



Consumer Attitudes: Effect of a Sales Associate’s Sex, Store of Employment, and Gender Expression on Attitudes Towards the Sales Associate

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Introduction

Current Focus of Research:

- Learned stereotypes may contribute to the development of certain attitudes and preferences towards gender conformity (Eagly & Wood, 2012).
 - Gender conformity is more praised and accepted (Swim et al, 2019).
- Males who are gender incongruent are typically viewed more negatively in masculine occupations than females who gender bend in masculine occupations or males who gender bend in feminine occupations (McDowell, 2015; Dozier, 2017).

Gap in the Research:

The current study strives to address the gap in research by examining the impact of three variables (sex and gender expression of the employee, and the “gender” of the place of occupation/store of employment (masculine vs. feminine)) on customer perceptions of the employees.

Purpose of Current Study:

The purpose of the current study was to determine how participants view retail associates who are gender congruent and incongruent at gendered retail stores. Another purpose of the current study was to determine if the sex of the employee, the gender expression of the employee, and how masculine or feminine the workplace is stereotypically viewed would interact to produce differences in the customer’s perceptions of the sales associate.

Hypotheses

H₁: Based on research showing that gender conformity is rewarded by social acceptance (Eagly & Wood, 2012), it is hypothesized that someone working in a gender congruent occupation will rate higher on the Attitudes Towards Retail Associates Questionnaire than an individual working in a gender incongruent occupation.

H₂: Based on research showing masculine females are seen more positively than their feminine counterparts in a stereotypically masculine setting (Embry et al, 2008), it is hypothesized that masculine females working in the sports retail store will rate higher on the Attitudes Towards Retail Associates Questionnaire than feminine females working in the sports retail store.

H₃: Based on research showing that feminine males are rated higher than masculine individuals in a feminine work environment (McDowell, 2015), it is hypothesized that feminine males working in a beauty retail store will rate higher on the Attitudes Towards Retail Associates Questionnaire than both masculine females and males working in a beauty retail store.

Methods

Design: 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design

- Independent Variables:** sex of the retail associate (female, male), “gender” of the store of employment (beauty, sports), and gender expression (stereotypically feminine, stereotypically masculine)
- Dependent Variable:** customer perception of the retail sales associate as the dependent variable as determined by the Attitudes Towards Retail Associate Questionnaire, which looks at authority, credibility, competency, comfortability (Cronbach’s alpha = .96)

Participants:

- 121 undergraduate students at Florida Southern College, recruited through SONA
- Age: $M = 19.14$, $SD = 1.31$ (22.3% males, 76.9% females, .8% transgender/other)



8 Conditions



Discussion

No Support for H1 & H2: Masculine males working in the sporting goods store had the lowest rating on the Attitudes Towards Retail Associates Questionnaire with an average of 3.83. Additionally, Masculine females working in the sports retail store did not rate higher on the Attitudes Towards Retail Associates Questionnaire than feminine females working in the sports retail store. These results were not consistent with previous literature (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Embry et al, 2008).

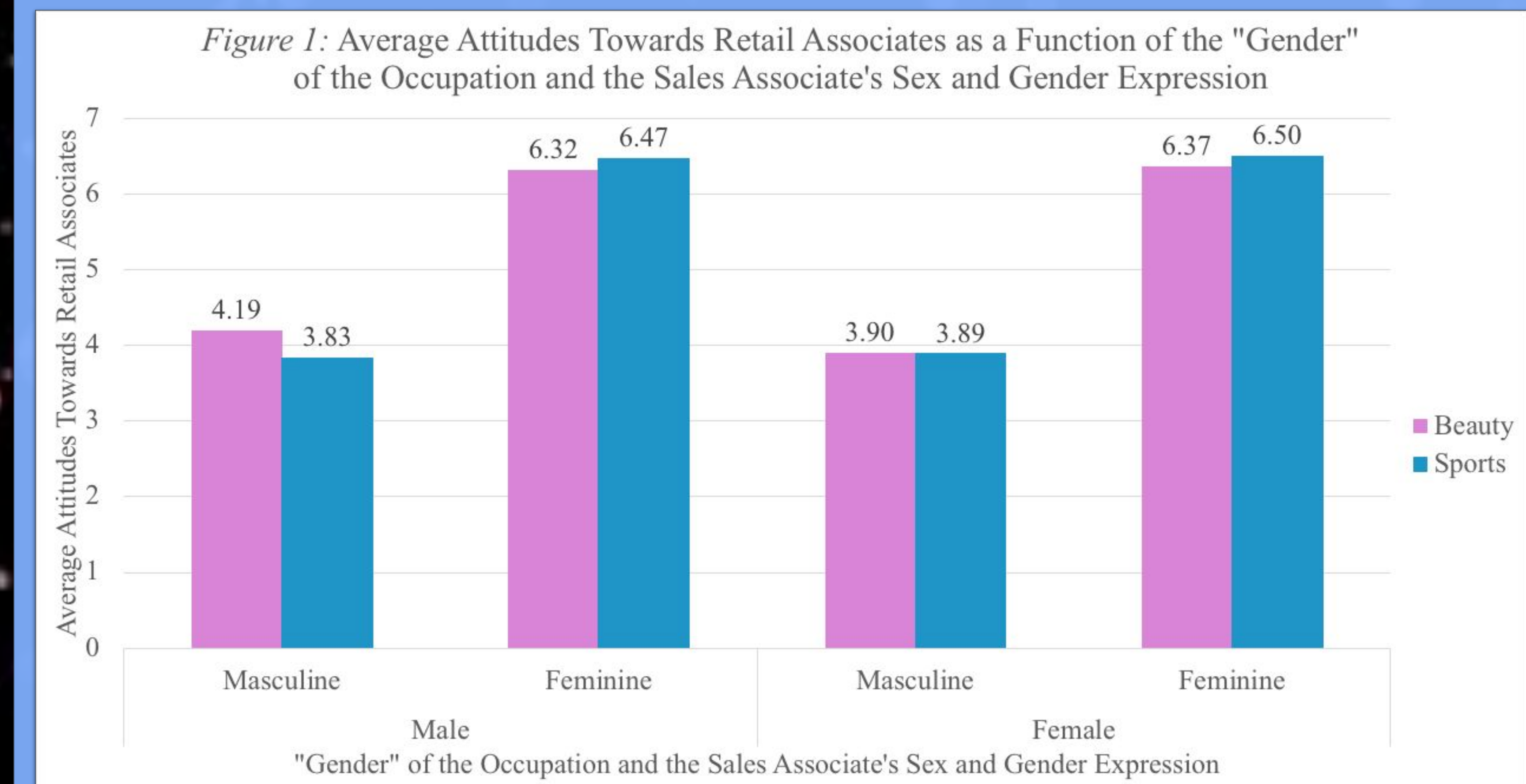
Support fo H3: When looking at our third hypothesis, the results supported the idea that feminine males working in a beauty retail store will rate higher on the Attitudes Towards Retail Associates Questionnaire than both masculine females and males working in a beauty retail store. Findings are consistent with current research (McDowell, 2015).

Limitations/Flaws: Overall, hypotheses that took masculinity into account (H1 and H2) were not supported. This may have been due to our portrayal of masculinity in the vignettes. We operationally defined masculinity as self-confident, assertive, and logical. Masculine retail associates were depicted as only giving one choice to the customers and not having any, which is not ideal in customer service. Additionally, inconsistency in number of participants could contribute to lack of support for the first two hypotheses.

Future Directions/Implications: In the future, it may be important to change the operational definitions if continuing with the same career or choose a career that does not require more stereotypically feminine characteristics in the way customer service does. Continuing research in this field is important due to the pertinence it has on businesses and the economy. Businesses can utilize this information to better themselves and better understand how to reach more diverse target demographics who do not hold traditional gender views.

Results

Analysis:A 2x2x2 between-subjects factorial ANOVA was conducted with gender expression of the sales associate (feminine, masculine), sex of the sales associate (male, female), and “gender” of the retail store (feminine beauty, masculine sports) as the between-subjects factors and customer attitudes towards the sales associate as the independent factor.



- As shown in Figure 1, there was sufficient evidence to conclude that the gender expression of the sales associate had an effect on customer attitudes towards the sales associate, $F(1, 113) = 227.66$, $p < .001$.
- Results reveal that participants gave significantly better attitude ratings towards the sales associate who expressed more feminine behaviors ($M = 6.46$, $SD = .66$) compared the associate who expressed more masculine behaviors ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(119) = -15.97$, $p < .001$.
 - However, neither the gender of the sales associate nor the “gender” of the retail store had an impact on customers' perceptions of the sales associate, $F < 1$.

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