

**The role of the fitting room in apparel quality evaluation by Mzansi
Youth female consumers**

Maryke Vermaak (27083714)
M Consumer Science: Clothing Retail Management
Supervisor: Prof HM De Klerk

January 2014

**The role of the fitting room in apparel quality evaluation by Mzansi
Youth female consumers**

by

Maryke Vermaak (27083714)

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
MASTERS IN CONSUMER SCIENCE: CLOTHING RETAIL MANAGEMENT**

in the

**FACULTY OF NATURAL AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER SCIENCE**

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
PRETORIA**

SUPERVISOR: PROF HELENA M DE KLERK

January 2014

DECLARATION

I, Maryke Vermaak (27083714), declare that this dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree of Masters in Consumer Science: Clothing and Retail Management at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Maryke Vermaak

January 2014

SYNOPSIS

The role of the fitting room in apparel quality evaluation by Mzansi Youth female consumers

by

Maryke Vermaak

Supervisor: Professor HM De Klerk

Department: Consumer Science

Degree: Masters in Consumer Science: Clothing and Retail Management

The physical and social space in which a consumer finds herself is a large influencing factor on product evaluation and decision-making (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:434). De Klerk (1999) states that, although most clothing consumers have a preconceived idea about where to go shopping for clothing and which type of clothing is desired, the final decision-making takes place within the store where consumers need information about the clothing products in order to evaluate the quality and to be able to make the final decision. It is said that retailers need to spend enough money, space and time on fitting rooms as the fitting room can be seen as the point and place where most apparel-based decisions are made (Lee & Johnson, sa:2). Fitting rooms are one of the critical areas in clothing stores; this is where the consumer tries on apparel products, makes evaluations about the products, and decisions to buy these apparel products or not (Rea, Mang & Underhill, as quoted by Baumstarck, 2008:12).

The research problem of this study is that in order for consumers to evaluate apparel products effectively and to make apparel buying decisions with which they can be satisfied, the fitting room experience plays a role. However, it is not known how consumers evaluate apparel products' quality and how the fitting room experience should be in order for the consumers to evaluate the apparel products' quality effectively. Therefore the **purpose** of this study was to explore and describe the role of the fitting room experience in Mzansi youth female consumers' evaluation of

apparel products' quality. The retail experience entails the aesthetic (stimulus, emotion and cognition) as well as functional (synchronising impressions, layout, space, service, furniture & fixtures) aspects. Evaluation of apparel quality comprises intrinsic, extrinsic and behavioural characteristics. The behavioural characteristics include the apparel products' functional (durability, comfort and maintenance) and aesthetic (stimulus, emotion and cognition) qualities.

The **justification** for conducting this research was that this research could lead to the generation of new information. This information may be used by retailers to enhance the fitting room experience in order to make it easier for consumers to evaluate apparel products' quality, so that the most appropriate apparel buying decisions can be made and customer satisfaction may be increased.

The confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm was used as theoretical perspective for the study. This paradigm was integrated with the literature and the relevant concepts to form the conceptual framework which directed the study. This study was conducted qualitatively where the aim was to explore and describe the phenomenon. Phenomenology was used as strategy of inquiry.

The Mzansi youth female consumers, who are part of the Black Diamond consumer group, were used as unit of analysis for this study, as the literature indicates that the Black Diamonds are the fastest growing consumer group within South Africa. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to accumulate the participants of the study. Fifteen females took part in this study. Fortunately data saturation did occur, so no more participants were needed.

The researcher used unstructured interviews to gather data as well as a photo-elicitation technique. The photos were used as an external stimulus in the interview process. This ensured data with depth and breadth. Two interviews (approximately 30 minutes each) were held with each participant. The second interview was only conducted after each participant had completed a specific task. The data was analysed by using the five steps suggested by Yin (2011:176).

The findings showed that the fitting room experience does play a crucial role in the Mzansi youth female consumer's evaluation of apparel products' quality. Furthermore it showed that the Mzansi youth female consumers do have clear expectations regarding the fitting room's aesthetics and functionality, and also how

these two elements should interact and should be in order for the Mzansi youth female consumer to be able to evaluate the apparel products' quality effectively. The findings further showed that when these expectations are not met by the actual fitting room experience it leads to the Mzansi youth female consumer being dissatisfied and therefore stopping her evaluation of the apparel products' quality or even leaving the store.

Therefore this study came to the overall conclusion that the fitting room is the place where the final decision to buy or not to buy is made, and where decisions about possible future visits are made, irrespective of the rest of the retail environment. It should therefore be treated like the queen of the apparel retail environment, and certainly not like the Cinderella.

Laus Deo! Praise be to God!

I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But, take heart I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Herewith, I would like to thank a few people from the bottom of my heart; without each and every one of you, the success of this study would not have been possible.

- Thank you to the University of Pretoria for the bursary which helped me tremendously financially.
- Thank you to Brenton Naidoo, Martin Kelbrick and the specific retail group for permission to gather data in two of your stores.
- Thank you to all of the participants of the study for your valuable time and willingness to discuss the research problem.
- Thank you to Dr Anna-Mart Bonthuys for editing my language, to ensure that this is truly a study of which I can be proud.
- Thank you to all of my colleagues at the University of Pretoria, especially to Chanelle van Oordt and Jonette Meyer for your interest and encouragement.
- Thank you to my Bible study group for your interest and prayers. Every week it gave me renewed hope and strength.
- Thank you to my family and friends for your love, interest and prayers. A special thank you to Stoffel and Sarie Vermaak.
- Thank you to my parents, Peet and Rynette Du Plessis, for your love and help financially. I cannot even begin to say how much it means to me.
- Thank you to my supervisor, Professor Helena De Klerk, for your patience, encouragement, pep talks, and also for your help financially. I don't think you understand what impact you have had on my study and my self-esteem. I appreciate it so much.
- Thank you to my husband and soul mate, Nico Vermaak, for your unconditional love, interest and support during this period. I love you with all my heart.
- Lastly and most importantly, I would like to thank Jesus Christ, my Saviour, who truly carried me every step of the way. Without Him none of this would have been possible!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
	LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
	LIST OF ADDENDA.....	xiv
	CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE	
1.1	INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.2	PROBLEM STATEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION.....	2
1.3	CHOICE OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR THE STUDY.....	3
1.4	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
1.4.1	The retail experience and the fitting room application.....	5
1.4.1.1	The role of aesthetics in the retail experience.....	5
1.4.1.2	The role of functionality in the retail experience.....	6
1.4.2	The quality of apparel products.....	6
1.5	THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	8
1.6	THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	10
1.7	THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	12
1.7.1	Research approach and design.....	12
1.7.2	Sampling plan.....	13
1.7.2.1	Unit of analysis.....	13
1.7.2.2	Sampling techniques.....	13
1.7.3	Data collection techniques.....	14
1.7.3.1	Unstructured interviews.....	14
1.7.3.2	Photo-elicitation.....	15
1.7.4	Data analysis.....	16

1.8	PRESENTATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY.....	16
	CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	19
2.2	THE RETAIL EXPERIENCE AND THE FITTING ROOM APPLICATION.....	23
2.2.1	The role of aesthetics in the retail experience.....	24
2.2.1.1	Stimulus.....	24
2.2.1.2	Emotion.....	28
2.2.1.3	Cognition.....	31
2.2.2	The role of functionality in the retail experience.....	34
2.2.2.1	Synchronising impressions.....	34
2.2.2.2	Layout.....	35
2.2.2.3	Space.....	36
2.2.2.4	Service.....	38
2.2.2.5	Furniture.....	40
2.2.2.6	Fixtures.....	41
2.2.3	The role of the fitting room in the retail experience.....	42
2.3	THE QUALITY OF APPAREL PRODUCTS.....	44
2.3.1	Intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics.....	45
2.3.2	Behavioural characteristics.....	47
2.3.2.1	Functionality.....	47
2.3.2.2	Aesthetics.....	49
2.4	CHOICE OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR THE STUDY.....	52
2.5	CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY.....	54

	CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	56
3.2	THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	56
3.3	THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	58
3.4	RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN.....	59
3.5	SAMPLING PLAN.....	61
3.5.1	Unit of analysis.....	61
3.5.2	Sampling techniques.....	62
3.6	DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES.....	64
3.6.1	Unstructured interviews.....	64
3.6.2	Photo-elicitation.....	66
3.6.3	The initial meeting and the first unstructured interview.....	67
3.6.4	The task meeting.....	67
3.6.5	The last unstructured interview.....	68
3.6.6	The specific retailers.....	68
3.7	DATA ANALYSIS.....	69
3.7.1	Step 1: Compiling.....	70
3.7.2	Step 2: Disassembling.....	70
3.7.3	Step 3: Reassembling.....	73
3.7.4	Step 4: Interpreting.....	73
3.7.5	Step 5: Concluding.....	74
3.8	TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	74
3.8.1	Credibility.....	74
3.8.2	Transferability.....	75
3.8.3	Dependability.....	76
3.8.4	Conformability.....	76

3.9	ETHICS.....	76
	CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION	
4.1	BACKGROUND.....	78
4.2	TO EXPLORE AND DESCRIBE MZANSI YOUTH FEMALE CONSUMERS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE FITTING ROOM EXPERIENCE AS PART OF THE OVERALL RETAIL EXPERIENCE.....	78
4.2.1	To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the aesthetics of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.....	79
4.2.2	To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the functionality of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.....	83
4.2.3	To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel products' quality in terms of intrinsic characteristics, extrinsic characteristics and behavioural characteristics.....	89
4.3	TO EXPLORE AND DESCRIBE MZANSI YOUTH FEMALE CONSUMERS' REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE OF THE FITTING ROOM AS PART OF THE OVERALL RETAIL EXPERIENCE.....	92
4.3.1	To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the aesthetics of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience.....	93
4.3.2	To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the functionality of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience.....	95
4.3.3	To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel products' quality in terms of its intrinsic	

	characteristics, extrinsic characteristics and behavioural characteristics.....	103
4.4	INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS.....	106
	CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	111
5.2	OVERALL CONCLUSIONS.....	111
5.3	IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	113
5.4	CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY.....	114
5.5	EVALUATION OF THE STUDY.....	115
5.5.1	Research approach and strategy.....	116
5.5.2	Unit of analysis.....	116
5.5.3	Data collection techniques.....	116
5.5.4	Data analysis.....	118
5.5.5	Trustworthiness.....	118
5.5.5.1	Credibility.....	119
5.5.5.2	Transferability.....	119
5.5.5.3	Dependability	120
5.5.5.4	Conformability.....	120
5.6	LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	120
6	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	121

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: OPERATIONALISATION OF OBJECTIVES 1 AND 2.....	71
--	----

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: CONFIRMATION/DISCONFIRMATION PARADIGM.....	4
FIGURE 2: THE ROLE OF THE FITTING ROOM EXPERIENCE ON APPAREL QUALITY EVALUATION.....	9
FIGURE 3: CONFIRMATION/DISCONFIRMATION PARADIGM.....	53
FIGURE 4: THE ROLE OF THE FITTING ROOM EXPERIENCE ON APPAREL QUALITY EVALUATION.....	56

LIST OF ADDENDA

ADDENDUM A:	PARTICIPANT PROFILE.....	132
ADDENDUM B:	EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW ANALYSIS.....	133
ADDENDUM C:	PHOTOGRAPHS.....	144

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

When it comes to apparel products many influences determine purchasing decisions, and retailers need a more comprehensive understanding of what consumers value as important when they are engaged in the consumer decision-making process (Rath, Bay, Petrizzi & Gill, 2008:5). This could lead to knowledge which might bring about higher consumer satisfaction and retail sales (North, de Vos & Kotzé, 2003). De Klerk (1999) states that, although most apparel consumers have a preconceived idea about where to go and shop for apparel products and which types of products are desired, the final decision-making takes place within the store where consumers evaluate the quality and fit of the actual products.

If cleverly used, store elements can evoke many desired intentions in a consumer (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:446). The retail experience involves consumer practices and reactions induced by aspects of the environment, the overall situation as well as the characteristics of the consumer. The shopping environment consists of social as well as expressive, formal and symbolic qualities which are pleasing in themselves and which can influence the acceptance of the merchandise in general (Fiore & Kim, 2007). The physical and social space in which a consumer finds herself has a strong influence on her product evaluation (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:434). An apparel product is evaluated in terms of its quality. Consumers evaluate the quality of apparel items in terms of intrinsic characteristics (fibre content, fabric and construction techniques), extrinsic characteristics (the store, brand and price), as well as the behavioural characteristics (aesthetics and functionality) (De Klerk & Tselepis, 2007; Romeo, 2009).

Shoppers evaluate their appearance in the fitting room and they form important opinions of the apparel products, including its fit and appearance on the body (All Dressed Up, The perfect fit, Fitting Designs and Mang as quoted by Baumstarck, 2008:12). Retailers need to spend enough money, space and time on fitting rooms, as these may be seen as the point and place where most apparel-based decisions are made (Lee & Johnson, sa:2). Fitting rooms are essential to the retail experience and often stand for that final instance where the consumer decides whether to make

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

an apparel purchase or not (Baumstarck, 2008:9). The consumer's time in the fitting room can be seen as the moment where he/she experiences an emotional response due to the environmental attributes when trying on garments (Baumstarck, 2008:12). Fitting room users might even use the same subconscious elements to evaluate the fitting room experience that are used on the main selling floor, such as quality, aesthetics, socialisation and culture (Baumstarck, 2008:12). This research study will therefore focus on the role that the fitting room experience (aesthetics and functionality), as part of the overall retail experience, might play in the female consumer's evaluation of apparel products' quality (with the use of intrinsic, extrinsic and behavioural characteristics).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION

This study's problem arises due to that, in order for a consumer to make appropriate apparel buying decisions with which she can be satisfied, the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience and the consumer's satisfaction thereof might play a role in the evaluation stage of the apparel decision making process.

South Africa is the "Rainbow Nation" of the world with its kaleidoscope of picturesque attractiveness and mesh of multicultural and ethnic legacy (Internet: Country Profile: South Africa, 2010:3). The dramatic political changes within South Africa since 1994 have also impacted on the importance of retailers' understanding of consumers' formal cultural backgrounds with regard to preferences and tastes (North & Kotzé, 2004). It is not known how these multi-cultured consumers (more specifically the Mzansi youth female consumers) in South Africa experience the fitting room in terms of its aesthetics and functionality, how apparel products are evaluated in the fitting room in terms of their quality, and how it is decided to purchase or not to purchase these apparel products. If a retailer fails to stay in touch with emerging markets and other cultures the consequences can be very costly (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:62). The Mzansi youth forms part of the emerging Black Diamond consumer group – also known as the black middle class – which according to research studies has become

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

one of the most powerful markets in South Africa in the past ten years (Ndanga, Louw & Van Rooyen, 2008:10). The people of the Mzansi youth sub-segment are still living in the homes of their parents; they are single students who in 2008 earned only about R800 per month (Ndanga *et al.*, 2008:13). Ndanga *et al.* (2008:13) say that, although this segment contributes only 3% to the Black Diamonds' buying power, they are the country's future consumers. Therefore this study's purpose is to focus on how the fitting room is experienced by the Mzansi youth female consumers as part of their overall retail experience in terms of aesthetics and functionality, and also to see what role the fitting room experience plays when these consumers evaluate apparel products' quality.

The justification of this study lies in the fact that if the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience is explored in terms of the role it plays in the quality evaluation of apparel products, as well as the Mzansi youth female consumer's satisfaction with it, it might lead to new information. This information can be used by retailers to enhance the fitting room experience so that consumers in future may be able to evaluate apparel products' quality more effectively and thereby make more appropriate apparel buying decisions with which they are satisfied.

1.3 CHOICE OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR THE STUDY

Buying patterns for consumer services and products are continuously changing (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff & Terblanche, 2008:67). When it comes to apparel products, many influences determine purchasing decisions (Rath *et al.*, 2008:5), and retailers need a more comprehensive understanding of what consumers value as important when they are engaged in the consumer decision-making process, as this will lead to knowledge which might bring about higher consumer satisfaction and higher retail sales (North *et al.*, 2003:43). Customer satisfaction is an emotion experienced by the customer in reaction to the degree that a product or service met or exceeded the customer's expectations (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:5). Customer

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

satisfaction can be explained by using the Confirmation/Disconfirmation Paradigm (see **FIGURE 1**).

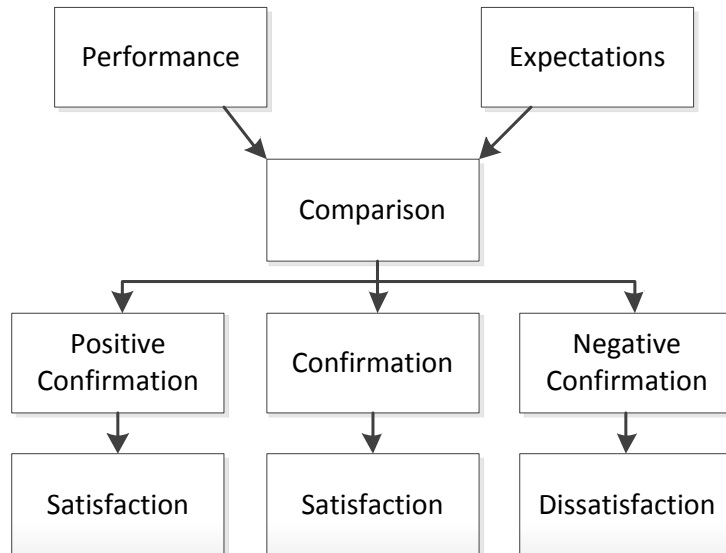


FIGURE 1: CONFIRMATION/DISCONFIRMATION PARADIGM (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:5)

This figure, which represents the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm, indicates that consumers have expectations of a product or service before it is bought, and these are compared against the actual performance of the product or service (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:21). If the actual performance meets or exceeds the consumer's expectations thereof it will most likely leave the consumer feeling satisfied (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:21). The opposite is also true. Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009:130) state that the confirmation or disconfirmation is dependent on the consumer's primary expectation of the product or service; it can be very difficult to satisfy a high expectancy with the actual performance. Similarly, if the consumer does not have sufficient knowledge or is not familiar with the products or service, she might have poorly shaped expectations (Evans *et al.*, 2009:131).

The confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm was found to be a very relevant theoretical perspective for this particular study as it is not known what Mzansi youth female consumers expect of the fitting room experience or how it should be for them to be able to evaluate apparel products' quality in order to decide about purchasing the products or not.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

A thorough literature review was done (see **CHAPTER 2**) to cover the relevant concepts as well as the implications for the study.

1.4.1 The retail experience and the fitting room application

The physical and social space in which a consumer finds herself has a large influence on her product evaluation (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:434). A shopping experience engages more elements than merely the acquisition of goods. It involves tangential experiences from the retail environment which may stem from the sophistication of the store design, recreations, educational actions and the entertainment (Fiore & Kim, 2007). The more qualities a retailer presents, the more likely it is that the consumer will return to the setting and buy products (Diamond, 2006:73). For the consumer an experience occurs when an organisation purposefully uses services and items as props to entice the individual consumer in a manner that creates an unforgettable event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Summers and Hebert, as quoted by Burns and Neisner (2006), found that when a customer is faced with a purchase decision the retail environment may play a larger role than the item itself. The retail experience includes both the aesthetics of the store and its functionality. Both these concepts are discussed as regards to their applicability to the fitting room experience.

1.4.1.1 The role of aesthetics in the retail experience

Aesthetics can be defined as a careful selection or appreciation of formal, symbolic and expressive qualities of an item or space, which provide benefits of a non-instrumental nature and lead the consumer to experience satisfaction or pleasure (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4-13). An aesthetic retail experience therefore depends not only

on the features of the product, but also on the retail environment. The latter has a distinctive influence on consumers (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4). An aesthetic experience affects the individual in three ways: the body by the stimulation of the senses (stimulus), the soul by the expression of feelings (emotion), and the mind by the activation of thought processing (cognition) (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:13). All these concepts and their implications for the study are discussed in full detail in **Chapter 2**.

1.4.1.2 The role of functionality in the retail experience

Baker, Levy and Grewal (1992) state that a retail space can be a valuable and powerful marketing device if it is optimally utilised. In order for a space to bring about a positive response among customers, it should reach out and grasp potential customers (Vieira, 2010). It is said that the most important task of a store is its capacity to facilitate the end-objective of its customers (Canter, as quoted by Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss, 2002; Shukla & Babin, 2013). Effective space design links the merchandise and atmospherics together in order to create a satisfying/pleasing and productive retail experience (Bell & Ternus, 2006:60; Machado & Diggines, 2012:42). Functional elements that should be addressed in the retail environment include the synchronising of impressions, the layout of the store, the use of space, services that are rendered, as well as the furniture and fixtures in the store. All these elements as well as their implications for the study are discussed in full detail in **Chapter 2**.

1.4.2 The quality of apparel products

The quality of an item refers to the entirety of the item's characteristics, which include end-use, appearance, performance, consistency and its lack of restrictions (Kadolph, 2007:14). Together with this, it is said that quality consists of a holistic, product-, producer-, customer- and value-based perspective (Kadolph, 1998:13-21). For this particular study, the concern is the customer's perspective, as the customer

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

is the one evaluating the product in the fitting room before it is bought. From a customer's perspective, an apparel product's quality is dependent on the dimensions of a service or product which is important to a particular consumer (Kadolph, 1998:16). From a customer's perspective quality is not a stable state, as the customer decides whether an apparel product exceeds or meets certain expectations (Kadolph, 1998:16). Therefore the product that meets or exceeds the highest degree of the individual's expectations has the highest quality (Koskennurmi-Sivonen & Pietarila, 2005). According to Brown and Rice (1998:38), different dimensions are used by consumers when assessing apparel items in terms of quality. Creusen (2010) notes that it might be beneficial for retailers to attend to the aspects that are important to consumers before deciding to buy products. Smith, De Klerk and Fletcher (2011) state that apparel products are assessed or evaluated in terms of the products' intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics. Intrinsic characteristics include the apparel products' fibre content, the fabric, construction techniques and finishes. If these characteristics are changed then the entire garment will be different (Romeo, 2009). Extrinsic characteristics, on the other hand, include the store, brand and price (Romeo, 2009). A change in extrinsic characteristics does not change the apparel product itself (Romeo, 2009). In many cases the consumers do not have the knowledge or experience to evaluate the intrinsic characteristics in terms of how it will affect the product's behavioural qualities; therefore they will use extrinsic characteristics to form a perception of how they think the product will behave. Smith (2010:19) states that using extrinsic characteristics to evaluate apparel quality is an easy way for a consumer to evaluate apparel quality as this type of information is easy to access at pay-points.

Certain abstract characteristics are ascribed to apparel products by consumers, such as beauty and durability, which relate to an apparel product's aesthetics and functionality (Hines & Swinker, 2001). This forms part of the behavioural characteristics that are also evaluated by the consumer when she assesses and evaluates apparel items while in the fitting room.

Functionality forms part of the behavioural characteristics or qualities of an apparel product and are mainly influenced by the intrinsic characteristics of the product. For

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

the purpose of this section, functionality is explained in terms of an apparel product's durability, comfort and maintenance, as well as how the product's intrinsic characteristics influence these elements. The concept of functionality is discussed in detail in **Chapter 2**.

As already mentioned aesthetics form part of the behavioural qualities of an apparel item and can be defined as a careful selection or appreciation of formal, symbolic or expressive qualities of an item or space, which provide benefits of a non-instrumental nature and lead the consumer to experience satisfaction or pleasure (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4-13). In the retail environment, an apparel aesthetic experience affects the individual in three ways: the body by the stimulation of the senses (stimulus), the soul by the expression of feelings (emotion), and the mind by the activation of thought processing (cognition) (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:13). The role of stimuli such as sight, smell, touch and movement in the elicitation of certain emotions and cognitions and the implications for apparel quality evaluation are discussed in **Chapter 2**.

1.5 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

With the chosen theoretical perspective and relevant literature in mind, the following schematic conceptual framework directed the study:

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

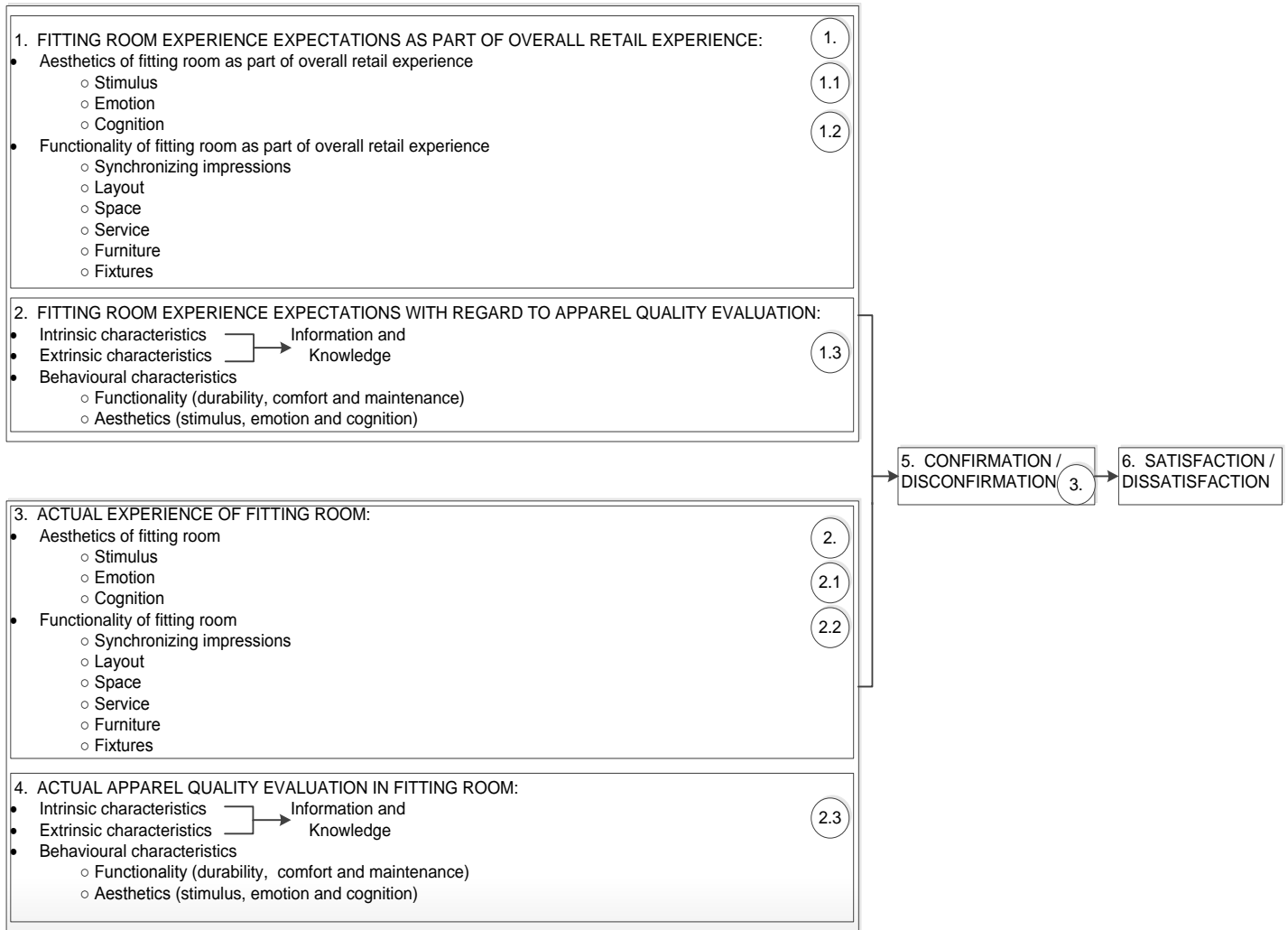


FIGURE 2: THE ROLE OF THE FITTING ROOM EXPERIENCE ON APPAREL QUALITY EVALUATION

Consumers, in this case the Mzansi youth female consumers, have specific expectations regarding the fitting room experience as part of their overall retail experience. This includes not only expectations relating to the aesthetics of the fitting room (stimulus, emotions and cognitions), but also the functionality of the fitting room in terms of layout, space, furniture, etcetera.

Consumers also have expectations regarding how the fitting room should assist them in evaluating apparel items in terms of the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics, and also in terms of the perceived behavioural characteristics of the item, namely its functionality and aesthetics.

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

Whether a consumer uses intrinsic or extrinsic characteristics as cues when evaluating the apparel products' quality in the fitting room, will depend on the amount of information and knowledge the consumer has. Especially those consumers with little or no knowledge of and experience with a specific apparel product, in many instances rely heavily on extrinsic characteristics as cues for forming a perception of the perceived quality of the product. The moment of truth is when the consumer actually takes the apparel item to the fitting room and experiences the cubicle/area in terms of the aesthetics (stimulus, emotion and cognition) and functionality (synchronising impressions, layout, space, service, furniture and fixtures). The actual apparel quality evaluation will take place once the consumer is in the fitting room cubicle and will be done by using the product's intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics to form an impression of possible functional and aesthetic behavioural qualities that will only come to light when the item is worn. The comparison between what is expected and what is actually experienced and evaluated in the fitting room will result in a confirmation or disconfirmation of consumers' expectations and might ultimately play a role in whether a consumer experiences satisfaction or dissatisfaction which is an emotion that influences a consumer's decision to purchase the apparel item or not as well as her post purchase satisfaction and return intentions.

The above conceptual framework also directs the objectives and sub-objectives for the study.

1.6 THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the role of the fitting room experience in Mzansi youth female consumers' evaluation of apparel products' quality. The following objectives were developed based on the literature review. There were two main objectives, each with three sub-objectives. The objectives and sub-objectives are the following:

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

Objective 1: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 1.1: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the aesthetics of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 1.2: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the functionality of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 1.3: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel products' quality in terms of:

- Intrinsic characteristics
- Extrinsic characteristics
- Behavioural characteristics

Objective 2: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 2.1: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the aesthetics of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 2.2: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the functionality of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 2.3: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel products' quality in terms of:

- Intrinsic characteristics
- Extrinsic characteristics
- Behavioural characteristics

Objective 3: To compare and discuss the congruence between consumers' expectations and experiences (of the fitting room) in order to present the discrepancies that were highlighted by the participants as a disconfirmation of their expectations (positive and negative) as evidence that could be used by retailers to improve the fitting rooms in the retail environments to the mutual advantages of themselves and their customers.

1.7 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.7.1 Research approach and design

As nothing is known about the Mzansi youth female consumer's quality evaluation of apparel products, a qualitative research approach was chosen for the study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:270), when a researcher follows a qualitative approach, the objective is to study the behaviour of people from their own perspective. A phenomenological approach was followed as a strategy of inquiry. This strategy involves the explanation of conscious daily experiences and social action of consumers (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:316). Phenomenology is also about the experience from the individual's perspective of taken-for-granted tasks (Lester, 1999:1). By using this approach and strategy the researcher could develop meaning and understanding of the phenomenon. For this particular study the phenomenological strategy was deemed to be the best, as the aim was to try and understand and describe how the fitting room experience might play a role in the apparel quality evaluation stage of the Mzansi youth female consumer's decision-making process. Another justification for this strategy was the fact that the decision-making process of apparel products happens within the store and is often taken for granted as it is seen as an automatic process; therefore this strategy attempted to explicate the decision-making process, in terms of the evaluation stage within the store, in order to understand it better and to create meaning. The findings of a phenomenological study need to be connected to existing literature as one should have a distinct place (paradigm) from where one can start the research process

(Delpont, Fouché & Schurink, 2011:305). Therefore for this study an extensive literature review of all the relevant concepts was undertaken before data gathering commenced.

1.7.2 Sampling plan

1.7.2.1 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for this research study was the female apparel consumers of the Mzansi youth sub-segment of the black middle class in South Africa, also known as the Black Diamonds. As previously mentioned, the Black Diamonds are still an emerging consumer market in South Africa. The Mzansi youth sub-segment are still living in the homes of their parents and are single students who in 2008 earned only about R800 a month (Ndanga *et al.*, 2008:13). Females were chosen to be studied because it was found that in terms of decision-making the women of the Black Diamonds play a more dominant role (Van Loggerenberg & Herbst, 2010).

1.7.2.2 Sampling techniques

The sampling techniques that were used for this study were purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is used when particular people have certain features which are important for a particular research study (Silverman, as quoted by Strydom & Delpont, 2011:392). In instances where only a small identifiable segment of the entire population (Mzansi youth female consumers) is to be studied, purposive sampling is recommended (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:166). Snowball sampling is directed at individuals that are hard to reach (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:393). Snowball sampling is done by asking an individual who forms part of the unit of analysis if she might know other individuals that might be part of the study's unit of analysis (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:393). First-year female students, who were deemed to form part of the Mzansi youth sub-segment, were approached/located at the University of Pretoria's main campus because, as mentioned above, one of the

Mzansi youth's characteristics is being a student. First-year female students were asked to participate in this study as they might not have as much experience/knowledge of the apparel shops in Hatfield/Brooklyn, since they might originally come from all over the country or from different areas within Pretoria. When sample members were located they were asked whether they knew any other females that might also be part of the Mzansi youth sub-segment, so that the sample could be increased and be more accurate. Both purposive and snowball sampling enabled the researcher to locate the specific unit of analysis. Fifteen individuals (18-20 years old) were initially asked to participate, but the number was subject to change if data saturation did not occur. Data saturation occurs only once the researcher cannot learn anything new from further data obtained from the participants (Monette *et al.* and Seidman, as quoted by Greeff, 2011:350).

1.7.3 Data collection techniques

Babbie and Mouton (2001:288) state that the research method selected to be used in a particular research study is dependent on which method will answer the research problem more effectively. The methods chosen to be used for this research study and its problem were unstructured interviews and a photo-elicitation technique.

1.7.3.1 Unstructured interviews

Unstructured interviews are done in order to understand the experiences of persons so as to see what meaning they derive from their experiences (Payne & Payne, 2004:132; Greeff, 2011:348). The focus is on determining the expectations, facts, forecasts and opinions of individuals as well as the reactions to primary findings and possible solutions (Greeff, 2011:348). It is the responsibility of the researcher to probe for clarification or further explanation where needed, but to stay neutral and non-directive toward the participant (Payne & Payne, 2004:132; Yin, 2011:137). In order for this type of interview to be used, the researcher should have extensive

knowledge in the field of inquiry so that probing can be used to optimise the data collection (Payne & Payne, 2004:132). Therefore for this study the researcher did an extensive literature review before beginning with data collection. This method of data gathering was found to be appropriate because of the research aim being to derive meaning from the Mzansi youth female consumers' reactions to the fitting room experience in terms of their apparel quality evaluation. The interview method enabled the researcher to obtain rich as well as in-depth data on the expectations and the actual "real world" experiences that these young women had in the fitting room, in order to see whether it played a role in their apparel quality evaluation.

Two lengthy (30 minutes each on average) unstructured interviews were held with each participant. For more detail on the set-up of the interviews as well as the focus of each interview, see **Chapter 3**. For each participant, both interviews were audio-recorded, and field notes were made, as is recommended for interviews (Payne & Payne, 2004:132).

1.7.3.2 Photo-elicitation

Photo-elicitation entailed using photographs which were taken by participants as a point of departure in an interview (Kent & Kirby, 2009; Lachal, Speranza, Taïeb, Falissard, Lefèvre, Moro & Levy, 2012). The photographs aided the interviewer by being used as a kind of mediator which makes verbal exchanges, the recalling of the experience as well as the expression thereof easier (Mountian, Lawthom, Kellock, Duggan, Sixsmith, Kagan, Hawkins, Haworth, Siddiquee, Worley, Brown, Griffiths & Purcell, 2011:356; Lachal *et al.*, 2012). This approach is also seen as phenomenological in nature in that it entails a thorough exploration of the participants' experiences (Lachal *et al.*, 2012). Photo-elicitation is seen as a technique to sharpen the participants' memory and is used as an external stimulus, which can bridge communication gaps between the researcher and the participants themselves by facilitating empathy; it lends itself to the flexibility of coverage and

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

exploration of new areas – a technique which produces richer data (Burt, Johansson & Thelander, 2007; Reavey, 2011a: xxvii; Lachal *et al.*, 2012).

This technique was found to be appropriate as one of its advantages is that it can bridge distinctive cultural worlds in that participants are given the opportunity to present their worlds by taking photographs and this enables the researcher to get an insider's perspective (Burt *et al.*, 2007). As the unit of analysis for this particular research study was the Mzansi youth females, and as their culture is distinctly different to the researcher's own culture, this technique was very appropriate. For more detail on how this technique was used during the data gathering period for this study, please see **Chapter 3**.

1.7.4 Data analysis

Data analysis is the procedure of establishing order, meaning and structure from the load of data that has been collected (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:397). The data for this study was analysed by using the following five steps (Yin, 2011:176): (1) Compiling, (2) Disassembling, (3) Reassembling, (4) Interpreting, and (5) Concluding. These steps have a “recursive and iterative” connection and do not necessarily follow in a linear sequence (Yin, 2011:179). For more detail on each step in the data analysis procedure used for this study, please see **Chapter 3**.

1.8 PRESENTATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The presentation and structure of the study are discussed in this section. This will help the reader to see the logical flow of this research process and to follow each step that was needed in order to arrive at the overall conclusions of the research problem.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 contains an extensive literature review of the concepts that directed the study and formed part of the research problem. This literature was studied in order for the researcher to gain enough knowledge on the subject field in order to go through the research process successfully, by asking relevant and probing questions during the interviews, if needed. This chapter concludes with the choice of theoretical perspective for the study (which also directed the research) as well as the justification thereof.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology of the study, covering the schematic conceptual framework, the objectives of the study, the research approach and design, the sampling plan, the data collection techniques, the data analysis, and also what was done to ensure that the study and its findings can be viewed as trustworthy and ethical. This chapter also refers to **ADDENDA A** and **B**, which contains a full participant profile and an example of how the interviews were analysed, respectively.

Chapter 4: Findings, discussion and interpretation

Chapter 4 includes the findings of the research, a discussion of the findings as well as the interpretation thereof. This chapter also refers to **ADDENDUM C**, which shows some of the photographs taken by the participants; these are discussed together with the findings.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, implications, contribution to theory and recommendations

This is the final chapter of the study and includes the overall conclusions on the research objectives and sub-objectives. It also evaluates the study in terms of the research methodology; limitations are discussed and future research studies are suggested.

CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

Please note that when referring to the Mzansi youth female consumers in this study it applies to the participants of the study only, as the findings of a qualitative study cannot be generalised to the broader population. Also take note that this study's language was edited to conform to UK English.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Buying patterns for consumer services and products are continuously changing (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:67). When it comes to apparel products, many influences determine purchasing decisions (Rath *et al.*, 2008:5), and retailers need a more comprehensive understanding of what consumers value as important when they are engaged in the consumer decision-making process; such understanding will lead to knowledge which might bring about higher consumer satisfaction and retail sales (North *et al.*, 2003). The feeling that a product has met or exceeded the expectations of the customers signifies customer satisfaction (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:5). Customer satisfaction is thus a reaction from the customer because of how a product or service met or exceeded the customer's expectations of that particular product or service (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:5).

Before one can understand what the consumer values as important, how consumers experience satisfaction and how the buying pattern is influenced, one must first understand the consumer decision-making process. The consumer decision-making process is a goal-orientated, problem-solving procedure (Internet: Consumer Decision Making). It is important to note that the apparel consumer's decision-making process differs from other decisions being made, because the entire process (all the stages) usually takes place within the store. De Klerk (1999) states that, although most clothing consumers have a preconceived idea about where to go shopping for clothing and which type of clothing is desired, the final decision-making takes place within the store where consumers need information about the clothing products in order to evaluate the quality and to be able to make the final decision. It is therefore not strange that the rate of in-store decision-making is said to have reached a staggering percentage of 76 (Vijayalakshmi & Magesh, 2013).

Generally, when making decisions, consumers follow the following set of stages (Pham & Higgins, 2005:10; Lamb *et al.*, 2008:68): (1) Problem recognition, (2) Information search, (3) Evaluation, (4) Choice/purchase, and (5) Post-purchase evaluation.

The problem recognition stage can be seen as the arousal of a want or need; this can be explained as the difference between a person's actual situation and the situation where the person wishes to be (Pham & Higgins, 2005:11). In a retail environment this will be when a woman becomes aware of an apparel item within the store that she does not have in her closet at home.

The information searching stage is concerned with how the consumer acquires information on various alternatives which could possibly solve the problem recognised above, and is viewed as an important step in the behaviour of consumers (Retief & De Klerk, 2003; Shiffman & Kanuk, 2007:314; Lamb *et al.*, 2008:69). Information can be searched internally or externally (Retief & De Klerk, 2003). External searches include sources outside of the consumer's own experience. Friends, family, Internet websites and business activities can be seen as elements of external searches (Retief & De Klerk, 2003; Shiffman & Kanuk, 2007:314). According to Jacobs (2003:41), consumers will move to different pre-selected stores in search of the product or item that will satisfy the aroused want or need. One can also say that consumers will move within the specific store but between different departments in search of similar products which will satisfy the need identified. Internal searching, on the other hand, is concerned with the consumer's memory of a situation or product as well as the perception thereof (Retief & De Klerk, 2003).

According to Brown and Rice (1998:38), different dimensions are used by consumers when assessing clothing items. The evaluation of alternatives stage, which is the most important stage for this study and which takes place inside the shop, involves the consumer's examination of the different options or products in terms of their appeal, properties, price, quality and the ability each has to satisfy the need (Pham & Higgins, 2005:28). Quality will be studied in this particular study from the consumer's perspective. The quality of an item refers to the entirety of the item's characteristics, which include end-use, appearance, performance, consistency and its lack of restrictions (Kadolph, 2007:14). Consumers evaluate the quality of apparel items in terms of intrinsic characteristics (fibre content, the fabric and the construction techniques), extrinsic characteristics (the store, brand, price, etcetera),

and also the behavioural characteristics (functionality and aesthetics) (De Klerk & Tselepis, 2007; Romeo, 2009; Smith, 2010:19-23).

The choice/purchase stage is about the consumer's decision to buy or not to buy, whether to accept or reject the item that has been evaluated in the above stage. This is done when the consumer selects the major features or criteria that will provide the consumer with the highest satisfaction or benefit, and then that product is chosen to be purchased (Rath *et al.*, 2008:287).

The post-purchase evaluation stage includes the discomfort that can be caused, if the consumer feels that the wrong decision was made during the decision-making process. This discomfort can vary from wondering whether the chosen alternative was in fact the correct choice, to severe remorse and the conviction that the chosen item was indeed the incorrect choice (Pham & Higgins, 2005:42). Solomon and Rabolt (2004:432) view consumer satisfaction, alternative retailers and product disposal as part of the post-purchase step. This is the stage where the consumer decides whether the best choice was made and whether she is satisfied, whether to dispose of the product, to look for an alternative or to continue buying and using the product from the same retailer.

Consumer decision-making is concerned with the interaction between the consumer's behaviour, environmental factors and cognitive and affective processes (Internet: Consumer Decision Making). If one of these elements is not adhered to, it becomes a blocking mechanism to the consumer while the consumer is engaged in the decision-making process.

If cleverly used, store elements can evoke many desired intentions in a consumer (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:446). The retail experience involves consumer practices and reactions induced by aspects of the environment, the overall situation as well as the characteristics of the consumer. The shopping environment may consist of social as well as expressive, formal and symbolic qualities which are pleasing in themselves and can influence the acceptance of the merchandise in general (Fiore & Kim, 2007). The physical and social space in which a consumer finds herself is a big influencing factor on her product evaluation and decision-making (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:434). Fiore and Kim (2007) state that the recognised value of one offering

within the shopping experience can affect the consumer's opinion of other offerings. Thus, the idea that the consumer has about a specific retail environment such as the brand, the products, the quality of services and products, the layout and the aesthetic appeal may affect the consumer in such a manner that it influences the consumer within other areas in that retail environment. This can also be said about the fitting room as part of the retail environment. Kim, Koo and Chang (2009) and Clarke, Perry and Denson (2011) noted that consumer decision-making has shifted from the rational to the emotional and experiential. The consumer therefore needs an experience that taps into all five senses and also satisfies her/him on an emotional and cognitive level (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4; Clarke *et al.*, 2011). Facing increasing competition, retailers therefore have to plan the retail environment and launch innovations in the shopping environment that will increase consumers' dedication and frequency of shopping trips while supporting the decision-making process. The same could be said about the fitting room as part of the retail environment.

Retailers need to spend enough money, space and time on fitting rooms as it can be seen as the point and place where most apparel-based decisions are made (Lee & Johnson, sa:2). Fitting rooms are one of the critical areas in clothing stores; it is the space where the consumer tries on apparel products and makes evaluations about the products and decisions to buy these apparel products (Rea, Mang and Underhill, as quoted by Baumstarck, 2008:12). Shoppers evaluate their appearance in the fitting room and they form important opinions about the apparel product, including its fit and appearance on the body (All Dressed Up, The perfect fit, Fitting Designs and Mang, as quoted by Baumstarck, 2008:12). Fitting rooms are therefore essential to the retail experience and often stand for that final instance where the consumer decides whether to make an apparel purchase or not (Baumstarck, 2008:9). The consumer's time in the fitting room can be seen as the moment where the consumer experiences an emotional response to the environmental attributes when trying on garments (Baumstarck, 2008:12). Fitting room users might even subconsciously use the same elements to evaluate the fitting room experience as are used on the main selling floor, such as quality, aesthetics, socialisation and culture (Baumstarck, 2008:12). The fitting room is therefore a key influencing factor in the evaluation stage

and also in the choice/purchase stage of the apparel consumer's decision-making process.

From everyday experiences in apparel retail stores it unfortunately seems that many retailers have not yet realised the importance of their fitting rooms. This chapter therefore firstly addresses the significance of the fitting room in the retail experience, secondly the concept of apparel quality and the role of the fitting room in apparel quality evaluation, and thirdly the choice of the theoretical perspective as point of departure for studying the problem.

2.2 THE RETAIL EXPERIENCE AND THE FITTING ROOM APPLICATION

The physical and social space in which a consumer finds herself has a big influence on her evaluation of the product (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:434). Shopping experiences engage more elements than just acquiring goods. Shopping involves tangential experiences from the retail environment which stem from the sophisticated store design, recreations, educational actions and entertainment (Fiore & Kim, 2007). The more qualities a retailer presents, the more likely it is that the consumer will return to the setting and buy the products (Diamond, 2006:73). For the consumer an experience occurs when an organisation purposefully uses services and items as props to entice the individual consumer in such a manner that it creates an unforgettable event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Summers and Hebert (as quoted by Burns and Neisner, 2006) found that, when a consumer is faced with a purchase decision the retail environment can play a larger role than the item itself. The retail experience includes both the aesthetics of the store and its functionality. Both these concepts will be discussed in terms of their applicability to the fitting room experience.

2.2.1 The role of aesthetics in the retail experience

Aesthetics can be defined as a careful selection or appreciation of formal, symbolic and expressive qualities of an item or space, which provide benefits of a non-instrumental nature and lead the consumer to experience satisfaction or pleasure (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4-13). An aesthetic retail experience therefore not only depends on the features of the product but also depends on the retail environment, which has a distinctive influence on consumers (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4), for example on the attitude of the consumer toward the apparel item. The enjoyment of aesthetics was found to be one of the reasons for people to shop in the first place (Bloch, Ridgway & Dawson, as quoted by Fan, 2003). An aesthetic experience affects the individual in three ways: the body by the stimulation of the senses (stimulus), the soul by the expression of feelings (emotion), and the mind by the activation of thought processing (cognition) (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:13). This section will look at how consumers can be influenced in terms of the retail environment's aesthetics and how it can be applied to the fitting room, by taking a closer look at stimulus, emotion and cognition.

2.2.1.1 Stimulus

Stimulus can be defined as the impetus within the retail environment with the ability to affect consumers on a cognitive and emotional level (Fiore & Kim, 2007), as well as on functional level (discussed in more detail later). Together with this, the value that the consumer believes to have gained during the consumption process includes the mental play and aesthetically pleasing elements, such as the imagery and the sensory stimulants of the shopping environment (Fiore & Kim, 2007). Environmental stimuli influence emotional states of arousal and pleasure, which in return influence avoidance or approach behaviours (Baker *et al.*, 1992). Vieira (2010) concurs with this, and says that if a person sees a striking or exciting retail space, it may have a positive reaction on that person which may include experiencing some form of

pleasure. The author adds that an encounter with beautiful things may influence consumers in a positive way on such a level that it improves the quality of their daily lives and permits them to satisfy needs and wants on a higher level.

Stimulus includes material elements within a store environment such as music, colour and lighting (Baker *et al.*, 1992). These elements can be seen as ambient factors (scent, noise, temperature, music and lighting) and form part of the multi-sensory experience (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:37; Machado & Diggines, 2012:35, 41). Fiore and Kim (2007) deem ambient factors to be the non-structural elements of the store space. It is argued that ambient factors affect the non-visual senses and tend to be processed at a subconscious level (Baker *et al.*, 2002). Consumers notice ambient factors when it exceeds suitable ranges, meaning when music is too loud or the lighting is too bright (Baker *et al.*, 1992). A person's ability to identify, categorise and assess product designs is seen as a person's acumen (Osborne, as quoted by Vieira, 2010). A person with high acumen will be able to see small differences within a retail space and will be able to imagine how these differences fit with the entire experience (Vieira, 2010). Thus one can say that the stimulants observed by the customer can encourage her to make a buying decision. The multi-sensory experience includes the ambient factors observed by the consumer through sight, smell, kinesthetics, taste, touch and hearing (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:37).

Sight is most likely the most important element of the multi-sensory experience in the Western society and is used to gather information for the consumer (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:37; Rath *et al.*, 2008:59; Machado & Diggines, 2012:44). When a consumer enters a space a sense of purpose is gained by seeing the arrangement of the space as well as the furnishing (Rath *et al.*, 2008:59). Colour is generally seen as a vital element in fashion (Rath *et al.*, 2008:59). It has been recommended that the proper use of colour could improve the overall quality of the environment and could influence consumer behaviour. Lots of prisons, hospitals, organisations and schools have incorporated systematic colouring schemes which have been designed to evoke particular performance states in their populace (Mahnke, as quoted by Etnier & Hardy, 1997). It should also be noted that most of the colours in the spectrum will reflect a tint on merchandise, and therefore in terms of colour, light, neutral or non-

colours are recommended to be used on doors and walls in a retail space (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:209). Colour brings with it perceptions of gender, weight and temperature (Rengel, 2007:342). Lighting can also evoke different reactions from consumers, for instance, soft lighting tends to evoke pleasant and relaxing feelings more so than bright lighting, which can do the opposite. Lighting can create a welcoming effect on consumers (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:133). Consumers tend to feel a sense of order in a space which is tidy, where there is no dirt, or items lying around, but where everything is properly in place (Rengel, 2007:13).

Sight is an important sense in the fitting room, which means that the lighting and colour in the fitting room must be such that it helps the consumer to better see the fit of the apparel products on the body, but it should also be pleasant so that positive emotions and positive cognitive thoughts can be evoked. The consumer should also not walk into a dirty or untidy fitting room as this might cause negative thoughts and emotions, which can influence behaviour. If the above is adhered to it might enable the consumer to evaluate the products' quality more accurately and make more appropriate buying decisions.

In creating an aesthetic experience in terms of the sense of smell, the retailer can scent the internal space with a pleasant fragrance so as to positively influence the consumer's behaviour or mood (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:41). Machado and Diggins (2012:44) state that a smell can create pictures in the consumer's mind about an environment. Smell can be used for its congruity with other cues, its pleasantness and its novelty, and it has the power to evoke different thoughts in consumers (Fiore & Kim, 2007; Rath *et al.*, 2008:60). Stores such as Victoria Secret and The Body Shop use fragrance to create ambience in the retail store and to attract customers to the store (Rath *et al.*, 2008:60). In the fitting room, scent might also play an important role, because if a fitting room smells of sweat or any other odour which is unpleasant to the consumer, it might have a negative effect on the consumer's evaluation of the products' quality. A nice smelling fragrance might have the opposite effect on the consumer in the fitting room.

Kinesthetics has more to do with the perception of the consumer's body movement (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:40). Therefore it has more to do with the apparel product and

will be discussed later. Taste also has to do with the product (e.g. edible underwear) and will not be discussed in this study (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:42).

Touch, which is also more related to the product, can also be present in the actual retail space. Touch can include the temperature and flooring of the retail space (Parsons, 2011). Touch can be linked to the fitting room, for instance if the space/cubicle is too small or the lights are too warm, the temperature in the fitting room/cubicle will rise and will make the consumer uncomfortable while trying on apparel products. In the fitting room touch is also evident in the flooring as some retailers have carpets in their cubicles which might also contribute to the temperature rising in the cubicle, but it might also make the consumer feel more welcome in the fitting room. This might play a role on how the apparel products are evaluated and whether it is decided to buy or not to buy. Another form of touch refers to being touched by sales associates inside the retail environment (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:40). This form of touch might influence consumers and will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Sound can create an aesthetic experience and it might also have an influence on the apparel preferences of consumers (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:41). Fiore and Kimle (1997:42) believe that music conditions a consumer while apparel items are observed in the retail space. It is said that music and lighting together are able to create an emotional attachment in a consumer toward a store (Koo & Kim, 2013). This is supported by the fact that different types of music are able to evoke different emotional and behavioural reactions within consumers (Burner, as quoted by Baker *et al.*, 1992). Music influences consumers' affective reactions in general and can lighten stress on consumers who are forced to wait in queues in a retail environment (Hui, Dube and Chebat, as quoted by Baker *et al.*, 2002). Fiore and Kimle (1997:194) also believe that background music creates pleasure, promotes merchandise and also adds to the retailer's image. However, the authors caution retailers to carefully consider background music as it can either complement the setting or echo it (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:194). Other sounds that may be heard in a retail environment include the voices of other consumers, intercom systems, footsteps, ringing telephones and so on (Rengel, 2007:336).

Hearing may also play a role in the fitting room and the consumer's experience thereof. Music in the fitting room may help the consumer while trying on apparel products in that it may make the consumer want to move around in the cubicle to the beat of the music. Thus the consumer can evaluate the product's quality on the body whilst she is busy moving around in it. Another kind of sound that may also be present in the fitting room is the voices of other consumers also trying on apparel products in neighbouring fitting room cubicles or of the employees of the store. If a consumer can clearly hear another consumer's conversation in a neighbouring fitting room cubicle she might feel uncomfortable trying on apparel products, as she may feel that her privacy is being compromised. The same may be true when she hears the employees talking loudly in the hall of the fitting rooms or over the store's intercom.

From the above it is clear that stimuli can either add to the retail experience and fitting room experience or reduce satisfaction levels.

2.2.1.2 Emotion

Stimuli in a product and environment not only influence the consumer's senses, but also play an important role in the consumer's emotional experience as part of a total aesthetic experience (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4; D'Astous, 2000; Burns & Neisner, 2006), and in the end may also affect customer satisfaction (although this is viewed as a cognitive construct). In addition, Bagozzi, Baumgartner and Pieters (1998) and Hunter (2006) stress the importance of positive, anticipated emotions in the consumer's shopping experience and final decision-making. Emotions are multifaceted reactions that involve both the minds and bodies of consumers (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994:151). An emotion is a delicate life drama, which evolves from a consumer's goals in a particular situation, and the beliefs of the consumer about herself and the world she lives in (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994:151). Emotion is evoked when a situation is evaluated as being of personal significance to the consumer (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994:151). Demir, Desmet and Hekkert (2009) also state that

an emotional experience is brought about by an evaluated situation, which may be either consistent or inconsistent with one's expectations, resulting in specific emotions. Emotion is aroused when trade-offs are made in the consumer's mind while being engaged in the decision-making process (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003:4). Trade-offs, for instance when buying a motor vehicle for comfort rather than style, take implicit account of our values, and it is mainly emotional experiences that establish our systems of value (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003:4). It is said that any gap that exists between actual reality and what is desired can potentially arouse emotions; the same may be said of anything that deeply concerns the consumer at a specific time (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003:4, 5). Furthermore, without the arousal of emotion, paralysis would occur in the consumer's decision-making, as she will not be able to make up her mind (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003:120).

Fiore and Kimle (1997:42) acknowledge that emotion and the expression of feelings form part of creating an aesthetic experience, and that it essentially has three dimensions, namely: pleasure, arousal and dominance. Pleasure is part of positive affect, as affect is seen as a dimension of evaluating emotion (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:43). Pleasure is also deemed to be the easiest to identify as it is part of whether an item or environment is liked or disliked (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:43). The retailer's goal should be to arouse emotions that are deemed to be pleasurable, as these will influence consumer behaviour (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:43). Arousal can be seen as a state that ranges from being frantic with excitement, to sleeping (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:43). Colour can be seen as a visual aspect that can arouse emotions, as warm hues arouse elevated moods whereas cool hues arouse more relaxed moods (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:42). Dominance, which is the third dimension, has to do with the consumer feeling as if she is in control of the circumstances or feeling unrestricted (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:44). A retail environment may sometimes overwhelm the consumer, leading to the consumer feeling less dominant, which leads to negative emotions (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:44). Therefore one can say that emotion has reactive properties, with an identifiable reason, thoughts or stimulus, which is typically spasmodic, with a short intense experience duration which a

consumer is usually aware of (Eich, Kihlstrom, Bower, Forgas & Niedenthal, 2000:89).

Consumers are therefore influenced not only by cognitions or viewpoints about products and services, but also by psychological events such as fantasies, images or recollections which occur during the shopping experience, and the value that is derived during the consumption process is also part of the emotional experience (Fiore & Kim, 2007). The pervasive power of an emotional reaction has long ago been recognised by marketers in different areas such as product usage, advertising and shopping (Holbrook, Chestnut, Oliva, Greenleaf, Batra, Ray, Westbrook, Batra, Holbrook & Cohen, as quoted by Machleit & Eroglu, 2000). Emotion can be described as the state produced by a shopping experience (Donovan, as quoted by Fiore & Kim, 2007). Shopping is a situation where a consumer is particularly likely to have an emotional reaction (Machleit & Eroglu, 2000; Machado & Diggines, 2012:42). Emotion is also said to be one of the most important dimensions to influence a consumer while consuming a shopping experience (Gilboa & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013). According to Machleit and Eroglu (2000), specific end goals and constraints are in the mind of a consumer when she enters the retail space, and emotional reactions occur as she endeavours to satisfy her goal. The authors write further that research has shown that a store's atmosphere can evoke certain emotions in shoppers. Store-induced enjoyment influences the amount of time spent in the space as well as the inclination to interact with store employees (Baker *et al.*, 1992). The knowledge of certain feelings evoked by the manipulation of the retail space may lead to greater insight into the role that emotions play in influencing consumer behaviour and shopping outcomes (Machleit & Eroglu, 2000). It is believed that negative emotions can lead to a consumer perceiving the merchandise as of lesser value; this is especially true if a customer is aggravated or annoyed with a retail space, where she may develop a feeling that she is giving up more than she is getting, and this feeling may become integrated with the merchandise value in her mind (Baker *et al.*, 2002). This has to do with the psychological cost, which will be discussed next, and which includes irritation with the environment influencing the buyer's cognitive and emotional processes (Baker *et al.*, 2002).

From the above it is clear that emotion has a huge influence on consumer behaviour and that an apparel retailer's aesthetic experience is perceived by the consumers. Emotion can also be linked to the fitting room experience because, as discussed above, if an area/situation is inconsistent with the consumer's expectations thereof the evaluation of that area/situation may bring about an emotional experience (Demir *et al.*, 2009). If a consumer takes apparel products to the fitting room and finds the area inconsistent with the expectations that she has of it – whether it be in terms of the colour, cleanliness, amount of space in the fitting room etcetera– in that instance the consumer may feel certain emotions (good or bad). These emotions (good or bad) that the consumer feels, while in the fitting room area, may have an influence on her while she is trying on the apparel products and may affect her quality evaluation – and ultimately the buying decision. Emotions may also be evoked before the consumer even enters the fitting room, while she is waiting in a queue before entering a fitting room cubicle and then the cost aspect can arise, leaving the consumer feeling negative. She may feel that she is giving up more than she is getting and that having to complete the task of trying on the apparel products is just a nuisance. She may actually feel so negative that she may regard it as not worth the trouble, and may leave the merchandise and store altogether.

2.2.1.3 Cognition

Cognition involves mental activity which stimulates the brain in such a manner that it creates symbolic meaning (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:44). This mental processing is stimulated by environmental cues (stemming from stimuli), and these environmental cues help in shaping beliefs about the product, retailer and the brands (Chebat, as quoted by Fiore & Kim, 2007; Machado & Diggins, 2012:42). Fiore and Kim (2007) claim that cognition includes thoughts, beliefs or perceptions produced by straight interactions with consumer offerings, the processing of secondary information resources as well as a comparison of information gathered, cognitive schemas and recall. A study done by Darden in 1983 found that customers' beliefs about the actual attractiveness of a retail space had a higher correlation with purchasing

attentions than product quality, price and selection (Baker *et al.*, 1992). Baker *et al.* (2002) agree by saying that consumers' perception of things such as interpersonal service standards, the cost of the shopping experience and the product value affect retail buying intentions.

As mentioned above, the cost of the shopping experience forms part of the cognitive mental processing that a consumer goes through while in the store. According to Baker *et al.* (2002), the experience cost – which includes the buyer's time and effort in acquiring the products – and the psychological cost – which includes irritation with the environment – influence the buyer's cognitive and emotional processes. The authors write that the psychological cost signifies the consumer's mental stress or emotional effort during the shopping experience. According to the authors, these costs will have a less desirable reaction with regard to the consumer and the environment. If a consumer believes she will spend too much time in a store, it may prevent her from even entering the retail space without first processing information about the service feature or the assorted merchandise (Baker *et al.*, 1992).

Value is also seen as an element of cognition, as it is a result of perceived advantages from search, achievement, use, ownership admiration, remembering, fantasising, conversation and/or removal of these goods or offerings (Fiore & Kim, 2007). A person's values might also influence one's behaviour and therefore forms part of cognition (Sproles, 1979:145).

Brand awareness, on the other hand, can also be seen as a form of cognition, as brand awareness has important effects on decision-making; it influences whether a certain brand is included in the consideration set within the decision-making process, or not (Macdonald & Sharp, as quoted by Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). Consciousness, according to Fiore and Kim (2007), is a higher order form of cognition such as product-use-related fantasies, creative play, product-related imagery and remembering pleasurable moments.

Knowledge is yet another form of cognition. It is said that what we know about products comes from experience, or what was read and/or seen, and this forms the basis for what is believed about the product (Rath *et al.*, 2008:105). Therefore marketers can appeal to consumers' knowledge and therefore to their cognition, by

providing information on the products (Rath *et al.*, 2008:105). Retief and De Klerk (2003) write that there are various sources that can be utilised in order to obtain information, for instance marketing sources (Internet websites etcetera), internal sources (memory and previous experience), and group sources (friends and family). According to Bettman, Johnson and Payne (sa: 52), information from the organisation influences decision-making because most information is not received simultaneously but rather sequentially.

From the above it is clear that the consumer's cognition is very important when it comes to the consumer's experience of the retail store in terms of aesthetics, and that there are many variables that may influence it, resulting in a wide variety of possible behaviours from that consumer.

Cognition can be linked to this study's problem, the fitting room experience, in the form of cost, as discussed above. If a consumer wants to try on apparel products and goes to the store's fitting room – only to find a queue of other consumers waiting to try on apparel products, the consumer may feel that she is giving up more than she is getting from the fitting room area and may then decide it is not worth it, and may leave the merchandise and store altogether.

Another way in which cognition can be linked to the fitting room is in the form of information and knowledge of specific products or environments which greatly assists the consumer in forming certain cognitions of the specific products or environments. The fitting room can provide consumers with specific information and knowledge, such as posters on the fitting room walls, showing a bra's proper fit or how pants should fit different figure types. Another source of information at the fitting room might also be the store employee manning the fitting room area; this employee must be able to help consumers when trying on apparel products, for instance where pants hemlines need to be shortened or by just giving general information on good fit of apparel products. This can be especially helpful in the South African context, as South Africa is the "Rainbow Nation" of the world, with many different cultures, some of which are still emerging. These consumers may not have the necessary information or knowledge to form appropriate cognitive evaluations about apparel products' quality or the environment where it is tried on. Therefore one can say,

information in the form of posters or in the form of a store employee may be helpful at the fitting room, where apparel products are tried on and cognitive evaluations are made.

2.2.2 The role of functionality in the retail experience

If a consumer approaches a store it brings about anticipation in the consumer and the first glimpse of the store creates a definite impression in the consumer (Rengel, 2007:21). Baker *et al.* (1992) state that a retail space can be a valuable and powerful marketing device if it is utilised optimally. In order for a space to bring about a response among customers it should reach out as it were and grasp potential customers (Vieira, 2010). This can be done by using sensory stimuli in the store in order to entice the consumer's senses. It is said that the most important task of a store is its capacity to facilitate the end-objective of its customers (Canter, quoted by Baker *et al.*, 2002; Shukla & Babin, 2013). Effective space design links the merchandise and atmosphere together in order to create a satisfying/pleasing and productive retail experience (Bell & Ternus, 2006:60; Machado & Diggines, 2012:42). Therefore this section will aim to explain the functionality aspect of the retail experience.

2.2.2.1 Synchronising impressions

Efficient store designs place customer service and the merchandise at the heart of everything, but at the same time it must present the store in such a way that it can be differentiated from other stores (Bell & Ternus, 2006:60). The visual message must fit in with everything else that the store is trying to create (Bell & Ternus, 2006:60; Machado & Diggines, 2012:33). Different design aspects may be used to improve a particular space, but overall there should be a unified totality so that the space can be evaluated correctly (Rengel, 2007:10, 176). It is said that the environment within a

store creates an expectation within a consumer, as it sends an obvious message of what is likely to be found in other areas of the store (Machado & Diggines, 2012:34).

With regard to the fitting room it can be said that the visual message that the consumers get while on the main selling floor must be carried over into the fitting room area so that no confusion is evoked among consumers because of expectations not met.

2.2.2.2 Layout

A retail store's aim is for the space to be designed in such a manner that it increases and encourages the continuous sale of products (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:195; Rengel, 2007:9; Machado & Diggines, 2012:45). It is important to note that, although a store's design might be expensive, it does not mean that the store's design is effective (Bell & Ternus, 2006:60). It is recommended that the management of a store consider what the consumer deems important while shopping, so that the layout can provide the consumer with the necessary comfort, safety and more detailed aesthetics (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:196). Consumers find convenience particularly attractive and this includes easy navigation within a store. Baker *et al.* (2002) claims that consumers want to get in and out of a store in a quick manner. A proper layout can help the consumer feel orientated within the space, as they will know where they are and where to find what they are looking for (Rengel, 2007:13; Nielson & Taylor, 2007:170). From this, one can argue that the layout of the retail space is very important and adds to the overall retail experience. This is reinforced by Lee and Johnson (sa:1), who point out that the key to having a customer purchase items, is the customer's ability to find the goods they are looking for inside the retail space. A poorly designed retail space might reduce shopping enjoyment and lead to consumers' moods being dampened (Spies, Hesse & Loesch, as quoted by Baker *et al.*, 2002).

A "free-flow traffic pattern system" should be used by retailers to achieve better circulation within the store; such a system of traffic trails will allow more flexibility in

the store for the placement of fixtures and will promote the optimal use of space (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:212). Traffic trails can be thought of as movement channels that have distinctive characteristics which allow a consumer to walk to a particular space while in the store (Rengel, 2007:40). The higher the volume of consumers expected, the wider these traffic trails should be (Nielson & Taylor, 2007:168).

Route markers can also increase a consumer's ease of navigation within a store. Route markers are prominent designed elements or objects that are positioned along the traffic trails (Rengel, 2007:187). The presence of route markers increases the consumer's awareness of movement as well as the overall experience (Rengel, 2007:187).

All this can also be linked to the fitting room, in that a store should have clear and prominent signs on the main selling floor to tell the consumer where the fitting rooms are. A consumer should be able to walk on a traffic trail in the store and easily find the fitting room area so that he/she can try on the apparel products. The layout of the physical fitting room area may also be important; an effective layout may improve and increase the flow of consumers in the fitting room area, making it a more pleasurable experience as one would not have to stand in a long queue in order to try on clothes.

2.2.2.3 Space

The retail space in itself affects consumers' appreciation of apparel items (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:34). Important factors to consider within a space is the way in which the space is enclosed, connected to other spaces, the way in which the spaces are arranged so that it enables a consumer to stand, sit and move around in order to complete the task at hand (Rengel, 2007:10). Defined spaces within a retail store can have very different effects, depending on whether the space is totally open and free, or encapsulated (Rengel, 2007:10). The size of a space, which includes the depth and height dimensions, should be in relation to the people using the space

(Rengel, 2007:299). Other differentiations can be the finishing of the edges, the placement of the openings, and also the number of spaces (Rengel, 2007:10).

The space within a retail store is very important and has different elements to it. One of these elements that may influence the consumer's overall experience of the retailer is the "butt-brush" effect. Every person has an area of personal space and when this is invaded by others/strangers, it creates discomfort which may lead to the customer leaving the space or making the wrong decisions (Lee & Johnson, sa:2). It is suggested that retailers should create enough space for consumers to manoeuvre in so that the "butt-brush" effect can be avoided; in return this will lead to the consumer spending more time in the store, and the probability of a sale as well as the accuracy of the decision made, being increased (Lee & Johnson, sa:2). Certain spaces should be designed in such a manner that the right conditions are provided to facilitate the task it was designed for (Rengel, 2007:233). In terms of the different spaces in a store it might require a specific size, a connection to other functions as well as privacy (Rengel, 2007:233). Rengel (2007:299) says that the size decisions of a space influences the wall designs, doorways, furniture, fixtures and privacy. Piotrowski and Rogers (2007:215) state that privacy is a major concern in the fitting room.

If the size of a space is adequate the indoor air quality will be enhanced as the air will be free from mould, dust and smoke (Nielson & Taylor, 2007:204). Thus, one should strive for optimum air quality, which can influence people in such a manner that they are more productive, they can make decisions clearly and they will feel more energised (Nielson & Taylor, 2007:204).

Another element of the retail space that might have an effect on a consumer is the walls. Most commonly the walls within a retail space have a drywall finish and this is accomplished with the use of a surface treatment (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:208). Before selecting a wall finish for a retail space, one should remember that sound is absorbed by porous, soft materials and reflected by rigid and hard materials (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:208; Rengel, 2007:337). Walls are also important in the sense that they circumscribe the limits of a space as well as its relationship to other spaces (Rengel, 2007:49).

The gateway which is also known as the doorway is another element of the retail space; as the name suggests, it is an obvious, defined entry point to a space (Rengel, 2007:44). One can distinguish between an ordinary doorway and a grandiose doorway (Rengel, 2007:44). A grandiose doorway is more formal, more prominent, large in size, and the trail passages that follow invite one in, whereas the ordinary doorway is usually double/single doors or cased gateways of comparable magnitude by which consumers enter (Rengel, 2007:44).

Other elements that also contribute to a space's definition are the flooring and the ceiling (Rengel, 2007:44). Ceilings act as audio treatments in a space and also as a panel for the lighting (Nielson & Taylor, 2007:269). The flooring in a retail space must be designed and constructed in such a manner that it can handle the traffic levels in the store (Nielson & Taylor, 2007:328).

In terms of the fitting room, the cubicles must be spacious enough so that the consumer is able to comfortably move around while trying on apparel products, without bumping against the walls of the cubicle, and the consumer must be able to comfortably turn around in the cubicle, looking at herself from different angles in the mirror, in order to evaluate the apparel product on her body. The space must also be such that it lends enough privacy for the consumer to comfortably take off her own clothes and try on the store's products, without having to worry about someone being able to see her from the outside.

2.2.2.4 Service

Service is another form of functionality in a store as consumers should be able to utilise the store employees for different reasons. As mentioned above, the employees in a retail store can be a source of information. These employees can affect one's thoughts and thereby one's cognition of the store and its products. This is reinforced by the fact that the friendliness of employees can enhance the customer's shopping task, and heighten their enjoyment of the shopping experience (Shukla & Babin, 2013).

A form of touch in the consumer's shopping experience, as already mentioned, is being touched by sales assistants inside the retail environment (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:40). According to Perner (2010:32), human beings are intrinsically social animals, and individuals have the power to influence one another. Therefore in this instance, touching by store employees is a social functional element of the retail space. This is reinforced by the fact that the social factor includes human qualities related to the retail environment such as interactions with other customers and staff (Fiore & Kim, 2007). This important element of shopping in a retail space is the interaction with the salespeople and other staff and the quality thereof (Baker *et al.*, 2002). It includes receiving prompt service, being treated well and being given personal attention, for instance, being greeted when entering the retail space (Baker *et al.*, 2002). It is believed that the more employees a store has, the more active and stimulating the store environment will be, which will lead to a higher sense of pleasure, more time being spent in the environment, and a better chance of good decision-making and satisfaction (Baker *et al.*, 1992). Fiore and Kimle (1997:40) state that if consumers are being touched by employees it might affect the experience and also the behaviour of the consumers.

Retailers should, however, refrain from crowding. Crowding is an element that can influence how the retailer is experienced by the consumer and relates to a crowded service area which prevents consumers from having a pleasurable experience; this will of course influence their decision-making (Hui & Bateson, quoted by Baker *et al.*, 1992). Retailers should try and incorporate a good balance of employees in the store to ensure that consumers have a pleasurable/satisfying experience.

This can be linked to the fitting room experience too: if more trained, helpful and friendly employees are available at the fitting room area it may enable consumers to evaluate the quality of products more effectively and may make them feel more special because of the personal service. This in turn might make the trying on of apparel products more pleasurable and efficient.

2.2.2.5 Furniture

The space must be designed in such a manner that it reflects an understanding of the intended use of the space, so that the furniture and fixtures can be placed in such a manner that it increases the feeling of convenience and efficiency (Nielson & Taylor, 2007:226). Apparel retailers always have a few furniture items which are not used as merchandise fixtures (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:213). The most commonly used furniture is chairs and mirrors. An interior designer's aim in selecting furniture is that it should be the correct shape, feel and height so that the user of the furniture can be satisfied (Nielson & Taylor, 2007:240).

Chairs are placed in the store for the customer's convenience (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:213). This will be particularly useful for consumers shopping with friends, spouses or other relatives (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:213). Having a seating area will lead to less complaints and the shopping act can continue for longer periods, which will lead to increased sales (Lee & Johnson, sa:2). The size of the chairs should be such that it can accommodate customers of different sizes, and it should be constructed in such a manner that it will not tip or roll over (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:213). Such a seating area should be located so that consumers can easily see it (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:213). A seating area at the fitting room area might be very useful, as some people might go to apparel retailers with their friends/family/spouses, and while one is trying on apparel products the others can have a seat and will not get fatigued that easily. Piotrowski and Rogers (2007:215) state that each fitting room should have a chair or a bench. This might help the person who is trying on the apparel products to evaluate the products and make decisions more accurately, because the ones sitting down might not rush that person in the cubicle to finish up because they are tired.

Mirrors are quite useful in a retail space as it can be used to prevent theft, as security is a big concern for retailers (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:210). Piotrowski and Rogers (2007:215) state that each fitting room should have a full-length mirror. Three-way mirrors are often placed in close proximity to other items in order to persuade customers in leaving the fitting rooms to look at themselves in a larger

mirror, which may give a store employee the chance to sell more items by giving advice or by adding more items to complete the outfit (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:212). Therefore, a mirror can be linked to the fitting room as the consumer must be able to see the apparel product that she has on, and it should be large enough so that the consumer can see the apparel product on the body from different angles while evaluating it.

2.2.2.6 Fixtures

Fixtures are equipment of adequate size which influences a consumer's experience within a space (Rengel, 2007:49). There are flexible and fixed display fixtures (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:212). These fixtures are mainly used to display merchandise. Flexible fixtures include furniture inside the store, and fixed fixtures include slat walls as well as certain lighting (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:212).

It is said that the main purpose of lighting in a retail space is to improve the merchandise display, but it is also said that lighting is important to certain activities performed in a specific space (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:209; Rengel, 2007:329). Lighting can improve a store's overall image by influencing a consumer's mood in a positive manner (Koo & Kim, 2013). If the lighting is poor or if it reduces the visual appeal of the merchandise, it will result in a decline of sales (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:209). In clothing stores it is recommended not to put lighting too close to the apparel products as it can alter the colour as well as the fibres of the products (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:210). Therefore lighting considerations should not be taken up too lightly. Lighting is also important in the fitting room as the consumer should be able to clearly see the apparel products while it is tried on, so that the apparel product can be evaluated effectively.

Other fixtures used in a retail store are the equipment used to display merchandise on the main selling floor. In the context of the fitting room, when one refers to fixtures one is referring to the hanging hooks or shelves in the actual cubicle. Piotrowski and

Rogers (2007:215) state that each fitting room should have a shelf for bags as well as several hanging hooks.

To conclude the importance of the retail experience, one can clearly see from the above discussion that aesthetics and functionality go hand in hand with the creation of the overall retail experience, and should be applied to the fitting room to improve the consumer's experience. It is also clear from the above discussion that the retail experience is very significant in terms of consumer behaviour and the apparel decision-making process; one could conclude that the fitting room may also play an important role in the apparel consumer's decision-making process. This importance will be discussed in the next section.

2.2.3 The role of the fitting room in the retail experience

It is clear from the above discussion that stimuli in the retail environment play an important role in stimulating the consumer's senses, and therefore also in the emotions that might arise in the consumer and that may be used as symbolic meanings that might be attached to the product and environment. Stimuli in the form of colour, lines, texture etcetera (that is, the formal qualities of the retail environment), however, do not only provide an aesthetic experience for the consumer, but also influence the functional aspects of the retail environment. This study's viewpoint is that the fitting room plays an important role in the total retail experience of the consumer.

Bell and Ternus (2006:23) believe that the fitting room is regularly overlooked and is often placed in such a tiny space that its location is difficult for consumers to find. In fact, retailers need to spend enough money, space and time on fitting rooms as it can be seen as the point and place where most apparel-based decisions are made (Lee & Johnson, sa:2). Fitting rooms are one of the critical areas in clothing stores and it is where the consumer tries on apparel products and make evaluations about the products, as well as decisions to buy these apparel products (Rea, Mang & Underhill, as quoted by Baumstarck, 2008:12). Shoppers evaluate their appearance

in the fitting room and they form important opinions of the apparel products, including its fit and appearance on the body (All Dressed Up, The perfect fit, Fitting Designs and Mang, as quoted by Baumstarck, 2008:12). Fitting rooms are essential to the retail experience and often stand for that final instance where the consumer decides whether to make an apparel purchase or not (Baumstarck, 2008:9).

The fitting room is therefore an important area in the apparel store and the consumer's experience of it has the power to influence her apparel decision-making. The fitting room experience can be seen as the moment where the consumer experiences an emotional response to the environmental attributes when trying on garments (Baumstarck, 2008:12). Fitting room users might even use the same subconscious elements to evaluate the fitting room experience that are used on the main selling floor, such as quality, aesthetics, socialisation and culture (Baumstarck, 2008:12). Thus one can say that the fitting room experience also includes exactly the same elements of experience as overall in the retail store, such as aesthetics in the form of cognition, emotion, stimulus and functionality as discussed above, with all its variables. What is experienced by the consumer on the main selling floor might therefore influence how the fitting room is experienced, either positively or negatively, resulting in either satisfaction or dissatisfaction and leading to behaviour of some sort.

The Anne Taylor stores understand this phenomenon by using the words "selling rooms" instead of fitting rooms and their "selling rooms" are said to be well-lighted, comfortable and spacious so that no gap can exist between the quality and decor style of the "selling rooms" and the main selling floor (Bell & Ternus, 2006:23). It is said that if a retail space is planned in terms of appearance and layout, the fitting room's lighting, colour schemes, comfort and size should also be scrutinised (Rath *et al.*, 2008:213). It is more likely for a consumer to try on apparel items if the fitting room is easily found (Bell & Ternus, 2006:23). Consumers must be able to engage with sales associates and complete their buying decisions while inside the store and consummate their decision within the environment of the apparel retailer (O'Cass & Grace, 2008). This is true for the fitting room, as some literature shows that the consumer decides to buy apparel products in the fitting room, and this is done while

the consumer consumes (tries on) the apparel item and evaluates it (Baumstarck, 2008:9). This is supported by the fact that, although the price of a product is known before it is bought, the value for money of the item is only realised once the item is tried on and the benefit is realised (O’Cass & Grace, 2008). This is very important, as in this day and age consumers are more value-driven and have great expectations for what they are set to spend on apparel items (De Klerk & Tselepis, 2007). They also have specific ideas about the quality that they expect from apparel products and how it should be evaluated in the fitting room environment.

The next section therefore addresses the concept of apparel quality and the evaluation thereof.

2.3 THE QUALITY OF APPAREL PRODUCTS

Kadolph (1998:12) states that consumers are getting more demanding in terms of the apparel products they would deem acceptable and what they are looking for in apparel. The author writes that apparel products’ quality is one important element that is used by consumers while making decisions. Together with this, Koskennurmi-Sivonen and Pietarila (2005) state that apparel products’ quality cannot be determined objectively, but can be evaluated. It is not known how consumers evaluate the quality of apparel products in South Africa (Retief & De Klerk, 2003). Therefore in this section, the concept of quality will be explained so that it can shed some light on how consumers might evaluate clothing quality in a fitting room.

The quality of an item refers to the entirety of the item’s characteristics which include end-use, appearance, performance, consistency and lack of restrictions (Kadolph, 2007:14). Quality evaluation is said to entail a holistic, product-, producer-, customer- and value-based perspective (Kadolph, 1998:13-21). For this particular study, the concern is the customer’s perspective, as the customer is the one evaluating the product in the fitting room before it is bought. From a customer’s perspective, an apparel product’s quality depends on dimensions which are important to the consumer (Kadolph, 1998:16). From a customer’s perspective quality is not a stable

state, as the customer decides whether an apparel product exceeds or meets her expectations (Kadolph, 1998:16). Therefore the product that meets or exceeds to the highest degree of the individual's expectations has the highest quality (Koskennurmi-Sivonen & Pietarila, 2005). According to Brown and Rice (1998:38), different dimensions are used by consumers when assessing apparel items in terms of quality. Creusen (2010) notes that it might be beneficial for retailers to look at the aspects that are important to consumers before deciding to buy products. Smith *et al.* (2011) state that apparel products are assessed or evaluated in terms of the products' intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics. Certain abstract characteristics are ascribed to apparel products by consumers, such as beauty and durability, and this relates to an apparel product's aesthetics and functionality (Hines & Swinker, 2001). This forms part of the behavioural characteristics that are also evaluated by the consumer in her assessing and evaluating of apparel items while in the fitting room. Smith (2010:19) states that behavioural characteristics entail what the apparel item can provide for the consumer, as determined by its intrinsic characteristics. Therefore it is said that the behavioural characteristics of an apparel product includes the functionality (comfort, maintenance, durability) of the item, as well as its aesthetics (stimulus, emotion and cognition) (De Klerk & Lubbe, 2008; Brown & Rice, as quoted by Hugo & Van Aardt, 2012).

2.3.1 Intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics

An apparel product's intrinsic characteristics include its fibre content, fabric, construction techniques and finishes. If these characteristics are changed then the entire garment will be different (Romeo, 2009). Extrinsic characteristics, on the other hand, include the store, brand and price (Romeo, 2009). If extrinsic characteristics change it does not change the apparel product itself (Romeo, 2009). In many cases, the consumers do not have the knowledge or experience to evaluate the intrinsic characteristics in terms of how these will affect the product's behavioural qualities, therefore they will use extrinsic characteristics to form a perception of how they think the product will behave. Smith (2010:19) states that using extrinsic characteristics is

an easy way for a consumer to evaluate apparel quality, as this type of information is easy to access at pay-points.

In the South African context, this can be an extremely important point, as South Africa is the “Rainbow Nation” of the world with its kaleidoscope of picturesque attractiveness and its mesh of multicultural and ethnic legacy (Internet: Country Profile: South Africa, 2010:3). The dramatic political changes within South Africa since 1994 also impact on the importance of the retailers’ understanding of the preferences and tastes of the consumers in South Africa, who come from diverse cultural backgrounds (North & Kotzé, 2004). Retailers should also understand how much knowledge these consumers have on retailers and apparel products in South Africa. Solomon and Rabolt (2004:62) argue that if a retailer fails to stay in touch with emerging markets and other cultures, the consequences could be very costly. The shopping habits of emerging markets and cultures have changed from wearying, goal-driven tasks, to acquiring basic necessities, to a splendours event (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:66). In South Africa, for instance, one of the most powerful marketing tendencies in the past 10 years is the emergence of the so-called Black Diamonds or the black middle class (Ndanga *et al.*, 2008:10). The Black Diamonds represent 40% of the South African spending (Van Loggerenberg & Herbst, 2010). Research suggests that the Black Diamonds form one of the most important up and coming consumer markets within South Africa, and this growing market is mainly due to affirmative action policies, access to education and the removal of remaining restrictions on growing occupational mobility (Seekings & Natrass, 2002). This emerging market has distinct consumer preferences in terms of products that convey a message of status; such products include cars, cell phones and clothing (Seekings & Natrass, 2002). This market segment may also differ as to how they evaluate the quality of apparel products and what they expect from the fitting room in this regard.

2.3.2 Behavioural characteristics

2.3.2.1 Functionality

Functionality forms part of the behavioural characteristics or qualities of an apparel product. The behavioural qualities are mainly influenced by the intrinsic characteristics of the product. However, in cases where consumers are not experienced or knowledgeable, they may use extrinsic characteristics to predict how the product will behave on a functional level. For the purpose of this section functionality will be explained in terms of an apparel product's durability, comfort and maintenance, and also in terms of the way the product's intrinsic characteristics influence these elements.

Durability forms part of an apparel product's functionality. Hatch (1993:15) defines the durability of a fabric in terms of the textile retaining its physical integrity for a reasonable time period under various conditions of stress. Durability is the degree to which the item withstands use and the time period that the product will still be able to perform its wearing function (Kadolph, 1998:28; 2007:12; Retief & De Klerk, 2003; Koskennurmi-Sivonen & Pietarila, 2005). The durability of an apparel product is influenced by various factors, such as the seam types, stitching (intrinsic characteristics), and also by the manner in which the item is cleaned, stored and used (Retief & De Klerk, 2003; Kadolph 2007:29). Other intrinsic characteristics of fabric that can contribute or subtract from an apparel product's quality is the fabric's tenacity properties, flexibility properties, elongation properties, tear resistance properties, abrasion resistance properties and colour-fastness properties (Retief & De Klerk, 2003; Kadolph 2007:29). It is difficult to determine how durable an item really is (Kadolph, 1998:28). The expectations that consumers have about products' durability may differ widely and will also depend on the type of product, namely whether it is a basic product or a high fashion product (Kadolph, 1998:28). Therefore, one cannot exactly pinpoint how a consumer will look at an apparel item's durability, but it is fair to say that intrinsic characteristics, as mentioned above, may be able to give the consumer an indication of the item's durability while the consumer evaluates it in the fitting room.

Comfort refers to the way an apparel product interacts with a consumer's body, allowing the consumer to be without annoyance or discomfort while wearing the apparel, and also giving the wearer a sense of safety and protection (Kadolph, 1998:30; Koskennurmi-Sivonen & Pietarila, 2005). Kadolph (2007:12) writes that comfort is the apparel product's ability to protect the wearer's body from injury. Thus, comfort can be described as freedom from pain or the freedom from irritability. It is said that people are comfortable in their clothing when they are psychologically and physiologically unaware of it (Hatch, 1993:26). Intrinsic characteristics of fabric that could contribute to an apparel item's comfort are the fabric's heat retention properties, elongation properties, density properties and absorbency properties (Kadolph, 2007:29). A fabric's texture can also be seen as an intrinsic characteristic that could influence the apparel product's physiological comfort, as it directly involves the interaction between the wearer's body and the specific fabric (Metje, as quoted by Hugo & Van Aardt, 2012). Texture consists of the following different components: fibres, yarns, fabrication and finish (Kadolph, as quoted by Marshall, Jackson, Stanley, Kefgen & Touchie-Specht, 2004:253). Texture is the part of the design which describes a product's surface look and feel (Marshall *et al.*, 2004:249). It can be described as the surface quality of an article, or the way an article feels when it is touched, for example: soft or stiff (Marshall *et al.*, 2004:249). These intrinsic characteristics might be used by consumers, if they have adequate knowledge, to evaluate apparel products' comfort so that it can be decided whether the products are of good quality or not. Fit also forms part of comfort and is seen as a physical and mental state, because when apparel items are worn it influences how a consumer acts, thinks, feels, behaves and how they interact with one another (Rasband & Liechty, 2006:3). Rasband and Liechty (2006:3) believe that if apparel items are too tight (do not fit properly), the wearer will be aware of it psychologically, which might generate feelings of unattractiveness; the wearer will also be aware of it physically, which means she will be uncomfortable and that will show through her body language behaviour that the fit of the item is incorrect. Fit is deemed the most important part of individuality and comfort (Koskennurmi-Sivonen & Pietarila, 2005). This is underscored by Hugo and Van Aardt (2012), who found that apparel items' total fit was deemed to be the most important element over all other elements by

their respondents in South Africa, in a study on casual daywear in 2012. One can therefore say that an apparel item's fit will also be scrutinised and evaluated by the consumer while she is trying it on in the fitting room.

Maintenance or appearance retention can be described as the ability of a textile to retain its original shape, size, colour and state of cleanliness after being worn, used and having undergone care procedures (Hatch, 1993:57; Kadolph, 2007:12). A study done by Hugo and Van Aardt in 2012 on South African female fashion consumers found that 98,1 percent of their respondents regarded the maintenance or appearance retention of apparel items as the most essential element of an apparel product's durability (Hugo & Van Aardt, 2012). Intrinsic characteristics which may influence a fabric's maintenance or appearance retention properties and therefore its quality, include the fabric's shrinkage resistance properties, dimensional stability, resilience properties and elastic recovery properties (Kadolph, 2007:29). Consumers might not have the necessary knowledge to look at the above aspects while evaluating apparel items' quality, and therefore might rather look at the wash-care labels inside the products and also rely on past experiences with the same type of fabric.

2.3.2.2 Aesthetics

As stated above, aesthetics can be defined as a careful selection or appreciation of formal, symbolic or expressive qualities of an item or space, which provide benefits of a non-instrumental nature and leads the consumer to experience satisfaction or pleasure (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4-13). It was also stated that an aesthetic experience affects the individual in three ways: the body by the stimulation of the senses (stimulus), the soul by the expression of feelings (emotion), and the mind by the activation of thought processing (cognition) (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:13). This section will now discuss how a consumer might evaluate an apparel product's quality in the fitting room, as it is said that apparel items' aesthetic appeal is judged while it is worn by the consumer in the fitting room or at home (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:31). This section

will therefore look at an apparel product's aesthetic appeal in terms of stimulus, emotion and cognition.

Stimulus in terms of the apparel product refers to the intrinsic characteristics of an apparel product that the consumer can experience by using her/his senses (Smith, 2010:21). Stimulus includes sight, smell, kinesthetics, taste, touch and hearing, and it has the power to affect consumers in many ways such as their cognition and emotions, and thus may affect the consumers' perception of quality in terms of the aesthetic characteristics (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:37).

Sight entails what the consumer sees when looking at the garment. It is said that the visual elements of the apparel product that can be appreciated by consumers include its pattern, style, proportion and colour (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:38). These can also be referred to as an apparel product's formal qualities (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:6). In the study done by Hugo and Van Aardt (2012) in South Africa, it was found that 96,1 percent of their respondents considered the colour of an apparel item as quite important to important, and 98,1 percent deemed an apparel item's appearance as quite important to very important. Therefore it can be said that consumers will probably look at these elements while evaluating apparel products in the fitting room.

Smell also forms part of the product's stimulus. Odours and fragrances are said to influence emotions and would thus also affect feelings of arousal, pleasure and dominance (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:216). Therefore, if a smell or odour is present when the consumer tries on the apparel product in the fitting room, it might influence the consumer's evaluation of the product as it might negatively or positively influence the consumer's cognitions of and/or emotions toward the apparel product.

As mentioned above, kinesthetics has to do with the perception of the consumer's body movement (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:40). When a consumer wears an apparel item and the fabric glides behind the arms and legs' movements, it can arouse feelings of gracefulness like a dancer, which might be pleasant in itself (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:40). This is due to the fact that the human body has sensory receptors that can feel when something moves against the body when the muscles are contracted or stretched (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:40). Therefore the kinesthetics of the apparel item also has the power to influence a consumer's cognitions and emotions and may also

play a role while the consumer tries on the apparel items in the fitting room and evaluates it.

One can experience pleasure from being touched and touching something (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:38). Touch is another stimulus which affects the product's aesthetics and thereby its quality. Touch has a lot to do with texture. Touch is also concerned with the moment when the consumer wears the apparel item, as touch in that instance refers to the contact between the torso, arms and thighs of the body and the fabric of the apparel item (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:39). Pleasurable sensations can be gained from fabrics (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:39). Therefore one can say that the touch of the apparel item is very important when it comes to the aesthetic characteristics of quality evaluation in the fitting room.

It is said that occasionally apparel items produce sounds that can have an influence on the product's aesthetics (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:41). Some garments make sounds when they are put on, together with the body movement while being worn, and this might enhance feelings of pleasure and in the process, the garment's aesthetics (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:41). This may also play a role and influence the consumer while she is evaluating apparel products in the fitting room.

From the above one can see that stimulus or the intrinsic characteristics which can be experienced by consumers' senses, are able to arouse certain emotions. This is also reinforced by Retief and De Klerk (2003), who state that an apparel item's aesthetic appeal includes the trends in fashion as well as elements of design and it commonly satisfies the consumer's emotional requirements. In addition, it is also said that although an apparel product can arouse emotions due to its characteristics it is an extremely intimate experience (Moody, Kinderman & Sinha, 2010). Furthermore, it is said that research is not generally conducted when consumers try on apparel items, when moods and emotions are expected to be elevated (Moody *et al.*, 2010). Moody *et al.* and Ryand (as quoted by Moody *et al.*, 2010) state that moods and emotions can especially be elevated during the trying on of apparel items because of the symbolic connotations that a consumer ascribes to the apparel products, social factors, and also the apparel item's ability to appeal to the consumer's senses. The symbolic connotations that are ascribed to apparel items by

the consumer relate to cognition. Chattaraman and Rudd (2006) believe that apparel items with the suitable sensory stimulus can be used by consumers as a coping strategy in order to bridge the gap between the ideals of cultures in terms of beauty and their own appearance perception, by increasing the consumers' self-esteem. As mentioned above, social factors also relate to cognition. Forand, Gunthert, German and Wenze (2010) state that consumers who are very worried about how they look may try and put themselves in other people's shoes in order to evaluate how such other people might perceive their appearance. This might therefore also play a role in the fitting room, where the consumer tries on apparel items, as she/he might think (cognition) of what other people might perceive of her/his appearance if she/he bought the specific items, and that might influence her/his evaluation of the products. From the above discussion on aesthetics it is clear that apparel items' aesthetic appeal is dependent on the items' sensory stimulus, which can influence the consumer's emotions and cognitive thoughts.

2.4 CHOICE OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore Mzansi youth females' expectations and experiences of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience, in terms of the functionality and aesthetics and the role that it plays in the evaluation of apparel quality. The overall justification was that retailers could use the information to plan/design a fitting room that would contribute to the customers' satisfaction with the total retail experience and their intention to again patronise the store.

The theoretical perspective serves as a point of departure for the study, with specific assumptions that also direct the broad research objectives or questions. For this study Lamb *et al.*'s (2008:5) Confirmation/Disconfirmation Paradigm (see **FIGURE 3**) was chosen as point of departure.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

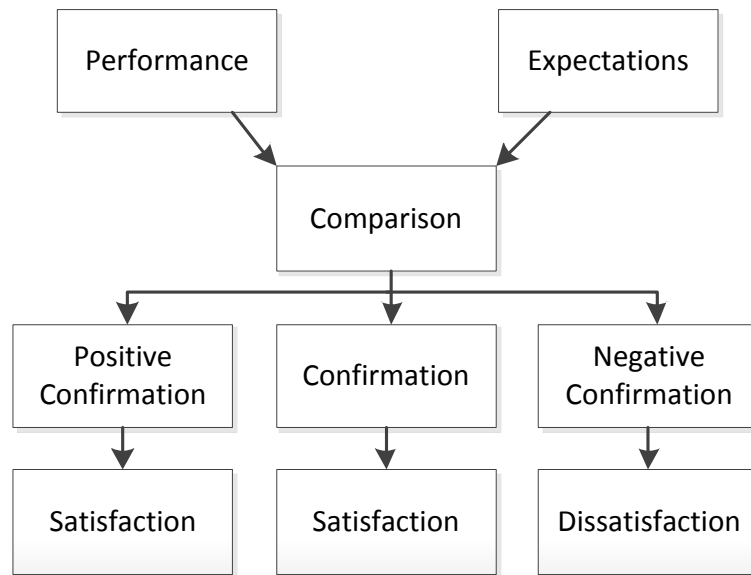


FIGURE 3: CONFIRMATION/DISCONFIRMATION PARADIGM (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:5)

This paradigm states that consumers have expectations of products or services before it is bought, and these expectations are then compared against the actual performance of the product or service (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:21; Park & Curwen, 2013). According to Nirmalya, Jayashree and Harsh (2012), the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm can be seen as a “mental state” due to the fact that confirmation/disconfirmation is based on the assumption that a consumer has a predetermined expectation of a product or service, which is an essential element in achieving satisfaction. The definition of an expectation is a consumer’s perceived likelihood that a positive or negative result will occur once the consumer engages in some sort of behaviour (Nirmalya *et al.*, 2012). The consumer’s expectations are therefore used as a reference frame or an adaption tool (Devlin, Gwynne & Ennew, 2002; Nirmalya *et al.*, 2012). Expectations about products/services mainly originate from four different sources, namely the need recognised by the consumer, what other retailers have to offer, previous experience with a particular product/service, and the communication received from a particular store about its products/services (Nirmalya *et al.*, 2012). Expectations can be explicit or implicit; explicit expectations refer to the consumer having a clear idea of what he/she will be able to find in a certain retail store, while implicit expectations refer to

expectations only arising once the actual experience has not met the “expectation”; this form of expectations is seen as subconscious in the mind of the consumer (Erasmus & Grabowski, 2013). Performance is the consumer’s overall perception of a product’s/service’s outcome (Park & Curwen, 2013). Disconfirmation, on the other hand, is defined as the “mental comparison” between the actual occurrence and the expected occurrence (Niedrich, Kiryanova & Black, 2005; Nirmalya *et al.*, 2012). If the actual performance of the product/service meets or exceeds the consumer’s expectations thereof, it will most likely leave the consumer feeling satisfied (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:21; Nirmalya *et al.*, 2012). The opposite is also true. In terms of confirmation/disconfirmation it means the comparison between expectations and actual performance (Evans *et al.*, 2009:130), and as the figure indicates (see **FIGURE 3**), the results can range from positive confirmation, confirmation or negative confirmation. Evans *et al.* (2009:130) state that the confirmation or disconfirmation depends on the consumer’s primary expectation of the product or service, as a high expectancy can be very difficult to satisfy with the actual performance. Similarly, if the consumer does not have sufficient knowledge or is not familiar with the products or service, they may have poorly shaped expectations, but this improves with exposure to the products and services (Evans *et al.*, 2009:131).

The confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm was found to be a relevant theoretical perspective for this particular study, as it is not known what Mzansi youth females expect of the fitting room experience and how it should be so that they are able to evaluate apparel products’ quality in order to decide whether to purchase the products or not. It is also not known how the comparison between the actual fitting room experience and their expectations thereof influences their evaluation of these apparel products in terms of quality so that satisfaction can occur.

2.5 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY

It became clear from the literature that the fitting room experience cannot be separated from the total retail experience and that it may play an important role in

the apparel consumer's quality evaluation, the decision-making process and the consumer's final satisfaction with the retail experience.

Fitting room stimuli in the form of formal characteristics such as colour, light, texture, etcetera may stimulate consumers' senses and may also play a role in the emotions that they experience, the meanings that they attach to the products and stores, the fitting room's functionality and how effectively they can evaluate the quality of apparel products.

Consumers, however, differ in what they expect from the apparel products' quality and also in how they evaluate the quality at the point of purchase. They may therefore also differ with regard to what they expect from the fitting room in terms of the whole retail experience, and also in terms of the fitting room's contribution to the quality evaluation process. Their experience of a specific fitting room may therefore also differ and in the end also their satisfaction with a specific fitting room. Questions to be asked for this study are therefore:

- What are the Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations regarding the aesthetics and functionality of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience?
- What are their expectations regarding the fitting room's contribution to the evaluation of the aesthetic and functional aspects of apparel quality?
- How do Mzansi youth female consumers experience the aesthetics and functionality of specific fitting rooms as part of the overall retail experience?
- How do they experience the fitting room contribution in their evaluation of the aesthetic and behavioural qualities of apparel products?
- How satisfied are Mzansi youth female consumers with the specific fitting room experience?

With these questions in mind, the next chapter explains the methodology that was used in the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the role of the fitting room experience in Mzansi youth female consumers' apparel quality evaluation. This chapter will discuss how the researcher addressed the research problem by looking at the conceptual framework, the research objectives, the research approach and design, the sampling plan, the data collection techniques, the research's trustworthiness issues and ethical considerations.

3.2 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

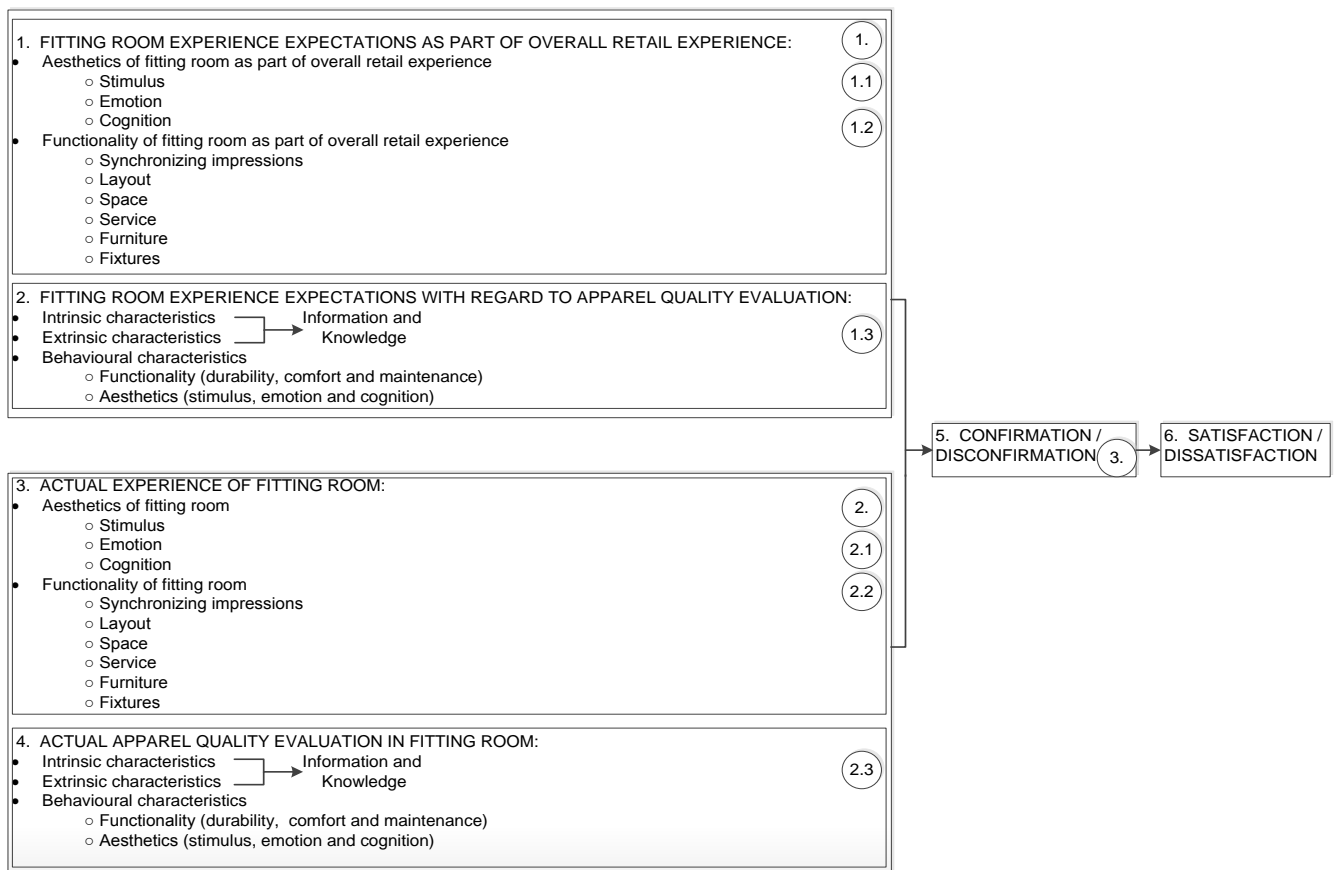


FIGURE 4: THE ROLE OF THE FITTING ROOM EXPERIENCE ON APPAREL QUALITY EVALUATION

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The above conceptual framework was developed by integrating the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm (the theoretical perspective of the study) with the concepts of the study, which were extensively discussed in the literature review (see **CHAPTER 2**). The conceptual framework shows what the fitting room experience entails, and also what apparel quality evaluation entails from a consumer's perspective.

As discussed in the literature review, the fitting room experience – as part of the overall retail experience – includes the aesthetics (stimulus, emotion and cognition) and the functionality (synchronising impressions, layout, space, service, furniture and fixtures). Based on their overall retail experience, consumers may develop expectations of the fitting room experience. Consumers may also have certain expectations regarding the fitting room and how it should be in order for them to evaluate the apparel products' quality while trying it on in the fitting room. The literature review clearly shows that from a consumer's perspective, quality is evaluated according to the products' intrinsic, extrinsic and/or behavioural characteristics. Whether a consumer uses intrinsic or extrinsic characteristics as cues when evaluating the apparel products in the fitting room depends on the amount of information and knowledge the consumer has. Those consumers with little or no knowledge of, or experience with, a specific apparel product, who have to evaluate the product's quality may not know how to predict the product's functionality; therefore, in many instances they may rely heavily on extrinsic characteristics as cues for forming a perception of the product's quality. The moment of truth is evident when the consumer actually takes the apparel item to the fitting room, in order to try it on and evaluate its quality, and has an actual experience in the cubicle/area in terms of the aesthetics (stimulus, emotion and cognition) and functionality (synchronising impressions, layout, space, service, furniture and fixtures). Baumstarck (2008:9) says that fitting rooms are essential to the retail experience and often constitute that final instance where the consumer decides whether to purchase the apparel item or not.

The conceptual framework also shows the expectations side of the fitting room experience as well as the actual experience side of the fitting room. This can also be

seen with the apparel quality evaluation. This is in accordance with the study's theoretical perspective, namely the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm. This paradigm shows that consumers have expectations of a product or service before it is bought, and these are then compared against the actual performance of the product or service (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:21; Park & Curwen, 2013). This study therefore focuses on the comparison between what was expected and what was actually experienced in the fitting room, to see whether it plays a role in the Mzansi youth female's evaluation of apparel products' quality which may result in the satisfaction or dissatisfaction thereof. The above conceptual framework also indicates the objectives and sub-objectives of the study (circled numbers), which will be discussed in the next section.

3.3 THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the role of the fitting room experience in Mzansi youth female consumers' quality evaluation of apparel products. The specific objectives were developed based on what was found during a study of the relevant literature. There were two main objectives, and each of them had three sub-objectives. The objectives and sub-objectives are the following:

Objective 1: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 1.1: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the aesthetics of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 1.2: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the functionality of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 1.3: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel products' quality in terms of:

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Intrinsic characteristics
- Extrinsic characteristics
- Behavioural characteristics

Objective 2: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 2.1: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the aesthetics of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 2.2: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the functionality of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience.

Objective 2.3: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel products' quality in terms of:

- Intrinsic characteristics
- Extrinsic characteristics
- Behavioural characteristics

Objective 3: To compare and discuss the congruence between consumers' expectations and experiences (of the fitting room) in order to present the discrepancies that were highlighted by the participants as a disconfirmation of their expectations (positive and negative) as evidence that could be used by retailers to improve the fitting rooms in the retail environments to the mutual advantages of themselves and their customers.

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

A qualitative approach was followed for this study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:270), when a researcher follows a qualitative approach the objective is to

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

explore, describe and understand the behaviour of people from their own perspective. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research, because qualitative research is conducted in a setting which is natural to the people that are being researched; it is more process focused; the person's view is highlighted; it aims to obtain thick descriptions as well as a broad understanding of behaviour, and it is not about generalising but more about understanding social behaviour in its natural setting (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:270).

A phenomenological approach was used as the strategy of inquiry. This strategy involves the explanation of conscious daily experiences and social actions of consumers (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:316). Phenomenology is also about the experience from the individual's perspective of taken-for-granted activities (Lester, 1999:1; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). By using this strategy of inquiry one can develop meaning and understanding of the phenomenon. The phenomenological strategy was found to be appropriate, as the study's aim was to try and understand and describe how the fitting room experience might play a role in the Mzansi youth females' evaluation of the quality of apparel products. Another justification for this strategy is the fact that the decision-making process of apparel products happens within the store and is often taken for granted as it is seen as an automatic process. Therefore this strategy attempted to explicate the decision-making process in terms of the evaluation stage, which takes place within the store's fitting room, in order to understand it better and to create meaning. This is reinforced by literature which states that the fitting room is one of the critical areas in clothing stores as it is in the fitting room where the consumer tries on apparel products and makes evaluations about these products, and also decisions to buy these apparel products (Rea, Mang & Underhill, as quoted by Baumstarck, 2008:12).

The findings of a phenomenological study need to be connected to existing literature as one should have a distinct point of departure (paradigm) from where to start the research process (Goulding, 2005; Delport, Fouché & Schurink, 2011:305). Therefore, for this study, a comprehensive literature review with all the relevant concepts was written before the data was gathered.

3.5 SAMPLING PLAN

Compiling a sampling plan is seen as the process of deciding on one's observations for a research study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:164). It includes the "who", "what" and "how". Specific techniques used in sampling are aimed at pin-pointing the exact group of individuals to be studied (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:164). Consequently, the researcher should know exactly "who" or "what" should be studied and "how" they will be found.

3.5.1 Unit of analysis

The "who" or "what", also known as the unit of analysis, for this research study was the female apparel consumers of the Mzansi youth sub-segment. As mentioned above, this sub-segment forms part of the Black Diamonds. The justification, for using this specific group lies in the fact that one of the most powerful marketing tendencies in the past 10 years within South Africa is the emergence of the so-called Black Diamonds or the black middle class (Ndanga *et al.*, 2008:10). Research suggests that the Black Diamonds is one of the most important emerging consumer markets within South Africa, and has come about mainly because of affirmative action policies, access to education and the removal of remaining restrictions on growing occupational mobility (Seekings & Natrass, 2002). Black Diamonds are a force to be reckoned with in terms of spending and earning, which boost key retail areas (Ndanga *et al.*, 2008:11). This is supported by the fact that research shows that the Black Diamonds represent 40% of the South African spending (Van Loggerenberg & Herbst, 2010).

This Mzansi youth are still living in the homes of their parents; they are mainly single students who in 2008 earned only about R800 a month (Ndanga *et al.*, 2008:13). Ndanga *et al.* (2008:13) write that, although this segment contributes only 3% of the Black Diamonds' buying power, they are the country's future consumers. This group is very optimistic and eager to improve their education (Ndanga *et al.*, 2008:13).

Focusing on the Mzansi youth sub-segment for this study has led to insights that could be used to educate retailers so that they in turn can improve the fitting room experience, so that the future higher earning Black Diamonds can evaluate the quality of apparel items more effectively and thus make more appropriate apparel decisions with which they are satisfied. Females were chosen to be studied because it was found that in terms of decision-making the women of the Black Diamonds play a more dominant role (Van Loggerenberg & Herbst, 2010).

3.5.2 Sampling techniques

In terms of the “how” of the study, with the Mzansi youth females as unit of analysis, it was decided that a purposive, snowball sampling technique would be best. Goulding (2005) recommends a purposive sampling technique for researchers using phenomenology as strategy of inquiry, as individuals are only selected to participate in the research if they have lived through the same type of setting and experience in “real life” as the research study is presenting.

Purposive sampling is used when individuals have certain features which are of concern for a particular research study (Silverman, as quoted by Strydom & Delpont, 2011:392). Therefore one could say that specific individuals are chosen because of specific characteristics they have. Before choosing the sample one must first think critically about the population parameters and choose the sample accordingly (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:392). Babbie and Mouton (2001:166) recommend purposive sampling in instances where only small identifiable segments of the entire population, such as the Mzansi youth sub-segment, are to be studied.

Together with the purposive sampling, snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling is usually used when one does not know or if there is no/little information available on the sample’s frame, and access to this sample is limited (Alston & Bowles, as quoted by Strydom & Delpont, 2011:393). Therefore snowball sampling is directed at individuals that are hard to reach (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:393). Snowball sampling is done by asking an individual who forms part of the unit of

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

analysis whether she might know other individuals who might also form part of the study's unit of analyses (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:393).

For the purpose of this research study, sample members were located by asking three females who form part of the unit of analysis, whether they know any other females who might also form part of the unit of analysis. This was done in order to increase the sample size and for the sample to be more accurate. First-year female students were approached/located at the University of Pretoria's main campus because – as previously mentioned – one of the Mzansi youth's characteristics is that they are students. First-year female students were asked to participate in this study as they might not have as much experience/knowledge of the apparel shops in Hatfield/Brooklyn; they probably originally came from all over the country or from different areas within Pretoria. Snowball sampling was deemed to be appropriate because the sample was difficult to contact due to their specific characteristics. Both purposive and snowball sampling enabled the researcher to locate the specific unit of analysis. Fifteen individuals (of 18-20 years old) were asked to participate. Usually, the data gathering process needs to be continued until data saturation occurs. Data saturation occurs only once the researcher cannot learn anything new from the data obtained from the participants, as everything keeps on repeating (Monette *et al.* and Seidman, as quoted by Greeff, 2011:350). Fortunately, data saturation did occur and no more participants were needed for the study. The only other guidelines that were followed regarding the number of individuals asked to participate in the study was that the sample had to be of such a nature that it would enable the researcher to find information on the research problem, the reason for the investigation, the usefulness, and also what would have increased the study's trustworthiness (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:350). Please see **Addendum A** for the full participant profile.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Babbie and Mouton (2001:288) state that the research method selected to be used in a particular research study depends on which method will answer the research problem most effectively. Together with this, while conducting phenomenological research, one may use various data collecting techniques, including observations, focus groups, action research, interviews and the use of documentation (Lester, 1999:2). The methods chosen to be used for this research study and its problem were unstructured interviews and a photo-elicitation technique.

3.6.1 Unstructured interviews

An unstructured interview formalises and extends conversation (Greeff, 2011:348). Unstructured interviews are done in order to understand the experiences of persons so as to see what meaning they derive from such experiences (Payne & Payne, 2004:132; Greeff, 2011:348). Such interviews focus on determining the expectations, facts, forecasts and opinions of individuals as well as their reactions to primary findings and possible solutions (Greeff, 2011:348). It is the responsibility of the researcher to probe for clarification or further explanation where needed, but to stay neutral and non-directive toward the participant (Payne & Payne, 2004:132; Yin, 2011:137). With this type of interview, the researcher should have extensive knowledge in the field of inquiry so that probing can be used to optimise the data collection (Payne & Payne, 2004:132). Therefore, for this study the researcher did an extensive literature review before beginning with the data collection. An interview poses some advantages and disadvantages, which may include (Stokes & Bergin, 2006) the following: the advantage of greater control over the sample selection, and more in-depth and understandable data may be obtained; the disadvantages may be that an interview could miss the opportunity of interaction between consumers, and the data obtained is harder to interpret.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This method of data gathering was found to be appropriate because of the research aim to derive meaning from the Mzansi youth females' reactions to the fitting room experience in terms of their apparel quality evaluation. The interview method enabled the researcher to obtain rich as well as in-depth data on the expectations and the actual "real world" experiences that these females had in the fitting rooms in order to see whether these played a role in their apparel quality evaluation.

Two lengthy (on average, 30 minutes each) unstructured interviews were held with each participant. The first interview was held with each participant separately. This was done only after the research purpose was discussed and consent forms were signed in the initial meeting. The aim with first interview was to gain an understanding of the expectations that the participants had of the fitting room experience, and also how the fitting room should be in order to help the participants to evaluate the apparel products' quality. The second interview was conducted with each participant separately, but only after the photo-elicitation technique was set in motion and a certain task was performed by each participant. The photographs were used as an external stimulus to start the interview. The aim with the second interview was to get an understanding and derive meaning from each participant's actual "real world" experience of the fitting rooms at a specific retailer in Hatfield Plaza and Brooklyn Centre. Another aim was to get an understanding and derive meaning from each participant's actual "real world" experience of the fittings rooms to see how/whether it played a role in the participants' evaluation of the apparel products' quality.

Both interviews, for each participant, were audio-recorded by means of tape recordings and field notes, as is recommended for interviews (Payne & Payne, 2004:132). This enhanced the study's trustworthiness in that its dependability was increased. The tape recordings as well as field notes are available from the researcher.

3.6.2 Photo-elicitation

As mentioned above, a photo-elicitation technique was also used in order to gather data. Photo-elicitation entails using photographs which were taken by participants, as a point of departure in an interview (Kent & Kirby, 2009; Lachal *et al.*, 2012). This technique is seen as multi-modal by combining the verbal and visual through using photographs generated by participants (Henwood, Shirani & Finn, 2011:331). The photographs aid the interviewer by being used as a kind of mediator which makes verbal exchanges, the remembering of the experience as well as the expression thereof easier (Mountian *et al.*, 2011:356; Lachal *et al.*, 2012). This approach is also seen as phenomenological in nature in that it entails a thorough exploration of the participants' experiences (Lachal *et al.*, 2012). By using photographs as a research method one can obtain data which may lead one to see how the participants experienced situations through other senses, which are not dependent on words (Burt *et al.*, 2007; Reavey, 2011b:6). Photo-elicitation is seen as a technique to sharpen the participant's memory and is used as an external stimulus, which can bridge communication gaps between the researcher and the participants themselves by facilitating empathy; it enhances the flexibility of coverage and the exploration of new areas, and thus produces richer data (Burt *et al.*, 2007; Reavey, 2011a:xxvii; Lachal *et al.*, 2012). This technique helps the researcher to get data on taken-for-granted activities performed by consumers, by letting the consumer take a central stand in the research course as the consumer is seen as the expert (Rose, as quoted by Clarke, Perry & Denson, 2011; Hodgetts, Chamberlain & Groot, 2011:305). Stress can be reduced by using this technique as it steers away from the participants' faces and focuses on the photograph (Burt *et al.*, 2007).

This technique was found to be appropriate as one of its advantages is that it is able to bridge distinctive cultural worlds in that participants are given the opportunity to present their worlds by taking photographs, and this enables the researcher to get an insider's perspective (Burt *et al.*, 2007). As the unit of analysis for this particular research study was the Mzansi youth females, and as their culture is distinctly different to the researcher's own culture, this technique was very appropriate.

Another added benefit of using this technique is that taking photographs are seen as a fun and easy activity and therefore a good method of enrolling potential participants (Rose, as quoted by Clarke *et al.*, 2011; Reavey, 2011b:7).

3.6.3 The initial meeting and the first unstructured interview

The above methods were implemented after locating the unit of analysis and arranging an initial interview with the participants, in an environment which provided comfort and privacy to the participants and which was easy to access (Greeff, 2011:350). The first interview was held in one of the lecture halls of the Consumer Science Department on the main campus of the University of Pretoria. On the day, the participants were briefed on the procedures of the research process, such as how the researcher would document the sessions (use of tape recorder and field notes), and the participants were informed about the purpose of the research and consent forms were signed (Greeff, 2011:350). All the consent forms were available from the researcher. Then the researcher conducted an unstructured interview with each participant separately, and asked questions in order to get an understanding around the expectations that the participants had of the fitting room experience and the concomitant apparel quality evaluation. The researcher also told each participant exactly what had to be done by each of them at the task meeting. Appointments were scheduled with each participant by using a calendar and timetable for the task meeting.

3.6.4 The task meeting

The task meeting was arranged with each participant (separately) to go to specific retailers where the photo-elicitation technique was set in motion. Each participant was asked to go to the Department of Consumer Sciences on the scheduled day and sign out a digital camera from the researcher. The researcher again explained what had to be done and answered all queries. After the camera was signed out, the

participant had to go to two specific retailers, namely one in Hatfield Plaza and the other in the Brooklyn Centre. While in the apparel store, each participant had to look for six apparel items in each store that she liked. After the items were picked, the participant had to take the items to that specific store's fitting room and try them on. While the participant was in the fitting room, trying on the items, she had to take photographs of anything that made an impression on her (good or bad) in that fitting room area/cubicle. Each participant was told that they had to take a maximum of 20 and a minimum of 10 photographs for both stores. After each participant left the two specific retail stores the digital camera was taken back to the Department of Consumer Science and signed in with the researcher. The researcher downloaded each participant's photographs into their own folder, so that the camera's memory could be cleaned and ready for the next participant to be signed out.

3.6.5 The last unstructured interview

The last unstructured interview was arranged with each participant (separately), and took place at the same location as the first interview. During this interview, the researcher developed each participant's photographs and used it as an external stimulus in the unstructured interview. The aim was to gain data on their actual "real world" experience of the fitting room at the specific retailers, and also on their evaluation of the apparel products' quality which brought about satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

3.6.6 The specific retailers

The specific retailer (two different stores from the same brand) chosen in Hatfield Plaza and Brooklyn Centre was appropriate, as this retail chain store can be seen as a discount store like PEP, Ackermans and Jet, which means the products are relatively low priced. As was mentioned, the unit of analysis was students who earned only about R800 a month, and therefore the products would have fallen

within their price range. Another reason why this retail brand was appropriate to use was that their apparel products can be seen as fashion forward and aimed at younger consumers. Therefore the probability that the unit of analysis would find apparel items that they liked in the store was high. The same retail brand was used but different stores in two different centres, namely one in the Hatfield Plaza and one in the Brooklyn Centre. The Hatfield Plaza store is an old concept store of the specific retail brand, while the Brooklyn Centre store is a new concept store of the specific retail brand. Using two different stores and two different fitting room areas/cubicles increased the trustworthiness of the data, as richer data was obtained from using two stimuli. Permission was asked from the regional manager, area manager and also from each store's manager, so that the participants could move freely within the store and take photographs of the fitting room areas/cubicles.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the procedure of establishing order, meaning and structure from the mass of data that has been collected (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:397). Qualitative data can be analysed using various ways, and the method of analysis can be altered as the analysis is being conducted (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:397). The method used depends greatly on the research question of the study (Schreier, 2012:37).

As already stated, the data was documented using field notes, tape recordings and photographs. After each interview the data was analysed, using the five steps discussed below (Yin, 2011:176). These steps have a “recursive and iterative” connection and do not necessarily follow a linear sequence (Yin, 2011:179). In **Addendum B** it can be seen how the interviews were analysed by using the steps below.

3.7.1 Step 1: Compiling

This step involved the sorting of the data collected into a logical format so as to create a database (Payne & Payne, 2004:36; Yin, 2011:178). The tape recordings were transcribed verbatim so as to enable the researcher to read the data (Payne & Payne, 2004:37; Gibbs, 2007:3). Field notes were also captured on the computer after each interview, while they were still fresh (Payne & Payne, 2004:37). The researcher compiled a folder for each participant of the study and these folders included the verbatim versions of the tape recordings, the field notes and the photographs taken by each participant.

3.7.2 Step 2: Disassembling

The second step was about breaking down the compiled data into tinier pieces. This was done by first reading repeatedly through all of the compiled data, in order to get an overall impression (Payne & Payne, 2004:37; Goulding, 2005; Yin, 2011:178). The written/compiled text was also verified to ensure that it had no transcription errors (Payne & Payne, 2004:37). Significant words, passages and phrases were highlighted by writing codes/memos after the significant word/passage/phrase as it helped with the exploration of the data (Payne & Payne, 2004:37 & Schurink *et al.*, 2011:409). Coding or the writing of memos involves the recording or identification of certain words/passages/phrases by one word, which in some way epitomises the same descriptive or theoretical initiative (Gibbs, 2007:38; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Usually, various words/passages/phrases are identified and then given the same code/memo (Gibbs, 2007:38). Thus, all the data that epitomised the same descriptive or theoretical initiative was labelled with the same code/memo (Gibbs, 2007:38). Therefore the writing of codes/memos on the verbatim version is the process of categorising it, to create a framework of thematic ideas (Gibbs, 2007:38). This process has to be repeated across all the participants' verbatim versions of the recordings, so that all the codes/memos can be clustered (Goulding, 2005). This was

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

exactly what was done by the researcher for all of the participants. An operationalisation table was drawn up in order to show how this process was done (see **TABLE 1**). The expectation side of the conceptual framework was done first, and thereafter the actual experience followed. All the concepts of the study, which can be found in the objectives, sub-objectives and conceptual framework, were given a distinct “colour label”. These “colour labels” were then used to “colour” the codes/memos written on each participant’s verbatim version, so that it could be seen which codes/memos related to which concept within the objectives, sub-objectives and conceptual framework of the study.

TABLE 1: OPERATIONALISATION OF OBJECTIVES 1 AND 2

OBJECTIVE 1: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers’ expectations of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience		
SUB-OBJECTIVE:	QUESTION EXAMPLES:	CODING WORDS EXAMPLES:
1.1 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers’ expectations of the aesthetics of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience	What is the first thing you expect to see when you enter a fitting room cubicle? How does it make you feel?	Aesthetics: colour- stimulus –sight; happy- emotion
1.2 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers’ expectations of the functionality of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience	How do you expect to locate the fitting room? How do you feel about the space in the fitting room cubicle?	Functionality: signage- layout ; small- space
1.3 To explore and describe	How do you decide to buy	Quality: price- extrinsic ;

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

<p>Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel product quality in terms of intrinsic, extrinsic and behavioural characteristics</p>	<p>the clothing once you have tried it on?</p>	<p>fit– aesthetics/behavioural characteristics</p>
<p>OBJECTIVE 2: To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience</p>		
<p>2.1 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the aesthetics of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience</p>	<p>What was the first thing that you noticed when you entered the fitting room cubicle? How did it make you feel?</p>	<p>Aesthetics: radio–stimulus –hearing; angry –emotion</p>
<p>2.2 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the functionality of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience</p>	<p>How did you locate the fitting room? How do you feel about the space in the fitting room cubicle after experiencing it?</p>	<p>Functionality: asked someone– service; small –space</p>
<p>2.3 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel product quality, in terms of intrinsic, extrinsic and behavioural</p>	<p>Why would you or wouldn't you buy the clothing you tried on?</p>	<p>Quality: my boyfriend didn't like it– extrinsic; I have to iron it– functionality/ behavioural characteristics</p>

characteristics		
-----------------	--	--

3.7.3 Step 3: Reassembling

The third step entailed the reorganisation of the smaller pieces compiled in step 2 (Yin, 2011:179; Schreier, 2012:38). Colour-coding was used to identify the pieces so that they could be reorganised/clustered using the conceptual framework, objectives and sub-objectives as categories under which the pieces could be arranged (Payne & Payne, 2004:37; Gibbs, 2007:39). This is seen as intellectually the most challenging step in the data analysis process, as this step integrates the whole endeavour by identifying recurrent ideas, prominent themes, belief systems and associations drawn across all the text (Payne & Payne, 2004:39; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Schurink *et al.*, 2011:410; Schreier, 2012:38). In this step the researcher identified the most prominent concepts and associations between the concepts, which provided insight into the research problem.

3.7.4 Step 4: Interpreting

In this phase a new narrative was formed by using the reorganised material from step 3 (Yin, 2011:179). Therefore the compiled database was interpreted by looking at it from a different perspective so that a link could be found between the study's conceptual framework, and the objectives and sub-objectives (Yin, 2011:179; Schreier, 2012:39). The data was analysed to determine its centrality and usefulness (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:415). The researcher checked that the gathered data would be able to provide insight (relevance) into the problem that was being explored. The researcher also critically challenged the way in which the data seemed to unfold so that other explanations might be found for the pattern (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:416).

3.7.5 Step 5: Concluding

This step included the drawing of conclusions and the writing up of the findings (Yin, 2011:179).

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In order for this qualitative study to be trustworthy, the following factors had to be adhered to (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:419-421): credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

3.8.1 Credibility

The credibility of a qualitative research study's aim is to show that the study was conducted in such a way that it ensured that subjects have been described and identified accurately (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420). The question to be asked is whether the participants of the research match the researcher's representation and reconstruction of them (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420). The credibility of this qualitative study was increased by using the following strategies (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420):

- Prolonged engagement: Two unstructured interviews were held with each participant. In total it constituted 30 contact sessions. So, one can say that the study's credibility was increased as the researcher was engaged with the participants for quite a period of time and therefore had enough time to really come to understand their views.
- Triangulation of methods: Before data gathering officially began, the researcher held a "trial data gathering". Four fourth-year students from the Consumer Science Clothing Department were asked to participate in the "trial data gathering". This was done so that the researcher could become more comfortable with the interview process and the probing for answers, without leading the participants in a specific

direction. The students were asked whether they felt that the researcher had led them to certain aspects. This was done as the students do have knowledge on the subject and would be able to tell whether they had been led in the unstructured interview. The two data gathering methods that were used with the actual data gathering, namely the unstructured interviews and the photo-elicitation, ensured that the collected data had depth and breadth. In order for the researcher to be able to probe for answers, an extensive literature review was done before the data was collected; this ensured that the researcher had enough knowledge on the subject and made probing easier as the researcher knew what to probe for. Purposive and snowball sampling was also used to assemble the unit of analysis to ensure that the most suitable participants were located/approached for the study. Using these multiple methods increased the credibility of the study.

- Member checks: After the findings had been written up, it was taken to five of the individuals that had participated in the study, so that they could say whether they agreed with the findings or not. The five participants agreed that the findings were accurate, thereby increasing this study's credibility.
- Peer debriefing: The raw data and the findings were taken to the supervisor of this research study, so that she could check whether the data had been interpreted correctly and whether the right conclusions had been drawn.

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability has to do with the question whether the research findings can be transferred from the specific case or situation to another (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277; Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420). The researcher based the research perspective on original theory in order to show how the collection and analysis of the data were guided by theoretical models and concepts (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420). The researcher ensured that the theoretical frameworks and paradigms direct the study and also ensured thick descriptions of the concepts and findings. A

triangulation of different methods was also used in this study (as discussed above), which also increased its transferability (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420).

3.8.3 Dependability

The dependability of a qualitative study has to do with how logical the research process is, and also whether it is soundly audited and documented (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420). For the purpose of this study a research plan was drawn, to show the logical flow of the research process. The documentation methods used were tape recordings, field notes and photographs. The use of multiple methods for data collection (as discussed above) and documentation (as mentioned above) increased the dependability of this research study.

3.8.4 Conformability

Conformability has to do with the confirmation of the study's findings by another person (Lincoln & Guba, as quoted by Schurink *et al.*, 2011:421). As discussed earlier, the raw data as well as the findings of this study were taken to the supervisor so that she could check that the data was correctly interpreted and the right conclusions drawn. She also checked whether she would have come to the same conclusions. This also increases this study's trustworthiness.

3.9 ETHICS

In order for the researcher to conduct this research study, the researcher had to be fully aware of the ethical issues that might arise, so that they could be addressed in terms of an action plan. Babbie and Mouton (2001:521-523) suggest the following actions in order to prevent ethical issues from arising: the participants of the study must have willingly decided to take part in the study by signing a consent form; the

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

research study must not entail any activities that may be harmful to the participants; and the participants must be ensured that all the information/findings obtained during the course of the research study will be treated as highly confidential and the participants' identity will stay anonymous. The above actions were adhered to while conducting this specific research study. Another prevention method that was added to this study was to gain the approval of the ethics committee of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, before the actual research was conducted.

The research findings, discussion of the findings and interpretation thereof are presented in the next chapter, which is **Chapter 4**.

4.1 BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the role that the fitting room experience may play in the Mzansi youth female consumers' evaluation of apparel products' quality. The researcher did this by exploring the Mzansi youth females' expectations and experiences of the fitting room as part of their overall retail experience, in terms of the functionality and aesthetics and the role that these play in the evaluation of apparel quality. The findings are presented and discussed against the objectives that directed the study, and are organised and discussed under the relevant objectives and sub-objectives. Discussions are substantiated by means of direct verbatim extracts (in italics and bold) from the transcribed interviews with the participants. The text of all the interviews is available from the researcher. When referring to the Mzansi youth female in this study, the information pertains to the participants in this study only, as the findings of a qualitative study cannot be generalised to the broader population. The codes and numbers in brackets refer to the specific participant's number and the corresponding page number in the transcribed interview. Where applicable, photograph numbers will also be found in brackets at the end of extracted verbatim. The photographs can be found in **Addendum C**.

4.2 TO EXPLORE AND DESCRIBE MZANSI YOUTH FEMALE CONSUMERS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE FITTING ROOM EXPERIENCE AS PART OF THE OVERALL RETAIL EXPERIENCE

An experience occurs for a consumer when a business deliberately uses services and items as props to entice the individual consumer in a manner that it creates an unforgettable event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In order for the consumer to be enticed, one needs to know what a consumer expects of the retail experience so that an "unforgettable event" can be created. The fitting room experience can be seen as the moment where the consumer experiences a response to the environmental attributes

when trying on garments (Baumstarck, 2008:12). According to the literature, the fitting room experience includes the aesthetics of the fitting room as well as its functionality, both of which may play a role in the quality evaluation of apparel products.

4.2.1 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the aesthetics of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience

An aesthetic experience affects the individual in three ways: the body through the stimulation of the senses (stimulus), the soul through the expression of feelings (emotion), and the mind through the activation of thought processing (cognition) (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:13). The aim of the first sub-objective is to explore and describe the Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the aesthetics of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.

It was clear from the findings that, for the Mzansi youth females, the three dimensions (stimulus, emotion and cognition) of an aesthetic fitting room experience are interrelated.

The participants expected a fitting room to be brightly coloured (sensory stimulus – sight) so that they could feel welcome (emotion) in the fitting room cubicle and better about themselves (cognition). ***“It’s like, the fitting rooms like, they only like, I don’t know, it doesn’t really make you feel at home. It’s just a room, that’s it, with a mirror. There’s nothing to it, it’s just, just there. Ja, I don’t know, add a colour, I don’t know, a welcoming colour, because it’s just white” (P2:3). “Uhm, I think they’re very dull. In terms of... like, you know, when you’re going into the fitting room it’s just like an open space. They don’t like have a nice curtain and whatever, with colour, so that you can feel good about yourself when you go in there” (P7:1).*** Visser, Du Preez and Janse van Noordwyk (2006) found that colour was important in terms of how consumers formed an image of a store. Colour brings with it perceptions of gender, weight and temperature (Rengel,

2007:342). So it can be said that when the Mzansi youth female sees (sensory stimulus– sight) the fitting room’s colour, it makes her evaluate herself and the environment around her so that certain perceptions or images are formed which then also affect her emotions.

They also expect a clean (sensory stimulus– sight) and an odourless (sensory stimulus– smell) fitting room area, as it seems to increase their comfort (emotion) level and it indicates for them that they are valued (cognition) as customers of the store. ***“Uhm, the floors are not clean. Ah, I’m not really comfortable, because I have to, maybe sometimes I have to take off my shoe and then I have to stand on the ground and... oh, I have socks on, so the floor’s going to make my socks dirty, so ja, I’m not really comfortable with that. Or maybe pieces of uhm, rubbish lying around, you know, ja” (P13:3). “Like, you know, some people... deodorant ja, and then you walk in it’s like... so that’s why I, like I was hoping that it would also like an air conditioner thing going on there to like...” (P14:5). “...Price tags, they’re on the, on the floor and then when a lot of people go in there and then they turn brown, so it gives me the feeling that it’s not clean, ja, that’s... very uncomfortable, like they don’t pay attention to the detail in the thing; I think it’s like a half-hearted effort, then you wouldn’t want to buy the clothes, because they don’t spend a lot of effort on their customers, so why should the customers spend effort on trying to buy the clothes, ja” (P15:8).*** The literature shows that consumers tend to feel a sense of order in a space which is tidy, where one does not see dirt, or items lying around, but where everything is neat and proper (Rengel, 2007:13). In terms of smell, the literature shows that smell can be used for its congruity with other cues, pleasantness and its novelty, and it has the power to evoke different thoughts in consumers (Fiore & Kim, 2007; Rath *et al.*, 2008:60). Retailers should take note that a smell can create pictures in the consumer’s mind about an environment (Machado & Diggines, 2012:44). This is reinforced by Soars (2009) who states that smell is the one stimulus which has the fastest link to human beings’ emotions, due to the fact that odours/smells trigger the “olfactory system” of the brain, which sends images to the “limbic system”, which then triggers emotions. The author adds that

odours/smells can keep the human brain busy with thoughts and are therefore especially powerful. Visser *et al.* (2006) found that a neutral scented store creates a positive store image within the consumers' minds. So one could say that a clean and odourless fitting room can play a role in the Mzansi youth female's thoughts and emotions, and therefore in her aesthetic experience of the fitting room as part of her overall retail experience.

In terms of sound, the participants expected to hear (sensory stimulus– hearing) nothing else but music in the fitting room area so as to keep them happy (emotion) and focused on themselves (cognition). ***“The radio... [chuckles]. It’s okay, because the music they play there is not so bad; it caters for... well it’s pop, so it’s fun” (P6:3). “Well, there are other customers I’d say, ja... Sometimes uncomfortable... Because like, let’s just say, I have a jean or something and then someone next door is complaining about how the jean looks on the hips and all that, so to me it’s going to start making me look at how it looks on me” (P8:4). “Oh, ja, my neighbours...[chuckles]. I don’t think you should be hearing them; you should hear them less, so that you concentrate on yourself and your thoughts of how you look...” (P13:4).*** Fiore and Kimle (1997:194) believe that background music creates pleasure, promotes merchandise and it also adds to the retailer's image. Several research studies indicate that music can influence a consumer based on its rhythm and tempo (Soars, 2009). Together with this, it is said that different types of music are able to evoke emotional and behavioural reactions within consumers (Burner, as quoted by Baker *et al.*, 1992). In 2010 a study found that if sound is used “incorrectly” it can have a less than desirable effect on consumers (Ballantine, Jack & Parsons, 2010). Furthermore research has also indicated that music can have an effect on the evaluation of products (Soars, 2009). The findings of this research, together with the literature and previous studies, indicate that what one sees, hears and smells can have an influence on one's emotions felt and one's cognitions formed. In the fitting room it is also evident, as the sound within and around the cubicle, and also the smells in and around the cubicle play a role in the consumer's experience of the fitting room. As Soars (2009) states, it can also influence the consumer's evaluation of products.

The participants expected that the fitting room area should not have queues which are too long; this would indicate to them (cognition) a store that regards good customer service as important and therefore make the participants feel happy (emotion) in the environment. ***“We like just stand in line. I don’t know, like it kind of... it just makes me feel uninterested in fitting anymore, because it’s like, it’s taking forever, so you’re like, ach, okay, whatever, let me just get out, maybe I’m going to find something somewhere else, where I think the service is actually going to be faster, and ja” (P2:14). “I know there would probably be a long line before I get into the fitting room. Ah, that’s annoying, because I stand in line to fit, and I get out, then usually when I get more stuff, then I have to wait again, and then once I’ve picked the clothing, I have to wait in another line to actually to go purchase the clothing, so ja, that’s pretty irritating, ja” (P5:2).***

The above relates to experience cost, as discussed in the literature review. Experience cost includes the buyer’s time and effort in acquiring the products, as well as the psychological cost which includes irritation with the environment, which would influence the buyer’s cognitive and emotional processes (Baker *et al.*, 2002). So one can say that the participants expect the experience cost to be low at the fitting room in order for them to be happy and feel valued as customers.

From the above findings it is clear how stimulus, emotion and cognition are interrelated and how it seems to affect the Mzansi youth females’ experience expectations of the fitting room. The findings are consistent with a study done in 1995 by Uzzell, which showed that an environment’s sensory stimulus has the biggest effect on customers (Fan, 2003). Fan (2003) states that sensory stimulus is one of the reasons why consumers go to retail stores and that the stimulation amplifies the consumer’s emotional experience. Fiore and Kim (2007) state that stimulus has the ability to affect consumers on a cognitive and emotional level. Therefore sensory stimulus helps consumers to form thoughts (cognition) by shaping their beliefs about the products, retailer and brands (Chebat, as quoted by Fiore & Kim, 2007; Machado & Diggines, 2012:42). Stimuli in a product and environment also play an important role in the consumer’s emotional experience as part of a total aesthetic experience and are seen as very important dimensions influencing a

consumer while she/he is engaged in a shopping environment (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4; D'Astous, 2000; Burns & Neisner 2006; Gilboa & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013).

One can therefore deduct from the above findings that stimulus, emotion and cognition are essential elements to an aesthetic experience and that the relationship between the three dimensions seems to play a role in the Mzansi youth female's expectations of the fitting room's aesthetics.

4.2.2 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the functionality of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience

The retail space could be a valuable and powerful marketing device if it is utilised more effectively (Baker *et al.*, 1992). In order to do this, one must find out what is expected by the consumer. As discussed above, the functionality of the fitting room includes the following elements: synchronising impressions, layout, space, service, furniture and fixtures. The aim of this sub-objective is to explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the functionality of the fitting room experience as part of the overall retail experience.

Participants expect that an apparel store's layout should be such that it is easy for them to locate the fitting room area. ***"I tried to find a fitting room; I didn't even see it. I left, and I had clothes in my hand – I wanted to fit them, but then I tried to look for a fitting room – I didn't see it"*** (P9:7). Research suggests that being able to see where one wants to go is so important that it can be put at the centre of a store's layout efficiency (Soars, 2009). It is said that proper layout can help the consumer feel orientated within a space, as they will know where they are and where to find what they are looking for. In terms of the fitting room this is also true because it is also said that it is more likely for a consumer to try on apparel items if the fitting room is easily seen (Bell & Ternus, 2006:23; Rengel, 2007:13; Nielson & Taylor, 2007:170). So in terms of the Mzansi youth female, it can be said that being able to locate/see the fitting room area can play a cardinal role in her

emotional experience of the store. This is consistent with the literature, which states that a poorly designed retail space may reduce shopping enjoyment and may lead to the dampening of consumers' mood (Spies, Hesse & Loesch, as quoted by Baker *et al.*, 2002). ***“You just feel, you, you get, because when you, when you start shopping you're very excited and then when where's like a drop in your mood it's going to like, okay, I should just leave, because then you, your mood has been interrupted; you're not feeling, you're not feeling the excitement anymore because you're a bit bothered for looking for the room, so you, you're not that excited anymore. And when you're not excited to fit on clothes you're probably not going to buy a lot of clothes, ja” (P15:9).***

It is also expected that the fitting room area should have an adequate number of fitting room cubicles. ***“For me it creates a sense that, that they just put it there for the sake of putting it there, not for somebody to go and enjoy themselves, take their time and normally there's about what... four fitting rooms? Not like ten fitting rooms...” (P1:11).*** If this is not adhered to it might result in the consumers feeling crowded, as many consumers will have to stand in a queue (as referred to above) in order to get into a fitting room cubicle. In a recent study done by Ballantine *et al.* (2010), feeling crowded was found to have a negative influence on consumers' emotions. The above findings indicate that layout in the form of how visible the fitting room area is from the main selling floor, and also the number of cubicles available in the actual area, play a role in the participants' emotions and cognitions. These findings are consistent with another study which found that lighting, layout and mirrors came in second, third and fourth respectively as contributing elements to the functionality of the store, and influence consumers' formation of a store's image (Visser *et al.*, 2006).

The participants expected the space of the actual fitting room cubicle to be large enough so that they would be able to try on apparel products in comfort. ***“Hm, what I personally think about them, they're a bit too small. I don't have that enough room to say, “Wow, I look good” (P1:1). “...it's small and you like... it's also like your mind is also limited in a way, ja. So you're not really free to actually try on nicely...” (P2:9).*** Interestingly enough, the concept of spacious fitting room

cubicle also emerged in another qualitative study (Visser *et al.*, 2006). The literature suggests that certain spaces should be designed in such a way that it would provide the right conditions so that it can facilitate the task it was designed for (Rengel, 2007:233). It was found that a large space can have a positive influence on a consumer's interaction with products (Ballantine *et al.*, 2010). This is reinforced by Fiore and Kimle (1997:34), who state that the retail space in itself is not only pleasing but also affects how consumers appreciate apparel items. Therefore the Mzansi youth female's expectation of a large fitting room cubicle can influence her emotions and cognitions, and may therefore also play a role in her evaluation of apparel products' quality.

The participants also expected that the walls, door and ceiling of a fitting room cubicle should be fully closed when inside the cubicle. ***"...some of them are still on curtains, so... instead of doors, so...I think it's below standard, because I mean, first of all, not only is it... some... it's, it's cheap... it's cheaper quality and less privacy. Anybody can just walk by; the wind blows, and then it's open, and they can see you getting changed. So I think that's very much below standard. Like I can't change in there. It just feels like privacy is... privacy is important to me, for any girl, because we all have insecurities, so... oh, not all, but most girls have insecurities. So that's important to me"*** (P4:1,2). ***"Normally the doors are short, like you [chuckles] can actually see the other person's legs, and what they're doing. No. Not good. [chuckles] I feel like they're actually looking at me"*** (P7:8). The above findings show that if the fitting room cubicle's walls, door and ceiling are not fully closed it can play a role in the Mzansi youth female's emotions, as it makes her feel insecure; she may feel that people from the outside can actually look at her while she is busy trying on the apparel products. The literature shows that privacy is a major concern in the fitting room (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:215), which is consistent with the participants' expectations of the fitting room cubicle's walls, door and ceiling.

The findings indicate that the Mzansi youth females expect service/employees at the fitting room area. They also expect the service/employees to be friendly

and helpful. ***“So they’re doing you more of a favour. So by the time you get into the fitting room, it’s like, ‘Okay, let me just wear these clothes and get it over and done with, the whole fitting thing’” (P1:2). “...like recently, I tried buying white pants and I didn’t have a size... ja, I had a size but then... oh, I went to the fitting room and then I tried fitting them on just to see, because I was really desperate, and then the lady was like, ‘No, you can’t fit on white pants.’ Because apparently people make them dirty, but still you still need to buy – you’re a customer, so the lady was like, ‘No, you can’t fit on white pants,’ but I was like, I need them desperately, what am I going to do? I mean it’s either I buy it or leave it, and if I leave it you’re going to lose money, and they said, ‘But no, you can’t fit on white pants, because like people make them dirty,’ and I was like no, I went to talk to the other lady so that she can talk to her, because I needed those white pants and I needed to fit them, because I can’t take them and what if they don’t fit? Because I need them, I needed them like for the next day, so ja, that didn’t sit well with me” (P13:15).***

The above findings show how the actions of the service/employees at the fitting room area can play a role in the participants’ emotions and cognitions toward the store and the product, and that it can ultimately also play a role in their purchase behaviour. Visser *et al.*’s (2006) study in the Western Cape found that service/employees together with apparel products form one of the most important dimensions contributing to the store image (Visser *et al.*, 2006). This is reinforced by the fact that the friendliness of employees can enhance the customer’s task of shopping and thereby also increase their enjoyment of the shopping experience (Shukla & Babin, 2013).

In terms of furniture, the participants expected at least a bench and mirror in the fitting room. ***“Ja, that’s why you go into a fitting room, to see if it fits and looks good on you. You don’t just fit and leave, you fit and say, ‘Does this look good on me?’ And I like to take some time from all that shopping and sit down and be like, ‘Okay, this is the one that I want’(P1:12). “Obviously they don’t want you to spend more time in it,***

I guess. That's how it makes me feel; it makes me feel rushed, it's like... it's unwelcoming" (P2:9). "I think the mirror, they need to get those side mirrors, you know, those ones that go on the side so that you can see the back and everything" (P6:1). "You want to see, you want to see your outfit at different angles; you want to know that if someone's looking at you from the right, this is what they see, so it's nice to get that experience when you're in a fitting room" (P10:4). In the United States a store known as Macy's successfully increased the time consumers spent in the store as well as the amount of purchases by enhancing the visuals in the reception areas of their fitting rooms (Soars, 2009). In this regard, Visser *et al.* (2006) found that lighting, layout and mirrors came in second, third and fourth respectively as elements contributing to the functionality of the store, which influence consumers' formation of a store's image (Visser *et al.*, 2006). The literature, previous research and the findings lead one to see that having a seat and a mirror in the fitting room plays a role in the Mzansi youth female's experience of the environment and may also give rise to emotions and cognitions.

Fixtures in the form of lighting, are also expected in the fitting room area by the participants. *"... Okay, certain lights make you look good [chuckles], because you're like... okay fine, ja they're enjoyable, and then some of them, they just, I don't know, maybe they can crowd your vision and then your judgement as well with the clothes, because you're like, "Ah-ah, no, not this" (P2:11). "It makes me feel good. Like even if I don't look good in something but, you know, the lighting just makes everything better, because you can actually see that I don't look, I don't look good in this thing; or I look good in this thing. It helps... like it helps a lot" (P7:6).* Lighting was found to be the most important functional element which influences consumers' formation of a store's image (Visser *et al.*, 2006). In a more recent qualitative research study conducted by Ballantine *et al.* (2010), it was found that lighting played a large role in the consumers' experience of the store environment and seems to particularly play a role in consumers' emotions (Ballantine *et al.*, 2010). The literature shows that lighting can improve a store's overall image by

influencing a consumer's mood in a positive manner (Koo & Kim, 2013). It is said that the main purpose of lighting in a retail space is to improve the merchandise display, but it is also said that lighting is important to certain activities performed in a specific space (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:209; Rengel, 2007:329). Therefore the Mzansi youth female expects lighting in the fitting room in order to facilitate the task of trying on apparel items, and in turn, the lighting can also play a role in her emotions and cognitions.

The participants also expected hanging hooks, which also form part of the fitting room's fixtures. The findings show that the participants expected hanging hooks to make the trying on of apparel items easier, and to facilitate their task in the fitting room cubicle. ***“Uhm, they do contribute, like to us feeling more welcome there, because like at least you don't have to put them down. You have somewhere to put them and that makes it look more neater and less untidy, than if you were to put them on the ground and then they'll have to be all squashed and stuff” (P3:10). “Just because when you want to bring in more clothing, then you obviously want to space them out nicely, and I don't want to hang everything on like one hook, and then the hook falls down” (P5:7).***

From the above it is clear that the functional elements within a fitting room area are appreciated by the consumer's senses, such as sight and touch. One can also see from the above that the functional elements not only facilitate the task of trying on apparel products but it can also play a role in the consumer's emotions and cognitions. The aesthetics of the fitting room experience and its functionality are therefore interrelated in many aspects.

4.2.3 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel products' quality in terms of intrinsic characteristics, extrinsic characteristics and behavioural characteristics

Apparel products are assessed or evaluated in terms of the products' intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics (Smith *et al.*, 2011). Certain characteristics are ascribed to apparel products by consumers, such as beauty and durability, and these relate to an apparel product's aesthetics and functionality (Hines & Swinker, 2001). This forms part of the behavioural characteristics that is also evaluated by the consumer while assessing and evaluating apparel items while in the fitting room. Smith (2010:19) states that behavioural characteristics entail what the apparel item can provide for the consumer, and intrinsic characteristics determine it.

Therefore the aim of this sub-objective was to explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel products' quality in terms of intrinsic, extrinsic and behavioural (functionality and aesthetics) characteristics. As discussed in the literature review, the functionality of an apparel product, which forms part of the product's behavioural characteristics, includes the apparel product's durability, comfort and maintenance. Aesthetics, which also forms part of the apparel product's behavioural characteristics, includes the elements: stimulus, emotion and cognition. This section's findings will therefore be discussed by referring to the above.

The findings indicate that the fitting room's functionality, in terms of certain specific aspects (discussed below), can play a role in the participant's evaluation of specific elements of apparel products in order to determine the quality.

One of these functional elements is the space in the actual fitting room/cubicle. The findings show that the Mzansi youth females evaluate apparel products' quality by looking at the products' behavioural characteristic, more specifically the aesthetics (sensory stimulus– sight) of the products. Furthermore, the findings reveal that the Mzansi youth females expect the fitting room/cubicles (space) to play a role in their

evaluation of apparel products. They expect the cubicles (space) to be large enough so that they are able to turn around comfortably in the cubicles, while trying on apparel items, and are able to evaluate how the apparel items look (sensory stimulus – sight), and then decide whether it is a quality product. **“Well, because I feel like when I’m inside them, I can’t move around to look at myself really clearly...” (P8:1).** **“I mean, it would be a benefit if it was bigger, you know, it would be better if, you know, you had more space to walk around, maybe look at yourself... now you have to get out of the fitting room to go look at the big mirror in the middle, and now everyone is going to see what you’re wearing, and that’s not really a good thing” (P11:5).** The literature and previous research indicate that a large space can have a positive influence on a consumer’s interaction with products, and also that every person has an area of personal space and when this is invaded it creates discomfort, which might lead to the customer leaving the space or making the wrong decisions (Ballantine *et al.*, 2010; Lee & Johnson, sa:2). A spacious fitting room/cubicle, which is a functional element of the fitting room area, is therefore required in order for the Mzansi youth female to evaluate an apparel product’s quality in terms of the product’s aesthetic elements (sensory stimulus– sight), which form part of the product’s behavioural characteristics.

Mzansi youth females expect certain furniture/fixtures such as mirrors in the fitting room in order to evaluate the quality of apparel products, more specifically the visual appearance of the products. Furniture in the form of mirrors, which are also a functional element in the fitting room area, is also expected to play a role in the Mzansi youth female consumer’s evaluation of apparel products’ quality. Again, it seems that the Mzansi youth females evaluate apparel products’ quality through the products’ behavioural characteristics, more specifically the aesthetics (sensory stimulus- sight) of the products. The participants expect the mirrors in the fitting room/cubicle to be large enough in order for them to see (sensory stimulus- sight) themselves clearly so that they are able to evaluate the apparel product to determine its quality. **“Uhm, the mirrors are okay, like you are able to see yourself from**

head to toe, and so I think they're good, they're okay" (P3:10). "Ja, you can only see the front view. If you have side mirrors then you can see like your dress or whatever from the sides and stuff. So you can make an informed choice" (P6:7).

Lighting, which is a fixture in the fitting room, and also part of the functional elements in the fitting room area, is expected in order for the participants to be able to evaluate apparel products' quality. The participants expect that the lighting in the fitting room should be sufficient in order to evaluate the products' aesthetics in terms of sight (sensory stimulus- sight) in order to determine the products' quality. ***"Things like uhm – let me see – like if the lighting, if it's dodgy then the colour won't turn, won't be the way it's supposed to be because when the sun is out the colour of your clothes seems to differ from when the sun is down, so it's nice to know that..." (P10:16). "Uhm, it just makes, it makes the clothes appear more, more desirable to you, because you see it in the full light and it uhm, also gives, it's a good, if you want to take photos; the lighting is good, so if you like how you look in the photos then you'd like how you feel in them" (P15:2).*** It is said that the main purpose of lighting in a retail space is to improve the merchandise display, but it is also said that lighting is important to certain activities being performed in a specific space (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:209; Rengel, 2007:329). Furthermore, it is said that if the lighting is poor or if it reduces the visual appeal of the merchandise it will result in a decline of sales (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:209). Ballantine *et al.* (2010) found that, although lighting can be aesthetically pleasing it is also an important element used by consumers to interact with products. Therefore, again the findings show that a functional element such as lighting (fixtures), is expected by the Mzansi youth females' in order to evaluate apparel products' quality. They specifically seem to evaluate apparel products' quality by looking at the products' behavioural characteristics, more specifically its aesthetics (sensory stimulus- sight).

From the above findings, one can see what the Mzansi youth females expect from the fitting room and how it should be in order for them to successfully evaluate an apparel product's quality – mainly the aesthetic behavioural

quality. It is also clear from the above that the Mzansi youth female expects to have specific functional elements in the fitting room/cubicle to evaluate a product's quality. This is reinforced by Burns and Neisner (2006), who state that consumers' evaluation of apparel products was shown to be based on the functional elements of the environment and the consumers' emotional reaction to it. The above findings also show that the participants seem to look only at behavioural characteristics in terms of the products' aesthetics or more specifically the sensory stimulus in terms of sight, in order to determine the apparel products' quality.

4.3 TO EXPLORE AND DESCRIBE MZANSI YOUTH FEMALE CONSUMERS' REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE OF THE FITTING ROOM AS PART OF THE OVERALL RETAIL EXPERIENCE

It is said that the physical and social space in which a consumer finds herself has a large influence on her product evaluation (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:434). According to the literature, the fitting room experience includes the aesthetics of the fitting room as well as its functionality, both of which may play a role in the quality evaluation of apparel products. This is reinforced by Fiore and Kim (2007), who state that a shopping experience engages more elements than just acquiring goods; it involves tangential experiences from the retail environment which stem from the sophisticated store design, recreations, educational actions and entertainment.

This objective's aim is to explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the fitting room as part of their overall retail experience. This will be done by looking at the fitting room's aesthetics and functionality as part of the overall retail store, and how these played a role in the Mzansi youth female's evaluation of the apparel products' quality. As discussed in **Chapter 3**, each Mzansi youth female who participated in this study visited two apparel stores as well as their fitting rooms, one in the Hatfield Plaza and the other in the Brooklyn Centre, and she was asked to perform a specific task (see **CHAPTER 3**). These stores, as discussed

above, were used as an external stimulus where the aim was to get an understanding and derive meaning from each participant's actual "real world" experience of the fitting room, and her evaluation of the apparel products' quality to bring about either satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

4.3.1 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the aesthetics of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience

As with the findings on expectations, this sub-objective's findings clearly show that for the Mzansi youth females the three dimensions, sensory stimulus, emotion and cognition of an aesthetic fitting room experience are interrelated. As mentioned in **Chapter 3**, each Mzansi youth female who participated in this study visited two apparel stores as well as their fitting rooms, one in the Hatfield Plaza (old concept store) and the other in the Brooklyn Centre (new concept store), and she was asked to perform a specific task (see **CHAPTER 3**). Although these two stores are situated in different centres as well as different suburbs in Pretoria, both these stores were from the same brand. The findings will therefore be discussed by first referring to the participants' "real world" experience in the Hatfield Plaza (old concept store) store, and then the Brooklyn Centre store (new concept store).

The Mzansi youth females' real world experience of the Hatfield Plaza's apparel store seemed to be negative in terms of the fitting room's aesthetics. The Hatfield Plaza store's fitting rooms/cubicles were not consistent with what was expected (disconfirmation) by the participants. The fitting room area and cubicles were dirty (sensory stimulus– sight), dark in terms of colour (sensory stimulus-sight), which the participants ascribed to the facebrick walls in the cubicles. The participants also talked about the cubicles being noisy (sensory stimulus-hearing). This led to the participants feeling unhappy (emotion), uncomfortable (emotion) and ultimately they did not enjoy (emotion) the aesthetic experience of the fitting room area in the Hatfield Plaza store. It also

seemed to play a role in the participants' thoughts (cognition), as they noted that by looking at their surroundings in the fitting room/cubicle they felt that the store was "telling" them to be quick in the fitting room cubicle and not to take their time trying on the apparel products. **"...instead of the one in Hatfield Plaza which is made out of brick wall, which makes you feel like you're in jail, ja"** (P1:2). **"I liked the uhm, the music parts, but then when the intercom came on, it kind of disturbed me, so ja, it just made me come back to reality I guess. Ja, so that kind of disturbed my thinking process..."** (P2:6). **"At the Hatfield one I wanted to get out [chuckles] as soon as possible"** (P5:3). **"The chewing gum on the walls... I think they should remove that when they clean... Like you're in a dirty place... Not nice at all. It makes you feel like you don't want to be there, because it has chewing gum on the walls"** (P6:4) (PHOTO 1). **"Oh, it made me feel very angry; I was very, very frustrated – seriously... if I wasn't doing this for you, I'm telling you, I would have left"** (P9:2). **"...in Hatfield the moment you close the door it just becomes a bit darker and it's like, [sighs]"** (P14:11). The literature shows that sensory stimulus in a product and environment not only influence the consumer's senses, but also play an important role in the consumer's emotional experience as part of a total aesthetic experience (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:4; D'Astous, 2000; Burns & Neisner, 2006). As discussed above and in the literature, what one sees, hears, smells etcetera can have an influence on a consumer's emotions, cognitions and also behaviour.

In the Brooklyn Centre store, the participants also had a negative experience in terms of the cleanliness of the fitting room cubicles (sensory stimulus-sight). As in the Hatfield Plaza store, it made them feel unhappy (emotion) and uncomfortable (emotion). **"It actually made me feel disappointed, because like, you know, when you look at yourself in the mirror, if a mirror is more clearer, you can see yourself more clearer than if it's got some stains on there, like you have to clean it up to see yourself clearly..."** (P3:2). **"The Brooklyn one, the main problem was the dust, because it was really dusty there..."** (P6:11). **"...clean up after someone**

has left the fitting room, so they just don't need to be leaving that there..." (P11:8). But overall, it seems that the participants had a more positive experience in the Brooklyn Centre store's fitting room area and cubicles. The fitting room area in the Brooklyn Centre store exceeded (positive confirmation) the Mzansi youth females' expectations on certain elements of fitting room's aesthetics, which included the fitting room walls. The walls were painted white (sensory stimulus- sight) and some sections of the walls had wooden panels (sensory stimulus- sight). Another element that seemed to have contributed to the overall positive aesthetic experience was the fact that the fitting room cubicles in the Brooklyn Centre store were not as noisy as in the Hatfield Plaza store. These elements played a role in the participants' enjoyment (emotion) of and comfort (emotion) in the fitting room area and the cubicles. It also played a role in their thoughts (cognition), as a bright (white walls with wooden panels) and noise-free environment indicated to them that they were valued as customers of the store and that they were welcome to take their time while trying on apparel products. ***"It makes me feel good, like, I mean they have a white... white is a neutral pure colour, so it brings that pure feeling and relaxed feeling when you wear the clothes"*** (P1:17) (PHOTO 2). ***"...The one at Brooklyn was really quiet and ja, I don't know, I just, I felt like I could, you know, have my own space..."*** (P5:6). ***"...the wood that they used for the, for the rooms, they're beautiful and they, they... they're in a way that you would want to get into and take your time when you're in there, yes"*** (P9:4).

4.3.2 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the functionality of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience

As stated above, the retail space can be a valuable and powerful marketing device if it is utilised effectively (Baker *et al.*, 1992). Therefore, the aim of this sub-objective is to explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience

of the functionality of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience. The functionality of the fitting room includes the following elements: synchronising impressions, layout, space, service, furniture and fixtures.

As with the expectations, the findings of this sub-objective revealed that for the Mzansi youth female the “real world” aesthetic experience in the fitting room area is interrelated with the “real world” functional experience of the fitting room area.

The Mzansi youth females referred to the synchronising impressions while discussing this sub-objective. This was interesting, as there was no mention of this in the expectations of the functional experience of a fitting room area; it only came out once the participants had the “real world” experience. According to the participants, they felt that the two stores and fitting room areas visited by them, which are part of the same brand but different stores, are not giving the same impression. This seemed to have confused the participants (thoughts), and they questioned themselves as to why two stores of the same brand seemed to generate different impressions in the store and fitting room areas. The participants were unhappy (emotion) with the fact that it seemed that because they are students the store close to them (Hatfield Plaza) generated a bad impression (cognition) when compared to the other store (Brooklyn Centre) which is farther away. It made them think (cognition) that they were not important to the brand/store. ***“Ja, you want to implement the same thing. You don’t want to be like ‘Okay, this one, here is for the poor people’ or ‘That is for the old people,’ you know, you want it to... you want everything to be the same and, you know, everything to fall under one category, ja” (P5:6). “It’s just, I think, because it’s a franchise you expect it to be synchronised, and when you get there it’s not, it’s just really disappointing, you know, it’s unfair to people that live closer to Brooklyn and to us that live here closer to Hatfield” (P12:18).*** It is said that the environment within a store creates an expectation within a consumer as it sends an obvious message of what is likely to be found in other areas of the store (Machado & Diggines, 2012:34). The literature also showed that different design aspects may be used to improve a particular space, but

overall there should be a unified totality (Rengel, 2007:10, 176). The above findings indicate how a functional element such as synchronising impressions can also play a role in the Mzansi youth female's aesthetic experience of the overall retail environment. This functional element was experienced through the participants' senses and then influenced their emotions and cognitions.

With regard to layout, the participants found the Hatfield Plaza store to be adequate and consistent with their expectations (confirmation) of an apparel store's layout. The participants were able to locate the fitting room area easily because of the layout. This fact seemed to have contributed to the participants feeling happy (emotion). ***"The actual store, ja, it's small, so I could see like from the counter the side of the fitting rooms, so that was not much of a hassle, and it's nice"*** (P2:19). ***"At Hatfield Plaza you can actually see the fitting rooms next to the pay point..."*** (P3:13). In the Brooklyn Centre store, on the other hand, the participants struggled to find the fitting room area as the layout of the store made it more difficult for the participants to spot the fitting room area from the main selling floor. This was inconsistent with their expectations (disconfirmation) and therefore made them unhappy (emotion). ***"Ja, I actually did struggle to find it. Not only is it because there's things all over the place, but it's also hidden. I wish that they could have maybe more, more signs directing you towards the fitting room"*** (P4:14). ***"We had to, we had to go around looking for the fitting room, and then the sign is there at the top, so you can't really see it. So it was... it wasn't that easy"*** (P9:15). As discussed above, also in the literature, a store's layout can have an influence on a consumer's emotions. This is reinforced by a previous research study's results which showed that a store's layout can play a role in consumers' positive experience of the space, if the layout makes it easy for the consumers to locate what they are looking for, where there are appropriate signage and where the layout seems logical to the consumers (Backstrom & Johansson, 2006). From the above one can say that the Mzansi youth females enjoyed the layout of the Hatfield Plaza store more than that of the Brooklyn Centre store.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

With regard to space, the findings revealed that the participants were unsatisfied in the Hatfield Plaza store's fitting room area/cubicles. The participants noted that the cubicles were too small, which aroused negative emotions and thoughts (cognition). The facebrick walls and the lack of ceilings in the fitting room cubicles also seemed to play a role in the participants' negative emotions and their negative thoughts (cognition) toward the store. The participants felt unsafe (emotion) in the fitting room cubicles; they just thought of getting out of there (cognition). ***"I was just showing you how the distance from my foot to the end of the room, it's actually very small"*** (P4:8) (PHOTO 3). ***"...when I walked into the one at Hatfield I was like, [intake of breath] like I just had this shock-moment, because like the moment I walked in I was like, 'Oh, it's so small!'"*** (P14:2). ***"...It looks like they're unfinished and they just... I understand it's the look, but I just don't like it. It makes me feel like I'm in a dodgy place; like I'm in a warehouse"*** (P6:7) (PHOTO 4). ***"...You can see at the top it looks like metal roofs there at the top, and that just felt like you were just in some deserted place that just wasn't proper, so I didn't really feel comfortable with that"*** (P10:10). On the other hand, in the Brooklyn Centre store, the participants found the space in the actual fitting room cubicles to be large enough for them to try on apparel items comfortably, and they noted that the fitting room cubicles had white ceilings, which were what was expected, according to them. However, the participants were not satisfied with the fact that the doors of the fitting room cubicles did not extend down to the floor, so there was a gap between the floor and the door. The participants expressed their unhappy emotions by stating that it felt less private and that it made them think (cognition) that someone could see them while they were trying on apparel items. ***"You feel more, like you can walk, actually you can walk and see how, maybe if you're trying on a shoe with the outfit you can walk and you can actually walk inside and see how it makes you, how you feel when you're walking in the outfit, so that's a bonus..."*** (P13:16) (PHOTO 5). ***"...Compared to the one at Hatfield Plaza, this one you don't see any roofing, there's like you only see... you see the ceiling..."*** (P3:7).

“Yes, and this is the door, so when everybody passes, you just feel... somebody might even peek at you when you’re in here. So I don’t like the spaces” (P9:13) (PHOTO 6). The literature shows that the size of a space, which includes the depth and height dimensions, should be in proportion to the people using the space (Rengel, 2007:299). The literature also indicates some important factors that should be considered by retailers when designing a specific space such as its enclosure, how it is connected to other spaces, the way in which the spaces are arranged so that it enables a consumer to stand, sit and move in order to complete the task at hand (Rengel, 2007:10). Piotrowski and Rogers (2007:215) state that privacy is a major concern in the fitting room. Rengel (2007:233) also underlines this by saying that different spaces in a store might require a specific size, a connection to other functions, as well as privacy. The findings above show how a functional element such as space, which was experienced by the participants’ senses, may play a role in consumers’ emotions and cognitions.

In terms of service, the participants seemed unsatisfied in both the Hatfield Plaza store and in the Brooklyn Centre store. The participants seemed to hold the staff and management of the two stores accountable for the dirty/dusty fitting room areas and cubicles. This again played a role in their emotions and cognitions, as the participants felt that they were not valued as customers of the store. ***“Uhm, those are the toilet paper down... so it seems like they never clean it or something, because it was very early... it was early in the morning” (P8:6).*** ***“I mean like, why doesn’t that person come in and check whether this person didn’t leave anything, because then I mean the other, the next customer coming in needs to be satisfied as well, so it should have... like that person should have just come in, checked, okay, if it’s dirty, fine, sweep it up or something, and then let the other person come in, ja” (P14:18).*** Research shows that in many instances consumers’ experience of an in-store environment is affected by employees’ interactions with the consumers or the lack thereof (Backstrom & Johansson, 2006). Furthermore, research also shows that small changes in store

employees' behaviour or interaction with consumers can lead to the consumers feeling more positive (Backstrom & Johansson, 2006). Burke (2005) concurs with this by stating that store employees could streamline the shopping environment by giving advice and assistance. For the Mzansi youth female the findings indicate that they would feel more positive toward the store employees or service of the store, if the employees would just clean the fitting room area and cubicles in the area.

In terms of furniture, more specifically the mirrors, the Mzansi youth females where had a more favourable experience in both the Hatfield Plaza store's fitting room cubicles and in the Brooklyn Centre store's fitting room cubicles, as their expectations were being met (positive confirmation). The participants noted that the mirrors where large enough for them to see themselves clearly. ***"I liked the mirror because it was uhm, big enough for me to see my whole, my whole body"*** (P3:8). ***"It was very nice; it was like full on the wall. I could see myself clearly..."*** (P7:10). The benches, which are another form of furniture, in the Hatfield Plaza store's fitting room cubicles were below the expectations of the Mzansi youth females. The Mzansi youth females noted that the size of the actual benches inside the cubicles was too small, and that the benches were not well maintained by the staff/management of the store. The participants felt that the management did not consider their customer base before putting benches in the cubicles of the fitting rooms and that the actual store/management was underestimating the size of their customers by putting small benches in the cubicles, on which only a certain size person can sit. ***"...It looked old and crusty, and it looks like if, I don't know, maybe termites were there, and you could sit there and it could break..."*** (P4:3). ***"...How small their benches are and if you are a bigger sized person you wouldn't be able to sit on the benches, so and it was, and it was in the corner, so I felt that was really unreasonable for anyone who was big, and it felt unfair..."*** (P10:6) (PHOTO 7). On the other hand, in the Brooklyn Centre store, it seemed that the participants felt happy (emotion) about the size as well as the maintenance of the benches in the fitting room

cubicles; it seemed to make them think (cognition) that the management thought about them as customers before putting a bench in the fitting room cubicles. ***“I just liked the fact that they actually put something there that’s actually maybe... they can actually hold a certain... okay, certain sizes of people...”*** (P2:12) (PHOTO 8). ***“...A proper like stool-thingy like not just like a corner bench like at Hatfield Plaza...”*** (P11:10). Nielson and Taylor (2007:226) suggest that the design of a space must be done in such a way that it reflects an understanding of what the use of the space is going to be, so that the furniture and fixtures can be placed in such a way that it increases the feeling of convenience and efficiency. More specifically, the chair size should be such that it can accommodate customers of different sizes, and the chairs should be constructed in such a way that it will not tip or roll over (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:213). Once again it can be seen from the findings above how a functional element such as furniture can play a role in the Mzansi youth females’ emotions and cognitions.

Fixtures in the form of lighting were below expectations (disconfirmation) in the fitting room area and cubicles of the Hatfield Plaza store, and this seemed to play a role in the participants’ emotions, cognition and satisfaction levels. The participants noted that the lighting made it difficult for them to see themselves clearly in the mirror. They also mentioned the fact that the light bulbs of the lighting in the fitting room cubicles were not covered, which made them come to certain conclusions (cognition). This was interesting, as there was no mention of this while exploring the participants’ expectations of lighting in the fitting room area. ***“It’s just not presentable, because uhm, a naked bulb symbolises poverty, so...”*** (P4:7) (PHOTO 9). ***“...In Hatfield I had to think about it for myself to say, ‘Wait, do I really want this,’ because I can’t actually see what I’m wearing...”*** (P14:2). The participants’ expectations were met (positive confirmation) in the Brooklyn Centre store in terms of lighting, which resulted in satisfaction. The participants were able to see themselves clearly in the mirror because of the lighting. They also noted that in this store the light bulbs of the lighting in the fitting room cubicles were all covered, which made the participants come to certain conclusions

(cognition). ***“This, is shows... it kind of... it’s classy in a way, it’s something I would actually maybe consider putting in my house, because I feel like they put effort in the... uhm, the lighting is actually big, like the light is, it’s huge, so it actually... it’s nice... it’s just... it was not bright and it was just... it was not dim, it was just perfect, which I liked”*** (P2:13) (PHOTO 10). Another fixture, known as hanging hooks (discussed above and in the literature review), did not meet the Mzansi youth females’ expectations (disconfirmation) and therefore resulted in dissatisfaction. The findings revealed that the number of hanging hooks in the fitting room cubicles of both stores made the Mzansi youth females feel and think that the store did not consider their needs in terms of hanging space and maintenance (only in the Hatfield Plaza store) in the actual cubicles, and that it was just put there for the sake of putting it there. However, it seems that the Hatfield Plaza store was deemed to be slightly better in this respect than the Brooklyn Centre store, because the Hatfield Plaza store had three hanging hooks in each cubicle whereas the Brooklyn Centre store had only two hanging hooks in each cubicle. ***“I don’t, I don’t like this, I don’t like this with the whole little pole because you can only put like three outfits onto that”*** (P1:12) (PHOTO 11). ***“I like that the hooks are clean, ja, but then they’re still small”*** (P8:9). ***“...It’s old; it looks rusted, so I took a picture of that and I was like, they can fix that; they should be maintaining that, ja... That they don’t care at all; it’s just another fitting room to them”*** (P10:7) (PHOTO 12). The literature indicates that lighting can improve a store’s overall image by influencing a consumer’s mood in a positive manner, because if the lighting is poor or if it reduces the visual appeal of the merchandise it will result in a decline in the consumer’s mood and therefore most likely result in a loss of sales (Piotrowski & Rogers, 2007:209; Koo & Kim, 2013). Piotrowski and Rogers (2007:215) state that each fitting room should have a shelf for bags as well as several hanging hooks. The findings above again show that what is experienced by the senses of a functional element such as fixtures in the form of lighting and hanging hooks, plays a role in the Mzansi youth females’ emotions and cognitions.

From the findings above it is abundantly clear that the aesthetics and functionality are interrelated in terms of a consumer's fitting room experience. The participants experienced the functional elements by using their senses and then it played a role in their emotions and cognitions. The literature states that the fitting room can be seen as the moment where the consumer experiences an emotional response to the environmental attributes while trying on garments (Baumstarck, 2008:12). From the above findings one can agree with Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Raghurir and Stewart (2009), who state that the functional elements within a store can influence consumers' perceptions of the store and therefore influence their behaviour.

4.3.3 To explore and describe Mzansi youth female consumers' real world experience of the fitting room in order to evaluate apparel products' quality in terms of its intrinsic characteristics, extrinsic characteristics and behavioural characteristics

As discussed earlier, apparel products are assessed or evaluated in terms of the products' intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics (Smith *et al.*, 2011). Behavioural characteristics, which include a product's functional and aesthetic attributes, are also used to determine a product's quality (Hines & Swinker, 2001). Smith (2010:19) states that behavioural characteristics entail what the apparel item can provide for the consumer, and intrinsic characteristics determine this. As discussed in the literature review, the functionality of an apparel product, which forms part of the product's behavioural characteristics, includes the apparel product's durability, comfort and maintenance. Aesthetics, which also forms part of the apparel product's behavioural characteristics, includes the following elements: stimulus, emotion and cognition.

This section will therefore discuss the findings in terms of what the Mzansi youth females' real world experience of the fittings rooms were, and the role it played in

their evaluation of the apparel products' quality, by referring to the above characteristics.

The findings revealed that the aesthetic experience or the sensory aspects of the fitting room could have played a role in the Mzansi youth females' evaluation process. Specifically sight and hearing seemed to play an important role in that an unpleasant sight or unpleasant noise can interfere with the evaluation process in the sense that it does not make them feel good in the fitting room, with the possibility of leaving the fitting room without completing the quality evaluation. ***"It is really dirty and it makes me feel not so good, not so good about being in there. I could assume that maybe their clothes are dirty..."*** (P1:14). ***"I felt like they were interrupting my me time, because ja, I kind of like maybe the whole silence or kind of hmmm, I just don't like other noises interfering at that moment. I'm fine with music, but then I don't want other outside interruptions, ja"*** (P2:7). ***"...And then the one at Brooklyn was really quiet and ja, I don't know, I just, I felt like I could, you know, have my own space..."*** (P5:6).

As was found in the exploration of the expectations, a functional element such as the space in the fitting room cubicles may have played a role in the Mzansi youth females' evaluation of the apparel products' quality. The findings revealed that the participants evaluated the products' quality by looking at the products' aesthetics (sensory stimulus- sight), which is part of the products' behavioural characteristics, and that they used the space in the fitting room in order to accomplish it. The participants noted that they were able to evaluate the apparel products better in the Brooklyn Centre store's fitting room cubicles as it was larger than the Hatfield Plaza store's fitting room cubicles. ***"It made me feel great, like I remember when I put on the clothes, having been in Brooklyn putting on the clothes, it felt more 'Oooh, I look good!' I see myself everywhere and I could walk in the fitting room, and see how when I walk how it's going to look"*** (P1:9). ***"Because they're small... Well, not miserable but irritated, ja, because I don't, I don't want to fit my***

***clothes; I just need to because... so that I know the right size, but I don't really look forward to that experience"* (P13:2).**

Furniture, in the form of a mirror, which is also a functional element, played a role in the Mzansi youth females' evaluation of the apparel products' quality. These findings again revealed that the participants evaluated the products' quality by looking at the products' aesthetics (sensory stimulus- sight), which is part of the products' behavioural characteristics, by using this functional element (furniture- mirror). The mirrors in the fitting room cubicles of both the Hatfield Plaza store and the Brooklyn Centre store were deemed to be consistent with the participants' expectations (positive confirmation) of fittings room mirrors, so that they were able to evaluate apparel products' quality and enjoy (emotion) the process. ***"...just the mirror part and the lighting part, it was just so exciting, I mean I could literally stay in there just doing nothing, observing, I don't know, because the place... the mirrors and everything like the lighting made everything just so... just so enjoyable"* (P2:24).**

Fixtures, in the form of lighting, which is also another functional element in the fitting room cubicle, played a role in the Mzansi youth females' quality evaluation of the apparel products. Again, it seemed that the participants only evaluated the apparel products' aesthetic behavioural characteristics, and in order for them to be able to do this they need sufficient lighting. The Hatfield Plaza store's lighting was deemed to be insufficient by the participants as they could not evaluate the apparel products properly, whereas in the Brooklyn Centre store the lighting was deemed to be very effective by the participants in their evaluation of the apparel products' quality. ***"It gave me like a dark claustrophobic image like [intake of breath], it was like, ugh, I just want to change [chuckles] and do what I need to do and like just get out, compared to the one... Ja, I felt rushed and compared to the one in Brooklyn I was like, 'Ah, I don't mind staying here for a while' because it's like bright and I can actually see what I'm wearing; it's like 'Hmmm, I actually like this outfit,' like, whereas the one in Hatfield I had to think***

about it for myself to say, ‘Wait, do I really want this’ because I can’t actually see what I’m wearing” (P14:2,3). “...The skirt I tried on I just wanted to try it on, but when I went into the fitting rooms then, because it’s not kind of my style but when, when I fitted it on and it looked nice in the mirror with the lighting and everything, then I really considered buying...” (P15:20).

From the findings it became clear that the Mzansi youth female consumers were only interested in, and only evaluated, the aesthetics behavioural qualities of the apparel products, with no or very little concern for the functional qualities.

4.4 INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

This study’s findings are interpreted against the chosen theoretical perspective, namely the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm, as well as the literature on apparel quality evaluation and the role of aesthetics and functionality in the retail experience. As discussed above, the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm states that consumers have expectations about a product or service before it is bought, and this is then compared against the actual performance of the product or service (Lamb *et al.*, 2008:21; Park & Curwen, 2013). According to Nirmalya *et al.* (2012), the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm can be seen as a “mental state” due to the fact that disconfirmation/confirmation is based on the premise that a consumer has a predetermined expectation of a product or service, which is an essential element in achieving satisfaction.

With regard to the fitting room, the findings showed that the Mzansi youth females do have definite expectations regarding the fitting room experience. As discussed above, an experience entails the functionality as well as the aesthetics. The findings showed that the Mzansi youth females have definite expectations regarding the functionality and aesthetics of the fitting room experience. In order for the Mzansi

youth females to evaluate the quality of apparel items, they specifically expect certain functional elements to make this task easier and more efficient.

According to research (Nirmalya *et al.*, 2012), the expectations about products/services mainly originate from four different sources, namely: the need recognised by the consumer, what other retailers have to offer, previous experience with a particular product/service, and the communication received from a particular store about its products/services. One could therefore speculate that what the Mzansi youth females expect from the fitting room experience in terms of functionality and aesthetics may be due to the needs they have realised when visiting apparel stores in order to facilitate the trying on of apparel items or to make this task easier/more enjoyable; they also may have formed expectations based on what various apparel retailers incorporate in their fitting rooms. They definitely did not expect the fitting rooms of the same brand store to differ greatly from store to store, to the extent that when it happened it made them feel unhappy and confused and they experience it as “unfair”.

It is clear from the findings that the Mzansi youth female consumers have a clear event schemata (script) of fitting and what is supposed to take place in the fitting room (the fit of apparel items), and also how the fitting rooms’ aesthetic and especially functional qualities should be in order to evaluate mainly the sensory aspects of garments (how beautiful it looks and fits on the body). Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2008:97-101) define event schemata as a person’s organised beliefs about the normal and typical course of events in a situation. The schemata tell one what to expect, and things that violate these expectations may then stand out. Lijander and Strandvik (1997) point out that the process of comparing expectations with performances comprises a cognitive process within a consumer’s conscious control, and also an affective process (emotion) outside of conscious control.

It became clear from the findings that Mzansi youth female consumers do not only have expectations regarding the sensory aesthetic qualities and functional qualities of a fitting room that should enable them to do what they are supposed to do (fit apparel products), but also definite expectations about the emotions that they would

like and not like to experience as well as the non-verbal messages that they will experience (cognition). Fitting rooms should have specific colours, smells, music, etcetera in order for them to experience certain positive emotions and get certain positive messages. Hunter (2006) points to the importance of positive anticipated emotions, and note that positive anticipated emotions “are the expected emotional consequences of achieving a goal” – in this context, being able to fit and evaluate apparel products in a fitting room.

The confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm states that, in order to reach satisfaction or dissatisfaction, consumers compare their expectations against their actual experiences. The actual experience is the consumer’s overall perception of a product’s/service’s outcome (Park & Curwen, 2013). The findings of this study clearly showed how the Mzansi youth female’s actual fitting room experience (functionality and aesthetics) was influenced by her expectations of the fitting room experience (functionality and aesthetics). It was also clear that the fitting room experience (functionality and aesthetics) does play a role in the Mzansi youth female’s evaluation of apparel products’ quality in that it enables her to fit and experience an apparel product on the body. In some cases (specifically in the Hatfield Plaza store), the fitting rooms did not meet their expectations (disconfirmation) and they experienced dissatisfaction with the aesthetic and functional qualities of the fitting rooms. This led to negative emotions and non-verbal messages to the extent that **“it makes you feel like you don’t want to be there” (P6:4), “wait, do I really want this” (P14:2) or “... I just want to change and do what I need to do and like just get out” (P14:2, 3)**. O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy (2003:120-123) therefore point to the important relationships between emotion, cognition and behaviour. “Without emotion, decision making would be in paralysis, for the decision-maker would be unable to make up his or her mind. This is because emotions link to values that are crucial for making trade-offs” (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2003:120).

With regard to the evaluation of apparel products’ quality the findings showed that the Mzansi youth females use their senses (sight), which is part of the products’ aesthetics (behavioural characteristics), to determine the products’ quality. It is said

that the element of sight/appearance in terms of the apparel product that can be appreciated by consumers include the product's pattern, style, proportion and colour (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:38). These senses also play a role in the Mzansi youth female's emotions toward and cognitions about the product. Fiore and Kimle (1997:13) state that an aesthetic experience affects the individual in three ways: the body through the stimulation of the senses (stimulus), the soul through the expression of feelings (emotion), and the mind through the activation of thought processing (cognition) (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:13). "If I look good (sensory stimulus- sight) good, then I feel good (emotion), which makes me think (cognition) I am good." Moody *et al.* and Ryand (as quoted by Moody *et al.*, 2010), state that moods and emotions can especially be elevated during the trying on of apparel items because of the symbolic connotations that a consumer ascribes to the apparel products, social factors as well as the apparel items' ability to appeal to the consumer's senses. The symbolic connotations that are ascribed to apparel items by consumers relate to cognition. Chattaraman and Rudd (2006) believe that apparel items with the suitable sensory stimulus can be used by consumers as a coping strategy, in order to bridge the gap between the ideals of culture in terms of beauty and their own appearance perception, by increasing the consumers' self-esteem. Shoppers evaluate their appearance in the fitting room and they form important opinions of the apparel product, including its fit and appearance on the body (All Dressed Up, The perfect fit, Fitting Designs and Mang, as quoted by Baumstarck, 2008:12).

In order for the Mzansi youth female to go through this evaluation process, to use her senses (sensory stimulus- sight) to evaluate the product's behavioural characteristics (aesthetics) in order to determine whether the product is of good quality, which in turn will play a role in her emotions and cognitions, the Mzansi youth female expects certain functional and aesthetic aspects from the fitting room environment (discussed above). The findings of this study therefore clearly show how the functional and aesthetic elements within the fitting room area should interact in order for the Mzansi youth female to use her senses (sight) to evaluate the products' quality, which will then play a role in her emotions and cognitions. However, it is alarming that the Mzansi youth female consumer seemingly considers

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

only the aesthetic qualities of an apparel product, while not giving due attention to any other indicators of perceived functional qualities, such as durability, comfort etcetera – in other words, those that she will experience when wearing the apparel product. In many cases that is then what leads to further dissatisfaction with the product. Summers and Hebert (as quoted by Burns & Neisner, 2006) found that when someone is faced with a purchase decision, the retail environment can play a larger role than the item itself. This became very clear from the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study's purpose was to explore and describe the role that the fitting room experience might play in the Mzansi youth female consumers' evaluation of apparel products' quality. The confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm, which served as the theoretical perspective of the study, and also literature on apparel quality evaluation and the role of aesthetics and functionality in the retail experience were used as point of departure (see **CHAPTER 2**). The findings, the discussion of the findings and the interpretation of the findings can be found in **Chapter 4**. When referring to Mzansi youth female consumers it refers only to the participants in this study, as the findings of a qualitative study cannot be generalised to the broader population.

In this chapter the conclusions to the objectives and sub-objectives of the study are given. These objectives and sub-objectives directed the study. Thereafter, a discussion on the implications of the findings for the retail environment and the contribution of the findings to existing literature are given. The methodology is also evaluated, followed by the limitations of the study. Recommendations are made and future research areas in this field are suggested.

5.2 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

It may be concluded that the fitting room plays an important role in the Mzansi youth female consumer's overall retail experience, and also in her fitting and evaluation of apparel products. It can further be concluded that the Mzansi youth female consumer has specific expectations with regard to the fitting room's aesthetic and functional qualities. These expectations play a role in her experience of the fitting room, and may result in her being satisfied or dissatisfied with the fitting room.

For the Mzansi youth female consumer the fitting of apparel products and the fitting room experience is not only about a physical or sensory evaluation or experience of the beauty and functionality of the fitting room, but also an emotional and cognitive

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

experience. The inter-relatedness between the physical or sensorial experiences and the emotional and cognitive experiences in the retail environment became very clear. The Mzansi youth female consumer expects the fitting room to be functional in terms of layout, space, service, furniture, fixtures and the synchronising impressions, in order for her to experience positive emotions and to receive positive non-verbal messages in the fitting room. She also wants to be stimulated by the sensorial beauty of the fitting room which should then evoke in her positive emotions as well as positive messages. She specifically expects bright colours, sufficient light, a clean environment and relaxing sound without noise, which will then evoke in her the expected emotions of feeling-at-home, relaxed, comfortable and excited, and with the message that the retailer cares about its customers. The Mzansi youth female also expects the fitting room without functional barriers that could hamper the fitting of apparel products and the accompanying emotional experience. She expects to be able to easily locate the fitting room area. Fitting rooms should be large enough, doors should close tightly for privacy, there should not be long queues outside the area, waiting to fit, and staff should be available for assistance. For the Mzansi youth female consumer, it is in the end about being able to “see” and experience how she looks.

It may further be concluded that, if the fitting room does not meet the Mzansi youth female consumer’s expectations regarding its aesthetics and functionality, she gets disappointed, experiences negative emotions and thoughts with the need to do something about it – in many cases then stopping the fitting process or leaving the environment. In such a case she gets angry and disappointed and feels that she does not belong there.

Finally, it may also be concluded that the fitting of apparel products is for the Mzansi youth female consumer not specifically about the evaluation of the various functional qualities of the products, such as durability, maintenance etcetera, but primarily about how it looks on her body. Space, light, mirrors etcetera should enable her to properly see how the apparel products fit on the body, while it seems that she pays

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

no attention to the other quality indicators such as construction, textile, finishes and so on.

These conclusions all clearly point to the importance of the fitting room as part of the overall retail experience. The fitting room is the place where the final decision to buy or not to buy is made, and where decisions about possible future visits are made, irrespective of the rest of the retail environment. It is the place where the female consumer's body, soul and mind are captured. It should therefore be treated like the queen of the apparel retail environment, and certainly not like the Cinderella.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study have important implications for the retail environment. It is said that, if cleverly used, store elements can evoke many desired intentions in a consumer (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004:446). This was true for the fitting room in this study, and therefore the retail environment should take note of the findings.

The Mzansi youth female consumer has expectations regarding what she wishes to see, smell and hear in the fitting room of an apparel retail store, and also what she would like to feel emotionally and think cognitively. All of these qualities combined contribute toward the Mzansi youth female consumer's aesthetic experience in the fitting room of an apparel retail store. Likewise it was also found that the Mzansi youth female consumer does have clear expectations regarding an apparel store's fitting room location, size, availability and the friendliness of staff, etcetera which in the end all contribute toward the Mzansi youth female consumer's functional experience in the fitting room of an apparel retail store. The combined aesthetic and functional expectations that the Mzansi youth female consumer has in terms of the fitting room experience, create a total experience expectation regarding fitting rooms in apparel stores. The fitting room experience as per the findings (see **CHAPTER 4**) is expected to play a role in the Mzansi youth female consumer's evaluation of the apparel products' quality.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore the overall implication of the study is that, if the Mzansi youth female consumers' expectations regarding the fitting room experience (aesthetics and functionality) in apparel retail stores are not met, their ability to evaluate apparel products' quality effectively would be hampered. Therefore they might make the wrong apparel purchase decisions, where products might be returned later, or they might leave the store without any products being bought but with their thoughts and feelings toward the store and its products being tarnished. Therefore retailers need to spend enough money, space and time on fitting rooms as it can be seen as the point and place where most apparel-based decisions are made (Lee & Johnson, sa:2).

5.4 CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY

As mentioned, the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm was used as theoretical perspective for the study (see **CHAPTER 2**), and it was found (see **CHAPTER 4**) that the Mzansi youth female consumers do have specific expectations regarding the fitting room experience in terms of its aesthetic and functional qualities. It was also found that if these expectations are not met it leads to the Mzansi youth female consumer being dissatisfied.

The contribution of this study to theory lies in the fact that it provides empirical evidence of the interactive role of the Mzansi youth female's emotions, cognitions and her behaviour. The emotions felt and the thoughts that the Mzansi youth female consumer thinks while in the fitting room area play a major role in her behaviour. Kim *et al.* (2009) and Clarke *et al.* (2011) noted that consumer decision-making has shifted from the rational to the emotional and experiential. This study found that although the functional elements such as the space, location, furniture etcetera within the fitting room area are important to the Mzansi youth female consumer to be able to carry out the task of trying on and evaluating apparel products, it is the emotions felt and cognitions formed within the actual fitting room area that play the

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

largest role in her behaviour and evaluation of the apparel products' quality. The Mzansi youth female consumer wishes to be stimulated (sensory stimulus) by the fitting room area's functional aspects so that she can feel certain positive emotions and think positive thoughts. These positive emotions and thoughts guide her through the process of evaluating apparel products' quality, so that she is able to decide whether the apparel products will satisfy her clothing needs or not. Therefore the aesthetic (stimulus, emotion, cognition) and the functional elements (synchronising impressions, layout, space, service, furniture and fixtures) are closely interrelated. If the functional elements within the fitting room and certain aesthetic elements such as the colour, sound, etcetera are not to the Mzansi youth female consumer's satisfaction, it will lead to her feeling angry and disappointed, thinking she is not valued as a customer of the store. This then plays a role in her evaluation of the apparel products' quality. She can either evaluate the quality of the apparel products as bad, stop the evaluation process while in the fitting room, or make the wrong purchase decision altogether. Fitting rooms are therefore essential to the retail experience; they represent that final instant where the consumer decides whether to make an apparel purchase or not (Baumstarck, 2008:9).

This study contributes to the theory by clearly showing the importance of emotions and cognition in the fitting room experience, and its contribution to apparel products' quality evaluation. If the Mzansi youth female consumer has a negative experience in the fitting room she begins questioning herself about whose fault it really is. This points to the importance of cognitive appraisal in the fitting room experience of apparel retailers. This theory (cognitive appraisal) can be used as theoretical perspective in future studies.

5.5 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

This section aims to evaluate this study in terms of the research approach and strategy, the unit of analysis studied, the data collection techniques applied, the data

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

analysis steps used, and also what was done to ensure that the findings are trustworthy. This could serve as a guide for researchers who would like to do a similar study in the future.

5.5.1 Research approach and strategy

A qualitative approach was followed for this study and phenomenology was used as strategy of inquiry (see **CHAPTER 3**). This approach and strategy were effective as they have led to deeper insights on the “taken-for-granted” activity, which is the trying on of apparel items in the fitting rooms of apparel retail stores. This approach and strategy also helped the researcher to explore and describe the role that the fitting room plays in Mzansi youth female consumers’ evaluation of apparel products by looking at this trying-on-and-evaluation activity from their perspective.

5.5.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis chosen to be studied was the Mzansi youth female consumer who forms part of the overall Black Diamond consumer group (see **CHAPTER 3**). The units of analysis were located by means of a purposive snowball sampling technique (see **CHAPTER 3**). Fifteen females (of 18-20 years old) participated in the study and were found to be appropriate as data saturation occurred. Data saturation occurs only once the researcher cannot learn anything new from the data obtained from the participants (Monette *et al.* & Seidman, as quoted by Greeff, 2011:350).

5.5.3 Data collection techniques

As discussed in **Chapter 3**, unstructured interviews and a photo-elicitation technique were used to collect data on the research problem. The unstructured interviews were

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

found to be appropriate as they rendered data with depth and breadth. The researcher was able to gather data on all of the concepts as well as the objectives and sub-objectives of the study, and could probe the participants further on certain aspects if needed. Two unstructured interviews were held with each participant (see **CHAPTER 3**) and were found to be effective, as the researcher was able to really delve deep into the participants' expectations and "real world" experiences of the fitting rooms in the two apparel stores, and also to explore whether the fitting room experience does play a role in their evaluation of apparel products' quality. Unstructured interviews are done in order to understand the experiences of persons so as to see what meaning they derive from the experiences (Payne & Payne, 2004:132; Greeff, 2011:348). Such an unstructured interview focuses on determining the expectations, facts, forecasts and opinions of individuals and also the reactions to primary findings, as well as possible solutions (Greeff, 2011:348). This was found to be true for this study as it assisted in, among others, an understanding of the important relationship between the physical environment and the consumer's emotions and cognitions.

The photo-elicitation technique was effective as it helped the participants to remember certain aspects of their "real world" experience of the fitting rooms that they visited, which enabled the researcher to obtain data with depth and breadth as well as thick descriptions (see **CHAPTER 4**). The photographs aided the interviewer by being used as a kind of mediator which makes verbal exchanges, the remembering of the experience as well as the expression thereof easier (Mountian *et al.*, 2011:356; Lachal *et al.*, 2012). Another way in which the photo-elicitation technique was found to be effective is the fact that the photos enabled the researcher to understand the participants better, as the participants could point to the photos while discussing their "real world" experience in the fitting rooms. This eliminated any misunderstandings. The advantage of this technique is also that it is able to bridge distinctive cultural worlds in that participants are given the opportunity to present their worlds by taking photographs, and this enabled the researcher to get an insider's perspective (Burt *et al.*, 2007). Finally, this technique also made the

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

participants more relaxed during the second interview, as the focus was shifted toward the photographs that were taken by them. Stress was reduced by using this technique, as it steered away from the participants' faces and focused on the photograph itself (Burt *et al.*, 2007).

5.5.4 Data analysis

The data analysis was found to be the most difficult step in the study. The data was analysed by using the five steps discussed in **Chapter 3**. There was a large amount of verbatim transcribed text, and the researcher had to read, reread and reread the data numerous times to ensure that the findings were correct. What assisted the researcher was the fact that all the data was organised in participant-specific folders. Each participant had a folder and in the folder one could find unstructured interview 1, unstructured interview 2, as well as all of the photographs taken by the specific participant. The photographs were also numbered. Being organised seemed to be a crucial part to the success of the data analysis. Another crucial key to the success of the data analysis was the fact that the researcher had extensive knowledge on the field, due to the study of the relevant literature (see **CHAPTER 2**), and could identify codes and categories more easily. Furthermore, the study's supervisor checked that the researcher had interpreted the findings correctly.

5.5.5 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study is always a problem. Therefore the researcher tried to adhere to different aspects so that this study could be considered to be trustworthy. These aspects included:

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.5.5.1 Credibility

- The credibility of the study's findings were enhanced in that the researcher was engaged with the participants over a long period of time – a total of 30 contact sessions were conducted over the data gathering period.
- The researcher used multiple methods to gather data (see **CHAPTER 3**). The researcher also held “trial data gathering” sessions in order to become more comfortable with the interview process, and also practised probing for answers without leading the participants. All these aspects increased the study's credibility and therefore also the study's trustworthiness.
- The credibility and therefore the trustworthiness of the study were increased by the fact that the participants agreed with the study's findings as they checked that it represented their point of view.
- The study's supervisor checked that the raw data was correctly interpreted and the right conclusions drawn.

5.5.5.2 Transferability

The study's transferability and therefore the trustworthiness was increased in that the researcher did an extensive literature review before the data was gathered to ensure that the theoretical framework and paradigms guided the study, and also to help the researcher to know what to probe for while conducting the interviews. This helped the researcher to obtain thick descriptions of the concepts and findings.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.5.5.3 Dependability

As already mentioned, the researcher used multiple methods to collect data. The researcher also used various methods to document the data, such as tape recordings, field notes and photographs.

5.5.5.4 Conformability

The study's supervisor confirmed the findings and conclusions drawn by looking at the raw data and interpreting it to see whether the researcher had done it correctly. This also increased the study's trustworthiness.

5.6 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was a qualitative study. The aim was therefore to explore and describe the phenomenon from the participants' perspective. Qualitative studies have only small numbers of people participating in the research, as was the case with this study. Therefore the findings of a qualitative study cannot be generalised to the broader population, and pertain only to the participants that participated in the study. It is recommended that in the future a quantitative research should be conducted so that conclusions can be drawn which would be applicable to the entire population. It is also recommended that future research studies should use the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm together with the cognitive appraisal theory as theoretical perspective to direct the study.

Another limitation is the fact that the study included only one specific culture and gender– the Mzansi youth female consumers of the Black Diamond consumer market. In future research studies, it is recommended that different cultural groups and also both genders be included.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- BABBIE, E. & MOUTON, J. 2001. *The Practice of Social Research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press. 674p.
- BACKSTROM, K. & JOHANSSON, U. 2006. Creating and consuming experiences in retail store environments: Comparing retailer and consumer perspectives. *Journal of Retailing & Consumer Services*, 13:417-430.
- BAGOZZI, R.P., BAUMGARTNER, H. & PIETERS, R. 1998. Goal-directed emotions. *Cognition & Emotion*, 12:1-26.
- BAKER, J., LEVY, M. & GREWAL, D. 1992. An experimental approach to making retail store environmental decisions. *Journal of Retail*, 68(4):445-460, Winter.
- BAKER, J., PARASURAMAN, A., GREWAL, D. & VOSS, G.B. 2002. The influence of multiple store environment cues on perceived merchandise value and patronage intentions. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(2):120-141, Winter.
- BALLANTINE, P.W., JACK, R. & PARSONS, A.G. 2010. Atmospheric cues and their effect on the hedonic retail experience. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 38(8):641-653.
- BARON, R.A., BRANSCOMBE, N.R. & BYRNE, D. 2008. *Social Psychology*. 22th ed. Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.
- BAUMSTARCK, A. 2008. *Effects of dressing room lighting direction on consumers' perceptions of self and environment*. Masters in Interior Design. University of Florida.
- BELL, J. & TERNUS, K. 2006. *Silent Selling: Best Practices and Effective Strategies in Visual Merchandising*. 3rd ed. New York: Fairchild Publications Inc. 399p.
- BETTMAN, J.R., JOHNSON, E.J. & PAYNE, J.W. sa. Consumer Decision Making. Available at: <http://www.haas.berkeley.edu/Courses/Spring2000/BA269D/-BettmanJohnsonPayne91.pdf> (accessed on 12 July 2011).
- BRILEY, D.A., MORRIS, M. & SIMONSON. sa. Reasons as carriers of culture: dynamic vs. dispositional, models of cultural influence on decision making. Available at: <http://gsbapps.stanford.edu/researchpapers/library/rp1607.pdf> (accessed on 12 July 2011).

LIST OF REFERENCES

- BROWN, P. & RICE, J. 1998. *Ready-to-wear Apparel Analysis*. 2nd ed. New Jersey: Merrill-Prentice Hall.
- BURKE, R.R. 2005. Retail Shoppability: A measure of the world's best stores. Available at: <http://kelley.iu.edu/CERR/files/shoppability.pdf> (accessed on 25 September 2013).
- BURNS, D.J. & NEISNER, L. 2006. Customer satisfaction in a retail setting. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 34(1):49-66.
- BURT, S., JOHANSSON, U. & THELANDER, A. 2007. Retail image as seen through consumers' eyes: studying international retail image through consumer photographs of stores. *International Review of Retail Distribution & Consumer Research*, 17(5):447-467.
- CHATTARAMAN, V. & RUDD, N.A. 2006. Preferences for aesthetic attributes in clothing as a function of body image, body cathexis and body size. *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal*, 24(1):46-61.
- CLARKE, D.W., PERRY, P. & DENSON, H. 2011. The sensory retail environment of small fashion boutiques. *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*, 16(4):492-510.
- CREUSEN, M.E.H. 2010. The importance of product aspects in choice: the influence of demographic characteristics. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 27(1):26-34.
- D'ASTOUS, A. 2000. Irritating aspects of the shopping environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 49:149-156.
- DE KLERK, H.M. 1999. A social psychological and cognitive approach to the development of a consumer's clothing decision-making model. *Journal of Family Ecology & Consumer Sciences*, 27(2):166-184.
- DE KLERK, H.M. & LUBBE, S. 2008. Female consumers' evaluation of clothing quality: exploring the importance of aesthetics. *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*, 12(1):36-50.
- DE KLERK H.M. & TSELEPIS, T. 2007. The early adolescent female clothing consumer: Expectations, evaluation and satisfaction with fit as part of the

LIST OF REFERENCES

- appreciation of clothing quality. *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*, 11(3):413-428.
- DELPORT, C.S.L., FOUCHÉ, C.B. & SCHURINK, W. 2011. Theory and literature in qualitative research. In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delport, C.S.L. 2011. *Research at Grass Roots: For the social sciences and human service professions*. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- DEMIR, E.P., DESMET, M. A. & HEKKERT, P. 2009. Appraisal patterns of emotions in human-product interaction. *International Journal of Design*, 3(2):41-51.
- DEVLIN, J.F., GWYNNE, A.L. & ENNEW, C.T. 2002. The antecedents of service expectations. *The Service Industries Journal*, 22(4):117-136.
- DIAMOND, E. 2006. *Fashion Retailing: Multi-Channel Approach*. 2nd ed. New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall. 411p.
- EICH, E., KHILSTROM, J.F., BOWER, G.H., FORGAS, J.P. & NIEDENTHAL, P.M. 2000. *Cognition and Emotion*. New York: Oxford University Press. 203p.
- ENTWISTLE, J. 2001. The Dressed Body. In Entwistle, J. & Wilson, E. *Body Dressing*. New York: Oxford International Publishers. 255p.
- ERASMUS, A.C. & GRABOWSKI, A. 2013. Female customers' expectations of the service offering and their perception of the service quality in an emerging clothing market. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 37:2-12.
- ETNIER, J.L. & HARDY, C.J. 1997. The effects of environmental colour. *Journal of Sport Behaviour*, 20(3):299-312.
- EVANS, M., JAMAL, A. & FOXALL, G. 2009. *Consumer Behaviour*. 2nd ed. England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. 560p.
- FAN, C. 2003. Satisfying shoppers' psychological needs: from a public market to cyber-mall. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23:439-455.
- FIORE, A.M. & KIM, J. 2007. An integrative framework capturing experiential and utilitarian shopping experience. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 35(6):421-442.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- FIORE, A.M. & KIMLE, P.A. 1997. *Understanding Aesthetics: for the Merchandising and Design Professional*. New York: Fairchild publications. 439p.
- FORAND, N.R., GUNTHER, K.C., GERMAN, R.E. & WENZE, S.J. 2010. Appearance investment and everyday interpersonal functioning: An experience sampling study. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 34:380-393.
- FOUCHÉ, C.B. & SCHURINK, W. 2011. Qualitative research designs. In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delport, C.S.L. 2011. *Research at Grass Roots: For the social sciences and human service professions*. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- GIBBS, G.R. 2007. *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. 160p.
- GILBOA, S. & RAFAELI, A. 2003. Store environment, emotions and approach behaviour: applying environmental aesthetics to retailing. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution & Consumer Research*, 13(2):195-211.
- GILBOA, S. & VILNAI-YAVETZ, I. 2013. Shop until you drop? An exploratory analysis of mall experiences. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47(1/2):239-259.
- GOULDING, C. 2005. Grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology: A comparative analysis of three qualitative strategies for marketing research. *European Journal of Marketing*, 39(3/4):294-308.
- GREEFF, M. 2011. Information collection: interviewing. In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delport, C.S.L. 2011. *Research at Grass Roots: For the social sciences and human service professions*. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. 547p.
- HATCH, K.L. 1993. *Textile science*. Minneapolis, St. Paul: West Publishing Co.
- HENWOOD, K., SHIRANI, F. & FINN, M. 2011. "So you think we've moved, changed, the representation got more what?". In Reavey, P. 2011. *Visual Methods in Psychology: Using and Interpreting Images in Qualitative Research*. Sussex: Psychology Press. 370p.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- HINES, J.D. & SWINKER, M.E. 2001. Knowledge: A variable in evaluating clothing quality. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 25(1):72-76.
- HODGETTS, D., CHAMBERLAIN, K. & GROOT, S. 2011. Reflections on the visual in community research and action. In Reavey, P. 2011. *Visual Methods in Psychology: Using and Interpreting Images in Qualitative Research*. Sussex: Psychology Press. 370p.
- HUGO, S.H. & VAN AARDT, A. 2012. Evaluative criteria applied by South African female fashion consumers when purchasing casual daywear. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 36:460-471.
- HUNTER, G.L. 2006. The role of anticipated emotion, desire, and intention in the relationship between image and shopping center visits. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 34(10):709-721.
- JACOBS (NEÉ GROENEWALD), B.M. 2003. *Professional South African women's adoption of the internet for apparel purchasing*. Masters in Consumer Sciences: Clothing Management. University of Pretoria.
- KADOLPH, S.J. 1998. *Quality Assurance for Textiles and Apparel*. New York: Fairchild Publications. 293p.
- KADOLPH, S.J. 2007. *Textiles*. 10th ed. New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- KENT, A.M. & KIRBY, A.E. 2009. The design of the store environment and its implications for retail image. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution & Consumer Research*, 19(4):457-468.
- KIM, J.B., KOO, U. & CHANG, D.R. 2009. Integrated brand experience through sensory branding and IMC. *Design Management Review*, 20(3):72-81.
- KOO, W. & KIM, Y.K. 2013. Impacts of store environmental cues on store love and loyalty: single-brand apparel retailers. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 25(2):94-106.
- KOSKENNURMI-SIVONEN, R. & PIETARILA, P. 2005. Quality clothes – an outline of a model for assessing the quality of customized clothing. *Nordic Design Research*, 1:252-260.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- LACHAL, J., SPERANZA, M., TAÏEB, O., FALISSARD, B., LEFÈVRE, H., MORO, M. & LEVY, A. 2012. Qualitative research using photo-elicitation to explore the role of food in family relationships among obese adolescents. *Appetite*, 58:1099-1105.
- LAMB, C.W., HAIR, J.F., MCDANIEL, C., BOSHOFF, C. & TERBLANCHE, N.S. 2008. *Marketing*. 3rd ed. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- LAZARUS, R.S. & LAZARUS, B.N. 1994. *Passion & Reason: making sense of our emotions*. New York: Oxford University Press. 321p.
- LEE, S.E. & JOHNSON, K.K.P. sa. Shopping behaviours: Implications for design of retail spaces. Available at: www.Informedesign.umn.edu (accessed on 12 July 2011).
- LESTER, S. 1999. An introduction to phenomenological research. Also available at: www.sld.demon.co.uk/resmethy.pdf (accessed on 13 March 2012).
- LIJANDER, V. & STRANDVIK, T. 1997. Emotions in service satisfaction. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 8(2):148-169.
- MACDONALD, E.K. & SHARP, B.M. 2000. Brand awareness effects on consumer decision making for a common, repeat purchase product: a replication. *Journal of Business Research*, 48:5-15.
- MACHADO, R. & DIGGINES, C. 2012. *Customer Service*. Cape Town: Juta & Company Ltd.
- MACHLEIT, K.A. & EROGLU, S.A. 2000. Describing and measuring emotional response to shopping experience. *Journal of Business Research*, 49:101-111.
- MARSHALL, S.G., JACKSON, H.O., STANLEY, M.S., KEFGEN, M. & TOUCHIE-SPECHT, P. 2004. *Individuality in clothing selection and personal appearance*. 6th ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education. 456p.
- MOODY, W., KINDERMAN, P. & SINHA, P. 2010. Relationships between trying on clothing, mood, emotion, personality and clothing preference. *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*, 14(1):161-179.
- MOUNTIAN, I., LAWTHOM, R., KELLOCK, A., DUGGAN, K., SIXSMITH, J., KAGAN, C., HAWKINS, J., HAWORTH, J., SIDDIQUEE, A., WORLEY, C., BROWN,

LIST OF REFERENCES

- D., GRIFFITHS, J. & PURCELL, C. 2011. On utilising a visual methodology. In Reavey, P. 2011. *Visual Methods in Psychology: Using and Interpreting Images in Qualitative Research*. Sussex: Psychology Press. 370p.
- NDANGA, L.Z.B., LOUW, A. & VAN ROOYEN, J. 2008. Increasing domestic consumption of South African wines: exploring the market potential of the “Black Diamonds”. Masters in Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development. University of Pretoria.
- NIEDRICH, R.W., KIRYANOVA, E. & BLACK, W.C. 2005. The dimensional stability of the standards used in the disconfirmation paradigm. *Journal of Retailing*, 81(1):49-57.
- NIELSON, K.J. & TAYLOR, D.A. 2007. *Interiors an introduction*. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.
- NIRMALYA, B., JAYASHREE, D. & HARSH, P. 2012. Paradigms of satisfaction research: a conceptual foundation. *Advances in Management*, 5(3):17-20.
- NORTH, E.J., DE VOS, R.B. & KOTZÉ, T. 2003. The importance of apparel attributes for female buyers. *Journal of Family Ecology & Consumer Sciences*, 31:41-51.
- NORTH, E.J. & KOTZÉ, T. 2004. Customer perceptions of the attractiveness of shopping centres in Pretoria. *South African Business Review*, 8(1):30-38.
- O’CASS, A. & GRACE, D. 2008. Understanding the role of retail store service in light of Self-image-Store image congruence. *Journal of Psychology & Marketing*, 25(6):521-537.
- OPEN TEXT CORPORATION. 2005. *Consumer decision making*. Available at: http://www.google.co.za/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CC4QFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fftp.cleary.edu%2FMKT%2FMKT480%2FTextbook%2FChap007.ppt&ei=hEOvUuKNNuPT0QW_IYDwBg&usq=AFQjCNH8VY5pwC9n56i2ql7k1SoXpwDxFq (accessed on 12 July 2011).

LIST OF REFERENCES

- OPEN TEXT CORPORATION. 2010. Country profile: South Africa. Available at: <http://www.thomaswhite.com/pdf/south-africa-country-05-2010.pdf> (accessed on 12 July 2011).
- OPEN TEXT CORPORATION. 2011. South Africa. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sf.html> (accessed on 12 July 2011).
- O'SHAUGHNESSY, J. & O'SHAUGHNESSY, N.J. 2003. *The Marketing Power of Emotion*. New York: Oxford University Press. 274p.
- PARK, J. & CURWEN, L.G. 2013. No pain, no gain?: Dissatisfied female consumers' anecdotes with footwear products. *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology & Education*, 6(1):18-26.
- PARSONS, A.G. 2011. Atmosphere in fashion stores: do you need to change?. *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*, 15(4):428-445.
- PAYNE, G. & PAYNE, J. 2004. *Key Concepts in Social Research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. 242p.
- PERNER, L. 2010. Consumer behaviour: the psychology of marketing. Available at: <http://www.consumerpsychologist.com/> (accessed on 12 July 2011).
- PHAM, M.T. & HIGGINS, E.T. 2005. Promotion and prevention in consumer decision making: state of the art and theoretical propositions. In Ratneshwar, S. & Mick, D.G. 2005. *Inside Consumption: Frontiers of Research on Consumer Motives, Goals, and Desires*. London: Routledge.
- PINE, B.J. & GILMORE, J.H. 1998. Welcome to the experience economy. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(4):96-105.
- PIOTROWSKI, C.M. & ROGERS, E.A. 2007. *Designing Commercial Interiors*. 2nd ed. United States of America: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- PISUT, G. & CONNELL, L.J. 2007. Fit preferences of female consumer in the USA. *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*, 11(3):366-379.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- PUCCINELLI, N.M., GOODSTEIN, R.C., GREWAL, D., PRICE, R., RAGHUBIR, P. & STEWART, D. 2009. Customer experience management in retailing: Understanding the buying process. *Journal of Retailing*, 85(1):15-30.
- RASBAND, J.A. & LIECHTY, E.L.G. 2006. *Fabulous Fit*. 2nd ed. New York: Fairchild Publications. 370p.
- RATH, P.M., BAY, S., PETRIZZI, R. & GILL, P. 2008. *The Why of the Buy*. United States of America: Fairchild Books. 474p.
- REAVEY, R. 2011a. Introduction. In Reavey, P. 2011. *Visual Methods in Psychology: Using and Interpreting Images in Qualitative Research*. Sussex: Psychology Press. 370p.
- REAVEY, R. 2011b. The return to experience. In Reavey, P. 2011. *Visual Methods in Psychology: Using and Interpreting Images in Qualitative Research*. Sussex: Psychology Press. 370p.
- RENGEL, R.J. 2007. *Shaping Interior Space*. 2nd ed. United States: Fairchild Publications Inc. 367p.
- RETIEF, A. & DE KLERK, H.M. 2003. Development of a guide for the visual assessment of the quality of clothing textile products. *Journal of Family Ecology & Consumer Sciences*, 31:21-29.
- ROMEO, L. 2009. *Consumer Evaluation of Apparel Quality*. Masters in Family and Consumer Sciences. University of Pittsburgh.
- SANDSTROM, K.L., MARTIN, D.D. & FINE, G.A. 2006. *Symbols, Selves, and Social Reality*. 2nd ed. America: Roxbury Publishing. 225p.
- SCHIFFMAN, L.G. & KANUK, L.L. 2007. *Consumer Behaviour*. 9th ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc. 561p.
- SCHREIER, M. 2012. *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. 272p.
- SCHURINK, W., FOUCHÉ, C.B. & DE VOS, A.S. 2011. Qualitative data analysis and interpretation. In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delpport, C.S.L. 2011.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Research at Grass Roots: For the social sciences and human service professions.* 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. 547p.
- SEEKINGS, J. & NATTRASS, N. 2002. Class, distribution and redistribution in post-Apartheid South Africa. *Transformation*, 50:1-30.
- SHUKLA, P. & BABIN, B.J. 2013. Effects of consumer psychographics and store characteristics in influencing shopping value and store switching. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 12(3):194-203.
- SMITH, M. 2010. *Professional women's use of quality indicators during evaluation of career wear.* Masters in Consumer Sciences: Clothing Management. University of Pretoria.
- SMITH, M., DE KLERK, H.M. & FLETCHER, L. 2011. Professional women's evaluation of the quality of career wear. *Journal of Family Ecology & Consumer Sciences*, 39:33-46.
- SOARS, B. 2009. Driving sales through shoppers' sense of sound, sight, smell and touch. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 37(3):286-298.
- SOLOMON, M.R. & RABOLT, N.J. 2004. *Consumer Behaviour in Fashion.* New Jersey: Pearson Education. 542p.
- SPROLES, G.B. 1979. *Fashion: Consumer Behavior Toward Dress.* Minneapolis: Burgess Publications Co. 244p.
- STARKS, H. & TRINIDAD, S.B. 2007. Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(10):1372-1380.
- STOKES, D. & BERGIN, R. 2006. Methodology or "methodolatry"? An evaluation of focus groups and depth interviews. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 9(1):26-37.
- STRYDOM, H. & DELPORT, C.S.L. 2011. Sampling and pilot study in qualitative research. In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delport, C.S.L. 2011.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Research at Grass Roots: For the social sciences and human service professions*. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. 547p.
- SUMMERS, T.A. & HEBERT, P.R. 2001. Shedding some light on store atmospherics: Influence of illumination on consumer behaviour. *Journal of Business Research*, 54:145-150.
- VAN LOGGERENBERG, M. & HERBST, F. 2010. Brand-building: a telling story. *USB Leaders Lab*, 4(2):13-17.
- VIEIRA, V.A. 2010. Visual aesthetics in store environment and its moderating role on consumer intention. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, (9):364-380, Spring.
- VIJAYALAKSHMI, C.S. & MAGESH, R. 2013. In-store decisions of shoppers in a leading apparel showroom. *Tactful Management Research Journal*, 1(5):1-8.
- VISSER, E.M., DU PREEZ, R. & JANSE VAN NOORDWYK, H.S. 2006. Importance of apparel store image attributes: Perceptions of female consumers. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 32(3):49-62.
- YIN, R.K. 2011. *Qualitative Research from start to finish*. New York: Guilford Publications. 348p.

ADDENDUM A: PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Profile Information								
Participant Number	Age	Race	Year	Field of Study	Originally from	Live in	Normally fit clothes	Normally shop
1	19	African	1st year	BA Humanities	De Vaal	PTA Hatfield	Yes	Mr Price, Poetry
2	18	African	1st year	BA Humanities	Malawi	PTA Central	No	Mr Price, Edgars
3	19	African	1st year	BA Humanities	Ficksburg	PTA West	No	Mr Price
4	18	African	1st year	Bcom Econometrics	Mafikeng	PTA Hatfield	No	Truworthe, Levis
5	18	African	1st year	BA Own Choice	Pretoria	PTA East	Yes	Urban, Vertigo
6	19	African	1st year	Bcom Agri Business	Pretoria	PTA East	Yes	YDE, Mr Price
7	18	African	1st year	BSc Biological and Agricultural Sciences	Newcastle	PTA Central	Yes	Mr Price, Identity
8	20	African	1st year	BSc Biological and Agricultural Sciences	Lebowakgomo	PTA Central	Yes	Mr Price, Legit
9	19	African	1st year	BSc Biological and Agricultural Sciences	Seshego	PTA Hatfield	Yes	Legit, Mr Price
10	19	African	1st year	BA Own Choice	Soweto	PTA Hatfield	Yes	Mr Price, Identity
11	18	African	1st year	Bcom Communications	Pretoria	PTA East	Yes	Forever New, Mangp
12	18	African	1st year	BA Psychology	Klerksdorp	PTA Hatfield	Yes	Chinese stores, Mr Price
13	18	African	1st year	BSc Landscaping Architecture	Soweto	PTA Hatfield	Sometimes	Mr Price, Truworthe
14	18	African	1st year	Bcom Communications	Cartonville	PTA Hatfield	Sometimes	Mr Price, Edgars
15	19	African	1st year	BA Own Choice	Rustenburg	PTA Hatfield	No	Mr Price, Edgars

Confidential interview with Participant 9: First interview

Date: 18 March 2013

R: I'm here with Participant number 9, and this is your first interview. Welcome!

P9A: Thank you.

R: And I hope you enjoy this interview. So, first of all, I would like to know, what do you think about fitting rooms?

P9A: Well, they're fine, but the only problem that I have with them is the space. **Space** I don't think there's enough space where one can be free to fit in everything that you want, and, you know, you go around and see if it looks good on you. **Space influence emotion, cognition and aesthetic-stimulus evaluation.** And also the lights, I don't think the lights... they, they're too... they're too bright for me, so if they could be darker, that would also be fine. **Fixtures** But everything is fine, though.

R: Okay. And the space, tell me about... you said the space is a little bit too small.

P9A: Yes, so you're not free to...

R: And how does that make you feel?

P9A: Uh, I really don't like it. It makes me feel bad, actually.

Space influence emotion

R: Okay. And the lighting, you said you would like it little bit dimmer or darker?

P9A: Yes.

R: How does the bright lighting make you feel?

P9A: It doesn't make me feel good though, because you know when you're in the fitting room, you want, you want to feel that I'm doing... I'm seeing myself as I am, and then it's... the light is too bright, and then the clothes also, they're too

bright. **Fixtures influence emotion** and aesthetic-stimulus **evaluation** So you think this colour is too bright, and when you go out, it's not the colour that you thought it was, because when you're in there, it's bright, but then when you go out, it's not what you thought it was. **Fixtures influence aesthetic-stimulus evaluation**

R: Okay. So do you think the lighting in the fitting room doesn't represent normal daylight lighting?

P9A: No, it doesn't, yes. **Fixtures influence aesthetic-stimulus evaluation**

R: Okay. And what do you think is the image that the specific store wants to create in your mind?

P9A: The image about?

R: The store as a whole.

P9A: Oh, it would be the, the image... they like to... they want to create that they're the best stores and that like everything is fine, but then when you go there, there're some things that you can pick up and know that this one is wrong, and then this one I don't like, yes.

R: Okay. And do you think that fitting rooms represent, the fitting rooms represent that image you've just explained to me?

P9A: No, it doesn't.

R: Why do you say that?

P9A: Because they, they represent this perfect store; when you go you, you feel happy; you think when you get out of there, everything that you want when you go home you like everything you want. But then when you go in there, you go into...

R: To the fitting...

P9A: The fitting rooms, you find that it's actually what you... it's not what you thought it was. So I don't think the image that they're presenting is what that actually is.

R: And do you think that's mainly due to the lighting?

P9A: Ja, the lighting actually, and the space. **Fixtures and space influence emotion and cognition**

R: And the space.

P9A: Yes.

R: Okay. So if you were to go to a fitting room today, what do you think you would see?

P9A: Uhm, the same things that I've always seen there.

R: Like?

P9A: Like I just go there and you find that there's an empty room; this empty small space that you go into with bright lights that you don't like, and you find that you go there and you, you're happy about what you have, and then you go in there and that something just puts you down, like your mood just goes down when you get there. **Space and fixtures influence emotion**

R: And why do you think your mood is pulled down?

P9A: Because you, you have a high expectation when you're going in there, and then you find that what you're expecting is not what you get, so...

R: In terms of the clothes, or in terms of the room?

P9A: In terms of the room, when you go into that room.

R: Okay.

P9A: It's not what you were expecting to find.

R: And what would you like to find?

- P9A: I would like to find a room, a, a bigger room because when you're in that room, you'd feel free; you'd be able to do what you want to do – that's one thing I want first. **Space influence emotion** And the second thing, I would like to find... and to... it should be clean, because sometimes you go in there and you find that the room is not clean, so I think the room also should be cleaner. **Stimulus-sight influence emotion** And also the lights, they should make the lights dimmer, if that could... **Fixtures**
- R: Okay. And if you were to go to a fitting room today, what do you think you would hear?
- P9A: What do I think I would hear? Most of the time when I go there, there's music, but it's a nice music, so I like that music when I go there. **Stimulus-hear influence emotion**
- R: Do you like it?
- P9A: Yes, I like it.
- R: Why do you like it?
- P9A: Because it's... I think it's... they, they're playing for different... different generations, and I think they, they're trying to fit everybody in, because they... there're different kind of people coming into their... And when I go, I think it's the kind of music that I also listen to, so it's fine. **Stimulus-hear influence emotion and cognition**
- R: And do you like the music when you're in the fitting room and it plays?
- P9A: Yes, I like that. **Stimulus-hear influence emotion**
- R: Okay. And if you were to go into a fitting room today, what do you think you'd smell?
- P9A: Uhm, what do I... uhm, smell. **Stimulus-smell**
- R: If anything, if there's nothing then it's fine.

- P9A: Ja, I don't think I smell anything. **Stimulus-smell**
- R: And is that fine with you?
- P9A: Ja, it's fine. **Stimulus-smell**
- R: Okay. And do you think there would be anything to touch?
- P9A: No – besides the room itself, I don't think there's anything that I would. **Stimulus-touch**
- R: What in the room would you touch?
- P9A: Oh, what in the room would I touch – nothing actually. **Stimulus-touch**
- R: Nothing, okay. Then, is there anything else that you think you would notice in the fitting room area?
- P9A: That is different?
- R: Ja, or what you would notice; what would spark something in your mind?
- P9A: I mean, the only thing that I don't forget when I come into their fitting rooms, are the mirrors. I, I think there's one thing that I, I realise, I see, when I get in there – the first thing that I see is the mirrors, ja. **Furniture**
- R: And how do the mirrors make you feel?
- P9A: I like the mirrors, because they're everywhere, like if there... it's a four... I create... it's a four-roomed house, so there's a mirror at the side; there's a mirror at this side, so I like the mirrors, they... you can see yourself from all angles. I love that, yes. **Furniture influences emotion and aesthetic-stimulus evaluation**
- R: Okay. And how do you feel about the furniture, like the chairs?
- P9A: There... in different uh, shops that I went, you, you find that some chairs are fine, but some of them they, they look old, so I sometimes, when you go to the shops and the

furniture... some of the furniture is not fine, especially the chairs. Furniture influences emotion

R: And how does that make you feel?

P9A: I wish I could change that, if it was possible [chuckles], I'll change that. Furniture influences emotion

R: Why?

P9A: Because they're not... they, they're making you feel like you're in this room where you... it's, it's like you go into a room and you expect that the... everything should be perfect. There should be good furniture; it should be clean, and when you go there, the furniture is not what you thought it would be like. And the chairs, they're too small, so if maybe they could be a little up here – they'd be fine. Furniture influence emotion

R: You think they are too low?

P9A: Ja, they're too low, so if they could be a little bit higher, I think that would be fine. Furniture influences emotion

R: And then tell me, how do you feel as a consumer if you go... or a shopper, when you go to a shop and you find something in the fitting room, where the furniture is bad, how do you then feel about that?

P9A: I, I really feel angry; I wish... even if, if I go into a fitting room and the furniture is not fine, I, I leave. Seriously, I don't go into the fitting room. Furniture influence emotion and behaviour

R: But do you still buy the clothes?

P9A: No, I won't buy the clothes if I didn't fit it. Furniture influence emotion and behaviour

R: So then you would leave it altogether?

P9A: Yes.

R: Okay. And did that happen to you before?

P9A: Yes, it has once. It only happened once.

R: Okay. And do you think it's easy to find a fitting room in a shop?

P9A: Uhm, not really, it's not. **Layout**

R: Why do you say that?

P9A: Because I've been to a shop in town, and I tried to find a fitting room; I didn't even see it. **Layout influence emotion**

R: So, what did you do then?

P9A: I left, and I had clothes in my hand – I wanted to fit them, but then I tried to look for a fitting room – I didn't see it. **Layout influence emotion and behaviour**

R: So you didn't ask the staff?

P9A: There... there was... the only people that I saw were the cashiers, they were the only people that were there, but besides that there was nobody. **Service influence emotion**

R: Wow! And how did that make you feel?

P9A: I was so angry, I was really angry, so I, I just decided to leave. **Service influence emotion and behaviour**

R: And would you go back again?

P9A: Ja, I would.

R: Why would you go back?

P9A: Because I think that the clothes that they sell, they sell really beautiful clothes, and they're in the fashion. I would go back to it. **Aesthetics- stimulus**

R: Okay. So let's say you find an item – if you pretend now with me – let's say you find an item at a shop that you like and you want to go and try it on before you buy it.

P9A: Yes.

R: What are the steps you are going to take in order to try it on?

P9A: I don't understand the question.

R: Let's say you find a top or a dress that you like.

P9A: Yes.

R: So now you first want to try it on, so what are you going to do in order to try it on?

P9A: I'll go to the fitting room, and then I'd see... I'll go and see if the dress fits me well, and then if I like it... if it fits me I'm going to buy it, yes. **Aesthetics- emotion and Functionality-comfort**

R: Okay. So is fit very important to you when you try on clothes?

P9A: Ja, it is very, very important. **Functionality- comfort**

R: Okay. What else is important to you?

P9A: If it fits me well, and the price, so the price also should be in a range that I can afford. **Extrinsic-price** So I can't just say... because sometimes that you find that you love a dress, but it's too expensive, so you can't by it. **Extrinsic-price** So the price and the fitting is important. **Extrinsic-price Functionality- comfort**

R: Anything else that's important to you?

P9A: Hmmm, no it's...

R: Is that it. Okay. And how do you feel about the privacy at the fitting rooms?

P9A: I think there is privacy. **Space Emotion and cognition**

R: Is it enough for you though?

P9A: Ja, I think... the one that I've... went to, but that there was one that I went to, there wasn't enough privacy and is...

I think it was only two fitting rooms (layout), and there was this long line (layout), and you were, you were rushed to do your things, because a lot of people like they, they want to get in, so you, you actually didn't have much time to do what you wanted to do and see if it fit... the things fit you well, ja. Layout influence cognition and emotion and evaluation of functionality

R: And how did you feel that you were rushed?

P9A: I was really sad, you know. It didn't make me feel good. Layout influence cognition and emotion

R: Okay. And you said that that one didn't have enough privacy. What do you think made that it didn't have enough privacy? Because there were only two fitting rooms?

P9A: There was only two fitting rooms, and the position where the fitting rooms were – they were at the centre of the shop, so it wasn't actually... if maybe they were at the corner, that would have been better, but for the fact that it was in the centre, it was not... yes. Layout influence cognition and emotion

R: So do you prefer a fitting room in a corner of a store?

P9A: Ja, if it... it it's somewhere where I, I can have my privacy. As long as it's not a place where everybody passes all the time, it's fine. Layout influence cognition and emotion

R: So would you like the fitting room to kind of be separate from the main store?

P9A: Yes. Yes, I would like that. Layout influence cognition and emotion

R: Okay. So when you try on clothes, when do you decide "Yes, I'm going to buy this item"?

P9A: Where, when to... when I'm in the shop and I go to the fitting – that's when I decide if I'm, I'm actually going to buy

- it, because you find that you love it, but then when you go into the fitting room and you've... you, you try it on, you see that it doesn't actually look... it doesn't actually uh, represent what you thought it would look like on you. So ja, that's when I decide "Okay, I'm going to buy this" – if it fits me and it looks good. **Aesthetics- stimulus and functionality**
- R: Okay. And if you were to go to a store right now, do you think you would be satisfied with the fitting rooms?
- P9A: Right now? I don't think so.
- R: And that's mainly due to the space?
- P9A: Ja. **Space influence cognition and emotion**
- R: And the lighting?
- P9A: Yes. **Fixtures influence cognition and emotion**
- R: Like you said. Okay. And do you think you would be satisfied with the clothes?
- P9A: Yes, the clothes, I think I'd be satisfied with their clothes.
- R: Why? Because of the style?
- P9A: Ja, I like the style. It's, it's funky – ja, it's funky, so it's... I love that. **Aesthetics- stimulus**
- R: Okay. And tell me, are there any other comments that you have on the fitting rooms? Anything else that you would like to say about it?
- P9A: Uhm, there's one thing that I also don't like – I forgot to mention that. You know when you go into the fitting rooms; there... say there's five rooms, so they're separated, right? But that there's that little space – I don't like that space. **Space-walls/ceilings/doors influence emotion and cognition**
- R: Oh, between the floor... **Space-walls/ceilings/doors influence emotion and cognition**
- P9A: Yes.

R: And the, and the door.

P9A: Ja, I don't like that, yes. **Space-walls/ceilings/doors**
influence emotion and cognition

R: Why don't you like it?

P9A: Because it doesn't... it feels like... you feel like somebody who's in there, you can see the person who's in there; they can see you – it just doesn't make you feel... you just don't have that privacy that you need. If it was... the door... the wall was... if it wasn't this high... **Space-walls/ceilings**
influence emotion and cognition

R: To the ground?

P9A: Yes, I think it would be better, ja.

R: Okay. And are there any comments that you have on the clothes that you would like to say –*anything*?

P9A: The, the clothes are fine. I love the clothes, and they, they represent today's youth, so I think their clothes are fine.

R: Okay. Thank you very much for your time – I enjoyed it.

P9A: Thank you. [chuckles]

ADDENDUM C: PHOTOGRAPHS

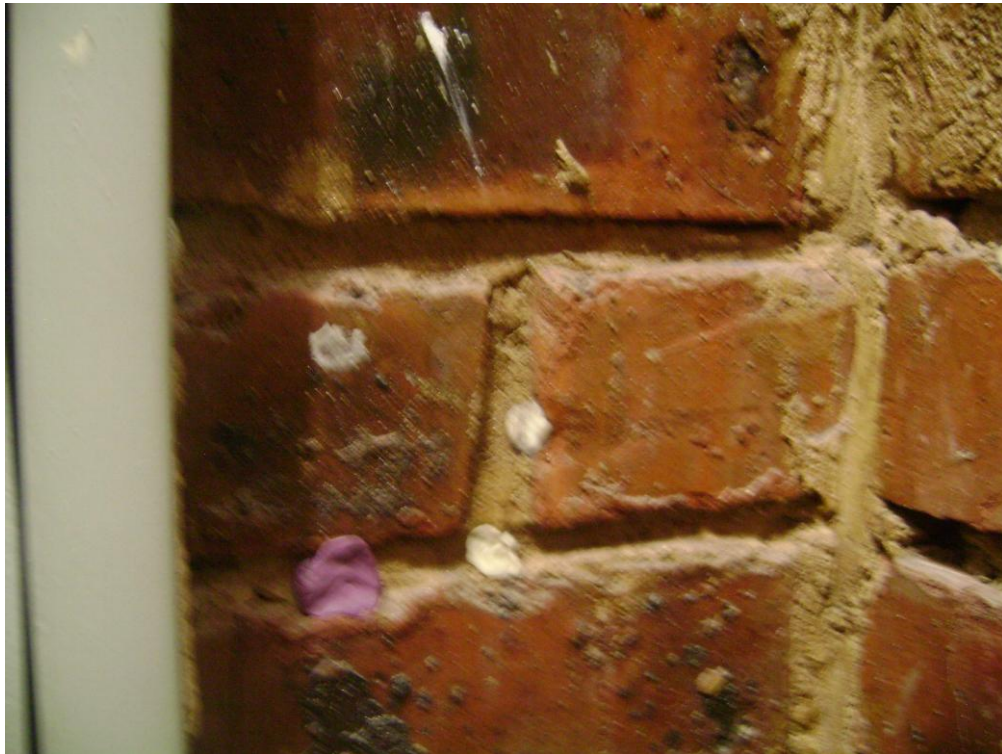


PHOTO 1: GUM ON WALL (P6:4)



PHOTO 2: WHITE WALL (P1:17)

ADDENDUM C: PHOTOGRAPHS



PHOTO 3: SMALL FITTING ROOM CUBICLE IN HATFIELD PLAZA (P4:8)



PHOTO 4: CUBICLE'S CEILING IN HATFIELD PLAZA (P6:7)

ADDENDUM C: PHOTOGRAPHS



PHOTO 5: BIG FITTING ROOM CUBICLE IN BROOKLYN CENTRE (P13:16)

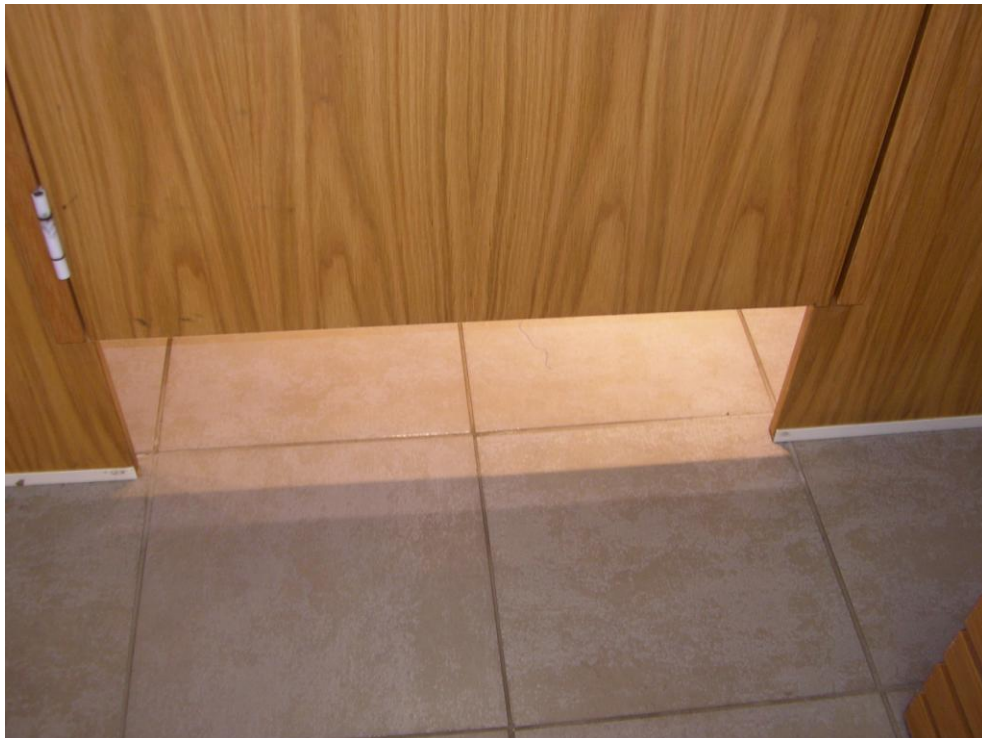


PHOTO 6: DOOR SPACE IN BROOKLYN CENTRE (P9:13)

ADDENDUM C: PHOTOGRAPHS



PHOTO 7: SMALL BENCH IN HATFIELD PLAZA (P10:6)



PHOTO 8: BIG BENCH IN BROOKLYN CENTRE (P2:12)

ADDENDUM C: PHOTOGRAPHS



PHOTO 9: LIGHTING IN HATFIELD PLAZA (P4:7)



PHOTO 10: LIGHTING IN BROOKLYN (P2:13)

ADDENDUM C: PHOTOGRAPHS



PHOTO 11: HANGING HOOKS IN HATFIELD PLAZA (P1:12)



PHOTO 12: HANGING HOOKS NOT MAINTAINED IN HATFIELD PLAZA (P10:7)