if moved elsewhere. Relocation would only be a consideration if the owner felt that the potential of higher profits outweighs the cost of moving. This is an extensive examination, requiring awareness of economic growth patterns and access to future local development projects.

## **Product Variety**

The merchandise, which was unchanged during the renovation process, was another non-design element that customers were asked to critique. A mean of 4.27 implied that, in general, the sample was pleased with the product offerings currently in the shop. Alternatively, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not the merchandise rating was based solely on the product or if the new display techniques and/or the modified store environment affected the shoppers' perceptions.

## **Customer Service**

Overall the response to customer service was very positive. Over 87% of respondents rated it as very good. This result implies that the majority of customers felt that customer service was above expected; yet in business there is always room for improvement. The owner may elect to administer another survey that asks open-ended questions pertaining to 'how' the shop can improve customer service and 'what' specialized assistance is desired by the customer base.

## **Evaluation of Extraneous Variables**

The evaluation of two variables that contributed little to the study itself, but offered valuable insight to the apparel industry, as well as the business owner were 1) the propensity to purchase environmentally sensitive clothing, and 2) the likelihood of buying more when products are discounted. Opinions regarding the former were non-extreme with a near even breakdown across neutral, agree, and strongly agree. It is realistic to suppose that awareness of these types of product offerings was minimal at the time of the study, however as the clothing industry continues to educate consumers on the growing concern of environmentally responsible manufacturing and design, this overall evaluation is likely to change. Recently, and specifically in the last year, there has been a major shift in the efforts made by designers and manufacturers to encourage vertically integrated earth-friendly practices. Organic cotton (pesticide free), the

use of bamboo fibers and abaca plants, and non-toxic vegetable dyes are all examples of eco-safe apparel components being sold in the market today.

The results of whether shoppers are prone to buying more when products are discounted were interesting. Although most respondents agreed that they buy more volume when items are discounted, several did not. In fact, five disagreed, giving reason to believe these shoppers buy what they like regardless of price. It may be advantageous to call this type of customer when new merchandise arrives, while those that prefer discounted items can be notified when sales occur. Understanding these customer characteristics may improve profits, as well as enhance overall customer service perceptions.

### **Demographics**

Nearly 70% of the sample was between the ages of 18–22, while the remaining 30% was split almost evenly among those aged 23–30 and 31–40. Leisurely intent was the most commonly reported reason for shopping, possibly indicating that these individuals are likely to shop at stores that offer a pleasurable environment and/or a unique experience. Additionally, most of the participants had heard of the boutique through a friend or relative. The sample also chose the period between 2–4pm as the most preferred time of day to shop.

After the customer loyalty composite was compared against the participants' mean demographical characteristics, it was found that those within the age bracket of 31–40 and those whom shop between 2–4pm tended to be the most loyal. Interestingly, the ANOVA analysis found 'special occasion' to be the favored shopping intention amongst the most loyal customers, which differs from the sample majority who chose 'leisure' as the most popular reason for shopping.

The statistical analyses revealed interesting results, but could certainly be expanded upon in future research studies. Possibilities for augmenting the information discovered here are

discussed in the following chapter, as is the consideration of specific modifications in order to create a more statistically sound research project.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

In America and around the world, the specialty apparel industry is expanding at a rapidly growing rate (Moore & Fairchild, 2003). Each month, dozens of high-fashion boutiques are popping-up making it increasingly important for shop owners to uniquely differentiate themselves (Moore & Fairchild, 2003). According to several retail analysts and researchers (Moore & Fairchild, 2003; Paulins & Geistfield, 2003), store image and other marketing competencies of a small business are integral to achieving customer loyalty and profitability. In the fashion marketplace where product life cycles are short and aesthetics are celebrated, it is often store image that helps frame shoppers' opinions of the overall shop characterization (i.e., the quality of merchandise, the type of people that shop there, etc.). In fact, some argue (Martineau, 1958; Arons, 1961; Kunkel & Berry, 1968) that store image may be the single most important way for retailers to distinguish themselves from others. It involves several complex layers with the physical aspect consisting of branding, packaging, and store design. Most retail environment studies have focused on the physical components of large department stores or national specialty stores with little focus on independently owned boutiques. This study is an example of consumers' evaluations of specific design elements and various marketing techniques within an independently owned women's apparel boutique.

### **Findings**

The study found adequate indication that customers regarded the identified store features as pleasurable and business appropriate; however, it did not produce definitive results about the relationship between specific elements and their effect on customer satisfaction of total store environment. All of the physical design elements 1) lighting, 2) color scheme, 3) atmospheric conditions, and 4) overall style/design, and all of the non-design elements 1) mood of shopper, 2)

location of store, 3) merchandise variety, and 4) service quality were shown to have highly favorable ratings amongst the pooled clientele. All of the respondents were female with the majority falling between the ages of 18–22. The highest number of participants preferred to shop between 2–4pm and were made aware of the shop predominantly through word-of-mouth. These women reported shopping mostly for leisurely purposes and were not strongly influenced by sales and markdowns. Results of the study show that an eclectically stylized fashion boutique, which encompassed both urban and feminine features was appropriate for an apparel boutique targeting trendy, college-aged/young professional women. An open layout that promoted social interaction by incorporating home-like furniture arrangements was also well received. The use of a mostly neutral color scheme with soft green and gold accents was positively evaluated, as was the utilization of the perimeter wall space for a majority of the merchandise display techniques.

The ANOVA analysis found that the most loyal of customers reported shopping between 2–4pm and fell between the ages of 31–40 years. It was also suggested that among the most loyal were those who shop predominantly for special occasions, meaning they select this boutique first when they are looking to buy something for an important occasion. Despite these findings, customer demographics of shopping intentions, preferred time of day to shop, social influences, and age were not shown to share a statistically significant relationship with overall customer loyalty, due to the limited sample size.

### **Limitations of the Research**

When understanding the results of the study, it is important to consider the limitations. First, the sample population was gathered in a non-random fashion from the boutique's existing customer base resulting in a positive response bias. These customers had previously patronized the store and by revisiting the shop, it is postulated that these individuals already hold favorable

tendencies towards the store environment. The purposive sampling technique generated a repository of unique perspectives from actual users of the space; however, the use of this type of sampling method greatly reduces generalization beyond that of the examined population.

A second limitation is the actual number of respondents that participated in the study. Typically a sample size of forty participants would be sufficient for examining a specialized niche market, but, because several analyses across groups were performed, a larger diversity among the various classifications was needed.

A third limitation was the use of an after-only study design. The observational procedure took place prior to the shop's December redesign and involved shoppers who were unaware they were being studied. This segment of the study then informed the experimental portion of the study, where respondents completed store evaluation surveys two months after the redesign. While the design features of the newly designed store were positively evaluated, it is difficult to measure the redesign success, due to the lack of documented assessments of the original space. Although the goal of this study was to determine if shop customers positively received the new design, another study of interest may be to test customer perception of improvement by performing a before-and-after study. In this case, it may be helpful to use the same sample group for both experimental studies.

Lastly, had a pre-test of the questionnaire been conducted prior to executing the study, it is possible that additional questions may have been incorporated, while others may have been removed. For example, mood had no strong relevancy to other aspects of the questionnaire; thus, it could have been eliminated. On the other hand, an open-ended question that asked customers what they like or dislike about the store may have resulted in a stronger statistical analysis.

### **Implications for Research Findings**

Interior designers are consistently charged with creating spaces that are both aesthetically appealing, yet intuitively functional. In fashion retail spaces, other than merchandise, the physical design elements ultimately dictate a certain style making it important to understand the feelings customers have towards specific design features. It may also be of significance for designers to be aware of how customer characteristics, such as age and reasons for shopping, influence attitudes towards design features. This is especially beneficial when retailers are targeting a specific market because designers can then tailor the store design to reflect those preferences of the intended customer base.

Although specific to one particular apparel boutique, these findings may be useful to other designers and retailers when determining what attributes effect consumers' overall store evaluations. Due to the nature of the experimental method, particular design features were selected and then actually implemented in a real environment, lending credibility to the accuracy of the evaluations. In essence, participants were truly experiencing an interaction with the environment, rather than just presuming what their reactions might be through photos or mock-ups. Additionally, the results may offer potential solutions for designers to consider when designing high-fashion retail environments.

Comfort level with the store environment plays an influential role on shoppers' length of stay, as well as their likelihood to return. As previous research has shown (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982), the more time shoppers spend in a given store, the more likely they are to make a purchase. As a result, designers have the potential of significantly increasing a business's bottom line if they incorporate design techniques that hold patrons in a shop for an extended period of time. The design knowledge and business information presented here offers both retailers and designers a mixed use of solutions to consider when developing women's apparel



boutiques. Understanding how these solutions evoke positive feelings within this specific domain could help to cultivate similar responses if repeated in other related environments.

### **Directions for Further Research**

The phenomenological concept of store image is continuously researched along with the effects of store environment on customer satisfaction and buying intentions. Much of this research has focused on large department stores and nationwide clothing chains with few of the studies involving specialty shops. This study is an example of one particular clothing boutique's store environment, suggesting a foundation in which to further supplement with other specialty shop research. It is recommended that comparable studies examine what store features and/or design elements have the most impact on customer satisfaction. In turn, this information could help guide conservative business owners as to which improvements are financially worthwhile to undertake, while also proposing alternative solutions to the retail and design communities. Researchers might also consider performing a similar case study to this one, but instead, structure it as a before-and-after study design.

### **Importance of Design Elements**

It would be instrumental to the retail industry and design professionals to further research the level of importance boutique customers place on particular store design elements. In this study, it was revealed how customers reacted to each identified feature as it had been implemented in the boutique, while previous studies mainly involved large department stores whose shoppers typically hold different store expectations than boutique shoppers. It may be useful to understand how shoppers rank these various features and why. For example, color scheme may play a large importance for one particular group; thus, it may make sense to investigate what color properties are most appealing to that audience and of those colors, which generate(s) a style that supports the desired store image.

Another study may find that customers at a specific store classify style as the most important design feature. This might be approached in different ways, two of which are 1) to develop a new measure for testing this type of procedure; or 2) to leverage existing preference rating methods to use in conjunction with simulation or mock-up visuals for determining which style is most preferred by the intended audience. Use of these visualization techniques will allow the researcher to provide the sample with more illustrative options without having to physically construct anything. By testing a specific feature's various alternatives, it is possible that a broader range of variation may occur and, as a result, produce more statistically significant results.

Likewise, it may be interesting to investigate the ways in which small stores space plan or demarcate their space. Perfumeries, apothecaries, social areas, and 'salons' are all becoming desirable constituents located within independently owned boutiques. In essence, they are 'boutiques within boutiques'. However, with most of these shops being relatively small (most under 1200sq/ft), it would be interesting to examine if boutiques are actually embracing this departmentalized concept, and if so, what techniques are they utilizing for layouts and general spatial considerations. What other solutions can interior designers propose to retailers? Can designers discover new solutions using other research practices? If so, what are these forms of research and how can they contribute to the greater body of design knowledge.

### **Customer Preference of Boutique Design**

Due to the ever-changing industry that fashion intuitively represents, apparel retailers must often consider updating their store's physical environment in order to portray a current image of status and style. By testing customer perception of space improvement variations, designers and researchers will be able to build a repository of cases that can be referenced if boutique retailers desire multiple store environment examples. Pursuing this study type will also generate multiple

prototype examples, enabling designers to explore various scenarios in true environments. Are physical environment improvements encouraging for existing shoppers? How willingly does this audience embrace change? Do they interpret the modifications as positive or negative? How frequently should a cutting-edge retailer alter interior environments? Is it more frequent than classic stores, such as Talbots or Brooks Brothers?

Further, it may be beneficial to investigate if boutique customers really prefer a store design that reflects the merchandise style. Does mirroring the two styles actually improve store profitability? Will potential customers then typecast the store and elect to shop elsewhere if an extreme style is dictated? Having answers to many of these questions could enhance designer credibility amongst the retail industry and, even possibly, expand the creative design possibilities for retail environments.

### **Conclusions**

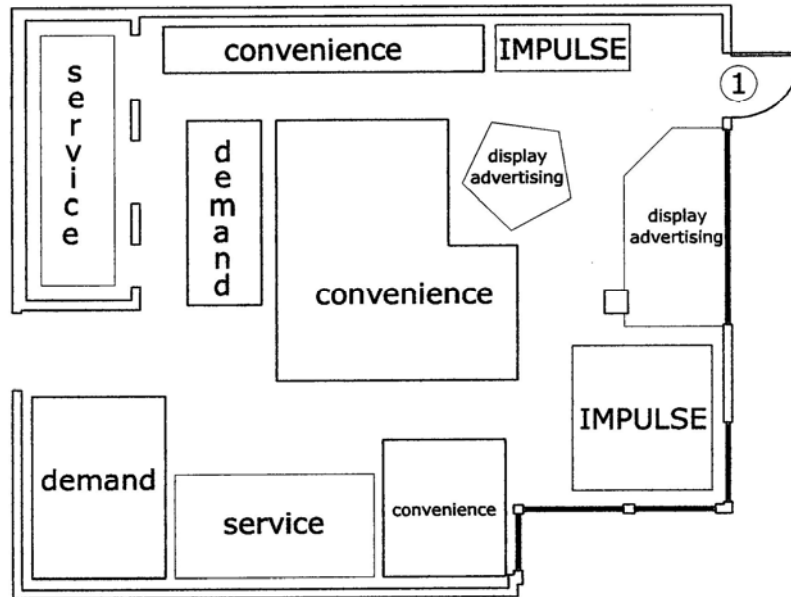
By definition, interior designers strive to enhance the human component of built environments. These professionals study how physical surroundings affect the human experience; therefore, presenting designers with supplementary solutions for retail environments would augment a sector of this body of knowledge. Shown here, are positive customer reactions to the identified retail design elements of atmosphere, style, color, and lighting in an upscale women's apparel boutique. Additionally, it is revealed how customers evaluated a boutique's business components of store location, product variety, and services. These findings reveal that the implemented design selections were not only well received by existing shoppers, but also considered pleasurable and desirable. Shoppers' moods were also tested to see if it had an effect on their evaluations; however, in this case, mood was not seen to have a noteworthy impact. The results also uncovered the basic demographics of the boutique's existing clientele, as well as what age group is the most loyal and when these customers prefer to shop. It is postulated that

future boutique design research would considerably impact this growing market segment of independently owned apparel specialty shops.

## APPENDIX A FOOTPRINT OF ORIGINAL BOUTIQUE LAYOUT

Below is the form used for the behavior mapping exercise. The footprint is of the boutique's existing floor plan. It is not to scale, however it is proportionately representative of the spatial relations and product placement methodologies.

Please document the behavior of customers by placing a number at each of their destinations as they move through the store (see example 1 below - entry). Record any verbal interaction with sales personnel or gestural cues made while looking at merchandise. Use back of paper for additional notes, if needed.



TIME	NOTES:
_____	① _____
_____	② _____
_____	③ _____
_____	④ _____
_____	⑤ _____
_____	⑥ _____
_____	⑦ _____
_____	⑧ _____
_____	⑨ _____
_____	⑩ _____

Did they buy? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, purchase amount? \_\_\_\_\_ # of items? \_\_\_\_\_

BM.1

## APPENDIX B PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE EXISTING BOUTIQUE'S INTERIOR ENVIRONMENT

The following are photographs of the experimental boutique's pre-existing style, layout, and other design features.



Figure B-1. Existing Store Entry Right Side



Figure B-2. Existing Store Entry Left Side



Figure B-3. Existing Store Cash Wrap



Figure B-4. Existing Store Line-of-Sight



Figure B-5. Existing Store Denim Area



Figure B-6. Existing Store Jewelry Display





Figure B-7. Existing Store Displays



Figure B-8. Existing Store-Displays

## APPENDIX C

### PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE BOUTIQUE'S DESIGN MODIFICATIONS

The following are photographs of the boutique after the design modifications had been implemented.



Figure C-1. Modified Store, Entry Right Side



Figure C-2. Modified Store, Entry Left Side



Figure C-3. Modified Store, Cash Wrap



Figure C-4. Modified Store, Line-of-Sight





Figure C-5. Modified Store, Denim Area



Figure C-6. Modified Store, Jewelry Display



Figure C-7. Modified Store, Displays



Figure C-8. Modified Store, Displays



Figure C-9. Modified Store, Alternate View



Figure C-10. Modified Store, Alternate View

# APPENDIX D DATA COLLECTION TOOL

## The Little Black Dress Customer Satisfaction Survey

D \_\_\_\_\_ #  
T \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating in this survey. By completing this questionnaire you will help us to continue to meet our beloved customer needs and wants! Please do not include your name as to keep all responses anonymous. Once you are finished completing the survey, please drop it in the designated box and receive your 20% discount coupon from a salesperson.  
Happy Shopping!

<b>1. Why do you shop?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure <input type="checkbox"/> Special occasion <input type="checkbox"/> Having a sale <input type="checkbox"/> General clothing needs <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ (please describe)	<b>2. What time of day do you most prefer to shop?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 10am-12pm <input type="checkbox"/> 12pm-2pm <input type="checkbox"/> 2pm-4pm <input type="checkbox"/> 4pm-6pm <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
<b>3. How did you hear of The Little Black Dress?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Friend/Relative <input type="checkbox"/> Gainesville Sun <input type="checkbox"/> Radio advertisement <input type="checkbox"/> Magazine _____ (please describe) <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ (please describe)	<b>4. What is your age?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 – please specify _____ <input type="checkbox"/> 18-22 <input type="checkbox"/> 23-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 <input type="checkbox"/> Over 40

Please indicate the extent of your attitude by placing a tick in the appropriate column.

	Very Bad	Bad	Neutral	Good	Very Good
Today, I describe my mood as:					
Location of store is:					
Store atmosphere is:					
The design of the store is:					
The colors in the store are:					
The lighting in the shopping area of the store is:					
The lighting in the fitting rooms is:					
The variety of product is:					
Customer service quality is:					

Please indicate your extent of agreement with the following statements by circling the number that best describes your feelings.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with my shopping experience.	1	2	3	4	5
I would purchase environmentally sensitive clothing.	1	2	3	4	5
I shop frequently at The Little Black Dress.	1	2	3	4	5
I buy more when products are discounted.	1	2	3	4	5
I recommend The Little Black Dress to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5

Q.1

## APPENDIX E

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

#### Informed Consent

**Protocol Title:** Preferred lighting elements for establishing a positive mood in clientele shopping within a trendy, fashion boutique environment.

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

#### Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of the study is to determine what store design and operational attributes, specifically lighting, are preferred in order to create a positive mood for clientele shopping in a trendy, fashion retail setting.

#### What you will need to do in the study:

If you agree to participate, you will be given a questionnaire that asks eighteen questions. Please check only one answer for each question. The first portion of the questionnaire contains basic demographic information. The second portion asks you to rate ten different elements relating to your opinion of The Little Black Dress' store design and operational attributes. There is space provided on the questionnaire to record your results.

#### Time required:

5-10 minutes

#### Risks and benefits:

This study is considered to have no more than minimal risk to participants. Potential benefits of the study include customer-informed store improvements for The Little Black Dress. Additionally, this study will help designers and store planners provide customers a more enjoyable shopping experience through evidence-based design solutions.

#### Compensation:

You will receive a 5% discount coupon that can be redeemed in the month in which the coupon was issued. The discount will be applied to your total purchase. Please note this coupon cannot be combined with any other offers or promotions.

#### Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned code numbers as seen in the upper right portion of the survey. These code numbers are for tracking times and dates only. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the coded list will be destroyed.

APPROVED BY  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board (IRB 02)  
Protocol# 2005-11-1045  
For Use Through 11-21-06



**Voluntary participation:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

**Right to withdraw from the study:**

You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

**Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:**

Lori Anderson, Graduate Student, Department of Interior Design, 313 ARCH, Phone: (352) 262-6486

Dr. Debra D. Harris, College of Design, Construction, and Planning, 342 ARCH, Office: (352) 392-0252 ext.457. [debraharris@dcp.ufl.edu](mailto:debraharris@dcp.ufl.edu) Fax: (352) 392-7266

**Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:**

UFIRB Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; Office: (352) 392-0433.

**Agreement:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Legal Guardian** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Needed only if participant is under 18.)

**Principal Investigator:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED BY  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board (IRB 02)  
Protocol# 2005-4-1045  
For Use Through 11-21-06

APPENDIX F  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD



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**Institutional Review Board**

98A Psychology Bldg.  
PO Box 112250  
Gainesville, FL 32611-2250  
Phone: (352) 392-0433  
Fax: (352) 392-9234  
E-mail: [irb2@ufl.edu](mailto:irb2@ufl.edu)  
<http://irb.ufl.edu/irb02>

DATE: November 30, 2005

TO: Lori Anderson  
313 Arch  
Campus

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD, Chair *ISF/TF*  
University of Florida  
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: **Approval of Protocol #2005-U-1045**

TITLE: Preferred lighting elements for establishing a positive mood in clientele shopping within a trendy, fashion boutique environment

SPONSOR: Unfunded

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I am pleased to advise you that the University of Florida Institutional Review Board has recommended approval of this protocol. Based on its review, the UFIRB determined that this research presents no more than minimal risk to participants. Given your protocol, it is essential that you obtain signed documentation of informed consent from each participant. Enclosed is the dated, IRB-approved informed consent to be used when recruiting participants for the research.

It is essential that each of your participants sign a copy of your approved informed consent that bears the IRB stamp and expiration date.

If you wish to make any changes to this protocol, including the need to increase the number of participants authorized, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the Board can assess their impact on your protocol. In addition, you must report to the Board any unexpected complications that affect your participants.

If you have not completed this protocol by November 21, 2006, please telephone our office (392-0433), and we will discuss the renewal process with you. It is important that you keep your Department Chair informed about the status of this research protocol.

ISF:dl/tf

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In March of 1977, Lauren was born in Chicago, Illinois. As the second daughter of Gary and Susan Anderson, she was often known for talking excessively, taking risks, and being creative. Throughout her adolescent years, Lauren frequently moved around, having taken up residencies in Georgia, Michigan, and California, until she finally graduated from Lake Mary High School in Orlando, Florida.

After receiving a fully paid scholarship, Lauren attended the University of Florida, where she pursued a Bachelor of Science in business administration. While attending undergraduate college and working part-time at a restaurant, the marketing major became involved in community activities and held several sorority leadership positions. Following graduation in May of 1999, Lauren went to Boston to pursue a Field Marketing position for a Software Development firm. After two years of extensive travel and extended work hours, Lauren's creative side reemerged and she began taking night classes at the New England School of Art and Design.

Before returning to University of Florida to pursue a Master of Interior Design, Lauren took a quick hiatus to San Francisco, where she managed a friend's contemporary women's boutique and explored the beautiful west coast. Having worked in retail since 16 years of age, Lauren had a strong interest in fashion and was beguiled by the phenomenological concept of store image. She was particularly interested in how store environment impacts the consumer. Throughout attending the Interior Design graduate program, Lauren worked at an upscale women's apparel boutique, which ultimately was the impetus for this topic of study.

Today, Lauren owns and operates her own contemporary women's boutique in Tampa, Florida, where she has successfully implemented several of the marketing practices and design recommendations mentioned in this study.