COOL BOYS AND SWEET GIRLS
a study about gender roles and children’s clothes
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Abstract

Title: Cool Boys and Sweet Girls, a study about gender roles and children’s clothes.

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Key Words: Children’s clothes, gender, stereotypes, unisex

Purpose: The main purpose of this thesis is to identify and analyse what influence fashion companies in their design and communication of children clothes according to traditional gender roles. The purpose is also to identify if there is a conflict between political correctness and profitability in reference to gender and children’s clothes. The aim was also to find how customers of children’s clothes can influence the fashion companies with their behaviour.

Method: The empirical research and data collection was done from both a qualitative and quantitative approach. In depth interviews were done with Lindex, KappAhl and Polarn o. Pyret on the Swedish market, together with observations of the fashion stores assortments and their advertising of children’s clothes and finally a consumer survey was conducted on Facebook.

Conclusion: Multiple factors were concluded influences on the fashion companies design and communication of gender specific clothing for children. The interpretation on the meaning of gender specific clothing was found to be an important factor as well as the lack or presence of an official standpoint. Political correctness was found harder to achieve in larger companies leading to the conclusion that profitability and political correctness is only achievable up to a certain size. Consumers were found to influence the fashion companies by sharing attitudes on social media and with friends and acquaintances, among other things. The importance of direct experience and personal interest in forming attitudes was confirmed. Mothers with children under the age of 6 were the consumer group with the strongest attitudes.
Preface

I would like to thank the contributors to this master thesis, a big thanks to everyone that answered my consumer survey on Facebook and to my contacts at the fashion companies that took the time and effort from their busy schedules to contribute to this work:

*Ann-Christine Bergstrand, Lindex*
*Sofia Wallin, KappAhl*
*Karina Lundell, Polarn o. Pyret*

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Sofia Franséhn

Borås, May 25th, 2011
1 Introduction

In this opening chapter a background for the research area will be presented. It is followed by a problem statement, purpose of the study and its delimitations and central concepts.

1.1 Historical Background

Gender specific stereotypes within children’s clothing have a background in children’s clothing history and the influences of social cultural forces. To fully comprehend the problem statement a background history of these subjects are presented.

In the 1960 the culture was symbolized by Rock n Roll, this new rock cultures lead words were energy and intensity. This also influenced children’s clothes consumption and development. In the 1960’s new techniques and advancements in chemistry led to new materials that took activity and mobility into account. New silhouettes emerged that contradicted the earlier standard that girls act more modest than boys. New patterns were created to fit children’s body and without fitted waistlines for girls. Stretch yarns also became popular, the new garments was low in cost and allowed more freedom of movement. Interest in fashion trends for children grew and traditional male clothes material and styles was adapted also to girls. In the end of the 1960’s jeans and shirts were considered ordinary school clothes for girls. In the 1970’s a bigger variety of children’s wear was present in the market in general. More trends made it possible for girls to actively choose an identity and to act more physical if wanted. The new fashion trends for girls supported the fact that they were allowed to take a more active participation in social life. (p. 216-223, Rubinstein, 2000)

Before the 1960’s children had dressed as small adults and follower of adult trends. Boys had dressed similar to their fathers but were now expressing their own interests. Designers of children’s clothing started to listen to what their consumers would like to wear and young designers came out with collections that was fashion forward also for children. In England the Beatles look influenced the boys fashion trends and slim silhouettes were popular. In the early 1970’s colours was an important element for children’s clothes collections. Purple was one of most popular colours for boys wear. During this time retailers had also become observant of that in most households mothers stood for children’s clothing purchases and fashion forward mothers encouraged their
children to wear what was in fashion. Discount retailers started to make fashionable children’s clothes at a lower cost and consumption and volume of children’s clothes increased. (p.225-228, Rubenstein, 200)

In the 1970’s the back-to nature movement also had an effect on the fashion trends in general and consequently for children’s clothing. Another trend was the sports minded child and by the end of the 1970’s there was as many sportswear looks as it was sports. Also new were the applications of animals adapted from cartoon characters such as Donald Duck and other farm animals. Unlike previous applications that had been hand made and embroidered these were machine made and designed to appeal to children’s personal taste. Some stores started to license merchandise and soon t-shirts, sweatshirts and pyjamas had portraits such as Superman, Snoopy etc. The new way of dressing for children did not appeal to all categories. School teachers tried to pressure children to wear more traditional clothing and for this reason became gatekeepers for the new fashion trends. The change in children’s clothing during the 1960’s and 1970’s can not be attributed to new technology alone. The 1950’s boom had lead to less poverty and consumption was increasing and the new prosperity made it possible to consume more clothes. It was also a change in socio cultural identity and the freedom for children to use their body’s for dance and sports that encouraged new clothes. In the 1960’s and 1970’s the wish for social expression was less gender specific and restrictive than before. By the new inter-gender and inter-class dialogue, children’s clothes were a part of the new social and cultural change. (p.229-236, Rubenstein, 2000)

By the 1980’s and 1990’s fashion retailers understood that children was not only consumers but also customers. Older children influenced their parents in their purchase decision and allowances that were saved up made children consume clothes with their own money. As divorces grew more common children was spoilt to make up for bad guilt and absent parent’s shopped clothes and other goods to make up for lost time. Fashion styles that symbolized the owners age, gender and class also became more common and new plush fabrics with soft colours and appearance was popular among children’s clothes. At the same time unisex clothing developed from the background that family hose holds was smaller with fewer siblings than previous decades. For example, a girl that was growing up without sisters but with brothers was more likely to have cross sex personality behaviour, in slang called “tom boy”. Fashion designers such as Calvin Klein and Donna Karen started in the 1990’s unisex collections that both boys and girls could wear and adopted adult styles into children’s sizes. But making children into small replicas of the adults was not liked by all designers. Some fashion designers of children’s clothing refused and claimed that children’s wear should reflect the self in age and gender leaving the fashion design for children split in two camps. During the 1990’s some fashion companies started to produce father-son and mother-daughter collections with the
result that the children dressed in adult styles. For example, young girls wearing short black dresses and suspenders by very young age. On the other hand unisex styles for children that were loose fitting, not gender specific and colourful had been successfully launched. These collections included garments that had playful images and colours that instead of pastels came in exciting colours and was mainly addressing children under the age of six. These two opposing approaches can be said to represent two different ideologies, there one side strives for children to grow up fast and adapt to adult life and the other want to make childhood last longer and let children have their time for openness, innocence and freedom. (p.241-262, Rubenstein, 2000)

1.2 Problem Background

It is not hard to see which part of a shop floor that is designated for girls and which are for boys when you walk in to Swedish children’s clothes store today. Girl clothes often have bright and fruity colours such as pink and turquoise. For the smallest sizes there are flowers, hearts and stars and a lot of glitter. For the older girls it is tuff and sexy clothing with fitted jeans and tight tops and miniskirts. Even bras, string thongs and see through sweaters are made for children in the age of 8 years old. The big retail chains in Sweden such as Lindex, Hennes & Mauritz and KappAhl have all had this kind of clothing in their assortment but have in history been forced to withdraw the garments because of public dislike. Research shows that clothes for infant girls are tighter and smaller than the same size for boys. A sweater for girls is in general 10 cm tighter and several centimetres shorter compared to a boy sweater in the same size. The fact that shape and size of a boys and girls bodies are similar in this age is not reflected in the children’s clothing. Boy’s clothes are far from tight and see through; instead they are very often baggy and aim to be rough and cool. It is often dark colours and prints with fire, thunder, death skulls, and military patterns. (p. 22-26, Norlin, 2007)

Customers of children’s clothes, mainly parents, are not always happy about the stereotypic gender design. Customer dislike has previously made companies forced to withdraw certain garment that have just been too provocative for the general public. An example was a bra made for young girls in 2003 by Lindex which started a public debate and dislike that did not stop until Lindex actually burned their whole stock of the product. (p, 23, Norlin, 2007) The bra was aimed for girls from the ages of 2 years old. (stockholmsfolket.se, 2011)

In January 2011 a debate on children clothes and the different sizes in boys and girls garments was started on a blog and spread to other customers through Facebook. An employee at Lindex had said that boys play around more and therefore need more
comfortable clothes than girls, which started the discussions. Many people were upset about the response and showed their dislike online. The discussion in social media lead to the attention from daily magazines and other media, which made the fashion companies forced to respond. A common response from the fashion companies were that they design and communicate only what the customer wants to buy. (dn.se, 2011)

1.3 Problem Statement

In my problem background I have identified that customers of children’s clothing sometimes have expectations of gender neutral clothing that the fashion companies do not meet. The clash is evident when customers through social media and other means of communication start discussions about their dislike of gender specific clothing for young children. The new social media network allows the customer to connect with others with similar opinions.

On the other side fashion companies have their own approach to gender awareness in design and communication of children’s clothing. The public discussions, started by customers, needs to be addressed forcing fashion companies to announce statements regarding gender specific design for children. But do all fashion companies have collective knowledge, awareness and a set standpoint to how they design and communicate gender in their clothing for children?

The problem lies in that customers and producers of children’s clothes present different views on how children’s clothes should be designed and communicated. Customers that raise their voice might not represent the whole customer group but their opinions are getting high awareness because of the social media.

A potential subject of discussion is the conflict between political correctness and profitability in reference to fashion companies’ design and communication of gender specific clothing. As mentioned in the problem background a common answer to the background for designing gender specific clothes is the demand from customers, consequently profitability. But the need for political correctness sways towards making no difference between the sexes and designing unisex clothes that fit both genders.
1.4 Research Questions

*What factors influence a fashion companies design and communication of gender specific children’s clothes?*

*How can the customer influence the communication and design of gender specific children’s clothes by their behaviour?*

*Is there a conflict between being political correct and being profitable in reference to designing and communicating non gender specific clothing?*

To visualise the essential parameters for this study I have created a research model. The research model aim to help identify how the knowledge, awareness, standpoint and behaviour plays a part in the influence between customers and fashion companies. The research model is made as a tool to find and identify the factors that are contributing to fashion companies influence of the customers and vice versa in the subject of gender and children’s clothes.

Figure 1: Research model
1.5 Purpose

The main purpose of this thesis is to identify and analyse the parameters that influence fashion companies in their design and communication of children clothes according to traditional gender roles. The purpose is also to identify if there is a conflict between political correctness and profitability in reference to gender standpoints and design of children’s clothes.

I also want to see how the customer with their behaviour can influence the fashion companies communication and design of children clothes.

1.6 Delimitations

The research of this thesis is limited to the Swedish market and will only include fashion retail companies that operate on the Swedish market, observations are also conducted on the Swedish market and inquiries will be conducted only on Swedish customers. The research is focused mainly on children’s clothes for younger children.

The thesis will emphasize on the qualitative research of the fashion companies and the identification of factors that influence the fashion companies design and communication of gender specific clothing. The customer research is limited to finding relevance between customer behaviour and children’s clothes and will not represent the customer of children’s clothes in general. The customer research will therefore not include the customer’s lifestyle, political belongingness or other social and economic factors. The inquiry is made in the purpose of identifying the influence and behaviour customers in general can have independent on their background.

1.7 Central Concepts

**Awareness:** knowing something; knowing that something exists and is important; being interested in something. (oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com, 2011)

**Gender:** the state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones). (oxforddictionaries.com. 2011)
**Influence:** the effect that somebody/something has on the way a person thinks or behaves or on the way that something works or develops. (oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com, 2011)

**Standpoint:** the position from which someone is able to view a scene or an object. (oxforddictionaries.com, 2011)

**Stereotype:** a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing. (oxforddictionaries.com. 2011)

**Unisex:** a style in which men and women look and dress in a similar way. (oxforddictionaries.com. 2011)

### 1.8 Previous Research

Very little research has been found in the subject of gender and children’s clothes. Except from the Swedish Consumer Advisory reports on advertising, children and gender stereotypes from 1994 and 1998 no research in the field of gender and children’s clothes in modern times on the Swedish market have been found.

Research on children’s clothes have often been from an historical perspectives and have included gender perspectives, but are just historical and do not include any research of today’s market. Research in this field have been found by Ruth Rubenstein and includes research up until the 1990’s on children’s identity, clothing and style (Rubenstein, 2000). On the Swedish market researcher Viveka Berggren Torell, have researched children’s clothes on the Swedish market. Her research concentrates on the development of the Swedish Welfare state during 1920-1950’s. (hgu.gu.se, 20011) This research was found to historical to be included in this study.

Some juvenile literature have been researched that talks about gender and society, for example Annika Norlins *Tänk (tvärt) om; tjejer, killar och makt* from 2007 encouraging young people to observe gender related questions including a section on children’s clothes. (Norlin, 2007)

One other thesis on master level has been found in the area of gender and children’s clothes, but within Sociology studies. This thesis researched parent’s adjustments to children’s fashion today and noticeable differences in boys and girls clothing. The research was done at Luleå University of Technology in the subject of Sociology in 2007 and written by Rita Bandsjö. The research focused on finding links between identity and children’s clothes in reference to Pierre Bourdieus literature in social capital and habitus.
The research concluded that children’s clothes are used as a tool to show social status and as lifestyle marker and can be used to identify gender. (uppsatser.se, 2011)

This study will cover a new topic in the research of children’s clothes and gender, since it has a modern approach and aim to investigate and analyse the present children’s clothes market in Sweden. Previous research was found to concentrate on the historical development of children’s clothes, with gender awareness but not with gender as a prime topic. This research aim to use the previous historical findings as a platform and contribute to the subject with a more modern approach with specific focus on gender. This thesis also aims to combine a company and consumer perspective adding a new aspect to the field of gender and children’s clothes.

This study brings up a relevant subject that has been discussed in media but not researched from an academic perspective. Based on the previous research and current focus on gender and children’s clothes in media this thesis touches an important subject with high contemporary relevance.
2 Theory

This chapter will describe the frame of reference that has been chosen for this study. This part will report different theories that are relevant for the problem statement and purpose.

2.1 Gender

2.1.1 Theories Regarding Gender Roles

There are two different directions in the field of research in gender roles and differences between boys and girls. One has an essentialism approach and the other promote constructivism. Essentialist states that men and female are each other’s opposites and claims that typical male and female characteristics are inherited. Essentialists promote female qualities and believe that different but equal is the way forward for feminism. Constructivists believe that there are biological differences between men and female but do not want to derive all differences to biology. What is conceived to be typical male and female characteristics change with each time period. For example it was in the 17th century socially accepted that men cried in public. It is however hard, almost impossible, to separate social and cultural determined behaviours. Since we are so influenced by our culture, natural male and female behaviour is hard to define. Research claims that parents will treat their sons and daughters different even in their first minutes of life. Evidence of biological differences between men and females are therefore unproven. (Edström, Jacobson, Muhr, Näslund, 1998)

2.1.2 Gender Attitudes

Gender attitudes can be put in an individual and in a cultural context. Attitudes towards gender equality and gender relations vary between individuals and countries. Diverse theories provide different explanations of variation in gender attitudes between countries and individuals. One theory argues that a country’s level of development will affect gender attitudes mainly through individual structural factors. This theory argues that individual gender attitudes will shape and influence the average gender attitude of a
country. Structural factors are considered social background and experience, for example, education, women’s employment and a general position in society about gender attitudes. A country’s development, especially its economic development, will therefore be a factor in its gender awareness and advancement in national development normally result in more liberal gender attitudes. (Bergh, 2007)

The second theory argues that people’s values explain their gender attitudes. Values and not structural factors are the forces that will develop a national attitude towards gender equality and relations. This theory does also take into account a country’s development but means that values are even more important with a growing development and will have a strong effect on people’s gender attitudes. Important in this theory is to separate attitudes and values. Values have a more general nature than attitudes and values can often be an explanation of an attitude. Attitudes are often favourable or unfavourable towards a subject or an object. (Bergh, 2007)

In conclusion the structural factors, such as background and experience, have in general a stronger importance than personal values in determining a person’s gender attitude. National development, measured by GDP per capita, correlates with the average gender attitude in a country. Gender equality in society often leads people to support gender equality in general. (Bergh, 2007)

2.1.3 Awareness and Practicing of Gender

Practicing gender was a new concept in the 1980’s then research was done on how gender is practiced through interaction in organizations. Often unintentional practicing of gender is more common at workplace than the intentional, meaning that many organizations do not reflect on gender at all in other forms than commending sexism and gender bias. Awareness and intention are important factors in a person’s reflection of gender. For example can awareness to gender be considered in the morning then we dress ourselves but later in the day it is completely ignored. The same is applicable to an organization; some efforts are reflective of gender others are not. (Martin, 2006)

To be reflective of gender is to consider opinions and following through with actions. To actually practice gender requires awareness and intention to a particular purpose. To actually find how companies practice gender is very challenging since it is often fluid and collective. Often “sayings” and “doings” are not the same thing and gender process and relationships are hard to record. Being aware and reflective of gender can still cause reactions that are not intended by the sender. Both reflective and unreflective practicing of gender can be interpreted differently by the receiver. (Martin, 2006)
2.2 Marketing, Ethics and Design

2.2.1 Marketing to Children

In previous time, marketers mainly marketed their messages at parents, since they in most cases are the ones that make the buying decision and purchases. Nowadays, many companies target children directly since they rely on the children to convince their parents to buy the product. Children are however, a vulnerable target group with little experience of purchasing. Marketers must remember that with increased marketing towards children comes a serious threat. Any marketing communication that will be perceived as aggressive or manipulative will make parents and society react with vengeance, such as boycotts, bad PR and even stricter laws and regulations. Large market opportunities come with reaching unspoilt consumers such as children, but a public backlash might turn the opportunity into a marketer’s worst nightmare. (p.18-20, Davidson, 2002)

Advertising directly to children under the age of 12 is today forbidden in accordance to Swedish law. The Swedish Consumer Agency controls and regulates that children’s best are considered. The regulations include all TV-commercial and also bans commercial brakes during children shows since children do not always understand the difference between commercials and regular TV shows. But not all Swedish TV-channels air from the Swedish broadcast net which makes it possible for channels sending from off com to avoid these regulations. Other than TV-commercials, internet advertising towards children is hard to control because of the nature of the media and today there are only standpoints, no regulations, regarding internet advertising towards children. Direct marketing towards children under the age of 16 are against good marketing practise. (konsumentverket.se, 2011)

Swedish consumers are in favour of banning advertising towards children, according to a research conducted by the Swedish Consumer Advisory. 88 % of Swedish consumer are in favour of the current regulations or would like to expand the ban, only 12 % are against the regulations. (sverigeskonsumenter.se, 2011)
2.2.2 Advertising and Gender Stereotypes

Criticisms have been pointed against advertising for enhancing stereotypic attitudes toward gender roles. Advertising have from an historical point of view been found unaffected by the women’s change in society. It was not until the 1980’s that women was portrayed less stereotypic and more equal than before. Advertising towards children have during the same time period become more stereotypic in the way it portrays boys and girls. For example were boys overrepresented in advertising there usability of products was emphasised and girls were overrepresented in advertising that had an emotional setting. It is however hard to define how advertising intermediate with those that are exposed. Some research shows that advertising of stereotypic behaviour strengthen and reinforces those values and attitudes that the exposed already might have. It is however hard to define single advertisements effect on peoples values since other media also influence their values and attitudes. It is almost impossible to isolate the influence of only one advertisement but a general conclusion can be drawn that advertising is one of the factors that can contribute to strengthen stereotypic conceptions on gender roles. (Bjurström, 1994)

2.2.3 Marketing Ethics

Critics of the marketing system accuse advertising as being cultural pollution, meaning that our senses frequently are assaulted by commercials. Advertising is hard to avoid and multiple messages of materialism, power, status and sex is directed to the consumer’s attention every day. Especially children’s exposure to marketing messages have been discussed as bad influence creating needs for materialistic goods such as toys and other branded products. Marketers response to the criticism has been defended with that they try to reach mainly their target group and therefore avoid mass-communication if possible. Other response approaches from marketing departments have been based on research saying that children are far more influenced by their parents and friends than of TV commercials and other advertisement. (Armstrong, Kotler, Saundes, Wong, 2005)

Groups of consumers have acted against business to improve rights and powers of buyers, these groups of organised movements of citizens and government agencies are referred to as consumerism. Even though the market power lies with the consumer who can always refuse to buy a product many feel that they have too little information and want to impose laws and regulations to protect them from questionable products and marketing practises. In history many consumerism movements have led to consumer protection legalisation. (Armstrong, Kotler, Saundes, Wong, 2005)
Marketers argue over marketing ethics and responsibility and two opposing stand points can be found. One side argue that consumers hold individual responsibility and that marketers should concentrate on the demand side to solve marketing problems, in other words it is up to the consumer to know their own good. Others encourages consumer to be educated and demand what is good for them and good for society. Naturally the middle way is that marketing executives use good judgement and the same ought to be expected of consumers. This can cause conflicts since the market itself is amoral, a moral system could therefore not be relying on the mechanism of the market. Sometimes organisations must act in ways that goes against maximization of profits or they will have to expect social or government control. To find a good balance companies should exercise good judgement and make decisions based not only on profits but also on consequences to the society. On the other side organisations must also educate consumers and provide them with information so that they can make their own decisions and intelligent judgements. Government regulations are needed then balance is not achieved and then consumers are unlikely to help themselves. (p 30-32, Davidson, 2002)

2.2.4 Designing and Marketing from a Gender Perspective

The design process does not only take gender in perspective from an aesthetical perspective but also from a performance and preference link between product/customer and management. Gender does influence people’s responses to what is created, a preference. Performance can relate to a range of activities including product development, innovation and organisational content. Managers will influence design and marketing values with their own personal values and preferences. Influences of gender can impact both performance and preference elements. (p. 198, Moss, 2009)

Preference elements impact people’s reactions to design but can also extend to peoples professional competence and interaction with others. Many organisations become homogenous because individuals are attracted to companies where they think they fit in and feel comfortable. Since there is a correlation between recruitment of employees and type of design and marketing, there is also a “similarity-attraction” that will influence the kind of products and advertising that is produced. For example, an organisation that has a management team mainly consisting of men will most likely recruit other men and these men if they are designers and marketing managers will be inclined to produce and design brands that have a masculine aesthetic. This might affect the company’s congruity with female customers. (p198-199, Moss, 2009) Congruence means that two parts are in agreement or in harmony. (oxforddictionaries.com, 2011)
Congruity between management and customer have many benefits and therefore also many negatives if not found. The benefits of congruity are too important for any organisations to ignore. The congruity principal inspires search of values and links between performance and preference that ensures that marketing values match those of the targeted market. (p.199- Moss, 2009)

2.2.5 Fashion and Social Factors

In the book *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, author Diana Crane describes the historical development of social classes, gender and identity in clothing. In this book clothing is described as one of the most important markers of social status and gender. Depending of the era, different clothing has proven to be important to show social status and identity. Some clothing has been worn by many social classes and both genders, while others have a history of being appropriate only for a smaller group. (Crane, 2000)

Clothes can encourage new behaviour and be empowering for people to adopt different social identities. But clothes can also be a constraint in different meanings. For example did the dresses in the Victorian era literally constrain women to move around freely. Uniforms can also be a constraint in the way it imposes a social identity on the wearer. Today the social constraints of fashion are less restraint and more fluid than those of the past. In the class society people shared the same culture with others in their class but could still have values, goals and gender ideals that were shared with people outside their social class. In a fragmented society, class distinctions are important in the workplace but outside the workplace distinctions are made of much more than belongings to social class and gender. For example are lifestyle, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation meaningful to create self-image and presentation. (Crane, 2000)

Members of the upper class have always tried to differentiate themselves from the other social classes today we also see that the young seek to differentiate themselves from the older population. In the new age graded culture most strong identities through clothing appears among the young and other minorities, such as different race and sexuality members that view themselves as exceptions to the dominant culture. (Crane, 2000)

Research by Crane in gender clothing and social identity was performed by letting women look at fashion press. However, it was hard to generalize the findings since the fashion photographs incorporated clothes into complex surroundings often overshadowing the clothes themselves. Seeing clothes in unfamiliar context might make the women more likely to reject the identities that were projected with them compared with if
they were seen by their own in a fashion store. This raises concerns about to what extent images and text in media affect the audience. (Crane, 2000)

2.3 Consumer Behaviour

2.3.1 Consumer Relationships

Satisfying consumer needs is not getting any easier, expectations are only getting higher and many companies find it hard to meet their consumer’s needs. Consumers demand for excellence service and products grows higher with the development of specific services and products developed to fit special needs. Failure from some companies to meet the growing expectations gives new companies opportunities to enter the market and fill the space. Customer relationship and concern for customer satisfaction was for many years neglected but in a buyers market customer can choose from a wide range of products and services. And companies can loose customers just as quickly. Consumers are becoming more educated, challenging and their expectations are constantly raised. (p, 465-466, Armstrong, Kotler, Saundes,Wong, 2005)

2.3.2 Consumer Attitudes

A variety of factors influence the consumer purchase decisions, the attitudes towards a particular product or a brand are powerful determiners of a buying decision. Consumers will buy products that they find attractive or useful and will avoid purchasing products that are considered useless or unattractive. People’s attitudes reflect their evaluation of the world around them; the attitudes towards a brand are based on their thoughts, expectations and feelings. Attitudes towards an object can be abstract such as materialism or overconsumption. Attitudes can also be concrete such as an attitude towards a specific brand, but attitudes can also be directed towards individuals or categories. Some define attitudes as always directed towards an object; in contrast to for example moods which have a more diffuse direction. (p 112-133, Fennis,Stroebe, 2010)

Beliefs about an attitude towards an object are based on information that has previously been gathered about the object. The information can derive from personal experience or through reading or hearing about it from friends. Direct experience often results in more information about the object than indirect experience. Attitudes based on direct experience are normally held with greater confidence and are more accessible in memory
than attitudes coming from an indirect experience. An attitude towards an activity or object also reflects the expectations of enjoyment of an activity or object. Then expectations prove to be consistent with the actual experience the better the attitude will predict the behaviour. This link emphasizes the impact of direct experience towards the importance of an attitude and behaviour. (p120-121, Fennis, Stroebe, 2010)

Another factor that can have importance in determining the impact of direct and indirect experience is the trustworthiness of the source of the information. Many people tend to distrust messages and information that are distributed through advertisement. Their own experience is perceived as more trustworthy and opinions of influential people can be seen as more trustworthy than those portrayed by the company directly. To form an attitude individuals often rely on own experience or shared cultural beliefs. Stereotypes are common in forming an attitude, for example can country of origin influence the consumers attitude towards the product based on stereotypic assumptions of that area. (p 123, Fennis, Stroebe, 2010)

The importance of an attitude can vary with the level of interest. Attitude toward an issue that is more important to the individuals shows stronger attitudes than attitudes towards an issue they hold less interesting. Self-interest also shows relevance to the commitment of an attitude, if it holds a personal interest the attitude will also be of more importance. Stronger attitudes are more stable than unimportant attitudes and are more likely to lead to behaviour and are more resistance of social behaviour. (p 142, Fennis, Stroebe, 2010)

2.3.3 Attitude-Behaviour Relationship

Human behaviour is considered guided by social attitudes. But attitudes and actual behaviour do not always correspond. The principle of compatibility has been important in establishing when attitudes are related to behaviour, in contrast to establishing whether they are related at all. An attitude or prejudice towards a group of people or a culture, for example Asians might indicate that people will not shop in their local grocery shop that is owned by Asians. But if the shop is open longer hours and offers fresher fruit at a lower price people might overcome their prejudice. According to the principle of compatibility measures of an attitude will only be related to measures of behaviour if both are assessed at the same level of generality. A specific action is at all times performed in respect to a given target, in a given context and at a given point of time. Almost al behaviours are influenced by situational factors as well as attitudes. (p196-198, Fennis & Stroebe, 2010)


2.3.4 Social Media as Consumer Behaviour

The new era of social media communication have changed the relationships between companies and consumers. One way communication does no longer work for companies since consumers have been given a stronger voice. Consumer voices are heard all over in the social media, in blogs, Facebook, YouTube and other social media outlets. Social media also affect the way companies should do business; if they do not pay attention they could easily risk losing customers. Most prominent is the fact that the customer has been given a bigger influence. Social media have given consumers an easier way to react to companies’ behaviour online. The anonymity and safety provided by the social media has given the consumer an outlet to react that was previously not available. Social media let the consumers feel more confident in expressing their true opinions about the brands and organisations they interact with. Researching companies online before making a purchase is also becoming more common, comments made by other consumers are found more trustworthy than traditional advertisement. Social media can be very damaging for companies if their space is filled with negative information and will contribute to loss of potential consumers. (Sem-group.net, 2011)

2.4 Theoretical Summary

In this chapter theoretical findings have been presented in the subjects of gender, including gender roles, gender attitudes and gender awareness and practising. In the subject area of marketing, theories regarding children and marketing were introduced, the aspect of advertising as a contributor to enforcing stereotypes was also examined and the history of marketing legislation to protect consumers from businesses amoral practising was told.

Theories on designing and marketing from a gender perspective was presented and research in the field of fashion and social factors were shown.

Finally theories in consumer behaviour were presented, with the attention to consumer relationships, consumer attitudes and behaviour and the new subject area of social media as consumer behaviour.
3. Method

In this chapter a discussion regarding chosen method are presented. Data collection and selection methods are looked upon as well as criticisms of the study.

3.1 Choice of Method

Inductive and abductive approaches represent two different research philosophies; relevant conclusions can be drawn from both methodologies. An inductive approach base the assumptions on empirical data which the researcher then creates theories and models from based on observations of reality. If a researcher instead uses existing theories and investigate them empirical with different research methods an abductive approach has been used. (Erikson & Widersheim, 1997)

This study is made from an abductive approach. I have based the empirical research on existing theories and will compare my own observations and research results with the theories to come to conclusions. The research consists of qualitative interviews, observations and a smaller inquiry.

3.2 Data Generation

3.2.1 Theoretical Data Generation

For the theoretical part of this study I have used secondary data, from printed literature, articles and data online.

I started by searching in libraries and databases on gender and fashion, gender marketing, gender design, children and fashion, children and gender, fashion consumer behaviour and social media as consumer behaviour. Firstly printed literature from Gothenburg University Library and Gothenburg City Library was researched and to complement the printed literature, articles from relevant databases was searched. The relevant literature was found in both economic/marketing sections but also from other section such as sociology and pedagogy.
3.2.2 Empirical Data Generation

To choose relevant fashion companies firstly previous research in the subject was considered. The problem background and statement also indicated that the problem was most current in the bigger retail chains of children’s clothes in Sweden. A quick search on the internet confirmed that H&M, KappAhl and Lindex were the biggest retail chains that offered children’s clothes on the Swedish market. To complement the bigger chains one medium sized fashion company that specialises in children’s wear, Polarn o. Pyret and a smaller children’s designer and retailer Villervalla was selected. The reason behind contacting the smaller to medium sized operators was to see if any conclusion could be drawn behind the size of the company and the research questions.

Of the contacted companies three out of five were willing to participate in the study. The three companies were; Lindex, KappAhl and Polarn o. Pyret. H&M declined with the response that they did not have time to help students. Villervalla never responded even though they were contacted at several times.

Lindex was an obvious choice since they had been mentioned in the media discussions that was one of the reasons behind the choice of research questions. KappAhl was also mentioned in the media debate in reference to gender specific clothing and were chosen on the basis that they are an important actor on the Swedish child clothes market. Polarn o. Pyret was chosen for the size of the company as presented earlier but also for the reason that they have a clear profile when it comes to design and marketing of children’s clothes and that they would be an interesting comparison to Lindex and KappAhl. The fact that Lindex and KappAhl both have their headquarters in Gothenburg helped with the performance of the interviews.

The qualitative interviews have been made with the Design and Purchasing managers for the children’s collection. I first contacted the headquarters there I told my subject for the thesis and in all three companies I was directed to the Design or Purchase manager for children’s clothes.

Data collection by observations can be done by different types of direct observation. It is important not to influence the observation content in any way. The traditional approach is to make a clear separation between the observer and the object. The observation is then done with a low or non existent interaction. By low interaction it is reasonable to believe that the behaviour of the observations is close to the natural and normal behaviour. Observations can be structured or unstructured, advantages with unstructured observations is that they can be adapted to the situation. In a structured observation only the predefined objects and behaviours are observed. (Skärvad,Lundahl, 2009)
I decided to use observations as data collection to identify design and communication of the current collections of children’s clothes from the selected fashion companies. The observations were done with no interaction and I did not talk to any shop assistance or in any other way interact with the objects. The observations were structured and similar objects were observed in the different shops.

I decided to use an internet inquiry to collect data from customers. The survey was posted on Facebook and answered anonymously by parents and non parents. The collection of consumer data through social media was considered a natural choice since the problem background had indicated that social media was a good way to reach many customers.

### 3.3 Research Methods

The empirical research was done from qualitative and quantitative methods.

The two biggest research methods within behavioural science are quantitative and qualitative methods. Both these methods has as a goal to create a better understanding of how surroundings, individuals, groups and institutions act and influence with each other. (Holme, Solvang, 1991)

#### 3.3.1 Quantitative Research

The results that are derived from a quantitative study are considered measureable and easy to present in the form of numbers and statistics. The purpose is to make generalisations based on the result of the research. The quantitative method is formalised and structured and researches the subject from a broad perspective. Quantitative research is controlled by the person that conducts the survey and the statistic methods have a central part in the analyses. (Holme, Solvang, 1991)

I decided to use a quantitative method to collect data from customers since it would allow me to make generalisations on customer’s behaviour and present statistical results which suited the research question.
In the construction of the inquiry relevant literature was considered and some questions were formed in scales so that attitudes and opinions could be measured. The inquiry was constructed by a free website called Surveymonkey.se and posted on Facebook and sent by email with direct link to the website. This web tool simplified the construction of the survey and was a helpful tool in analysing the results with cross referencing and other analytic tools.

The inquiry on Facebook and online was available to around 600 people, it is however hard to establish if all of these 600 people did visit Facebook during the 3 weeks the inquiry was available. The inquiry was mainly directed to parents which also excluded many of the 600. It was however, not solely answered by parents which gave the researcher the opportunity to compare results with parents and non-parents. The inquiry was available between April 27th and May 15th 2011. The Facebook link was shown to friends of the researcher but also but also friends of friends since it was shared and posted on to friends profiles.

3.3.2 Qualitative Research

In a qualitative research importance lay with interpreting data and the knowledge from an individual person. It is also important to notice details and to put the collected information in the right context considering peoples own behaviour and values. In qualitative research the perspective of those being studied is the point of direction. What they see as important and significant sets the orientation. A qualitative researcher wants to see the world through the respondent’s eyes and therefore seeks close involvement with the interviewee. In a qualitative research understanding of behaviour, values and beliefs are sought after in relevance to the context of the research. (Bryman, Bell, 2007)

This thesis concentrates on the qualitative research in meeting the purpose to identify the factors that influence a fashion companies design and communication of gender specific children’s clothes. In the purpose of identifying factors it was necessary to understand the respondent’s behaviours, values and beliefs in reference to children’s clothes and gender.

Semi structured interviews rely on an interview guide but the interviewer can respond and react to the answers given. The questions will have a similar wording in the different interviews but questions that are not included in the guide can also be asked. The interview process is flexible and offers the researcher the possibility to respond to which direction the interview takes. In comparison a structured interview is designed to find answers to a clear specified set of questions. A totally unstructured interview is set among a range of topics and the interviewee is allowed to respond freely. Unstructured interviews are very similar to a conversation. (Bryman, Bell, 2007)
The qualitative interviews were mainly done in a semi-structured approach which gave the researcher an opportunity to react to the answers given by the respondents which led to interesting interviews and results. The first qualitative interview took place at Lindex headquarter the 21th April with the Design and Buying Manager of children’s clothes. The respondent had set a whole hour aside which encouraged follow up questions and time for reflections. The second qualitative interview was done by email with the Design Manager of Polarn o. Pyret and reactions to answers and follow ups was done by email which led to a more structured interview with less opportunity to react to the answers given. The answers were however clear and no questions had been misunderstood which gave a satisfying result of the interview. The third interview was done the 12th of May with the Design and Purchasing Manager for children’s clothes for KappAhl at their headquarter in Mölndal. The interviewee had set aside 45 minutes that was sufficient in answering the questions and also allowed some time for follow up questions.

3.4 Method Discussion

3.4.1 Validity

Validity refers to the relevance and assurance of the measuring tool used and whether it really measures the qualities that is attended. (Lekwall, Wahlbin, 2001)

Then it comes to the theoretical references I have worked with well-known literature in the relevant subject areas which gives a high validity. I could have missed some literature in my data search which might affect the validity of the theory negatively. By complementing the printed literature with articles from scientific databases I have tried to race the level of validity.

In my choice of research methods I decided to use qualitative and quantitative methods. To avoid miscommunications both the quantitative and qualitative research questions were read by friends and family before use and some minor changes was made to the questionnaire and to the interview guide. Literature in the field of how to create a good survey was also read and considered. After the qualitative interviews I realised that some questions could have been asked differently to gain a better result. In the qualitative interviews that was made in persons it was easy to complement the questions with a follow up question if the full meaning of the question was not understood. In the
qualitative interview that was made by email this was missed and might have led to a lower validity compared to the other interviews.

3.4.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the measure tools capacity to resist influence of different circumstances in the interview situation. This meaning that another researcher should come to the same conclusions given the same research method and be able to draw the same conclusions. Factors that can lead to low reliability can be stress, tiredness, uncleanness or a bad interview environment. (Lekvall, Wahlbin, 2011)

On both qualitative interviews made in person with Lindex and KappAhl the environment was relaxed and the respondents seemed comfortable and answered with enthusiasm to all questions which should give a good credibility. The second qualitative interview with Polarn o. Pyret was done by email, because of time strains and physical distance. The respondent was situated in Stockholm and the researcher was therefore not able to have a face to face interview. This probably affected the reliability of the interview even though the respondent said no questions were hard to understand the level of assurance would have been higher if explained in person. Also the lack of follow up questions lead to shorter and less explanatory answers which could affect the reliability negatively.

The survey results could have been somewhat different if the researcher had another background and different friends on Facebook, which affects the reliability of the survey. The fact that the survey was spread to friends of friends did however increase the reliability level.

The reliability of the observations is dependent on exact day, time and place. Should another researcher have visited the same stores the same day the results should have been equal since no interactions was made by the observer. This gives the observations of the fashion stores a high reliability. However, observations of ads in newspapers were dependent on the researcher’s observations skills and some ads could have been missed giving the observations of advertising lower reliability.

3.4.3 Method and Source Criticism

Some literatures that have been used in this study have an older publishing date, mainly in the method chapter and history description. Literature that have been used in the main
subject areas such as gender, consumer behaviour, design and marketing ethics have been more up to date. In some subject areas I have tried to complement the literature with newer articles from relevant databases. The reason behind the use of some older literature is lack of relevant new literature. In the area of fashion, children and gender very few books and articles have been found which encourages further studies in the subject and enforces the relevance of this study.

Of course a bigger customer inquiry would have given the survey a more reliable result. I do however believe that the inquiry meet the intended attentions and therefore deserved a place in the empiric research.

Criticism can also be given to the one qualitative interview that was done by email; unfortunately no time was given for a phone or in life interview which led to shorter and less explanatory answers.

The choice of research companies can have affected the results, in a perfect world all fashion companies that designs and communicate children’s clothes should have been interviewed. I do however believe that the empirical findings from the three fashion companies were sufficient for the frame of this study.

3.5 Method Summery

In this chapter the research methods and choices have been presented and discussed. The research is done from an abductive approach, using both theoretical and empirical data. The research method that was chosen was both quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative research has been performed through semi structured interviews with employees at three fashion companies of children’s clothes and observations of the design and communication of their assortments have been done with a structured observation format with no interaction. The quantitative research was done through a survey on Facebook and answered by both parents and non parents.

Finally validity and reliability of the study was evaluated and criticism of the method and sources discussed.
4. Empirical

In the empirical chapter the research companies will be presented and the results from the observations and interviews from each company. Finally the results from the consumer survey will be presented.

4.1 Lindex

Lindex was founded 1954 in Alingsås, Sweden and have today over 400 stores in the Nordic countries, Russia, The Baltic’s, Central Europe and the Middle East. Lindex business vision is to offer fashion conscious women inspiring and affordable fashion. Their assortment consists of different collections within ladies fashion, underwear, children’s clothes and cosmetics. Lindex have around thirty designers and have during the last years worked intensely with raising their fashion level. Lindex have also launched an online shop and both women’s and children’s wear can be found in their web shop since 2007. (lindex.com, 2011) In 2010 Lindex had a turnover of 578,7 million Euros (stockmanngroup.fi).

4.1.1 Lindex Children’s Fashion

Lindex have divided their children’s collection into baby, boys, girls and a few other more specified collections such as Bamse (a cartoon figure), Organic and Heart quake. The collections are also divided in sizes from, baby (50-86), 86-122 and 128-170 cl\(^1\). Lindex are one of the biggest retailers of children’s clothes in Sweden. (lindex.com, 2011)

Figure 2: Lindex advertisement online (lindex.com, 2011)

\(^{1}\) cl= height code unit for children’s clothes based on centimetres.
In the past, Lindex have been mentioned in the press at several occasions regarding their design and marketing of children’s clothing. In 2003 they were getting a lot of attention in the press because of a bra for young girls. Consumers responded with the opinion that kids should be allowed to be children and not small grown ups. (stockholmsfolket.se) In the beginning of 2011 an upset customer started a Facebook link regarding the sizes of Lindex children’s wear. This started a discussion regarding the differences in sizes of boys and girls clothes. The author of the link had visited a Lindex shop and was surprised that the difference between girls and boys garments was so big. A kid that had 110 in a boy size needed a 122 in a girl’s size. When she asked the shopping assistant the answer was that boys play around more and therefore needed more comfortable and loose clothing. (stockholmsfolket.se, 2011)

The shopping assistant had answered on her own behalf, Lindex PR office later came with a more political correct version. The reason behind the different sizes for boys and girls are that it is what the market demands, according to the press office. They also stated that Lindex offers different collection there the fit and shape varies depending on the material and the trend level. (stockholmsfolket.se, 2011)

### 4.1.2 Observations of Lindex

Observations of design and communication of children’s clothes from Lindex have been made during April 2011 in Gothenburg. In the observations both actual designs of the garments and the communication material, online and in newspapers have been observed.

In the Lindex shops it was very clear where the section for boys and the section for girls were located. It was possible even from a distance to see which sections belonged to which sex since the colours was distinctively different. The female sections had mainly the colours pink, red and purple with many flowers and other patterns. The boy’s section was mostly dominated by the colours of blue, green, black and yellow. Boy’s garments often had sport references or had checked or striped patterns.
The communication material in the shop showed pictures of boys in the boy’s section and girls in the girl’s section. Very few showed pictures of boys and girls together.

On the internet the fronted collection was called “Right Now Fashion” and showed both boys and girls in summer/spring clothes. These pictures showed girls in pink dresses with flowers and boys in blue checked shirts and blue pants. A similar ad was also observed in Metro showing two girls from the “Right Now Fashion” collection.
4.1.3 Interview with Lindex

**Introduction of the Respondent and Work Group**
Ann-Christine Bergstrand is the Design and Buying Manager of Lindex Children’s wear. Ann-Christine has worked for Lindex 12 years and as responsible for the children’s department for 6 years.

The work group consists of designers, buyers, buyer assistants, controllers and pattern makers. Lectures, trend watches, books and everyday life is the inspiration of each new season. All category designers first set the look for the season, rat the moment they are working on s/s 12 and this is done for all three categories. Later the children’s work group discusses which design ideas should be given the most space and other factors that are important especially for the children’s collection.

Ann-Christine takes part in the management team meetings and any long terms directions of the children clothes design is discussed here. The responsibility of the design for each season is Ann-Christines. Any opinions from the marketing department is presented in the managing group but no marketing employee is represented in the children’s work group.

In the work group approximately 90 % have children and it is mainly female employees. Ann-Christine reflects on that many of the young girls that start soon get pregnant. There
is only one guy in the group, at most they have had three male employees. Ann-Christine explains that they employ designers that do not have children but much comes for free if they do. If they have children of their own they will be in the right environment, for example at nursery. They do not have to go on expensive inspiration trips to Tokyo.

**Gender**

All branding goes under Kids for Lindex, with no gender reference. This label was launched in 2006 after a discussion regarding unisex had surfaced in the media. Lindex first introduced a unisex collection the same year. Ann-Christine reflects over the fact that most customers like to see if the clothes are meant to be for boys or girls. Some people get upset when their baby is mistaken for the opposite sex and therefore try to emphasize the sex belonging with clothes.

Ann-Christine also thinks many people change when they become parents, and will not necessarily act the way they thought they would. For example regarding unisex, they might have had very strong opinions about not dressing their child in gender specific clothing but then mother in law comes with something that they can’t turn down. Also, Ann-Christine says almost all girls love pink by the age of 4 and it is hard as a parent to say no.

Lindex design for boys and girls but also have garments that are in a grey zone, these outfits leads to discussion where they should be placed in the stores. Today they are branded with big tags that say “all kids”’’ to be more noticeable. The thought is that these garments should hang between the boys and girls section but often they only hang for 14 days and after that the staff place them in either the girls or boys sections depending on personal references. Unfortunately, says Ann-Christine, they can’t control the process. The unisex garments also often cause irritation and confusion from the markets outside of Sweden since it is a very Swedish phenomenon. If they only designed for the Swedish market the unisex collection would probably be given more attention. The unisex collections target baby up to 6 year olds, these garments can be a part of another collection or sometimes stand by themselves. In general they are launched three times a year and are more or less unisex. Some garments are unisex and others flirt with the other sex, for example an addition of a denim skirt.

Lindex have no official standpoint or positioning regarding gender specific children’s clothes. Most thoughts regarding gender come from the staff of the children’s department themselves. For example, in 2006/2007 they reflected on the need for a unisex collection after the discussions in media. Ann-Christine says she always loved Barbie dolls then she was a girl and always thought it was sad that her own daughter didn’t like them at all. But she also felt that Lindex had a responsibility to help out in the debate that had started.
Marketing/Ethics/Design
Lindex try to mix up the gender roles, for example, Ann-Christine says, they will make a skeleton pajama in pink but unfortunately it will not sell and therefore probably not be done again. They will also put typical boy prints on a girl garment and the other way around. Pink works on a boy outfit as long as the prints are boyish, it can’t have flowers on it. Animals are very interesting, since they are closely connected with gender. Butterflies and cats are only for girls, wolfs, dogs and spiders only for boys. Owls and maybe giraffes can be unisex. These ideas about gender roles is not dictated by Lindex, but influenced by the society, according to Ann-Christine. The designers are free to come up with their own designs. Ann-Christine also reflects on the thought if it is up to them to accept these gender roles or strive for difference. In her opinion, it is not as important as equal pay for men and women; there are more important things to fight about than if it the clothes are blue or pink.

Regarding the discussion in media around different sizes of their boy and girl garments Ann-Christine explains that they are working on aligning the sizes for both genders. The work had already begun before the debate in media but unfortunately since they are a big organization cross controls are not always so easy. They had tried to oversee the process but the grading was wrong. It can sometimes be a matter of quality and production why two garments are different in size. When media comes in they often compare apples with pears, it is a lot of stretch in girl outfits, right or wrong, while the boy outfits often are more baggy. Lindex try to do more fitted garments for boys but they will only sell in some areas, mainly big towns like Stockholm there the trend level is higher. These garments might not be so play friendly so mothers prefer to buy the baggier clothes. Ann-Christine thinks it is good that media acknowledge these things.

When designing at Lindex a good colour sense is important and a good feel. The designers are not controlled by sales statistics and are free to do their own designs within the current trends. Ann-Christine says she employed a designer that had done a lot of unisex clothing which they thought were interesting, but when she started at Lindex she couldn’t express her own thoughts as much anymore and her design got influenced by the bigger organization.

The trends from adult fashion often influence the children’s collection. This season it is very pink in the girl assortments, which Ann-Christine explains as a current trend. But sometimes the base of a collection can be a specific expression, like navy or a cartoon figure. A comparison with a smaller fashion company is that they might build their whole collection around one expression while Lindex have multiple. Some adult trends can be more expressive in the children’s collection, for example, colours and prints can be
bolder. Some trends from the women’s collection might not be fit for children and they will therefore turn them down. Lindex try to have garments that attract many people and they try to be as broad as possible. They might do “mini adult” designs and the opposite. The fact that the current children’s collection is very similar to the adult collection Ann-Christine describes as important to take advantage of the current trends. Girls have a very romantic look this season, with flowers and dresses inspired by the women collection and for the boys it is a lot of checked shirts which have been a trend on the adult male side for a while. The girl clothes are trendier since they have a bigger turnaround; it is the same as for adults. Women and girls shop a lot more clothes than men and boys.

Discussion regarding gender specific clothing Ann-Christine feels often comes from parents that have children in the ages of 2-3 years old, not very often from parents with children at school. She says she gets the feeling that the parents of small children sometimes live in their own world and forget things like they have to do garments after fit and age. They could of course do the same clothes for all kids but they would not fit them so well. For example, they can not make a body for children over the age of 2 since the design will not work accordingly.

Lindex target group is mothers, but they also flirt with the children. The reason they focus on mothers is that they are a female company. Fathers are also welcome but since they do not have men’s wear it is more natural that the mothers will visit them. Ann-Christine also thinks it is mothers that find it most fun to shop, not only children’s clothes but in general. They will also invite the grandparents but they are not the primarily target group.

Lindex marketing campaigns for children’s wear is mainly folders that are sent home to club members or handed out in the shops. Sometimes they will use direct marketing to contact new potential customers. They have very few ads for children; most marketing money is spent on the women collection. They also use banner and online advertisement. The reason most of the budget is used for women’s clothes is that adult clothes are bought out of a more irrational needs. Women are much more unfaithful to a fashion brand, they shop around more for clothes for themselves. Children’s clothes is often bought for a rational need, maybe the trousers are to short or broken and they need a new pair. Customers of children’s clothes are more faithful and the parents will return when the old pair needs replacing.

**Consumer Influence**

Lindex has an information department that makes sure everything that is written about Lindex in the media is published on their intranet. Ann-Christine says she do not follow everything but will be aware if it is anything of importance. They also have customer service that will forward feedback directly from customers. Most common feedback is
regarding the quality and colours of the garments. Some parents contact them in reference to gender specific clothing and explain that they will buy clothes for their girls from the boys section and that their sales figures therefore will be misleading. Ann-Christine says that she think this group of customers that are very controversial have the potential to influence the assortment by purchasing from the unisex collection. This way they will support unisex clothing.

Most feedback is positive, much that is written on blogs are actually good for Lindex. It can be recommendations on clothes they have bought and there to find it. They also receive feedback from the shops every quarter, which is a good opportunity to catch up on things that is not presented in the sales figures. For example if there is demand for more unisex clothing. The children clothes stands for the biggest sales online. The reason behind that, Ann-Christine thinks, is that size is not as important for children and most parents buy a bigger size for children to grow into. It is also easier to show the children clothes online instead of dragging them into a shop.

Regarding demand for unisex clothing Ann-Christine believes the hype was some years ago and have diminished today. The trend today goes towards more boyish and girlish designs. The peak of unisex was around three years ago together with a retro trend in general, says Ann-Christine. Regarding future trends in the children’s clothing market Ann-Christine thinks that only a small group will persist with unisex clothing for children. She believes the current trend with more specific boys and girl’s clothes will continue. She also reflects on the fact that too much gender equality can lead to reverse behavior from the child and also acknowledge the fact that boys today have a bigger interest in fashion and cosmetics then before which she thinks is fun. She would like to see more variety in garments for boys in the future. Ann-Christine does not think the same kind of design for boys and girls are the way forward, she believes in differentiation.

4.2 Polarn o. Pyret

The current company got its name in 1976, but was actually founded in 1909 in Sweden selling contraceptive’s and child commodities. In the 1970’s the business started to concentrate on child clothes and developed their own designs. P&P’s (Polarn o. Pyret) signature look was the stripy garments in many colours. Already in their first collections the striped look was presented in red, blue, green, and brown. A very important aspect of the design was functionality, unisex, quality and natural materials. The design and look of P&P’s garments represented the political time era of the 1970’s, soon collections for men and women were also launched and unisex translated into unifamily. After some rocky
years P&P are since 2000 a part of RNB Retail and Brands and have reinvented their concept, but the core values are still quality and functionality. P&P have 112 stores; some operating under franchise agreements, 60 are located in Sweden and the rest in the other Nordic countries, The Baltics, UK, Ireland and USA. (polarnopyret.se, 2011) P&P had in 2010 a turnover of 435 million SEK. (allabolag.se, 2011)

4.2.1 Polarn o. Pyret Children’s Fashion

P&P offers children’s clothes in the sizes of 0-12 years and a mother’s collection. The children’s wear is divided into assortments of baby 0-6 months, 6 months-2 years, 2-7 years and 7-12 years. The garments are divided into categories such as, outdoor clothes, underwear, long sleeves etc. No distinction is made between boys and girls clothing.

Figure 7.Polarn o. Pyret online (polarnopyret.se, 2011)

Polarn o Pyret communication strategy is focused around letting children be children. In an advertisement promotion from January 2011 children in different coloured clothes are seen playing around in a playground. Their communication manager says in an interview that besides focusing on functionality they want to show that P&P believe in making garment that allows children to be just children. (dagensmedia.se, 2011)
4.2.2 Polarn o. Pyret Observations

Observations were made in the Gothenburg area, during April 2011. During the observations garments and communication in store and online have been observed. The first that was noticed, from a distance, before entering the shops was bright colours through the shop windows. When entering the store no clear distinction between boys and girls section was noticed.

![Shop Window, Polarn o. Pyret, Kungsmässan, Kungsbacka, observations 16th April](image)

The garments were divided into different themes and sizes and some parts of the shop were dedicated to baby clothes and others to themes such as a “party” and a more traditional classic look. Few posters was shown in the shops, instead many mannequins was wearing the garments and showed different combinations of clothes and colours. In the baby section the colours were mainly bright colours with different prints. No clear distinction was made between girls and boys even though the dresses in the ages of 2-7 often were pink or red and many of the boy mannequins were wearing jeans.
Online the Eco collection was fronted on the first page, showing new garments in different colours. Other topics were happy prints and Easter clothes in yellow. No print ads in daily newspapers were found during the observations.
4.2.3 Polarn o. Pyret Interview

Introduction of the Respondent and Work Group
Karina Lundell is the Design Manager at Polarn o. Pyret. She has worked for the company for 12 years, the last 5 years as Design Manager.

The work group consists of mainly women, particularly in the design team; approximately 75% have children of their own. They create new collections by building up themes or periods that set the direction for colours and graphics. After each theme has been set they build the collection after need for new products. What kind of trousers is needed and how the sweaters should look like etc. They always start with the functionality and need for a garment. Also details and quality is very important. Child safety and functionality also influence the design and product development. P&P have high standards when it comes to wear and tear of the garment, according to Karina.

Gender
P&P stands for unisex clothing; the whole idea of unisex clothing is the foundation of the company since the start and is very prominent in the company culture. Children’s bodies are the same up until they become teenagers and they see no reason to make different fits and sizes for boys and girls. When P&P build their collections they always start with a unisex collection and thereafter ad some boys and girls garments. They always put the fact that they make clothes for children, not boys or girls, first.
P&P have a standpoint on gender and children’s clothing. It is that they make clothes for children. Not boys or girls and not to mini adults. Karina also emphasizes that it is up to the customer to choose what they like.

**Marketing/Ethics/Design**

Karina definitely believes that P&P have a social responsibility in the way they design and market children’s clothing. She hopes that they contribute to the general opinion about what boys and girls should wear with the fact that they makes clothes that see to children’s needs to play and feel good and feel unlimited in colours, shape and functions.

Karina believes that they get influenced by society’s expectations of traditional gender roles, a lot of people have opinions about what they do. In the 80’s and 90’s they went away from the core of the business and the unisex aspect was not as prominent during these years. The last five years they have again focused around unisex and Karina believes that it is an important core philosophy in the company, to let children be children.

P&P get their inspiration for children’s clothes from so many different things, their own children, the world around them, art, exhibitions, lectures and so many other things. Karina also thinks that the customers’ expectations and behaviour influence their design; they are very receptive for feedback from customers.

Karina says that she thinks children’s clothes design will get inspired by the adult fashion if they were following trends. Since they do not follow any trends they neither get influenced by adult trends.

P&P’s main target group is parents, children and other consumers buying presents. They do not do any marketing towards children and direct their advertisement primarily to the parents.

**Consumer Influence**

P&P selects feedback from their customers through customer service, their shops and through Facebook. Their customer is very engaged which Karina thinks is fantastic and they gather as much information as possible. They try to incorporate as much feedback as possible in their design process. The demand for unisex clothes goes up and down and is highest on the Swedish market, compared to the other markets they operate in. There is a bigger demand today, compared with 5 to 10 years ago from the Swedish consumer, according to Karina.
The new communication channels that have been possible through social media have made P&P’s communication with customers a lot easier and it is today faster to get feedback than before.

In the future Karina hopes that more markets shall appreciate and understand the value of non-gender specific clothing.

4.3 KappAhl

Kappahl have 360 stores and operate on the Nordic and Baltic markets. They have collections of women, men’s and children wear. Their own designers create all their collections and they sell in total around 60 million garments each year. KappAhl is registered on the Nasdaq OMX Stockholm and had during 2009/2010 a turnover of 5,1 milliard SEK. KappAhl’s business idea is to offer valuable fashion for many people. KappAhl is expanding their business and opening up new shops in new markets continuously. (kappahl.com, 2011)

4.3.1 KappAhl Children’s Fashion

KappAhl offers children’s wear in the assortment of baby (50-86 cl), girls/boys (86-128 cl) girls/boys (128-170cl). They also have a collection called vintage stories, which have the same look and name as one of their women’s collection, and a Kaxs collection with colourful clothes for both boys and girls. (kappahl.com, 2011)

Figure 12: Vintage stories online (kappahl.com, 2011)
Kaxs are functional garments with unisex sizes and fit. The collection is placed in between the girls and boys sections and has been designed for both girls and boys in mind. The colours shift with the fashion trends but are completely gender neutral according to a press release sent out by KappAhl during the discussion around sizes and children’s clothes in January 2011. In the same press release it is stated that it is the type of garment and the material that decides the actual size since it is hard to compare stretch leggings with a pair of baggy denim trousers. (kappahl.com, 2011)

Figure 13: Kaxs collection (kappahl.com, 2011)

KappAhl state that they are fully aware that people have many different opinions regarding what type of clothing they choose for their children. They try to accommodate all by offering both unisex collections and collections that make differentiations between boys and girls depending on the current fashion trends. (kappahl.com, 2011)

**4.3.2 KappAhl Observations**

Observations were made at KappAhl in Gothenburg during April and May 2011. When entering the children’s department at KappAhl first impressions were many bright colours and quite mixed garments with no clear division between boys and girls clothes. Entering further into the floor it was a clear sections for either boys or girls clothes.
In the girls section, many garments had flower prints and bright colours in pink, yellow, turquoise and purple. The mannequins were dressed in both skirts and trousers. In the underwear section for girls, pink was the dominant colour. For older girls, sizes 128-170 cm pink was also the most dominant colour together with black.
In the boys section the prints were checked or with action and cartoon hero’s. Colours were mainly blue, green, yellow, black, kaki and red.

The baby selection showed a more natural colour scheme with beige, white and purple garments.

The webpage fronted vintage stories with pictures of boys and girls in clothes with pail colours and retro look. An ad in the Gothenburg Post showed girls dressed in bright colours and flower patterns.
4.3.3 KappAhl Interview

Introduction of the Respondent and Work Group
Sofia Wallin is the Design and Purchase Manager of KappAhl's children’s clothes; she is newly appointed and previously worked as Collection Manager for children’s clothes. She has worked for KappAhl since 2006.

The team consists of 35 designers, buyers, buyer assistants, controllers and pattern makers. Approximately 25 are parents themselves and only one is male. Every unit has a complete competence, from drawing designs to negotiating orders. In setting the trend directions for the company they work together with both women’s and men’s departments and then decide which trends should be for children and which for women etc. They adopt the trends to fit each target group.

Gender
KappAhl have divided their collections into boys and girls but the primary differentiations are made between small children (86-128 cl) and older children (128-170 cl). Before 2006 KappAhl had a more prominent division between boys and girls clothing but they sensed that there was a new demand on the market, a new kind of buying behaviour, primarily for the smaller children. Before 2006 all designs were done from boys or girls specifically but when came the unisex trend that was very prominent and they reacted towards that trend. They relaunched a brand called Kax that is a unisex collection that focuses on play friendly, colourful every day clothes with focus on functionality. They work in colour spectrums and build the collection from the colour schemes. This is fairly different compared to how they work with other collection development. For example, they will make each sweater or trousers in five different colours and will not do any definition of what is for boys and what is for girls. If they guys want pink they can buy it, says Sofia. The inspiration for the Kax collection comes more from a society trend than a fashion trend. A trend that wants children to wear play friendly functional clothes so that they can move freely and see no difference between boys and girls, all children should be happy playful people. That is why they chosen happy colours. The Kax collection does not change as much as other trend collections, the colour scheme are time neutral. The garments hang between the boys and the girls department and Sofia says it is a constant demand. It is also a quite big part of their sales and very important to KappAhl.

KappAhl do not have a standpoint on gender roles and children’s clothing. Their general standpoint is that they are a fashion company that should offer a variety of clothes that
will fit many customers. They do not want to limit themselves in any directions. The customer is given a choice, that is very important, Sofia explains. They do not actively take a standpoint in a gender debate.

**Marketing/Ethics/Design**

Sofia does not believe they have a responsibility towards society in how they design and communicate children’s clothing. That is too big she says, instead she believes they have a responsibility in offering many customers products. KappAhl offer both unisex garments and clothes that are designed for boys or girls separately. Talking about social responsibility Sofia thinks code of conducts in production countries and to take an environmental responsibility is more relevant. For example, they now have a collection of garments made from 100% ecological cotton for children. Sofia do not believe that they have a responsibility in what children should wear, it is up to the parents to decide. They work after meeting the demand and work a lot after trends. They react after the demand and try to have a variation in their assortment and to make it simple and clear for the customer in their shops.

KappAhl have chosen to not have any army influenced or camouflage fashion, they do not have any real fur or any down since they do not want to be connected with that kind of products.

Sofia is asked over what is most important for KappAhl, meeting the customers demand or their own design philosophy and thinks that the two meet. But at the end of the day they are a commercial company and are of course driven by business results. Their design philosophy is to make fashion for many people, especially fashion forward people. They interpret trends and test trends and when decide which to go for. They always try to secure a balance, a certain percentage of base products and when some edgy clothes that the customer do not know that they want yet, a surprise. But Sofia assures that the unisex assortment would not be taken away even if the demand declines. In a comparison with their closest competition she thinks they have an advantage in always having a unisex assortment. Lindex have some collection but not a permanent assortment, H&M have their Logg products that are the closest they come to unisex even though they are still designed for boys and girls. This creates a position for KappAhl to always have a unisex assortment. P&P of course have a different take on this, Sofia explains, but then they are at a different price level and not necessary direct competition.

Sofia says that the unisex collection first was not at all popular outside the Swedish market but is actually growing. They will set the collection and then adjust the volume for the different markets. Sweden is such a significant part of the business, around 300 of 360 shops is situated in Sweden, so the design mainly aims for the Swedish consumer.
Even though she is not sure the garment is actually considered unisex in the other markets but since it is up to the customer to choose it really does not matter, in Sofia’s opinion. Today KappAhl have no web shop, it will be launched this autumn.

Sofia says that the children collection is influenced by the women’s collection, but there is fashion that is only for children such as the retro and unisex trend. That trend only applies to smaller children and baby and is a completely separate trend. Lately there has also been a trend in children’s wear to focus on functionality. Some adult trends they see if they can adapt to children. For example, the 70’s boho-chic trend with lots of flowers they have adopted to the children’s collection. But they always think very much of function and fit to make the garments playful and child adjusted, according to Sofia.

Sofia explains that their main target groups are mothers, aged 30-50 years old. They know from external research that it is the mothers that do most of the purchasing of children’s clothes but of course it is addressed to both parents. Most communication goes to their current customers, through the customer club. They also collaborate with a web site called alltförföäldrar.se (allforparents.se). Here parents actively can choose to apply for membership. They do some other marketing to parents through text messages and web but they are not big on social media yet, according to Sofia.

Sofia thinks it is important to state that KappAhl do no marketing directed towards children, it is not even legal. The reason they target mainly women is that the company is driven by women, she thinks.

**Consumer Influence**

Most customer feedback is collected directly from the shops. They also analyse a lot from the sales figures. It is possible to do a variety of analysis, anything from colours, quality etc. They also get some customer emails; it was a lot of response during January and the sizes of children’s clothing, both from customers and media. Other feedback is about prints or specific garments. But the whole size and gender discussion this January turned really big and many customers engaged and sent emails. Sofia thinks it is important to emphasize that a lot of people actually find it easy with the divisions between girls and boys collections, many people have very little time today so they make sure it is easy and clear. First age, then gender and many customers appreciate that it is easy to find. Those customers that engage are often those that want change.

Speaking about the media debate in January around sizes and children’s clothes, Sofia says that it went really fast from the first blog comment to national media. It only took a few days. They were watching the comments online and then it all happened very fast.
That is the effect of social media. But she thinks that all feedback is great and that they are proud of the statement they made. It is always good when people get involved, Sofia says.

KappAhl always try to adopt their collections to the customer feedback, if the feedback is relevant, that is. Sofia is the one that receives the feedback and decides which is most important to share with the rest of the department. They always make sure they do not loose their own design ideals but are positive to customer feedback in general.

Social media has definitely improved communication with customers today, both through Facebook and their own web page, but Sofia thinks it is only the beginning. So many new things are coming, four square, check in when entering a store etc. Today KappAhl already send text messages instead of emails to their customers.

Looking forward Sofia thinks that it is going to be a clearer separation between adult trends and children trends. The current trends for children have been very inspired by the adult collections. The trends that are coming, that they can see now, are not going to be able to be adopted for children. Especially the 90’s trend with suits does not work for children. The romantic wave that has been present this spring has been the same all the way from women down to baby. Sofia thinks it instead is going to be more specific children trends, probably a bit more naive and childish then before. For the older children Sofia thinks the teen fashion is going to grow, and be very distinctive for boys or girls. That is always the case when the children themselves take part in the buying process, according to Sofia. The unisex trend she believes will stay for young children and continue to sell at the same volume and demand as today.

4.4 Consumer Survey

4.4.1 Introduction to Survey

The consumer survey was done during almost 3 weeks, April 27th to May 15th, 2011 and answered by a link from Facebook to Survey Monkey by parents, expecting parents and non parents. The Survey was answered by 65 persons (74% female and 26 % male). Of the respondents 69 % were parents, 8 % were pregnant and 23 % were non parents. Of the parents 81 % had children under the age of 6.
28% of the parents had both boys and girls, 37% had boys and 35% girls.

4.4.2 Survey Results

Of all 65 respondents, 35% answered that they know exactly how they want children’s clothes to look like, 52% answered that they have an approximate opinion of what they like but can easily change their minds and 12% answered that they do not have a fixed opinion. Of the female respondents, 48% said that they know exactly what they like, while only 12% of the male respondents were sure of what they liked. 41% of the male respondents answered that they had no fixed idea on how children’s clothes should look like, compared to only 2% of the female respondents. Parents with children under the age of 6 also had a more exact opinion on how children’s clothes should look like compared to parents with children over the age of 6. (appendix 1)
5 % of the respondents think that children’s clothes should be divided into boys and girls categories, 29 % prefers unisex clothing for children and 62 % thinks a combination of unisex clothing and separately designed garments for boys and girls are the best. 5 % answered that none of the three options of how children’s clothes should look fitted them. Of the male respondents 12 % thought that children’s clothes should be divided into boys and girls categories while only 2 % of the female respondents had the same opinion. No difference was shown between parents and non parents, 7 % of both categories answered that they preferred specific clothes for girls and boys. None of the pregnant respondents shared this opinion. Parents answered in a bigger extent that they preferred unisex clothing (38%), than non parents (21%) and pregnant (17%) that instead preferred a combination of unisex and gender specific clothing. Parents with children under the age of 6 preferred unisex clothing in a bigger extent than parents with children over the age of 7. (appendix 1)

58 % of all respondents think that it is very important that there are non gender specific clothes in the children’s clothes stores, 22 % finds it fairly important and 20 % do not find it important. Female respondents found it very important 67 % in higher extent than the male respondents there only 35 % found it very important. Parents found it very important 67 % in a bigger extent than pregnant (50%) and non parents (47 %). No significant difference could be detected between parents with children in different ages. (appendix 1)

85 % of all respondents believe that the fashion companies have a social responsibility in how they design children’s clothes, 12 % do not believe so and 3 % do not know. 88% of all female respondents thought that the companies have a social responsibility compared with 76 % of the male respondents. 89 % of all parents said that fashion companies have a social responsibility, compared with 83% of the pregnant respondents and 71 % of non parents. (appendix 1)

In asked how they would react if dissatisfied with a purchase the respondents answered with a multiple choice question. The most common answer was that they would return the product and report the dissatisfaction to their friends. 15 % would report their dissatisfaction through blogs, Facebook or other social media.
How do you react if you are dissatisfied with a purchase? 
(multiple choice)

- I return the product: 74%
- I report my dissatisfaction of the product/store to the company: 25%
- I report my dissatisfaction of the product/store to my friends: 60%
- I choose not to shop in the same store again: 42%
- I report my dissatisfaction through blogs/facebook or other social media: 15%
- I contact the papers and ask them to notice the bad product/store: 0%

Figure 21: Reaction of dissatisfying purchase (appendix 1)

In asked what kind of research the respondents do before a purchase, the most common answer was looking for information on the internet and only returning to stores there they been satisfied before. Impulse buying came at third place, followed by checking with friends and checking a couple of stores before making a decision.

What kind of research do you do before a purchase? 
(multiple choice)

- None at all, I mainly do impulse buying: 36.90%
- I trust my previous purchases and only return to stores I've been pleased with: 38.50%
- I check at least a couple of stores before I make my purchase: 32.30%
- I check with friends and acquaintances if they have any tips?: 30.40%
- I look for information on internet: 38.50%
- Other: 4.60%

Figure 22: Research before a purchase (appendix 1)

In asked which sources that were considered trustworthy before a purchase, in a scale of 1-5, 1 being very trustworthy and 5 being not trustworthy at all the respondents found information from friends and acquaintances the most trustworthy source. The second
most trustworthy source was information from other consumers through blogs and Facebook etc. The least trustworthy was information from advertising campaigns.

![Bar chart showing trustworthiness of different information sources](image)

**Figure 23: Trustworthy information (appendix 1)**

### 4.5 Empirical Summery

In the empirical chapter the research results from qualitative interviews and observations of three fashion companies have been presented. The fashion companies were presented with a short historical background and special attention was given to their children’s fashion. First observations of the chosen companies stores were described, attention was given to the design of the garments, the store sections, in-store communication material as well as online communication and ads found in daily newspapers. The observations were done with attention to gender design and gender marketing communication. After the observations followed detailed interviews with the Design and/or Purchase Managers from the three companies. Both observations and interviews with the three fashion companies showed the diversity within the children’s clothes market and their gender approach.

Last but not least, the results from the consumer survey were presented. The results were displayed both in general figures and broken down to categories of parents, non parents and pregnant respondents. Comparisons with male and female respondents were also done as well as comparisons between parents with children in different ages.
5. Analysis

This chapter analyses and compares the theoretical and empirical data what have been collected in the previous chapters. It will also analysis the research model in relation to findings from the theoretical and empirical chapters.

5.1 Gender

5.1.1 Gender Awareness and Standpoint

The three interviewed fashion companies have different levels of knowledge and awareness of gender in relation to children’s clothes. Both Lindex and KappAhl refer to unisex collections when speaking about non gender specific clothing. Unisex is also referred to as only for children under the age of 6 and often connected with a retro style, by the two bigger fashion companies. P&P refers to letting children be children and about making clothes for children and not for boys or girls as a reference to how they work with gender and clothing. The different interpretations of non gender specific clothing by the researched companies also shows in their assortment. In KappAhl and Lindex the unisex collections are a small part of their total assortments placed in-between their boys and girls collection. At P&P there are no sections for boys or girls but instead they are divided into different themes such as party or classic.

It is suggested in the theoretical framework that different attitudes to gender equality can be both personal and structural oriented. In the empirical research it is shown in the Lindex case that personal attitudes and values are given a bigger space in companies with no official standpoint of gender and children’s clothes. The Purchasing and Buying Manager of children’s clothes says that they have no official standpoint and that the responsibility of gender related questions is left to the team members. She also shows her own values when referring to what she thinks her daughter should wear then speaking about Lindex children’s collection.

Structural factors such as social background, experience and education seems to by more or less similar comparing the three respondents. They are all female and have worked some years in their companies. The fact that all three respondents are Swedish could indicate that they would share a bigger support for gender equality compared to employees in less developed countries, according to the theoretical findings. Since the
respondents backgrounds are similar, meaning they share the same structural factors it is more likely that their different understanding and level of gender awareness are caused by other factors, such as personal values and company standpoints.

Only P&P have an official standpoint regarding gender and children’s clothes. It is that they make clothes for children, not boys or girls. Both Lindex and KappAhl say that they have no official standpoint. At Lindex most thoughts regarding gender comes directly from the staff. KappAhl says that it is important to make fashion that will fit many customers and therefore do not want to limit themselves in any directions.

Since KappAhl and Lindex refer to non gender specific clothing as unisex collections, synonymous with a retro look, it is important for them to state that they do not want to limit themselves to this design only, since they want to fit many customers. Since P&P’s understanding of non gender specific clothing is to let children be children, there standpoint is also wider and only state that they make clothes for children, not boys or girls.

5.1.2 Practising of Gender

Practising gender is often unintentional at organizations. It is also tied to the actual awareness of gender; some practicing can be intentional while others are unintentional. For the researched companies most practic ing are done intentional, for example, launching unisex collections, which KappAhl and Lindex have done, or having a unisex platform for all clothes such as P&P. For KappAhl and Lindex that have no official standpoint and have a somewhat more narro w perception on what non gender specific clothes are, the unintentional and non reflective practicing of gender can be suspected to be higher. For example, they are reflective with their gender positioning within their unisex collections but outside the specific collection they might not reflect of gender. To be reflective of gender is to consider opinions and follow through with actions. And to practice gender requires awareness and intention to a particular purpose. In the non unisex collections both Lindex and KappAhl have very specific gender attributes in their garments. This can of course be reflective and intentional, but the interpretation by the receiver can also be different than the company attended. Consumers that have a strong preference for non gender specific clothing might interpret the non unisex collections as the company standpoint on gender equality and not limit their attention to only the unisex collection.
5.2 Marketing, Ethics and Design

5.2.1 Design

Clothes are described in the theoretical framework as one of the most important markers of social status and gender. Lindex also described the need for identification of a newborn baby by dressing them in a gender specific garment. Hence there seem to be a need of identifying gender by the use of clothes. In the consumer survey 62% of the respondents answered that they think there should be a mix of both unisex clothing and specifically designed clothes for boys and girls on the market. KappAhl and P&P also expressed that they see a demand for both unisex and gender specific clothing. Neither the companies nor the majority of the customers that was asked in this research thinks that only unisex clothing is the best option. Again the meaning of non specific gender clothing or unisex clothing can have an impact in both the companies and the customer’s response. Since the unisex label for the bigger companies are described as a retro look, it is possible that some of the customers have the same reference.

The fashion companies was asked what influences their design of children’s clothes and if it was influenced by the adult fashion trends. In the historical background it was presented that two different ideologies had been observed. One that made children into little adults by dressing them in adult influenced clothing and another that promoted children to be just children and created unisex clothing that was colourful, loose fitting and non gender specific. The researched fashion companies had rather different answers. Lindex responded that their children’s collection often is built on trends for the women’s collection. They think it is important to take advantage of the current trends and that girls outfits are trendier than boys since women and girls shop much more clothes than boys. KappAhl had a similar approach and said that some trends are applicable to adapt from the adult collections to the child collections. Both Lindex and KappAhl assured that they would only use adult trends that were appropriate for children. KappAhl and Lindex also said that their unisex collection was less trend sensitive than their other collections and that the unisex collection is built around colours or prints. P&P says that their children’s clothes would be inspired by adult fashion if they were to follow trends. But since they do not follow trends their design inspiration comes from other things such as their own children and the world around them. In reference to the historical background it is clear that P&P belongs to the ideology that promotes children to be just children and the observations that was made also confirmed that their garments fit the description from the historical background with colourful, non gender specific clothing that is loose fitting. KappAhl and Lindex unisex collections also fit in to this description. However, their other children clothes collections are very much inspired by the adult trends. It was very
prominent by the observations that flowers and romantic dresses were central in the girls department and checked shirts and jeans in the boys department at both KappAhl and Lindex. This kind of look was described as this season adult trends by Lindex. The resemblance between the two companies’ collections was higher within the girls department indicating a higher trend level for girls’ clothes. In conclusion it can be said that both ideologies are present in the researched companies. Two companies even combine the two approaches to reach as many customers as possible. That implies that it is even possible to integrate the two ideologies. It is not a contradiction in terms of profitability since they are able to sell both unisex and mini adult clothing. It could however be one reason for the customer’s dissatisfaction since both KappAhl and Lindex have been mentioned and criticised in the media discussions, started by customers, and P&P have not.

Looking into the future, the predictions are quite different given from the researched companies. Lindex believes that it will be even more diverse than today moving further away from the unisex trend and instead towards more gender specific clothes. KappAhl predicts that the child collections will be more separate from the adult collections, with a more naïve and childish feeling and P&P hopes that more markets will appreciate the unisex clothing. It is by this not clear which direction the child clothes design is taking in reference to the different ideologies. Neither KappAhl or Lindex predict that the unisex trend will grow and are showing no indications towards extending their unisex platforms to their other collections. Judging by their current behaviour, confirmed by the observations, it is not likely that the unisex trend will be driven by the bigger fashion companies. If the smaller companies, such as P&P and the group of consumers that prefers unisex clothing have strong enough influence to shift this trend is left to see.

The congruency link between a company and their target group can be an advantage in the design and marketing of a product according to the theoretical framework. All three researched companies have a high congruency with their target group. All have a majority of women; around 70%-90% are parents in their workgroups and very few men, consistent with their proclaimed target groups that are mainly mothers for KappAhl and Lindex and for P&P parents. Because of the similarity of the work groups it is hard to conclude if any congruency advantages are found in either of the companies.

5.2.2 Ethics

In the theoretical framework it is described how consumers historically have formed groups, called consumerism, to protect them from questionable products and marketing practise which have led to consumer protecting legalisation. But there are grey zones that lie outside legislation but still touch subjects of moral and political correctness. The
theoretical framework suggests that companies as well as consumers should use good moral judgement to reach a middle way, avoiding conflicts. In the empirical studies both the fashion companies and the customers answered to the question if they think that the fashion companies hold a social responsibility in the way they design clothes for children. For the consumers the answer was a strong yes, with 85 % believing that they do. The answer from the fashion companies was a bit more diverted, P&P said a clear yes and hope that they contribute to the general opinion of what boys and girls should wear. Lindex answered that they felt a need to help out when the debate concerning gender and children’s clothes started around 2006, but also stated that they do not think it is up to them to change the stereotypic gender roles and find other discussion topics more important. KappAhl was very clear with that they think it is the customer’s choice and that they do not take an active standpoint in the gender debate. KappAhl also thinks other discussions are more important and brings up CSR (corporate social responsibility) and environmental issues. In conclusion the majority of the customers in the research believe that fashion companies have a social responsibility but only one of three researched companies think that they do. This confirms that there are a conflict of opinions between consumers and the fashion companies. But is there a conflict in being profitability and being political correct? Looking at P&P which have actually improved their results after reinventing their core based on unisex clothing five years ago, it would have to be said that if unisex stands for political correctness there is no conflict in being political correct and meeting the customers demand.

5.2.3 Marketing

Marketing to children under the age of 12 is not legal according to Swedish law, but it is hard to control. Advertising that target children can cause back lash if it come across as manipulative or aggressive, since parents can be very protective, according to theory None of the research companies do much marketing on their children’s collection. Lindex and KappAhl both stated that the child is an important influence on the parent in the buying process. This was mainly the case with the older children and that girls were more interested than boys of trends and fashion. In observations of fronted collections on the companies’ websites and in daily newspapers it is clear that both Lindex and KappAhl focus on their trendier collections. Lindex showed the “Right Now” collection both on their website and in print ads with clear influences from adult trends. KappAhl fronted their “Vintage Stories” online that have been influenced by their adult collection. KappAhl also had a print ad that was very similar to the Lindex ad in the daily newspaper. P&P fronted their eco collection on their website. None of the researched companies can be said to target children specifically but their communication of
children’s clothes shows their main focus. For Lindex and KappAhl it is clear that the focus is on the trendy garments that have been inspired by their adult collections.

Values and attitudes of stereotypic gender roles can be strengthened and reinforced by advertising. It is however hard to define how certain advertisement contributes to strengthen existing stereotypic conceptions on gender roles. In the case of Lindex and KappAhl there could be a risk that their mini adult collections strengthens the perception from consumers that already believe that these companies have a clear gender specific approach. Both companies choice of advertising shows which collections that are the most important for them and it is clear that is not their unisex collections. It is important to consider that observations were only done during one month of the year and therefore not valid as a general conclusion of the full year.

5.3 Consumer Behaviour

5.3.1 Company Perspective

Satisfying consumer needs and meeting the customer’s needs is getting harder in today’s competitive market. All three researched companies’ state that they take customer feed back seriously and that they have their customers demand as an important factor in their development of children’s clothes. The extent of how important the customers demand is considered is somewhat different between the companies. Lindex and KappAhl both emphasizes on the fact that they are business oriented and that demand plays a vital role when it comes to their development of collections. Lindex say’s that their designers are not directly driven by sales figures, but also that a garment that do not sell is taken out of the assortment. P&P also state they are driven by the consumer needs, especially needs for functionality. KappAhl say’s they are driven by demand of course but would not remove their unsex collection even if the demand was to decrease. Again the question whether customer demands, hence profitability and unisex clothing have to be a conflict is raised. The fact that Lindex not have a permanent collection of unisex clothing would indicate that it is not permanently demanded but P&P have mainly unisex clothing and find no conflict in meeting the demand. The fact that P&P have a smaller turnover, and therefore a smaller customer group, could be a factor that makes it easier for them to meet their demand. Lindex also suggested that since they are a bigger company they have a more diverse demand to satisfy from their customers and can not build their collections
around only one design idea. A conclusion is therefore that a smaller company easier can meet their customers demand since they can profile themselves around a specific design idea. Consequently P&P can meet the demand of their current customers with a focus around unisex clothing but would find it harder to do so if they were to grow and expand their customer base.

All three companies say that they are happy that the customers give them feedback; most feedback is concerning design or function of their garments. But some feedback is regarding gender related questions. Noticeable around the time the discussions on social media about gender are most prominent. Lindex say that some parents contact them to say that they will buy clothes for their girls in their boys section and therefore their sales figures should not be trusted. This group of controversial parents are often more likely to take contact and engage than others according to KappAhl.

Lindex also suggested that discussions regarding gender related clothing are most common from parents with very young children; under 2-3 years of age and that many people change their opinions about gender equality when they become parents. This hypothesis was later tested in the customer survey.

5.3.2 Consumer Perspective

In the consumer survey the relations between strong views on children’s clothes were measured by parents, non parents and pregnant respondents. Also parents with young children were compared to parents with older children. Parents found it very important that the stores offered non gender specific clothes for children to a bigger extent than non parents and pregnant. No significant difference could be detected between parents with children in different ages. However female respondents found it much more important than male. This indicates what both Lindex and KappAhl suggested that it is the mothers in most cases that do the shopping of children’s clothes. This is also strengthened by the theoretical framework that states that strong attitudes often are correlated to self interest and personal relevance. This is also coherent with the results since parents show stronger opinions than non parents.

It is also more likely that attitudes based on direct experience are held with greater confidence, according to the theory. In the case that the attitudes are proven consistent with the actual experience they can also be a tool to predict purchase behaviour. In the survey 48 % of the female respondent said that they know exactly what they like, while only 12 % of the male respondents were sure of what they liked. This strengthens the previous assumption that mothers do most of the purchasing of children’s clothes and also confirms that direct experience leads to stronger attitudes.
The survey also showed that most customers preferred a combination of both unisex and gender specific clothing. Parents showed a bigger preference for unisex clothing than non parents and male respondents preferred specific clothes for each gender in a bigger extent than female respondents. Indicating that unisex is most popular among female parents. In this research question parents with children under the age of 6 showed a bigger interest in unisex clothing than parents with older children that instead preferred a combination of unisex and gender specific clothing. This corresponds with Linde x assumption that unisex is more popular with parents with young children. However, no significant difference was seen between parents with children between 0-2 years and those who had children in the ages of 3-6 years.

In the theoretical framework it was also said that direct experience is a more trustworthy source of information than indirect. Indirect information distributed in the form of advertisement is often distrusted. This theory was proven to be accurate in the survey there the least trustworthy information was advertisement. Most trustworthy was information from friends and in second place information from other consumers through blogs and social media showing the significance of the new social network. In asked what kind of research what was done before a purchase, most consumers said they relayed on their previous experiences together with searching for information on the internet. This result indicates again that direct experience is an important source for purchase behaviour. The significance of internet and social media is also shown in the survey there consumers were asked how they respond if dissatisfied with a purchase. The most common answer was to return the product and let friends and acquaintances know about their dissatisfaction. But 15 % also said that they would report their dissatisfaction on blogs, Facebook or other social media. A relatively big number, especially since none of these consumers would report their discontent directly to the media. This confirms the theory that the anonymity and simplicity of social media makes it easier to react and show opinions and gives consumers a bigger voice and influence than before. The survey also support the theory that consumers today research companies online before making a purchase and that comments made by other consumers are found more trustworthy than traditional advertisement.

### 5.4 Research Model

In the research model four parameters was presented as a tool to identify the factors that are contributing to fashion companies influence of the customers and vice versa in connection with non gender specific children’s clothes. Some of these parameters have
been found to have high significance while others less. In the analysis of gender from a fashion company perspective it was apparent that non gender specific clothing had different meaning to the research companies. P&P referred to letting children be children and Lindex and KappAhl to specific unisex collections. The conclusion of this is that the interpretation of non gender specific clothing plays a far more important role than the actual knowledge. It was also found that fashion companies that had no official standpoint were more influenced by personal values in reference to non gender specific children’s clothes than the fashion company that had an official standpoint.

![Fashion Company Perspective](image)

![Fashion Customer Perspective](image)

Figure 24 (1): Research model

The reflection and awareness of gender was lower in the companies with no standpoint suggesting that is the standpoint, or lack of it, that affects the awareness and not the other way around. The parameters that are presented in the research model should therefore change places.

The fashion companies’ behaviour was also dependent on the different interpretations of non gender specific clothing. For KappAhl and Lindex attention to gender equality was only prominent in the retro inspired unisex collections for young children, which merely stand for a small part of their assortment. For P&P the wider meaning to let children be children, not boys or girls, was showed in the majority of their assortment.

From the customer perspective it was confirmed that attitudes was a predictor of purchase behaviour and that the strength of attitudes on non gender specific clothing was determined by the level of personal interest. It was clear that parents specially mothers,
had stronger attitudes in the subject of gender specific clothing than non parent male respondents. It was also shown that attitudes are based on direct experience which in turn can be a predictor for consumer behaviour. In reference to the research model the parameters should be changed and direct experience and personal interest, rather than knowledge, will be the determiner of consumer attitudes that leads to behaviour. The new model is shown below:

![New model diagram]

Figure 25: New model

Two central concepts of this research model were establishing the relations between influence and behaviour. How do the fashion companies influence the customer with their behaviour? And how do the customer’s behaviours influence the fashion companies?

The fashion company’s behaviour definitely influences the consumers as they are affected by their direct experience from previous purchases of children’s clothes when forming attitudes. On the other hand consumer behaviour, such as returning products, and telling friends and other consumers about unsatisfying purchases will influence the fashion company. They will loose direct sale if the comments are negative or gain sales if they are positive. Social media have also given the consumers a stronger influence over the fashion company than before and had the impact that information spreads faster and that information from unknown consumers are more accessible and considered trustworthy.
6. Conclusion

In this chapter the conclusions of this study is presented. Here the answers to the research questions are presented in a short summary.

What factors influence a fashion companies design and communication of gender specific children’s clothes?

The fashion companies are influenced by:

- The interpretation of the meaning of non gender specific clothing as well as personal values. Personal values are found more important in companies with no official standpoint on gender and children’s clothes.

- None reflective and unintentional practising of gender. Which was found to be higher in organisations with no official standpoint on gender and children’s clothes.

- The demand from customers for both unisex and gender specific clothing. Anticipating the customers need and demand was found to be of major importance.

- Adult fashion trends as well as general trends in society.

- A need from parents to identify gender by clothing.

- A belief that the gender debate should be driven by the consumers and that the fashion company have no social responsibility, in this matter. At least according to the larger fashion companies.

- The size of company and target group. A smaller company might easier meet their target group demands and can have a more coherent assortment.

- Consumer feedback, both in form of sales figures but also from what is written in social media and emailed to customer service.
How can the customer influence the communication and design of gender specific children’s clothes by their behaviour?

- By posting attitudes on blogs and other social media as well as telling friends and acquaintances.
- By researching the internet, reading other consumers feedback and using it as a trustworthy source of information before a purchase.
- By their purchase behaviour, affected by their direct experience and personal interest, consumers will form attitudes that determine their shopping behaviour.
- By listening to friends and acquaintances, they will form attitudes that will be a decisive factor in making a purchase decision.

Is there a conflict between being political correct and being profitable in reference to designing and communicating non gender specific clothing?

The conflict between political correctness and profitability was not found at all in the smallest company, indicating that it is possible to be political correct and profitable if the demands of only a small target group was to be satisfied. The larger companies that were driven by the need to meet the wider target group diverse demands could not take a political standpoint because of the risk to lose customers. Political correctness was therefore harder to achieve for the larger companies leading to the conclusion that profitability and political correctness is only achievable up to a certain size.

Other findings:

- In the relation to gender specific clothing the strongest attitudes was found by female parents. Indicating that mothers stand for most of children’s clothes purchases, according to the personal interest and direct experience link.
- A majority of the consumers preferred a mix of unisex and gender specific clothing and 85 % of the consumers think fashion companies have a social responsibility in the way they design children clothes.
- Parents showed a bigger demand for unisex clothing than non parents and parents of children under the age of 6 showed a bigger interest than parents with children of the ages over 6 years.
7. Future Research

In this chapter new ideas for future research, within or in close connection to the research area of this study, is suggested.

This study left many ideas for future research. Since not much have been written or researched before in reference to gender and children’s clothes the door is open. The fact that this study falls under many subject categories also gives possibilities to explore different research areas.

One interesting approach could be consumer backgrounds, lifestyles and social and political belongingness in reference to attitudes and opinions on gender and children’s clothes. This study aimed to identify the factors that influence fashion companies. An interesting addition to of the research could therefore be to identify the factors that influence the consumers.

One idea that was raised during one of the interviews was the connection between price level and gender awareness. It was suggested that non gender specific clothes could have a higher price than gender specific clothes. Research that compares the price sensitivity with gender standpoint would therefore be interesting.

Gender identity was briefly explored as an importance for children’s clothes design in this research. Further studies in this area with focus on using clothing as identification could be interesting with the extension of including not only gender identity but also class, ethnicity and sexual identity etc.

The research could also be extended to include other markets since the non gender specific clothing seems to have a stronger importance on the Swedish market compared to other European markets. The diversity of the European markets could be an interesting platform for further research in reference to gender and children’s clothes.

Finally the role of advertising as creator or influencer of gender stereotypes could be researched in the relations to children’s clothes. This thesis focused on the fashion companies’ influence. An interesting approach would be to investigate the advertising agencies influence over gender stereotypes.
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**Interviews**

Ann-Christine Bergstrand, Design and Buying Manager, Children’s Department Lindex, conducted at Lindex head office in Gothenburg between 12:00-13:00 on the 21th of April 2011.

Karina Lundell, Design Manager, Polarn o. Pyret conducted by email on the 21th of April 2011.

Sofia Wallin, Design and Purchasing Manager, Children’s Department, KappAhl, conducted at KappAhls head office in Mölndal between 12:45 and 13:30, 12th May 2011.

**Appendix**

Appendix 1: Survey results

Appendix 2: Interview guide

**Frontpage**