No, I’m not shopping for my girlfriend!

— A Millennial Perspective on Gender in Fashion Retail

Thesis for Master, 30 ECTS
Textile Management
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Thesis number #17
Abstract

The idea of this thesis is to achieve deeper understanding of how gender is materialised in the retail environments of brands challenging the traditional division between male and female especially in their marketing and style direction. Furthermore, the research aims to give deeper understanding on how the gendered shop environments are understood by a sample of Millennial consumers and how the consumers reflect on gender in these settings.

Using varying data collection methods from in-store observations to go-along interviews with participants chosen with purposive sampling technique, the thesis uses qualitative method as a research tool and further analyses the data upon framework of servicescape theory.

Using constructivist grounded theory as main analysis method, the findings suggest that there are significant differences between merchandising womenswear and menswear assortments. The research also indicates that among Millennial consumers there is clear interest and market potential towards the assortment of opposite gender, and the consumers also recognise the gendered differences in the materialised retail environments.

Keywords: Fashion retail, cross-dressing, womenswear, menswear, go-along, servicescape
Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to send my biggest thanks for my thesis supervisor, researcher Maria Fuentes for all the help and inspirational feedback along the way. Without your outstanding support this thesis would not be in the state as it currently is.

Also I would like to thank my friends and thesis-coherents Aneta Machova and Anni Alentola for co-experiencing the process with me and reminding me that it’s gonna be fine. You are the best and I am proud of you.

Further, I want to thank my research participants for the valuable input on my research as well as my family and all my amazing friends in Finland, Sweden and everywhere regardless the geographical location. Great that you exist.
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1 Introduction

*This chapter introduces the reader to gender-fluid fashion, discusses about the problem and provides an insight of the phenomenon of this thesis.*

Perhaps no other tangible item can suggest social status, identity and gender as a piece of clothing. However, the relationship an individual has with clothing is very personal, and as Entwistle (2000) points out, a piece of clothing is nothing before an individual wears it and takes it as part of their “embodied selves”.

Oversized silhouettes, unisex and relatively androgynous garments have been growingly trending in fashion for several years. Fashion brands such as Vetements are combining their womenswear and menswear lines, some brands like Gucci are showing them on the same runways and heavily communicating the freedom of choice in their marketing. Musician Bobby Gillespie modeled half of Acne Studio’s AW17 womenswear resort collection (Acne Studios, 2017) and Swedish clothing brand HOPE has recently started marking all of their garments with both male and female sizing (HOPE, 2017).

According to a study made in the US, half of consumer group of Millennials believed that gender exists in a spectrum instead of only as categories of male and female (Fusion, 2015). Furthermore, the study suggested Millennials as the “most tolerated consumer group to date” (Fusion, 2015).

People are communicating and constructing their identities with more freedom than ever before and the traditional consumption patterns divided into demographic categories of age, gender or family status are going through groundbreaking changes. Freedom of self, especially in the Western countries, seems to be constantly growing and cannot be considered as a fad but phenomenon that is here to stay.

But can the blurred lines of female and male categories and freedom of choice be seen in fashion retail, the place where consumer and the products actually meet? When entering to many retailers known of their gender-fluid marketing and brand communication, the styles are still divided into womenswear and menswear assortments, a way that seems to be in conflict with the overall brand communication. Currently the brand communication on websites, photo shoots and marketing campaigns differs from retail departments where the styles are still strictly separated into menswear and womenswear assortments. Packaging communicates the gender and helps to choose (McIntyre, 2013) and presumably the store design assist consumers in a similar manner helping them to choose the products and perhaps even guide them through the retail environment.

The main weight of this thesis is to study how a group of Millennial consumers understand gendered division in selected fashion retail stores in Sweden. The thesis studies whether the consumers feel guided or controlled due the gendered selection in the stores and what kind of reflections it wakes in the group of Millennial participants chosen to this study.
As consumers and markets are suggested to be studied together as a dialogue of interaction (Kusenbach, 2003), the thesis uses go-along interviews made in retail stores of Acne Studios, COS, HOPE and Weekday in Gothenburg. Moreover, using qualitative research method the thesis includes and discusses about in-store observations made by the researcher as well as compares the made observations with digital brand communication of the selected brands.

Is there strong division, how is it understood, does it limit the selection in the eyes of a consumers and what kind of an impact it has to the consumer experience? This is what this thesis is all about.
2 Aim, purpose and research questions

This chapter introduces the reader to the aim, purpose and research questions of the thesis.

The aim of this thesis is to gain deeper understanding of how gender is materialised in the retail environments of brands challenging the traditional gender division in their marketing and style direction. Furthermore, the research aims to gain deeper understanding on how the retail environments are understood by Millennial consumers being target customers of the brands selected to the study and how the consumers reflect on gender in these settings. With the gained knowledge, the purpose of the research is to provide implications and discussions to the fashion management sector.

The specific areas of interest in this thesis are how the participants reflect on the shop floor being divided into menswear and womenswear assortments and how the participants reflect to the differences in the menswear and womenswear assortments, their merchandising as well as to the atmospheric cues of the retail settings. Moreover, the research gains understanding from informants personal reflections and experiences.

The brands selected to the study are Swedish fashion brands of different price points known of their relatively oversized silhouettes and thus approachable design direction for gender-fluid shopping and cross-dressing.

The thesis aims to answer to following research questions:

Q1: How is gender materialised in retail store setting?

Q2: How do Millennial consumers reflect and understand the gendered retail store settings?

Q3: In managerial perspective, what problems and possibilities gendered retail settings have?
3 Previous research on gender and retail

This chapter introduces the reader to the previous research that has been made about fashion, gender, atmospheric elements in the retail stores as well as places and their relation to an individual’s identity-construction. The chapter also discusses of the modern consumer.

Studies about fashion and retailing have provided a great deal of knowledge about consumers and their behaviour in the stores. Thus, the vast majority of retail research has been oriented towards studies about consumer behaviour, branding and retail marketing (Fuentes and Hagberg, 2013) as well as pricing, promotion, globalisation and branding (Grewal and Levy, 2007). Moreover, the consumer behaviour studies have been focusing on what kind of impact the atmospherics of the retail environments, such as music and light (Turley and Milliman, 2000, Babin et al., 2003, Baker et al., 2002, cited in Fuentes and Hagberg, 2013), have on the consumer behaviour and consumption.

As Fuentes and Hagberg (2013) discuss, the main theories used in consumer behaviour research build upon various psychological, marketing and microeconomic theories. The methods for consumer behaviour, consumption and retailing research primarily use quantitative methods such as variance and regression analysis. However, qualitative methods in studying such topics have been rarely used (Brown and Dant, 2008).

It has been widely acknowledged that social and cultural factors are to have an important impact on consumption methods performed by consumers (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Crewe, 2000, 2003; Goss, 2004, 2006 cited in Fuentes and Hagberg, 2013). Further, Fuentes and Hegberg argue that many retail scholars especially in the past have considered a consumer as a deliberate and sovereign actor although the research on social and cultural themes has proved differently. The social and cultural studies have indicated retail capacities as performative places for portraying, replicating and reproducing for example identities, gender (Clarke, 2000; Pettinger, 2005; cited in Fuentes and Hagberg, 2003), ideologies (Arnould et al., 2001) as well as various meanings (Jackson and Holbrook, 1995). Thus, the retail spaces can be considered as tools for performing one’s identities instead of being only psychological and technical locations. At the end of their paper, Fuentes and Hagberg (2013) draw a conclusion according to which retailing and society cannot be considered as two separate bodies.

3.1 Shopping as a tool of identity-construction

As retailing and shopping can be considered as social and cultural phenomenon (Fuentes and Hagberg, 2013), one dimension of shopping is interlinked with constructing identity. As a piece of clothing truly becomes a thing only after being worn, shopping is a way of executing gender roles (Pettinger, 2005) and further it can be used in re-considering identities (Miller et al., 1998). Thus, the pieces sold in the retail stores have an important role on building and communicating one’s identity to others and retail spaces cannot be considered simply as places for companies’ consumer manipulation.
As discussed previously, retail spaces cannot be only considered as technological locations with psychological value. Instead, especially in socio-cultural research, it is valuable to understand that the locations and their practices are making efforts on transforming meaningful value to the products and services provided (Fuentes, 2011). Furthermore, an individual’s feeling of belonging with the occupied environment has been proven to be more important for them instead of what is actually sold and available in the store (Johnstone, 2012).

Thus, the retail spaces have an essential role in building and shaping consumers identities and worldviews (Fuentes and Hagberg, 2013) as well as beauty ideals and gender roles (Pettinger, 2005). Shopping can be seen as a tool of informing issues involved consumers ethnicity, gender orientation, sexual orientation and belonging to a group (Belk, 1999).

The role of a consumer is much more substantial than simply purchasing the assortment provided in-store. Instead, previous research indicates consumers as a middlemen in the meaning-transform between a product and an individual (Crewe, 2000). Furthermore, it is argued that retailing locations can be rearranged and re-contrived by consumers (Fuentes and Hagberg, 2013). Jackson and Holbrook (1995) again argue that retail spaces have a multitude of meanings, one of them leaning on relation between shopping and identity. Thus, the retail spaces are being defined in different ways between consumers.

3.2 Atmospheric cues vs. people and the place

Already Martineau (1958) pointed out that the shoppers themselves formulate the image of each store and brand by combining the functional qualities as well as the psychological attributes of the space. The surroundings and overall atmosphere of a retail store are unarguably important in making impressions, forming advantages as well as separating the very brand from the other competitors within the same field (Turley & Chebat, 2002).

These advantages can be considered crucial, as they are excellent ways of marketing and distinguishing the retail locations from others. Although most of the retail stores and their managers do not have the ability to use a multitude of differentiating in-store methods to make the location extremely unique, there are methods that can help retailers standing out from their competitors (Turley & Chebat, 2002). Such strategies can for example be maintaining and altering various atmospheric cues discussed later in this chapter.

When choosing a retailing strategy, the managers decide on a number of tactics related to merchandising and operating. In his paper, Lewison (1997) discusses and underlines three elements often related with retail strategies. These elements are choosing the desired retail format, targeting the format to previously defined consumer group and finally communicating these decisions in the retail setting in a competitive way that differentiates other retail brands of the same field.

As Turley & Chebat (2002) argue, another way of separating a brand and its retail store from the competitors is investing on differentiating the atmosphere and surroundings of the retail store from the competitors in the market. In their research, Turley and Milliman (2000) sepa-
rate the retail environment further into five different categories communicating the atmospheric cues of the chosen retail strategy and brand.

The first ‘exterior cue’ concentrates on the surroundings, such as parking availability and exterior windows, of the retail area. When entering the store, the second cue measures the intangible variables, lighting, music, colour and scents, forming and communicating the atmosphere in-store. The third cue looks into the layout and design variables such as locations of different categories, departments, fixtures, merchandise groups and cash registers. Furthermore, Turley and Chebat (2002) list point-of-purchase items and decorations such as signs, cards and interactive displays as fourth variables building up the retail atmosphere. The last atmospheric variable are human variables such as possible work uniforms and varying characteristics and demographics of the store personnel.

As stated by Holloway and Hubbard (2001, cited in Johnstone, 2012), people and place should not be studied separately, as the our geographical understanding makes the relationship between people and place purposeful. Thus, the relationship between people and place is fundamental subject place-based studies.

Also the social factors of a place can have positive or negative impact on the customer’s service experience (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003). Therefore retail managers and marketers need to consider a place as a social system as it is formed and identified by the individuals occupying and attaching meanings to it (Johnstone, 2012).

Moreover, a marketplace should be considered as crucial place not only for consumers to purchase items, but also as a space boosting social connections (Shields, 1992, cited in Johnstone, 2012). As individuals often identify themselves firstly being specific kind of persons, they also feel belonging to people who they identify as being similar with themselves based on certain characteristics and preferences (Johnstone, 2012).

### 3.3 Gendering and gender orientation in retail

Gendering is very distinct in retailing. According to Pettinger (2005), the gendering related to fashion retail encompasses a compound forms, whose main dimensions can be divided into three forms. These dimensions, discussed by Pettinger (2005) interweave around gendering of the the functions and duties in the retail work, the gendered construction and design of the work tasks and finally the gendered character of the retail environments.

Pettinger (2005) highlights “emotional labour” as example of gendering of the work tasks in retail service culture. Emotional labour means conveying of emotions desired and determined by a brand in the service situations (Morris & Feldman, 1996) and presumably is most often linked with positive emotions. As Cho et al (2013) argue, the positive and friendly emotions performed by the sales personnel towards the clientele are likely to be discerned and and identified by the customers. Often, being able to perform good emotional labour is generalised as a “female job” (Macdonald & Sarianni, 1996). Secondly, female and male employees are gendered into different activities and occupations in the retail service sector and finally the prod-
ucts sold in-store have been strongly gendered into womenswear and menswear categories (Pettinger, 2005).

As discussed by Pettinger (2005), the clothing sold in retail stores has been widely gendered at the point of use. The gendering of retail products thus has been applied into the selection of employees of the retail resulting female sales assistants often serving female customers buying womenswear. However, the constant coming and growing of unisex fashion has “complicated” the gendering of retail work for example by women serving men, men serving women and the service provided in unisex retail and unisex spaces (Pettinger, 2005). The context in which the gendered service is performed, in other words the consumption environment, thus implicates and also defines the gendered work performed in substantial spaces where the work is performed (Pettinger, 2005).

In the past, shopping was often generalised as “female activity”. Not only the shopping itself has been strongly gendered, so are many retail shops themselves. Especially in the past decades, the retail installations and environments were either strongly feminized or masculinized in order to communicate and connect the selection with the target customers (Pettinger, 2005). As Pettinger states, this method serves as an example on how gender was and still is coded and set up into the retail environments.

In their study Borges et al (2013) argue that gender orientation could be seen as segmentation variable related to store atmospheres discussed and defined previously by Turley and Milliman (2000). Moreover, the segmentation variable falls into the category of layout and design variables communicating the strategy of the store and brand in question. The research also points out that consumer’s understanding of a store can be and are affected by their gender orientation.

The research conducted by Borges et al suggests that by making variations to the atmospheric cues in the shopping surroundings the brands can impact on customer perceptions of their stores - in more or less favourable ways. The researchers stress that by modifying the atmospheric cues in-store, the brands can have an value-adding impact on the brand image as well as to the tangible products sold in-store. Furthermore, Woodruffe-Burton and Wakenshaw (2011) suggest that the interactive process between the customer and the store atmospherics can culminate into helping consumers to define and further communicate their identities as well as add value to the brand and its offer in the eyes of consumer. However, this process and its intensity depends on individuals and is still in need of further research.

Moreover, Borges et al (2013) stress that men and women mostly are put into same category in the already existing marketing researches. According to the authors, the environmental cues in retail are not commonly even considered as potential influencers on the store perceptions and interpretations. However, a research by Spangenberg et al (2006) looks into the similarities, differences and overall impacts of the environmental cues have on gender orientation. Like Borges et al suggest, gender orientation can be seen as potential modifier and influencer on the evaluation customers will have of the store atmosphere.
The authors suggest that gendering in retail could be taken further by considering a consumer not only based on their physical gender affiliation but also based on their personal gender orientation. With gender orientation the authors mean the gender a person orient themselves the most regardless their physical birth sex. By concentrating on gender orientation instead of gender affiliation the authors believe to achieve and moderate the value that is transferred from the environment into the products and further into the brand image as whole. Several researches (Locken & Ward, 1990, Bitner, 1990, cited in Borges et al., 2013) indicate that the cues in retail spaces can contribute to grouping and categorisation and acknowledgment. Moreover, the environmental cues may have an impact on the understanding and consumer experience that, again, further result by influencing the assumptions and beliefs. Borges et al. (2013) also discuss about the different orientations customers have when entering the store. Whether the customers are looking for offerings with either utilitarian or hedonic value that might lead to increased satisfaction and behaviour (Ryu et al., 2010). Whereas the utilitarian value of the store selection can be communicated for example via attributes such as pricing, convenience and merchandising, the hedonic value proposition usually consists of offering the unique experience with the help of “affective qualities” such as music, lighting, the store design and the behaviour of the staff (Borges et al., 2013). As Cardoso and Pinto (2010) point out, defining the mostly desired value helps retailers to adjust and customize the retail surroundings according to the needs of the target consumers. In other words, depending how is the target consumer defined by the brand, the retailers can adjust and modify the environments depending on the predicted shopping value a customer desires.

The atmospheric cues in retail settings have been proven to likely have an impact on hedonic retail experiences (Ballantine et al., 2010) and customers that are experiencing pleasant emotions while in retail settings have been evaluating the retail settings in general as well as the products available in-store (Borges et al., 2013). Retail settings have widely been very gendered and the selection tends to be divided strongly in male and female categories. However, the character of the contemporary era encourages individuals to orientate and express their gender with increased freedom. The differences between sex are growingly becoming less stereotyped and the gender blurring is more commonplace than ever before (Borges et al., 2013). Thus the research conducted by the authors suggests that differences in store atmospheres outcomes as behavioural differences within customers. The differences are depending on the customer orientation in question as well as how the consumers communicate with the retail atmosphere in question. Finally Borges et al (2013) suggest that understanding customer’s orientations is crucial for the retailers for them to reach the wanted results in the customer’s shopping behaviour.

3.4 Consumers challenging the dichotomies of consumption

The consumers have changed notably during the past decades. As the postmodern individuals rather "do their own thing" (Rosenau, 1991, cited in Aubert-Gamet, 1997), they are more likely to deny the dominant values or things that are considered as ‘normal’. Instead, in the postmodern consumer culture, the emerging "customizing consumer" takes elements of offerings here and there further crafting them according to their own symbolic and personal preferences
(Aubert-Gamet, 1997). Thus, in postmodernity the consumer has more power to customize their world and self-communication (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) than ever before.

In the cultural perspective, again, the postmodern consumer is considered as actively redefining the meanings of items they consume, as the meanings are not alone inscribed into the products in managerial level via design, marketing and advertising. In the end it is the consumer who puts the purchased products into practise and use their inventiveness in the meaning transformation into the products (Aubert-Gamet, 1997). In this way consumption can be considered as a form of production (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995).

The space, too, needs to be re-considered in the postmodern thought. As Aubert-Gamet (1997, p. 30) states, the space then becomes the ground of "dimensional mutation". Hence the space cannot be any longer considered as predictable or controlled, as meaning is constantly and interactively being transferred to things and goods in the postmodern consumer society.

3.5 Cross-dressing consumers

As Vencato (2013) argues, many people are interested of wearing styles that are in traditional sense categorised as clothing of “opposite sex”. The interest for cross-dressing can come from multiple of reasons, and usually the reason behind the interest relates to an individual’s self-esteem, self-image and their individual understanding on how they understand themselves as a person (Vencato, 2013).

Furthermore, Vencato (2013) points out that cross-dressers are often targets of heavy prejudices, such as being homosexuals or transgenders. This is, however, not the case. As Vencato (2013) points out, most of the cross-dressers identify themselves as straight. There are various variations and reasons behind cross-dressing, and such reasons can be everything from being transsexual to just being genuinely interested of the assortment of the “opposite sex” (Vencato, 2013).

In conclusion, Vencato (2013) argues that also cross-dressing is a way of identity construction and differentiating oneself from different groups and individuals especially in the modern Western society.
4 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the reader to the servicescape concept (Bitner, 1992), a relevant theory closely related to the research topic. This chapter also discusses and presents other theories that are been combined and used with servicescape concept.

As the research concentrates on gaining greater understanding on Millennial consumers reflections on how gender is materialized in the retail environments of Acne Studios, COS, HOPE and Weekday, Mary Jo Bitner’s typology of servicescape (1992) is be used to theorize the qualities of the retail setting and the relationship between the retail environment and the consumer.

In her framework Bitner (1992) suggests that the physical surroundings of the service setting have a complex influence of the behaviour of both customers and employees. The servicescape concept acknowledges and combines a compound mix of psychological and environmental aspects influencing the responses and actions of individuals.

With the servicescape concept Bitner (1992) means the context of service encounter that has either direct or indirect impact on consumer’s experience. Thus, by combining the experienced atmospherics and the actual purchase situations, the servicescape concept can be used as a tool for helping consumers to analyse and formulate their expectations and fulfillments of the service experience as whole (Morrison et al., 2011). Whether the consumer has either positive or negative experience, it has an impact on their emotional understanding of the environment and its level of service (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014) further impacting on consumer’s attitudes and decision-making (Morrison et al., 2011). Thus, if the experience of the physical service environment is poor, the consumer is likely not to return the retail environment in the future. Below, a number of aspects of the servicescapes having an impact on consumer’s experience are introduced.

4.1 The dimensions and experience of a servicescape

As Bitner (1992) suggests, a servicescape environment can be scrutinized by dividing it into three physical factors impacting on the experience a consumer has of it. These factors are ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality as well as symbols and artefacts (Bitner, 1992). This research particularly looks into the spatial layout and functionality of a service-space as well as to the signs, symbols and artefacts of the servicescape.

Successfully done, the spatial relationship of items within the service environment ease consumer’s use of the servicescape itself. The layout and spatial matters should be designed for particular target markets, and as Nilsson & Ballantyne (2014) suggest, the consistency and harmony of the servicescape and their different sections and departments are crucial. Furthermore, the servicescape concept concerns the product placement (Nilsson & Ballantyne,
2014) and at the most successful it influences the overall consumer experience positively and further results desired consumer behaviour (Bitner, 1992).

The signs, symbols and artefacts, again, provide consumers with cues about the design and offering of the service environment as whole (Bitner, 1992). As the symbols and signification are an important tool in the exchange of human interaction, they help clarifying the meaning of other people’s actions. The process known as symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969) has been used widely in behaviourist explanations that however do not grant analysis between response and stimulus.

It has been suggested that consumers tend to interact with objects as well as with each other by interpreting the actions of other consumers instead of only directly reacting to actions (Blumer 1969). Thus, Blumer (1969) suggests that consumer’s individual actions are not direct reactions to what other consumers are doing, but rather the actions are based on the attached meanings of the actions instead. In other words, other customers in the service environment can influence the behaviour of others, and thus the environment should be studied not only by the material conditions, but also by the number and mix of other customers in the space (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). As previous studies suggest, gender also influences on what kind of an impact the environment has on the consumer. According to the research made by Diep and Sweeney (2008) men value the practical aspects like product value performance more than female customers.

4.2 Self-identity and the experience of servicescape

“The physical setting, objects, and activities that occur in various environments may provide one with meanings about place, but they are not the property of place, rather ‘they are [the] property of human intentions and experiences (Relph, 1976, p. 47, cited in Johnstone, 2012)”.

With their above argument on servicescape, Relph (1976, cited in Johnstone, 2012) means that retail managers cannot assume having an absolute control of the space as an individual consumer always attaches and designates meanings to it. A consumer shapes place-identity to an environment in a similar way they shape their personal self-identity. As place-identity and self-identity go hand-in-hand, the self-identity is constantly defined by the physical and social environment a consumer currently occupies (Johnstone, 2012). Thus, also in the managerial level, retail environments need to be considered as social structures constantly being re-built and re-defined by consumers.

An individual’s self-concept is a combination of personal and social identities (Tajfel, 1978, cited in Johnstone, 2012). Furthermore one’s personal identity is impacted by their view of themselves in association to surrounding world and thus one’s self-concept is partially influenced by their social identity (Tajfel, 1978, cited in Johnstone, 2012). Understanding one’s place-identity simultaneously helps understanding the surroundings and how they are included into an individual’s self-concept. Understanding such things thus enables easier explanation of individual’s behaviour in the place (Krupat, 1983, cited in Johnstone, 2012).
4.3 Approach-avoidance behaviour and servicescape

According to environmental psychology, individuals tend to react to places with either approach or avoidance behaviour. Whereas approach behaviour refers to person’s willingness to stay in a certain place, the avoidance behaviour means an individual’s willingness to leave a certain place (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

There are number of reasons influencing the approach-avoidance behaviour of a consumer. As Johnstone’s (2012) graphic (Figure 1) points out, reasons for forming the patronage choices can for example be the need to be connected with other individuals in the space, the physical aspects of the space or the eagerness to browse the assortment offered. Moreover, an individual might be experiencing a role change of a kind, such as re-defining their gender identity, or combination of all of the aspects.

Especially Millennial consumers often try to choose retailers who organise their servicescape in a way that is consistent with their self-concepts (Grotts & Johnson, 2013). Therefore the way an individual identifies and recognises the servicescape will impact on their patronage decisions, such feeling desire to return to the servicescape in the future (Johnstone, 2012). If an individual feels like an insider (Relph, 1976, cited in Johnstone, 2012) in a place, they are likely to re-approach the place. And in contrast, feeling like an outsider (Relph, 1976, cited in Johnstone, 2012) in the servicescape, the customer might not want to patronise the place again (Johnstone, 2012).

Figure 1. The dimensions of place and its influence on patronage decisions (Johnstone, 2012).
Hence, the servicescape will formulate the way an individual identifies with the very place. In case of lack of coherence between the individual and the place, the individual is likely to find a space that represents them in more suitable manner or even attempts to modify the very place to increase the feeling of identification and connectedness (Relph, 1976, cited in Johnstone, 2012).

4.5 Servicescape and place attachment

Servicescape also helps formulating an emotional bond between the consumer and the retail site. Furthermore, the servicescape might distribute various of meanings and activities for groups, cultures and persons. As Johnstone (2012, p. 1403) states, positive place attachment can result one with “a sense of security, familiarity, control, and relaxation in one’s everyday life”. Place attachment can also channel and connect groups, such as families and subcultures (Johnstone, 2012) because people distinguish their belonging to a group based on various characteristics (Ellemers et al., 2002, cited in Johnstone, 2012). The groups sharing similar characteristics with an individual are identified as ingroups whereas groups with dissimilar characteristics are classified as outgroups (Tajfel, 1978).

As stated by Low and Altman (1992, cited in Johnstone, 2012), place attachment can support the development and upkeep of person’s individual or cultural identity. A place can, too, have an impact on individual’s experiences as it also is shaped by the people occupying it (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992, cited in Johnstone, 2012).

When an individual interacts with the environment, their identity is simultaneously being constructed or reconstructed. In managerial level, the symbolic cues need to be taken into notice, as they often come critical in the place attachment formation with new potential clientele. However, the symbolic cues need to carefully considered in order not to cause the loss of existing clientele by making them experience dis-identification and displacement.

In environmental psychology, several appropriation practices related to servicescapes are presented. Fischer (1992, cited in Aubert-Gamet, 1997) identifies three of them. In nesting behaviour consumers wish to feel at home and stay in certain area of the servicescape. Stamping behaviour, again, refers to consumer might be transferring personal factors into the place occupied thus marking, or stamping, the territory as their own. Finally in investigating behaviour, the consumer has physical control and mental ownership over the space and thus feels free to explore it as it was their private space (Fischer 1992, cited in Aubert-Gamet, 1997).

4.6 Servicescape and corporate image formation

As Nguyen (2006) argues, the products and their functions have a major impact on the corporate image of brands. Thus, advertising and marketing are often common tools for communicating such messages (Nguyen, 2006). Servicescape, often being the aesthetic factor in the formulation process of the corporate image, needs to be created with two types of needs in
mind (Nguyen, 2006). The first need is making the organisation to work as efficient as possible. The second, again, aims creating a servicescape that positively impacts the customer’s attitudes towards the company (Bateson, 1989; Bitner, 1992; Mattila and Wirtz, 2001; Tombs and McColl-Kennedy cited in Nguyen, 2006).

The servicescape experience should be designed to provide as pleasant atmosphere as possible for clients. The atmosphere should not only be time-efficient for example in the service speed but also in terms of fulfilling the marketing needs (Nguyen, 2006). The marketing needs and positive servicescape experience can be achieved by offering a feeling of familiarity and orientation influenced by spatial layout (Bitner, 1992). As Bitner argues, especially the familiarity in the servicescape setting means not to disorientate, confuse or negatively surprise the clients occupying similar settings.

Thus, the ideal is to achieve applicable amount of the sense of familiarity in the setting, and the management must be conscious of possible negative interpretations of new servicescapes. In order to ease client’s orientation in the environment, signs and artifacts may be used as a tool of communicating the “directions, places, rules of behaviour, and norms and expectations” (Nguyen, 2006, p. 240). As Bitner (1992) concludes, organisation might be able to achieve both external marketing goals as well as internal company goals with careful and creative management.

Reflecting the data to the theoretical framework of servicescape by Bitner (1992), the thesis aims gaining deeper understanding of the materialisation of gender in retail environments. Often influenced by visual cues and atmospherics of the retail environments, the thesis also aims to gain understanding on Millennial consumer’s reflections on such environments.
5 Method

This chapter presents the reader the principles of the design of the study and how it was conducted. Furthermore, it presents the sample group as well as the brands chosen to the study.

Since this thesis concentrates on gaining greater understanding on Millennial consumers understanding and reflections on how gender is materialised in the retail environments of brands challenging the traditional division between male and female (see section 5.4 for a description of the brands), qualitative research can be considered the most applicable method (Morse, 1991, cited in Creswell, 2013).

In order to better understand the phenomenon, gathering of data can be considered crucial in the research (Bernard, 2002). As the aim of the research is gaining knowledge on Millennial consumers understanding and reflections, purposive sampling technique took place. Also called as judgment sampling, the purposive sampling means the intentional selection of informants based on their qualities and not depending on underlying theories or fixed count of research participants (Tongko, 2007). In other words, the researcher using purposive sampling technique decides the character of data to be gathered and finds people capable and willing to contribute the research (Bernard, 2002). The nature of the collected data then is ethnographic data, whose strength is to provide “thick descriptions” of compound social situations (Agar, 1980, cited in Pettinger, 2006).

In this case, the thesis aims to gain deeper understanding on how an individual consumer reflects the shop floor of selected retail environments. Thus, the use of ethnographic data enabled the researcher to better understand the materialisation of gender in retail environments as well as collect personal reflections of a sample of Millennials in the environment. Among the most important elements of the data collection in ethnographic research and this research was to observe the shop floor as well as the participants engaging to it. Thus, the research uses a constructivist worldview, ethnographic design and observation of behaviour (Creswell, 2013). To add depth to the study, researcher’s personal observations of the retail store locations and their layouts in comparison with digital marketing materials being mainly the websites of the chosen brands were used.

A sample of four males and four females from varying socioeconomic backgrounds was interviewed, from fashion students to stylists, retail shop employees to workers of creative industries ranging in age from 21 years to 38 years (see section 7 for a description of participants). The commonplace characteristic when selecting the informants was their high level of interest in fashion either due to their employment, education or preoccupation as well as welcoming attitude towards open gender politics and cross-dressing for example by wearing and purchasing pieces from the assortments from opposite gender. Furthermore, all informants could be considered as target customers of the brands selected to the study. All participants belong to the group of Millennial consumers, also known as the “internet-generation”, born between 1977 and 1997 (Meister and Willyerd, 2010).

Millennial consumers have been described as optimistic, brand-loyal and environmentally conscious consumers putting thought on sustainability matters in their fashion consumption
Being brand-loyal, the Millennials have been acknowledged selecting brands in order to express themselves and their general life values (Noble et al., 2009) and communicate their status to the other members of their reference groups (Grotts and Widner Johnson, 2013). Furthermore, past research has suggested Millennials choice of brands being associated with the brand's personality and thus having an impact on the consumption and further to the embodiment through status consumption (Noble et al, 2009). Millennials have also been proven to have more money to use than any other young consumer group before (Bakewell and Mitchell, 2003, cited in Grotts and Widner Johnson, 2013).

5.1 Go-along as main research method

The main research method of the study was a natural go-along interview performed in the retail locations of Acne Studios, COS, HOPE and Weekday in the city of Gothenburg, Sweden. All participants were advised to lead the researcher through two retail locations simultaneously answering to the semi-structured and open-ended interview questions by the researcher. As the respondents were already familiar with the servicescapes of interest, the selection of natural go-along, a route determined by the interviewee, (Kusenbach, 2003) was chosen.

The conversation-like interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Depending on the size of each retail location, the interviews took approximately 20-40 minutes per store supplemented later with semi-structured and open-ended base interviews of personal consumption patterns and reflections to the topic. The base interviews took approximately 30 minutes each.

The go-along survey can be considered as an efficient method of studying the relationship a respondent has with the environment of interest as it can be seen as more systematic manner of hanging out with the informants (Kusenbach, 2003). As the informants are urged to make connections with the environment, they are less likely to try to provide the “correct” answer to the questions. The go-along has been considered as more intimate data collection method as the engagement of the place is happening exactly in situ (Solnit, 2001, cited in Kusenbach, 2003). Thus, go-along interviews, known as walking interviews, have suggested to develop richer data for the research and analysis (Kusenbach, 2003).

By requesting the informants to talk about and discuss the environment in question while currently staying in the environment, the informants sense and connect with it in an unique way (Ingold and Lee, 2008, cited in Kusenbach, 2003). The informants of go-alongs have been proven to be spatially focused, engage more with the features of the area as well as simultaneously provide access to their experiences and interpretations (Kusenbach, 2003). In this research the visual merchandising and atmospheric cues other environmental elements of the locations have been experienced and interpret in situ whilst being fulfilled by personal life experiences possibly linked to the locations.

As all of the research methods, also go-along survey method comes with certain limitations that need to be taken into notice. Such limitations are for example the possibility of excluding certain interview techniques and informants by walking. Moreover, the research questions
(Appendix 1) needed to be carefully considered and framed by the environment of interest (Kusenbach, 2003).

5.2 Constructivist grounded theory as main analysis method

Constructivist grounded theory is the main method for the analysis of data in this thesis. As constructivist grounded theory prioritises the phenomena of the research, it considers the data and the analysis as a combination of experiences and the relationship the individual has with them (Carmaz, 2014).

The theory mainly builds upon interpretive traditions and it aims to show how and why the sample form meanings and reactions in the situations of the research. Using constructivist approach in the data analysis, the researcher looks how the participants view the research situations (Charmaz, 2014).

As Charmaz (2014) states, researchers using constructivist theory might also look into the conversational analysis by Silverman (2004, cited in Charmaz, 2014). Thus, the constructive analysis means learning how, why and when the experience of interest is enclosed for example to people and relationships. As Charmaz (2014) suggests, the constructivist theory means being aware of the conditions the experiences and situations happen and what kind of impact they have to the group of informants.

The theorists and researchers using constructivist grounded theory consider the analysis and the data as social structures the reflect what their creation encompasses (Bryant, 2002, 2003; Charmaz, 2000; Hall & Callery, 2001; Thome, Jensen, Kearney, Noblit & Sandelowski, 2004 cited in Charmaz, 2014). Thus, the time, place and situation are the contexts the analysis especially looks into. Furthermore, the constructivist theory not only uses the participants reflections, but also reflects upon and arises from the researcher’s own interpretations (Charmaz, 2014).

5.3 Transferability of the research

As Moisander and Valtonen (2006) discuss, in context-specific cultural research such as this thesis the main goal is not to provide widely applicable theories. Instead, it is necessary to evaluate the transferability of the research.

According to Moisander and Valtonen (2006), transferability means whether or not the findings can be implemented and connected to different situations. As many cultural marketing researches, the thesis does not implicate broader theories. Instead, it connects personal experiences and understandings of the participants (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). Thus, this thesis provides empirical data that can be used in drawing conclusions with relatively similar situations in a process of natural generalisation (Stake, 1994, cited in Moisander and Valtonen, 2006).
In order to enhance the transferability, this thesis uses thick descriptions and close reading of the interviews in interpreting, analysis and conclusion making. As discussed by Agar (1980, cited in Pettinger, 2006), thick descriptions are the strength of ethnographic data and such descriptions help readers to “see the phenomena in their own experience and research” (Dyer and Wilkins, 1989, p. 617, cited in Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). Thus, with thick descriptions the readers can thus transfer the findings of the research larger cultural structures and practices to better understand analyse them (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006).

The knowledge acquired from the findings of this thesis can be transferred in other cultural researchers related for example to fashion retail, Millennial consumers, consumer behaviour and environmental retail studies.

5.4. The brands of the study

As discussed by Lewison (1997), retail managers define the consumer group they want to reach out and design the concept and brand communication according the target group's values and ideas. Thus, the four retailer brands selected in this research in a way or another have been understood as suitable for gender-fluid consumers and relatively easily approachable in terms of cross-dressing and shopping beyond gender categories at least in their marketing and brand communication. Moreover, the brands have varying price points from budget to designer (Diamond & Diamond, 2013).

The observations and go-along interviews have been performed in Acne Studios, COS, HOPE and Weekday retail locations in Gothenburg, Sweden during spring 2017. Four informants, two male and two female, have visited each of the locations with the researcher.

5.3.1 Acne Studios

Stockholm-based Acne Studios is a noted luxury fashion house with multidisciplinary approach (Acne Studios, 2017). The brand, founded in 1997, is a respected creator of women's and men's ready-to-wear collections as well as denim, shoes and accessories with the lead of founder and creative director Jonny Johansson. Whereas Acne Studios' womenswear line produces four collections annually, the menswear department produces only two collections per year. Being simple, well-tailored and slightly oversized, the menswear and womenswear collections are presented and marketed separately. Half of the styles of the brand's womenswear pre-fall 2017 campaign were modelled by musician Bobby Gillespie hence taking the brand one step towards more gender-fluid marketing.

The price point of Acne Studios falls into the designer category for ready-to-wear pieces. The average retail price for a jacket in the designer price point category is from $740 to $1500 and the pieces are usually found in high-level department stores (Diamond & Diamond, 2013).

5.3.2 COS
Established in 2007, COS offers “reinvented classics and wardrobe essentials” (COS, 2017), the brand states to create timeless pieces planned to last beyond the season. Thus, recognized from its minimalistic and relatively oversized menswear and womenswear assortment, the brand is reasoned to include in the study.

The retail stores of COS are placed in carefully planned modern locations seasoned with architectural design concept collaborating with Danish furniture and goods brand HAY. COS is a brand under Swedish H&M organisation.

The price point of COS falls into the category of upper moderate/lower bridge category, being more up-to-date from the normal moderate category where the price of a jacket is moderately priced from $100 to $120. This price point category is known of being extremely price-conscious with pricing appropriate to middle-income consumers (Diamond & Diamond, 2013).

5.3.3 HOPE

Swedish HOPE, established in 2002, is characterised with classic and original menswear and womenswear design. Describing itself as a “consistent and recognisable lifestyle concept” the brand is known of its raw and authentic style direction. The inspiration for the collection comes from men's workwear and vintage uniforms (HOPE, 2017) and since the SS17 collection the brand has marked all of their garments with both menswear and womenswear sizing. The reason for the renewed sizing is to challenge the separation of menswear and womenswear categories and to “inspire people to view fashion and clothing in a way that isn't limited by gender norm” (HOPE, 2017), although both of the collections are still divided on the website.

The price point of HOPE falls into the category of young designer, where the price of a jacket is priced from $400 to $600. The young designer price point is especially attractive to a status conscious and trendy consumer, and the pieces are usually found in both specialty stores, shop-in-shops as well as some high-end department stores (Diamond & Diamond, 2013).

5.3.4 Weekday

Founded in 2002, Swedish Weekday describes itself as a “modern and mindful fashion and denim brand offering current, international fashion influenced by Scandinavian style” (Weekday, 2017). The brand carries in-house brands as well as selected pieces from external designers such as Swedish designer Ann-Sofie Back. Weekday produces menswear and womenswear collections that are separated in the marketing although the style direction of Weekday can usually be described as gender-fluid, unisex and oversized. Also Weekday is a brand under the Swedish H&M organisation.

The price point of Weekday falls into upper budget or moderate category, where the price of the jacket is $150 at the maximum. Currently the most expensive jacket in Weekday's wom-
enswear category is $110. The price-conscious category often produces reproductions of high-end pieces with lesser quality materials (Diamond & Diamond, 2013).

5.4 The informants

In order to gather as reflective data as possible, the informants chosen to this thesis vary in age, background and nationality. However all of the four male and four female informants are involved in fashion in a way or another and thus are believed to provide thoughtful and reflective perspectives to the research.

During the base interview all informants were asked if they agree with the statement “Gender exists in a spectrum” used in US study (Fusion, 2015) for Millennial consumers. All informants agreed with the claim which suggests them to be tolerable towards more open gender politics. Furthermore all informants try to avoid over consumption and impulsive shopping when buying new fashion items.

5.4.1 Alva, 25 years

Slovakian Alva is a fashion management master graduate with business and economics background. She is currently based in Sweden and approximately purchases one new fashion item every month. Instead of buying trends, her fashion consumption is focused on buying staple elements and classical timeless pieces into her wardrobe. Alva tries to avoid impulsive shopping and buys approximately half of her pieces from e-commerce and half from physical retail stores spending approximately 70 euros on fashion each month.

Alva owns several menswear pieces and usually checks the menswear collection when she is shopping. Most often she purchases menswear shirts.

Alva's favourite brands are COS, Weekday, Max Mara and Vagabond but she also follows luxury retailers such as Acne Studios. During this research Alva visited at COS and Weekday retail locations in Gothenburg.

5.4.2 Cassie, 33 years

Swedish Cassie works as freelancer stylist, photographer and writer as well as sales assistant in a vintage store in Gothenburg. She prefers buying her clothes from vintage stores but also purchases seasonal items from budget retailers such as Zara and H&M. She prefers not to rush her decision when buying new items and tries to avoid impulsive shopping. Cassie buys most of her clothing from physical retail stores spending approximately 200 euros on fashion each month.

Cassie buys a lot of menswear and looks especially into oversized shirts. Her last menswear purchase was a vintage trench coat.
Cassie attends to Stockholm fashion week almost each season and her favourite brands are Scandinavian brands such as Ganni, Whyred and Acne Studios. During this research Cassie visited HOPE and Acne Studios retail locations in Gothenburg.

5.4.3 Karla, 21 years

Swedish Karla works in an outlet store of Swedish retailer Ted & Teresa mainly focusing on Scandinavian fashion. She likes to shop for fun, prefers buying second hand but also purchases items from H&M, vintage sportswear retailers as well as Comme des Garcons. During the past year Karla has decreased her consumption and tries to think about sustainability before purchasing.

Karla buys a lot of menswear and especially looks into menswear shirts and outerwear. Her last menswear purchase was Comme des Garcons menswear shirt.

Karla’s favourite brand is Comme des Garcons favourite retailer is Broadway & Sons in Gothenburg and she spends approximately 120 euros on fashion each month. During this research Karla visited COS and HOPE retail locations in Gothenburg.

5.4.4 Tessa, 23 years

Swedish Tessa is a creative project manager, freelance illustrator and social media strategist. She also works part-time in a retail store selling mainly Scandinavian fashion but prefers buying second hand and carefully considers her purchase decisions by selecting pieces that have as little environmental impact as possible. She spends time with shopping on e-commerce websites however seldom finishing the purchases and instead buys most of her fashion from second hand stores. Lately she has decreased her fashion consumption.

Tessa buys a lot of menswear and always checks the menswear department when shopping. Especially Tessa likes to purchase menswear sweatshirts from Weekday but seldom finds bottoms that fit her properly.

Tessa’s favourite brands are vintage retailers but browses e-commerce websites from Zara to Falling Pieces spending approximately 200 euros on fashion each month. During this research Tessa visited Weekday and Acne Studios retail locations in Gothenburg.

5.4.5 Milo, 38 years

Swedish Milo works as graphic designer and art director. He is extremely interested of fashion and spends a lot of time researching and following influencers and brands he likes. Milo prefers shopping in physical retail stores where he can engage with the fabrics and fit the
garments but growingly purchases especially accessories from e-commerce platforms. On average Milo purchases one new fashion item every week.

Milo owns several womenswear pieces such as jeans, shoes and accessories and shops womenswear also for his girlfriend. His most recent womenswear purchase was a COS laptop bag.

Milo’s favourite brands are COS and Weekday for basics and luxury brands such as Acne Studios for more upscale purchases. Milo also follows British and Italian designers for accessories and he spends approximately 500 euros on fashion each month. During this research Milo visited COS and Acne Studios retail locations in Gothenburg with the researcher.

5.4.6 Per, 23 years

Swedish Per works as a freelance fashion consultant as well as in the finance industry. When purchasing fashion he prefers upscale designers and tries to find unique pieces that nobody else owns. Per travels often to Paris for trade shows and purchases approximately 50 percent of his pieces from showrooms.

He is active in designer forums and purchases approximately 40 percent of his clothing online and 10 percent in physical retail stores. Per doesn’t buy a lot womenswear for himself due fit issues but still finds womenswear collections generally more interesting than menswear collections.

Per’s favourite brand is Comme des Garcons and he follows several luxury designers especially from Japan and Britain spending approximately 1000 euros on fashion each month. During this research Per visited COS and HOPE retail locations in Gothenburg with the researcher.

5.4.7 Theo, 32 years

Canadian Theo works as an assistant store manager in an upscale fashion boutique in Toronto. He is very methodological when purchasing his pieces but follows fashion and trends for his customers. Theo likes to shop in curated military stores, vintage stores and e-commerce. Theo also gets clothing from his friends that share similar taste in fashion. He prefers technical and utilitarian styles and materials in his wardrobe.

Theo also owns womenswear pieces and shops womenswear for himself and his girlfriend. Last womenswear purchase he made for himself was a PVC dress.

Theo’s favourite brand is Comme des Garcons, Our Legacy and vintage retailer Broadway & Sons in Gothenburg. He spends approximately 125 euros on fashion each month. During this research Theo visited Weekday and Acne Studios retail locations in Gothenburg with the researcher.
5.4.8 Hugo, 25 years

Swedish Hugo studies animation and is currently based in Oslo. He is relatively satisfied with his current wardrobe and tries to avoid buying new pieces and concentrates on buying items from second hand and flea markets.

Hugo owns several womenswear pieces and would prefer purchasing more womenswear if it would fit him better. His most recent womenswear item was a PVC coat purchased during the interview at Weekday.

Hugo’s favourite brand is his previous employer Our Legacy and he likes to shop at vintage store Beyond Retro. He spends approximately 70 euros on clothing each month. During this research Hugo visited Weekday and HOPE retail locations in Gothenburg with the researcher.
6 Results and analysis

This chapter presents the reader an overview of the main findings made during the research. Furthermore, it discusses, analyses and reflects the findings upon the literature related to the topic as well as the theoretical framework of the servicescape concept (Bitner, 1992).

By discussing the results brand by brand, each sub-chapter first compares the in-store observations with brand marketing and further presents the results of go-along interviews with participants of the research. Finally, the chapter presents and analyses the participants’ individual reflections and experiences of the gendered retail environments.

6.1 Acne Studios

![Image 2](Image 2: Pre-Fall 2017 campaign shoot on Acne Studios website. Accessed 24.4.2017.)

As discussed in the introduction, Acne Studios womenswear AW17 resort collection campaign was partially modelled by a musician Bobby Gillespie (Image 2). On the website the menswear and womenswear collections are however marketed separately, including the sub-collections such as new denim line Blå Konst. The menswear line is also strongly divided and marketed on the website as its own section of offering. This division was to continue in Acne Studios’ physical retail location in Gothenburg.
6.1.1 Divided by collections

Located in central Gothenburg, Acne Studios small retail store is divided into womenswear and menswear departments. When entering the store, the customer first sees the sales desk with sales assistant, the menswear department is on the right and womenswear on the left.

During the research period, a low shelf with accessories is placed in front of menswear and womenswear departments. In the menswear side the shelf was equipped with jewellery and eyewear, in the menswear department the accessories were small leather goods and shoes, that can be considered as more masculinised objects and goods (Pettinger, 2005).

The planning on both sides of the space is almost symmetrical with new arrivals rack behind the accessory shelf and other styles hanged on the racks on the sides. A large shelf with jeans is placed in the menswear department and it also includes women’s jeans probably due functionality of the spatial layout of the store (Bitner, 1992).

In both departments the styles are sorted and divided by collections instead of merchandise groups, such as trousers and blouses (Images 3 and 4). As the brands womenswear department is producing four collections per year and menswear only two, the volume of pieces is higher in the womenswear department. Thus the placement of womenswear denim is also reasoned in the same shelf as menswear.
In the store relatively low number of pieces are sold and presented, and thus it is easier for the brand to maintain and develop a low stock in-store and also provide more thorough customer service by for example getting more suitable sizes from the storage of the store.

The sales assistant at Acne Studios did not consider the division into menswear and womenswear as problematic in terms of the planning and functionality of the store. According to him, especially female customers purchase menswear styles in relatively high numbers.

However, the colourful pieces of menswear SS17 line (Image 4) have confused the customers.

Sales assistant: Actually, a lot of men ask if it's womenswear because in the new season we have a lot of pastel colours.

Based on the statement by Acne Studios sales assistant, being surrounded by surprisingly colourful styles the male consumers might experience confusion and outgrouping (Tajfel, 1978) as the environment is more colourful than the consumers are used to. However Acne Studios brand personality also in the menswear line is less limited into the monochromatic colourways defining several scandinavian fashion retailers and thus the visuality of the servicescape might have disorientated and surprised (Bitner, 1992) the male clients used to less colourful settings.

6.1.2 “I’m more inspired here”

When going to the store with the informants, also they described they felt the store being strongly divided into menswear and womenswear categories. Theo and Milo started browsing the menswear department first as it is generally their assortment of interest. As Tessa is usually more prone of purchasing menswear, she also started from the menswear department. Cassie, being generally more interested of womenswear assortment, naturally started browsing the womenswear assortment.

Both male and female informants argue that it is easy to distinguish the menswear and womenswear departments from another. According to the informants, the communicative elements are mainly the colours, sizes and mannequins informing about the assortments placed in the store.

Tessa: It's very gendered. Like, pastel-lime-green, very peachy, pale in womenswear. The female collection is more fragile and light with fabrications, menswear is more thick.

Theo: The women's department you can tell right away, you can see women's shoes, it's softer, there are florals and feminine silhouettes. The first thing you see is that it is for girl.

In the menswear section all informants were pleased with brighter colours of the SS17 season as well as the way the pieces have been merchandised and presented in the store. However, Tessa and Theo felt that the menswear department has more masculine atmosphere due the masculinised (Pettinger, 2015) merchandise groups.
**Tessa:** The shoes, the glasses on the table are very manly and masculine. The menswear colours are also here more crisp than womenswear.

**Theo:** The styles are very basic, like t-shirts, outerwear; you won’t see small little tops (like in womenswear). The selection is not that seasonal.

All informants proceeded relatively fast towards womenswear department, probably also due the limited size of the store. Especially Milo enjoyed browsing the womenswear department and spent notably more time in there carefully looking the pieces on the racks. Milo was very interested of the womenswear fabrics and especially oversized womenswear suit jacket on a mannequin woke Milo’s interest.

**Milo:** I need to say that I'm more inspired here. This is definitely a garment I could wear. It's something I could consider buying. See? I am spending more time again in womenswear. But I wouldn't usually do this if I wasn't with you. I would probably not feel very comfy doing it alone.

Based on Milo’s statement of uncomfortability, he would avoid the womenswear department (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) if he was alone in the store. The reason for the avoidance would the uncomfortable feeling probably caused by his need of “being connected with other individuals occupying the space” (Johnstone, 2013). Furthermore, as Nilsson and Ballantyne (2014) suggest, the number and mix of customers in the space have an influence on individual’s experience of comfortability and atmosphere.

Thus, Milo might feel uncomfortable in the womenswear as majority of other consumers occupying the space are females. When accompanied with a female researcher, Milo does not need to “re-define his gender identity” (Johnstone, 2013) as his presence at womenswear department feels more reasoned for him.

Also Cassie stated that she would not probably browse menswear department if she was alone in the store whilst Tessa and Theo suggested they would be comfortable browsing both categories also if being alone.

**Cassie:** Unless I'm looking for jeans, then I would not even come here (menswear). Maybe that is actually stupid, because if I came to look here to menswear I would probably find something that I could use. Like this, for example this (a knit) it's not a typical male colour and I find it nice.

As Ellemers et al (2002) state, people tend to reason and distinguish their belonging to a group based on various characteristics. The researcher’s statement can be applied to Milo’s and Cassie’s feelings of not browsing the category of opposite sex.

Milos description of his experience suggest “sense of security, familiarity, control, and relaxation” (Johnstone, 2012) in the menswear department and thus his place-attachment is more
distinct there. Although Milo feels more relaxed in the menswear department, he is more inspired in the womenswear despite the lack of feeling belonging with the servicescape.

And in the other hand, Cassie would feel more attached to womenswear department. If accompanied with friends, both Cassie and Milo would probably look at both departments without stress.

**Tessa:** *It's definitely not encouraging to check both categories. They are like miles away.*

As Tessa among other informants state, the store does not encourage the average consumer browsing both departments. However, all informants would be open to mixing the gender categories in the store.

**Theo:** *Acne is such a coveted brand and people really look up to it. I would probably do more mixed mens and womens, a way that it makes sense. I would probably mix the gender basics together but then there are obviously certain styles that are clearly for the physique of women.*

**Milo:** *I think here they could try mixing the departments more. I would be really inspired. It's it's way smaller space and the colours, it's easy to mix here. I would definitely do it.*

Whether Acne Studios wanted to communicate more open gender politics with their womenswear pre-collection photo shoot or not, the given message was not to be seen in the Gothenburg store. As the menswear and womenswear departments were located at the very ends of the store, the placement and spatial layout (Bitner, 1992) were not boosting and matching the open-minded marketing campaign in the servicescape.

As Acne Studios general brand communication is strongly divided by male and female assortments, the AW17 pre-collection look book probably wanted to achieve attention among their open-minded target group, a postmodern consumer (Aubert-Gamet, 1997) and thus communicate the brand values still not taking the cross-dressing and non-binary shopping further in actual the shop floor.
6.2 COS

As COS is known of it’s oversized and minimalistic style direction, it can be considered as a brand with relatively easy approach to unisex offering. Based on COS online marketing the menswear and womenswear lines are however very divided with notably heavier emphasis on the womenswear styles.

In the COS landing page (Image 6) it is first hard to tell that the brand has menswear in the selection as the models are both female and the “MEN” text on the menu almost disappear to the background picture.

The COS landing page seems to correspond with the placement and emphasis on menswear in the Gothenburg store, as first a consumer unfamiliar with the brand cannot deduce the store also has menswear in its assortment. However, when looking carefully both in-store and online, one can actually find the menswear assortment and categories that are notably less marketed and communicated in the store and on the website.

6.2.1 Menswear aside

COS retail location in central Gothenburg is an airy and bright environment of two floors. The entrance floor consists of womenswear styles as well as Danish home decoration and furniture brand HAY’s goods such as dining tables and sofas. On the first floor one can also find atmospheric elements (Turley and Milliman, 2000), such as plants and a large shelf with small HAY merchandise such as notebooks, jewelry boxes and candlesticks.
Taking the stairs up, one can see a male and female mannequins and a small MENSWEAR, WOMENSWEAR, KIDS texts serving as symbols, signs and artefacts (Bitner, 1992) guiding the customer in the environment. When entering the second floor, the menswear department placed on the left side is divided into three “rooms” whereas womenswear department is occupying the middle and right section of the space. Kids wear is placed within womenswear section.

Throughout the research period, the first menswear room is business wear themed. The second and third room have relaxed casual wear and basics in the assortment. Based on the time spent in the COS location during the research period the themes and pieces in the menswear rooms were not notably changing.

The womenswear styles in the first and second floor were mainly sorted by colours such as yellows, reds, blues and blacks whereas the accessories are scattered throughout the womenswear departments. During the research period the placement of certain products and colour themes was changing. However, the kids wear assortment was throughout the research attached with women’s sleepwear section. Probably with the stable placement of kids wear COS was aiming for social relatedness of the female consumers (Johnstone, 2012) and tried to decrease the possibility to confuse or disorientate (Bitner, 1992) a male customer browsing the menswear assortment as kids wear is not traditionally attached to menswear department.

During the research it was obvious that more thought and effort was put into the visual merchandising of womenswear departments. Moreover, the merchandise groups, shelves, furniture and fixtures especially in the second floor were changing on a daily basis. Furthermore, the pieces separated into colour categories were changed often whereas the menswear department and its atmospheric elements stayed relatively similar from day to day.

As Turley and Chebat (2002) state, also COS changes the in-store atmosphere with visual cues referring to shelves and merchandise groups almost on a daily basis. The HAY furnitures and goods were presented in themed shelves also in the second floor: one shelf was kitchen-themed with cutting boards, drinking glasses, scissors and dish washing brushes (Image 8). The kitchen shelf was never to be found from menswear section nor was the kidswear. In the menswear department the themes of goods sold in shelves were constructed according a man who travels for business or works at his office.
The elements placed in the shelves were for example small wooden combs, toiletry bags, eye masks and in-flight neck pillows, pens, notebooks and laptop brushes (Image 7). Especially in the menswear department the management of COS was trying to reach a nesting behaviour (Fischer, cited in Aubert-Gamet, 1997) among the male consumers meaning that the male consumers were wished to feel like home (Aubert-Gamet, 1997) whilst browsing the menswear categories.

For a consumer not familiar with COS or its retail space, it might be hard to predict that there are also menswear styles in the store due the lack of “relatable” products or visual stimuli (Bitner, 1992) on the entrance floor. For a male customer it might feel uncomfortable to step into the location and look for menswear and thus the poor visual stimuli might result as avoidance behaviour caused by uncomfortable feeling (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

Furthermore, the menswear department felt more dark and pushed aside when compared with womenswear department. This might, however, be reasoned by higher sales margins of womenswear or the women’s generally more hedonistic approach towards shopping where visual elements, lighting and other affective qualities come with greater importance (Borges et al., 2013).

The sales assistant working at COS did not consider the division of menswear and womenswear problematic but she was positive about the idea of expanding the menswear into second floor.

Sales Assistant: You could think about it (menswear) being spread little bigger, because it's very small. But when you think about retail world, the womenswear selection is always bigger.
According to assistant’s observations, the female customers at COS browse more menswear than male customers browse womenswear. She believes that the sizing issues are the main reasons limiting the among of male consumer engaging themselves with the “unfamiliar territory” and thus experience social outgrouping (Tajfel, 1978).

6.2.2 “Really predictable”

Image 9: The view from COS entrance.

When entering the COS retail location with the informants, despite their gender, everyone payed the first attention into the HAY furniture in the store (Image 9). Especially Alva and Per were praising the furniture and Per even told he rather comes to COS to see the furniture instead of the menswear styles he describes as boring.

**Karla:** If I was a man, I wouldn't assume they have a menswear section. When you walk in, everything is really feminine. I mean, when you walk in, there's a fucking dining table first thing you see. Very home-like and pastel colours.

Most of the informants agree with Karla’s statement suggesting that the first floor of the store is barely communicating the existing menswear department to the customers. Moreover, the informants see the first floor as very feminine and relatively unapproachable for male customers.
Per: I think the collection (on first floor) is very feminine, and most of the stuff is not possible for men to wear. The fabrics are silky, they are very thin, feminine cuts, colours. Almost the whole store is for women.

Again, the atmospheric cues (Turley and Chebat, 2012) found in COS entrance floor are likely to impact on hedonistic experiences by waking pleasant emotions when stepping into the servicescape (Ballantine et al, 2010). However, all of the informants regardless their gender were experienced these positive emotions due the HAY atmospheric elements it the store. For an average male consumer not familiar with the store the elements might be too much to take, confusing and result outgrouping and unfamiliarity (Tajfel, 1978) and finally avoidance behaviour (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). And as Pettinger (2005) states, the retail installations and environments often have been planned as either female or male target consumer in mind.

According to the informants, the first cue regarding menswear department is the male mannequin placed to the staircase as a symbol of menswear assortment (Bitner, 1992) leading to the second floor. When entering the second floor, the mannequins on the menswear department are again the visual cues and spatial symbols (Bitner, 1992) about the division of merchandise groups. This is what also Alva recognises when entering to the second floor.

Alva: From the first moment I can see that here on the front it's probably womenswear, on the left there is menswear because of the (male) mannequins. The menswear the mannequins are definitely communicating the gender. For womenswear, I can see dresses, and, you know, a bit more colours.

Whereas Per, Milo and Karla start browsing the second floor from menswear department, Alva prefers starting from the right side with womenswear and kids wear. The informants describe the placement of womenswear styles as strategic and sorted by colours pursuing the hedonistic shopping method (Borges et al, 2013).

Alva: I think it is kind of a constructible outfit on one rail. The garments can work very nicely together.

Milo: This is easier to browse for a guy. It's easier here than on the first floor, I think that's because it's kind of a mix, it's so open, I think if you are a guy and you come up here, you don't really stand out. And you see that there is guys section there too, you can see the mannequins.

Per: Party selection, gold and silver... This is like the beach section here. A lot of blue and yellow, I immediately think about sand beach, working and being by the sea, somewhere in southern France.

Especially the womenswear department with product placement with an emphasis on black colour in the assortment make Milo feel more relaxed and welcomed in the setting. This is probably due the fact he is more used to and comfortable with browsing styles that come in darker tones. Thus, Milo feels that the black womenswear environment is easier to approach.
and he feels less tempted of leaving the place than if occupying a space with for example only red garments (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

When entering to the menswear department, the informants are not generally satisfied with the selection of different colours, cuts and silhouettes. Instead, most of them describe the selection as predictable.

**Karla:** *So here we just landed to the darkest section of the store. I think it's really predictable, very COS. It looks they always work with the same shapes.*

Thus, the product placement and colour assortment at COS menswear section are likely aiming for feelings of ingrouping (Bitner, 1992) as well as comfortability and overall satisfaction of the male consumers (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014).

When discussing about the furniture and HAY goods placed in shelves, all the informants agree that their placement in the store feels very gendered, feminized or masculinised (Pettinger, 2015) for example because of the differences in the goods and the bright colours in womens department. Especially Milo and Karla consider it as a negative thing.

**Alva:** *In womenswear we can see more like, trays, hooks, small boxes you can use for jewelry. Bright colours, pink chair, lamps...*

**Milo:** *It's a huge difference. This women's selection feels almost like childish, even though the goods are not for kids.*

Half of the informants think that the COS store is not encouraging the consumer to shop and browse beyond gender categories. Per thinks that the layout and visual cues encourage him to browse, Milo again would like to see more mixed accessories in menswear and womenswear departments. As he is buying often womenswear accessories, the new placement would make him feel more comfortable and satisfied browsing them (Nilsson & Ballantyne 2014; Bitner, 1992).

**Milo:** *For example, if this (a scarf at womenswear section) was hanging a bit closer to menswear section, I would feel more comfortable buying it, I might consider this.*

**Karla:** *No, it's absolutely not encouraging ! The menswear is at the back of the store. My friends would never even look at menswear.*

Karla would place some of the menswear to the first floor whereas Milo would re-plan the accessory groups closer to menswear department thus being more easily approachable for male customers. Per and Alva state that they are happy with the planning of the store as it currently is.
HOPE’s overall design direction can be considered somewhat unisex and oversized, as the main inspiration and starting point for the brand was emphasis on well-made male utility wear (HOPE, 2017). As discussed earlier, HOPE adapted a new sizing method called The New Standard and from now on the brand is marking all of their styles with male and female sizing.

The thought behind the sizing is for customers to feel less limited by the conventions of women’s and menswear (HOPE, 2017) and to make the development of less gender-normed clothing to go forward. However, the good thought feels still like being somewhat half-way, as the planning of the store might limit customers engaging themselves with both collections.

On HOPE website the collections are separated, and the landing page (Image 10) suggests also the division between menswear and womenswear. When browsing the menswear styles on the website, the female size equivalent is not automatically marked as the information part of the product (Image 11). Instead, a link inserted to the page redirects the customer interested of male size to ‘size guide’ page making the process relatively arduous and might work against the size marketing.
6.3.1 In conflict with marketing

When entering to HOPE store in central Gothenburg, the womenswear is ruling the floor (Image 12). The womenswear groups are two main departments of the small store, menswear is placed to the right hand side and even very distinctively “marked out” with massive shelf with
jeans (Image 13). The shelf divides the floor and has menswear denim on the menswear side and womenswear on the womenswear side.

Womenswear styles and departments are again easy to recognise but the brighter colours in the seasonal styles and lighter fabrications in the pieces. The racks at womenswear are planned by outfits again communicating the hedonistic shopping values (Borges et al., 2013) whereas the menswear styles are mainly presented by product groups for more utilitarian shopping (Ryu et al., 2010). During the research period only two basic menswear t-shirts were in seasonal purple colour whilst most of the womenswear styles were more colourful. Both departments had two mannequins, two male mannequins in menswear and two female mannequins in womenswear serving as signs and artefacts of the layout of the servicescape and its varying assortments (Bitner, 1992).

The womenswear department continued in the back room of the store where more gender-fluid and less colourful styles were presented. In the back room, close to dressing rooms was also a large shelf equipped with perfumes and other skincare products (Image 15). Placing the products in the back room might cause lost sales, as according to the sales assistant the perfumes were mainly unisex. In the menswear department no such products were sold, and the male customers are not necessarily aware of the unisex selection placed in the back room in the store planning and would feel less likely to approach the space (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

The menswear department feels very uninviting and unapproachable especially due the denim shelf (Image 13) dividing the two spaces. For a female consumer it feels hard to accidentally go to menswear department, and on the contrary it feels that male customers are not encouraged to browse womenswear category due strong division. In the small and quiet store a male customer might feel uncomfortable and outgrouped (Tajfel, 1978) especially browsing the back room with all the womenswear styles.

The sales assistant of HOPE store did not consider the division between menswear and womenswear problematic. According to her, the different merchandise groups are not hard to understand.

**Sales Assistant:** Sometimes if the pattern is bigger than usually, especially women are asking if the style is actually menswear. We have separated the menswear and womenswear categories in the store, but I think we are going to change it eventually.

The combined sizes marketed as easily approachable were not communicated in the physical retail store in any way. The womenswear and menswear collections were separated and thus the “more approachable” sizing (HOPE, 2017) were not to be seen in the layout and spatial planning (Bitner, 1992) of the store. In conclusion the sizing might be confusing for customers and their feeling of belonging to the environment (Mehrabian & Russell, 1978) might be risked.

However the marketing and thought behind ‘The New Standard’ is probably appealing to HOPE’s target consumers especially in a symbolic way and level of thought (Johnstone,
2012). This also strengthens Nguyen’s (2006) statement of products and their functions impacting on the overall corporate image via marketing.

6.3.2 “Darker, rough, strong, male”

When entering the HOPE store with informants, no common pattern in the first interest was found. Cassie’s attention was drawn into a silver handbag, Karla was interested of shoes, Hugo payed attention to a flower on a vase and Per enjoyed the industrial feeling of the store. Again, Cassie was the only customer who started browsing the store from womenswear whilst Karla, Hugo and Per begun from menswear department. All informants agreed with below statement.

**Per:** You immediately see where the men stuff are and where the female stuff are. The women’s stuff looks a bit more light, the menswear is more black and navy. And menswear is also just in the corner of the shop, the rest is womenswear.

Also the informants see the new, ‘more approachable’ (HOPE, 2017) sizing being in conflict with the overall store planning and layout, as the product groups are strongly separated by gender.

**Cassie:** I feel that they are doing very separated male and female sections, which is a bit going against what they are suggesting with the sizing and marketing.

**Per:** Why would they separate the store if the clothes are both for men and women?
When entering to the menswear department, the visual and atmospheric cues communicating the gender assortment were for example the mainly dark colourways of the styles. Only two seasonal colours, purple and pink, are available in the menswear assortment that is organised by product groups instead of outfits.

**Hugo:** (This department is) 100 percent masculine, it's the colours. The colours are so like, I've noticed that guys, especially Swedish guys only like dark tones and all black. And from the selling point, everything here would be easy to sell.

Furthermore, Cassie thinks that the furniture placed in the menswear department are more masculine than the furniture in the womenswear section. This can be considered as an atmospheric element and what Pettinger (2015) calls masculinising in order to communicate the gender in the setting.

**Cassie:** It feels very Scandinavian, I would say. More minimal. But in menswear actually it's more masculine with reading lamp and working desk. And otherwise, more darker, rough, strong, male.

In the womenswear section the assortment is hung hedonistically on the racks by outfits instead of product groups in menswear. As discussed previously, the womenswear styles are also more colourful and indeed smaller in size.

**Hugo:** This section has way more colour; it gets a bit more fun for the eye... Even though these sunglasses are in the womenswear section, I wouldn't say these are female glasses only.

All informants think that some of the styles in the womenswear assortment could be easily worn by a male customer. However, Per sees the new size conversion very problematic.

**Per:** I think (this department) is very feminine. The Mac coats could be unisex. But this suit jacket is very feminine and very small. Oh, what is the guy size? This is my size actually (according the conversion). Do you want me to try it on? This is way too small for me. That's ridiculous. Men and women have different bodies and if you want something to fit perfectly, you cannot make it for both men and women.

The two female mannequins placed in the womenswear department (Image 7) were dressed relatively gender-fluid way probably in order to appeal to male customers and communicate further the marketing in the servicescape. The styling example on the mannequins was probably in more harmony (Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014) with the new sizing and gender fluid marketing as anything else in the store.

**Cassie:** The mannequin shows that it's a female, but her look is a bit more masculine. It's dressed in jacket and more unisex, I would say. And this one (pink shirt dress), I think this could be worn by any gender because it has very loose fit and pattern. It's unisex.
The perfumes placed in the back of the store (Image 15) in the womenswear section are unisex and a male customer would not necessarily look at the back of the store to discover them due the spatial planning and layout (Bitner, 1992). All of the informants describe the perfume and skincare assortment in the store as a positive thing, but their placement in the back of the store might be problematic regardless more unisex pieces in that very department.

**Hugo:** Here it (the assortment) could be definitely also for guys. Have you smelled this (a perfume in the shelf)? This is fresh, I like it.

**Cassie:** I think the perfumes and these products are unisex. And I think it goes well with their whole branding. I feel this section and pieces are female, but depending on the person, it could be genderless too.

All informants think that the store is not encouraging male customer to browse both categories, as menswear department feels isolated especially due the planning and placement of the shelf separating the space.

**Per:** I mean, I just get discouraged by that (the denim shelf). But probably some people don't.

**Karla:** I would check both. Probably the male customer would just walk to menswear without thinking anything more and block the womenswear out.

**Cassie:** No. I wouldn't go to the men section. I think it's (the denim shelf) shutting off the section. Making this like an isolated space.

To encourage the customers to browse every part of the store, the informants suggest removing the denim shelf separating the menswear section and thus making the layout more approachable (Bitner, 1992). The informants would also like the space being more open and easy to move around in.

**Karla:** I need to walk around. But this shop is so small, maybe I would not be afraid of mixing menswear and womenswear a bit. Because then you really make the customer to make the choice of skipping the rack or looking at it. They could direct the consumer a bit more.

**Hugo:** I think it's (the menswear) so tiny room. Open it up more, is my advice.

**Cassie:** It would be better to have one unisex section in the middle that would connect the branding more.
6.4 Weekday


The main design direction of Weekday is minimalistic, modern and Scandinavian with relatively oversized fits and silhouettes. However, the assortment is mainly divided into menswear and womenswear both in e-commerce as well as in the retail stores.

Besides menswear and womenswear, the denim category on Weekday’s website has an unisex department. However, the page on the website was completely empty (accessed 24.4.2017). As the styles and collections in the web shop, also the retail location in Gothenburg was strongly divided into menswear and womenswear.

Thus, the Weekday landing page (Image 16) is an excellent example of the brand’s assortment in a general: approximately similar styles that are produced in different sizes, colours and curated separately. However, the pastel collection presented on the landing page as not in the stores during the research period. Weekday, being known of relatively gender-neutral pieces that often can be adapted for a consumer regardless their gender, the brand could take steps towards building more welcoming and less separated shot environment in-store.
6.4.1 Equal in size, different in merchandising

Image 17. Two male mannequins as a sign of menswear section on the second floor.

Weekday’s retail location in central Gothenburg occupies an old movie theatre and thus is large in size and has high ceiling. During the research period, Weekday’s entrance floor included strategically the first drop of the new womenswear SS17 collection (Image 18). Also the mannequins placed on the windows facing the street were all female probably aiming to result as acknowledgment, ingrouping and categorisation of female customers (Locken & Ward, 1990 cited in Borges et al., 2013).

When walking into the store, the male and female underwear and socks were placed together close to the sales desk as well as seasonal accessories being this time of the year sunglasses. The womenswear department continued also on the left side of the store when walking further in-store.

On the entrance floor the womenswear colours were more seasonal (Image 18) whilst in the second floor the palette was more basic and monochromatic in comparison with the first floor. When taking the stairs to the second floor one small fixture with two male mannequins (Image 17) was used as a cue, sign and symbol (Bitner 1992) about the menswear department on the second floor.

Entering the second floor, the division of menswear and womenswear was relatively visible and easy to understand due the colours still being slightly more colourful in the women’s side. Both of the departments on the second floor were approximately equal in size.

In womenswear department the assortment was mainly curated by outfits and certain fabric groups again following the hedonistic shopping methods (Borges et al., 2013). In menswear the styles were vice versa, sorted by garment categories instead of outfits thus following the thought of males as more utilitarian shoppers (Borges et al., 2013). As one of Weekday’s staple products is denim, the denim section was placed in the middle of the floor but still being divided into womenswear and menswear assortments.
The menswear department was placed as a mirror image of womenswear and in comparison with COS the volume of pieces available and the space occupied was higher. However, only some seasonal colours such as pink and purple could be seen on the menswear department. Mainly the colourways in also this department were dark staying true to Weekday’s overall design direction.

The sales assistant at Weekday did not consider the division between menswear and womenswear problematic, and according to him both male and female customers browse the selection for opposite gender in relatively similar numbers.

**Sales Assistant:** Sometimes guys even ask me if there is menswear section even though they are standing at menswear section. They might be fooled by the colours. Menswear and womenswear are about different fits and it cannot work as well with both genders. But I think we could definitely have some unisex styles in the centre of this floor.

Specialising with denim category, the sales assistant told that Weekday doesn’t have very skinny fitting jeans for male customers and very loose-fitting styles for females. Thus he confirmed what Milo said earlier about skinny jeans for males:

**Sales Assistant:** If guys are looking for skinny jeans, they go to womenswear and if women want something especially loose, they look at menswear.

According to the sales assistant’s statement, the male customers also in this retail location might have experienced feelings of unfamiliarity, disorientation, confusion and outgrouping (Bitner, 1992) due the more colourful assortment than they have normally used to.
6.4.2 “They have a straight line”

When entering to the entrance floor of Weekday’s retail location, all of the informants note bright colours and majority of womenswear. Only one informant payed attention to the male mannequins placed in the staircase at the back of the store, others gave feedback about the mess on the rails filled with clothes.

**Tessa:** *I think it's pretty much feminine. You see, they have popped up all the feminine colours to the front. The strappy, the frilly styles, then it becomes more male as you walk further. But definitely more feminine as you walk in. The new collection is always on front.*

**Hugo:** *For me, it's not very tempting. It's too crowded and too many pieces. The fabrics and the materials, they're just productions. They have something for everyone here just to make it sell.*

The mess on the rails being visual stimuli made especially Alva, Hugo and Tessa feel uncomfortable. If alone, the respondents might have decided to avoid browsing the messy servicescape (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974).

Whilst Alva and Theo walked further to browse sunglasses strategically placed next to the sales counter, Hugo and Tessa continued directly to the larger second floor with menswear and womenswear assortment. Only Alva took time to browse the womenswear on first floor thoroughly.

Entering to the second floor, Alva and Hugo suggest that from the first glance is hard to differentiate the menswear and womenswear departments and thus immediately form feeling of
belonging to one of the departments (Ellemers et al., 2002, cited in Johnstone, 2012). Theo and Tessa, however, considered the division as clear and easy to understand.

**Theo:** Looks like that some of the colours are mostly on the other (womenswear) side. Pink, yellow, stuff like this, but not so much at the menswear. And at menswear there is also colours, but more like dark purple.

**Hugo:** Gender-wise I would say, Weekday is very Swedish because it's very black and dark tones. I wouldn't be able to categorise if it's for which gender. That's what I like, you can just go here (takes a bomber jacket) and you can try it on without knowing which gender is it made for and you just try it because it's so nice.

**Alva:** If I didn't know the store before I wouldn't probably know which direction to go for menswear and womenswear. If you start observing, you can see what can be menswear and what can be womenswear. That's because of the colours and the sizes. And I can see one male mannequin on the left.

Whereas Tessa and Theo started browsing the menswear section, Alva and Hugo begun from womenswear. Again the planning of the assortment and colourways are different in womenswear but the difference is not as notable as at COS and HOPE.

**Tessa:** They kind of build the outfits on each row. Cause they like to attract the female way of thinking, whereas the male is more practical. Male are like "I need a t-shirt, I will go and buy a t-shirt".

**Alva:** Here is basic shirts in different colours, sweatshirts, shirts, it's not too many as you can say, fads such as fishnets. More timeless stuff for women. They are not necessarily so prone to adapt each trend.

When browsing womenswear jackets, Hugo’s attention is drawn into shiny black PVC raincoat. He gets excited about the style, checks the material and the price of the style. Hugo puts the jacket on and the fit is good.

**Hugo:** Oh wow! You know, my most iconic person I look up to is Trinity from Matrix. Maybe I should buy it. Yeah. Because I always wanted something like this, this is perfect Trinity look. Let's buy it.

At menswear section the informants describe the selection and the styles very basic and timeless, not adapting a lot of seasonal trends. Moreover, Tessa describes the feeling in the menswear department and the second floor in general as ‘really masculine’ and heavy.

When browsing the menswear collection, Hugo comes across almost similar raincoat as the one he already decided to purchase from the womenswear assortment.

**Hugo:** This is probably the opposite style for guys. But I think this (girl one) is way more cooler. I don't like this guy version, the girl one is thicker and with this shiny fabric.
Tessa: *I think the menswear colours are a bit more sharp. We have poppy colours, always poppy colours. Guys have really crisp colours. And just like the basic ones, blue, black, brown, white, grey.*

Again, Alva and Hugo consider see the store as encouraging to browse both of the gender categories in the store and consider both of the departments as easily approachable. This is probably due their personal preferences and moods regarding the store.

Alva: *I would say yes. For me, I don't have a problem with that. Now I don't have the urge to browse it, as usually I find what I need from there (womenswear). But of course if I don't find what I am looking for, then I go menswear.*

Tessa and Theo, on the other hand, do not consider the Weekday retail location as especially encouraging or welcoming to browse because of the strict division between womenswear and menswear line but especially Tessa considers the division consistent with Weekday’s overall brand communication.

Tessa: *They have a straight line. This is female, this is male. It's really chopped down. I feel that it is actually what it says it is. I often shop online, and it's really separated there as well. I don't really expect from an H&M chain to be anything but H&M chain which is thousand pieces and really separated.*

Tessa and Alva would place menswear and womenswear basics combined to the first floor. Theo would cross-dress the mannequins and do unisex grouping but also points out that it might be tricky for an average consumer and might result as feelings of outgrouping and confusion (Bitner, 1992).

Theo: *If they would have been mixing (the categories), there would be less division in the lines. If I wanted to do an unisex grouping I would have two mannequins side by side with very genderless merchandising and mixed up pieces. But it could be too confusing for most of people.*

Hugo and Tessa argue to understand that the groupings and categories have been planned strategically and according to the sales figures but especially Tessa would like to welcome some change in the future.

Tessa: *My dream store is obviously where you build outfits on the row. For male and female. A man can wear a dress and a woman can wear a suit.*
6.5 Are you playing in the other team?

Even though shopping is no longer understood as heavily as “female activity” (Pettinger, 2005), based on the go-along surveys with informants it is clear that the stigma of shopping beyond traditional gender categories is heavier among male customers.

According to the informants, a male wearing or buying womenswear still in the contemporary society is often requested to explain himself way more than females purchasing and wearing menswear styles.

**Hugo:** I like going to Filippa K womenswear section because they have so nice materials. But then they always ask me "Is it for your girlfriend?". It's annoying! I mean, do you have a girlfriend is the first question and when I answer no, they continue asking if it's for my mother. Why should I be able to explain myself when I'm in a store?

**Milo:** I've been asked a reason why I am looking at womenswear section and it might be a mood killer; it might feel a bit hindering and insulting on my mind. I want to go look covers and materials also for my work, and I might want to spend time like half an hour at womenswear section and I know I'm not alone.

Furthermore, some male respondents of the research discussed about the prejudices they have faced when wearing more feminine pieces such as colourful clothing or accessories. Even though shopping and personal style are a way of communicating for example gender or sexual orientation (Belk, 1999), shopping beyond gender categories is not direct indicator of such things and should not lead for assumptions and prejudices. And as Vencato (2013) suggests, cross-dressing can provoke such prejudices of people’s sexual orientation and identity.

However, these kind of prejudices stay tight in the modern society although there has been a lot of good development for example in terms of more open atmosphere for everyone regardless their looks. As Theo discussed, in Canada the stigma and expectations on how a man should dress are still strong.

**Theo:** In North America, it's still very strong machismo and alpha-males. In Vancouver, if you dress somewhat fashionable, a guy would be a "fucking gay". And in Toronto too, if you start to dress more flamboyant, that guy is instantly gay.

All the Swedish male informants had experienced or are aware of similar prejudices what it comes to dressing according what Theo describes as flamboyant.

**Hugo:** Some people think because I have pinkie ring, it's like, people always categorise. They ask like "Are you playing in the other team?" and I'm like "What team?". They are asking if I am gay.

**Per:** Of course it looks better if a woman wears male suit. But if a man wears womens suit, it looks like you are a gay going to some parade or that you are an ultra feminist.
Milo: As I said, I really like to browse womenswear because I'm so interested of fashion. So then in cases like this, if someone would say if I have a girlfriend I'm buying for, I would be a bit annoyed because I am just interested of the styles. Or asking if I'm gay, even though I don't care about that question, but still.

Shopping is an important tool of identity construction and reconstruction (Miller et al, 1998, Pettinger, 2005). In the example of Hugo and Milo, their identity is assumed being a husband or boyfriend by sales assistants when they browse womenswear section. In another example Hugo’s identity has been assumed as homosexual due the fact he is wearing a ring on his finger.

These kind of assumptions might have a negative impact on individual’s identity construction and even result as uncomfortable feelings among consumers causing outgrouping (Tajfel, 1978, cited in Johnstone, 2012) and less desire to browse womenswear. Also in the managerial level it should be carefully taken into notice when planning how to train new sales assistants to the stores.

6.6 The traditional way

Most of the informants refer to gendered division of menswear and womenswear as traditional thing when asking about their understanding on the subject. Many informants also recognise the sizing issues, personal preferences as well as practical matters impacting on the division.

Cassie: For the general people I feel it's (the division) more relevant. Because, people just want to see it, just like when people go into grocery store, you kind of want to have the dairy department and the bread department.

Theo: In the traditional sense, there is menswear meaning business wear and everyday workwear and there is womenswear which is whether you domesticate a woman. It's divided into genders, that it's specific for. It's part of the business, dictated by the people, dictated by the money, dictated what people prescribe to.

When asking the informants their personal opinion about the division, most of them would be positive for increasing genderless styles, have an emphasis on unisex or challenge the consumer by delicately starting to mix the womenswear and menswear pieces. Most of the informants consider the traditional matters regarding menswear and womenswear categories old-fashioned, and many believe that some sort of change should be on the way.

Furthermore, many informants thought about the average consumer and their preferences in the possible division.

Per: Menswear is too big for women and womenswear is too small for men. I believe in female and male sizes. Of course, if you wanna be very trendy you can have an unisex label.
Theo: I don't think it really matters. As long as it's good fit and you feel comfortable wearing it, it really doesn't matter if it's male or female. (For average consumers) it's not super comfortable for many to select the pieces if they just really like it.

Alva: It came from something old-fashioned, but I think it's still on point. I don't think I personally have any problem with that, but also I'm not a fan of dividing it strongly.

Karla: Doing fashion that is more gender-fluid, I think it's necessary. It sucks that it's still so separated, especially in the shops like H&M. They have such a huge impact on people, they are all inspired by all the big fashion houses.

The informants would be open for taking more steps towards less-gendered division in the retail shop floor, and especially Milo, Karla, Tessa and Hugo state that they would have more fun and they would be more inspired if they were to shop in a store with mixed categories.

Furthermore, if being predisposed to both assortments, the informants besides Per believe they would spend more time and money in the stores. As Firat & Venkatesh (1995) discuss, the postmodern consumer is customizing their world and giving meanings to the goods they consume, and thus less gendered shopping atmosphere might result consumers using more money and browse both categories. Thus, for example a womenswear shirt bought by a male consumer would be re-defined as a piece of clothing, and perhaps turn a menswear piece when worn by a man. This kind of meaning-transformation is also discussed by Aubert-Gamet (1997) and his reflections of postmodern consumerism.

However, the informants take into account consumers who are shopping more utilitarian than hedonistic reasons (Borges et al., 2013). As Alva points out, for an average consumer the division might turn out confusing especially if looking something in particular with a limited schedule. Other participants also express their concern on customers of a busy modern society spending more time on the retail stores.

As Per argues, he thinks it might become a problem if the retailers tried to adapt to all individuals who orientate themselves somewhat different. Instead, he calls back courage among the consumers to step out from their comfort zones in case they would be interested of for example buying styles beyond gender categories. Karla, on the other hand, believes that big fashion companies such as H&M, and thus COS and Weekday, should take the first steps towards more open gender politics also in the retail level. This way consumers might be encouraged to break out the societal norms and dress as they please instead of following prevalent assumptions and expectations on how one should or should not dress.

However, Theo being an assistant manager of high-end fashion boutique stresses that the big fashion companies are ruled by money and consumption and make their decisions according what sells the most. Thus separating the gender assortments can be considered as what Theo calls playing it safe.
Theo: They (the companies) don't go too far-end, or if they do, they maybe have one piece that is a statement to it, to make people happy, but at the end of the day that is not what they are selling.
7 Discussion

This chapter presents the reader the end discussion of all the themes analysed and discussed in the previous chapter.

Based on the observations, comparisons and interviews on this thesis, the idea of gender-fluid and less binary shopping exists. However, this idea is currently to be seen only in the non-tangible brand communication such as collection photo shoots, runway shows and websites communicating the brand story. Brands such as Acne Studios, COS, HOPE and Weekday want to tell their stories to open-minded, modern and less judgmental consumers consisting mainly of the large consumer group of Millennials. Thus, brand communication with emphasis on freedom of self and non-binary individualism is reasoned.

The Millennial consumers interviewed in this research also have a welcoming attitude towards more open gender categories, cross-dressing and non-binary shopping. As Fuentes & Hagberg (2013) discuss, an individual transforms a meaning to a retail site, and whereas for some a womenswear department can mean just a "no-go-zone", for others it might mean inspirational, educational and entertaining explorable environment. For Hugo, Theo and Milo, for example, the womenswear department means also an interesting assortment full of possibilities to purchase, as all of the informants have purchased items labeled as womenswear. Moreover, as learned for example from Alva, Tessa and Cassie, the menswear department is another assortment to add to their wardrobes.

Despite the open-minded consumers in this thesis, not necessarily everyone is open for such developments. As discussed previously, the stigma of well-dressed and fashion-conscious male consumer being "instantly gay" stays tight in the society and might restrict and impact on a male consumer’s feeling of social connectedness if browsing womenswear assortment in a retail site. What is more, as Milo and Hugo suggested, a male consumer browsing womenswear assortment might receive questions from the sales assistant about their reason for looking at “wrong” department. This might have an enormous impact on consumers feeling of comfort, place-identity and self-identity (Johnstone, 2012) in the servicescape.

The statement of Millennials being the most tolerable consumer group to date (Fusion, 2015) predicts growingly open attitudes towards non-binary gender orientation and freedom of self also in the future. Hopefully one day a man wearing female accessories or clothing is not considered as "instantly gay". Or perhaps one day the pieces are not even labeled as womenswear pieces any longer. Currently, however, the idea of mixing the gender categories in retail sites might be considered hard, confusing and unprofitable for the management of fashion companies. Also most of the participants in this thesis agree that combining the menswear and womenswear might currently be hard especially for the mainstream consumers.

Based on the perspectives gained during the interviews, it is obvious that neither the average consumer nor the brands are ready for mixing the assortments in retail. Reasons behind this, based on this study, are however mainly not in the problematic attitudes among the consumers but in timing, functionality and ease of shopping instead. As Milo feels more inspired in the womenswear, Tessa always browses the menswear collection and Hugo buys womenswear,
the informants of this research are shopping for more hedonistic than utilitarian reasons (Borges et al., 2013). Tessa, Theo, Hugo and Milo among others do not represent the average consumer likely bringing most of the profit for the brands in this study. Thus, mixing the womenswear and menswear categories in the retail sites would likely cause feelings of un-grouping, uncomfortability (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and confusion among most of the consumers - even though, as learned, it might make the most tolerable and fashion-forward consumers more inspired and spend more time and money in the store. The negative feelings the re-formed retail sites might cause would likely lead to lost profit, that, as Theo suggested, is certainly not what the companies are aiming when planning changes.

As this research suggests, all four brands have notably stronger emphasis on the womenswear assortments in the store. The brands seem to invest way more to the atmospheric cues in the womenswear departments by changing for example the placements of different merchandise groups and other elements, such as HAY furniture in COS store. The womenswear styles on the racks are merchandised by outfits probably to encourage and inspire the female consumer who is assumed to shop for hedonistic, not utilitarian reasons (Borges et al., 2013). During the research period the placements of menswear assortments were not notably changing and the styles were mainly presented by garment groups. As men are usually more often considered shopping for utilitarian reasons (Ruy et al., 2010), the retailers have probably wanted to adjust and customise the retail sites (Cardoso and Pinto, 2010) with convenience in mind.

The HAY goods in COS menswear section or the themes of the masculinised (Pettinger, 2005) departments were not especially altered, whilst the goods and the overall look of COS womenswear department were changing almost on a daily basis during the research period. The decisions of altering or not altering the atmospherics and merchandising are probably formed after an analysis what is profitable to do. However, in COS and HOPE the menswear section felt almost like pushed aside and reasoned to exist just because it has to. Acne Studios and Weekday menswear sections were almost equal in size in comparison with the womenswear sections, but the differences in the merchandising of the styles were still evident, as menswear styles were mainly presented by product groups.

As Milo and Hugo argued, they were feeling more inspired when browsing the womenswear department and both spent more time in the womenswear section during the interviews. Furthermore, Milo suggested he was feeling more comfortable in the womenswear section when accompanied with the female researcher. As discussed, planning the menswear exactly like womenswear would probably not work in the stores now - or perhaps never - due the profitability and functionality. Still I suggest that the menswear planning should be challenged in a way.

What could be the way?

The findings of this thesis suggest that the attitudes towards gender-fluid retail among the informants are growingly welcoming. Moreover, most of the informants believe that developments in the retail level should and will be changing towards more welcoming atmosphere for people interested of shopping beyond gender categories as the overall attitudes are likely to keep developing towards more open direction.
As discussed previously, growing number of brands already mix female and male styles in their marketing and presentations and thus it is expected to see the gender-fluidity also in retail. The retail sector is the level where the marketing and runway shows actually turn into profit, and the managers of fashion companies should not underestimate the importance of the physical stores in strengthening the brand image. However, the changes in the shop floor should be made subtly.

Instead of confusing the consumers by strongly mixing the assortments in retail sites, the management of fashion companies could start planning small steps towards more welcoming servicescapes for consumers interested in cross-dressing and shopping beyond gender categories. Another thing to be addressed in the managerial level should be training the sales personnel not to ask reasons for customers browsing the the assortment of opposite gender in order to avoid offending the consumer or cause uncomfortable feelings.

For management, the changes in retail planning could start from combining womenswear and menswear accessories or gradually bringing the womenswear accessories closer to menswear department as Milo suggested. Perhaps male and female shoes and accessories could be merchandised together, closer to the entrance or on the entrance floor. Instead of setting menswear assortment aside or dividing the assortments into different floors, the female and male styles could be placed more widely in the store. This might, perhaps, result as confusion among the most traditional consumers or require more time spent in the store, but it might also be the first push towards big change in the physical fashion retail sites.

As appositely stated during one of the interviews:

**Tessa:** They (consumers) would be scared, in the beginning. And then they would get used to it, as they always do.

My suggestion for contemporary retailer brands with minimalistic and oversized design direction would be trying for example with the aforementioned changes by slightly adjusting the retail sites and thus testing it out. In the worst case some daily profit might be lost, some consumers might be confused but on the other hand, consumers like Milo and Hugo would feel more relaxed in the store, become more committed to the brand and perhaps purchase more. In the best case, the managers, investors, and customers might be positively surprised. Moreover, the desired brand image would strengthen in the long run.

As learned especially from COS, the store atmospherics or furnishing in retail sites can be changed almost on a daily basis with little effort. The best thing about testing new plannings and placements in retail sites is the fact that if it doesn’t work, it can always be changed. It has to start somewhere.
8 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis as well as shows that the aim and purpose of this research were implemented.

As the aim of this thesis was to gain deeper understanding on how gender is materialised in the retail sites, the findings suggest that differences between menswear and womenswear assortments are evident. The gendered environments differ from each other for example in the colours and merchandising of the collections, as usually in the retail environments the womenswear styles are arranged by collections and menswear styles by product groups. Furthermore, the findings suggest that notably heavier emphasis has been put on the quantities and floor space of womenswear collections, and generally menswear and womenswear assortments are very divided in the spatial planning of the retail environments.

Moreover, the thesis aimed gaining better understanding of Millennial consumers reflections and understanding of the gendered environments. The consumers recognise the gendered planning of womenswear and menswear categories and would welcome less binary actions to be performed in the planning of retail environments. The findings suggest that there is clear and significant interest towards the assortment of the opposite gender among male and female consumers participating to this thesis. However, especially the male consumers interested of womenswear might experience apprehensive feelings when browsing the assortment of opposite gender for example due the aforementioned differences.

In managerial level, the aim was to map out the problems and possibilities the gendered retail environments have. The findings suggest that a lot could be done to reduce the consumer’s apprehensive feelings, but the actions need to be subtle. The retailers cannot re-structure the assortments by mixing everything in order not to confuse the average consumers. However, the findings suggest that consumers would welcome small adjustments in the planning of retail environments. Such planning could for example be placing accessories closer to each other and thus make them more accessible for female and male consumers.

The trials of making the assortments more accessible might result consumers spending more time in the store and perhaps purchase more items thus resulting increased sales for the brands. As the findings suggest, there is growing market potential for males interested of womenswear, and larger emphasis on non-binary retail planning might result as strengthened brand commitment among consumers and grown profit among the actual retailers.
9 Suggestions for future research

This chapter presents the reader suggestions for future research within the topic by suggesting different themes and samples for the possible forthcoming studies.

This thesis included a small sample of open-minded Millennial consumers suggesting that gender exists in a spectrum instead of the two categories of male and female. Using wider sample of Millennial participants would probably result notably different findings, as not everyone in the consumer group would have as open and welcoming attitude towards shopping beyond gender or mixed gender categories.

Thus, the future qualitative researches related to this topic could concern larger sample of Millennial consumers of different socioeconomic groups and perspectives on life, fashion consumption and gender equality. For example, the future researches could concern different fashion brands with emphasis on more strict gender categories and traditional style direction.

The four male participants in this thesis provided perhaps the most interesting and important findings. By openly discussing their experiences and reflections of browsing and purchasing womenswear assortments, they proved that in the current society it is more controversial for males to dress, shop and consume in a feminine way. Thus, the future researches could focus on larger sample of only male participants, that could have a major market potential if made comfortable browsing womenswear assortments.
References


Appendix 1: The interview questions

Before going to the store:

Name? Age? Profession?
Describe how you consume fashion?
When and where do you go shopping?
Do you shop at Acne Studios / HOPE / COS / Weekday?
How often do you go shopping?
Can you estimate how much of your budget you spend on fashion?
From where do you get ideas/inspiration on fashion? Any magazines, blogs or internet sites you visit regularly?
Is anything in particular s/he is interested in at the moment – looking for new pants/spring outfit etc to have as a guide for the visit?

In-store interviews:

So what catches your eye first?
Where would you go look first? (Go there and ask the informant to tell you what s/he thinks of the garments and them move along)
Going around: Describe what you see?
Show some items - ask them to describe them.
Menswear / womenswear section: How you understand this department is communicating or hinting the gender?
How would you describe the division of different merchandise groups in this store?
Do you feel some departments are especially feminine or especially masculine? What makes you think so?
Do you browse the whole store or just parts of it? Why or why not?
Describe how you understand the division of menswear and womenswear in this store?
What do you think is the thought behind this?
Do you think the store encourages the consumer the browse the categories for opposite sex?
How would you plan this store if you could? Considering gender categories?
How do you think the store corresponds with the image you have of it? In terms of its gendered offering?

After visiting the stores:

How do you feel about dividing the categories into womenswear and menswear?
Do you consider it being old-fashioned or relevant? Why or why not?
How you think retail stores should reflect to the more open gender politics?
F / M categories - do you think the division is relevant?
How would you think about your shopping experience if the categories would not be divided?
Do you believe it would make you shop in a different manner?
Would it make you shop more / shop less?
Describe how you understand womenswear and menswear categories?
What do you think is the reason for such division?
Do you believe gender exists in spectrum?
How would you describe Acne Studios (or any brand the study concerns) in reflection to these categories?

**Store personnel:**

What do you think about the division of gender in the stores?
Do you find it problematic?
Can you tell me about customer experiences related to it?
Do you feel customers feel limited of shopping beyond the gender?