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HOW DOES IT FIT? DEPARTMENT STORES' BRAND IMAGES, MANAGERS'
PERCEPTIONS, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

A variety of factors contribute to workers' employment prospects, such as the levels of human and social capital that employees may possess. However, factors related to employers' approaches to labor management contribute substantially to workers' opportunities to find jobs that pay above poverty wages. This investigation examines mechanisms that may act to unevenly distribute opportunities for older workers to obtain higher-quality employment both across and within different retail firms. Specifically, this study considers the role of six Chicago-area department store retailers' business strategies, and the associated brand images and hiring practices they use, as mechanisms that may limit or enhance employment opportunities available to workers age 50 and over. Because labor demand plays out on the front lines of organizations through the decisions managers make when hiring workers, managers' perceptions of whether older workers may fit within the firm and within particular jobs may help explain the distribution of opportunities for older workers within and across department stores. As such, this study examines hiring managers' perceptions of older workers and specifically the extent to which older workers are perceived as being a good fit for each firm and for particular jobs.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research demonstrates that older adults in the US have become increasingly financially vulnerable and employment trends reveal that Americans are working longer in life and returning to work after retirement in increasing numbers. In fact, Americans age 55 and over represent the fastest growing segment of the US labor force. Scholars have noted variation in the presence of these workers in different sectors of the US economy and that finding a new job at an older age can be a challenge. While the retail industry may be seen by some as a welcoming environment for older adults, a deeper understanding of factors related to older workers' chances of being hired for good-quality retail jobs is needed. This dissertation will examine mechanisms that may operate within retail firms, specifically department stores, which may be related to opportunities for older workers who are seeking new jobs. Department stores offer certain advantages over specialized clothing stores as research sites for this inquiry. First, department stores tend to be large companies that employ workers in a wide range of jobs where there is likely to be variation in job quality. Further, department stores offer merchandise that appeals to a wide range of customers, including shoppers of varying ages, unlike specialty clothing stores that target a narrow slice of customers, generally of specific ages.

Older Adults and Financial Vulnerability

The Great Recession [2007-2009] contributed to rates of poverty and financial distress among older adults. For example, the Federal Reserve Board finds that, prior to the Great Recession (2005), the poverty rate (National Academy of Sciences (NAS) definition) for those age 65 and over was approximately 15% and rose to approximately 18% during the recession (Federal Reserve Board, 2008). During this time, workers ages 45-64 saw similar increases in

poverty rates, rising from approximately 10% prior to the Great Recession and 13% during the recession (Thompson & Smeeding, 2013). In a 2010 analysis of Current Population Survey (CPS) data conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Public Policy Institute, the data indicate that nearly ten percent of adults age 65 and over (3.7 million people) live in poverty and 13.7 million older adults have incomes below 200% of the poverty level, including more than one third (36.2%) of adults 65 and over (O'Brien, Wu, and Baer, 2010). While these levels were lower than for those ages 18-64 (poverty levels of 13.7% in 2010, representing 26.3 million people) (US Census Bureau, 2011), poverty remains a concern given the fast rate of growth of the older population in the US.

Further, based on an analysis of data from the Consumer Bankruptcy Project, an organization that provides pro-bono legal help to low-income individuals who have high levels of debt, Thorne and colleagues (2009) find that Americans are experiencing increasing levels of financial risk as they age. Using a nationally representative sample of Americans who filed for bankruptcy in 2007, the authors conclude that, "Age is increasingly associated with financial distress and with seeking protection from creditors through the bankruptcy courts," (p.100). Overall, the authors find that the age of Americans who file for bankruptcy has risen, with those age 55 and older experiencing the greatest increase; people age 65 and older are filing for bankruptcy at a rate more than double that of the rate in 1991 (Thorne, Warren, & Sullivan, 2009). Even older adults who work are experiencing economic hardship. In a nationally representative sample of workers who have been unemployed in the 12 months preceding August 2008, older job seekers (age 55 and older) were found to have significant amounts of personal debt, specifically credit card debt. In nearly one-third of cases (30%), credit card debt exceed retirement savings (Heidkamp, Corre, & Van Horn, 2010).

Taken together, poverty, financial distress, and high debt levels appear to be related to older workers' expectations and intentions about exiting the workforce. Research finds that older adults now anticipate working longer than they originally expected (Szinovacz, Martin, & Davey, 2013). According to a nationally representative survey of Americans ages 50 and over conducted in 2012 by AARP in partnership with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 78% of workers ages 50 and over said they were employed for financial reasons (AARP/SHRM, 2012). Similarly, a study in 2013 by the Associated Press (AP) in collaboration with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) found that 69% of older respondents (those ages 50 and older) indicated that financial need was the most important factor in deciding when to retire (AP-NORC, 2013). Further, Starace and colleagues (2015) note that, in their online survey of a nationally-representative panel of American adults ages 50 and over, 60% of survey respondents who were working part-time indicated that they were employed either because they needed to work or because they both needed and wanted to work (Starace, Van Horn, & Zukin, 2015).

Older Adults in the Labor Market

Research on employment of older adults supports this conclusion. Brown and colleagues (2010) find that, due to this economic hardship and uncertainty, eroded economic security, and ongoing increases in the Social Security retirement age, the working lives of older adults are in fact growing longer (Brown, Aumann, Pitt-Catsoupes, Galinsky, & Bond, 2010). Between 2003 and 2007, the average retirement age in the US was 59 years-old. After the recession, the average age increased to 62 years-old (AP-NORC, 2013). According to the national, random-digit-dial survey conducted by AP-NORC with Americans ages 50 and older, 59% of adults ages 50-64 were employed as were nearly a quarter (24%) of those age 65 or older (AP-NORC, 2013).

Workers age 55 and older represent the fastest growing segment of the US labor force. Of the nearly 139 million jobs held by Americans as of June 2014, 21% are held by workers age 55 and older (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

While some older adults may choose to remain in their current jobs, others may seek new positions, which is the focus of the present study. Evidence indicates that older adults who are seeking new jobs may have difficulty finding them. Of workers ages 55 and older who wished to be employed, 1.6 million were unemployed in 2013 and those who had been displaced from their jobs had lower re-employment rates than their younger counterparts. The re-employment rate for workers ages 25-54 was 68% as of January 2014 while workers ages 55-64 were re-employed at a rate of only 53%. Workers ages 65 and older had the lowest re-employment rate at only 23% (BLS, 2014). Given that older adults are both seeking work in increasing numbers and may be struggling to find opportunities, it is important to examine factors that may be related to older workers' chances of obtaining employment and the nature of the jobs into which they may be placed.

Opportunities for Employment and the Retail Sector

Having access to a high-quality job can make the difference between economic security and poverty. The Great Recession altered the employment landscape in the US; poor-quality jobs represent a growing proportion of jobs available in the US, leaving disadvantaged workers at risk for poverty in multiple ways. Sixty percent of the jobs lost during the Great Recession were what are frequently referred to as middle-class jobs, those that pay an adequate wage and offer opportunities for income growth (National Employment Law Project [NELP], 2012). Further, the loss of such jobs puts workers at more extreme economic risk since middle-class jobs are likely

to enable workers to access social welfare benefits, such as Social Security and Unemployment Insurance, which are predicated on workforce participation (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004).

During the recovery, the economy saw significant growth in low-wage jobs with nearly the same proportion of jobs created as mid-wage jobs lost during the recession. Effectively, low-wage jobs, such as those in the retail industry, replaced higher-quality employment during the recovery and retail jobs were among those with the most growth during that time (NELP, 2012). Specifically, the number of good-paying jobs in the manufacturing sector dropped sharply between 2007 and 2009, losing 15% of its workforce in only 18 months (Barker, 2011). In contrast, service work in fields such as retail proved more resilient with jobs declining by only six percent during the same period (BLS, Current Employment Statistics [BLS CES], 2014). Since the recession ended in 2008, jobs in the retail trade grew by five percent while manufacturing jobs grew by only two percent (BLS CES, 2014). Further, part-time work that is unlikely to provide employees with an adequate living has proliferated, particularly with respect to involuntary part-time employment, which grew from 4.1 million workers in 2006, prior to the recession, to 7.3 million workers today (BLS CPS, 2014).

The focus of this study is on older adults' employment in the retail industry. The four largest industries in the US, health care, retail, manufacturing, and educational services, together employ nearly half of all workers in the private sector (44%). Forty-six percent of all older workers hold jobs within these fields. Approximately 4.2 million workers age 55 and older are employed in the health care field, 2.9 million work in the retail industry, 3 million are employed in manufacturing, and 3.3 million hold jobs in educational services (Hayutin, Beals, & Borges, 2013). Additionally, according to a 2009 nationally representative survey of US employers conducted by the Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College, the aging population in the

US is likely to result in an increase in older customers for retailers. This trend suggests that, although employees in the retail sector are disproportionately younger workers, retail firms may seek to hire an increasing number of older workers to serve these customers, likely making retail a welcoming field for older adults who are seeking employment (Sweet & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2010).

Jobs in the retail industry tend to be low-paying, a fact that may be of concern to older adults who are seeking new employment for economic reasons. According to the BLS, in 2014 the median hourly wage rate for retail salespersons was \$10.29. However, wage rates alone do not tell the full story of the quality of jobs. Scholars have conceptualized job quality in multi-dimensional ways considering, for example, opportunities for promotions, access to health insurance and pension benefits, work scheduling practices, and full-time job status (Henly & Lambert, 2014; James, Swanberg, & McKechnie, 2008; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000; Lambert & Waxman, 2005; Watson & Swanberg, 2011). Although, in general, retail jobs have been found to be of low quality, some evidence points to variation in job quality. In particular, business strategies appear to be related to job quality (Appelbaum et al, 2000; Batt, 2000; Haley-Lock & Ewert, 2011).

Business Strategies, Brand Images, and Staffing Approaches

The economic prospects of older workers seeking new employment depend, in part, upon decisions made by managers who are responsible for hiring and placing new employees into jobs of varying quality. This dissertation will build on previous research that indicates that managers' decisions may be influenced by the business strategies and brand images their organizations embrace, by the types of employees managers perceive as fitting with their firms' brand images, and by perceptions managers may hold of potential employees, such as older adults. Further,

since brand image has been found play a role in retail hiring and job placement, this dissertation will examine the extent to which managers strive to hire employees who embody the brand in some manner. Brand embodiment refers to the tendency for firms to prefer to hire workers whose personal characteristics, such as age, align with the images firms strive to portray to customers (e.g., Pettinger, 2004 & 2005; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990; Williams & Connell, 2010). Employees whose personal characteristics are perceived as enhancing or reinforcing stores' brand images may be considered particularly attractive by hiring managers since these characteristics signal workers' potential for successfully embodying the brand (e.g., Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Williams & Connell, 2010). Finally, because stereotyping plays a role in human decision-making behavior (Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 1994), hiring and job placement decisions at retailers may depend in part on managers' preconceptions (stereotypes) of the fit between older workers' personal characteristics and firms' brand images.

The following section presents the conceptual foundation upon which this inquiry is based.

Conceptual Foundation

Theories of business strategies, along with brand image and brand embodiment, provide a framework for examining the distribution of opportunities for older workers across different types of department stores. These theories, as well as an internal labor market framework, help frame the examination of the sources and nature of opportunity structures within and across department stores. The framework also relies upon research on stereotyping to further illuminate mechanisms, specifically hiring and job placement practices, which may contribute to variation in the distribution of opportunities for older workers within and across stores.

Business Strategies and Brand Images

Researchers have shown that companies use varying strategies to compete in the marketplace (e.g., Kim & Lim, 1988; Lamont, Marlin, & Hoffman, 1993). Porter (1980) proposes a model that puts forth three general strategies, specifically, cost leadership, differentiation, and focus, to explain variation in organizational structures and practices employed by businesses. Firms pursuing cost leadership strategies (cost-leaders) focus on becoming the low-cost provider in an industry while firms pursuing differentiation strategies (differentiators) work to create the impression that their offerings are unique among their competitors. Differentiators attempt to distinguish themselves based on a variety of factors, including, for example, prestige of offerings and level of customer service (Porter, 1980). Firms pursuing focus strategies target a slim market segment and are not the subject of this study since department stores, by definition, target a broader market. Contingency theories propose that business strategies such as these generally align with organizational practices, which in turn relate to certain outcomes (e.g., Arthur, 1992; Schuler & Jackson, 1988). Research demonstrates that one essential characteristic of cost-leaders is a strong emphasis on operational efficiency that is designed to standardize and streamline activities with the goal of minimizing costs to the organization (Porter, 1980). Since these organizations target customers whose purchasing decisions are based primarily on price, efforts to reduce firm costs enable them to pass savings onto these customers. These firms tend to manage human resource costs by engaging in hiring processes that are streamlined, limiting costly staff time, and offering jobs that primarily pay low wages. In contrast, the essential characteristics of differentiators de-emphasize cost containment and focus on creating structures that facilitate high levels of customer service. These organizations target customers who desire high levels of service and seek exclusive items. Staff

at differentiators are generally paid more than employees at cost-leader firms and hiring processes tend to be more intensive (Porter, 1980). This study will examine the relationship between stores pursuing cost-leader and differentiator strategies and customer service models, hiring and job placement approaches, and job structure and quality.

Brand Image, Customer Service, and Hiring Practices

In their review of the brand image literature, Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) articulate the essence of brand image as a subjective impression held in the mind of the consumer that is formed through both reasoned and emotional interpretations of marketing activities, personal observations, and peer perceptions. Marketing scholars propose that the kinds of employees firms hire play a role in how firms and their brand images are perceived (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Harris & De Chernatony, 2001; Hawabhay, Abratt, & Peters, 2009; Hoeffler, Bloom, & Keller, 2010; Miles & Mangold, 2004; Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980). In his classic case study of retail stores, Martineau (1958) asserts the, “[B]iggest single factor in the store image is the characteristics of the sales personnel,” (p. 52) and finds that, “[D]epartment store clerks are mentioned more often than any other image-creating factor,” (p.53). Burman and Zeplin’s (2005) qualitative study of brand consultants and corporate brand managers at eleven German companies in service-intensive industries supports Martineau’s assertion, emphasizing that brand image is created not only by marketing staff, but by front-line employees as well. Harris and de Chernatony (2001) suggest that employee behavior can either reinforce or undermine a brand’s advertised message, making workers important to firm success. One way in which employee behavior plays out on the front line in retail is through the provision of customer service, the definition of which varies from organization to organization based upon the business strategy and brand image embraced. Given the importance of employees to brand image and

customer service, hiring practices tend to reflect both brand images and skill sets required to deliver varying levels of customer service. For example, Pettinger (2004) finds that women's apparel retailers that offer varying levels of customer service as an aspect of their brand images tend to hire different types of employees. Her ethnographic study reveals a continuum of service cultures ranging from self-service, to routine service, to personal service, and finds that differences in service cultures and their associated skill requirements are related to managers' hiring decisions.

The need for employees to provide varying levels of customer service includes the implied service of making customers feel the brand is represented in all aspects of the store. Firms that provide high levels of customer service appear to recruit candidates based in part on applicants' ability to embody the brand, that is, to present brand-consistent appearances to customers (Klassen, Clayson, & Jasper 1996; Williams & Connell, 2010; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). This type of customer service is referred to as aesthetic labor, which is defined as, "[T]he employment of workers with certain embodied capacities and attributes that favourably appeal to customers and which are then organizationally mobilized, developed and commodified," (p. 104, Nickson, Warhurst, Witz, & Cullen, 2001). By communicating brand image and embodiment priorities to managers, organizations may influence managers' perceptions of a variety of personal characteristics an ideal job applicant should possess (Cable & Judge, 1997; Perry & Finkelstein, 1999; Pettinger, 2004). Pettinger (2004) concludes that aesthetic labor requirements in retail stores do indeed play a role in hiring practices. At a high-end, exclusive image store in her study, job candidates who exude what she refers to as "style" are preferred. The store seeks to hire workers whose hairstyle, make-up, and manner of dress present a professional, highly

polished appearance. In contrast, a store with a hip, fashion-conscious brand image prefers to hire attractive, young, slim workers.

Warhurst and Nickson's (2007) study of UK retailers shows similar results. The authors collected survey and focus group data from UK employees in the hospitality and retail industry to understand the extent to which these employees were selected based upon managers' perceptions of candidates' brand embodiment. In their analysis, the authors note that employee appearance is a prominent element in the selection process. They observe that participants receive messages from hiring managers that convey the need for employees to embody the employer's brand. Eighty-nine percent of respondents said managers emphasized the importance of appearance during hiring interviews. This finding was supported by focus group results. For example, one participant explained, "[The manager] said I had to look right, [he said] when you turn up, make sure you're smartly dressed," while another noted, "[The manager said] you can't have someone who has got dyed pink hair and a wee miniskirt.... You have to be kind of in keeping with the image of the company," (p. 111).

Similarly, Williams and Connell (2010) interviewed 19 employees of upscale retail stores in the US and conclude that job descriptions tacitly include, "looking good and sounding right," meaning prospective employees are evaluated on their ability to perform the aesthetic labor associated with the brand (p. 350). They explain, for example, that applicants who do not sound right according to hiring managers' perceptions of their stores' brands are disadvantaged in the hiring process. One employee in their study notes, "You have to definitely be able to talk to people, [be] relaxed.... Some of the African Americans don't speak as well, and that kind of sets them apart." The authors explain that, rather than expressing a racist sentiment, the worker is, "[A]rticulating the logic of aesthetic labor," (p. 367), meaning, the employee is making a

distinction between personal characteristics that fit the brand image of the store and those that do not.

The Relevance of Brand Images for Hiring of Older Workers

The findings above suggest that employees' personal characteristics, such as age, may play a significant role in hiring and job placement at differentiator stores where conveying brand image relies on high levels of customer service and where employees are expected to embody stores' exclusive styles. As a result, older workers may be advantaged over younger workers during hiring and job placement when mature age is viewed as a good fit with differentiators' brand images but disadvantaged when a youthful image is viewed as a good fit. In contrast, characteristics like age may play a smaller role in hiring and job placement at cost-leader stores where price dominates the market strategy, in which case older workers appear likely to be no more advantaged or disadvantaged than younger applicants. It is also possible that the range and/or type of merchandise sold at a given store may be related to the salience of age during hiring and job placement. For example, research suggests that older workers may be disadvantaged at clothing stores that serve younger customers. In a quantitative study by Davies and Chun (2012), the authors find that age is a salient factor in whether job candidates may be perceived as embodying stores' brands image. In this case, findings point to the possibility that older workers may be disadvantaged when seeking employment. The authors surveyed employees (n=424) and customers (n=964) of four fashion stores in Great Britain and confirmatory factor analysis of their data reveals a negative relationship between employee age and perception of the stores' brand images. This negative relationship could hurt older workers' chances of being hired at fashion stores. Survey findings at fashion retailers in Belgium by Brengman and Willems (2009) support this conclusion. Using a convenience sample of 70

adults, the authors note that respondents associate older salespeople with “outmoded” fashion stores (p.352).

In contrast to clothing/fashion stores where managers’ perceptions of older workers’ abilities to effectively embody stores’ brands images may damage older adults’ employment prospects, department stores carry a wide range of merchandise and cater to a wider variety of customers, including mature adults. Thus, in the case of department stores, older workers may be viewed as valuable hires. For example, Foster and Resnick (2013) present a single-case study of a UK health and beauty retailer that offers a wide range of merchandise. They find that customers are conscious of what they termed “mirroring” and “matching” when interacting with salespeople who, in this study, ranged in age from 16-69 years-old. Mirroring means customers sought help from someone who, “[L]ooked like them,” (p. 242), which could either advantage or disadvantage older workers. As one manager notes, “You’ll probably get a younger person going to a younger assistant and an older person going to an older assistant,” (p.242). “Matching” refers to customers’ perceptions of which employees may be best suited to assist them with purchases of particular types of merchandise. The authors note that customers’ perceptions of employees’ differing levels of technical expertise with particular products varied with employee ages. For example, while one participant commented, “Age does matter. I may not ask advice from people who are quite old on things like cosmetics,” (p.242), another remarked, “[I would] probably go for someone a bit older as you would think they would be more knowledgeable about [health-related items]. [Older associates may have a] bit more authority about what they are talking about,” (p.242). This finding seems to indicate that department stores may gain an advantage by hiring older workers and placing them into departments, such as fine jewelry or high-end designer bags, where demonstrating authority on products may help customers feel

confident making expensive purchases. The subject of advantages and disadvantages in hiring and job placement leads to the question of which jobs are the most desirable in which to be placed.

Conceptualizing Job Quality

The definition of job quality has become more expansive over time. In addition to wages and promotions, other measures of job quality include access to health insurance and pension benefits (Kalleberg et al., 2000). Further, organizational scholars have identified work scheduling practices as an important contributor to job quality as well. This broadened conceptualization of job quality hinges on a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between employee well-being and schedule unpredictability, instability, and rigidity, all of which make it difficult for employees to attend to their responsibilities outside of work (Henly & Lambert, 2014; James, Swanberg, & McKechnie, 2008; Lambert 2008; Lambert & Waxman, 2005; Watson & Swanberg, 2011). Additionally, as scholars have noted, hourly wages alone may not adequately capture income due to the proliferation of part-time work (Lambert, 2012). Thus, full-time status, which also often determines benefits eligibility, has also been used as an important measure of job quality (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004). Given that job quality may vary on a wide range of factors, it is important to understand mechanisms that may be associated with where high-quality jobs can be found within firms.

Job Quality, Stratification, and Labor Markets within Firms

Opportunities for workers to obtain higher-quality jobs are often stratified within organizations. Theories of internal labor markets (ILMs) provide a lens through which to examine this stratification, which advantages some workers while limiting others. Some firms operate ILMs, organizational structures that define job ladders through which employees may

advance toward better jobs within firms (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). Others operate spot markets, flat structures that do not offer job ladders and thus have few opportunities for employee advancement (Jacobs, 1994). Whether or not firms have ILMs is related to the ways in which they compete in the market, tying back to Porter's (1980) business strategies and firms' corresponding brand images. Cost-leader firms tend to operate with spot markets where job quality is generally low and stratification of opportunities for high-quality employment is less prominent because so little opportunity is available in the first place. In contrast, differentiators are likely to have ILMs and thus more stratification of opportunities for higher-quality employment.

For example, Hunter (2000) examines job quality in the long-term care industry in Massachusetts and notes that nursing homes that pursue differentiation strategies offer higher-quality jobs, as measured by wages, benefits, on-the-job training, and advancement opportunities, than those that pursue cost-leader strategies. In particular, low-wage nursing assistant jobs were found to be measurably better in differentiator nursing homes than in cost-leader nursing homes. Similarly, Bailey and Bernhardt (1996) examine retail jobs using a comparative case study method and find that another aspect of job quality, the degree to which low-wage jobs are considered interesting, is associated with whether stores pursue differentiation versus cost-leader strategies. Further, Holman and colleagues (2009) observe that, in call centers in 16 countries, more job discretion is available to employees who work in organizations that pursue differentiation strategies (Holman, Frenkel, Sorensen, & Wood, 2009). Haley-Lock & Ewert (2011) find that job characteristics vary among restaurant chains based on the different customer service-related images they project. The authors interviewed 16 managers at two restaurant chains where one firm competes based on higher levels of customer service, which fits

with a differentiation strategy, while the other competes primarily on price, a cost-leader characteristic. The authors find that firms that emphasize customer service offer better fringe benefits, such as health insurance and paid time off, and use more favorable scheduling practices than firms that emphasize price. Additionally, in a nationally-representative survey of customer service companies, Batt (2000) argues that jobs at companies where employees provide attentive customer service tend to be of better quality. Similarly, Boxall (2003) proposes a framework that suggests that firms that de-emphasize customer service are more likely to design jobs that require little knowledge to perform, pay low wages, and recruit low-skilled employees. Thus, workers who obtain jobs with employers that present differentiation brand images may have better prospects than those who are employed at firms presenting cost-leader brand images.

Summary

In sum, theory proposes a relationship between the business strategies that firms pursue and the brand images they present to the marketplace. Further, theory suggests that brand images will be associated with the type of customer service firms offer to the marketplace and the hiring practices they employ to support this service. These factors are predicted to be related to organizational structures, such as the degree to which opportunities for higher-quality employment are stratified within firms and the quality of jobs that are available. All of these elements are relevant to the opportunities that are expected to be available to older workers who are employed at firms with differing business strategies and brand images.

Research on Stereotyping

A substantial body of research examines how people deal with information overload in everyday life. Stereotyping is explained as a tool used by individuals to minimize the cognitive resources they employ to process interactions with unfamiliar individuals (e.g., Allport, 1954).

Research on stereotypes characterizes people as so-called cognitive misers who tend to place people into categories that allow them to use past experiences, previously-acquired information, social norms, and social influence from sources such as the mass media, as a type of shorthand to help them determine how to behave (Cuddy et al., 2009; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Fiske & Russell, 2010; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Lee, Beatson, Taylor, & Durden, 2007; Macrae et al., 1994; Rudman, Glick, & Phelan, 2008; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990).

Research in the stereotyping field informs questions for this study by providing a means to understand how hiring managers at department stores may perceive older workers, which has implications for older adults' prospects of obtaining employment. Stereotyping research has uncovered both positive and negative perceptions of older workers as well as several mechanisms through which these perceptions may operate to limit or enhance older workers' opportunities to obtain higher-quality employment.

The US is widely characterized as a youth-oriented society and youthfulness plays a key role in the marketing and employment strategies of many retail businesses as evidenced by images prevalent in their advertising and messages targeted at young audiences. However, some retailers capitalize on positive stereotypes about older workers, an example being the presence of warm, grandmotherly/grandfatherly greeters at some big box stores such as Wal-Mart. Additionally, businesses may combine these strategies through placement of workers of different ages into different jobs. While it may be unusual for a woman in her 60s to work in the receiving area at a department store due to perceptions that she may have limited physical abilities, such an employee may be more likely to be placed at the lay-away counter where positive stereotypes about older workers, which will be discussed shortly, may put customers at ease, encouraging lay-away purchases.

Since stereotyping plays a significant role in human decision making (Macrae et al., 1994), hiring decisions may depend in part on managers' preconceptions (stereotypes) of older workers. Further, studies have found jobs may be age-typed, that is, there may be shared beliefs within organizations about typical jobs that are appropriate for older workers versus younger workers and these beliefs may be related to managers' decisions about hiring and job placement (Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995; Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, & Dijkers, 2008; Martin & Strauss, 1956; Panek, Staats, & Hiles, 2006; Sofer, 1970). Thus, a key goal for this study is to understand what stereotypes of older workers are common among department store HR managers and how stereotypes may be related to retail managers' perceptions of older workers' fit with firms' brand images, and thus, hiring and job placement decisions.

Perceptions of older workers: Dimensions of age. Age has been conceptualized in multi-dimensional ways. Chronological and biological age are interrelated constructs. Borkan and Norris (1980) conceptualize these in the following manner, "Biological age estimates the functional status of an individual in reference to his or her chronological peers on the basis of how well he or she functions in comparison with others of the same chronological age." Functional status, also described as functional age, includes both physical and cognitive functioning in this framework. Although it is legal for employers to ask prospective employees for their date of birth, discrimination on the basis of chronological age is illegal. In contrast, any obvious physical or cognitive limitations a prospective employee may possess could prevent them from obtaining a job if these limitations leave them unable to fulfill the requirements of the role. Thus, for this study, functional age plays out as an important concept since managers consider candidates' physical abilities but were not asked to distinguish between older individuals of comparable chronological ages.

Biological age is closely linked to the concept of social age, which refers to how people's perceptions of biological age play out. Pitt-Catsouphes, Matz-Costa, and James (2012) note that social age relates to the question of how old or experienced or out of date an individual may be perceived to be by others. Biological age could vary widely between individuals within the same chronological age group such that, for example, some 50 year-olds could live with physical or cognitive limitations that place their biological ages into the 70s. It is possible that prospective workers with these characteristics could experience employment bias if their social ages were perceived as too old to perform a particular job. Conversely, some 70 year-olds could have excellent physical and cognitive health, giving them biological ages much younger than their chronological ages. In such a case, an older worker might not experience bias during hiring if their social ages were perceived as being young enough to adequately perform on the job. Thus, both biological and social age may play a role in older workers' employment prospects. This study was not designed to overtly investigate these dimensions of age, and managers' perceptions of age reported in this study undoubtedly conflate their interpretations of employees' biological and social age.

Stereotyping, employment, and older workers. A wide variety of studies have examined the relationship between stereotyping and employment. For example, research about how race, low-income status, gender, and candidates' appearance influence recruitment and hiring seems to indicate that managers use stereotypes connected to ascriptive characteristics as a cognitive resource during the hiring process (e.g., Braddock II & McPartland, 1987; Foschi, Lai, & Sigerson, 1994; Hamilton & Roessner, 1972; Hatfield & Gatewood, 1978; Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991; Moss & Tilly, 1996, 2003; Neckerman & Kirschenman, 1991; Reskin, McBrier, & Kmec, 1999). For example, Neckerman and Kirschenman (1991) found that

stereotypes about race influence companies' decisions about communities from which to recruit job candidates. Negative stereotypes about inner-city black workers reduce opportunity for these potential employees by deterring employers from recruiting in primarily black, inner-city communities. Stereotypes about race and their association with worker quality also seem to influence managers' hiring decisions. Negative stereotypes about the quality of African-American workers appear to reduce the likelihood of being hired for these potential employees (Hatfield & Gatewood, 1978; Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991). Similarly, Hamilton and Roessner (1972) find that hiring managers' negative stereotypes about low-income job applicants, in this case participants in the Work Incentives program (WIN), influence their decisions. Their analysis demonstrates that factors beyond the tasks required to successfully perform the job influence candidates' chances of being hired. Moss and Tilly (2001) detail their discussions with numerous hiring managers, explaining that employers' negative stereotypes of disadvantaged workers (defined by race, class, and geography) color their perceptions of their skill levels. They found that managers' evaluations of potential employees' skills and the racial stereotypes they hold are deeply intertwined with managers' perceptions and influence hiring decisions. Additionally, Hatfield and Gatewood (1978) find that a candidate's appearance can influence managers' perceptions and hiring decisions. In their study, managers seem to hold negative stereotypes of obese candidates, which appear to reduce the likelihood of these workers being hired.

A great deal of literature indicates that both positive and negative stereotypes of older workers can be found in organizational settings (Anderson, Richardson, Fields, & Harootyan, 2013; Arrowsmith & McGoldrick, 1996; Arvey, Miller, Gould, & Burch, 1987; Bertolino, Truxillo, & Fraccaroli 2012; Hertel, van der Heijden, de Lange, & Deller, 2013; McCann &

Keaton, 2013; Posthuma & Campion, 2009; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976; Van Dalen, Henkens, & Schippers 2010). Stereotyping studies such as these have been based on a wide variety of research methods, including vignette studies (e.g., Heyma, van der Werff, Nauta, & van Sloten, 2014; Karpinska, Henkens, & Schippers, 2013a and 2013b; Richardson, Webb, Webber, & Smith, 2013), surveys based on representative random samples of employers (Van Dalen et al., 2010) as well as convenience samples of managers and/or employees (e.g., Bertolino et al., 2012; Broadbridge, 2001; Calo, Patterson, & Decker, 2013; Hassell & Perrewe, 2005; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976), and single case studies (e.g., Arrowsmith & McGoldrick, 1996; Arvey et al., 1987).

One way in which the present study seeks to contribute to the literature is to bring the in-depth perspective of a comparative case study to questions of stereotyping of older workers. There are also several comprehensive reviews of the literature (e.g., Anderson et al, 2013; Hertel et al., 2013; Posthuma & Campion, 2009) that seek to describe the state of the research and possible next steps for the field. Research that focuses on hiring managers tends to dominate the literature. However, surveys involving non-manager employees in organizations and students also appear with the idea of describing the nature of stereotypes rather than the relationship between stereotyping and organizational practices. Many authors conclude that ageism exists in organizations and hurts older workers' employment opportunities. As a result, interest in combating ageism has led to exploration of the accuracy of negative stereotypes of older workers and their relevance to organizational outcomes (Finkelstein et al, 1995; Hertel et al., 2013; Karpinska, 2013a & 2013b; Posthuma & Campion, 2009).

How positive and negative perceptions of older workers play out in organizations.

Researchers frequently assert that negative stereotypes are more prevalent than positive

ones. Posthuma and Campion (2009) review 117 books and articles about stereotypes related to the age of workers and conclude that there is overwhelming evidence that older workers are most frequently perceived in negative ways. They note that evidence indicates that older workers are perceived by employers to be less motivated and productive than younger workers, to possess less job-related ability, and to have lower job performance overall. Their finding that older workers are perceived as being generally more resistant to change, such as being less flexible and adaptable and being harder to train than younger workers, has been supported by work performed by many other scholars (e.g., Arrowsmith & McGoldrick, 1996; Richardson et al., 2013; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976; Van Dalen et al., 2010). They also note that stereotypes of older workers include the perception that older workers possess less potential for development on the job and that they are perceived to have fewer years in which to work such that employer investments in training will not pay off. They also find that managers perceive older workers as being more costly both because they are seen as more likely to use benefits, such as health insurance, frequently and as requiring higher wages due to longer firm tenure.

However, other scholars, using a variety of research methods, find evidence that older workers are often believed to be more dependable than younger workers. For example, in Van Dalen, Henkens, and Schipper's (2010) survey of a representative sample of Dutch employers, managers perceive older workers as being more committed and more loyal to their employers as compared to younger workers. Finklestein and colleagues's (1995) meta-analysis of age discrimination in the US shows similar results with the authors noting that older workers are believed to be less likely to miss work and more honest and trustworthy than their younger coworkers. Other studies have found that older workers are believed to have stronger soft skills, such as customer service skills, than younger workers (e.g., Arrowsmith & McGoldrick, 1996;

Posthuma & Campion, 2009; Ranzijn, Carson, & Winefield, 2004; Van Dalen et al., 2010). For example, Bertolino and colleagues (2012), in a survey of clerical and financial administration employees in Italian schools, find that older workers receive higher ratings than younger workers on perceptions of task performance. Kang and Hillery (1998) present a mixed-methods study in the US and find that both older and younger respondents have positive reactions to older salespeople and prefer them to younger salespeople. Respondents indicate that older workers appear to be more interested in helping them with purchases, provide them with more information about merchandise, and are more respectful of them during sales interactions.

Numerous studies have identified relationships between stereotyping of older workers and organizational outcomes, such as performance reviews and interviewer ratings, as well as hiring decisions and preferences. Particularly relevant for this study of opportunities for older workers in department stores is research on hiring preferences. In some studies, managers appear to prefer to hire older workers while in other studies older applicants may be disadvantaged. In Heyma, van der Werff, Nauta, and van Sloten's (2014) vignette study, a negative relationship between age and hiring probability was observed; the probability of a manager indicating s/he would hire a worker declined significantly after age 58. In contrast, Arvey and colleagues' (1987) conducted a large, in-depth single case study of retail hiring outcomes and find that, overall, managers prefer to hire older workers. Arrowsmith and McGoldrick (1996) noted that managers hold mixed feelings about hiring older workers in their study of line managers at a major UK food retailer. Although managers report that older workers do well in their stores, they also indicate that they see older workers as the labor pool of last resort. The present study will contribute to the knowledge base on retail managers' hiring preferences by examining the nature of department store managers hiring preferences with respect to worker age.

As noted, one factor that appears to mediate the relationship between stereotyping of older workers and hiring prospects is age-typing of jobs, which refers to raters' perceptions of whether a job is best performed by an older or younger worker (Cleveland, Festa, & Montgomery, 1988; Cleveland & Hollman, 1991; Cleveland & Landy, 1983; Perry, 1994; Perry, Kulik, & Bourhis, 1996; Perry & Bourhis, 1998). Hiring managers at department stores may perceive some jobs, such as sales positions in the electronics department, as being more suitable to be performed by a younger worker. In contrast, managers may perceive other jobs, such as customer service desk positions, to be more suitable for older workers. Thus, older workers may be more or less likely to be placed in some jobs than in others and, depending upon the quality of various jobs, may either reap a benefit due to their age or pay a penalty.

Age stereotypes have been found to be more strongly related to hiring decisions when managers evaluate older applicants for a job they consider best performed by a younger worker (Perry, 1997; Perry & Bourhis, 1998; Perry et al., 1996). For example, Perry and Bourhis (1998) find that when study participants are asked to evaluate hypothetical job candidates, younger applicants are rated more highly than older applicants for a strongly youth-typed job, pizza deliverer. For a less youth-typed job, fast food worker, older applicants are rated more highly than they are for the pizza delivery job, indicating that the more strongly youth-typed a job is, the more age stereotypes of older workers appear to be related to the evaluation of the applicant. The reverse is also true in that younger workers are rated more highly for youth-typed jobs than older workers and rated less highly for non-youth typed jobs. However, Finklestein et al (1995) found that age-typing of jobs did not appear to be an important element in hiring decisions. Importantly, in their study, participants were provided with scant information on the nature of the job in question, meaning, the degree to which this job may have been youth-typed may not have

been clear to participants, which may be related to the outcome of the study. A search of the literature did not reveal any studies that examined jobs that were specifically considered best performed by older adults. Finally, the previously mentioned study of a health and beauty store by Foster and Resnick (2013) may indicate that age-typing of jobs is likely to occur in department stores. If, as the authors found in their study, age is salient for customer preferences of sales associates depending upon the merchandise customers were seeking, older workers may be advantaged during job placement for department store jobs that involve selling merchandise geared toward mature adults. However, if these jobs are found to be of lower quality than jobs that involve selling merchandise targeted at younger customers, older workers may, in fact, be less likely to obtain higher-quality employment. Questions such as these are subjects that are investigated in the present study.

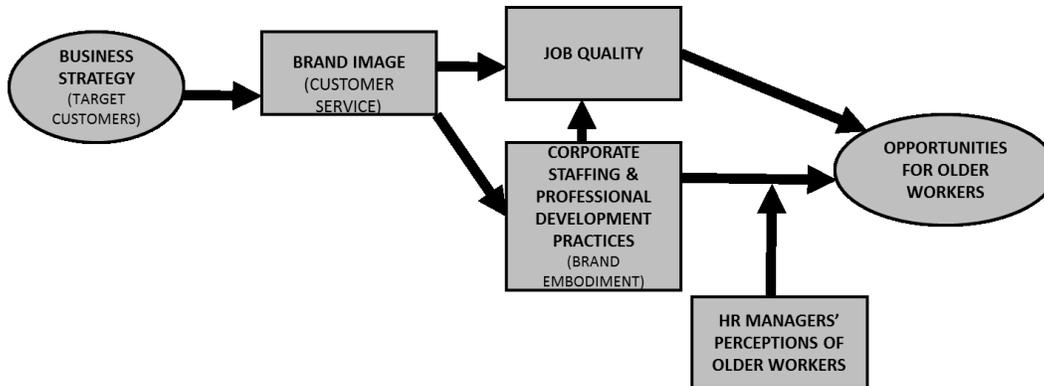
Implications of stereotyping research for examining opportunities for older workers. Stereotyping is likely to play an active role in the hiring process in retail since managers must use limited information to make hiring decisions. In this study, questions about the nature of managers' perceptions of older workers and the relationship between managers' perceptions and their hiring and job placement practices, are investigated in order to shed light on opportunities for older workers to obtain higher-quality jobs.

Overview of Dissertation and Research Questions

A variety of factors contribute to workers' employment prospects, such as the levels of human and social capital that employees may possess. However, factors related to employers' approaches to labor management, such as business strategies, also contribute substantially to workers' opportunities to find jobs that pay above poverty wages (Porter, 1980). This investigation examines mechanisms that may act to unevenly distribute opportunities for older

workers to obtain higher-quality employment both across and within different retail firms. Specifically, this study considers the role of six Chicago-area department store retailers' business strategies, and the associated brand images and hiring practices they use, as mechanisms that may limit or enhance employment opportunities available to workers age 50 and over. A comparative organizational analysis, including interviews with key informants, observations of stores, and examination of companies' websites, was conducted in order to illuminate how labor demand plays out on the front lines of these organizations. The study focuses on the decisions managers make when hiring workers and managers' perceptions of whether older workers may fit within the firm and within particular jobs. The analysis investigates whether these factors may help explain the distribution of opportunities for older workers within and across department stores. Analyses examine variation in business strategies, brand images and brand embodiment, and managers' perceptions of older workers in order to understand similarities and differences in the opportunities available to older workers in these types of stores. Further, the study examines variation in opportunities available to older workers within each store and the ways in which brand images, brand embodiment, and perceptions of older workers held by hiring managers may be related to the likelihood of older workers obtaining higher-quality employment.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model Guiding Exploration of the Relationship between Business Strategy, Brand Image, Job Quality, Staffing/Talent Management Strategies and Practices, HR Managers' Perceptions of Older Workers, and Opportunities for Older Workers



Brand image theories propose direct causal relationships between brand image and brand embodiment, customer service conceptualization, recruiting and hiring practices, performance evaluation practices, and professional development practices. Further, the way in which customer service is conceptualized is proposed to have a causal relationship with brand embodiment requirements. Brand embodiment theory predicts an association between brand embodiment and recruiting and hiring practices. Further, brand image theory proposes a direct relationship between brand image and job quality. It is logical to conclude that these factors will be related to the extent to which older workers will have opportunities to obtain higher-quality employment. HR managers' perceptions of older workers are proposed to moderate the relationship between staffing and professional development practices that are determined at the corporate levels and opportunities for older workers that play out on the ground within stores. Brand image theory also predicts variation in job quality, staffing, and professional development practices between firms pursuing cost leadership and differentiation strategies.

The following chapters will investigate these research questions:

1. What messages do hiring managers receive about firms' brand images and how do these messages play out in store practices?
2. What is the nature of the relationship between firms' brand images and organizational practices related to recruiting, hiring, job placement, performance evaluation, professional development, and job quality?
3. What perceptions of older workers do hiring managers hold and to what extent do managers perceive older workers as fitting with their firms' brand images?
4. How are hiring managers' perceptions of older workers' fit with their firms' brand images related to organizational practices and what implications do these practices hold for older workers' opportunities to obtain higher-quality employment?

Chapter 2 will describe the research design and methods used to conduct this investigation. In Chapter 3, the six stores in this study will be described in detail, along with the characteristics of both the communities in which they are located and the jobs found in the stores. Chapter 4 will report findings for the first research question about the messages hiring managers receive about firms' brand images and how these messages play out in store practices. Chapter 5 will examine the second research question by describing the nature of the relationship between firms' brand images and organizational practices, including recruiting, hiring, performance evaluation, professional development, and job quality. Chapter 6 will examine the third and fourth research questions, reporting findings on hiring managers' perceptions of older workers and the extent to which managers feel these workers fit with their firms' brand images. Further, the chapter will explore how these perceptions of fit are related to hiring and job placement practices and the

implications these practices hold for older workers to obtain higher-quality employment. Chapter 7 will provide a discussion of the study results, limitations of the study, implications for practice and theory, and an agenda for future research.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research design employed for this dissertation is a comparative organizational analysis, a form of multiple-case study. There is a long tradition of case study research by organizational scholars who seek to uncover the mechanisms at work within and across organizations that employ low-wage workers. Yin (2003) explains that a case study design is appropriate when the goal of a study is explanatory – when “how?” questions about contemporary events are at the heart of the research – and when the researcher has no ability to control or manipulate events. This is the case for this research that investigates how differing department store brand images and hiring managers’ perceptions combine to expand or limit opportunity for older workers. Comparative case studies rely on collection of data from multiple sources to permit triangulation that can help evaluate the strength of findings (Yin, 2003). Since this study focuses on understanding how variations in brand images may help explain manager behaviors, multiple cases of department stores with divergent brand images were examined. This chapter will explain the Institutional Review Board approval process, the method use for case selection, and a brief description of the characteristics of these stores, the nature of the data sources and data collection methods that were used, and the data analysis strategy that was pursued.

Institutional Review Board Approval

Since this study involved human subjects, approval was sought from the University of Chicago’s School of Social Service Administration Institutional Review Board. All pertinent documents and information were submitted for expedited review since the study posed minimal risk to the research subjects, did not involve any classified research, and included procedures that

ensured that there would be minimal risk of a breach in confidentiality. The review protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board with no requests for modifications.

Case Selection

Following Porter's (1980) model of generic strategies that includes overall cost leadership and differentiation strategies, a range of stores that would encompass these strategies, as well as stores that might fall somewhere in between, were solicited. The case selection method and results are discussed below.

Selection method. Cases were selected by identifying the complete universe of Chicago-area department store chains, defined as stores that are organized into separate sections that offer a wide variety of products including many different brands. To obtain cases, selection was based on the classification of stores as defined in the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) report, "High-End Department Stores, Their Access to and Use of Diverse Labor Markets: Technical Report," (US EEOC, 2004). The authors used relative merchandise price points to identify four classifications of stores: Designer/Bridge, Better/Moderate, Moderate/Popular, and Off-Price/Discount. They examined websites for stores in the ten largest US metropolitan areas to compute average prices of merchandise in three categories: women's apparel, women's shoes, and women's handbags. Using the five most expensive items in each category for each store, the authors computed averages to estimate maximum price points and placed stores into the four categories. They further investigated the presence or absence of particular brand name items and conducted a cluster analysis that identified the four groups. Given the overlap between the two middle groups that both include "moderate" stores, the categories were collapsed to create three classifications that, based on their brand images, spanned Porter's (1980) strategies: Designer/Bridge, Better/Moderate/Popular, and Discount. In

order to validate that using three classifications of department stores accurately reflected the range of competitors in this segment of the retail industry, a top retail industry analyst confirmed that these three categories appropriately characterized the department store market space.

In the Chicago-area, five chains that fit the criteria for Designer/Bridge were identified, five chains that fit the criteria for Better/Moderate/Popular were identified, and four chains that fit the criteria for Discount were identified. One of the chains identified as Discount was Wal-Mart, a firm that has a well-known history of declining to participate in research conducted by social scientists. Since agreement to participate was deemed highly unlikely, the firm was excluded from the case selection process leaving three firms in the Discount category. Given that the maximum number of cases that could be obtained from this category was three, all three chains were approached for participation. In order to balance representation of brand images in the study, participation was sought from three chains from the Designer/Bridge category and three chains from the Better/Moderate/Popular category. Since there was no theoretical or practical justification for purposively sampling chains within each category, the chains were randomly selected from the chains in each category and, when a chain declined to participate, an additional chain was randomly selected and approached until the available chains were exhausted or three chains in the category had been obtained. When selecting the stores within each chain to solicit, recruitment began with stores that were located within a driving distance radius of the researcher's home, moving counter-clockwise across the Chicago-area beginning in the north at Lake Michigan and sweeping west and south until the desired number of cases was obtained.

Recruitment for the study began with cold-calls to stores during which the researcher attempted to contact the store's HR manager. Repeated calls were made until contact was established or until it became clear that the HR manager was not willing to return a call. The

researcher identified herself as a Ph.D. student doing dissertation research and explained the purpose of the research and what would be required for participation in the study. When a store declined, another store in the same chain was approached. After three stores in the chain declined participation, the chain was dropped and another chain in the same category was approached. When an HR manager agreed to participate, a meeting for an interview was scheduled and a confirmation letter was sent (see Appendix A).

Case sites. A clear pattern emerged early on in the recruitment process in which HR managers in the Better/Moderate/Popular category indicated their willingness to participate but explained that permission from the store manager had to be obtained. HR managers in the Designer/Bridge and Discount categories were able to respond without seeking permission. The reason for this difference in participation decision-making remains unclear. All of the HR managers in the Better/Moderate/Popular category ultimately declined, uniformly citing corporate policies that prevented them from participating. The fact that only the middle category cited such a limitation prompted a search for possible correlates for the existence of corporate policies forbidding participation in research. The following chain characteristics were examined: unionization status, financial results in the prior year, and geographic distribution of stores. However, no patterns could be discerned. While it was unfortunate that participation could not be obtained from any Better/Moderate/Popular chains, three Designer/Bridge chains and two Discount chains agreed to participate. In total, 19 stores were invited to participate with six accepting and 13 declining corresponding to a 32% response rate. At one Discount chain, HR managers at two different stores ultimately agreed to participate, yielding a total of six cases in the study. The participating chains well-represented Porter's (1980) cost leadership and differentiation strategies and the final composition of stores in the study fulfilled Creswell's

(2005) maximum variation case selection strategy that depends on selecting, “diverse cases to fully display multiple perspectives about the cases,” (p. 120). Thus, it was decided that moving forward without Better/Moderate/Popular chains would still yield rich data useful for addressing the research questions posed. To simplify the names of the categories, the Designer/Bridge classification was renamed “High-End.” The Discount category retained its name. All of the stores in the study were assigned pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Overview of participating stores. As shown in Table 2-1, one Discount store and all three High-End stores were located in suburban areas defined as towns outside of Chicago city limits. Two Discount stores were located in urban areas defined as neighborhoods within Chicago city limits. All three Discount stores were so-called “destination stores,” that is, stores that were not co-located with other department stores. The Discount stores were all located in strip malls. One High-End store was also a destination store and was located not in a strip mall but, rather, in a mall-development in the midst of a suburban downtown business district. The other two High-End stores were mall anchors, that is, they were located in large shopping malls where several other department stores were present.

Table 2-1: Cases

	Generic Strategy	Store Location	Configuration
Real Deals - South	Cost-Leader (Discount)	Urban	Destination store
Real Deals – North	Cost-Leader (Discount)	Suburban	Destination store
Budget Style	Cost-Leader (Discount)	Urban	Destination store
Splendid Things	Differentiator (High-End)	Suburban	Mall anchor
Luxe	Differentiator (High-End)	Suburban	Destination store
Classic Style	Differentiator (High-End)	Suburban	Mall anchor

Data Sources and Data Collection Methods

As previously mentioned, comparative case studies rely on collection of data from multiple sources to permit triangulation that can help evaluate the strength of findings (Yin, 2003). Data sources for this study were interviews with key informants that included a scenario exercise, a questionnaire about characteristics of specific jobs in the stores, store observations, and corporate document/website review.

Key informant interviews. Interviews were conducted with HR managers who were the key informants at each of the six stores. At one Discount store, the store manager participated in the interview along with the HR manager. Thus, a total of seven key informants were interviewed. Interviews generally lasted one and a half hours and follow-up interviews, when conducted, lasted one half hour.

Purpose of interviews. Key informant interviews served as the richest data source for this study, allowing collection of in-depth information about the key concepts in the study. Specifically, interviews covered topics including high-level information about stores and their employees; brand images; customer service levels; job quality; recruiting, hiring, and job placement practices; professional development practices; and, respondents' perceptions of older workers. In this study, older workers were defined as individuals who were in their 50s or older, following previous research that tends to define older workers in this way¹. Given that research shows that re-employment rates are lower among workers age 50 and older, and the focus of this dissertation is on older workers entering new employment rather than aging in a job, defining

¹ Research on older adults includes definitions of older workers that vary depending on the goals of each analysis. For example, when attempting to understand the situation of retired individuals, "older" is generally defined as age 65 or over, capturing older adults who are Social Security-eligible. Further, the age definition for this group is sometimes set at 62 or over, capturing older adults who may have claimed Social Security benefits at the earliest possible time for Social Security eligibility. At other times, older adults are defined in terms of old models of pension plans, which generally permitted early retirement and tax-advantaged disbursement of retirement funds at age 50 or 55.

older workers as age 50 or older fits with the goals of this study. Still, it is likely that HR managers hold differentiated perceptions of what constitutes an older worker. However, this study was not designed to shed light on managers' perceptions of workers in their 50s versus their 60s versus their 70s. Rather, managers were asked to consider older workers using the comprehensive definition of age 50 and over that is commonly found in the literature.

Interview data collection process. Prior to interviews, HR managers received letters confirming the date and time of each meeting. The letter summarized topics to be addressed and requested certain administrative data that would be helpful in answering interview questions (see Appendix A). The letter requested job titles for all salaried and hourly roles in the store for part-time, full-time, and benefits-eligible employees, total percentages of employees in each job, and percentages of employees in these jobs who were in their 50s or older. All interviews were conducted by this researcher. Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted with Real Deals – South, Budget Style, Splendid Things, and Classic Style. The HR manager at Real Deals – North agreed to an extended initial interview in place of an initial and follow-up meeting. The HR manager at Luxe declined a follow-up interview after it was announced that the store would be closing. Thus, a total of ten interviews at six stores with seven key informants were conducted. When clarifying information or additional data were needed, informants were contacted either by telephone or email. During interview scheduling, permission for audiotaping was requested. Two stores declined audiotaping but agreed to have a research assistant present for note taking. In these cases, the research assistant wrote extensive notes directly on the interview protocol form and job quality survey forms during the interviews.

The interview protocol included both close-ended and open-ended questions, along with probes that were used to draw out more detailed responses (see Appendix B). Table 2-2 outlines

topic areas discussed during the interview. The interview protocol was piloted with two department store chains and revised before it was used for data collection.

Table 2-2: Interview Topics

Store and Occupational Demographics
List of Job Titles
Market Position, Major Competitors, and Brand Image
Recruitment, Hiring, and Job Placement Practices
Role of Older Workers in the Store
HR Manager's Perception of Older Workers
Characteristics of Selected Jobs:
Duties and Requirements
Preferred Candidate Characteristics
Performance Review Practices
Generative Opportunities
Job Mobility

Information gathered focused on the composition of the store's workforce at the time of the interview, which is explained below in presenting the job characteristics questionnaire.

Interview data and related research questions. Questions related to managers' understanding of their firms' brand images and descriptions of jobs in their stores were intended to shed light on the first research question about messages managers receive with respect to brand images and how they play out in store practices. In order to understand HR managers' perceptions of their chains' brand images, managers were asked a variety of open-ended questions during the interview. They were asked to broadly describe their chains' brand images, competitors, and their target markets. Interviewees were also asked how their management talked about ways in which their brand images ought to influence how their businesses were run day-to-day. Questions about day-to-day operations included questions about the responsibilities of employees in a wide variety of jobs in the stores.

The second research question addresses the relationship between firms' brand images and organizational practices. In order to answer this question, occupational demographics, such as the proportion of store employees who hold customer service-related jobs, were gathered. Further, managers were asked questions about recruiting, hiring, job placement, professional development, and performance evaluation practices. During in-depth explorations of three particular jobs, questions were asked about job characteristics that are indicators of job quality such as wages, benefits eligibility, and scheduling practices. The in-depth explorations of these jobs, in addition to store demographic data, allowed a picture of variation in job quality to emerge.

The third research question addresses managers' perceptions of older workers and the extent to which managers' perceive older workers as fitting with their brand images. Questions that directly addressed managers' perceptions of older workers were explored as were questions about the role of older workers in the stores that were intended to uncover managers' perceptions of older workers' fit with stores' brand images. Exploration of HR managers' perceptions of older workers during interviews began with broad, open-ended questions and progressed to closed-ended questions to allow for an assessment of the consistency of HR managers' statements. To begin, managers were asked how they would define "older workers." Specifically, managers were told that researchers define "older workers" in a variety of ways and asked what age group came to mind when they thought about "older workers." After explaining that this study was concerned with workers in their 50s or older, managers were asked demographic questions about the jobs older workers most commonly held and whether those workers were hired at age 50 or older or whether they had aged into this range while in the job. Next, HR managers were asked about their perceptions of older workers' motivations for working, reasons

for leaving, and whether they believed older workers were looking for opportunities for advancement. After these orienting questions, several questions were posed that sought to uncover more detail of perceptions of older workers HR managers held.

Social desirability bias refers to respondents' tendencies to provide researchers with answers that paint themselves in a positive light. Research has shown that respondents may be reluctant to answer questions honestly when they fear their responses may be viewed negatively. Given that certain interview questions were sensitive in that they asked managers to, potentially, give answers that indicated they held negative perceptions of older workers, measures were taken to reduce the risk of social desirability bias. To this end, HR managers were asked questions about differences between older and younger workers. The goal of the language used in these questions was to tacitly give HR managers permission to identify differences without feeling that they were saying things that might meet with the disapproval of others. For example, questions included the phrases, "In some studies, some managers say..." and "Research also shows that some managers say..." After these statements were made, managers were asked what they thought about these findings and whether or not they had similar opinions. Further, when asked specifically about positive and negative traits they might associate with older workers, managers were told that previous research had concluded that people attribute both positive and negative qualities to older workers. Thus, interview questions were designed to provide reassurance that some other managers held opinions that older and younger workers were different from one another in certain ways in the hopes of allowing HR managers to express their opinions honestly without fear of judgement.

Specifically, managers were asked how any differences they observed between older and younger workers played out in their stores, whether there were jobs in the store where older or

younger workers tended to be more or less successful, and what they believed the advantages and disadvantages of employing older workers were. Next, HR managers were asked to respond to statements that presented common positive and negative stereotypes of older workers that were derived from the literature (Appendix B). They were then handed a sheet with an agreement scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Managers were asked to compare older and younger workers on the following characteristics that have been examined by other researchers, as previously mentioned: loyalty to the company; honesty/trustworthiness; motivation; productivity; reliability/dependability; resistance to change; difficulties with training; “soft skills,” such as customer service skills; potential for development on the job; cost to employ; likelihood of missing work; and fluency with technology.

During the interview, managers were also presented with a vignette exercise designed to illuminate their thought processes and the influence of their perceptions of older workers during job placement. As previously mentioned, exercises of this sort have been fruitful in illuminating managers’ decision-making processes during hiring and job placement in other research studies. Managers were given a worksheet that included four photographs of prospective job candidates with names and brief descriptions (Appendix C). To control for the possible influence of race and gender, all prospective job candidates were white women. Candidate #1 was described as a part-time community college student; the associated photograph was of a woman in her early 20s. Candidate #2 was described as a former at-home mom; the associated photograph was of a casually-dressed woman in her mid-30s. Candidate #3 was described as a homemaker whose husband had recently retired; the associated photograph was of a casually-posed woman in her late-60s. Candidate #4 was described as a previously-retired office manager; the associated photograph was of a professionally-posed woman in her late-60s. The worksheet instructions,

which were read aloud to each manager, stated that the manager was to assume she had interviewed all four candidates, decided they were all well-qualified, and had decided to hire all four women. The manager was then asked to place each candidate into one of the jobs that the manager and researcher had collaboratively selected for in-depth investigation earlier in the interview. Further, the manager was instructed to fill all three jobs. After the manager had completed the worksheet, the interview continued with a series of questions that probed the manager's thought processes with respect to assumptions made about the candidates and the job placement decision.

Finally, the fourth research question investigates how managers' perceptions of older workers' fit with their stores' brand images were related to organizational practices and the implications of this relationship for opportunities for older workers to obtain higher-quality jobs. Data about hiring and job placement practices were collected during interviews, in particular during vignette exercises, and questions about job quality were collected during in-depth job explorations. During data analysis, these data were aligned in order to allow themes to emerge. In addition to questions asked during interviews, a variety of data were collected using job characteristics questionnaires in order to answer questions about job quality, customer service levels, and the presence or absence of older workers in particular jobs as described below.

Job characteristics questionnaires. Batt (1999) notes that the jobs that workers tend to find most interesting are designed so that workers can use their discretion to meet customer needs. Given that jobs that workers tend to find more interesting are likely to be more desirable to workers and, thus, perceived to be better-quality jobs, it was anticipated that jobs involving more customer contact/personal service would be considered to be better quality jobs than jobs that involved little customer contact/personal service. The researcher and key informant together

selected one job in each store that involved a great deal of personal service (the High-Touch Job) and one job that involved very little or no personal service (the Low-Touch Job) for investigation. Since most stores had a Customer Service Desk Job, this job was also investigated when present. Including this job allowed for consistent collection of information about this role which provided data for comparisons both within and across the High-End and Discount categories.

Questionnaire data collection process. Detailed data were collected for the selected jobs in each store, except for the High-End Chain that declined a follow-up interview. Table 2-3 includes job characteristics and administrative data collected during the interview via questionnaire forms for the target jobs (see Appendix D). To begin discussion of each job, the interviewee filled out the questionnaire, usually with the researcher reading the questions and writing down the answers. In one case, the interviewee preferred to read the questions and write answers herself. Participants referred to computer records or organizational documentation, such as HR manuals, for questions about topics such as wage ranges, turnover rates, and employee demographics. This information focused on workers currently employed in the store.

Table 2-3: Target-Job Characteristics Questionnaire Topics

Job Qualifications Turnover Rates Seniority Wages Employee Demographics Work Hours Scheduling Practices

After completing the target-job characteristics questionnaire, HR managers were asked follow-up questions to generate a richer picture of each job. Questions included inquiries about

specific duties of each job; any physical demands; the use of technology in the jobs; ways in which employee performance was evaluated; characteristics of typical applicants for the job, as well as characteristics of individuals who were actually hired; personal qualities that were most important for success in the job; turnover reasons; and, promotional opportunities available in the job.

Store observations. Observational data were used to validate the accuracy of store characterization according to Porter's (1980) framework of the characteristics of cost leadership versus differentiator strategies. Observation data points were built off of interpretations of what cost-managing operations might look like on-the-ground at cost-leader stores (e.g., centralized checkout lines) and what in-depth customer service might look like on-the-ground at differentiator stores (e.g., personal assistance in dressing rooms). In all cases, store observations confirmed correct placement of stores into these categories. Observations also provided insight into customer service practices, an element of brand image, and rich contextual detail that were used in analyses. Store observations were made according to a protocol worksheet (see Appendix E) that facilitated collection of data including: the store's location (strip mall, major mall anchor, destination store); surrounding neighborhood (urban, suburban); presence of different merchandise types based on names of departments or signage in aisles (e.g., Women's, Juniors, Men's Sportswear, Children's, Cosmetics, Bridal); price and quality of a women's skirt, jacket, and blouse that were either displayed or placed toward the front of a merchandise section; elaborateness of displays (mannequins, displayed outfits on hangers, place settings for tableware, racks, tables, shelves, locked cases); location of cash registers (centralized, dispersed in departments); presence of shopping carts (present, not present); overall floor staff density (concentrated or dispersed) that was assessed by counting the number of departments or

merchandise areas where a floor associate was present and grouping stores into less than half of departments staffed (concentrated) or more than half of departments staffed (dispersed); presence of an assisted sell (throughout store, limited locations) that was assessed by approaching employees on the sales floor and inquiring about an item and coded “throughout store” if a majority of employees could answer in-depth questions and give advice about merchandise and “limited locations” if a minority of employees approached could answer in-depth questions and give advice about merchandise; presence of a customer service desk (present, not present); presence of visible loss-prevention measures (present, not present) based on the presence of uniformed security officers and/or whether dressing room attendants monitored and limited number of items allowed in the dressing rooms; and, nature of dressing room help available (personal assistance, shrinkage monitoring) based on whether the associate offered help locating items or counted items and handed out numbered cards. These data elements were selected for examination based on Porter’s (1980) model of generic strategies and the on-the-ground business practices those strategies imply (i.e., visible loss-prevention measures in cost leader stores; higher priced merchandise in differentiator stores).

Store observations data collection process. Store observations were conducted by visiting each store in the study during non-peak season (not in November, December, or January) and engaging in normal shopping behavior throughout the store. All store departments were visited. In each store, several floor associates were approached with questions to gauge the nature of dressing room help available and extent to which assisted sells were available. Notes were recorded off-premises using the protocol and a digital recorder, written up after the visit, and loaded into NVivo for analysis.

Table 2-4: Store Observation Coding

Data Point	Coding	Coding Rubric
Merchandise price and quality	Higher quality or lower quality	Coded higher quality if brand name of a displayed women’s skirt, jacket, and blouse was a well-known designer, the materials used and item construction were of high quality; coded lower quality if brand name of a displayed women’s skirt, jacket, and blouse was not a well-known designer, the materials used and item construction were of lower quality
Location of cash registers	Centralized or dispersed in departments	Coded “centralized” if checkout lines were present; coded “dispersed in departments” if cash registers were spread throughout the store
Shopping carts available	Present or not present	n/a
Overall staff density	Concentrated/ dispersed	Coded “concentrated” if, while walking through departments, floor associates were present in a minority of departments; coded “dispersed” if, while walking through departments, floor associates were present in a majority of departments
Assisted sell offered	Throughout store or limited locations	Coded “throughout store” if the majority of employees approached on the floor could answer in-depth questions and give advice about merchandise; coded “limited locations” if a minority of employees approached on the floor could answer in-depth questions and give advice about merchandise
Customer service desk present	Present or not present	n/a
Visible loss-prevention measures	Present or not present	Coded “present” if uniformed security officers were present and/or dressing room attendant monitored and limited number of items allowed in the dressing rooms
Dressing room help available	Personal assistance or shrinkage monitoring	Coded “personal assistance” if floor associate offered help locating items; coded “shrinkage monitoring” if employee counted items and handed out numbered cards

Corporate document/website analysis. In order to obtain a more complete picture of each store's brand, as well as context for each firm's hiring practices, company websites and annual reports were examined to identify the nature of the brand images that chains presented to customers, prospective employees, shareholders, and the communities in which they operated. Data collection for corporate documents was done entirely online, primarily through the chains' websites.

Data collection – customers. To examine store characteristics and brand images projected, stores' retail websites were investigated using a data collection protocol (see Appendix F). The protocol included items such as type of merchandise offered (list of departments), home page and department pages emphasis (low prices or sales vs. seasonal designer collections), availability and/or types of discounting programs offered (loyalty points, credit card discounts, price matching), language used for discounted merchandise (sale, clearance), return policies, minimum purchase to earn free shipping for online purchases, order of options offered in dropdown sort box (e.g., price low to high, price high to low), prices of selected items (women's dresses, women's shoes, perfume), overall merchandise price point, availability of personal shoppers, and customer service options offered (phone, email, chat). These data were used to compare the stores across the High-End and Discount categories in terms of brand images and customer service levels offered. Similarly to the store observation data collection protocol, these data elements were selected for examination based on Porter's (1980) model of generic strategies and the on-the-ground business practices those strategies imply (i.e., emphasis on sales/low prices on cost leader stores' websites, indication of the availability of personal shoppers on differentiator stores' websites).

Data collection – communities. To examine how the chains positioned themselves in the eyes of the communities in which their potential customers resided, chains' corporate and retail websites and annual reports (obtained from websites) were analyzed using a data collection protocol (see Appendix F). Both annual reports and websites were examined for references to corporate citizenship, charitable giving, employee volunteering, and giving back to communities. The content of these messages was copied and loaded into NVivo for analysis.

Data collection – prospective employees. To examine how the stores positioned themselves in the eyes of prospective employees, stores' Careers websites that were accessible through links on the retail websites were investigated using a data collection protocol (see Appendix F). Data were collected by identifying messages related to the brand image the store wished to project and relevance of brand to hiring practices; opportunities for career growth, professional development, or career advancement; and references to opportunities to receive training/coaching. The content of these messages was copied and loaded into NVivo for analysis.

Data collection – shareholders. To examine chain characteristics and brand images projected to shareholders, stores' corporate websites were investigated using a data collection protocol (see Appendix F). Data collected included positioning language for stores' brands; identification of target markets; references to corporate social responsibility, philanthropy/charitable giving, giving back to community, and employee volunteerism; and references to store environments. The content of these messages was copied and loaded into NVivo for analysis.

Table 2-5: Website Review Coding

Consumer Website		
<i>Data Point</i>	<i>Coding</i>	<i>Coding Rubric</i>
Most prominent homepage message	Descriptive	A description of the most prominent message was composed by noting the presence and positioning of terms such as clearance, sale, deals, seasonal collection, designer
Minimum purchase for free shipping	Numeric	The dollar amount of the minimum purchase required to obtain free shipping was recorded
Pricing programs offered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyalty • Price match • Credit card discount or points • Discount code/ coupons 	Yes/No for each program
Return policy timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended • 90 days or more • Less than 90 days 	Yes/No for each option
Customer service options available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone support • Email • Online chat 	Yes/No for each option
Personal shopping offered	Yes/No	Website searched for terms such as personal shoppers, fashion advice, personal assistance
Merchandise price ranges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dresses highest • Dresses lowest • Women's shoes highest • Women's shoes lowest 	Dress and women's shoes website sections were sorted by price high-to-low and price low-to-high and dollar amounts were recorded
List of departments	Department names	Department type present or not present on the website
Department characteristic: Most prominent homepage message	Descriptive	A description of the most prominent message was composed by noting the presence and positioning of terms such as clearance, sale, deals, seasonal collection, designer
Department characteristic: Pricing sort dropdown box order	Price low-to-high first Price high-to-low first	Yes/No for each option

Table 2-5: Website Review Coding (continued)

Careers Website		
<i>Data Point</i>	<i>Coding</i>	<i>Coding Rubric</i>
Overall message to prospective employees	Descriptive	A description of the overall message was composed by noting the presence and positioning of terms such as team, flexible, grow, and career
Emphasis on career growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prominent message on homepage • Link to in-depth description • Mention of “growth” • Mention of “opportunities” • Mention of “coaching/mentoring” • Mention of “professional development” • Mention of “training” 	Yes/No for each item
Sample job posting for customer-facing position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive • Job status • Outreach to customers mentioned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job description text copied to NVivo • Full-time, part-time • Yes/No
Corporate Website		
<i>Data Point</i>	<i>Coding</i>	<i>Coding Rubric</i>
Brand image message	Descriptive	A description of the overall message was composed by noting the presence and positioning of terms related to cost-leader or differentiator strategies
Financial results message	Descriptive	A description of the overall message was composed by noting the presence and positioning of terms such as profitable, challenging, or downturn
Role of customer service message	Descriptive	A description of the overall message was composed by noting the presence and positioning of terms related to cost-leader or differentiator strategies
Corporate social responsibility message	Descriptive	A description of the overall message was composed by noting the presence and positioning of the term corporate social responsibility
Community involvement message	Descriptive	A description of the overall message was composed by noting the presence and positioning of terms such as charitable giving, philanthropy, giving back, and employee volunteerism

Data Analysis Strategy

Analyses were framed around the concepts that had been identified in the literature, specifically, brand image and brand embodiment, customer service conceptualization, job quality, perceptions of older workers, and hiring/job placement practices. As analysis progressed, themes were identified. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) note that approaches to qualitative analysis vary in terms of the ways in which coding is conducted. They identify three approaches to content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative. Conventional content analysis consists of approaching the data without preconceived codes while directed content analysis involves beginning with a set of codes that are extrapolated from theory and expanded as new themes emerge. Summative content analysis involves counting or otherwise quantifying the frequency with which codes occur in the data. This analysis was conducted using directed content analysis. Specific coding techniques described by Miles and Huberman (1996) (e.g., steps for creating codes, revising codes, and structuring codes into hierarchies) served as a guide for the coding process. Analysis of administrative data was conducted by visualizing the data in charts that were organized by brand image (High-End or Discount). Triangulation of data from different sources was conducted to examine the robustness of themes that emerged.

Method used. All data were loaded into NVivo for analysis. The coding process began with closed coding using a codebook developed from interview questions. These questions encompassed the full range of concepts relevant to the investigation. Throughout the closed coding process, new codes were generated and placeholder codes were used during open coding once closed coding was completed. As themes emerged during open coding, additional codes were created and recoding was conducted as needed. Content captured under each code was subsequently re-read and examined for underlying themes. Where overlapping themes were

identified, codes were collapsed together as appropriate. Codes were revised to reflect any underlying themes that were not well-articulated by the original codes. Codes were then grouped into hierarchies to organize evidence as themes emerged. Analysis of job-specific questionnaire data, as well as numeric descriptions of individual stores (e.g., number of employees, percent of employees in their 50s or over) was conducted by visualizing data in comparative charts. Charts were generated for each store and for stores within each brand image category which allowed for comparisons across categories.

Within-case analysis. In order to generate an in-depth picture of each case, interview transcripts and notes, store observation write-ups, data from job-specific questionnaires, and relevant items gathered from websites and annual reports were collected in a single case file and systematically combined and compared. The content of NVivo nodes was examined at the store level and combined with charts that were generated from job-specific questionnaires. From these data, reflective memoing was conducted in a standardized format. The in-depth description of each store on the conceptual dimensions of interest allowed the character of each store to surface. Where appropriate, tables were generated to compare patterns and variation within each store. For example, job characteristics for the three target-jobs at a given store were assembled in a table, aligning data for each job on: job qualifications; turnover, seniority, and wage rates; benefits eligibility; employee demographics; and, hours requirements, guarantees, and variation. Differences between these job quality factors became immediately apparent, illuminating the consequences of job placement. Overall, this process allowed “unique patterns of each case” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 540) to come to light and also facilitated cross-case comparisons during subsequent analyses.

Within-category cross-case analysis. Where appropriate, tables were generated to bring data for the stores in each category together in such a way that they could be examined at-a-glance and compared with one another. Reflective memos that were generated for each case allowed for comparisons across stores within each category (High-End and Discount). The findings from the within-case analysis were used to identify similarities and differences between stores in each category with respect to the nature of their brand images, customer service levels, job quality, and managers' perceptions of older workers. These comparisons also allowed for aggregated characterization of the two categories that was used for between-category analysis.

Between-category analysis. Between-category analyses were conducted and helped illuminate variation in job quality and how brand images and managers' perceptions of older workers combined to create or limit opportunity for older workers. The two categories of stores (Discount and High-End) were compared to each other in aggregate. Summary tables of store characteristics, including items such as schedule posting practices, wages, and the presence or absence of particular jobs in each store, as well as comparisons of seemingly-similar jobs across stores (e.g., Customer Service Desk Job) were generated. These tables provided a clear comparison of the ways in which the brand images of different types of stores were associated with opportunity structures. Summary tables of HR managers' perceptions of older workers permitted evaluation of similarities and differences in perceptions across store categories. The analyses that were assembled to answer research questions 1, 2, and 3 were used to examine research question 4.

Conclusion

The research design employed for this dissertation is a comparative organizational analysis, a form of multiple-case study. Data from multiple sources including HR manager

interviews, store observations, job-specific questionnaires that included administrative data, and website review permitted triangulation that helped evaluate the strength of findings (Yin, 2003). Cases were selected following Porter's (1980) model of generic strategies that includes overall cost leadership (Discount) and differentiation (High-End) strategies. Seven interviews were conducted with key informants at six stores representing five department store chains in the Chicago area. Half of the stores participating met criteria to be categorized as High-End stores and the other half met criteria to be categorized as Discount stores. Stores were located in both urban and suburban communities. During interviews, job-specific questionnaires were used to collect administrative data. Observations of the stores were conducted while engaging in normal shopping behavior. Chains' websites and corporate documents such as annual reports were examined. All data were loaded into NVivo and both closed and open coding was conducted to allow themes and patterns to be identified. The next chapter describes the communities in which participating stores were located, descriptions of the stores themselves, and descriptions of jobs found in the stores.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY, STORE, AND JOB CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter will provide descriptions of the communities in which the six stores in this study operated, descriptions of the stores themselves, and details about the full range of jobs available in the stores. In addition to setting the stage for presenting analyses and findings, these data are used to evaluate the appropriateness of stores' placement into the High-End or Discount categories. Further, these descriptions will provide context for examination of the role of the brand images in structuring opportunities for quality employment in the stores, including those that may be available to older workers.

Store Profiles

Profiles of the six stores that participated in this study are presented below. Each store is identified by a pseudonym that reflects its brand image, and, in the case of the department store chain with which two of the stores are associated, location. Each profile includes a store snapshot that provides information about high-level store characteristics, a description of the in-store experience, and characteristics of the community in which the store is located. Store snapshots are based primarily on information provided by HR managers during interviews. The in-store experience was assessed through store observations that were made using the protocol worksheet (Appendix E). Community characteristics data are taken from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates 2008-2012.

Discount stores: Real Deals – North. The chart below provides a store snapshot for Real Deals – North as well as a summary of the in-store experience related to generic strategy confirmation and community characteristics. Located in a suburban strip mall in the northern suburbs of Chicago, Real Deals – North employed 140 workers, 86% of whom worked part-time

and 97% of whom were paid hourly. Part-time work status conferred eligibility for very basic employee benefits at this store while workers with full-time employment status were eligible for a richer benefits package. Work schedules at Real Deals – North were posted two weeks in advance. The HR manager reported that the annual turnover rate at this store was around 60%. At the time of this study, one-third of employees at this store were in their 50s or older.

Store observations revealed an environment that conveyed a brand image message aligned with Porter's (1980) cost leadership strategy. At Real Deals – North, shopping carts and centralized cash register lines, both of which facilitated efficient processing of high-volume sales, were the first thing visible upon entering the store. Further, cost leadership relies, in part, on tightly controlling costs including what is referred to as "shrinkage," meaning, theft. The presence of attendants whose responsibility it was to monitor merchandise going into and out of the dressing rooms, rather than to wait on customers and bring additional merchandise to try on, supports the conclusion that this store pursued a cost leadership strategy. Customer service in the store was highly concentrated with many departments lacking even a single visible employee. Even in the few areas of the store where an assisted sell was required because there were locked cases, there were often no employees present. Again, the sparse availability of personal service, which represents an expense to the employer, supports the conclusion that this store pursued a cost leadership strategy.

The community in which Real Deals – North was located had a median annual income of approximately \$57,000 and 11% of residents lived below the federal poverty line. The education level of the majority of residents in the community (51%) was a high school education or less; only five percent had acquired graduate or professional degrees. More than half of community residents (51%) spoke a language other than English in the home. One-third of residents

identified as Latino and nearly one-third of residents (32%) were US immigrants. The median age of residents was 38.3 years old.

The HR manager who was interviewed at this store was a white woman who was an experienced HR professional with long tenure at the store. When asked to describe her idea of what an older worker was, she responded, “Because I’m 59, I think of *older* people. I mean we have people here that are in their 70s!”

Discount stores: Real Deals – South. The chart below provides a store snapshot for Real Deals – South as well as a summary of the in-store experience related to generic strategy confirmation and community characteristics. Located in a small strip mall on the north side of Chicago, Real Deals – South employed 100 workers, 80% of whom worked part-time and 95% of whom were paid hourly. Part-time work status conferred eligibility for very basic employee benefits at this store while workers with full-time employment status were eligible for a richer benefits package. Work schedules at Real Deals – South were posted two weeks in advance. The HR manager reported that the annual turnover rate at this store was around 63%. At the time of this study, one-third of employees at this store were in their 50s or older.

Store observations at Real Deals – South conveyed the same brand image message as that at Real Deals – North as might be expected with two stores in the same chain. Thus it is not surprising that this store’s brand image message also aligned with Porter’s (1980) cost leadership strategy.

Table 3-1: Store Characteristics for Real Deals – North

Store Snapshot	In-store Experience		Community Characteristics		
	Strip-mall	Shopping carts available	Present	Neighborhood	Suburban
Store size without seasonal employees	140	Location of cash registers	Centralized	Median income	\$57,171
Store size with seasonal employees	140	Overall staff density	Concentrated	% below poverty	11%
Proportion part-time	86%	Customer service desk present	Present	% high school education or less	51%
Proportion hourly	97%	Dressing room help available	Shrinkage monitoring	% some college	22%
Proportion ages 50 and over	33%	Assisted sell offered	Limited locations	% Associate's degree	6%
Store turnover rate	60%			% Bachelor's degree	16%
Benefits eligibility requirements: part-time benefits	Job status = part-time			% graduate or professional degree	5%
Benefits eligibility requirements: full-time benefits	Job status = full-time			% Latino	33%
Schedule posting timeframe	2 weeks in advance			% African American	1%
				% immigrants	32%
				% language other than English spoken in the home	51%
				Median age	38.3 years

Placement of shopping carts and centralized cash register lines, both of which facilitated efficient processing of high-volume sales, were also the first thing visible upon entering At Real Deals – South. Dressing room attendants at this store monitored merchandise going into and out of the dressing rooms for shrinkage and did not wait on customers, further supporting the conclusion that this store pursued a cost leadership strategy. Departments at this store were rarely staffed; it was difficult to locate a floor associate to ask questions. Even where there were locked cases that required customers to have assistance to inspect merchandise, there were often no employees present. Rather, customer service was concentrated in a few locations, specifically the check-out lines and customer service desk. Again, low staff levels and little personal service, which represents an expense to the employer, support the conclusion that Real Deals – South pursued a cost leadership strategy.

The community in which Real Deals – South was located had a median annual income of approximately \$57,000 and 11% of residents living below the federal poverty line. The education level of 42% of residents in the community was a high school education or less; only nine percent had acquired graduate or professional degrees. Nearly half of community residents (49%) spoke a language other than English in the home. Approximately one-quarter of residents identified as Latino and 13% were US immigrants. The median age of residents was 37.2 years old.

The HR manager at this store was a Latina with long tenure at the store. She described herself as “just an hourly worker,” yet, she had many years of experience in HR at the store and a considerable amount of authority during the hiring process. This HR manager did not specifically mention her age but appeared to be in her late 40s or early 50s. When asked to describe her idea of what an older worker was, she responded, “Maybe over 60 years-old?”

Table 3-2: Store Characteristics for Real Deals – South

Store Snapshot		In-store Experience		Community Characteristics	
Store location	Strip-mall	Shopping carts available	Present	Neighborhood	Urban
Store size without seasonal employees	100	Location of cash registers	Centralized	Median income	\$56,590
Store size with seasonal employees	120	Overall staff density	Concentrated	% below poverty	11%
Proportion part-time	80%	Customer service desk present	Present	% high school education or less	42%
Proportion hourly	95%	Dressing room help available	Shrinkage monitoring	% some college	23%
Proportion ages 50 and over	15-20%	Assisted sell offered	Limited locations	% Associate’s degree	7%
Store turnover rate	63%			% Bachelor’s degree	19%
Benefits eligibility requirements: part-time benefits	Job status = part-time			% graduate or professional degree	9%
Benefits eligibility requirements: full-time benefits	Job status = full-time			% Latino	26%
Schedule posting timeframe	2 weeks in advance			% African American	1%
				% immigrants	33%
				% language other than English spoken in the home	49%
				Median age	37.2 years

Discount stores: Budget Style. The chart below provides a store snapshot for Budget Style as well as a summary of the in-store experience related to generic strategy confirmation and community characteristics. Located in the middle of a city block on the north side of Chicago, Budget Style employed 140 workers, 86% of whom worked part-time and 97% of whom were paid hourly. Part-time work status conferred eligibility for very basic employee benefits at this store while workers with full-time employment status were eligible for a richer benefits package. Work schedules at Budget Style were posted two weeks in advance. The HR manager reported that the annual turnover rate at this store was around less than 60%. At the time of this study, only five percent of employees at this store were in their 50s or older.

Store observations revealed an environment that conveyed a brand image message aligned with Porter's (1980) cost leadership strategy. Similarly to the two Real Deals stores, Budget Style placed cash registers and shopping carts front and center at the store entrance to facilitate efficient processing of high-volume sales. Dressing rooms at the store also had attendants who monitored shrinkage rather than providing personal service to customers, supporting the conclusion that this store pursued a cost leadership strategy. With the exception of the electronics department, few floor associates were attending departments with customer service highly concentrated, keeping staffing costs low and supporting the conclusion that this store pursued a cost leadership strategy.

The community in which Budget Style was located had a median annual income of approximately \$47,000 and 22% of residents lived below the federal poverty line. Despite these socio-economic indicators, 20% percent of residents had acquired graduate or professional degrees. Only 27% had education levels of a high school education or less. This pattern of income and education levels was influenced by the presence of several colleges and universities

in the neighborhood. One-third of community residents (33%) spoke a language other than English in the home. Thirteen percent of residents identified as Latino and 33% were US immigrants. The median age of residents was 36.8 years old.

The HR manager who was interviewed at this store was a white woman who had entered the HR field intending to make it her career. She had worked at the store since it opened several years prior to this study but it was unclear how many years of service she had at the company. She was clearly young, perhaps in her late 20s. When asked to describe her idea of what an older workers was, she responded, “Early- to mid-40s and up...to me that’s the start of ‘older workers’.” The store manager who was interviewed was also a white woman but, in contrast to the HR manager, she was a highly-experienced HR professional who had long tenure at the company. She had been selected to be part of the team that was responsible for opening the store. She described herself as an “older worker” according to the definition used in this study (age 50 or older). When asked to describe her idea of what an older worker was, she responded, “I guess 50s and up...oh no, that makes me an older worker!”

High-End stores: Splendid Things. The chart below provides a store snapshot for Splendid Things as well as a summary of the in-store experience related to generic strategy confirmation and community characteristics. Located in a high-end suburban strip mall in the northern suburbs of Chicago, Splendid Things employed 182 workers with the number rising to 200 during the holiday rush. Thirty to forty percent of employees worked part-time and 90% of these workers were paid hourly. Part-time work status conferred eligibility for very basic employee benefits at this store while workers with full-time employment status were eligible for a richer benefits package.

Table 3-3: Store Characteristics for Budget Style

Store Snapshot		In-store Experience		Community Characteristics	
Store location	Stand-alone store	Shopping carts available	Present	Neighborhood	Urban
Store size without seasonal employees	300	Location of cash registers	Centralized	Median income	\$47,132
Store size with seasonal employees	380	Overall staff density	Concentrated	% below poverty	22%
Proportion part-time	87%	Customer service desk present	Present	% high school education or less	27%
Proportion hourly	97%	Dressing room help available	Shrinkage monitoring	% some college	18%
Proportion ages 50 and over	5%	Assisted sell offered	Limited locations	% Associate's degree	5%
Store turnover rate	40%			% Bachelor's degree	31%
Benefits eligibility requirements : part-time benefits	Average work hours >22 hours per week			% graduate or professional degree	20%
Benefits eligibility requirements : full-time benefits	Average work hours >32 hours per week			% Latino	13%
Schedule posting timeframe	2 weeks in advance			% African American	2%
				% immigrants	26%
				% language other than English spoken in the home	33%
				Median age	36.8 years

Work schedules at Splendid Things were posted three weeks in advance. The HR manager reported that the annual turnover rate at this store was around 40%. At the time of this study, one-half of employees at this store were in their 50s or older.

The brand image message conveyed at Splendid Things aligned with Porter's (1980) differentiation strategy. The store dazzled upon entry with an environment that conveyed a sense of luxury, consistent with this strategy. Differentiation strategies rely on attentive personal service that was indeed available, along with assisted sells, throughout the store. Employees were easily visible in more than half of departments, further supporting the conclusion that this store pursued a differentiation strategy.

The community in which Splendid Things was located had a median annual income of approximately \$60,000 with 12% of residents living below the federal poverty line. The education level of nearly one-third of residents in the community (32%) was a high school education or less while 14% percent had acquired graduate or professional degrees. More than half of community residents (56%) spoke a language other than English in the home. Only six percent of residents identified as Latino with another six percent identifying as African American. Forty-seven percent of residents were US immigrants. The median age of residents was 44.2 years old.

The HR manager who was interviewed at this store was a white woman who had many years of experience as an HR professional and had long tenure with the store. She described herself as an "older worker" according to the definition used in this study (age 50 or older). When asked to describe her idea of what an older worker was, she responded, "I would say 50 on up, that's what I would think of as older."

Table 3-4: Store Characteristics for Splendid Things

Store Snapshot		In-store Experience		Community Characteristics	
Store location	Mall anchor	Shopping carts available	Not present	Neighborhood	Suburban
Store size without seasonal employees	164	Location of cash registers	Dispersed in departments	Median income	\$60,145
Store size with seasonal employees	200	Overall staff density	Dispersed	% below poverty	12%
Proportion part-time	30-40%	Customer service desk present	Present	% high school education or less	32%
Proportion hourly	90%	Dressing room help available	Personal assistance	% some college	22%
Proportion ages 50 and over	50%	Assisted sell offered	Throughout the store	% Associate's degree	6%
Store turnover rate	40%			% Bachelor's degree	25%
Benefits eligibility requirements: part-time benefits	Average work hours \geq 20 hours per week			% graduate or professional degree	14%
Benefits eligibility requirements: full-time benefits	Average work hours \geq 30 hours per week			% Latino	6%
Schedule posting timeframe	3 weeks in advance			% African American	6%
				% immigrants	47%
				% language other than English spoken in the home	56%
				Median age	44.2 years

High-End stores: Classic Style. The chart below provides a store snapshot for Classic Style as well as a summary of the in-store experience related to generic strategy confirmation and community characteristics. Located in a high-end suburban mall in the northern suburbs of Chicago, Classic Style employed 100 workers with the number rising to 135 during the holiday rush, 70% of whom worked part-time and 90% of whom were paid hourly. All employees at this store were eligible for the same generous employee benefits package. Work schedules at Classic Style were posted four weeks in advance. The HR manager reported that the annual turnover rate at this store was around 40%. At the time of this study, 65% of employees at this store were in their 50s or older.

Classic Style, similarly to Splendid Things, presented a brand image message that aligned with Porter's (1980) differentiation strategy. Well-dressed, stylish mannequins greeted customers at the door with sparkling cosmetics counters just behind them, conveying a sense of high-style consistent with this strategy. Floor associates were scattered throughout the store and easily located to access attentive personal service and provide assisted sells providing supporting for the conclusion that this store pursued a differentiation strategy.

The community in which Classic Style was located had a median annual income of approximately \$100,000 with 5% of residents living below the federal poverty line. More than one-quarter of residents (27%) had acquired graduate or professional degrees while the education level of only 17% of residents in the community was a high school education or less. Nearly one-third of community residents (30%) spoke a language other than English in the home. Only two percent of residents identified as Latino with another two percent identifying as African American. Twenty-two percent of residents were US immigrants. The median age of residents was 46.3 years old.

The HR manager who was interviewed at this store was an African-American woman who had studied human resource management in college and was dedicated to a career in HR. She had worked at the store for several years but it was unclear how many years of service she had at the company. She was clearly young, perhaps in her late 20s. When asked to describe her idea of what an older worker was, she responded, “I think of probably 60 and older.”

High-End stores: Luxe. The chart below provides a store snapshot for Luxe as well as a summary of the in-store experience related to generic strategy confirmation and community characteristics. Located in a downtown business district in Chicago’s North Shore area, Luxe employed 60 workers, 10% of whom worked part-time and 83% of whom were paid hourly. Work schedules at Luxe were posted four weeks in advance. At the time of this study, one-half of employees at this store were in their 50s or older.

The brand image message conveyed at Luxe was elegant and refined. More dimly lit than Classic Style and Splendid Things, this smaller store provided a more intimate setting that felt like one was entering a well-appointed home. This environment aligned with Porter’s (1980) differentiation strategy. Attentive personal service and assisted sells were readily available throughout the store with employees who were as elegantly dressed as the mannequins. These were strategically placed throughout the store and easily visible, further supporting the conclusion that this store pursued a differentiation strategy.

Table 3-5: Store Characteristics for Classic Style

Store Snapshot		In-store Experience		Community Characteristics	
Store location	Mall anchor	Shopping carts available	No	Neighborhood	Suburban
Store size without seasonal employees	100	Location of cash registers	Distributed throughout store, available in most departments	Median income	\$99,538
Store size with seasonal employees	135	Overall staff density	High (≥ 2 employees visible in department)	% below poverty	5%
Proportion part-time	70%	Customer service desk present	No	% high school education or less	17%
Proportion hourly	90%	Dressing room help available	Provided by a salesperson staffing the department	% some college	18%
Proportion ages 50 and over	65%	Assisted sell offered	Yes	% Associate's degree	4%
Store turnover rate	40%			% Bachelor's degree	35%
Benefits eligibility requirements: part-time benefits ²	Job status = part-time, benefits-eligible			% graduate or professional degree	27%
Benefits eligibility requirements: full-time benefits	Job status = full-time			% Latino	2%
Schedule posting timeframe	4 weeks in advance			% African American	2%
				% immigrants	22%
				% language other than English spoken in the home	30%
				Median age	46.3 years

The community in which Luxe was located had a median annual income of approximately \$116,000 with 6% of residents living below the federal poverty line. Nearly one-third of residents (31%) had acquired graduate or professional degrees while the education level of only 14% of residents in the community was a high school education or less. Fifteen percent of community residents spoke a language other than English in the home. Five percent of residents identified as Latino with another two percent identifying as African American. Eleven percent of residents were US immigrants. The median age of residents was 45.4 years old.

The HR manager at this store was a white woman who was an experienced HR professional who had been with the firm for many years and at this store in particular for several years. She defined herself as over 50. When asked to describe her idea of what an older worker was, she responded, “Over 65...I’m trying to be objective here, I’m over 50!”

Comparisons of characteristics of Discount and High-End stores. The data presented reveal a high level of variation in characteristics between Discount and High-End stores. Store characteristics supported their categorization into cost leadership versus differentiation strategies. Discount stores employed a vastly part-time workforce and High-End stores employed a greater proportion of full-time workers than Discount stores. Further, variation was found in scheduling practices between Discount and High-End stores with High-End stores providing their employees with more notice of their work schedules (between three and four weeks) than Discount stores (two weeks). Since both full-time status and scheduling stability are considered markers of job quality, these data suggest that, overall, jobs at High-End stores were of higher quality than those at Discount stores. Variation in job quality will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Table 3-6: Store Characteristics for Luxe

Store Snapshot		In-store Experience		Community Characteristics	
Store location	Stand-alone store	Shopping carts available	No	Neighborhood	Suburban
Store size without seasonal employees	60	Location of cash registers	Distributed throughout store, available in most departments	Median income	\$115,549
Store size with seasonal employees	60	Overall staff density	High (>=2 employees visible in department)	% below poverty	6%
Proportion part-time	10%	Customer service desk present	No	% high school education or less	14%
Proportion hourly	83%	Dressing room help available	Provided by a salesperson staffing the department	% some college	18%
Proportion ages 50 and over	50%	Assisted sell offered	Yes	% Associate's degree	3%
Store turnover rate	n/a			% Bachelor's degree	33%
Benefits eligibility requirements: part-time benefits	n/a			% graduate or professional degree	31%
Benefits eligibility requirements: full-time benefits	n/a			% Latino	5%
Schedule posting timeframe	4 weeks in advance			% African American	2%
				% immigrants	11%
				% language other than English spoken in the home	15%
				Median age	45.4 years

¹ Data not available

Discount stores in the study employed far fewer older workers than High-End stores. Discount stores' workforces included a maximum proportion of 33% workers age 50 or over at Real Deals – North to a low of five percent at Budget Style. In contrast, at least half of all employees at High-End stores were age 50 or over with Classic Style's workforce at 65% percent. HR managers at the stores explained the presence (or absence) of older workers in their stores as related to the labor pool available in their communities since stores hired most of their workers from the surrounding neighborhood. This finding is supported by the fact that at two High-End and one Discount store managers reported identical turnover rates (40%) with widely disparate proportions of older workers. At Budget Style, which was located in an area of Chicago where several colleges and universities were located, only five percent of employees in the store were age 50 or over. In contrast, Splendid Things and Classic Style were both located in more affluent suburban communities and had employee populations where 50% and 65% of employees were age 50 or over, respectively. It is possible that workers may have aged while in their jobs, as opposed to being hired at an older age. Unfortunately, this information was not available.

Store observations indicated that in-store experiences related to brand image strategies varied greatly between Discount and High-End stores. Discount stores provided highly centralized customer service in locations such as checkout lines while customer service was widely distributed, and more available as observed through differences in staff density, throughout the High-End stores. Similarly, dressing room experiences at Discount and High-End stores seemed to reflect disparate organizational goals. At Discount stores, the tight control of merchandise in and out of dressing rooms appeared to be designed to limit theft that would impact the stores' costs. In contrast, salespeople accompanying customers to dressing rooms and

locating additional items for them at High-End stores suggests an emphasis on attentive service. Shopping carts that allowed customers to carry a great deal of merchandise while shopping were present only at Discount stores suggesting that these stores sought to encourage high-volume shopping among their customers, a characteristic of cost leader strategies. In contrast, differentiators rely on higher price points for their profits. In this case, selling fewer items at higher prices would yield the desired results, making shopping carts unnecessary. Taken together, these findings support Porter's (1980) model where differentiators rely on attentive customer service and merchandise differentiation when competing in the market and cost leaders facilitate high-volume, low-cost operations.

All three High-End stores were located in communities where incomes were higher than those in the communities in which Discount stores were located. In the case of Luxe, the median income level was more than double that of the communities in which the Discount stores were located. Classic Style's community income level was also close to that level. While poverty rates in two of the three communities in which two High-End stores were located were much lower than the communities in which Discount stores were located, the poverty rate in Splendid Things' community fell into the same range as the poverty rates in the Discount stores' communities. There was substantial variation in education levels between Discount and High-End stores with more than 60% of residents of the communities in which Classic Style and Luxe were located having attained Bachelor's degrees or higher. The communities in which Discount stores were located were substantially more racially and ethnically diverse than those in which High-End stores were located. Immigrant families represented higher proportions of the populations in the communities in which Discount stores were located with the exception of Splendid Things. The community in which Splendid Things was located also had the highest

proportion of families who spoke a language other than English in the home. The residents of communities in which Discount stores were located were substantially younger, on average, than those in the communities in which High-End stores were located. Discount stores' communities had an average median age of 37.4 years old as compared to 45.3 years old in the communities in which High-End stores were located.

Table 3-7: Comparisons of Characteristics of Discount and High-End Stores

	Discount Average	High-End Average		Discount Average	High-End Average
Store size without seasonal employees	180	108	Median income	\$53,631	\$91,744
Store size with seasonal employees	213	132	% below poverty	15%	8%
Proportion part-time	84%	38%	% high school education or less	40%	21%
Proportion hourly	96%	88%	% some college	21%	19%
Proportion ages 50 and over	19%	55%	% Associate's degree	6%	4%
Store turnover rate	54%	40% ¹	% Bachelor's degree	22%	31%
			% graduate or professional degree	11%	24%
			% Latino	24%	4%
			% African American	1%	3%
			% immigrants	30%	27%
			% language other than English spoken in the home	44%	34%
			Median age	37.4 years	45.3 years

¹ Data not available for Luxe

Job Characteristics

This section will provide an overview of the range of jobs available in the stores as described by HR managers; some jobs were not present in all stores. The jobs described below include Merchandise Movers, Store Zoners, Customer Processors, Service Desk Staffers, Display Designers, Personal Shoppers, Solicitous Sellers (Commissioned and Non-Commissioned), Specialty Skill Providers, and Store Managers.

Job type: Merchandise Movers. Merchandise Movers were responsible for unloading truck deliveries, unpacking merchandise, logging items into inventory, and placing them on the sales floor to be “zoned,” meaning, organized according to a store map. They also “back stocked” items that did not fit on the shelves, meaning they took items back into the stock rooms after zoning was completed and logged them back into inventory. All stores employed Merchandise Movers. The two smaller Discount stores in this study, Real Deals – North and – South, employed relatively small teams of Merchandise Movers. However, Budget Style, which had roughly three times the number of employees of each Real Deals store, employed many Merchandise Movers and ran a 24-hour operation. At all three Discount stores, Merchandise Movers were not responsible for the zoning the store, meaning, they moved merchandise onto the floor and other employees put items on shelves or racks. Merchandise Movers at High-End stores performed many of the same tasks as those at Discount stores. However, in two of the three stores, they had additional responsibilities. At Luxe and Classic Style, Merchandise Movers also performed the role of Store Zoners as described below.

Job type: Store Zoners. Store Zoners organized merchandise that had been placed on the sales floor by Merchandise Movers. They used store zoning maps that indicated where each item belonged and placed them accordingly. Store Zoners arranged items that had been moved to

the floor from delivery trucks at four of the six stores in the study. At Discount stores, zoning was the responsibility of floor associates. These employees were out on the sales floor during the day when customers were shopping. Store Zoners at Discount chains also rearranged items already on display when store management altered the store zoning map, which happened periodically as items went on sale, arrived seasonally, or when display styles were updated. In addition to arranging items from the trucks or rearranging items according to new maps, Store Zoners at Discount chains also relocated items that had been misplaced by customers. Further, employees in these jobs helped customers locate merchandise. As previously mentioned, Merchandise Movers zoned items at both Luxe and Classic Style. Splendid Things had a dedicated team that took care of zoning after Merchandise Movers had placed items on the floor. At all three High-End stores, zoning out-of-place items during the day was assigned to Solicitous Sellers for completion when customer traffic was slow.

Job type: Customer Processors. Customer Processors were responsible for processing customer purchases at the cash register. This role existed only at the Discount chains; at High-End chains, this function was performed by Solicitous Sellers who took their customers from product selection all the way through purchase completion. The primary role of Customer Processors was to get shoppers through the checkout lines as quickly as possible. At all three stores, these workers had the additional job of promoting store offerings such as asking if customers had a rewards card or store credit card and whether they would like an e-receipt or replacement plan for expensive items.

Job type: Service Desk Staffers. All Discount stores and one High-End store had customer service desks where Service Desk Staffers assisted customers in a centralized location with issues such as returns or exchanges. Two High-End chains did not have customer service

desks. At these stores, Solicitous Sellers handled customer service requests at cash registers located in various departments. At Discount stores, Service Desk Staffers handled tasks as diverse as processing returns and sorting the items into bins for restocking or trash; answering questions and explaining store policies; issuing rain checks and, at one store, fishing licenses; processing money orders; and, answering phone calls that came into the stores. They also monitored check-out lines and called Store Zoners off the floor to help at cash registers as needed. At Splendid Things, Service Desk Staffers handled returns and answered questions. However, they also provided other types of service such as handling store credit card account inquiries and gift wrapping.

Job type: Display Designers. High-End stores employed workers whose job it was to artistically arrange merchandise that had been placed on the floor to make it appealing. This job was not present at the Discount chains. These groups, called Visual Teams, performed tasks such as dressing mannequins, setting up table displays, and arranging items in windows and glass cases.

Job type: Personal Shoppers. Two of the High-End chains employed Personal Shoppers who provided extensive personal service to a select group of customers. A third High-End chain employed Personal Shoppers per their website, but this service was not offered at this store location. Personal Shoppers would consult with their customers and “pre-shop” the store for items that would fit their customers’ needs. Customers would try the items on during a personal appointment and Personal Shoppers would assist them, bringing additional items as needed. Personal Shoppers also engaged in “clientelling” in which they made proactive contact with customers to build and maintain relationships. Personal Shoppers had significant sales goals they were expected to meet.

Job type: Solicitous Sellers – Commissioned. Solicitous Sellers waited on customers to help them select merchandise, performing what was referred to as an “assisted sell.” In most cases, these employees were eligible to earn commissions as an incentive to sell aggressively. At both Real Deals stores, workers stationed in the electronics or jewelry departments had the opportunity to earn small commissions on certain types of items. These workers answered questions about merchandise and unlocked cases for customers. Solicitous Sellers in commissioned jobs at High-End stores were responsible for helping customers find items they were seeking and making suggestions about alternatives and complementary items. In the case of apparel, these workers accompanied customers to the dressing rooms in order to provide input on fit and style as well as retrieving additional sizes and items as appropriate to shoppers’ needs. These workers also engaged in clientelling and had sales goals they were expected to meet. Commissioned Solicitous Sellers worked with customers from start to finish, assisting with item selection and processing their transactions at cash registers located in the departments. They were also responsible for offering store credit cards to customers and for collecting email addresses. Solicitous Sellers who were located in departments with locked cabinets, such as jewelry or cosmetics, also had responsibility for keeping track of stock and processing mark-downs.

Job type: Solicitous Sellers – Non-Commissioned. Some stores employed non-commissioned Solicitous Sellers. These employees performed functions similar to those of commissioned Solicitous Sellers but received only hourly pay. At Budget Style, Solicitous Sellers who were stationed in the electronics department or jewelry counters were not eligible for commission pay. Real Deals stores did not employ non-commissioned Solicitous Sellers. Luxe did not employ any non-commissioned Solicitous Sellers while at Classic Style nearly all

Solicitous Sellers were non-commissioned, the exception being those stationed in the shoe, jewelry, and cosmetics departments. At Splendid Things, a small minority of Solicitous Sellers were completely non-commissioned.

Job type: Specialty Skill Providers. A few chains in the study employed small numbers of workers with specialized skills. A full-service pharmacy operated on-site at Budget Style and the store employed a team of workers with pharmacy skills. These jobs required extensive training and licensing due to both legal requirements and risk management. They also employed a team of assets protection specialists who provided security against shrinkage. Neither Real Deals store had such positions. Both Splendid Things and Luxe had seamstresses on staff to provide alteration services to customers.

Job type: Store Managers. All chains in the study employed several salaried managers, including a store manager and other high-level managers. They also generally employed full-time hourly managers called “leads” who acted as assistant managers for various departments. Managers represented a very small proportion of workers in all stores. At each Discount store, there were several salaried managers who were responsible for functions such as general store operations, merchandise management, and logistics/receiving management. The managers reported to the store manager. Reporting to these salaried managers were full-time hourly employees who were primarily department managers. At Budget Style, which was a much larger operation, there were several additional salaried roles, including a manager of assets protection (security/theft prevention) and a pharmacy manager. Also, the HR manager at Budget Style was salaried, whereas, at Real Deals, the HR managers were hourly employees. Many of these salaried managers had full-time hourly employees reporting to them who were assistant managers. High-End stores also employed salaried managers who were responsible for areas

such as general store operations, merchandise management, human resources, and logistics/receiving management. These managers reported to the store manager. At both Splendid Things and Classic Style, the assistant managers were salaried employees. Luxe, which was a smaller operation, did not have assistant managers. Rather, at this store, the salaried managers were responsible for the complete operations of their areas.

Proportion of workers in different jobs. Using data provided by HR managers during interviews, the proportions of workers employed in different jobs in each store were calculated. These data are presented for both Discount and High-End stores, followed by a comparison of the two.

Proportion of workers in different jobs – Discount stores. The largest proportion of employees at both Real Deals stores was in Store Zoner jobs. At Budget Style, the largest Discount store, the most prevalent job was Merchandise Movers. Both of these roles were primarily concerned with ensuring that merchandise was accessible to shoppers. Over two-thirds of the workers employed at Discount stores were in customer-facing roles. Specifically, customer-facing employees, including Service Desk Staffers, Customer Processors, Store Zoners, and Solicitous Sellers, represented an average of 68% of the total employees in the Discount stores.

Table 3-8: Proportions of Store Workers in Different Jobs – Discount Stores

	Real Deals- North	Real Deals- South	Budget Style
Merchandise Movers	2%	10%	37%
Store Zoners	41%	43%	27%
Customer Processors	34%	24%	18%
Service Desk Staffers	5%	8%	5%
Display Designers	0%	0%	0%
Personal Shoppers	0%	0%	0%
Solicitous Sellers – Commissioned	<5%	<5%	0%
Solicitous Sellers – Non-Commissioned	0%	0%	<5%
Specialty Skill Providers	0%	0%	3%
Store Managers	14%	14%	10%

Note: Some HR managers provided estimates and/or rounded numbers; percentages may not total to 100%

Proportion of workers in different jobs – High-End stores. The data revealed that, overall, High-End stores’ staffs were heavily weighted toward employees who were responsible for providing attentive service to customers. Between 67% and 83% of the workers employed at High-End stores were in Solicitous Seller or Personal Shopper jobs. None of the High-End stores had centralized cash register lines thus there were no Customer Processors employed at these stores. As previously noted, this function was performed by Solicitous Sellers. The High-End stores each employed similar, and small, proportions of Merchandise Movers and Store Managers/Assistant Managers.

Table 3-9: Proportions of Store Employees in Different Jobs – High-End Stores

	Classic Style	Luxe	Splendid Things
Merchandise Movers	5%	8%	4%
Store Zoners	0%	0%	4%
Customer Processors	0%	0%	0%
Service Desk Staffers	0%	0%	4%
Display Designers	1%	3%	2%
Personal Shoppers	0% ¹	8%	n/a ²
Solicitous Sellers – Commissioned	20%	59%	65%
Solicitous Sellers – Non-Commissioned	63%	0%	14%
Specialty Skill Providers	1%	5%	2%
Store Managers	10%	17%	9%

¹ Personal Shoppers were available at other store locations

² Store data not available

Note: Some HR managers provided estimates and/or rounded numbers; percentages may not total 100%

Comparisons of proportion of employees in different jobs relative to total employee population. The most notable variation in the distribution of employees in jobs between Discount and High-End stores was the proportion of employees in jobs that focused on either merchandise moving/organizing or attentive customer service. The tables below provide detail on these differences by store and a comparison of all six stores in the study.

Table 3-10: Proportions of Store Employees in Different Jobs – All Stores

	Real Deals- North	Real Deals- South	Budget Style	Classic Style	Luxe	Splendid Things
Merchandise Movers	2%	10%	37%	5%	8%	4%
Store Zoners	41%	43%	27%	0%	0%	4%
Total	43%	53%	64%	5%	8%	8%
Personal Shoppers	0%	0%	0%	0% ¹	8%	n/a ^{1,2}
Sollicitous Sellers – Commissioned	<5%	<5%	0%	20%	59%	65%
Sollicitous Sellers – Non-Commissioned	0%	0%	<5%	63%	0%	14%
Total	<5%	<5%	<5%	83%	67%	79%
Customer Processors	34%	24%	18%	0%	0%	0%
Service Desk Staffers	5%	8%	5%	0%	0%	4%
Display Designers	0%	0%	0%	1%	3%	2%
Specialty Skill Providers	0%	0%	3%	1%	5%	2%
Store Managers	14%	14%	10%	10%	17%	9%

¹ Personal Shoppers are available at other store locations

² Store data not available

Note: Some HR managers provided estimates and/or rounded numbers; percentages may not total to 100%

Table 3-11: Mean Percentages of Store Employees in Different Jobs – Discount versus High-End

	Discount	High-End
Merchandise Movers	16%	6%
Store Zoners	38%	1%
Total	53%	7%
Personal Shoppers	0%	n/a ¹
Sollicitous Sellers – Commissioned	<3%	48%
Sollicitous Sellers – Non-Commissioned	<2%	26%
Total	<5%	76%
Customer Processors	25%	0%
Service Desk Staffers	6%	1%
Display Designers	0%	2%
Specialty Skill Providers	1%	3%
Store Managers	13%	12%

¹ Store data not available

At least two-thirds of employees in each of the High-End stores were in customer service-intensive jobs while only a small fraction of employees at Discount stores were in similar roles. Conversely, roughly one-half of employees at Discount stores were responsible for moving/organizing merchandise while at High-End stores only a small fraction of employees had this responsibility. In three cases, particular jobs were found only in one type of store or the other. Specifically, High-End stores did not employ Customer Processors while Discount stores did not employ either Display Designers or Personal Shoppers. In both cases, the presence of absence of these roles aligns with stores' strategies of either differentiation or cost leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a view into the characteristics of the communities in which stores are located, the characteristics of the six stores, and the characteristics of the jobs available in the stores. High-End stores were consistently located in affluent communities while Discount stores were located in less affluent communities. Discount stores were organized in a more centralized manner compared to High-End stores. High-End stores offered more full-time employment opportunities and more notice for employees' work schedules, suggesting that jobs at these stores were of higher quality than those at Discount stores. This question will be explored in more depth in Chapter 5. Overall, the types of jobs available and the distribution of employees into those jobs appeared to be consistent with the brand image strategies the six firms pursued.

CHAPTER 4

BRAND IMAGE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR JOB QUALITY

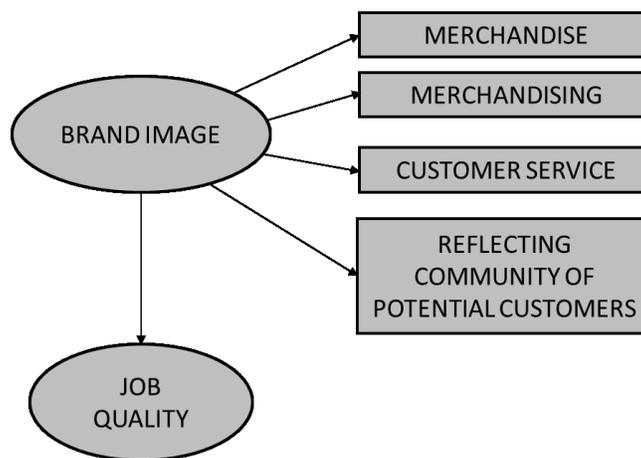
This chapter will address the first research question by providing explanations of how HR managers in this study understood the messages they received about the key elements of their stores' brand images and how these messages played out in store practices. Managers' conceptions of brand image were triangulated with evidence collected from store observations and website reviews to examine where brand images were reflected in store practices and in messages to customers. During interviews, HR managers were asked open-ended questions designed to elicit their understanding of brand image messages conveyed by their organizations. Managers were asked to describe their stores' brand images and the ways in which management talked about how their firms' brand images ought to influence day-to-day store operations. Brand images were investigated during store observations via examination of merchandise displays and pricing, store staffing patterns, and the presence or absence of store features such as assisted-sells, shopping carts, cash registers, and customer service desks. Reviews of stores' websites explored the presentation of brand images in varying ways to customers, prospective employees, and shareholders.

To gain an understanding of the quality of jobs available within the stores, HR managers were asked to identify three jobs in their stores for deeper examination, a job that involved a great deal of customer contact (High-Touch Job), one that involved little or no customer contact (Low-Touch Job), and the Customer Service Desk Job, where applicable. HR managers were asked questions about job characteristics that are indicators of job quality such as wages, benefits eligibility, and scheduling practices. The in-depth explorations of three jobs at the stores, in addition to store demographic data, allowed a picture of variation in job quality to emerge.

The Dimensions of Brand Images

The elements that HR managers articulated that comprised brand images fell into four categories at both Discount and High-End stores, specifically, merchandise, merchandising, customer service, and reflecting the community. Overall, brand image was associated with the quality of jobs available in the stores.

Figure 2: Dimensions of Brand Image as Articulated by HR Managers and Their Relationship to Job Quality



During interviews, HR managers at Discount stores described their merchandise in terms of low prices and good quality. Merchandising at these stores represented activities that resulted in presenting customers with a clean, organized store, which ultimately facilitated customer service. Customer service at Discount stores was conceptualized as providing customers with an environment in which they could easily locate merchandise without employee assistance. HR managers also pressed the point of how crucial it was that stores fitted with the surrounding communities. HR managers at High-End stores in this study described their merchandise in terms of offering fashion-forward, high-quality, exclusive items. Merchandising was focused on creating a luxurious environment where items were artistically displayed for maximum aesthetic

impact in order to make customers feel they were in an elegant place. Customer service at High-End stores was conceptualized as waiting on customers in an attentive, responsive way. To facilitate customer service, the role of Solicitous Seller was professionalized and employees were provided with professional development opportunities and pathways to advancement. Offering multi-channel convenience to customers (e.g., through in-store service and services through their websites) was also an aspect of customer service at these stores. Store observations and analyses of websites provided a window into how these stores' brand messages, as perceived by HR managers, played out in the stores and in messages to customers and prospective hires.

Merchandise as a dimension of brand image. The type of merchandise offered at the stores was a key aspect of how brand images were communicated to customers. Price point, quality level, the extent to which items were fashionable and unique, and type of brands offered all sent messages to shoppers of what to expect from the stores. There was substantial variation in the type of merchandise available in Discount versus High-End stores, which sent widely varying brand image messages to customers.

Merchandise at Discount stores. Discount stores offered a range of items from no-name products, to store brands that offered better quality at a somewhat higher price point, to celebrity brands that were exclusive to their stores and priced somewhat higher than store brands. One HR manager noted that low prices and high quality went together at their store, "We have cool stuff at a good price," she said. Another HR manager commented that customers really noticed the product quality, remarking, "People are surprised at the prices [because] the quality went up [recently]." In addition, the sections of Discount stores' websites that were geared toward shareholders, investors, and industry analysts emphasized stores' celebrity brand partnerships as an example of delivering high-quality items at low prices.

At Budget Style, the store manager explained that their merchandise had to be priced competitively relative to other stores in the area and that some types of merchandise had to be more responsive to conditions than other. She noted,

When it comes to food, we're very sharply priced [because our customer] is shopping us and then they're also shopping [competitor stores]. So they know where they can get the best price for this, that, and the other [thing]. And probably one of the biggest challenges we have is, since it is a neighborhood store, they want us to carry a much broader selection of food than we ever will because we're just not set up for that. We're not designed to be a grocery store. So that's been one of the biggest challenges, how you have such a diverse neighborhood and carry enough breadth in selection to keep everybody happy. We're limited to what we can do.

The HR manager at Budget Style added that so-called softlines (e.g., apparel and accessories) required the store to price competitively but that competition wasn't as fierce since these items were not daily purchases for most shoppers,

[We monitor competitors], we look at them because we have a good amount of clothing within this store so we look at them to see how they price. We're at very similar price points, not exactly, but similar because we have similar demographics in clothing. I think we're all chasing that same customer.

The concept of low prices at Discount stores in the study extended beyond price tags on items into other ways for customers to save money. One HR manager described several key features of the store's offerings that complimented low merchandise prices and strengthened the store's low-cost message. First, at some stores loyalty programs offered customers the opportunity to earn points that could be applied toward discounts for merchandise,

We have a rewards card that works very well...one lady came in yesterday and was surprised her points would double in a day [because of a program promotion] so she used her rewards card and was really excited. She got a lot for her money that time.

Another HR manager described two money-saving programs at her store,

Sometimes we have double coupons, and every week we have a promotion that if you buy \$25, they get something free, too. This week it's orange juice. A couple weeks ago I got my son a new lunchbox for free.

Similarly, purchases at Discount stores made with a store credit card received an automatic discount or points awards at the time of purchase.

Merchandise at High-End stores. HR managers at High-End stores spoke repeatedly and animatedly about the importance of fashion and trendiness to their brand images. They used words like fashion-forward, fashion-driven, trendy, hip, upscale, exclusive, and high-end to describe both their brand images and the merchandise offered in the stores. As one HR manager remarked, “Our brand image would be very *trendy*, very *New York*.” Merchandise offered in the stores was largely apparel and accessories, what was referred to as “ready-to-wear.” When HR managers described merchandise in terms of price they tended to use euphemisms, as though it was gauche to discuss price directly. For example, the term “expensive” was not used by HR managers. Rather, as one HR manager commented, “[We carry] women’s clothing that are at a...[tilts head, looks toward ceiling] *certain* price point.” Another noted, “Our bags are mostly by well-known, [nodding] *upscale* designers.” HR managers often described the characteristics of the merchandise with regard to their fashionable, luxurious, and discretionary nature. One HR manager noted, “We sell lots of lovely things but we don’t sell anything you need to have to survive.”

HR managers at all stores commented that their stores offered a wide range of apparel styles, including business wear, formal attire, and trendy, casual items, in addition to what one HR manager described as, “our upscale lines.” Another HR manager commented, “[Y]ou go [to our store] for your really nice dresses to wear to parties and prom and weddings and stuff like that. You go for your great quality suits, you go for your great shoes.” Store observations and website analysis indicated that “nice” and “great” not only referred to quality and style but were also terms that substituted for “expensive.” At one store, a mannequin displayed a suit composed

of a \$500 jacket, \$200 blouse, and \$250 skirt. Blue jeans at High-End stores routinely ran between \$100 and \$200 a pair. On one store's website, over 100 dresses in the \$2,000 to \$5,500 range were available. Additionally, High-End stores carried a wide variety of upscale cosmetics and fragrances, fashion and fine jewelry, high-end housewares and gifts, as well as handbags and other accessories. These items had equally high price points. When describing cosmetics, one HR manager noted, "[T]hat [facial cream that costs \$300] is not the most costly [we offer]...we have a \$700 cream in there." Indeed, many items available in these stores and on their websites routinely ran into the thousands of dollars. During store observations, it was not uncommon to find women's shoes priced over \$1,000. Further, while a few handbags priced just under \$200 were available at one store, a wide range of bags were offered in the \$1,000-\$3,000 range. While most perfumes at the stores were priced in the \$100-\$200 range, stores' websites revealed offerings as high as \$3,000 per bottle.

The second dimension of brand image as defined by HR managers was merchandising.

Merchandising as a dimension of brand image. The ways in which stores were laid out and merchandise was displayed also reflected stores' brand image messages and varied accordingly.

Merchandising at Discount stores. Stores used a variety of merchandising methods to convey their low-price messages, including signage, labeling, arrangement of displays, and, in one case, loudspeaker announcements. HR managers at Discount stores did not appear to think of these elements as merchandising per se. Rather, they talked about making it easy for customers to find deals. One HR manager explained, "Yeah, our signs are bigger when there's a sale, they're bright to grab your attention." This claim did bear out during store observations. Another noted, "Our clearance stuff is always together, it's easy to find." Indeed, in all stores a wide

variety of clearance merchandise was grouped together in segregated areas of the stores, enabling interested shoppers to focus on these lowest-priced items. Special, brightly-colored price labels were affixed to clearance items to further distinguish them as the best deals to be had. In fact, at one store, the first merchandise display encountered was composed of clearance items that were set up on the sidewalk in front of the store entrance. The message to customers was forceful that there were deals to be had here.

Observations revealed that in all Discount stores signage for price reductions and sales promotions, such as buy-one-get-one-free, was prominently placed at the ends of the aisles where customers could not help but see them. Reduced-price items were easily located as a result of this signage. Further, such merchandise was not hidden in the back of display areas or discretely placed. Rather, sale items were either up-front in floor display areas or prominently called out with shelf signage. During the observation at one store, an announcement was made over a loudspeaker, notifying shoppers of a special deal and directing them to the area of the store in which this deal could be found. In this case, the store was quite literally communicating a low-price message to customers. In addition to calling out discounted merchandise, stores also used signage to emphasize the low prices offered every day, even without sales promotions or discounts. Further, the emphasis on low-cost, high-volume shopping was immediately apparent upon entering the stores since the first thing in view were rows of shopping carts and check-out lines. The overall message to customers was that they could take a big basket, load up with deals, and get out the door fast.

Another aspect of merchandising at Discount stores was presenting a clean, well-stocked store. One HR manager explained, “[T]his particular store is very clean.... We always are trying to keep up with keeping our [merchandise] stock[ed], and things like that.” Speaking rapidly and

animatedly, another HR manager noted, “[Y]ou come in and [the store] feels like it’s *clean*. It’s *open*. It’s not congested and crowded. It’s not like the merchandise is dirty and nasty.” A third remarked, “I mean, we want to have a clean, neat store. We want things to be where they’re supposed to be. We want [prices to] be signed appropriately.” In the website section geared towards shareholders, investors, and industry analysts, one of the Discount stores specifically mentioned having an organized, well-stocked store environment as a competitive strategy.

The extent to which this merchandising strategy played out within Discount stores varied. At one store, unattended cardboard boxes of merchandise awaited stocking in the aisles and a number of shelves throughout the store were not neatly arranged. In contrast, at another Discount store, not a single item appeared out of place. However, during the observation at this store, when shelf labels were closely examined, it was clear that merchandise did not match up with labels. Upon inspection, the reason for the mismatch became clear; a number of grocery items were absent from the shelves and it appeared that merchandising had been poorly executed at this store. However, it was later revealed that this was an intentional merchandising strategy used by the store to give an at-a-glance impression that the store was well-stocked. As one HR manager explained,

So, they’re always scanning merchandise...and let’s say that item’s been discontinued, we have zero on hand. Well, clearly we’re not getting it back in, so what that [Store Zoner] does is, then, they replace that item with something next door...so that we don’t have gaping holes [and our customers will] come in and go, ‘Oh, are they going out of business?’

At this store, the strategy clearly worked since the lack of specific merchandise only became apparent when shelf labels were inspected closely. However, at another store where shelves did not have merchandise gaps, the result was that shelves appeared crammed with disparate, unrelated items, giving the impression that the stock was, in fact, low.

The ways in which items in the store were organized was another aspect of merchandising. Items were arranged along a series of aisles filled with shelves where customers could easily view the merchandise that was offered. The clothing displays in each store consisted of racks and shelves that were grouped together in an open space, rather than arranged in aisles. However, racks were placed close together in rows that approximated aisles in each store, resulting in the impression of efficient organization, like the rest of the store.

Merchandising on stores' websites functioned through the look and feel of the websites and their emphasis on low prices. Home pages centered on special sales with discount percentages highlighted in bright colors. Clearance sections, as well as special daily deals, were prominently placed. Upon drilling down into the departments on the websites, such as clothing, baby, and home items, the vast majority of departments' home pages featured discount and sales information front-and-center. Savings opportunities and special deals were highlighted and displayed in multiple places on the pages, enabling customers to easily shop for discounted items. Once a merchandise category was selected, such as dressers and chests in the bedroom furniture section, a drop-down menu was available to allow customers to sort the way in which items were displayed on the webpage. Merchandising on stores' websites also took the form of the structure of sort options in dropdown menus. The first options listed were marketing suggestions, such as "recommended" or "featured." The sort option immediately following these marketing-sorts was a sort-by-price option where merchandise could be arranged from lowest to highest price. Several other sort options appeared below this one, such as sort by price high-to-low or sort by customer ratings. By placing the sort by price low-to-high option towards the top of the menu, the stores emphasized their Discount images by making it easy for customers to comparison shop for the least expensive items.

Merchandising at High-End stores. HR managers remarked enthusiastically about merchandising strategies at their stores. For example, the HR manager at Classic Style spoke animatedly about a new type of merchandise display that was meant to signal a shift toward more trendiness in the store's brand image. She explained,

[T]hey're called 'sexy tables.' They're very cool display tables in each department, and you look at it, and you just...even though you really shouldn't [rolls eyes], it makes you want to *buy* stuff, the way it looks. It's so hip and colorful and awesome!

Another HR manager commented on the overall feeling shoppers experienced in her store, which resulted from their merchandising approach, explaining, "I think they enjoy shopping at this store, they like being *in* the store. I think they think of it as a pretty store, a pretty place to be in." This store employed a small team of Display Designers whose job centered exclusively on merchandising. After new items arrived at the store and had been zoned, Display Designers came through and rearranged merchandise artistically. The HR manager explained, "It's the [Display Designers] that come in and give it the POP, the WOW...they layer it, make it look like a magazine spread."

These HR managers' descriptions did indeed play out during store observations. Upon entering the High-End stores, merchandising efforts were immediately on display for customers. The elegant surroundings observed at the stores conveyed the exclusivity of the merchandise. Stylishly dressed mannequins and sparkling glass cases containing artistically-arranged items were placed front and center near the entrances and attractively-dressed salespeople were stationed nearby. The message conveyed to customers was that they should feast their eyes, let attentive staff assist them to make their experiences luxurious. Further, stores strived to make their environments feel exciting in order to entice customers to come and shop. At one store,

balloons were attached to the high chairs placed at some cosmetics counters. At the entrance of another store, a player-piano offered entertainment for shoppers.

The sales floors at High-End stores were organized in wide open spaces where items were grouped together. Apparel was generally organized by target customer (e.g., men's, juniors), by occasion (e.g., formal wear, bridal), or by merchandise type (e.g., furs, handbags, shoes). In some cases, individual designers had their own areas where racks contained only that designer's items. In cosmetics departments, spaces were less wide open and organized in aisles, however, the aisles were rarely straight and symmetrical. Rather, they resembled meandering pathways that shoppers could stroll through.

The look and feel of the High-End stores' websites revealed merchandising efforts aimed at emphasizing fashion-forward merchandise. Home pages centered on promoting newly released designer collections as well as "must-haves" and fashion guides for the season. Specific items were modeled in multiple ways, highlighting the item and providing shoppers with ideas about how to wear it. For example, one guide promoted a particular blouse style and was modeled with a business suit, a casual skirt and sweater, and with jeans and boots.

Merchandising on High-End stores' websites extended to sort options within different departments. In each case, the dropdown menu first offered the opportunity to sort by new arrivals, followed by best sellers, top customer rated, price high-to-low, and price low-to-high. The message to shoppers was that customers of this store would be interested primarily in the latest, most popular items and that lower-priced items would be of least interest to them.

The third dimension of brand image as defined by HR managers was customer service.

Customer service as a dimension of brand image. A key dimension of brand image at both Discount and High-End stores was customer service, which was conceptualized in radically different ways depending upon stores' brand images.

Customer service at Discount stores. HR managers at each of the stores commented on the importance to the brand image of providing good customer service. The way in which Discount store HR managers described customer service focused on creating a store environment that enabled customers to easily locate merchandise without assistance and helping customers solve problems and complete transactions.

Locating merchandise. Although HR managers at Discount stores did not explicitly identify the results of store zoning as "customer service," their descriptions of the intensive attention given to these activities was clearly linked to the objective of helping customers locate desired merchandise without employee assistance. Store zoning can be thought of as passive, and thus, low cost, customer service. In these stores, shoppers rarely had personal (active) interactions with store staff in order to locate desired items. Rather, the activities of Store Zoners (keeping shelves and racks stocked and organized) indirectly (passively) helped customers find what they wanted without personal assistance. The fact that, on average, approximately 40% of employees at Discount stores were in Store Zoner jobs provides support for the observation that zoning, as a strategy for delivering customer service, was a high priority for Discount stores.

When, despite stores' zoning efforts, customers were unable to locate merchandise on their own, HR managers identified behaviors that were expected of Store Zoners when interacting with customers to help them locate merchandise. For example, HR managers explained that when customers were browsing within ten feet of where a Store Zoner was working, they were expected to make eye contact and ask the customer if they needed help. One

HR manager explained, “While they’re zoning, they’re supposed to be aware of their surroundings and if they notice someone within ten feet they’re supposed to ask if they need help. That’s very important.” Further, if the item was located elsewhere in the store, the Store Zoner was not supposed to point in the right direction or just give an aisle number. Rather, the Store Zoner was expected to walk customers to the correct location of a desired item. Another HR manager commented, “[Store Zoners] are *not* supposed to just point. No! Maybe other places but not at this store. And we watch them to make sure.” Additionally, if, after checking the proper location, the item was still not found, Store Zoners were expected to use an electronic device to check the stockroom to see if a missing item was available and if so to retrieve it. At one store, failing this effort, the Store Zoner was expected to walk the customer to a computer kiosk where items could be ordered online. The HR manager explained,

When we don’t have something here in the store for the customer, we take them to the computers that are all around the store, we pull it up....they can have it shipped to their house for free and we get them to order it that way. [The Store Zoners] accept it and that’s been going on pretty good now, because you’re showing [these employees] another way of trying to help customers out.

Store observations revealed that, for the most part, these behaviors did play out in the store as described by the HR managers. For example, at Budget Style, Store Zoners were observed walking customers to areas where desired items were located. During one interaction at Budget Style, when an item was not where it was expected to be, the Store Zoner did take the additional step of using a hand-held electronic device to check availability in the stockroom. The item was then retrieved by a Merchandise Mover and the Store Zoner brought it out to the floor. In another case at Budget Style, when an item was not in the stockroom, the interaction ended. At Real Deals – South, a Store Zoner paused from zoning tasks when a customer asked for help locating an item. The Store Zoner then walked the customer over to the proper location.

However, these expectations of Store Zoners did not always play out. During an interaction in the women's clothing department at Real Deals – North, a Store Zoner pointed in the general direction of where an item was located rather than escorting the customer there. Further, on multiple occasions Store Zoners appeared deeply engaged in their zoning tasks and did not look up at nearby customers until they were asked a question, thus, failing to obey the ten foot rule.

Solving customers' problems. HR managers at Discount stores identified solving customers' problems as an important dimension of providing customer service. HR managers explained that solving customers' problems was primarily the responsibility of Service Desk Staffers and involved tasks such as explaining store policies, handling merchandise returns, and correcting transaction errors that had occurred during check-out. One HR manager noted that problems often included money issues, "They have to be good with money to work at the [service] desk, we want them to already have experience. People get mad when they're over-charged or don't get the right refund." Another HR manager explained that Service Desk Staffers had to be diplomatic when trying to solve customers' problems. She commented, "A lot of service desk is all about explaining policy and then seeing what is the most we can do for that person so that they don't feel like they're just talking to a brick wall."

During store observations, customer service desks at Discount stores handled a nearly constant flow of customers with problems to be solved. Service Desk Staffers at all three stores were observed processing returns and, in some cases, exchanges of merchandise. At Budget Style, a Service Desk Staffer attempted to explain the return policy for a particular item to a customer and ultimately involved an Assistant Manager to help solve the customer's problem.

Service Desk Staffers were not the only providers of solutions for customers. At all three stores, the problem of locating items' prices could also be solved by customers themselves

without assistance by using self-service scanning stations. Store observations revealed this self-service offering was highly effective at solving the problem of merchandise that was not marked with price tags. As previously mentioned, customers at one store could also solve the problem of encountering out-of-stock items by using computer kiosks that were available on the sales floor. A small group of customers was observed ordering an out-of-stock item using a kiosk at this store. During the interaction, one customer commented to a companion that this service option had saved her a return trip to the store. “This is better than a rain check,” she remarked. “They’ll send it to my house free, I don’t have to come back.” In this way, the firm enabled customers to solve their own problems with the help of self-service technology that supported the brand image.

Transaction completion. HR managers at Discount stores emphasized that fast transaction completion was a vital aspect customer service at their stores. Customer Processors were expected to move shoppers through the checkout lines as quickly as possible as a way to provide good customer service. As one HR manager commented, “Waiting people are not happy people. We have to get them out the door.” One impediment to quick checkouts was that Customer Processors at Discount stores were also supposed to offer store credit cards or loyalty club sign-ups during checkout. While doing so might provide better service to a particular customer, there was always the risk that slower transaction processing could make other customers’ experiences less positive. To adjust for that, or for heavy customer volume, Service Desk Staffers at one store were responsible for watching the lines and calling Store Zoners off the floor to open new registers if necessary. While this sounded like a good customer service strategy, in practice it did not always work so well given that the customer service desk at this store was positioned so that Service Desk Staffers’ backs were to the check-out lines. The HR manager explained,

I was at the Service Desk one day, and I'll never forget it, I was helping somebody and he was leaving and he says to me, "Turn around!" and I turned around and I'm like, oh my God, the lines were crazy! I just started to laugh because you have to have eyes in the back of your head. It's kind of embarrassing when you turn around and all of a sudden you've got like six or seven people in a line.

During store observations, problems such as this were not observed. All stores had only short waits in the check-out lines and, at Budget Style, an additional lane was opened when some of the lines became more than three customers deep. While customer service interactions at the check-out lines during store observations were brief, employees appeared to be personable and completed their tasks quickly.

Service Desk staffers also facilitated fast transaction completion during the exchange of previously purchased merchandise for other items. HR managers stated that cash registers were available in the electronics and jewelry departments and employees stationed there were responsible for facilitating transaction completion for those higher-priced items. At one store, all Store Zoners played a role in facilitating transactions by making merchandise in locked cabinets quickly accessible to customers. The HR manager explained,

Whoever is on the floor has keys for all the cabinets. If [a customer] needs help and they ask [any Store Zoner], that person can get it for them and not wait for the [Store Zoner assigned to that area] to get to the counter. That way [the customer] doesn't just stand there and wait for [the Store Zoner] to walk all the way back there from wherever they are.

Further, at the Real Deals stores, another form of self-service technology played a role in facilitating transaction completion. In addition to in-store computer kiosks, the store offered customers the option of ordering items online from home and then picking them up, fully packaged and ready to go, at the store.

Customer service at High-End stores. HR managers at High-End stores strongly emphasized the importance of customer service to their brand images and customer service was

strongly emphasized on the stores' websites. Customer service, which was conceptualized as attentive and personal, was also immediately evident during store observations, indicating that customer service as a key dimension of brand image was thoroughly and effectively enacted throughout the organization. Both HR managers and websites consistently used superlatives to describe the level of personal service offered to customers. Words like exceptional, outstanding, world-class, and legendary were powerfully emphasized as differentiators for the stores' brands. Further, administrative data obtained from HR managers provided further evidence of High-End stores' commitment to this dimension of brand image. Specifically, on average, approximately 50% of employees at High-End stores were in Solicitous Seller jobs. A key strategy to delivering intensive customer service was the professionalization of the Solicitous Seller role. Convenience was offered to customers through online means as well.

Professionalization of the Solicitous Seller role. On stores' website job postings and in messages to consumers on websites, stores frequently used the word "professional" with respect to the characteristics expected of workers in Solicitous Seller jobs. This characteristic was enacted through the demeanor of employees on the stores' floors during observations. As the HR manager at Splendid Things put it, "You can't clerk in this job. You can't just hold up the rack stand. You have to act like a professional." The professionalization of these jobs reflected the way in which stores' brand images emphasized the importance of human capital necessary to provide attentive customer service. Solicitous Sellers were encouraged to take their jobs seriously and be dedicated to customers, making every effort to understand and meet their needs.

So, every day we [the management team] talk about certain things that [our Solicitous Sellers] have to do with all of our customers. Are we greeting them? Are we assisting them? Are we giving them our business card?

Communication, relationship-building, and customer service skills were vital and HR managers actively recruited employees with these characteristics.

Professionalization: Relationship building and inspiring trust. The ultimate goal of the professional image Solicitous Sellers were expected to convey was to build relationships and inspire trust in order to generate repeat business. Messages from management about the importance of relationship and trust building were strong and constant. In describing how this aspect of the brand image played out in the stores, one HR manager explained,

We tell [Solicitous Sellers] to think about things like are we asking [customers] if they need help in the fitting room? Are we following up with them? Do they have a [store name] credit card? What can we do to assist them? Because it's all about building relationships.

Another HR manager commented that their employees were expected to have regular contact with their customers outside of the store via phone calls, letters, and text messages. She gave the example of a Solicitous Seller contacting a customer by phone to tell her that some new shoes had arrived at the store that would go well with the outfit the customer had purchased several weeks ago. One HR manager noted that when they had special events in the cosmetics department, Solicitous Sellers were required to reach out and schedule appointments with their customers,

A lot of [Solicitous Sellers] will do facials or makeovers. So, they'll have to have a certain amount of appointments booked for those days. They might follow up with [the customer] on their [past] purchase, like, 'Oh, you haven't had this cleanser in two months, do you need a refill? We're having this event...I'm doing a spa session...you should come in!'

Personal Shoppers at these stores provided the most intensive level of customer service and were expected to be especially adroit at relationship building and inspiring trust. The stores' websites explained that these employees had frequent contact with their customers for a variety of purposes. Personal Shoppers kept records of their customers' special dates, such as birthdays and

anniversaries of loved ones, and contacted customers with reminders and suggestions for gifts. They also contacted customers when new seasonal merchandise arrived in order to schedule appointments. Further, they reached out to customers to let them know about sales and other in-store events. Through these efforts, Personal Shoppers strived to build trust and close relationships that lead to repeat sales. Indeed, in order to be promoted into the job a Personal Shopper, Solicitous Sellers had to achieve significant sales targets by leveraging their relationships with clients.

Professionalization: Solicitous Sellers' expertise and ability to guide customers. The professionalization of the Solicitous Seller role was related to the knowledge these workers were expected to communicate to customers. HR managers and websites used words such as portraying expertise, being knowledgeable, and appearing authoritative about fashion to describe what was expected of their Solicitous Sellers and what customers could expect from the brand. Solicitous Sellers were expected to behave as personal guides to customers, to advise them, offer choices, and assist them in selecting merchandise. They were also expected to demonstrate their knowledge of their stores' merchandise and services, as well as the latest fashion trends, when interacting with customers. One HR manager offered an example of the way one Solicitous Seller demonstrated product expertise during a recent training session,

[She] said, 'I have tried their [brand] \$300 cream and let me tell you,' and she went on to explain in a fabulous fashion...at the end of it, all of us were ready to run downstairs and buy it. She had talked to the features and the benefits and why, and we were all so impressed.

When describing their Solicitous Sellers and Personal Shoppers, the stores' websites noted that these associates would keep customers abreast of the latest trends, offer customers in-depth product knowledge, provide choices that aligned with the customers' personal sense of style and budget, and help them explore fashion as a way to enhance or reinvent their personal style.

During store observations, Solicitous Sellers demonstrated their expertise and ability to guide customers during several interactions. During one visit to Splendid Things, a Solicitous Seller checked with a customer in the dressing room to see if she liked the item. The customer noted that, while the style was attractive, the fit was not good. The Solicitous Seller asked questions to determine what about the fit was amiss and walked the customer to several different areas of the department where similarly styled dresses were available. Further, the Solicitous Seller left the department in which she was stationed and went to another area to obtain an additional dress. In another interaction, an associate in a coat department responded to a comment about the length of coats that were displayed and explained the new fashion trend that was reflected in the merchandise, pointing out several items and explaining how different designers had interpreted the trend.

At a cosmetics counter, the Solicitous Seller answered customers' questions and made recommendations for skin care products after carefully examining complexion and then offered a demonstration of the newest makeup styles for the season that would complement skin tone. Additionally, at a fine jewelry counter, a Solicitous Seller answered questions about particular gems that were set in a bracelet and pointed out earrings that contained the same gems. The Solicitous Seller also mentioned that a private sale was coming up and offered to hold these items for the customer to purchase at the lower price during the private sale event. During all of these interactions, the professionalization of the Solicitous Seller role played out through employees' efforts to guide customers and demonstrate their expertise.

Professionalization: Communicating the opportunity for career growth to prospective employees. The professionalization of the Solicitous Seller role was conveyed to prospective employees through messages about growth opportunities they could expect from jobs in the

stores. HR managers and “Careers” sections of High-End stores’ websites emphasized that providing employees with opportunities for career growth was a priority at their organizations.

Website messages about career growth appeared to be intended to attract skilled applicants who would seek to advance their careers within the company. Since High-End stores depended on high levels of customer interaction to achieve their business goals, these firms had a financial interest in recruiting workers with professional aspirations who had ambitions to grow the skills needed to serve customers. On one store’s Careers website, the banner headline declared that the company was growing and by joining the organization employees could find career opportunities. Companies’ websites included statements that their corporate cultures enabled employees to distinguish themselves. They also emphasized that opportunities for growth existed in all areas of the company, from the stores to corporate offices. High-End stores communicated a clear message to prospective employees that jobs in their stores were not dead-end jobs.

Convenience to customers. At High-End stores, offering convenience to customers was an important element in conveying the brand image dimension of offering attentive personal service. The Solicitous Sellers’ and Personal Shoppers’ behaviors mentioned above were all geared toward providing such convenience. On one store’s website, the company conveyed the priority of offering convenience to customers by framing their services as time-savers, proclaiming that Solicitous Sellers and Personal Shoppers were “[H]ere for your convenience, to make your life a little less hectic.”

Stores took a multi-channel approach to saving their customers time and making shopping convenient for them. For example, one store offered virtual personal shopping services where customers could chat online, exchange emails, or speak on the phone with a fashion expert

who would then identify appropriate items and reconnect with the customer. This employee could also take the customer's order on the spot and have it delivered to the customer's home. Further, analyses of stores' websites revealed that they also offered apps for smartphones to provide their customers with mobile convenience.

Store observations revealed that Solicitous Sellers were widely dispersed throughout High-End stores, providing customers with convenient access to personal assistance. Solicitous Sellers were in customers' lines of sight in almost all areas of the store. When they were not, customers had to walk only a short way to locate assistance. Thus, the store appeared staffed-up to make it convenient for customers to obtain help. Cash registers were placed in each department, enabling customers to conveniently complete sales in a variety of locations rather than carrying merchandise to a central register line. In several areas, employees were stationed on the floor such that shoppers would encounter them when walking through the stores between departments. These workers greeted customers and, in some cases, asked if there were any questions they could answer. At Splendid Things, where a customer service desk was available, there was clear signage to direct customers to its location.

Reflecting community. Being embedded in and responsive to the needs of the communities in which their potential customers were located was another important aspect of brand image that was conveyed by HR managers. This message was expressed in much greater detail by HR managers at Discount stores than by those at High-End stores. However, websites for both types of stores presented the importance of appealing to communities in which customers resided to equal degrees.

Reflecting community at Discount stores. HR managers at Discount stores explained how important it was that their stores be recognized as fully embedded in the community. At one

store the HR manager commented, “[W]e’re constantly trying to see how we can be better members of the community...[T]o be good neighbors.” Another described the store and its customers this way, “We’re a *neighborhood* store. People in the neighborhood shop here.” At one store, the HR manager noted that to fit into the community the store had to demonstrate its responsiveness to the unique needs of local residents. At this store, Service Desk Staffers demonstrated this responsiveness by helping customers complete in-store online transactions at computer kiosks when customers did not have credit cards, which was not uncommon in this community. The HR manager explained,

If they don’t have a credit card that they can use to make that [online] purchase, they can go to the service desk, we can find out how much it will be, then they can buy a gift card with cash and pay for [the item to be ordered online] that way.

This service reinforced the store’s brand image of being a place where the store understood customers’ needs and could help them shop no matter what their financial lives might look like.

Another way that stores conveyed their connection to community was by hiring community members. One HR manager noted, “[Y]ou know, [we] have that community look, and people that shop here are the same people that work here, so that’s really important.” Hiring community members benefited stores by going beyond portraying a “community look.” These stores also had a community sound since employees often spoke the native languages of customers who were immigrants. As such, all respondents at Discount stores completely dismissed the notion that they needed to hire employees specifically for language skills since it naturally came along with hiring from the community. When asked about hiring for language skills, one HR manager shook her head vigorously and stated, “I have yet to say [when recruiting employees], ‘Oh! This person speaks this language! We need to hire them.’ I haven’t really even

looked into that.” She noted that the language skills necessary to serve customers were abundant among their employees,

[Language] is never a problem. What we often do is get on the walkie and we’ll be like, ‘Hey, does anyone speak Russian?’ Someone’s gonna be, like, ‘I do,’ so we’ll utilize that.... And we have a pretty high propensity of Latinos that work here, so we have a lot of employees that speak Spanish....It’s just the community.

An HR manager at another store made the same point,

We do have a lot of employees who speak Polish and Spanish, so we’ve been pretty good with being able to translate things when we have a customer that can’t communicate well. We usually have somebody that we could call to help....We don’t have too many employees that [live] too far away from the store.

Indeed, during one store observation, a cashier processed the purchase of one customer entirely in Spanish and then switched effortlessly to English to greet the next one. Further, all of the Discount stores provided bilingual Spanish/English signage in the stores, reflecting the large Spanish-speaking populations in these neighborhoods.

Another strategy Discount stores used to build a brand image that conveyed their support for communities was charitable giving. Their websites’ revealed that the stores made charitable gifts to local communities using a variety of approaches, including direct contributions of money and merchandise to community-based organizations, sponsoring or hosting special community events, and providing employees with volunteer opportunities in their communities. While stores’ websites promoted their community-focused charitable activities with great fanfare, these brand image messages did not appear to have been strongly conveyed to HR managers, who did not mention them as a brand image strategy during interviews. One HR manager mentioned charitable donations in passing but this particular activity would not have been visible to customers. In this way, the activity could not be considered part of the organization’s brand image strategy. She remarked,

There's furniture that comes back damaged that we donate or recycle, so we could give it to a recycling program or we bring it back to the floor and we ticket it on clearance if it's a sellable item. But we do donate to local charities sometimes.

Further, charitable giving as a brand image strategy did not play out directly in the stores. During store observations, there was no prominent signage about charitable giving. Further, while their websites touted efforts to provide customers with opportunities to make charitable donations while in the stores, store observations did not bear this out.

Reflecting community at High-End stores. At High-End stores, employing workers who mirrored the communities in which the stores were based was a business strategy that was used to facilitate customers' comfort with the store in hopes of building loyalty and repeat business. The stores were located in affluent communities and customers were local shoppers. In describing customers, HR managers used words like upscale, educated, social, and sophisticated. The HR manager at Splendid Things characterized her customers by saying, "We have customers who come in because they want to be the first on their block to wear *this* (points to her dress)...they want to be the first on the block have *those* shoes, *that* handbag." HR managers noted that it was important that customers perceived workers as similar to themselves in addition to feeling that employees were knowledgeable about the needs of customers. The HR manager at Splendid Things also explained, "I think [customers] think [the store] fits them and what they're all about. I think they see themselves reflected in our store," HR managers indicated that the main reason their employees reflected their communities was that most of them lived in the community. The HR manager at Luxe commented, "Our customers are demanding, and our [employees] can personally relate to that." She further noted that her employees tended to use their local networks to generate sales, indicating that these workers lived in the area. The HR manager at Splendid Things commented, "[When we are hiring] it's like, 'Okay, look, you are a

reflection of your community, you live around here, you're in the whole surrounding area.' And it's so fabulous!"

Reflecting the community could be seen playing out during store observations. Employees at the stores did possess traits consistent with the demographics of the communities in which the stores were located. For example, a few workers at Splendid Things wore bindis, make-up placed in the center of the forehead typically worn in countries such as India. Further, consistent with store demographics, no African American Solicitous Sellers were present. The HR manager at Classic Style explained that her workforce shared age-related traits with her customers. "I feel like my team, my [workers]...they fit the customer," she remarked. She described these customers this way, "There are a lot of retired [customers], or we have a lot of stay-at-home moms who come and shop." This age-match description played out in the store as the majority of the employees observed were mature women.

Language issues were not a topic HR managers at High-End stores brought up during interviews. Although Luxe and Classic Style were located in communities in which few non-English speakers resided, the community was ethnically diverse at Splendid Things. However, the HR manager never mentioned language as an element of reflecting the community.

High-End stores' websites included information about their philanthropic efforts in the communities in which they were located. Financial contributions and employee volunteer efforts were highlighted, however, this aspect of brand image did not appear to have filtered down to the store level. HR managers at High-End stores did not comment on these initiatives during any part of the interviews and no promotional signage was present at the stores.

Job Quality and Stores' Brand Images

Theory predicts that the quality of jobs available in the stores will be associated with the business strategies and brand images the firm pursues. In order to examine the relationship between stores' brand images (differentiation versus cost-leadership) and job quality, HR managers were asked to identify several different jobs for more in-depth evaluation. HR managers were asked to complete survey forms for these jobs by drawing on firm administrative data. They were then asked a series of follow-up questions to further illuminate similarities and differences in the quality of these jobs. Jobs were selected to represent a variety of levels of personal service and similar or similar-seeming jobs were selected across stores to allow for comparisons. The HR managers identified one High-Touch and one Low-Touch job that were selected based on the amount of customer contact each job involved. When one existed in the store, the Service Desk Staffer job was also analyzed. The elements of job quality investigated included wages, health benefits eligibility, percentage of workers employed full-time, scheduling practices, and HR manager-reported turnover rates. The next sections will provide comparisons of the different jobs within and across each brand image type in order to assess the prevalence and location of higher-quality jobs at each type of store, illuminating the extent to which workers may expect to find financial security and work-life balance opportunities at these stores.

Overview of job characteristics. The following two tables provide a summary of job quality data for Discount stores and for High-End stores. These jobs will be compared in subsequent sections.

Table 4-1: Elements of Job Quality – Discount Stores

	Real Deals- North High- Touch Job	Real Deals- South High- Touch Job	Budget Style High- Touch Job	Real Deals- North Low- Touch Job	Real Deals- South Low- Touch Job	Budget Style Low- Touch Job	Real Deals- North Service Desk Staffer Job	Real Deals- South Service Desk Staffer Job	Budget Style Service Desk Staffer Job
Job	Store Zoners	Store Zoners	Store Zoners	Claims & Damages*	Merchandise Movers	Merchandise Movers	Service Desk Staffer Job	Service Desk Staffer Job	Customer Service Desk
Proportion of employees in the job out of total employees	60%	60%	40%	<1%	10%	37%	5%	8%	5%
Average hourly wages	\$8.50	\$8.25	\$9.50	\$8.75	\$8.25	\$10.35	\$8.88	\$9.00	\$9.00
Minimum hourly wages	\$8.25	\$8.25	\$8.25	\$8.25	\$8.25	\$8.50	\$8.75	\$8.75	\$8.25
Maximum hourly wages	\$13.00	\$14.00	\$10.00	\$13.00	\$14.00	\$10.35	None	\$15.55	\$10.00
Opportunity for commission pay	Very limited	Very limited	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
Benefits eligibility: basic plans	Extensive	Extensive	Extensive	Extensive	Extensive	Extensive	Extensive	Extensive	Extensive
Benefits eligibility: comprehensive plans	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited
Minimum hours guarantees – full-time	30	39	None	n/a	39	None	30	39	None
Minimum hours guarantees – part-time	None	16	None	n/a	16	None	None	16	None
Typical hours – full-time	Unpredictable	Unpredictable	37.5	n/a	n/a	38	36	No typical hours	37.5
Typical hours – part-time	17.5	Depends on availability	24	25	19.5	22	32.5	Depends on availability	24

Table 4-1: Elements of Job Quality – Discount Stores (continued)

	Real Deals- North High- Touch Job	Real Deals- South High- Touch Job	Budget Style High- Touch Job	Real Deals- North Low- Touch Job	Real Deals- South Low- Touch Job	Budget Style Low- Touch Job	Real Deals- North Service Desk Staffer Job	Real Deals- South Service Desk Staffer Job	Budget Style Service Desk Staffer Job
Schedule stability (hours variation) full-time	Very unstable	Not available	Very stable	Not available	100% stable	Very stable	Very stable	100% stable	Very stable
Schedule stability (hours variation) part-time	Very unstable	Very unstable	Relatively unstable	100% stable	100% stable	Very stable	Relatively unstable	Very stable	Relatively unstable
Schedule predictability (advance posting)	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks
Turnover rate (likelihood of sustained employment)	63%	133%	50%	0%	50%	12%	50%	1%	7%
Amount of personal service required in job	Very little	Very little	Very little	None	Very little	None	A great deal	A great deal	A great deal

* Claims & Damages, a role that involved sorting returned merchandise in a back room

Table 4-2: Elements of Job Quality – High-End Stores

	Classic Style High-Touch Job	Luxe High-Touch Job	Splendid Things High-Touch Job	Classic Style Low-Touch Job	Luxe Low-Touch Job	Splendid Things Low-Touch Job	Splendid Things Service Desk Staffer Job
Job	Sollicitous Sellers	Sollicitous Sellers	Sollicitous Sellers	Merchandise Movers	Merchandise Movers	Merchandise Movers	Service Desk Staffer Job
Proportion of employees in the job out of total employees	84%	63%	76%	5%	8%	4%	4%
Average hourly wages	\$12.00	n/a*	\$14.00	\$10.00	n/a*	\$14.00	\$12.00
Minimum hourly wages	\$8.80	n/a*	\$10.00	\$8.50	n/a*	\$12.00	\$11.00
Maximum hourly wages	No cap	n/a*	\$22.00	No cap	n/a*	\$18.00	\$18.00
Opportunity for commission pay	Somewhat Limited	Extensive	Extensive	None	None	None	None
Benefits eligibility: basic plans	None available	n/a*	Limited	None available	n/a*	Extensive	Extensive
Benefits eligibility: comprehensive plans	Moderate	Extensive	Extensive	Limited	Moderate	Limited	Limited
Minimum hours guarantees – full-time	37.75	n/a*	None	38.5	n/a*	None	None
Minimum hours guarantees – part-time	15	n/a*	None	15	n/a*	None	None
Typical hours – full-time	38.5	n/a*	37.5	40	n/a*	37.5	30
Typical hours – part-time	20	n/a*	22.5	20	n/a*	22.5	22.5
Schedule stability (hours variation) full-time	Very stable	Completely stable	Very stable	100% stable	n/a*	Very stable	Relatively unstable
Schedule stability (hours variation) part-time	Relatively unstable	Completely stable	Relatively unstable	Very stable	n/a*	Very stable	Completely stable
Schedule predictability (advance posting)	4 weeks	4 weeks	3 weeks	4 weeks	4 weeks	3 weeks	3 weeks

Table 4-2: Elements of Job Quality – High-End Stores (continued)

Classic Style High-Touch Job	Luxe High-Touch Job	Splendid Things High-Touch Job	Classic Style Low-Touch Job	Luxe Low-Touch Job	Splendid Things Low-Touch Job	Splendid Things Service Desk Staffer Job	
Turnover rate (likelihood of sustained employment)	50%	n/a*	65%	100% (stable core, revolving door)	n/a*	20%	0%
Amount of personal service required in job	A great deal	A great deal	A great deal	None	None	None	A great deal

*Data not available: After the first interview with the HR manager at Luxe, the corporation announced the closing of this store within several months. Following this announcement, the HR manager failed to return phone calls, making scheduling of a second interview, which was needed to complete data collection, impossible.

High-Touch jobs. All HR managers at Discount stores selected the Store Zoner job for in-depth exploration as the High-Touch job while those at High-End stores selected the Solicitous Seller job. Comparisons of these jobs within each brand image type are examined below.

High-Touch jobs at Discount stores. The job quality characteristics of Store Zoner jobs at Discount stores were, for the most part, consistent across the stores with the exception of turnover rates, which ranged from 50% to 130% as reported by HR managers. Although there was some variation in hourly wages, with Budget Style offering a higher average pay rate, opportunities for commission pay were very limited or nonexistent. All average pay rates at Discount stores were well below the level advocated for in the “Fight for 15” campaign that has been well-publicized since 2012.

Most Store Zoners were eligible for very basic health insurance plans that provided limited coverage, in part due to their largely part-time status. No part-time employees at Real Deals – North and Budget Style were guaranteed a minimum number of hours each week, unlike part-time Store Zoners at Real Deals – South. This practice was not a formal policy but rather at the discretion of the store manager. Full-time Store Zoners at the two Real Deals stores were guaranteed a minimum number of hours each week. Budget Style did not guarantee hours for either full- or part-time employees. Both full- and part-time Store Zoners generally had unstable work hours and schedules at the Discount stores. The HR managers at Real Deals indicated that the actual number of hours full-time Store Zoners could expect to work each week was unpredictable despite the guarantee of a minimum of 30-40 hours per week. In contrast, at Budget Style, full-time Store Zoners typically worked 37.5 hours per week. All Discount stores’ work schedules were posted two weeks in advance.

Based on these job characteristics, it is clear that workers were universally in precarious employment situations. Low pay rates and a lack of guaranteed hours would be expected to result in financial insecurity and difficulty earning an adequate living. The limited availability of comprehensive health benefits would likely also contribute to workers' financial insecurity. Further, unstable and unpredictable work schedules would likely make it difficult to balance work-life responsibilities.

High-Touch jobs at High-End stores. The quality of Solicitous Seller jobs at High-End stores was fairly consistent. Turnover rates for these jobs ranged from 50% to 65%. At Classic Style and Splendid Things, hourly wage rates for Solicitous Sellers were between \$12 and \$14 per hour. A substantial majority of Solicitous Sellers at Splendid Things, and all of them at Luxe, were eligible to receive commission pay. The HR manager at Splendid Things noted that commissions for Solicitous Sellers could be a substantial amount of money. She remarked,

[Y]ou'd be surprised because I get all the reports that come up and who's getting what and you kind of look [at the dollar amounts of the commission payouts] and go 'Whoa, that's a nice one!' And it really makes me feel good because you see some big dollars coming through.

In contrast, most of the Solicitous Sellers at Classic Style worked part-time hours and were not eligible for commissions. Many Solicitous Sellers were eligible for comprehensive health insurance plans. At Classic Style, both full-time and part-time Solicitous Sellers were guaranteed a minimum number of hours each week. This was not the case at Splendid Things where no employees were guaranteed minimum hours. Full-time Solicitous Sellers' schedules at all High-End stores were stable with respect to the number of hours they worked per week. However, part-timers at both Classic Style and Splendid Things had relatively unstable schedules with respect to the specific days and times they could expect to work unlike part-timers at Luxe whose

hours were completely stable. Schedules at High-End stores were posted 3 to 4 weeks in advance, contributing to overall schedule predictability.

In sum, commissioned High-Touch jobs at High-End stores were the highest-quality jobs observed in this study. With an overall high percentage of full-time workers who were eligible for generous benefits and the opportunity to earn commissions, these employees were likely to have a reasonable opportunity to earn an adequate living and have greater financial stability than workers in other jobs in the study. Although fewer workers in High-Touch jobs at Classic Style had access to commission pay, there was no wage cap for these positions and, for employees who stayed in their jobs, hourly wage rates could become significant. Further, part-time employees were guaranteed a minimum of 15 hours per week at Classic Style, providing some income security. Although organizational policies and scheduling practices provided workers with a certain amount of schedule stability and predictability, it is possible that individual workers' hours could vary enormously.

Low-Touch jobs. HR managers at two Discount stores, Real Deals – South and Budget Style, selected the Merchandise Mover job for in-depth exploration as the Low-Touch job. The HR manager at Real Deals – North selected what she referred to as the “Claims and Damages” job as the Low-Touch job at her store. At High-End stores, all HR managers selected the Merchandise Mover job as the Low-Touch job. Comparisons of these jobs within each brand image type are examined below.

Low-Touch jobs at Discount stores. Low-Touch jobs at Discount stores focused on moving merchandise. Merchandise Movers transferred items from delivery trucks to stock rooms while the Claims & Damages employee at Real Deals – North took merchandise that had been returned and moved it into bins for returns to vendor, clearance selling, or disposal. The quality

of Low-Touch jobs was similar across Discount stores. Turnover rates among these workers tended to be lower than in the High-Touch jobs examined in this study. At Discount stores, turnover rates for these jobs ranged from 0% to 50%. There was variation in hourly wages for these jobs, with Budget Style offering a significantly higher average pay rate (an average of approximately \$2 per hour more). Employees in Low-Touch jobs, all of whom were part-time, were only eligible for basic health insurance plans that could create financial insecurity in these workers lives much as it would for employees in Discount store High-Touch jobs.

While employees in Low-Touch jobs earned low wages, these employees could count on a stable number of work hours per week. Further, they also enjoyed a great deal of schedule stability and predictability since the jobs depended upon delivery truck schedules. Thus, these employees had the potential to more easily commit to a second job if they so desired. However, it is possible that work hours of individual workers could vary, meaning that not all employees might be in stable circumstances.

Low-Touch jobs at High-End stores. Overall, the job quality characteristics of the Merchandise Mover jobs at High-End stores were consistent across the stores, with the exception of wage rates, which were substantially higher at Splendid Things than at Classic Style (an average of \$4 per hour more). Turnover rates for these jobs ranged widely between Splendid Things, where turnover was only 20% for this job, and Classic Style, where turnover was 100%. Classic Style had a stable core of employees and a revolving door for one position that had to be continuously rehired. The HR manager explained that this particular position had an undesirable work schedule coupled with low pay,

We have five positions and it's the 'core four' is what I call them and that one person just keeps turning and turning and turning. Originally it was the commute, we thought, because we were hiring a lot of people from Chicago. And it doesn't pay well. So the

commute with the little bit of money, and it's one day a week, and the little bit of hours just wasn't worth it to people so they stopped coming when they found something better.

Very few Merchandise Movers were eligible for comprehensive health insurance plans since nearly all of these employees worked part-time. Overall, employees in these jobs faced working conditions with low pay and sparse health coverage. However, employees in Low-Touch jobs at High-End stores enjoyed a great deal of schedule predictability since delivery trucks arrived on a set schedule. These employees could also count on a stable number of work hours per week. While these general schedule characteristics appeared desirable, at the same time it is possible that individual workers' hours could vary substantially.

Customer Service Desk jobs. All three Discount stores had Customer Service Desk jobs and data were collected accordingly. At High-End stores, only Splendid Things had a Customer Service Desk job. These data are included for comparison to jobs at the Discount stores.

Job quality characteristics of Customer Service Desk jobs were consistent across the Discount stores. Turnover rates among these workers tended to be similar to the Low-Touch jobs examined in this study, ranging from 1% to 50%. Average hourly wages at all three stores were virtually identical. Most employees in Discount store Customer Service Desk jobs were only eligible for very basic health insurance plans that provided limited coverage. A few employees worked full-time and were thus eligible for more generous benefits. Part-time employees in Customer Service Desk jobs at Real Deals – North and Budget Style were subject to a great deal of schedule unpredictability with respect to the times and days they could expect to work each week. Thus, overall, workers in Customer Service Desk jobs at Discount stores were subject to challenging working conditions similar to those of employees in High-Touch jobs. One exception is that both full- and part-time workers at Real Deals – South had stable schedules that might permit them to commit to second jobs similar to workers in Low-Touch jobs. However, it

is possible that individual workers' hours could vary a great deal and thus not all employees might have been in stable circumstances.

Characteristics of Customer Service Desk jobs at Splendid Things varied substantially from those at Discount stores. For example, the average hourly wage for Customer Service Desk jobs at Splendid Things was \$3/hour higher than at any of the Discount stores. Further, 14% of Customer Service Desk employees were eligible for full health benefits. Thus, while workers in Customer Service Desk jobs at Discount stores faced challenging working conditions, employees holding these jobs at a High-End store experienced a better level of job quality.

Comparison of High-Touch, Low-Touch, and Customer Service Desk jobs at Discount stores. Jobs in Discount stores were generally low-paid, part-time, positions with limited health benefits that primarily involved moving merchandise. Customer Service Desk jobs tended to be less physical. However, the average wage for this job was approximately the same as those in the High-Touch and Low-Touch jobs. There were few opportunities for full-time work and, thus, comprehensive employee benefits, in any of the jobs. Turnover rates were highest in the High-Touch jobs and most jobs came with unpredictable work schedules. Employees received little advance notice of the number of hours they could expect to work each week or the days and times for which they would be scheduled to work. Taken as a whole, low-quality jobs were the primary type of employment available at Discount stores.

Comparison of High-Touch, Low-Touch, and Customer Service Desk jobs at High-End stores. Compensation levels for jobs at High-End stores varied substantially, with employees who were not responsible for driving financial results for the company receiving lower total pay. Employees in High-Touch jobs were much more likely to be employed full-time, consistent with their job responsibilities. Building relationships required these employees to stay

in constant contact with customers, necessitating more work hours than the other jobs. In contrast, employees in Low-Touch and Customer Service Desk jobs were easily substituted for one another and these jobs tended to be part-time positions.

Jobs were similar with respect to the predictability of work schedules since these were posted 3-4 weeks in advance for all workers, which could facilitate the ability of workers to anticipate the days and times they would be scheduled to work. However, despite the general trends HR managers conveyed, it is possible that individual workers' hours could vary substantially each time schedules were posted. Part-time workers in all three jobs typically worked approximately 20 hours per week. Overall, due to the higher compensation levels available to employees in High-Touch jobs related to commission pay, the greater prevalence of full-time employment, and the trend toward more predictable work schedules, these jobs tended to be of higher quality than either the Low-Touch or Customer Service Desk jobs at High-End stores.

Variation in job quality across brand image categories. There was a distinct pattern of differences in job quality by brand image with differentiator stores offering better-quality jobs than cost-leader stores. Jobs at High-End stores tended to offer higher wages and more full-time positions, making it easier for workers to “opt in to full labor force participation,” (Lambert, 2012). Further, High-End stores tended to have more benefits-eligible positions. Thus, workers in jobs at these stores might be expected to be better off financially than those working at Discount stores, particularly those in commission-eligible positions at High-End stores. The best quality jobs, commissioned Solicitous Sellers and Personal Shoppers at High-End stores, required higher levels of human capital making them accessible only to workers with specialized skills in selling and relationship building. Lower-skilled workers could earn more money at

High-End stores than those at Discount stores. Schedules were posted further in advance at High-End stores than at Discount stores, thus, these jobs were more likely to be manageable for employees with outside commitments, such as caregiving responsibilities, a second job, or school. In sum, jobs at High-End stores offered better financial and work-life balance opportunities.

Although High-End store jobs were uniformly of better quality than those at Discount stores, there was some variation in job quality at Discount stores. Some of these small differences may be meaningful to some workers. For example, when comparing Store Zoner, Merchandise Mover, and Service Desk Staffer jobs, the data indicate that Merchandise Mover jobs pay an average of \$0.34 - \$0.55 per hour more. Typical hours for this job averaged across Discount stores were 20.75 per week. Thus, monthly income for Merchandise Movers would be \$30 - \$50 more per month than Store Zoners or Service Desk Staffers, assuming an equal number of hours. Beyond wages, Merchandise Mover jobs offered highly stable schedules, a job characteristic that is preferred by some workers. Also, Service Desk Staffers were monitored less closely than other workers and given more autonomy, a job characteristic for which employees might be willing to trade higher wages.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the first research question for this study by examining the messages hiring managers received about firms' brand images and how they played out in store practices. The key elements of brand images identified by HR managers were the nature of the merchandise offered; the approach to merchandising; customer service, which was conceptualized differently at Discount versus High-End stores; and, reflecting the communities in which their stores were located. Triangulation of data from interviews, store observations, and

examinations of websites indicated that these brand image elements showed up in store practices in varying ways, with the exception of charitable activities, as a strategy for supporting communities. Variation in job quality at Discount versus High-End stores aligned with variation in business strategies and brand images, with High-End stores offering higher quality jobs than Discount stores. The next chapter will address questions related to the relationship between firms' brand images and firms' organizational practices.

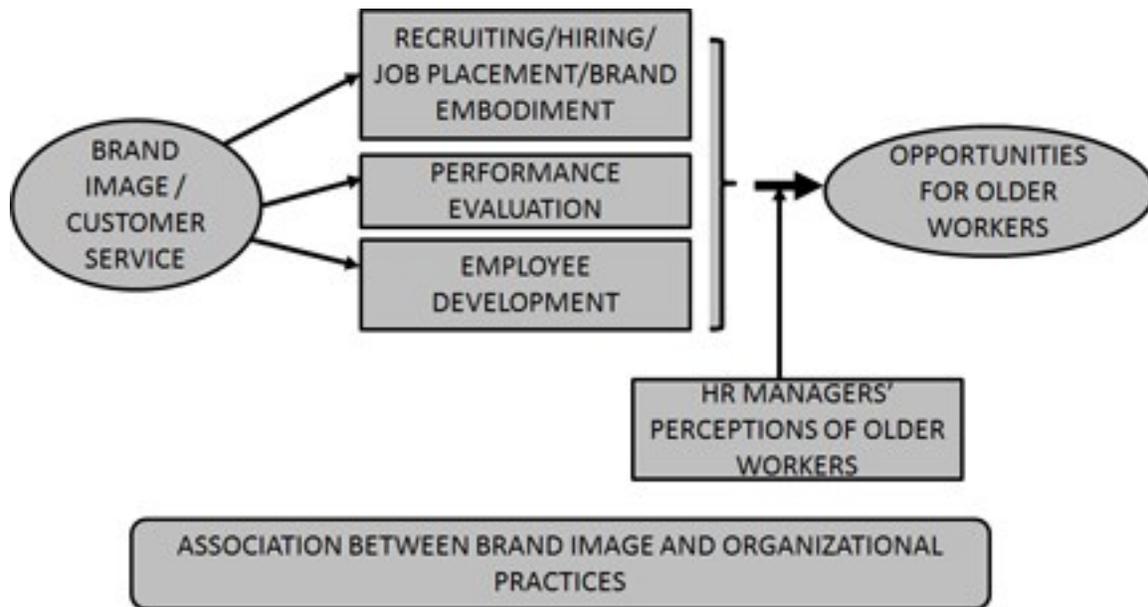
CHAPTER 5

BRAND IMAGES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

This chapter addresses the second research question by examining the ways in which stores' organizational practices, specifically their approaches to recruiting and hiring, job placement, performance evaluation, and professional development, were related to their brand images and, in the case of hiring and job placement, brand embodiment preferences. These organizational structures all have important implications for workers seeking employment in department stores. Hiring and job placement procedures play a central role in determining which candidates will gain access to which jobs in the stores while professional development practices function to either enhance or limit workers' opportunities to build human capital while in their jobs.

The chapter will first examine Discount and High-End stores' recruiting, hiring, and job placement practices and the relationships that were observed between these practices and stores' brand images and brand embodiment preferences. Next, Discount and High-End stores performance evaluation and professional development practices and their relationships to stores' brand images are explored. Analyses suggest a relationship between brand images and organizational practices that is associated with which workers are likely to have access to higher-quality jobs and opportunities to develop their human capital. The following figure depicts the relationships that were uncovered and suggests how they may interact with HR managers' perceptions of older workers to enhance or limit their opportunities for higher-quality employment.

Figure 3: Association between Brand Image and Organizational Practices



Interviews, website analyses, and a scenario exercise provide data for these explorations.

Recruiting, Hiring, and Job Placement and Stores' Brand Images

Findings about Discount and High-End stores' recruiting, hiring, and job placement practices suggest a relationship between these practices and stores brand images and brand embodiment requirements. At Discount stores, nearly all jobs in the stores required low levels of human capital and recruiting and hiring practices were designed to be streamlined and cost effective, consistent with their cost-leader strategies. Since Discount stores competed primarily on price, at these stores there was no way for employees to embody "low prices." Accordingly, it was not surprising that Discount stores did not actively seek brand embodiment during hiring and job placement. In contrast, at High-End stores, where higher levels of human capital were important to success in most jobs, recruiting and hiring practices were more intensive and were closely related to brand embodiment, in line with differentiation strategies.

Recruiting and hiring practices at Discount stores. Discount stores did not invest a great deal of resources in their recruiting processes. Recruiting at Discount stores in the study

primarily involved offering application sections on their websites and computer kiosks in the stores that enabled store visitors to apply online. On occasion, the stores would place advertisements in local papers. First, I will lay out the application process in these stores and then I will explain what managers looked for in hiring workers for different positions.

At Discount stores, the first step in the application process was online screening that prospective employees had to complete before they could be offered the opportunity to speak with a staff member. Applicants filled out an online questionnaire with 75 to 100 questions that screened for characteristics that the companies felt would indicate whether or not a candidate would be a good employee.

A substantial number of questions pertained to schedule availability. Applicants were asked the number of hours they wanted to work per week and asked which days of the week they would be available. They were also asked to identify times of day they could be available to work and whether they were available to work on national holidays. On both Real Deals and Budget Style's questionnaires, the availability screens offered options where applicants could indicate they had open availability. Real Deals' questionnaire asked about academic experiences, such as whether an applicant had ever failed a class in school and where the applicant fell in their class rank (e.g., top 10% of the class, top 25% of the class). Budget Style's questionnaire did not ask about academic experiences.

Other questions appeared to be designed to ascertain applicants' personality traits, such as patience levels. For example, Real Deals' online questionnaire asked respondents to state how true it was that, "I often lose my patience with others" and asked them to state how often they showed their emotions when under stress. Budget Style's online questionnaire included pairs of statements and asked applicants to choose which one best described them. Statements included

items such as whether the person would describe themselves as easy to get along with, concerned about the feelings of others, and friendly. Other statements asked whether the applicant enjoyed working in teams or preferred to work independently. Some statements related to leadership preferences, such as, “I prefer not to be a leader but would do so if asked to,” “I would welcome the challenge of being in charge,” and, “I don’t want to be in a leadership role.”

Both firms asked questions about applicants’ perceptions of their ability to cope with change and learn new things. For example, Real Deals’ questionnaire asked how others would describe the applicant’s “ability to adapt to new policies, procedures, or situations.” It also asked applicants to rate how much they enjoyed working in environments that required them to learn new tasks or procedures. Budget Style’s questionnaire included statements such as, “Once I know how to do something I think it’s best to keep doing it that way,” and “I am flexible about doing things in new ways.” The questionnaires did not ask about specific skills such as whether or not the applicant had computer experience.

The online questionnaire was designed for efficient use of relatively-costly staff time, consistent with Discount stores’ cost-leader brand image. The HR manager at Real Deals-North noted, “They can set up their own interview, once they passed all the tests and assessments and everything.” The HR manager at Budget Style described a similar process. She explained that, if an applicant “passes the test,” the individual moved on to the next part of the process, which involved contact with a member of the HR staff. HR managers were not specific as to what it meant to “pass the test.” The application was scored by the automated system and thus the HR managers simply received a list of applicants who passed the test.

The next step in the process at these stores was an interview with an HR person who was a gatekeeper for further interviews. At Real Deals – North and South, the interview was in

person while at Budget Style the HR person did a phone screening. The HR manager at Budget Style described the phone interview,

My HR team will look over the application [for those who passed the screening] and contact that person. So, they do a phone screening and ask a variety of questions, talk about their work history, their availability, and the job that they're looking to fill. Then, [if they pass], they'll set them up for an interview.

If the HR team approved the applicant during the phone screening, the candidate was interviewed by an assistant manager,

[The Assistant Manager] will go through a series of four questions in the interview packet, and then [if they pass them] there is a [salaried manager who] will do the second interview....[A]t that point, they'll say yes or no.

At Real Deals, applicants had in-person interviews with the HR manager as a second step in the process. The HR manager then decided whether the applicant would interview with a member of the management team. After a second interview, the hiring decision was made.

The limited face-to-face interactions involved in Discount store hiring practices demonstrated the lack of importance of brand embodiment in Discount stores. If brand embodiment was a central requirement for hiring, stores would likely assess this fit early on in the process, which was not the case here.

The interviews revealed the kinds of qualifications that HR staff was looking for in hiring for different types of jobs. HR managers responded to a series of closed-ended questions about the importance of different types of qualifications for different types of jobs in order to understand their hiring priorities. Specifically, HR managers were asked how important it was that an applicant have a high school diploma, be a US citizen or legal resident, be fluent in English, not have visible tattoos or piercings, be able to lift/push heavy objects, be fluent with technology, have previous retail experience, have any type of previous work experience, be available to work nights and weekends, and be available to work on short notice. In customer-

service related jobs, specifically Store Zoners and Service Desk Staffers, finding employees with experience providing direct service to retail customers was not a priority for Discount store HR managers. None of the HR managers identified previously rated retail experience as “very important” for these jobs. HR managers at two Discount stores rated this experience as “not very important” while the third indicated it was only “somewhat important.” At Discount stores, customer service, as a dimension of brand image, included limited customer interaction with staff. Thus, it is not surprising that previous experience in retail was not particularly important in the hiring process since zoning tasks required little skill and direct customer service skills were only a small part of the job requirements.

Recruiting and hiring practices at High-End stores. High-End stores utilized a variety of recruiting practices including using professional recruiting firms and personally involving HR managers in recruiting efforts. Some HR managers attended on-campus college job fairs and posted openings on job boards at community colleges, in addition to posting positions on the firms’ websites. A recruiting priority at High-End stores was identifying applicants with previous relevant work experience. Specifically, HR managers indicated that previous retail experience and/or strong sales experience in any context were important for customer-facing jobs at High-End stores. For example, with regard to hiring Solicitous Sellers for their shoe department, the HR manager at Classic Style commented, “They must have previous sales experience. You don’t necessarily have to be in retail or even have shoe experience. You have to be that aggressive seller person that’s hungry for it.”

In addition to human capital in the form of retail experience and sales skills, employees in some areas needed to bring in-depth knowledge to their jobs, as one HR manager noted, “You do need to have previous jewelry experience...it’s difficult learning all those gems and stones.”

Further, recruiting and hiring emphasized brand embodiment in customer-facing roles. Specifically, HR managers and online job postings emphasized the importance of dressing professionally in order to reflect stores' fashion images. One HR manager explained, "We feel that it gives a nice flavor that we [workers who interact with customers] are polished and professional." While employees at High-End stores were not required to purchase their clothing there, they were offered generous discounts in order to help them afford these items and to encourage them to dress stylishly and professionally to embody the brand.

High-End stores in the study used a more personalized approach to hiring, providing evidence that the ability of workers to embody High-End stores' brands was important to securing a job. None of the three chains had an online screening process that was similar to the process that was found at Discount stores. Rather, prospective employees started with in-person, first-level interviews with the HR managers, who acted as gatekeepers. If an HR manager approved the candidate, this interview was followed by either two or three further interviews before a hiring decision was made.

The HR manager at Classic Style explained that, for Solicitous Sellers who were not eligible for commissions, the candidate only had two interviews, one with herself and one with an assistant manager. However, for commissioned Solicitous Sellers, a third interview would be conducted by the store manager, direct supervisor for that department or, in the case of cosmetics, the vendor for the product line,

If it's cosmetics, [the candidate] can go on to meet with my general manager or my counter manager, which will be their direct supervisor....[T]hey can also go on to meet with an account executive for that particular vendor.

She explained that the vendor would not only evaluate candidates' skills but also would determine whether or not, "[T]hey fit the brand, the look for that cosmetics brand."

Splendid Things conducted three in-person interviews, except during the holidays, when they used group interviews to deal with the high volume of seasonal hires,

For the holidays we do a group interview. We invite ten people, and the managers are all behind me, and I asked the questions. [The managers] are not to ask any questions. They're just there to observe. When [the candidates] are out [of the room], they can choose to interview every one of them or they can just say, 'I only like that one person.'

For non-holiday hiring, the three-interview process was used for all positions. For part-time non-commissioned Solicitous Sellers, if the HR manager approved, the candidate would go on to interview with two assistant managers. Commissioned Solicitous Sellers might have a fourth interview with a representative of the product line for which they were being hired, depending on the preference of the vendor. The vendor would evaluate prospective employees' fit with the brand they represented, indicating that brand embodiment was a key factor in the hiring process. The HR manager noted that Luxe used a three or four-step process since the store contracted with outside recruiters, "[The recruiters] identify and screen possible candidates and send them to me for an initial interview." She would then conduct an in-store interview and, if she approved, would send them to the store manager for an interview. For most Solicitous Selling positions, a hiring decision would be made at this point. However, for higher-commissioned positions, candidates would go on to interview with the vendor for the product line during which the vendor would evaluate prospective employees' fit with the brand they represented. Thus, for the jobs in which employees could earn substantial commissions paid by the merchandise brand, the final decision was based on brand fit.

These data indicate the importance of brand embodiment in hiring at High-End stores. Further, the intensive and personal nature of hiring processes at these stores aligned with the higher skill requirements in these jobs, particularly with respect to selling skills and customer service skills.

Job placement practices: A scenario exercise. To examine their placement decision-making processes for jobs with varying characteristics, HR managers were presented with a scenario exercise as part of their interviews. The exercise was designed to illuminate their thought processes and perceptions of workers of varying ages and their fit with their stores' brand images during job placement. The scenario exercise included a worksheet with four photographs of prospective job candidates with names and brief descriptions (Appendix C). In order to ensure that HR managers would consider a wide range of possible job placements, they were asked to place candidates into the High-Touch, Low-Touch and Service Desk Staffer jobs that they had previously selected.

HR managers were told to imagine that they had interviewed these four candidates and had decided to hire all of them. They were then asked to identify the job into which they would place each candidate. The photographs of the candidates were presented with descriptions of each person. Specific ages were not given, however, the appearance and descriptions of each candidate signaled the person's age. For example, both Sarah's and Mary's descriptions included the word "retired" and both candidates had gray hair. It was unclear whether or not Sarah and Mary were the same or different ages but the appearance of both candidates indicated they fit the study definition of an older worker, meaning, they were at least in their 50s or older. The candidate descriptions made clear that their work experience levels were quite different (Sarah was a homemaker and Mary was a retired office manager). This variation in personal characteristics besides age allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how managers viewed older workers and allowed for isolation of age as a factor in job placement. In contrast, Ashley had a youthful appearance and was clearly younger than Leslie who, in turn, was clearly younger than either Sarah or Mary.

After reading the descriptions and viewing the photographs of the four candidates, HR managers were asked to place the candidates into the jobs that had been identified. Although they were instructed to fill each of the positions, two HR managers declined to place any candidates into the Low-Touch job due to the physical requirements of the job and their perceptions of the physical limitations of all candidates. One HR manager declined to participate in the scenario exercise, however, during the interview this HR manager spoke about her job placement approach, making a partial analysis of her preferences possible. HR managers' job placement decisions are presented below.

When asked about their thought processes in placing candidates in these jobs, the themes that arose centered on HR managers' assumptions about of the physical abilities, job characteristics preferences, and skill levels of the job candidates. As will be discussed at the end of this section, brand embodiment was not raised as a factor in job placement during the scenario exercise.

Table 5-1: Hiring Scenario Results

Store Name	Ashley	Leslie	Sarah	Mary
	A part-time community college student looking for a job to help pay tuition	A former at-home mom returning to the workforce to supplement family income	A homemaker with a recently-retired husband who is now looking for a job to help meet expenses	A previously-retired office manager returning to the workforce to help meet expenses
<i>Discount Stores</i>				
Real Deals – North	Store Zoner	Customer Service Desk Staffer	Store Zoner	Claims & Damages
Real Deals – South	Store Zoner	Customer Service Desk Staffer	Store Zoner	Store Zoner
Budget Style	Store Zoner	Merchandise Mover (HR Manager) Store Zoner (Store Manager)	Store Zoner	Customer Service Desk Staffer
<i>High-End Stores</i> ¹				
Splendid Things ²	Merchandising	-	-	Customer Service Desk Staffer
Classic Style	Merchandise Mover	Solicitous Seller	Solicitous Seller	Solicitous Seller

¹ No information was available for Luxe. As previously noted, after the first interview, the corporation announced the closing of this store within several months and the HR manager failed to return phone calls making scheduling of a second interview impossible.

² The HR manager declined to fill out hiring scenario form, indicating she could not accurately respond without knowing the express job placement preferences of the new hires. During conversation, however, she did remark about the jobs in which the apparently-youngest and apparently-oldest candidates would be best placed.

Assumptions about candidates’ physical abilities and job placement. HR managers at both Discount and High-End stores took the physical requirements of jobs in their stores into careful consideration while deciding where to place scenario candidates. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, HR managers indicated that they perceived older workers as having less physical ability than younger workers. In other words, HR managers perceived a noticeable difference in functional and social age between workers age 50 and older and those who were younger,

meaning, they perceived older workers' physical abilities to be diminished, making them seem "older." Consistent with these data, when the physically demanding Merchandise Mover job had been selected as the Low-Touch job, respondents did not place either of the older candidates (Sarah and Mary) in this job. There was no variation between Discount store and High-End store HR managers' job placement decisions with regard to physical ability.

The store manager at Budget Style explained that, while not all Merchandise Movers unloaded trucks, everyone moved heavy objects around in the back room. She remarked that such responsibilities could be taxing on older workers,

If [an older worker is] doing it [moving heavy objects] repetitiously all day long, well, I think that they might do well for a while. But I think it could break them down to where they're physically not enjoying work and they end up leaving us earlier than they should.

This respondent placed Sarah, the retired homemaker, in the Store Zoner job so that, "[S]he can move around," to minimize problems with her presumed-arthritis. She placed Mary, the retired office manager, at the Customer Service Desk noting that this job did not require as much standing still as the Customer Processor job or as much bending down as the Store Zoner job.

Although HR managers passed over older workers for the most physically demanding jobs, older workers were not the only candidates deemed unsuitable for these roles. HR managers also expressed concerns about whether all but the youngest candidate (Ashley) could handle the physical requirements of certain jobs. For example, the HR manager at Real Deals – South placed candidates into the High-Touch and Service Desk Staffer jobs quickly but hesitated over the Merchandise Mover job with only one candidate left, Leslie (the at-home mom). Finally, she selected the Service Desk Staffer job for Leslie, leaving the Low-Touch job slot unfilled. Apologetically she explained, "I know that's not what I'm supposed to do, but I can't put the nice lady in Receiving with all the heavy boxes."

HR managers' perceptions of a disparity in physical ability between older and younger workers played out in job placement when HR managers placed Ashley, the youngest candidate, into a job. The HR manager at Classic Style placed Ashley into the Merchandise Mover job, explaining, "Receiving positions tend to be really physical, so I feel like she's young, she'd be able to do the Receiving job physically. I feel that she'd be open to it." Similarly, the HR manager at Splendid Things placed Ashley in the Merchandising role, which involved moving and organizing stock after Merchandise Movers had unloaded the trucks and rolled racks out to the sales floor. While this job was less physically demanding than the Merchandise Mover job, it was more physically demanding than Solicitous Seller positions.

In sum, HR managers gave serious consideration to the physical nature of the jobs when making their job placement decisions and relied strongly on their perceptions of candidates' physical capabilities, meaning their functional ages, when deciding which employees to place in such jobs. This played out consistently with HR managers at both types of stores passing over older candidates for the most physically demanding jobs.

Assumptions about candidates' preferences for specific job characteristics and job placement. HR managers made assumptions about job candidates' preferences for the characteristics of particular jobs when making their placement decisions.

Assumptions about candidates' preferences for specific job characteristics and job placement – Discount stores. With the exception of Real Deals – North, HR managers at Discount stores did not express opinions about the preferences various candidates were likely to have for specific job characteristics. During the scenario exercise, this HR manager commented,

Leslie, the at-home mom, she'd be best for the service desk. Moms have worked out well there. They like the hours, they can work nights. They're more flexible with their hours.

This HR manager's comments addressed two issues. First, she commented on her perception that the candidate would like the job due to a particular job characteristic, the schedule. She also noted that employees with Leslie's personal profile have been effective in these positions in the past. In contrast, HR managers at High-End stores discussed candidates' preferences for particular jobs in greater detail.

Assumptions about candidates' preferences for specific job characteristics and job placement – High-End stores. Two HR managers at High-End stores placed Ashley, the youngest candidate, into jobs with relatively stable, part-time schedules, reasoning that, as a part-time student, a job with these characteristics would be her preference. The HR manager at Classic Style noted, "[Ashley] is a part-time college student. She's looking for something part-time that works with her classes so that's why I put her in Receiving." The HR manager at Splendid Things commented that Ashley's student status would likely drive her work schedule preference, remarking, "[Ashley] would like the Merchandising job. You know, come in early, finish by noon, get to class."

Further, the HR manager at Classic Style made the assumption that Leslie, the at-home mom, and Sarah, the retired homemaker, would prefer jobs with low-pressure characteristics, such as those that did not include sales quotas. She remarked, "Leslie, I feel like she'd want a position that doesn't require so much pressure. Like, you know, come in, enjoy, you get out of the house a little bit and get a little income." About Sarah, she commented, "She wouldn't want that real extreme pressure of being in that real work environment."

Thus, HR managers' perceptions of candidates' life circumstances played an important role in job placement decisions. HR managers inferred candidates' schedule preferences based on whether or not the candidate's description indicated a substantial non-work commitment, such

as school. They also made assumptions about candidates' job placement preferences based on their sense of whether or not candidates wanted to work hard at a job.

Assumptions about candidates' skill levels and job placement. Three of the four job candidates, Ashley, the community college student, Leslie, the at-home-mom, and Sarah, the previously-retired homemaker, were described in a way that did not indicate strong previous work experience. In contrast, Mary was described as a previously-retired office manager. HR managers interpreted this piece of information as a signal that Mary had a skill set that made her well-qualified for particular jobs, citing her previous work experience as the reason for placement.

Assumptions about candidates' skill levels and job placement – Discount stores. Both the HR manager and store manager at Budget Style participated in the scenario exercise and both jumped at Mary as the best candidate for the Service Desk Staffer job. The store manager commented, "I [placed the candidate in the Service Desk Staffer job] because she's a retired office manager and the service desk really needs...." The HR manager finished her sentence, exclaiming, "Organization!" The store manager concurred, "Yes! Exactly!" Further, the HR manager at Budget Style considered Leslie's life experience as an at-home mom to be an indicator of a strong skill set that would make her successful in the Merchandise Mover job. She explained,

I feel like there's so much going on when you're at home and being a mom and raising kids, so being in the back room unloading a truck, putting this away, adding this, I think that's something that you would naturally do being a homemaker, an at-home mom.

The HR manager at Real Deals – North commented on presumed skills when placing Mary into the Claims & Damages job at her store. She explained, "I probably would hire this

lady for [the Claims & Damages job] because she's got office experience which is pretty much what you need for it because there's a lot of paperwork to keep straight."

Assumptions about candidates' skill levels and job placement – High-End stores. The HR manager at Splendid Things indicated that Mary could be well-suited for the Service Desk Staffer job because of her previous work experience, noting,

When I look at customer service desk, [the workers] have to be very patient because the customers hang over their desk and watch them wrapping the gifts. It's not like you can turn your back to them. They're right up there, they have questions about their account, and so while you're on the computer doing something for them, they're right there with you...so, she may be very comfortable with this.

HR managers indicated that Mary's previous work experience signaled skills that would allow her to handle demanding work environments, making her suitable for higher-pressure jobs.

At Classic Style, the HR manager was adamant that Mary would thrive in a commissioned Solicitous Seller job. She explained,

I would definitely put [Mary] in my [commissioned Solicitous Seller] job because she's a previous office manager and she's been in that professional environment...She would be able to handle the pressure. I think she'd be, 'I know what needs to be done and I'm going to go do it, and the pressure's fine, it's not going to break me.'

Thus, when HR managers perceived that candidates possessed particular skill sets, they placed them into jobs according to these assumed strengths.

Job placement and brand embodiment. During interviews, HR managers at High-End stores indicated the importance of brand embodiment for placement into certain jobs in their stores, as did High-End stores' websites. Brand embodiment also played a role during hiring processes in these stores. However, brand embodiment considerations did not arise as part of the job placement process during the scenario exercise. During interviews, Discount store HR managers remarked on the importance of employees in reflecting their communities but did not raise brand embodiment as a factor during the job placement scenario. One possible explanation

for this omission is the fact that the exercise was geared primarily toward investigating the role of age in job placement. As such, brand embodiment elements, such as style of dress and hair and make-up presentation, were not prominent in the photographs of job candidates. Further, to control for race as a factor in job placement, all of the candidates were white, eliminating the possibility that HR managers might or might not place a candidate in a particular job because of perceived match with racial characteristics of their customers and communities. Additionally, the fact that the candidates were all white eliminated the possibility that HR managers would place candidates in particular jobs based on assumed ethnic characteristics, such as mastery of a second language.

Performance Evaluation Practices and Stores' Brand Images

Discount and High-End stores in this study approached employee performance evaluation in ways that varied in line with their cost-leader and differentiator strategies. Most workers at Discount stores were evaluated based on the speed and efficiency with which they completed their assigned tasks, while most workers at High-End stores were evaluated based upon their success in meeting sales goals.

Performance evaluation practices at Discount stores. HR managers at Discount stores described the performance evaluation process for employees in customer service-related jobs, including Service Desk Staffers, Customer Processors, and Store Zoners. Their descriptions indicated that stores' performance management systems reflected their customer service goals, specifically locating merchandise, problem solving, and transaction processing.

With respect to locating merchandise, Store Zoners' were monitored on completion of zoning tasks in a timely manner. As one HR manager explained, "[Managers] look at [Store Zoners] productivity, how much they can get done in a day....That's the biggest thing." Another

HR manager commented that managers were able to observe Store Zoners zoning completion performance quite clearly,

[I]f you're zoning home décor and 11:00pm rolls around and you're halfway done and you have three carts of re-shop, meaning, stuff out of area that you've picked up, and I know that they never called for backup and so you weren't on the [check-out] lanes for two hours, what were you doing? Why did you struggle?

It was easier for managers to observe these behaviors than to observe whether or not Store Zoners were engaging in the required behaviors related to customer interactions. One HR manager explained,

With the sales floor [customers can] take surveys and say how friendly you were, how helpful were you, were you available to them when they needed you to be. But that doesn't tie [that customer] to one [Store Zoner], it ties [that customer] to the whole experience of the day. So, we're able to be like, 'Oh, I think you [the Store Zoner] were here at this time, so they might have been talking about you,' but we're not 100% sure.

The problem-solving aspect of brand image was measured, in part, by the speed of task completion by Service Desk Staffers. These employees were timed while processing customer inquiries. The time algorithm that management used to evaluate performance took into account the possibility that Service Desk Staffers could encounter unusually involved customer interactions. However, HR managers indicated that the algorithm was not perfect and managers did not penalize Service Desk Staffers based on its results. "If you have one long transaction, it's not going to mess something up drastically, but it's not perfect. It's nothing that they'll heavily look at [for performance evaluation]," she commented.

While transaction timing data were only used to evaluate Service Desk Staffers performance to a small degree, such data were more important for evaluating Customer Processors who handled most of the transaction completion. "[Transaction time is] looked at more for cashiers, of how fast the checkout was," an HR manager noted. However, processing transactions was not the only responsibility these employees had. Customer Processors were also

monitored on the number of store credit cards for which customers applied. The HR manager explained, “[W]e’re able to measure, if you’re a [Customer Processor]...what’s your percentage of getting a [customer] to fill out a [store] credit card [application].” At Real Deals – North and South, this behavior was even incentivized by the opportunity to earn small commissions. Overall, however, Customer Processors’ transaction times were more important during performance reviews than the number of credit card accounts opened.

In sum, performance evaluation at Discount stores consisted largely of assessing transactional behaviors, meaning, how quickly and efficiently employees could assist shoppers with locating merchandise, complete transactions, or solve customers’ problems.

Performance evaluation practices at High-End stores. The most significant performance measure that HR managers described for customer-facing employees at these stores was meeting sales goals. Selling success was considered to be a proxy for demonstrating attentive personal service and relationship building. The definition of selling success extended beyond purchases made by the Solicitous Sellers’ own clients. At Splendid Things, Solicitous Sellers who represented specific brands were incentivized to promote their lines to their co-workers. Co-workers who then sold items to their own customers would get a kick-back commission from the Solicitous Seller who represented the merchandise line. One HR manager explained,

If I sell [brand name] and I go to you and say, ‘We just got the most gorgeous sundresses in, your customers will love them. Come take a look,’ and then you sell my dresses, my vendor gives me a commission and I share some of it with you. So we both get paid.

Monitoring sales goals was a highly-streamlined way for managers to assess employees’ job performance at Splendid Things, where the vast majority of Solicitous Sellers were commissioned, and at Luxe, where all of the Solicitous Sellers were commissioned. Performance

evaluation at Classic Style varied somewhat from this approach. The HR manager at Classic Style explained that Solicitous Sellers in the shoe, cosmetics, and jewelry departments had specific sales goals that were closely monitored. Solicitous Sellers in other departments did not receive additional pay for meeting sales goals and enforcement was more lenient,

You have little goals, but you don't have all this pressure on you... You do have to maintain sales-per-hour, at least 75% of the zone average. We don't have, 'You have to sell \$1,000 today.' If the zone average sales-per-hour is \$100, you need to be at least \$75.

The less-stringent performance goals and more lenient monitoring were consistent with the lower pay these employees received.

Although it played only a small role in performance evaluation, most Solicitous Sellers and all Personal Shoppers at High-End stores were measured on rates of email capture and credit card applications at check-out. Both of these tasks supported stores' revenue-generation goals. Email capture also supported clientelling efforts that were essential to developing repeat sales.

In sum, performance evaluation practices at High-End stores were designed to incentivize sales performance, a proxy for delivering attentive customer service, which was a key aspect of brand image.

Professional Development Practices and Stores' Brand Images

Professional development opportunities were of great import for High-End stores as noted by HR managers and publicly available documents. This was not the case at Discount stores. In order to successfully meet business goals, High-End firms had a financial incentive to develop their employees in order to drive sales, unlike at Discount stores where cost management was paramount.

Professional development practices at Discount stores. HR managers at Discount stores did not refer to professional development practices during interviews. At these stores,

there was very little need or opportunity for employees to develop skills on the job since non-management jobs in Discount stores were universally low-skilled and required little training. With respect to Store Zoner jobs, the HR manager at Real Deals – North explained, “Really it’s just cleaning and straightening so it’s not real difficult to do. I mean it’s physical but it’s not brain surgery. You gotta put [the merchandise] in the right place.”

While training was mentioned by interviewees at Budget Style, the training lasted only two weeks. A formal cross-training process at this store offered employees the opportunity to learn about new areas and roles in the store but this was framed as a way to provide increased job satisfaction by offering more variety in tasks and being cross-trained in and of itself did not garner employees higher wages. Further, it was unclear how many workers had access to different types of cross training. All Store Zoners were trained as Cashiers, but the jobs were comparable with respect to wages. When Store Zoners had the opportunity to cross-train as Service Desk Staffers, a move into this job would potentially garner them only a modest raise given that the average hourly wage for Store Zoners was \$9.00 per hour versus \$9.50 per hour for Service Desk Staffers. While helping shoppers at the customer service desk did require somewhat more skill than zoning the store, the relatively small pay increase associated with this job change indicated that skill development had limited value to the organization.

Professional development practices at High-End stores. Professional development played out on the ground through organizational practices such as training and coaching of employees that would provide them with skills to help them advance in the company. For example, Splendid Things offered a management training program for college graduates that provided 18 months of intensive training and job rotations to prepare them to take on

management roles in the company. Entry into this program was competitive and it was unclear how many new hires were placed in these jobs.

Further, professional development emphasized skills that would help Solicitous Sellers generate sales such as classes about merchandising and selling skills. For example, the HR manager at Classic Style spoke animatedly about a new type of merchandise display that her Solicitous Sellers received training about. She explained,

Our designers explained why stuff is [laid out] this way and how to point a customer to things that go together without even saying it, so you don't sound all pushy. You wouldn't notice, but the corner of a scarf touches the clasp of a necklace that's laid around a pair of earrings and they all coordinate.

Similarly, the HR manager at Splendid Things described a sales skills class she taught for Solicitous Sellers,

I'm trying to get everyone in this class to understand features and benefits as you're selling. What's a feature? What's a benefit? Do you understand the difference? You have to be able to talk to what's the difference between a handbag that's \$300 versus \$1,000. [Looks over glasses and shakes head] You can't talk about price. At that point people want to know what makes a \$1,000 bag cost \$1,000? You need to talk about the leather, the name, this and that.

While the training that employees at Splendid Things received was intended to build sales skills, it also served to indoctrinate Solicitous Sellers with the notion that customers might find it tacky to openly discuss price given that the store's brand image emphasized fashion and exclusivity.

HR managers at Luxe and Splendid Things noted that professional development at their stores also involved formal coaching by managers according to their employees' individual needs. The HR manager at Luxe remarked, "We've got this employee, she has great product knowledge, but her sales are lower than they should be and her manager is working with her to develop her follow-up skills – she's helping her up her game with clientelling." At Splendid

Things, managers were expected to use particular techniques when coaching employees. The HR manager explained,

We don't believe you can change people and how they work by *telling* them. We coach to the *behavior*... if someone is going to grow within the company, they'll grow more if we coach to the behavior rather than just say, '[Name], you need to do this.'

The goal of providing professional development was to enable workers to grow in their careers. Opportunities for career growth took the form of internal labor markets at High-End stores. Job ladders and policies of promotion-from-within enabled workers to advance. The HR manager at Splendid Things commented, "I feel like we love to promote from within. We try our best to recognize great talent about people." Splendid Things' job ladders offered a variety of directions for employees. For example, non-commissioned Solicitous Sellers could be promoted into commissioned jobs and part-time Solicitous Sellers could be promoted into full-time positions. At both Luxe and Splendid Things, commissioned Solicitous Sellers could be promoted into selling particularly exclusive and expensive brands or into Personal Shopper positions, both of which offered higher commissions. At the same time, HR managers emphasized the importance of allowing employees to define for themselves what career growth meant. The HR manager at Splendid Things explained,

We want to show people that there's growth. Some people, for growth, it isn't about being in management, but it's growing from being in an hourly to commissioned area...it could be going from hourly to cosmetics....One of our challenges is to make sure everyone realizes that there's different growth patterns. It just depends what you want. Not everyone wants to be the store manager.

At Classic Style, the HR manager noted that career growth for many employees at her store meant moving into positions with more desirable, daytime hours. "Nobody really wants to be managers. They don't want that responsibility....They want the day part-time slots," she said. Classic Style's website and HR manager did not emphasize promotion to the same degree as

Luxe and Splendid Things and, in fact, fewer promotion opportunities in the form of full-time or commissioned jobs were available at this store.

Overall, professional development practices and associated opportunities for career growth at Discount and High-End stores varied in ways that were consistent with their business strategies and brand images.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the second research question by analyzing the ways in which stores' organizational practices, specifically recruiting and hiring, job placement, performance evaluation, and professional development practices, were related to brand images. Overall, the data indicate these organizational practices aligned with firms' brand images. However, the scenario exercise did not provide support for the relationship between brand embodiment and job placement. The next chapter will address HR managers' perceptions of older workers and the extent to which HR managers perceive older workers as being a good fit with their firms' brand images.

CHAPTER 6

HR MANAGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF OLDER WORKERS AND BRAND IMAGE FIT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER WORKERS

This chapter will address the third and fourth research questions by presenting data on HR managers' perceptions of older workers and the extent to which HR managers perceive older workers as fitting with their firms' brand images. Further, it will examine how these perceptions are associated with the organizational practices discussed in Chapter 5 and, thus, with older workers' opportunities to obtain higher-quality employment. Results of open-ended and closed-ended interview questions provide data to address these questions.

HR Managers' Perceptions of Older Workers

Most HR managers in this study agreed with many, but not all, of the stereotypes of older workers, both positive and negative, commonly found in the literature. The table below provides data from closed-ended questions. Results suggest that HR managers hold a greater number of positive perceptions than negative perceptions of older workers.

HR managers were also asked about their perceptions of older workers' reasons for working in, and reasons for leaving, their stores.

Table 6-1: Closed-Ended Questions

“Compared to younger employees, workers who are age 50 and older tend to....”	Strongly Agree or Agree	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
be more loyal to the company (positive stereotype)	Splendid Things Classic Style Budget Style Real Deals-North Real Deals-South	none
be more honest and trustworthy (positive stereotype)	Classic Style Budget Style Real Deals-North Real Deals-South	Splendid Things
be less motivated (negative stereotype)	none	Splendid Things Classic Style Budget Style Real Deals-North Real Deals-South
be less productive (negative stereotype)	none	Splendid Things Classic Style Budget Style Real Deals-North Real Deals-South
be more reliable and dependable (positive stereotype)	Splendid Things Classic Style Budget Style Real Deals-North Real Deals-South	none
be more resistant to change (negative stereotype)	Splendid Things Classic Style Budget Style Real Deals-North	Real Deals-South
be more difficult to train (negative stereotype)	Splendid Things Classic Style Budget Style	Real Deals-North Real Deals-South
have better “soft skills,” such as customer service skills (positive stereotype)	Splendid Things Classic Style Budget Style <i>(store manager only)</i> Real Deals-North Real Deals-South	Budget Style <i>(HR manager only)</i>
have less potential for development on-the-job (negative stereotype)	Classic Style	Splendid Things Budget Style Real Deals-North Real Deals-South
be more expensive to employ (negative stereotype)	Splendid Things Classic Style	Budget Style Real Deals-North Real Deals-South
be less likely to miss work (positive stereotype)	Splendid Things Budget Style Real Deals-North Real Deals-South	Classic Style

Table 6-1: Closed-Ended Questions (continued)

“Compared to younger employees, workers who are age 50 and older tend to....”	Strongly Agree or Agree	Strongly Disagree or Disagree
be less fluent with technology (negative stereotype)	Splendid Things Classic Style Budget Style Real Deals-North	Real Deals-South
have less physical ability (negative stereotype)	none	Splendid Things Classic Style Budget Style Real Deals-North Real Deals-South

Website analyses indicated that Discount stores, which required prospective employees to complete an extensive online survey before they could be granted an interview, wove questions related to some of these stereotypes into their assessments. Specifically, a wide range of questions addressed applicants comfort with change and willingness to learn new things. Many questions addressed workers’ willingness and preference for accepting leadership positions, which relates to the stereotype of having potential for on-the-job development.

Negative perceptions of older workers. HR managers at both High-End and Discount stores generally believed older workers were harder to train and less fluent with technology, more resistant to change, and had more limited physical abilities than younger workers. With respect to physical abilities, HR managers identified lack of strength, difficulty standing for long periods of time, poor dexterity, and diminished eyesight as limitations faced by older workers. At one Discount store and one High-End store, the HR managers expressed disappointment that their older workers were not interested in accepting promotions even though they were well-qualified. Additionally, HR managers at High-End stores felt older workers were more expensive to employ.

Training, fluency with technology, and resistance to change – Discount stores. HR managers at Real Deals – North and Budget Style agreed that technology was a weak spot for older workers. In response to a closed-ended question, the HR manager at Real Deals – South indicated that she did not find older workers lacked these skills. However, during the interview she noted that some older workers were unable to handle the pressure of cashier jobs because of the constant interaction with the computerized cash registers. She explained, “Cashiers are mostly younger...older ones don’t like cashier so much. One older lady was at cashier, but she felt so much pressure...she asked to move, she was shaking, she was so nervous.” At Real Deals – North, the HR manager noted, “We’re doing a lot of stuff on the computer now, so the older...some of the older ones...some of them excel, you know, but some have a hard time with the computer.”

Even when older workers were able to manage computer training, using technology on the job presented a problem, this HR manager explained. “I hired another lady, I think it was before Christmas and she had no problem [training] on the computer at all. She got through everything, no problem whatsoever. We put her on the register...she couldn’t do it.” Further, at this store, management had recently introduced new hand-held electronic scanning devices used by Store Zoners for checking inventory. These new devices were substantially smaller than the previous version, as the HR manager explained, “[Now we have] to use this little, tiny thing! Our [electronic scanners] are like this big now (shows with her hands). They’re like a smart phone.” She noted that this new device posed a problem for older workers, “[One older worker] doesn’t have a computer at home. He got through the training and everything Ok, but if you’re going to start handing him all these devices, I don’t think he’s going to be able to handle it.” At Budget Style, the store manager noted, “[Older workers] are never on the Internet, and then they’re like,

‘You want me to use this thing [the portable electronic scanning device]?! And what is it??’ So, that can become very stressful.” She also remarked that these devices were not the only form of technology with which older workers had to interact in the Store Zoner role,

[They have to learn] how to talk on the walkie-talkie, how to channel back and forth, how to use the phone system. Sometimes those things become super overwhelming for someone who hasn’t worked in this or maybe doesn’t play video games or whatever.

While the HR manager at Real Deals – South did not agree that older workers were more resistant to change in closed-ended questions, HR managers at both Real Deals – North and Budget Style did agree. At Budget Style, the store manager explained that the way their store was run represented a change in work processes from what older workers may have been used to in the past. She noted that working in teams may not have been familiar to older workers who grew up in educational systems that did not often incorporate group work. She felt this made them resistant to changing work styles, commenting,

I think for older workers, sometimes when you come into an environment that’s all about ‘team’ and everybody working together, it can feel uncomfortable because you feel like, ‘Well, how am I going to show what I can do when nobody’s going to know what I did and everybody’s getting credit for everything?’ So, I think that sometimes that can be a little stressful for an older worker.

The HR manager at Budget Style noted that multi-tasking has become a common experience for younger workers who have grown up with interactive technologies such as social media and texting. She explained that multi-tasking is a crucial skill in retail and felt that older workers were less likely to have had experience with it and both resisted and found it difficult to adapt. She commented,

Like, during the training process, when an over-50 [employee] comes on the team, a lot of times you’re helping a [customer] and a call button goes off here, and another [customer] needs help, and, well, it’s something that they’ve had to get used to. [Older workers] get used to it, but it might be a little overwhelming at first.

She also noted that older workers entering retail for the first time tend to experience a big transition. This new work environment forced these workers to deal with change, as she explained,

I guess, stepping outside of a comfort zone, something that they've been doing for many, many years, and then coming into retail, and it might be their first experience in retail...the not-knowing. So, [they need to be] comfortable with that not-knowing piece and uncertainty in the beginning.

Training, fluency with technology, and resistance to change – High-End stores. The HR managers at Splendid Things and Classic Style agreed that older workers were less fluent with technology than their younger counterparts. At Splendid Things, when asked if older workers were harder to train, the HR manager emphatically agreed, explaining the issue was technology. "It's the computer...our registers are all computers. It can be very difficult [for the older workers]," she said. At Classic Style, the HR manager found older workers were resistant to using technology in their jobs. She explained,

I've had struggles. I've had [older workers] not even make it through training or make it to the [sales] floor because they just can't get the register. If you've never used a computer, or rarely used one...I have some associates that don't like using the computer and I have to help them enroll in benefits, and they're like, 'I don't want to touch it.' So that is definitely a challenge for some of my older associates.

In response to closed-ended questions, the HR manager at Splendid Things agreed that older workers were more resistant to change; the HR manager at Classic Style strongly agreed with this statement.

Physical ability – Discount stores. Physical ability was an important job requirement at Discount stores since the majority of jobs at these stores primarily involved moving merchandise around. For example, during the scenario exercise, the store manager at Budget Style cited older workers' lack of strength as a barrier to performing certain jobs. Pointing to pictures of two older women, she commented,

I didn't look to either one of these [candidates] to be in the back room [Receiving department] just because I know enough about the job, that there's more physicality to it than there is working on the general sales floor....It can be very physical when you're pulling down a piece of furniture that needs to get restocked on the sales floor.

She also emphasized that standing could be a problem for older workers, unlike moving around in a more active job,

Cashiers stand in a stationary spot. The other positions on the sales floor, you're moving around all the time, so typically it's not as hard on people if they have arthritis, or something like that, as we all tend to as we get older. Whereas, if you're standing stationary, you can start having more problems with your hips and back, things like that.

At Real Deals – North, the HR manager also commented that jobs that required a lot of standing were problematic for older workers. “A couple of [older workers] couldn't do the job anymore. You know, they can't stand on their feet like that,” she explained. At Real Deals – South, the HR manager described a situation where an older worker could no longer perform her job as a Customer Processor. In this case, the store was able to reassign her since she was a good employee. “We had a lady at the register, she couldn't do it anymore, her arthritis got bad. They are having her greet [customers at the front door] now, and they still give her hours,” she noted.

The HR manager at Real Deals – North pointed to diminished dexterity as a problem for older workers, especially with respect to using technology. Referring to one older employee, she commented,

He doesn't have the dexterity, I guess you would say, to use the [handheld inventory device].... The older people are on medications, you know, that could hinder, you know, give them the shakes that would hinder them from using that small device.

The store manager at Budget Style noted that older workers may have impaired eyesight, which could make certain jobs difficult. The HR manager, a woman in her 20s, mentioned that older Store Zoners could avoid using hand-held inventory devices if the small screens were a barrier. She commented, “There's a way to read the shelf labels so that you wouldn't even need to use

[the handheld device].” The store manager, a woman in her 50s, explained that this was not a foolproof solution. Laughing, she retorted, “Unless your eyes are going! Then you can’t read the shelf labels anymore!”

Physical ability – High-End stores. HR managers at High-End stores did not cite standing, diminished dexterity, or limited eyesight as potential barriers to older workers’ success in jobs in their stores. Rather, older workers’ strength, energy-levels, and overall health were their concerns. Both HR managers remarked that Solicitous Seller jobs required strength in order to wait on customers. At Classic Style, the HR manager commented that certain departments were more problematic for older workers than others. She explained,

My Women’s Dresses and my Women’s Sportswear are very difficult, especially Dresses. They’re heavy, and it’s a lot of recovery [restocking of merchandise] because people take in 20 dresses at a time and leave them on the floor, and it’s a lot more work than my Kids’ department.

The HR manager at Splendid Things, who made an effort to be upbeat about all employees, remarked about an exception that proved the rule that older workers tended to lack strength, which could limit them in certain jobs. She described one older worker, noting, “She works in Domestics and she’s always moving things and she’s 71. I was just stunned!” This HR manager explained that jobs in the store besides Solicitous Selling could be difficult for older workers. Specifically, she described the Merchandise Mover job, “The processing of the truck and moving that fast and lifting boxes and everything...I don’t know if an older associate would even want to do it, would even be physically able to do it on a continual basis.” At Luxe, where intensive clientelling was paramount, the HR manager emphasized that success in the job depended not on age, but on a willingness to work very hard. At the same time, she pointed out that, “[T]here are physical, you know, energy limitations, as you get older.” She felt that energy limitations could affect workers’ ability to drive themselves relentlessly in a demanding job. The

HR manager at Classic Style felt older workers were responsible about showing up for work but noted that they often took longer to recover from health issues. She explained,

Older workers, they're older...so...health plays a lot into it, and people tend to be sick often...Or, they may hurt themselves, and it takes much longer to recover...Yeah, if they get a cold, they're out for a week, not just a day.

Disinterest in career advancement – Discount stores. The HR manager at Real Deals – South briefly expressed some disappointment that her older workers did not appear motivated to achieve promotions. At Real Deals – South, the HR manager gave an example, “[O]ne lady turned down promotion – she didn’t want the pressure. She was so good, it was too bad.” Since opportunities for career advancement were extremely rare in Discount stores, where job ladders were not available, it is perhaps not surprising that HR managers at these stores had little or nothing to say on the topic.

Disinterest in career advancement – High-End stores. The HR manager at Classic Style noted that older workers did not appear motivated to achieve promotions. She remarked that even her best older employees were not interested in career advancement, “Even the ones I want to promote, they like to come in, do their job, and go home and be with their families.” She indicated that, in her experience, older workers who wanted to advance in their careers were few and far between. She explained,

[In all the time I’ve been here], I probably have two people over 50 that have expressed interest in moving up. One we promoted from [a part-time night shift] to full-time in a very hectic area. She’s awesome and she’s been a manager before [at another job]. Then I have another person who’s over 50 and she has expressed it, but I don’t know if it’s very legitimate, I just think she just said that because, you know, that’s what I should say [at a performance review].

In contrast, the HR manager at Splendid Things felt quite the opposite. When asked about older workers’ interest in promotions, she exclaimed, “Oh, absolutely! They want [to advance in their jobs] too. They’re always asking, ‘What else can I do? What else can I be?’”

Cost to employ – Discount stores. Unsurprisingly, HR managers at Discount stores did not believe that older workers were more expensive to employ. Given that nearly all the jobs in Discount stores were part-time and thus employees were not eligible for full health benefits, the cost of health care that older workers might be more likely to use more intensively was unlikely to drive up employer costs. Thus, there was no reason to expect that a difference would exist in the cost to employ older workers.

Cost to employ – High-End stores. Unlike HR managers at Discount stores, HR managers at Splendid Things and Classic style agreed that older workers were more expensive to employ. At Splendid Things, 60-70% of employees worked full-time, making them eligible for a richer health benefits plan than part-timers. As a result, the HR manager felt full-time older workers were more expensive to employ due to her perception that they would file more health claims. Similarly, at Classic Style, the HR manager commented, “I’ve had a lot of FMLA cases, leaves of absence for medical and stuff like that, with older associates.” She explained that this meant spending more of her time processing claims and rescheduling workers, an indirect cost to the company.

Positive perceptions of older workers. HR managers in this study expressed appreciation for their older workers. Their perceptions of older workers’ strengths divided into the personal characteristics older workers possessed and the workplace behaviors they exhibited. With respect to personal characteristics, HR managers at both Discount and High-End stores observed that older workers were reliable, dependable, responsible employees who were honest and trustworthy. They felt older workers were loyal employees who took pride in their work and were motivated to do a good job. HR managers praised older workers’ conscientiousness, work ethic, and respectfulness. Finally, most HR managers felt older workers had potential for on-the-

job development. With respect to workplace behaviors, HR managers noted that older workers rarely had problems with tardiness or absenteeism and were productive in their jobs. HR managers also praised older workers' customer service skills, leadership and role modeling abilities, and, in the case of High-End stores, selling and relationship-building skills.

Personal characteristics – Discount stores. The HR managers at both Real Deals stores, as well as the HR and store managers at Budget Style, agreed that, as the HR manager at Real Deals – South put it, “[O]lder workers know how to work.” The HR manager at this store was adamant that older workers were superior with respect to their dependability, reliability, honesty, and loyalty. When asked to describe older workers, she rattled off a litany of positive qualities. “They stick around, they’re loyal workers. [Older workers] know how to be responsible in a job...they just show more respect and common sense.” The HR manager at Real Deals – North explained that older workers’ brought a good work ethic and life experience to their jobs,

[They are] loyal and they’re committed and they have a good work ethic. There’s no argument. You know, ‘Do I have to do that?’ Oh, I can’t stand it! [Mockingly, in a whiny voice] ‘Why do I have to do this training?’ None of that stuff. They just do it because that’s how it’s been programmed into their lifestyle. Because they’re serious...they’ve been around awhile, they know what it is to have a job.

She noted that older workers were both motivated and productive. “They like to work. They get it done,” she explained.

The HR manager and store manager at Budget Style stated similar opinions. The store manager described a difference in attitude between older and younger workers, explaining,

[Older workers are] more likely to just be a little bit more diligent, have a little bit more pride in some of their work performance, as opposed to somebody that, it’s their first job ever and they just want to go home because they’re going to a big party tonight and so, ‘Can’t we just get out of here?’

The HR manager agreed, “[W]hen [older workers] go home, they were happy that they were able to close the store clean, and the younger generations have the mindset of, ‘Oh, I’m happy that I

left earlier than usual.” The store manager remarked that the reason older workers had a different attitude than younger workers was because of their life experience. “I also think that, sometimes, they have a little bit more attention to detail, from the standpoint of understanding the reasoning *why* it’s very important that things are orderly, and where they belong, and it’s done neatly,” she explained.

Both the store manager and the HR manager emphasized that a strength of older workers was the way they took pride in their work and liked being accountable for their performance. The store manager commented, “I think that’s probably one of the biggest things, maybe a sense of responsibility and signing their work.” The HR manager, nodding vigorously, affirmed, “[It’s about] accountability.” The store manager responded that older workers in their store have a distinct preference for work arrangements where they were accountable for their own outcomes, as opposed to being judged only on the team’s performance,

[W]e’ve gotten feedback from a team member over 50 that said, ‘Hey, I really like this idea [of being assigned to a particular aisle] because I’m able to say, “Come on, this is my ownership of what I’ve done, what I’ve accomplished.”’

In response to a Likert scale question about older workers’ potential for on-the-job development, Discount store HR managers indicated that older workers had as much potential for development as younger workers. That being said, there were few opportunities for advancement at Discount stores. Thus, although older workers’ potential was viewed positively, this view did not often play a role in the stores’ workplace practices.

Personal characteristics – High-End stores. The HR managers at both Splendid Things and Classic Style expressed sentiments similar to those at the Discount stores, although their remarks were somewhat less effusive and detailed. When asked about her older workers, the HR manager at Splendid Things commented, “You know what? They are conscientious, they take

pride in their work.” Similarly, Classic Style’s HR manager noted, “The older workers are dependable and loyal... that is the main thing with my older workers. They’re responsible.” The HR manager at Classic Style praised older workers’ attitudes, “The majority of them are very respectful...some younger people like to mouth off or do crazy things. But I do feel that [older workers] are, on average, more respectful. So that is definitely an advantage.” This HR manager also gave a counter-example, articulating an exception that proved the rule. She explained,

I hired an older woman and I thought she’d be great up there [in the Accessories department], she’s so mature, so I felt like she’d be responsible. No! That is not the case! I’ve had [older workers] steal and stuff like that. It’s so odd!

In response to a Likert scale question, HR managers at Luxe and Splendid things indicated that older workers had as much potential for development as younger workers. The HR manager at Classic Style did not agree with this statement.

Workplace behaviors – Discount stores. HR managers at Discount stores were emphatic that older workers’ workplace behaviors were superior to those of younger workers. The HR manager at Real Deals – South gushed,

The older workers do more things right. They don’t call off [call at the last minute to say they won’t be coming to work], or aren’t late – older workers are always on time. They do it right the first time. They don’t get into trouble or have any infractions [disciplinary notes in their files] for a whole year, where a younger worker might have ten infractions in one month!

The HR manager at Real Deals – North concurred, “[Older workers] show up on time and they do the job whether they want to do it or not.” When asked if there were jobs that older workers were particularly good at, she remarked, “No, I don’t think so. They’re just good. They’re good on the floor and they’re good at the register, you know?”

Older workers were valued for their soft skills at both Real Deals and Budget Style. At Real Deals – North, the HR manager described an older employee who, “all the customers just loved” and gave an example of strong customer service skills,

I saw her one day, I was coming in and she was outside, because we always have some kind of sidewalk sale going on, and she was picking up the clothes off the floor. She stopped what she was doing, went inside, and got a chair for whatever woman was out there going through the clothes, because [the customer] needed to sit down.

At Budget Style, the HR and store managers described older workers as having strong leadership skills. Noting that a few of their department managers were older, the store manager explained that these employees,

[M]anage [their subordinates] in different ways [than younger workers]. And, sometimes, [employees] look to them in a mother- or father-figure way, and kind of listen to them a little bit more when they sit down and say, ‘Hey, look, this is what’s not going well,’ or ‘You’re coming in late to work, what’s going on?’

Further, she explained that older workers displayed leadership skills even when they were not in management positions. Noting that, when older workers were placed in teams to reorganize part of the store, department managers made an effort to mix older and younger workers because, “[T]he older generations are sometimes kind of saying, ‘Alright, let’s move onto the next [aisle],’ and they kind of become the natural leader within that group.” The HR manager agreed, noting, “[They] help kind of inspire everybody else to come along for the ride.”

Workplace behaviors – High-End stores. At High-End stores, HR managers noted that older workers possessed both customer service skills and selling and relationship-building skills that were crucial to success. At Splendid Things, the HR manager pointed to a particular department that was staffed largely by older workers and noted that older workers had the skills to be successful there,

To be in the [high-end designer] area, you have to be a heck of a great salesperson. You have to be able to build relationships, because these [customers] are coming in to buy

women's clothing that are at a...certain [very high] price point. And so, it's all about building a relationship. These ladies, they really do it.

The HR manager at Classic Style also emphasized that simply waiting on customers in an attentive way was not enough to be successful at her store and that older workers were able to do more than that,

I have [older] people over there [in a high-end, trendy department] that are not trendy at all [in their personal style] but are awesome sellers, and they know the merchandise and they can pick out outfits for other people and that's what really counts.

However, this HR manager commented that there was variation in the behaviors of her older workers, noting, "Some older workers, maybe they aren't as great help in some of the departments, a few [of them] that aren't really doing what they should be doing. Most are good, but not all."

With respect to one very specialized skill, the HR manager at Splendid Things noted that her Alterations department was staffed entirely by older workers. She explained that, in addition to being conscientious in their work, these employees possessed excellent seamstress skills that were hard to come by. "They're practically artists. It's a dying skill, so that's not surprising [that they are older]," she noted.

All HR managers at High-End stores viewed older workers as productive workers who were motivated to do a good job. At both Splendid Things and Luxe, the HR managers viewed older workers as having ambitions for promotions or as having ambitions to build their businesses to substantial levels. The HR manager at Luxe explained, "Here, it's person-by-person. It's about your willingness to work hard and be successful in the job, not about age. Older workers have that willingness, too."

Perceptions of older workers' reasons for working. HR managers at Discount and High-End stores identified both social and financial reasons as key explanations for why older

workers chose to accept jobs at their stores. HR managers' descriptions of financial reasons for working took on different meanings at Discount versus High-End stores.

Perceptions of older workers' reasons for working – Discount stores. HR managers at Discount stores identified needing social stimulation as a motivation for working, however, they spoke in more depth of financial need as a driver for having a job. Financial needs included having money for discretionary spending as well as having an income to pay the bills.

The HR managers at Real Deals – North and Budget Style observed that getting out of the house was a common reason for older workers to take a job at their stores. The HR manager at Real Deals – North commented, “Some of them just need to get out of the house. They need to be busy.” The HR manager at Budget Style expressed a similar sentiment, however, at this store where most workers were in their 20s, the HR manager considered workers over 40 years-old to be “older.” She remarked,

[Y]ou get that group of moms that are in their early to mid-40s and they come back [to work] because they've got empty nest syndrome...they just want to have that part-time job on the side to kind of get out of the house.

At Real Deals – South, the HR manager remarked that older workers chose to work seasonal, part-time jobs for financial reasons but not in order to have an income to survive. She explained, “A lot of people who are retired come back to work extra hours during Christmas. They work to buy gifts for family.” However, with respect to older workers who held permanent positions, the HR manager at Real Deals – North indicated that making ends meet motivated older workers to stay in their jobs as long as possible. “The ones that are in the full-time positions, this is their livelihood so they're going to stay as long as they possibly can,” she noted. She did not believe this was the case with most older employees since she believed most older workers preferred part-time jobs because they had less need for a higher income. Rather, she

explained, “I think they’re really just looking for part-time, most of them. The part-timers, I think they’re just looking for a supplement [to their retirement income].” She also explained her perception of why older workers specifically chose to work in retail. She commented, a bit tentatively,

I don’t want to say this in a negative way, but I think it’s the skill factor [that motivates them to work in retail], because most of them were just high school graduates. They don’t have a big education to do something else.

Perceptions of older workers’ reasons for working – High-End stores. HR managers at all three High-End stores noted that older adults chose to work at their stores for social stimulation. At Classic Style, the HR manager noted that her employees were past the life stages where paying for college or saving for retirement were an issue, “A lot of people [who work here] are retired, and I feel like people go into retail...you know, it’s, ‘I just want to do something part-time; I like working with people, so I’m going to do retail.’” She described her older workers’ attitudes towards their jobs this way, “I’m retired and I kind of don’t want to be at home. I just want to do a little bit of something.” She noted that the store discount offered to employees was appreciated by older employees but she did not believe the discount alone was a motivator for older adults to take jobs in her store. “[Older workers] love the discount and they get to shop the holiday season and buy stuff for the grandkids and kids, but it’s not a make-or-break for them,” she commented. At Luxe, the HR manager commented that, “Most [older workers] are here for the social [interaction] and for the discount.” However, she added, “But, they are driven and care about the job and making their goals.” The HR manager at Splendid Things reported a similar perception, noting, “You know, a lot of [older workers] come here because they enjoy it, it’s a pleasant experience [to work in these surroundings].” She went on to say, “Some are empty nesters thinking, ‘Gee, what am I going to do with my time?’”

At Luxe and Splendid Things, HR managers perceived financial reasons as playing an important role as well. At these High-End stores, key financial needs for older workers were different from those at Discount stores. The HR manager at Luxe noted, “Some have kids to put through college while they’re saving for retirement.” When asked about older workers’ financial motivations for working, the HR manager at Splendid Things remarked, “Some work for extra money, some need the money. Honestly, I would say both across the board.” During the discussion, the definition of “needing the money” that emerged proved to be quite different from the one described by Discount store managers. At her store, employees who need the money were unable to retire when they had expected to do so; they were not living paycheck to paycheck. She noted,

There are older people who live [in this community], people who’ve lost a spouse recently or a spouse has been sick, and they haven’t had to work in years. They’re like, ‘Oh, wait, I thought we would be ready for retirement and we can’t afford to retire.’

Perceptions of older workers’ reasons for leaving their jobs. The most frequently-mentioned reason HR managers at both Discount and High-End stores gave for older workers leaving their jobs was physical decline. HR managers at High-End stores also noted reasons beyond physical limitations.

Perceptions of older workers’ reasons for leaving their jobs – Discount stores. Physical decline was the sole reason expressed by HR managers at Discount stores for why older workers left jobs at their stores. For example, the HR manager at Real Deals – South poignantly explained that, “[Older workers] don’t retire, they just kind of wear out.” She noted that these workers began to suffer from health problems that prevented them from doing their jobs well. She provided an example, explaining, “We have a lady who is from 1998 at the register and she

is having problems with arthritis and she had a cane....She probably won't keep coming since she is in her seventies." The HR manager at Real Deals – North concurred, explaining,

We've had to tell a couple of people, 'It's time for you to go, you're getting up there in years.' A couple of them couldn't do the job anymore. They can't stand on their feet like that. So when it gets to the point where they're getting to be 65 or 67, they're usually going to go.

Perceptions of older workers' reasons for leaving their jobs – High-End stores. HR managers at High-End stores spoke primarily about physical decline as the reason why older workers left jobs in their stores. The HR manager at Classic Style noted that older workers left their jobs because they were unable to perform their duties. "With some [older workers] it was like, 'You pretty much really need to retire because you are not able to really do your job very well.'" She gave an example of two employees in this situation, explaining,

I had an alterations person who just needed to retire. She was having issues like accidents on herself. I also had one gentleman that was full-time and he was doing stocking and receiving and he just wasn't able to keep up the physical demands. It was affecting business so it was a, 'You really should retire,' type of situation.

At High-End stores, HR managers gave reasons beyond physical limitations when discussing why older workers left jobs in their stores. For example, the HR manager at Luxe commented that some older workers could not meet sales expectations and that some did not want the pressure of doing so. She noted,

Some can't meet their goals and some don't want to. [The Solicitous Seller position is] not an easy job, it's physical – you're on your feet, and it's emotionally demanding to deal with our customers because they expect a lot.

Further, the HR manager at Classic Style noted that work schedule preferences were a cause of turnover among her older workers. She commented, "They don't like the hours that they're working, they don't really want to work evenings so they just leave."

At Splendid Things, the HR manager noted a variety of reasons that older workers left, none of which involved physical decline. She explained, “[Older workers] leave because they got a job in their field [not retail]. They might be moving. They’re taking care of someone who is ill. Those are the main reasons.”

Summary: HR managers’ perceptions of older workers. HR managers at Discount and High-End stores held many of the same positive and negative perceptions of older workers. Overall HR managers at both types of stores held a greater number of positive than negative perceptions of older workers.

HR managers’ perceptions of older workers – Discount stores. HR managers at Discount stores believed older workers were harder to train and more resistant to change than younger workers. They also perceived older workers as having more limited physical abilities than their younger counterparts. Discount store HR managers perceived older workers as reluctant to accept promotions (which were few and far between). Despite these negative perceptions, Discount store HR managers also held many positive perceptions of older workers with respect to both their personal characteristics and their workplace behaviors. They expressed themselves using a large vocabulary of positive traits when describing their older workers, including dependable, reliable, honest, loyal, responsible, respectful, and productive. Further, these HR managers indicated that their older workers showed pride in their work and were diligent and conscientious in their jobs. They also reported that older workers could be counted on to be at work and be on time and to follow the rules, as well as to demonstrate leadership on the job.

HR managers at Discount stores identified two primary reasons they believed older workers took jobs at their stores: social reasons and financial reasons. With respect to social

reasons, they indicated that older workers sought jobs at their stores in order to get out of the house and have something to do. HR managers at Discount stores believed older workers were employed because they needed the money to make ends meet or to make discretionary purchases such as holiday gifts.

Discount store HR managers overwhelmingly identified physical decline as the reason most older workers left jobs at their stores. They noted that these employees stayed on their jobs until they “wore out,” presumably because they could not afford to be out of the workforce.

HR managers’ perceptions of older workers – High-End stores. HR managers at High-End stores expressed many sentiments about older workers that were consistent with those of Discount store HR managers. With respect to negative perceptions, these HR managers also believed older workers were more resistant to change, harder to train, and had more physical limitations than younger workers. High-End store HR managers expressed mixed opinions about older workers’ willingness to accept promotions.

Like Discount store HR managers, High-End store HR managers also held many positive perceptions of older workers, using many of the same words, such as reliable, loyal, responsible, committed, and motivated. They indicated that older workers at their High-End stores could be counted on to be at work and be on time and to work hard. Further, they saw older workers as knowledgeable employees who possessed strong customer service, selling, and relationship building skills.

HR managers at High-End stores also believed that older workers took jobs at their stores for both social reasons and financial reasons. They explained that getting out of the house was a key reason that older adults worked at their stores and referred to “empty nest syndrome” and being retired as sources of older workers’ desire to be employed. With respect to financial

reasons for working, in contrast to Discount store HR managers, HR managers at High-End stores identified long-term financial goals, specifically, saving for retirement or children's college expenses, as the primary reason older workers took jobs in their stores.

HR managers at High-End stores also identified physical decline as the reason most older workers left jobs at their stores. Additionally, some HR managers indicated older workers left jobs because they did not want the pressure or work schedule associated with the position or because they needed to care for a sick spouse or relative or were relocating.

HR Managers' Perceptions of Older Workers and Brand Image Fit

This section will address the second half of the third research question by considering the extent to which HR managers perceived older workers as fitting with their firms' brand images. HR managers' perceptions of older workers combined with their understanding of their stores' brand images to create a perception of the degree to which older workers fit with their brand images. At both Discount and High-End stores, HR managers expressed enthusiasm about this fit. Primarily, they spoke in terms of older workers' fit with their brand images in light of the customers they aimed to attract to their stores. High-End stores also mentioned brand embodiment as an element that played into their determination of older workers' fit with specific jobs within their stores.

Perceptions of older workers and brand image fit – Discount stores. HR managers at Discount stores expressed the importance of having older workers in floor positions in order to match older shoppers, who were identified as a key segment of their target markets. The importance of such customer matching was expressed primarily in terms of creating a comfortable shopping environment for older customers who, it was believed, would be more at ease with older employees when seeking assistance with purchases.

At both Real Deals – North and Budget Style, HR managers discussed the importance of hiring older workers in Store Zoner positions in order to create a comfortable environment for older shoppers. At Real Deals – North, the HR manager commented, “I think [older workers] fit in great because in this particular store we have an older customer base. The customers actually like the fact that we have older employees here.”

The store manager at Budget Style made a similar remark, stating,

I think one of the biggest advantages [of having older workers] is just to help mirror our [customer] traffic...when you walk into the store, you’ll see at least one or two people that at least make you feel like, ‘Hey, they get me, they’re like me.’ I think that’s one of the biggest advantages that we can have.

The perception that older workers were a good fit with their stores’ brand images with respect to their target markets predisposed Discount store HR managers to look favorably upon older workers as prospective employees, likely enhancing older workers’ opportunities to obtain employment at the stores. Further, since older workers were perceived as reliable, hard-working employees, HR managers’ expectations that these employees would be good Store Zoners implied that older workers fit with Discount stores’ brand images in the sense that they would contribute to the brand image goal of creating an environment where customers could serve themselves.

At Budget Style, the HR manager also noted a benefit to assigning older workers to zone merchandise with which they likely had personal experience, such as housewares. The purpose of placing older workers in these departments was to signal to customers that expert advice was available, not to embody the Discount store’s brand, which did not rely on employee expertise.

Regardless, these preferences did not confer any advantage on older workers with respect to their opportunities for obtaining higher-quality employment since all the jobs in the store were of low quality.

Perceptions of older workers and brand image fit – High-End stores. HR managers at High-End stores also explained that the purpose of customer matching was to make older customers feel welcome in their stores. At Classic Style, whose customer base had an average age of 50 to 60 years-old, the HR manager explained, “I feel like my team...they fit the customer [in terms of age].” Her primary concern was that older shoppers might not relate to younger workers like herself. “Our customers are probably more comfortable working with [older workers] than me, going up there like, ‘Who is this chick?’”

At Splendid Things, the HR manager noted that she had recently hired some older workers in the department that sells youth-oriented fashions in order to match their customers, who were not always young. “We’ve recently hired a couple of older women who have had teenage girls because of the moms who come in wanting to buy things for their teenage daughters and they can definitely relate to [older women],” she explained. The perception that older workers helped reflect their target markets made HR managers at High-End stores appreciate them as prospective employees, likely enhancing older workers’ opportunities to obtain employment at the stores.

Further, at Splendid Things, the HR manager spoke in terms of the age of Solicitous Sellers as an aspect of identifying workers who would most effectively embody the brands in particular departments. In some cases, this HR manager felt it was important to match workers to the age of the market segment to which the merchandise was targeted. This meant that, for the most part, she preferred to place younger workers in departments selling young-typed items and older workers in departments where merchandise targeted customers referred to as “mature.” In these cases, the HR manager’s strategy was to signal product knowledge to customers.

For example, this HR manager viewed higher-priced cosmetics as generally geared toward mature customers. In this case, she felt it was important to staff these areas with older women. She explained,

The ladies [customers] I'm thinking of are considered older, at least 50s, and the price points are higher. A [facial] cream could be \$300 to \$700. So [a customer doesn't] want [a Solicitous Seller] who's 21 necessarily. Would they understand why you need to buy a certain kind of cream?

Since commissions on such high-priced sales could be substantial, this HR manager's preference for placing older women into such jobs could be a boon for them, providing them with access to a desirable job that they would not have to compete with younger colleagues to obtain. Further, she indicated that younger workers were more likely to be placed in positions selling apparel brands that targeted younger shoppers. The shoppers she referred to in this case were not teenagers whose mothers might shop for them. Rather, she commented, "Someone in their 20s or 30s may want someone who reflects them, if they're buying [a designer apparel brand targeting younger customers]." Some young-typed brands had very high price points, meaning, Solicitous Sellers could earn substantial commissions by working in these areas. In this case, older workers were at a disadvantage in that their younger counterparts were favored for such positions.

This preference did not hold, however, when it came to apparel that was targeted to mature women. The HR manager remarked, "[I]f someone's buying [designer brand targeted to mature women], they're normally an older person and [customers are] fine with [a Solicitous Seller of any age] assisting them." Further, older workers were also disadvantaged in store departments that sold brands that targeted a wide age range. The HR manager commented that it was more desirable to have younger Solicitous Sellers wait on older shoppers for such apparel brands. She explained,

Just recently I've hired two young [Solicitous Sellers] because mainly [workers have] been older in that department, which is fine. But [an older customer] may be buying [designer brands targeting customers in a wide age range] and want a younger, hipper look for herself. Can someone who's older give you that input? Yes, they can, but you may feel more comfortable with someone younger.

From her point of view, an older shopper who was looking for age-typed merchandise that did not match her age group might well prefer to work with a Solicitous Seller who also did not match her age group.

In contrast, the HR manager at Classic Style did not feel that merchandise matching by age mattered for Solicitous Sellers to be effective as long as they possessed strong sales skills. While this store was moving toward offering more trendy, youth-oriented styles, the HR manager did not believe this shift needed to be reflected in her sales staff's appearance. "My [Solicitous Sellers] don't have to look the part [of young styles]. I don't really care if you look a certain kind of way, trendy or not trendy, if you can sell," she explained. Thus, at Classic Style, workers' ages did not appear to either advantage or disadvantage them during job placement.

Summary: HR Managers' Perceptions and Opportunities for Older Workers

All HR managers in the study perceived older workers as being a good fit with their stores' brand images and, thus, desirable hires.

Opportunities at Discount stores. At Discount stores, where customer service was defined as creating a store environment where customers could easily locate merchandise, older workers' strong basic work skills supported this aspect of brand image and likely advantaged older workers during hiring. Further, Discount store HR managers valued older workers for the role they played in matching their target markets. However, as previously noted, since the quality of jobs at these stores was poor, HR managers' hiring preferences did not open doors to obtaining higher-quality employment. Older workers were particularly valued for Store Zoner

and Service Desk Staffer roles, both of which were overwhelmingly part-time, low-paid positions with very limited health insurance benefits and unpredictable schedules.

Discount store HR managers were disinclined to hire older workers as Merchandise Movers and Customer Processors due to the physical demands of these jobs. In the case of the Customer Processor job, HR managers' perceptions that older workers were less facile with technology than their younger counterparts also worked against them during hiring for these roles. However, as before, these jobs were of low quality and HR managers' reluctance to hire older workers for these roles did not substantially disadvantage them with respect to their opportunities to obtain higher-quality employment. At the same time, some older workers might desire a stable work schedule, such as those responsible for caring for a spouse or partner. In this case, being viewed as undesirable for Merchandise Mover jobs would put these individuals at a disadvantage in a way that could matter for their work-life balance.

Opportunities at High-End stores. At High-End stores, older workers were viewed favorably during the hiring process with the exception of when stores were hiring for Merchandise Mover jobs since, similar to Discount stores, HR managers at High-End stores believed that the physical demands of the job were too much for older workers. Since these jobs comprised a small proportion of the total jobs at the stores, and were of lower quality than other jobs, this perception did not, for the most part, disadvantage older workers seeking employment at High-End stores.

As previously mentioned, at Splendid Things, the story of the HR manager's perception of older workers' fit with her store's brand image was more complex and created a mixed environment for opportunities for older workers. Keeping this exception in mind, High-End stores offered older workers some excellent opportunities to obtain higher-quality employment.

Older workers were viewed positively as candidates for Solicitous Seller and Personal Shopper jobs, many of which could be quite lucrative and often offered full-time status and generous health benefits. Even lower-quality jobs at High-End stores, such as the Service Desk Staffer and Merchandising roles at Splendid Things, were better-paying than comparable roles at Discount stores, providing somewhat better opportunities for older workers seeking such positions.

Overall, the story of HR managers' perceptions and opportunities for older workers was a nuanced one. Older workers were viewed as desirable hires who fit well with stores' brand images. However, the extent to which this positive view held by HR managers conferred advantages on older workers for obtaining higher-quality employment varied substantially based on stores' cost-leadership or differentiation strategies.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined data related to the third and fourth research questions, revealing HR managers' perceptions of older workers and the extent to which HR managers perceived older workers as fitting with their firms' brand images. Further, the data provide insight into how these perceptions were related to opportunities for older workers. Overall, HR managers held more positive than negative perceptions of older workers. They expressed appreciation for their older workers' strong basic work skills, such as being on time, not calling off, and taking pride in completing a task well. They perceived older workers as being more reliable, dependable and responsible than younger workers and felt older workers were loyal, honest, trustworthy employees who were motivated to do a good job. HR managers stated that older workers showed a strong work ethic and provided leadership to, and set a good example for, younger workers. They did not believe older workers were any less capable of on-the-job development than younger workers. At the same time, older workers were generally viewed by

HR managers as being less capable than younger workers with respect to their facility with technology and physical capabilities and found them to be harder to train. HR managers' perceptions of older workers' reasons for seeking employment at their stores included the perception that older workers wanted to get out of the house and sought social opportunities and the perception that older workers needed income for various reasons.

All HR managers indicated that older workers fit well with their stores' brand images and contributed to the success of their businesses by mirroring their customer bases. At Discount stores, age did not confer an advantage upon older workers nor did it disadvantage them since job quality was universally poor. At one High-End store, Splendid Things, older workers were at a disadvantage as compared to younger workers for jobs in certain departments but were advantaged for placement in jobs in several well-paying departments. The final chapter will discuss the implications of the findings from this study as well as its limitations and suggestions for future investigation.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

US employment trends indicate that Americans are both staying in the workforce longer and returning to work after retirement in increasing numbers. The retail industry, which offers a significant number of employment opportunities, may be seen by some as a welcoming environment for older adults. Retail job quality and the likelihood that older workers may obtain better-quality jobs may vary as a result of mechanisms that are not yet well understood. Thus, there is a need for further examination of the factors related to the hiring and job placement of older workers in the retail industry. This dissertation has examined mechanisms that may operate within retail firms, specifically department stores, which may be related to opportunities for older workers who are seeking new jobs.

This dissertation has investigated two factors that may serve to limit or enhance employment opportunities available to department store workers age 50 and over. Six Chicago-area department stores are the focus of the dissertation. The first factor under investigation is the role of retailers' business strategies and brand images and the second factor concerns HR managers' perceptions of older workers. Labor demand plays out on the front lines of organizations in part through the decisions managers make when hiring workers. Managers' perceptions of whether older workers may fit with firms' brand images and in particular jobs may help explain the distribution of opportunities for older workers within and across department stores. This final chapter will summarize the study findings and elaborate several themes that emerged from the data. Implications for practice and theory, limitations, and an agenda for future research will also be presented.

Discussion of Results

The findings that answer the original research questions that were posed are presented below. Next, three significant themes that highlight the conditions under which age may or may not make a difference in helping explain access to higher-quality jobs at department stores are examined.

Summary of findings: Brand image messages. The first research question concerned the messages hiring managers received about firms' brand images and how these messages played out in stores' business practices. Study results revealed four dimensions of brand images that were conveyed by the firms, specifically, merchandise, merchandising, customer service, and reflecting community.

First, interviews with HR managers, store observations, and examination of websites indicated that a key aspect of stores' brand images was the price and quality of the merchandise carried. At Discount stores, brand image messages focused on good quality products that were offered at low prices, consistent with their cost leader business strategies. At High-End stores, brand image messages highlighted the high-fashion, exclusive items stores offered, consistent with their differentiator business strategies. In contrast to Discount stores, where data sources revealed forceful messages about low prices, at High-End stores HR managers obliquely referred to the (high) price points of their merchandise, reflecting the genteel, high-class brand image messages their firms sought to convey to customers.

Second, the data illuminated how brand image messages played out in the ways in which merchandising was executed in stores and on websites. At Discount stores, interviews and store observations revealed that merchandising efforts appeared to be designed to support the presentation of self-service store environments where customers would require limited amounts

of personal assistance from store staff. Thus, merchandise was prominently signed to emphasize low prices and to enable customers to easily locate the best deals. Stores were efficiently laid out in aisles and merchandise was zoned according to detailed merchandise maps to keep items organized. Similarly, websites seemed to be structured to facilitate comparison shopping and deal-finding. At High-End stores, merchandising approaches conveyed the elegant, luxurious nature of product offerings. Merchandise in the stores was presented artistically and high-fashion displays were ubiquitous. Websites resembled fashion magazine spreads that educated customers about the latest seasonal trends and designer interpretations.

Third, all data sources revealed the prominent role that customer service played in conveying stores' brand images to shoppers. At Discount stores, customer service was conceptualized as providing shoppers with a self-service setting where they could quickly solve their own problems with little involvement by store staff. HR managers emphasized store practices, such as providing on-the-floor technology that enabled customers to check prices and locate out-of-stock items online, which allowed customers to obtain information without interacting with staff members. These store practices played out during observations. At High-End stores, customer service was conceptualized as an experience involving intensive, personal interactions where shoppers could be served and educated by trustworthy staff who could guide their selections. HR managers at High-End stores gave elaborate descriptions of the ways in which customers would be assisted and such service did indeed play out during store observations and in website analyses. High-End stores also offered personal shopping services that took customer service to an even more intensive level.

A final key dimension of stores' brand images was reflecting and supporting the communities in which the stores were located. This brand image message primarily played out

through stores' practices of hiring employees from their local communities. When HR managers described the communities in which their stores were located, they frequently referred to residents' personal characteristics, such as their ethnicity. The personal characteristics of the workers who worked in the stores appeared to be a way that the reflecting-the-community brand image message was conveyed to customers. For example, HR managers at Discount stores noted that their workforces included employees who, like other community members, were native speakers of the languages most commonly found in the communities in which their stores were located. While charitable giving was mentioned on store websites as an important avenue through which firms supported the communities in which they were located, this brand image message was only apparent on websites and did not play out on the ground at either type of store. While websites described charitable giving efforts at length, there was no signage to that effect in the stores and during interviews HR managers did not mention charitable giving as a way in which their stores engaged with their local communities.

Understanding the dimensions of stores' brand images that were described by HR managers provides a foundation for examining the basis of store practices that were related to the distribution of opportunities within the varying types of stores. As discussed below, in some cases, dimensions of brand image appeared to be related to opportunities for higher-quality employment, which, in some cases, varied by age, while other dimensions ultimately seemed to have no bearing on opportunities.

Summary of findings: Brand images, organizational practices, and brand embodiment. The second research question explored the nature of the relationship between firms' brand images and organizational practices related to hiring, brand embodiment, job placement, performance evaluation, and professional development.

Brand embodiment refers to the hiring and job placement preferences some firms have for workers whose personal characteristics, such as perceived age or fashion sense, align with their brand images (e.g., Pettinger, 2004 & 2005; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990; Williams & Connell, 2010). When hiring managers at such firms perceive candidates' personal characteristics as having the potential to reinforce their stores' brand images, these candidates may be considered particularly attractive by hiring managers. In these cases, such characteristics may signal workers' potential to successfully embody, and thus communicate, the brand image (e.g., Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Williams & Connell, 2010). At Discount stores, hiring processes appeared to be streamlined to contain costs and HR managers were not actively seeking workers with specific skills, such as being able to work with a computer, or specific knowledge, such as knowing a particular type of merchandise such as jewelry. And there is little evidence that managers in Discount stores gave preference to hiring workers whose personal qualities embodied their stores' brands. For this reason, brand embodiment expectations did not play out during hiring or job placement decisions at Discount stores.

In contrast, High-End stores seemed to invest considerable resources in recruiting and hiring employees. Further, evaluating workers' skills and fit with and, in some cases, embodiment of, their stores' brand images appeared to be a central goal of both the hiring and job placement processes. The data from this study indicate that, for some positions, the recruiting, hiring, and job placement processes at High-End stores did serve the purpose of evaluating candidates' abilities to embody the brands of particular merchandise, as will be discussed shortly.

A scenario exercise where HR managers were provided with profiles of four prospective employees and asked to place them into jobs in their stores revealed that HR managers at both

Discount and High-End stores took similar approaches when making their job placement decisions. In both cases, brand image fit and embodiment did not appear to be a consideration during placement decisions. HR managers at both types of stores made placement decisions during the scenario exercise primarily by relying on their perceptions of workers' functional and social ages. Specifically, HR managers considered their perceptions of job candidates' diminished physical abilities, meaning, functional ages, during job placement. They also considered what they assumed candidates' preferences for particular job characteristics would be, and the skills they assumed the candidates possessed, meaning, their social ages. In other words, they made assumptions about how old these workers were and what they would want at a particular life stage such as a less demanding job after retirement. Social age also pertains to assumptions people make about career stages and HR managers made inferences about skill levels based on age. This combination of assumptions appeared to play a role in older workers' employment prospects. Note that although skills did not appear to play a role in Discount stores' hiring practices, skills were a consideration at the job placement stage.

Performance evaluation processes varied substantially across the brand images of the stores. At Discount stores, workers were primarily evaluated based on transactional behaviors such as the speed at which they processed customer purchases and returns or zoned areas of the stores. This approach to performance evaluation aligned with their cost leader strategies. In contrast, High-End stores primarily evaluated the vast majority of their workers, who were in selling positions, based on their achievement of sales goals, which were viewed as a proxy for successfully delivering attentive customer service. This approach aligned with their differentiator strategies.

Professional development opportunities were not available at Discount stores, where jobs were universally low-skilled. As cost leaders, Discount stores focused on keeping expenses low and appeared to structure jobs at their stores in a way that eliminated the need for costly training. Providing professional development opportunities would not serve the business objectives of Discount stores and, indeed, none were found at these stores. In contrast, at High-End stores, training and coaching were readily available. As differentiators, High-End stores needed employees who could convey the exclusive, high-quality nature of their offerings and bring strong sales skills to their interactions with customers. By actively promoting the availability of professional development opportunities to prospective employees, High-End stores appeared to be seeking to attract skilled workers who would find these opportunities appealing. Having the chance to increase human capital on the job is, in and of itself, a form opportunity for workers seeking higher-quality employment. Thus, the availability of professional development opportunities aligned with High-End stores' business strategies.

Summary of findings: Perceptions of older workers and brand image fit. The third research question examined the perceptions of older workers that hiring managers held and the extent to which managers perceived older workers as fitting with their firms' brand images.

HR managers at both Discount and High-End stores believed that older workers fit well with their stores' brand images. Overall, they appeared to hold more positive than negative perceptions of older workers and felt that older workers brought many strengths to their firms. They found older workers to be reliable, trustworthy, conscientious employees who took pride in their work and were motivated to do a good job. HR managers at both types of stores noted that older workers were productive employees who rarely had problems with tardiness or absenteeism. They observed that older workers generally had strong customer service skills,

leadership and role modeling abilities, and, in the case of High-End stores, selling and relationship-building skills.

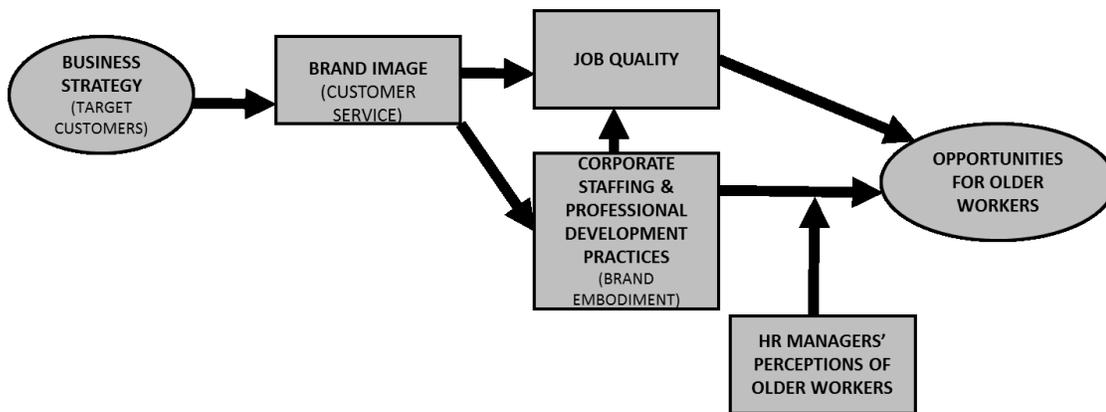
At the same time, HR managers at both types of stores acknowledged some disadvantages of hiring older workers. They believed that older workers were harder to train and less fluent with technology, more resistant to change, and possessed more limited physical abilities than younger workers. As with the job placement scenario, the examination of HR managers' perceptions of older workers revealed that both functional and social age appeared to play out in the workplace. HR managers' perceptions that older workers had diminished physical abilities and were harder to train related to their functional ages, which involves both physical and cognitive abilities. The perception that older workers possessed less fluency with technology related to their judgments about social age, meaning, they assumed if a worker was "old" they would likely have less experience interacting with technology. Additionally, HR managers at High-End stores, where comprehensive health insurance benefits were more frequently provided, felt that older workers were more expensive to employ. Despite this perception, HR managers at High-End stores believed the trade-off between the cost of employing older workers and the benefits of hiring them came out in favor of older workers. However, as discuss below, it is important to note that social desirability bias may have played a role in how HR managers responded to interview questions, which could result in an overstatement of managers' positive perceptions of older workers and an understatement of negative perceptions.

Summary of findings: Brand image fit and opportunities for older workers. The final research question investigated the ways in which hiring managers' perceptions of older workers' fit with their firms' brand images were related to organizational practices. Further, the implications these practices held for older workers' opportunities to obtain higher-quality

employment were examined. While HR managers at both Discount and High-End stores viewed older workers as desirable hires who were a good fit with their stores' brand images, this positive perception did not always appear to bear fruit for older workers. The extent to which older workers were advantaged in obtaining and being placed into higher-quality jobs seemed to vary substantially based on stores' cost-leadership or differentiation strategies. Three themes emerged that illuminate the conditions under which workers' ages did or did not seem to play a role in their opportunities to obtain higher-quality jobs.

Access to higher-quality jobs: When does age matter? The theoretical model presented below forms the foundation for this investigation. In probing these relationships, several prominent themes emerged about the ways in which age might or might not play a role in the availability of opportunities for older workers in the context of firms' varying business strategies and brand images.

Figure 4: Conceptual Model Guiding Exploration of the Relationships



The factors related to how firms' business practices and HR managers' perceptions of older workers played out with respect to the availability of opportunities for older workers were, (1) firms' hiring practices and brand embodiment preferences with respect to local labor markets,

(2) the relationship between age segmentation of the market for particular types of goods and brand embodiment expectations, and (3) the amount of variation in job quality within each type of store.

Firms' hiring practices, the local labor market, and brand embodiment. The extent to which HR managers' perceptions of older workers played a role in their opportunities to obtain higher-quality jobs appeared to be limited by the stores' uniform practice of hiring from surrounding communities. Stakeholder theory proposes that, to be successful, companies must respond to the needs of a wide range of entities that hold interests in their success, including shareholders, employees, and the communities in which firms are located. Donaldson and Preston (1995) explain that firms frequently hold informal, or relational, contracts with their communities. Stores in this study did appear to hold such relational contracts. Specifically, HR managers at Discount stores, and the websites of both Discount and High-End stores, positioned their firms as good neighbors who supported the communities in which they were located. Stores appeared to attempt to act like good neighbors through the human resource practice of reflecting their communities by hiring most employees from the surrounding area. Indeed, HR managers emphasized that it was desirable to have to hire a workforce that mirrored the customers whom they sought to attract to their stores. At High-End stores, HR managers appeared to actively take into account whether prospective employees looked right.

At Discount stores HR managers reported that certainly having a workforce who sounded familiar and looked right was of value, but that they did not actively seek to hire workers who embodied the community, that is, who were of a particular ethnicity or who spoke a particular language. Rather, they simply hired applicants who applied for a job and these applicants happened to be mostly local residents.

For example, as previously mentioned, the store manager at Budget Style noted that a high proportion of her employees were Latino, which matched the ethnic make-up of the community. She explained that the ethnic composition of her workforce was not due to an intentional hiring strategy but, rather, that her employees lived in the community in which the store was located and, thus, came from the same ethnic group as their customers. Thus, it is unclear from these data whether the manager's proclaimed interest in "looking right" (e.g., reflecting the ethnic makeup of the area) was an artifact of the applicant pool she naturally drew or if she would have actively sought Latina employees if they did not already appear in numbers in the applicant pool.

This is in contrast to the high-end stores. In the case of Luxe, the HR manager indicated that the extent to which candidates appeared to fit with the socio-economic characteristics of the communities in which the store was located was an element of looking right. In this case, when the HR manager noted that her stores' employees could personally relate to the need of customers to be appropriately attired for social events she appeared to be indicating that workers who moved in similar social environments were preferred. Although this HR manager did not refer specifically to her employees' appearance, it seems likely that if her employees could personally relate to customers' needs and came from the community in which the store was located, they would share personal characteristics, such as overall appearance, with customers.

Age seemed to play a limited role, or no role at all, in HR managers' assessments of whether or not candidates were perceived as fitting community characteristics by looking right. One exception was Classic Style, where the demographics of the community leaned toward older residents. Classic Style was located in a community in which the median age of residents was, on average, six years older than in the other communities in which stores in this study were located.

Further, as previously mentioned, the HR manager at Classic Style emphasized that her customers tended to be older (in their 50s and 60s) and appreciated that her team fit her customers. Presumably, she was referring to her employees' mature appearance that would mirror the mature appearance of her customers. Thus, to convey the store's brand image through reflecting the community, Classic Style did appear to find older workers to be particularly attractive hires, giving older workers a potential advantage over younger workers during hiring at this store. Similarly, as previously mentioned, the HR manager at Real Deals – North noted that her store had an older customer base and that these customers appreciated seeing older employees in the store. Again, this HR manager was presumably referring to customers' and employees' mature appearances.

One implication of this finding is that it is possible that older workers who resided in communities with predominantly younger residents may be disadvantaged during hiring as compared to younger applicants. However, study participants from Budget Style, which was located in a community where many young college students resided, did not communicate this sentiment, raising the question of whether or not advantage or disadvantage worked in both directions with respect to age of community members and age of job candidates.

Sounding familiar refers to employees whose language skills fit with the brand image dimension of reflecting-the-community. Specifically, employees sounded familiar to customers when they were able to interact with them in the languages commonly spoken in the communities. Sounding familiar appeared to be particularly valued (although not recruited for) in Discount stores, where, for example, bilingual Spanish/English signage was provided, but not at High-End stores where HR managers made no mention of non-English-speaking customers. For example, as previously mentioned, HR managers at both Budget Style and Real Deals – North

specifically mentioned that many of their employees possessed language skills that allowed them to effectively serve non-English speaking customers. In the case of Budget Style, Spanish and Russian were commonly spoken in the community and by their employees. At Real Deals – North, the familiar languages were Spanish and Polish and many store employees were fluent in these languages. Although Discount store HR managers stated that they did not intentionally hire for language skills, they valued the fact that many workers who sounded like community members fit with their brand images.

Workers who looked right and/or sounded familiar tended to live in the areas in which the stores were located. Thus, workers' places of residence and the extent to which they looked and/or sounded like other community residents may have either advantaged or disadvantaged workers during hiring. One implication of this finding is that HR managers at High-End stores, which were located in affluent communities and in which the best jobs were located, could have conceivably perceived workers who came from less-affluent communities as being a poorer fit with their brand images. That is, candidates who came from less-affluent communities could have been perceived as less able to effectively embody the High-End stores' brand images. In this way, older workers and their younger counterparts from less-affluent communities, who may have been well qualified in other respects, might have been excluded from opportunities to obtain higher-quality jobs at High-End stores. At Discount stores, jobs were universally of poorer quality than at High-end stores. Thus, whether or not workers of any age were perceived as fitting with the less-affluent communities in which the stores were located was not relevant for obtaining higher-quality employment.

Age segmentation of the cosmetics and apparel markets, brand embodiment expectations, and age-typing of jobs. In High-End stores, age sometimes appeared to matter for

the distribution of higher-quality Solicitous Seller jobs and seemed to depend upon the product that these employees were responsible for selling. At these stores, the markets for high-end cosmetics and designer apparel were age segmented, meaning, particular products were designed to appeal to customers of varying ages.

HR managers indicated that hiring and job placement processes for Solicitous Seller cosmetics positions emphasized the degree to which candidates embodied the products' brand images and who could, thus, bring credibility to the sales process. Specifically, older workers appeared to be advantaged for jobs with cosmetics brands targeted toward mature customers, as was noted by HR managers at both Classic Style and Splendid Things. Like nearly all Solicitous Seller jobs at High-End stores, Solicitous Sellers who sold cosmetics generally had full-time status and were eligible to receive commission pay, unlike roles such as Display Designers or alterations positions.

In contrast to cosmetics sales positions at High-End stores, older workers' abilities to embody apparel brands by matching the age-related target market of the items did not seem to provide older workers with better opportunities to obtain higher-quality jobs. In fact, interviews suggested that older workers were not advantaged as compared to younger workers regardless of whether the merchandise was targeted toward mature shoppers, younger shoppers, or when the target market was not age-specific.

Brand embodiment theory predicts that prospective employees who effectively embody products' brand images will be more likely to obtain such jobs than those who do not embody the brand image. Predictions from brand embodiment theory did not play out in this investigation with regard to High-End store jobs that involved selling apparel geared toward older shoppers. HR managers did not, in fact, perceive older workers' abilities to embody brands that targeted

mature shoppers as a plus during job placement. HR managers felt that talented sellers of any age could do the job well, intimating that older customers who were shopping for clothing would not mind receiving assistance from younger employees who might, perhaps, be perceived as able to help them look more fashionable. Thus, findings from this study seem to suggest that older workers did not garner an advantage over younger workers in obtaining these Solicitous Seller positions at High-End stores, which were some of the best quality jobs in the stores and nearly always provided commission pay and full-time status.

Similarly, brand embodiment theory predicts that workers who embody the youthful images of apparel that is marketed to young shoppers will be more likely to be hired and placed into jobs to sell such merchandise. In this study, results were mixed with regard to whether older workers were advantaged or disadvantaged as compared to younger workers with regard to being placed into jobs selling apparel that was geared toward young shoppers. HR managers at High-End stores did appear to perceive older workers as being less able to embody the youthful images of the brands; however, they were split on whether their inability to embody the brand made older workers less able to sell items to younger customers. Again, Solicitous Seller jobs at High-End stores were attractive positions relative to pay and job status. In this case, whether or not these jobs were likely to be open to older workers was unclear.

Further, when it came to apparel carried by High-End stores that was geared toward a wide range of shopper ages, the results were again mixed. Brand embodiment theory would predict that HR managers would be indifferent to hiring older or younger workers and placing them into selling jobs that involved apparel with target markets spanning a wide age range. In such a case, age would not be a key factor in the brand image strategy for this merchandise. In this study, one High-End store HR manager expressed a preference for hiring younger, rather

than older, workers to place into these jobs, intimating that both older and younger shoppers would prefer to work with younger salespeople whom customers viewed as being more in touch with fashion trends. Another High-End store HR manager found worker age irrelevant for selling apparel that targeted a wide age range and suggested that selling skills mattered more. As before, these selling jobs were of higher quality than most other jobs in the stores, offering attractive commissioned compensation and usually full-time status.

In sum, cosmetics brands carried by High-End stores that were geared toward mature customers appeared to offer good prospects for older workers, who could effectively embody these brands. While it may not be unreasonable to infer that older workers may have been disadvantaged when it came to jobs selling cosmetics brands that were geared toward younger shoppers, since older workers would be unable to embody this aspect of brand image, no evidence of this kind emerged. In contrast, age segmentation of the high-end apparel market appeared to offer older workers no advantages and, at times, seemed to disadvantage older workers, regardless of whether the apparel was targeted at mature customers, at younger shoppers, or at a wide range of customer ages. In this regard, social age, meaning, how older workers were perceived with respect to how up-to-date or out-of-date they were in regards to fashion appeared to play a role in their opportunities to obtain higher-quality jobs.

Previous research concerning the relationship between age-typing of jobs, managers' perceptions of older workers, and opportunities for older adults to obtain higher-quality jobs indicates that older workers tend to be disadvantaged in the hiring and job placement process for youth-typed jobs (Perry, 1997; Perry & Bourhis, 1998; Perry et al., 1996). HR managers in this study, who perceived older workers as having more physical limitations than younger workers, expressed concerns about placing older workers in physically demanding jobs. Thus, it is

possible to conclude that jobs such as Merchandise Movers could be considered youth-typed job, that is, jobs that were better suited to younger workers. If so, results of this study would support the findings of this previous research. While these jobs were low-paying positions that offered no commission pay and rarely conferred full-time status, they did pay slightly higher wages than other jobs and were more likely to provide workers with stable, predictable work schedules.

Variation in job quality, HR managers' perceptions of older workers, and opportunities for higher-quality employment. The variation in job quality that was present between Discount and High-End stores in this study appeared to constrain the extent to which HR managers' perceptions of older workers either advantaged or disadvantaged these employees. Where more variation in job quality was present, HR managers' perceptions of older workers at times seemed to play a role in the extent to which opportunities for higher-quality employment were available to older workers. As previously mentioned, at High-End stores, where variation in job quality was present, although HR managers generally held positive perceptions of older workers' personal qualities and work skills as compared to younger workers, older workers appeared to garner advantages in only a few job placement decisions (specifically, certain cosmetics jobs). In contrast, at Discount stores, where jobs were uniformly of low-quality, HR managers' perceptions of older workers, whether positive or negative, seemed irrelevant to older workers opportunities because there were almost no high-quality jobs into which older workers could be placed.

In sum, in this study, older workers appeared to be advantaged and disadvantaged in only a few types of jobs and in only a limited number of ways. Specifically, older workers seemed advantaged during job placement into jobs selling cosmetics marketed toward mature customers. They appeared to be disadvantaged in job placement for jobs selling apparel geared toward

younger customers as well as for jobs selling apparel targeted at mature customers. Further, older workers appeared to be disadvantaged during placement for jobs that required significant physical strength, such as Merchandise Mover positions. These instances in which older workers were disadvantaged during job placement represent potential barriers to obtaining jobs with certain attractive qualities. With respect to the apparel sales positions, these jobs could be lucrative, both in terms of opportunities for commissions and full-time hours. Further, these roles usually offered higher-quality health insurance benefits. While Merchandise Mover jobs were of relatively poor quality as measured by average wage levels below \$10 per hour, part-time status, and limited health insurance benefits, they did offer somewhat higher wages and better work schedules than other low-skilled positions.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study have implications for social workers and for older workers' ability to earn above poverty wages.

Social workers in workforce development can benefit from a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges older workers are likely to face when seeking employment in retail businesses. In particular, by understanding where better-quality jobs can be found among different types of department stores, social workers in workforce development may be able to help direct their agencies and clients toward organizations that may offer the most promising opportunities. Since both Discount and High-End stores tended to hire from the communities in which they were located, it is possible that people who live in less-affluent areas, regardless of their ages and skills, may be at a disadvantage relative to those who live in more-affluent communities. While there are no simple solutions, social workers in workforce development organizations could perhaps work to build relationships with High-End stores and challenge

them to consider hiring workers who live outside the affluent communities in which the stores are located while encouraging such workers to apply for positions at these stores.

Further, social workers in labor rights advocacy roles might consider working with lawmakers to offer incentives, such as tax breaks or wage supplements, to High-End stores in exchange for hiring disadvantaged workers who live in less-affluent communities, including older workers. Poverty exists even in affluent communities. Thus, another possible route for advocacy might be for social workers to partner with lawmakers to establish regulations that would require High-End stores that receive Tax Increment Financing (TIF) monies or other tax benefits to hire lower-income community members, including older workers. This study also has implications for older workers' ability to earn an adequate living. Results indicate that jobs at both types of stores are, for the most part, unlikely to, by themselves, provide workers of any age with above poverty wages. The table below provides hypothetical scenarios of what a typical employee at each type of store could expect to earn in yearly wages. With the exception of Solicitous Sellers, none of the jobs that were examined provide incomes above the poverty line for a family of two, which may be a common household configuration for older workers. Non-commissioned Solicitous Sellers would be below 175% of poverty, qualifying them for some social welfare benefits such as Obamacare Premium Tax Benefits and Cost Reduction Subsidies. Even though hourly wages are approximately \$3-4 per hour higher at High-End stores, employees in these jobs would still be likely to have a hard time making ends meet if they relied solely on income from these jobs. Merchandise Mover jobs paid higher hourly wages than other jobs at Discount stores and wages for this job would be even higher at High-End stores. Although older workers appear to be unlikely to be hired for these better-paying jobs due to perceptions that their physical abilities would make the position too difficult for them, these jobs

would not be likely to garner them incomes that would put them above poverty. Older workers who have other sources of income, such as Social Security, other retirement plans, or income from a spouse or partner, may find jobs in these store to be adequate for their needs.

Table 7-1: Hypothetical Incomes for Workers at Discount and High-End Stores

<i>Federal Poverty Guideline 2015: \$15,930 for a household of two</i>			
Discount Stores			
Job	Average Hourly Wage	Typical Hours	Yearly Income
Store Zoner	\$8.75	20.75	\$9,441.25
Merchandise Mover	\$9.30	20.75	\$10,034.70
Service Desk Staffer	\$8.96	28.25	\$13,162.24
High-End Stores			
Solicitous Seller (excluding commissions)	\$13.00	38	\$25,688
Merchandise Mover	\$12.00	21.25	\$13,260
Service Desk Staffer	\$12.00	22.5	\$14,040

Some jobs at High-End stores, such as Solicitous Seller and Personal Shopper positions, can be lucrative and may provide older workers with adequate income. However, older workers appeared advantaged in obtaining such jobs only when the jobs involved selling cosmetics targeted at mature customers. Further, in positions where employees were responsible for selling apparel, older workers did not seem to be advantaged for jobs selling merchandise geared toward mature shoppers and appeared somewhat disadvantaged for jobs selling items targeted at younger shoppers or at shoppers of a wide age range. As a result, it is possible that older workers

may have difficulty obtaining jobs in High-End stores that would provide them with an adequate income.

Limitations of Study

This study has several limitations that are important to consider when interpreting the results.

Case study design. First, as is not uncommon in case study research designs, the small number of cases and the non-random sample used for analysis limits the generalizability of study results. Secondly, there were no middle-range stores included in this study and it is possible that such stores could have characteristics relevant to opportunities for older workers that cannot be detected with the cases included here. For example, perhaps middle-range stores offer fewer opportunities for commission pay than High-End stores but higher starting wages than Discount stores.

Social desirability bias. With respect to identifying HR managers' perceptions of older workers, social desirability bias was a risk to the validity of their responses. Although measures were taken to limit this risk, such as designing questions in a way that validated the possibility that managers could hold negative perceptions of older workers, it is possible that HR managers may not have fully expressed any negative opinions. In such a case, the results of this study would overstate the prevalence of HR managers' positive perceptions of older workers while understating the prevalence of HR managers' negative perceptions of older workers. Further, HR managers gave widely divergent definitions of older workers when asked how they define older workers, ranging from mid- to late-40s up to 70s. Even though asked to define older workers as in their 50s and older for the purposes of this study, managers may still have had their original definition in mind as they answered the questions.

In addition to social desirability concerns, the accuracy of managers' responses (regardless of their motivation) could not be verified. The data in this study represent managers' expressed views that come from their personal experiences and cognitive schemas as well as any social desirability concerns. Given the subjective nature of these data, it is difficult to ascertain what is true about how their perceptions play out with respect to hiring and job placement of older workers. Although managers were asked to draw on data from the company's information systems to provide objective information about where older workers could be found in the stores, both in terms of roles and in terms of departments, they were also asked to describe how these workers landed in these jobs. In other words, they were asked to describe their job placement processes but no data were available to verify that what they said about placement decisions actually played out as they described.

HR managers' perceptions of variation in social ages. As previously discussed, there can be wide diversity within chronological age groups with respect to biological ages, meaning, individuals' levels of cognitive and physical functioning as compared to their peers of the same chronological age. Further, as explained, biological age is closely tied to social age, which relates to how old or experienced or out-of-date an individual may be perceived to be. The study was not designed to parse differences in managers' perceptions of older workers in varying chronological age ranges (e.g., 50s versus 60s versus 70s). Thus, it is possible that when HR managers discussed their perceptions of older workers there may have been underlying nuances that the study was unable to fully detect. Glimpses of this potential nuance did emerge in the data. For example, several HR managers noted that older workers were reluctant to use technology, such as the computerized cash registers, and that these workers appeared to fail to use them properly once on the sales floor. Also, the HR manager at Splendid Things described an

exception that proved the rule when referring to a highly energetic worker in her 70s. In both cases, HR managers highlighted the relevance of older workers physical or cognitive capabilities, which they viewed as lower than younger workers, to job performance. Deeper analysis of this topic requires additional data that are not available from this study.

In-group bias. HR managers were not explicitly asked to share their ages in this study. While it was possible to infer whether or not any given HR manager fell into the age group specified in the study as an older worker, it is also possible that this inference could have been erroneous. As previously explained, in-group bias refers to the tendency for individuals to prefer to hire workers whose ages appear to be similar to their own. If in-group bias was operating it may have been related to HR managers' placement decisions for the older workers in the scenario exercise. Without knowing with certainty the ages of the HR managers in this study, it was not possible to assess conclusively whether or not in-group bias may have been functioning during job placement. Two of the HR managers who were interviewed appeared to be in their 20s while the other interviewees identified themselves as or, in the case of Real Deals – South appeared to be, in their 50s or older. None of these older women appeared to be over age 60. The scenario exercise portrayed women who were described as retired. Thus, none of the HR managers in this study could be said to be in the same age group as the job candidates described in the vignettes. Future research could examine at how the age of the manager may be relevant to the distribution of opportunities for older workers.

Workers' perspectives. Data were not collected from workers during this study. Such data could be useful in understanding possible variation in what HR managers say they do with respect to hiring and placing older workers into higher-quality jobs as compared to how they actually behave on the ground. Moreover, whether or not older workers believe they were

actually advantaged or disadvantaged during hiring and job placement is unknown. Insights gained from older workers themselves could shed light on how workers perceive their age influencing treatment on the job as well as suggest the basis for managers' personal perceptions of older workers. Further, data were not collected about the characteristics of workers who applied for jobs as compared to those who were actually hired by stores. Additionally, it is possible that there was variation in the opportunities available to older workers who aged while in jobs at department stores as opposed to those who sought new employment, which was not the focus of this study. Although this study gathered some information on opportunities for internal mobility, the questions focused managers' attention on the hiring and placement of newly hired employees into different jobs.

Job placement scenario exercise. The scenario exercise that was conducted with HR managers was not designed to directly detect variation in the relevance of brand embodiment for opportunities for older workers. For example, in order to understand how elements of brand embodiment might play out during job placement, a scenario exercise might incorporate profiles of older workers with variation in candidates' style of dress and hair and make-up presentation. Variation in older workers' races and ethnicities could also help tease out the role of brand embodiment during job placement, given the importance of reflecting local communities to firms' brand images.

An Agenda for Future Research

Several directions for future research are presented below. Specifically, future research on employee perspectives, hiring processes, and age-typing of jobs.

Employee perspectives. Data were not collected from older workers during this study. Such data could be useful in understanding possible variation in what HR managers say they do

with respect to hiring and placing older workers into higher-quality jobs as compared to how they actually behave on the ground. Thus, whether or not older workers believe they were actually advantaged or disadvantaged during hiring and job placement is unknown. Further, insights gained from older workers themselves could shed light on how managers may be developing their personal perceptions of older workers. Further, data were not collected about the characteristics of older workers who applied for jobs as compared to those who were actually hired by stores.

For example, HR managers' perceptions of the financial reasons that compelled older workers to accept jobs in their stores appeared to vary by the social status of the store. As previously mentioned, at Discount stores, HR managers reported that older workers worked because they needed the money to make ends meet. In contrast, at High-End stores, HR managers believed older workers sought employment in order to achieve longer-term financial goals, specifically, saving for their children's college expenses and for retirement. Employee perspectives could provide insight into their actual reasons for seeking employment, or leaving jobs, at department stores that could offer an important check on HR managers' perceptions of these reasons.

Additionally, data were not available to shed light on whether HR managers' perceptions of employees' financial reasons for working influenced hiring decisions. Thus, it was unclear whether or not these perceptions had implications for opportunities for older workers. Research examining both HR managers' and employees' perceptions of the extent to which older workers' financial reasons for seeking employment play a role in older workers' job prospects could provide insight into factors influencing opportunities for older workers. Employee perspectives could also offer a view of older workers' beliefs about how they might obtain the best

opportunities for higher-quality employment at department stores and the strategies they use to secure employment.

Hiring processes. While HR managers and website analyses provided in-depth information on the mechanics of hiring and closed-ended questions were used to rate the importance of different qualities for different types of jobs HR managers' decision-making processes were not observed directly. A finding that emerged from the data was that a key factor in the hiring process was the geographic location of the store. However, no data were collected to explore why this was the case and how HR managers had come to this practice. While two HR managers at High-End stores briefly mentioned recruiting at community colleges or four-year colleges, their goals for doing so and the prevalence of hiring employees from these sources remains unknown.

Further, an assumption HR managers were asked to make during the job placement scenario exercise was that all of the candidates had already been selected to be hired into the store. Future research that investigates why HR managers approach hiring in varying ways could help shed light on factors that may be relevant for older workers' opportunities to obtain employment in such stores. A hiring scenario exercise could be designed to include two age-typed jobs, job candidates of varying ages, and no assumption that all candidates would be hired. HR managers could be asked to rank the job candidates based on the likelihood that they would hire them for the job in question and to explain their hiring decisions. An exercise such as this could illuminate HR managers' thought processes when faced with an older job candidate. This type of research method could shed light on how any potential bias either for or against older workers may play a role in older workers' employment opportunities during the hiring decision.

Variation in opportunity: Perceptions of age, race, ethnicity, and class. This study asked managers to define older workers as those who were age 50 and older. When asked for their own perspectives, HR managers defined older workers using a wide range of ages, from mid- to late-40s up to 70s. As previously mentioned, it is likely that managers may hold different perceptions of older workers of varying chronological age ranges (e.g., 50s versus 60s versus 70s). This study was not designed to examine such variation in managers' perceptions, and research that considers differences in managers' perceptions of older employees of varying ages could be useful to understanding possible disparities in opportunities for older workers. Further, the study did not attempt to identify possible differences in opportunities for older workers of varying racial, ethnic, or socio-economic backgrounds, though the preference to hire from the community may have reinforced class differences in securing jobs at Discount versus High-end stores. Since much employment research has identified patterns of bias related to such factors, future examination of how managers' perceptions of older workers' race, ethnicity, and social class may play out would be valuable.

Age-typing of jobs. Finally, future research would be valuable in investigating the extent to which specific department store jobs were viewed as age-typed and the relationship between age-typing of jobs and opportunities for older workers.

Older adults in the US increasingly face economic challenges and longer working lives. Understanding factors related to the distribution of higher-quality jobs in the retail sector is a potentially fruitful direction for improving the economic prospects of older workers.

APPENDIX A: CONFIRMATION LETTER

Date

Name

Address

City State Zip

Dear [name]:

It was a pleasure to speak with you today. I greatly appreciate your willingness to meet with me as I conduct my dissertation research on older adults' employment in Chicagoland department stores.

Date and Time of the Interview

As we discussed, I will meet you at your office at [address] on [day, date] at [time]. The interview will take approximately one and a half hours to complete. During our meeting, I will ask you a number of questions about the jobs and employees in your store, your company's brand image, and the role of older workers in your store. Together we'll choose a few jobs in your store to explore in more detail. Then, we'll walk through a short exercise about an imaginary scenario where you are hiring several employees for these jobs. If we have time, I'll give you a short (1-page) survey to fill out with more information about each job. Then I'll ask a few more questions about each job. If we run short on time, we will schedule a time for a half-hour follow up on the surveys and related questions.

How to Prepare for the Interview

There's very little to do to prepare for your interview. Most of the questions will be about your store's brand image, descriptions of the jobs at your store, and your perceptions of older workers and their role in your store.

Most of this information comes from your personal experience with hiring and placing workers into different jobs in your store and from your broader experience in the retail industry. Most of the data you will be asked for is likely to come from reports that you already complete as a regular part of your job.

There is some information you could write down prior to the interview that would be helpful. If you have the time, please jot down the following information on staff currently working in your store:

	Percentage of all employees in your store who are...	Percentage of these employees who are in their 50s or older
Hourly	%	%
Part-time	%	%
Benefits eligible	%	%
<i>Please list the job titles in your store below (for example, sales associate, assistant manager). Please include both salaried and hourly employees.</i>		
Job 1:	%	%
Job 2:	%	%
Job 3:	%	%
Job 4:	%	%
Job 5:	%	%
Job 6:	%	%
Job 7:	%	%
Job 8:	%	%
Job 9:	%	%

Confidentiality of Your Responses

I want to remind you that your participation in my study is completely voluntary. No one at your store will know that you have participated in this research. As we discussed, *[our meeting will be recorded and the audiotapes will be transcribed **OR** a research assistant will accompany me to our meeting to take notes]*. These *[files **OR** notes]* and any other information you provide to me will be kept strictly confidential. Specifically, I will not keep any materials under your name or your store's name – I will use a number code to track all of the participants in my study. Therefore, no one will be able to trace your answers back to you or your store. In my dissertation and in any presentations or publications, I will never use your name or refer to your store and will take care to disguise your identity.

After the interview, if you have any questions about confidentiality or your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of Chicago, which is a group that monitors the performance and ethics of researchers. You can reach the Institutional Review Board by phone at (773) 834-0402,

fax (773) 702-0874, email (irb@ssa.uchicago.edu), or regular mail (SSA Institutional Review Board, 969 East 60th St., Chicago, IL 60637). If you have any other questions about the study, either before or after the interview, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Conclusion

Again, thank you very much for participating in my dissertation research. If you have any questions before or after we meet, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,

Ellen G. Frank-Miller, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate
The University of Chicago
School of Social Service Administration

egfrank@uchicago.edu
847-492-0804

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEW

Case ID:

Firm name:

Firm address:

Firm phone:

Respondent's name:

Respondent's title:

Date:

Time began:

Time ended:

1) In what ways are you involved in hiring in the store?

2) How many people work in this store?

TOTAL OVERALL

% HOURLY EMPLOYEES

% PART-TIME EMPLOYEES

REDUCTIONS IN HEADCOUNT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?

3) What are the job titles for the jobs in your store and what do people in each job do?

WHERE WOULD JOBS FALL ON AN ORGANIZATION CHART?

NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO HOLD EACH TYPE OF JOB OR % OF TOTAL EMPLOYEES AT THE STORE

J1(g): How do managers handle requests for time off for employees?

J1(h): How much input do people in this job have into their work schedules? Can they request to work or not work specific days/times?

4) Now I'd like to talk about your company's market position. Who are your company's competitors?

5) How do you define your company's target market?

6) When you think of your company's "brand image", how would you describe it?

IF COMPANY HAS SEVERAL DIFFERENT STORES/BRANDS, LET THEM START WHEREVER – CORPORATE, THEIR DIVISION, ETC. THEN, DIRECT THEM DOWN A LEVEL. WHEN THEIR STORE IS THE NEXT LEVEL...

HOW DOES THAT BRAND IMAGE PLAY OUT IN YOUR STORE?

7) Does your management talk about how your company's brand image should influence how the business is run day-to-day?

IF YES: HOW DOES THAT PLAY OUT IN YOUR STORE?

IF NO: WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

13) As you know, older adults are working in growing numbers and until later ages now and retail is often seen as a welcoming environment for older workers. Researchers define ‘older workers’ in a variety of ways. When you think about ‘older workers,’ what age group comes to mind?

8) For purposes of my study, I’m defining “older workers” very broadly – as workers “in their 50s and older”. How well do you think workers in their 50s and older fit with your company’s brand image?

HOW ABOUT IN YOUR STORE?

9) Which jobs in your store do most workers in their 50s and over hold?

% HIRED INTO THESE JOBS

% WHO REACHED THAT AGE WHILE THEY WERE IN THESE JOBS

APPROXIMATELY WHAT % OF PEOPLE WHO APPLIED FOR THESE JOBS WERE IN THEIR 50s OR OLDER? WHAT % OF THESE PEOPLE WERE HIRED?

10) Based on your experiences, why do you think workers in their 50s seek out jobs in your store?

EXTRA \$\$, SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES?

11) Why do you think they may have left jobs in your store?

HEALTH ISSUES, ANOTHER JOB, RETIREMENT?

12) Do you think workers in their 50s and over are looking for opportunities for advancement?

WHAT KINDS OF OPPORTUNITIES ARE THEY LOOKING FOR?

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THAT?

14) In some studies, some managers say there are significant differences between older and younger workers today. What do you think? Have you seen any differences along these lines?

IF YES, HOW DO THESE DIFFERENCES PLAY OUT IN YOUR STORE?

15) Research also shows some managers say workers of different ages tend to be more or less successful in different types of jobs – they’ve felt older workers may be more suited to certain jobs than younger workers or vice versa. What do you think? Are there jobs that you find older/younger workers are best suited for?

IF YES, WHICH JOBS HAVE YOU FOUND OLDER WORKERS ARE BEST SUITED FOR?

WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

IF YES, WHICH JOBS HAVE YOU FOUND YOUNGER WORKERS ARE BEST SUITED FOR?

WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

16) Like all employees, older workers are stronger in certain areas than in others and there are advantages and disadvantages to employing them.

IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT ARE SOME STRENGTHS OLDER WORKERS BRING TO THE JOB?

AND WHAT ARE SOME AREAS WHERE YOU THINK OLDER WORKERS ARE LESS STRONG?

ADVANTAGES OF EMPLOYING THEM

DISADVANTAGES OF EMPLOYING THEM

17) One thing we know from the research is that people attribute a variety of personal qualities to older workers, some positive and some negative. When you think about 'older workers' in general, what traits do you associate with them?

Now I'm going to read you a list of characteristics that researchers have found people tend to identify when thinking about older workers. For each characteristic that I read, please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement.

[HAND THEM THE SCALE SHEET]

18) “Compared to younger employees, workers who are age 50 and older tend to....”

	Strongly agree	agree	disagree	Strongly disagree
be more loyal to the company				
be more honest and trustworthy				
be less motivated				
be less productive				
be more reliable and dependable				
be more resistant to change				
be harder to train				
have better “soft skills,” such as customer service skills				
have less potential for development on-the-job				
be more expensive to employ				
be less likely to miss work				
be less fluent with technology				

19) What other traits do you associate with workers age 50 and older?

For this study, I want to focus in on a few jobs in your store and learn about them in detail. I’d like your help choosing these jobs. I’m particularly interested in the amount of personal service to customers that is required for each job.

20) Let’s talk about “high-touch” jobs, where there is an assisted sell. We talked about some of those jobs before – of those high-touch jobs, I think _____ has the largest number of employees, is that right? Ok, let’s choose that as our “high-touch” job.

[SELECT HIGH-TOUCH JOB...BUT, IF THIS JOB IS CUSTOMER SERVICE DESK ATTENDANT, ASK “THIS IS A GREAT JOB FOR US TO TALK ABOUT. CAN YOU THINK OF ANOTHER JOB THAT INVOLVES A LOT OF PERSONAL SERVICE?”]

IF CUSTOMER SERVICE DESK ATTENDANT WAS NOT SELECTED, EXPLAIN THAT WE’LL LOOK AT THIS JOB TOO SINCE IT INVOLVES CUSTOMER INTERACTION

[SELECT CUSTOMER SERVICE DESK ATTENDANT IF NOT ALREADY SELECTED]

21) Now let’s talk about some jobs at the other end of the spectrum – jobs that involve little or no “waiting on” customers. of those high-touch jobs, I think

_____ has the largest number of employees, is that right? Ok, let's choose that as our "low-touch" job.

[SELECT LOW-TOUCH JOB]

24) Before, you mentioned that workers in their 50s and older are most likely to hold _____ job.

IF THIS IS THE HIGH-TOUCH, LOW-TOUCH, OR CUSTOMER SERVICE DESK ATTENDANT JOB, ASK: IS THAT RIGHT?

IF THIS IS A DIFFERENT JOB:

DO YOU THINK OF THIS AS A JOB THAT INVOLVES A HIGH LEVEL OF PERSONAL SERVICE, A LOW LEVEL OF PERSONAL SERVICE, OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN?

LET'S PICK THIS AS ONE OF THE JOBS SINCE I'M INTERESTED IN UNDERSTANDING THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKERS IN THEIR 50s AND OLDER

[SELECT OLDER WORKER JOB]

Great. The next thing I'd like to do is give you imaginary situation and ask you to think about the jobs we just discussed. Please fill it out, matching the job to the new-hire described, then I have a couple of questions for you.

[WRITE IN THE JOB TITLES AND HAND THEM THE HIRING SCENARIO]

POST-SCENARIO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Scenario Q1: Can you tell me about your thought process in placing these different new hires into the jobs we talked about?

Scenario Q2: How difficult did you find this exercise? Why do you think so?

TIME CHECK! IF AT 1 ½ HOURS, STOP AND DISCUSS FOLLOW UP MEETING. IF NOT, CONTINUE THROUGH FIRST JOB....
--

Now I'd like to get some details from you about these jobs. I'm going to give you a short survey form for each job. Please fill them out as best you can. I can walk you through them now, or I can leave them with you – what do you prefer?

When you're done with the survey for the first job, I have some questions for you about it. Then we'll see how we're doing on time.

[HAND OUT THE FIRST SURVEY]

POST-SURVEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: JOB #1

Here's a list of the topics I want to cover for each job [GIVE THEM QUESTION SUMMARY]. Let's see what we can get through and we can pick up where we left off in a short follow up interview if necessary.

So, let's talk further about this job.

J1(a): Let's summarize the specific duties of employees in this job. You mentioned that includes [FILL IN FROM DISCUSSION EARLIER]. Is there anything else they generally do?

J1(f): What are the physical demands of this job? How much is the use of technology required in this job?

J1(b): How would you describe a *typical applicant* for this job?

J1(c): How would you describe the *typical person you hire* for this job?

J1(d): We talked about personal qualities you look for in candidates – are there specific qualities that are particularly important for this job?

J1(e): What are the most common reasons workers leave this job?

J1(i): What numbers or measures do managers look at when they evaluate workers in this job?

J1(j): Do employees in this job receive any kind of report or data about their job performance?

J1(k): What kinds of opportunities do employees in this job have to share their knowledge and expertise with their *colleagues*? For example, are they involved in training, or paired with a less-experienced employee for mentoring?

J1(l): What kinds of opportunities do employees in this job have to share their knowledge and expertise with *customers*? For example, are they involved in assisted sells or expected to educate customers about the merchandise?

J1(m): How long would someone have to work in this job before they could be considered for a promotion or before they could move into a job that people tend to like?

J1(n): Thinking of the last 3 years, what percentage of employees in this job have moved into management (such as a supervisory role, assistant manager, department manager, etc.)?

J1(o): If there are part-time workers in this job, what proportion of them eventually get a full-time job at the store?

That's it for this job.

<p>TIME CHECK! IF AT 1 ½ HOURS, STOP AND DISCUSS FOLLOW UP MEETING. IF NOT, CONTINUE THROUGH NEXT JOB....</p>
--

Here's the survey for our next job.

POST-SURVEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: JOB #2

Now, let's talk further about this job.

J1(a): Let's summarize the specific duties of employees in this job. You mentioned that includes [FILL IN FROM DISCUSSION EARLIER]. Is there anything else they generally do?

J1(f): What are the physical demands of this job? How much is the use of technology required in this job?

J1(b): How would you describe a *typical applicant* for this job?

J1(c): How would you describe the *typical person you hire* for this job?

J1(d): We talked about personal qualities you look for in candidates – are there specific qualities that are particularly important for this job?

J1(e): What are the most common reasons workers leave this job?

J1(i): What numbers or measures do managers look at when they evaluate workers in this job?

J1(j): Do employees in this job receive any kind of report or data about their job performance?

J1(k): What kinds of opportunities do employees in this job have to share their knowledge and expertise with their *colleagues*? For example, are they involved in training, or paired with a less-experienced employee for mentoring?

J1(l): What kinds of opportunities do employees in this job have to share their knowledge and expertise with *customers*? For example, are they involved in assisted sells or expected to educate customers about the merchandise?

J1(m): How long would someone have to work in this job before they could be considered for a promotion or before they could move into a job that people tend to like?

J1(n): Thinking of the last 3 years, what percentage of employees in this job have moved into management (such as a supervisory role, assistant manager, department manager, etc.)?

J1(o): If there are part-time workers in this job, what proportion of them eventually get a full-time job at the store?

That's it for this job.

<p>TIME CHECK! IF AT 1 ½ HOURS, STOP AND DISCUSS FOLLOW UP MEETING. IF NOT, CONTINUE THROUGH NEXT JOB....</p>
--

POST-SURVEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: JOB #3

Now, let's talk further about this job.

J1(a): Let's summarize the specific duties of employees in this job. You mentioned that includes [FILL IN FROM DISCUSSION EARLIER]. Is there anything else they generally do?

J1(f): What are the physical demands of this job? How much is the use of technology required in this job?

J1(b): How would you describe a *typical applicant* for this job?

J1(c): How would you describe the *typical person you hire* for this job?

J1(d): We talked about personal qualities you look for in candidates – are there specific qualities that are particularly important for this job?

J1(e): What are the most common reasons workers leave this job?

J1(i): What numbers or measures do managers look at when they evaluate workers in this job?

J1(j): Do employees in this job receive any kind of report or data about their job performance?

J1(k): What kinds of opportunities do employees in this job have to share their knowledge and expertise with their *colleagues*? For example, are they involved in training, or paired with a less-experienced employee for mentoring?

J1(l): What kinds of opportunities do employees in this job have to share their knowledge and expertise with *customers*? For example, are they involved in assisted sells or expected to educate customers about the merchandise?

J1(m): How long would someone have to work in this job before they could be considered for a promotion or before they could move into a job that people tend to like?

J1(n): Thinking of the last 3 years, what percentage of employees in this job have moved into management (such as a supervisory role, assistant manager, department manager, etc.)?

J1(o): If there are part-time workers in this job, what proportion of them eventually get a full-time job at the store?

That's it for this job.

<p>TIME CHECK! IF AT 1 ½ HOURS, STOP AND DISCUSS FOLLOW UP MEETING. IF NOT, CONTINUE THROUGH NEXT JOB....</p>
--

POST-SURVEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: JOB #4

Now, let's talk further about this job.

J1(a): Let's summarize the specific duties of employees in this job. You mentioned that includes [FILL IN FROM DISCUSSION EARLIER]. Is there anything else they generally do?

J1(f): What are the physical demands of this job? How much is the use of technology required in this job?

J1(b): How would you describe a *typical applicant* for this job?

J1(c): How would you describe the *typical person you hire* for this job?

J1(d): We talked about personal qualities you look for in candidates – are there specific qualities that are particularly important for this job?

J1(e): What are the most common reasons workers leave this job?

J1(i): What numbers or measures do managers look at when they evaluate workers in this job?

J1(j): Do employees in this job receive any kind of report or data about their job performance?

J1(k): What kinds of opportunities do employees in this job have to share their knowledge and expertise with their *colleagues*? For example, are they involved in training, or paired with a less-experienced employee for mentoring?

J1(l): What kinds of opportunities do employees in this job have to share their knowledge and expertise with *customers*? For example, are they involved in assisted sells or expected to educate customers about the merchandise?

J1(m): How long would someone have to work in this job before they could be considered for a promotion or before they could move into a job that people tend to like?

J1(n): Thinking of the last 3 years, what percentage of employees in this job have moved into management (such as a supervisory role, assistant manager, department manager, etc.)?

J1(o): If there are part-time workers in this job, what proportion of them eventually get a full-time job at the store?

That's it for this job. We are done with everything I have! Is there anything that you would like to add that we haven't talked about?

Thank you so much for your time!

APPENDIX C: HIRING SCENARIO WORKSHEET

Candidate #1:

Ashley – part-time community college student, looking for a job to help pay tuition



Candidate #2:

Leslie – former at-home mom, returning to the workforce to supplement family income



Candidate #3:

Sarah – homemaker with recently retired husband, now looking for a job to help meet expenses



Candidate #4:

Mary – previously retired office manager, returning to the workforce to help meet expenses



You have interviewed these 4 candidates and they are all well-qualified to work in your store. There are several jobs open at the store right now. Which person would you place in each job? You can only hire one person for each open job.

Job #1 _____
Job #2 _____
Job #3 _____
Job #4 _____

Candidate hired: _____
Candidate hired: _____
Candidate hired: _____
Candidate hired: _____

APPENDIX D: JOB CHARACTERISTICS SURVEY

How important are the following qualifications for this job?	1 = Not at all important 2 = Not very important 3 = Somewhat important 4 = Very Important			
	1	2	3	4
High school degree	1	2	3	4
US citizen or legal resident	1	2	3	4
Fluency in English	1	2	3	4
No visible tattoos or piercings	1	2	3	4
Physical ability (for example, ability to lift/push heavy objects)	1	2	3	4
Fluency with technology	1	2	3	4
Previous retail experience	1	2	3	4
Overall previous work experience	1	2	3	4
Available to work nights and weekends	1	2	3	4
Available to work on short notice	1	2	3	4
Other:	1	2	3	4

Of employees who currently hold this job at your store...	
how many, or what percentage, were <i>hired into</i> this job (vs. moving from another job in the store)?	
how many, or what percentage, have <i>moved into</i> this job from another job in the store?	
For this job at your store, what is the...	
number of workers hired in the past year?	_____ workers
overall annual turnover rate?	_____ %
level of turnover compared to other jobs?	High Medium Low
proportion of employees who have been working here for at least a year?	_____ %
average seniority?	_____ years/months (circle one)
lowest and highest seniority?	_____ to _____ years/months years/months (circle one) (circle one)
minimum hourly wage?	\$ _____
maximum hourly wage?	\$ _____
average hourly wage?	\$ _____
What percentage of employees in this job are...	
benefits eligible?	_____ %
female?	_____ %
White?	_____ %
Black?	_____ %
Latino?	_____ %
Other?	_____ %
18-25 years-old?	_____ %
25-30 years-old?	_____ %
30-50 years-old?	_____ %
in their 50s or older?	_____ %

For this job...	Full-Time Employees	Part-Time Employees
how many employees are required to work nights?	all most some only a few	all most some only a few
how many employees are required to work weekends?	all most some only a few	all most some only a few
how often are people asked to work overtime?	a few times a week once a week once every few weeks once a month never	a few times a week once a week once every few weeks once a month never
how is overtime defined?		
are workers guaranteed a minimum number of hours per week?	Yes No	Yes No
if yes, how many?	_____ hours	_____ hours
what is the typical work week (number of hours)?	_____ hours	_____ hours
how far in advance are schedules posted?	_____ days/weeks (circle one)	_____ days/weeks (circle one)
how much does the number of hours people can expect to work vary week to week?	not at all very little a fair amount a great deal	not at all very little a fair amount a great deal
how much do work schedules vary in terms of the days/times employees are scheduled to work week to week?	not at all very little a fair amount a great deal	not at all very little a fair amount a great deal

APPENDIX E: STORE OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Store Observation Protocol

Store name:

Location:

Type of location: strip mall, mall anchor, stand-alone

Neighborhood: urban, suburban

Description of store “feel”:

Cash register check-out lines: yes, centralized no, dispersed in departments

Customer service: concentrated in a few locations dispersed throughout store

Customer service desk: yes no

Shopping carts: yes no

Visible loss prevention: yes no

Types of merchandise [list names of departments]:

Merchandise pricing:

Women’s skirt \$ _____	brand _____
Women’s jacket \$ _____	brand _____
Women’s blouse \$ _____	brand _____

Merchandise displays:

Mannequins	yes	no
Outfit displays	yes	no
Racks	yes	no
Shelves	yes	no
Tables	yes	no
Locked cases	yes	no

Department characteristics:

<u>Department name</u>	<u>Dedicated Register?</u>	<u>Staff Density</u>		<u># of help offers</u>	<u>Ease of finding help</u>	<u>Worker able to answer without asking others?</u>	<u>Assisted Sell?</u>	<u>Dressing room help available?</u>	<u>Loss prevention measures obvious?</u>
	Yes no	0-1 Low	>=2 High	_____	Visible upon entry = easy Search necessary = hard	Yes no	Yes no	Attendant but no assistance Sales floor employee assisted None present	Yes no

APPENDIX F: WEBSITE REVIEW PROTOCOL

Website Review Protocol

Store name: _____

Category: Discount High-End

CONSUMER WEBSITE

Most prominent message on homepage (e.g., clearance, sales, deals, seasonal collections)

Minimum purchase for free shipping \$ _____

Pricing programs offer loyalty price match credit card discount discount code/coupons

Return policy description _____

Customer service options available phone email chat

Personal shopping offered yes no

Price ranges

 Dresses lowest \$ _____ highest \$ _____

 Women's shoes lowest \$ _____ highest \$ _____

List of departments _____

Department characteristics:

 Department name _____

 Most prominent homepage message _____

 Price sorting dropdown box order:

 price low-to-high first

 price high-to-low first

CAREERS WEBSITE

Description of overall message _____

Emphasis on career growth

 Prominent mention on homepage yes no

 Link to in-depth description yes no

 Mention of career "growth" yes no

 Mention of career "opportunities" yes no

 Mention of "coaching/mentoring" yes no

 Mention of "professional development" yes no

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