

Sense of Belonging, Prejudice, or Safety: Why People Choose to Identify with One Kroger Over Another

ABSTRACT

Literature on grocery stores typically focuses on marketing tactics and its affect on consumers' choice of retailer, however, less is known on why certain communities "form" in a perceived to be neutral place, like a grocery store. Specifically, this research looks at how a sense of belonging, prejudice, and feelings of safety impact people's decision to utilize either the Kroger on 2nd street or the Kroger on South College Mall Road, both located in Bloomington, Indiana. To determine the reasons why different people have specific preferences for different Krogers, ethnographic and open-ended interview questions were used with Kroger customers in order to determine if one's age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status related to their sense of belonging, experience of prejudice, and feelings of safety in enhancing customer loyalty to one Kroger location over another. Talking with Kroger customers revealed that sense of belonging, prejudice, and feelings of safety did have an impact on one's choice of loyalty towards a specific Kroger. Analyzing "the why" - specifically the reasons why communities form in different Krogers - is vital to understanding how an "us" vs "them" mentality can form.

INTRODUCTION

Retailers often differentiate themselves by the product they carry, organizational structure, location, pricing and other factors that influence a certain person to shop at a store. While retailers differentiate themselves in many ways, it is seen that when two stores are almost identical in product display, organizational structure, and pricing there still seems to be an external factor that drives people towards certain stores, which is seen with the Krogers in Bloomington, Indiana.

The community that shops at the Kroger on 2nd street drastically differs from the community shopping at the Kroger on South College Mall, making the experience of grocery shopping quite different. Stereotypes regarding the communities that utilize the different Krogers attributes to the established nicknames that the Bloomington community holds regarding the two Krogers. The Kroger on 2nd street is known as “Kroghetto” from the rundown surroundings such as an abandoned car wash, a Greyhound bus stop, homeless park, and facilities to assist people experiencing homelessness. Differing from this negative nickname, the Kroger on S. College Mall Road is known as “Krogucci” from the notable, modern buildings such as Crumble Cookies, Truffles Fine Cuisine & 56 Degrees Bar, Hobby Lobby and a Starbucks located within the Kroger. When referencing the two Krogers throughout the paper “Kroghetto” will be referred to as the Kroger on 2nd street and “Krogucci” will be referred to as the eastside Kroger to steer away from value laden terminology. Contrasting nicknames surrounding Krogers that are within a 5-mile radius of one another and carry the same edible inventory, have similar displays to help customers navigate the store, and a dilemma of empty shelves encouraged me to investigate external social factors encouraging different people to utilize different Krogers since these nicknames perpetuate stereotypes assigned to certain communities.

Different people using certain spaces end up creating communities, whether voluntarily choosing to be a part of that community or not. Communities form from certain people using stores and allowing other customers to realize the type of person that shops at the store. A community is a “group of people who share something in common” and feel a sense of belonging or a connection with people part of that community (Simon, 2018). Communities often consist of people who are alike in some way, either from appearance, socioeconomic status, desires or shared characteristics bonding people together. Communities are voluntary in

that one chooses the community to be a part of based on feelings of connectedness with others in the group. Communities form in public spaces based on people's social identity, which influences how people see both themselves and how they interact with others.

One's social identity with a community they associate with tends to be seen as the "us" group whereas a community they do not associate with is seen as "them" from a lack of belonging. Social identity creating an "us" vs "them" mentality fosters an environment of increased segregation and less integration from the view of "them" being an outsider. Neutral spaces contributing to "them" feeling isolated based on sense of belonging, experience of prejudice, and concerns of safety from the "us" group makes it critical to understand why only certain individuals feel welcomed in communities, since outcomes differ based on the community one associates with.

Communities have people composed of different age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status putting certain communities at an advantage depending on who belongs to a specific community. For instance, the Hispanic community perceived to have white skin have "higher incomes and lower unemployment and poverty rates than black and other-race Hispanics" showing that people of light skin are part of communities put at an advantage from higher income contributing to stronger resources for this community in comparison to people of dark skin communities (Bell, 2007). Outcomes changing based upon the status of a community makes it critical to analyze why communities arise.

One community observed to determine how certain external factors impact the sense of community belonging is Kroger. There are multiple Krogers in Bloomington, Indiana which carry almost identical inventory, but seem to have drastic differences in the actual experience while shopping. Kroger aims to "serve customers through food freshness, low prices and

innovation” which are fundamentals that remain at the heart of Krogers mission (Kroger, 2022). To explore the communities that have formed at both Krogers, the Kroger on 2nd street and the east side Kroger were observed. Observing different Krogers and understanding why people choose one Kroger over another allows for a further understanding on why communities form in a supposedly neutral place, like a grocery store.

To measure if external social factors affected certain demographics, informal interviews were conducted at both Krogers. To determine how ones 1) sense of belonging 2) experience of prejudice and 3) safety effected different demographics, customers of different ages, gender, race, and socioeconomic status were approached to analyze how these three social factors play a role in determining the Kroger one decides to shop at. Results revealed that these three social factors are determinants as to why someone shops at the particular Kroger they do in Bloomington, Indiana.

LITERATURE REVIEW

REASONING BEHIND PEOPLE CHOOSING ONE KROGER OVER ANOTHER

Numerous studies analyze how marketing tactics and store ambiance impact consumer shopping decisions and behavior. Retailers are left in a position to systematically build an ambiance that appeals to key customers, knowing the importance that features have on consumer decisions. According to research which indicates how store features such as lighting, displays, music, promotions, and other factors influence shopping experience, there seems to be a gap in the literature on what drives consumers to a particular store when two stores carry almost identical inventory.

Corporate level Kroger makes all decisions for Bloomington Krogers, leaving little room for individual stores to market towards customers. Recognizing that it is not an internal part of

Kroger creating a taste preference, but an external social factor pointed my research into the direction of three important factors 1) sense of belonging within a community 2) prejudice of groups and 3) feelings of safety impacting one's choice of Kroger. In this paper it further explores how 1) sense of belonging within a community 2) prejudice of groups and 3) feelings of safety impact people's decision to utilize one Kroger over another. Within these three areas of study, there is further exploration if age, gender, race and socioeconomic status impact people's decision in choosing one public space over another.

“SENSE OF BELONGING”

Sense of belonging is the first social factor observed, which according to Cornell University is the feeling of “security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group.” When someone feels as if they belong to a community, they can bring their pure version of themselves to the physical space since there is a perceived commonality that makes them distinctive from others. On the other hand, when people feel like they don't belong then they disengage until they find a group in which they feel a part of something. The extent to which someone feels they are part of a community can be the determinant factor if someone is an active member or disengaged. If one feels part of the community that shops at a particular Kroger, they will be an active member from their strong sense of inclusion.

“PREJUDICE”

Prejudice towards different group memberships is the second social factor observed. Prejudice are the preconceived ideas or feelings about people in a certain group affecting the way someone views and treats people of that group. According to Chamberlin (2004), emotions such as pity, envy, disgust and pride have a bigger impact on prejudiced attitudes than people believe.

These emotions make “homeless people, drug addicts and poor people rated low on both warmth and competence, prompting them to feel disgust” ultimately leading to prejudiced attitudes on people that identify within these particular groups (Chamberlin, 2004). People who feel prejudice towards certain groups who utilize a specific Kroger will avoid that Kroger to resist a linkage between themselves and the “other” group.

“SAFETY”

Safety among different group memberships is the third social factor observed. To feel safe, one has to feel that “hazards and conditions leading to physical, psychological or material harm are controlled in order to preserve the health and well-being of individuals and the community” (Public Health Expertise and Reference Centre, 2018). To feel safe and secure, one has to feel that they are in control of one’s self and the surrounding environment. On the other hand, one’s sense of safety will decline when in an unfamiliar environment with people they may not know since they are not in control of as many factors. If one feels a sense of unsafety from one Kroger, this will deter them from shopping there and encourage them to be customers at the other location.

“SENSE OF BELONGING”

AGE, GENDER, RACE, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Age, gender, race and socioeconomic status are demographics that might influence a shopper’s decision to choose one Kroger over another based on one’s sense of belonging to a particular store. In terms of age, literature revealed that older consumers face a range of in-store difficulties when shopping for food. One study conducted identified the main food shopping issues experienced by older people to determine if they are satisfied by current food retail services. Satisfaction from food retail services impacts the feelings of sense of belonging since satisfaction from grocery stores might be a driver as to why someone chooses a store. To be

included in the research, people had to be over 60 years old, living independently and carrying out their household shopping. When determining in-store difficulties, “nearly one quarter (23%) of seniors perceive the size of the supermarket to be a problem in their shopping, having a negative impact upon the food shopping satisfaction and 35% of older people were unsatisfied with the provision of seating” (Lesakova, 2016). Along with these stated difficulties, standing in line to be checked out and lack of assistance were issues reported by elderly people.

Gender is another demographic that might impact consumers' decision to utilize one store over another based on the sense of belonging a person feels to a particular store. Evidence suggests that more “men today are shopping for groceries than in previous generations due to gender roles shifting leading to men picking up more household responsibilities and more Americans putting off marriage so single men need to shop for themselves” (Bhattarai, 2018). Men more frequently grocery shopping today shows an increase in sense of belonging for men in grocery stores. The Chicago Tribune examined distinct differences in the way men and women approach grocery shopping and found that men go into a grocery store and purchase what they need for that particular night, while women strategically grocery shop for what they will need for the entire week which might have an impact on the sense of belonging that men feel in comparison to women when grocery shopping.

Another demographic observed is if race has an impact on one's sense of belonging. A study conducted on college campuses looked to determine first year undergraduates' sense of belonging based upon racial groups. To measure sense of belonging they asked questions such as (a) “I Feel comfortable on campus,” (b) “I would choose the same college over again,” and similar related questions. Results showed that white/Caucasian students felt the strongest sense of belonging of all racial groups and that African American students were more “likely to report

a less strong sense of belonging than white students” (Johnson et al., 2007). White people having a stronger sense of belonging might persuade them to a particular location from an increased awareness of association when in particular places.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is another demographic observed to determine how it affects one's choice of store to shop at. Socioeconomic status is “the social standing or class of an individual or group” which can explain inequalities in access to resources, issues related to privilege and power (American Psychological Association, 2022). The American Psychological Association conducted a study where they asked college students to circle places on campus where they belong and places they feel they do not belong to determine their sense of belonging. Afterwards, they completed a short survey answering questions like “I belong at X,” “I feel at home at X.” This study, similar to other literature, revealed that lower socioeconomic individuals don’t utilize public spaces as often as their affluent counterparts. People often point to lack of transportation and residential segregation as being a few factors into why people of lower SES don’t utilize public spaces, but even when these problems are eradicated for low SES individuals there still seems to be the factor of feeling “out of place” (Trawalter et al., 2021). No one explicitly denies access to these spaces, but one might wonder whether spaces feel welcoming to low-SES individuals. Trawalter et al. (2021) suggest that “lower SES students use public space on campus less than do higher-SES students and that this difference in use of public space can account for differences in belonging.” So even when those from low socioeconomic status have access to public space, they are often discouraged from utilizing it as they feel like they are being judged.

“PREJUDICE”

AGE, GENDER, RACE, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

One condition observed is how different age people experience prejudice, ultimately affecting their store of choice. In general, “individuals express predominantly negative attitudes and beliefs toward older adults, especially in comparison to their attitudes toward younger people” with forgetfulness, mental incompetence, and slow being a few reasons as to why people decide to be more prejudice towards elderly people (Richeson & Shelton, 2000). The study suggests that attitudes and stereotypes about elderly have negative impacts on older people. According to the Washington post, “about 82% of those 50 and older have experienced prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping based on their age” (Searing, 2020). Older people typically experiencing more prejudice than young people will persuade elders to shop at the Kroger with people who are similar in age to them to avoid prejudice.

Another demographic observed is how different genders experience prejudice in public areas. Throughout history, women typically experience more types of prejudice than male counterparts as women were viewed in a negative light from not being able to participate in the workforce and other areas. Over the past several decades women have made huge strides in labor force participation along with other areas, but they continue to experience extreme amount of prejudice leading to discriminatory behavior. A survey included a sample of men and women ages 18 and above and had a broad definition of sexual harassment that included verbal forms of sexual harassment, physical harassment, cyber harassment and sexual assaults which concluded that “77% of women had experienced verbal sexual harassment and 51% had been sexually touched without their permission. About 41% said they had been sexually harassed online, and 27% said they had survived sexual assault” (Charterjee, 2018). This extreme amount of harassment was most of the time (66%) found to take place in public spaces (Charterjee, 2018). In comparison to women, men also face sexual harassment during their lifetime but less

frequently than women. Women experiencing higher amounts of prejudice than men puts women in a position to deeply consider which Kroger location to shop at based on where they believe they will experience the least amount of prejudice.

Race is another demographic that might impact consumers' decision to utilize one store over another based on the prejudice an individual might experience while at a particular store. While it has been more than 150 years after the 13th Amendment abolished slavery in the U.S., “most U.S. adults say the legacy of slavery continues to have an impact on the position of black people in American society today” (Horowitz et al., 2019). Pew Research center investigated the public view about the state of racial inequality in America and found that:

“about six-in-ten Americans (58%) say race relations in the U.S. are bad, some 56% think president Trump made race relations worse; just 15% say he has improved race relations and another 13% say he has tried but failed to make progress on this issue”

Americans believe that race relations have worsened for black people since Trump took office in 2017. When looking at racial discrimination and how race impacts people’s lives it was found that 56% of adults in America say being black *hurts* people’s ability to get ahead at least a little and 59% say being white *helps* people’s ability to get ahead” (Horowitz et al., 2019). Black people experiencing more discrimination than White people puts black people in a position to consider prejudice they have experienced more heavily than white people when considering which Kroger to shop at.

Socioeconomic status is a demographic which affects the way people view others, depending on the class one identifies with. Being perceived a certain way based upon socioeconomic status might encourage individuals to go to places in which their socioeconomic status is not a factor they are being judged upon. Western Michigan University conducted a study

in which they showed children ranging from 5-13 years old pictures of homes and asked a series of questions. One picture consisted of a run-down home and the other a suburban-style house, to determine perceptions of poor vs rich people. Responses from kids revealed that children feel that public messages belittle people living in poverty. In response to the question, "What do other people think of the people in this house?", indicating the "poor house," twenty-two children (92%) said that "people" or at least "some people" strongly disapprove of persons living in this house" (Weinger, 1998). One child made a remark that others would not like the people with "dingy clothes" because:

"they might come out with no-name shoes or something, and those people, rich people wear Nikes or Filas or something like that. They might smell different than them... or look different. These children believe that the poor are not welcome in a more affluent society and perceive themselves as potential outcasts"

This study indicates prejudiced views of "poor people" develop from a young age, ultimately shaping the way that society views people of lower socioeconomic status.

"SAFETY"

AGE, GENDER, RACE, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Age is another factor observed to determine how it impacts one's sense of safety when deciding which Kroger to be a customer at. PubMed Central conducted a study in which they developed a series of questions to measure general feelings of unsafety and asked individual questions such as

"you have to be extra careful when you are out on the streets at night."

"I seldom go out alone because I am afraid of being mugged."

"These days, it is not safe to let children out on the streets without supervision."

Individuals answered these questions and findings suggested that feelings of unsafety increased with age and were related to a lack of economic resources, demographic variables, health and wellbeing. Additionally, perceived ageism (being the stereotypes against individuals or groups on the basis of their age) also emerged as a critical finding.

Gender is another demographic that may impact a consumer's decision to go to one Kroger over another. A study done in Irvine, California measured fear in public spaces between genders and found that, "Most men students described themselves as not highly fearful in public space. Twenty-four men (of 82) responded 'Yes' to the question, "Is fear for safety in public space a big problem for you?" (Day, 2001). Men's strength and competence are often connected to their lack of fear, as seen in one response to the idea of fear:

"I think it's more of a masculine reaction because like a man—I can defend myself in most situations, so [that is] a male perspective on it. You are just like macho, and I can probably defend myself, and makes [me] feel a little safer all in all." (White man, age 19)

Men not perceiving fear of safety in public spaces as a problem indicates men will consider safety less often than women when deciding which grocery store to shop at.

Race is another demographic which affects how safe one feels in the surrounding environment. Ohio State University conducted a study in which they gave smartphones to young black men in Columbus. Throughout the day they were sent numerous surveys asking if they felt safe in the place they were in. The study showed that boys who were black "experienced a decreased sense of safety when in neighborhoods with a larger white population than areas they normally are in" due to increased scrutiny, surveillance and direct targeting when navigating White spaces (Garcia, 2018). Beyond just young black males, it is found that four in ten black adults say they do not feel safe walking alone at night. Gallup conducted a survey to determine

Americans' sense of safety when walking alone at night in their community by asking “Do you feel safe when walking alone at night in the city or area where you live?” 84% white Americans responded “yes” to feeling safe when walking alone in comparison to 60% of black Americans. 16% of white Americans answered “no” to feeling safe when walking alone in comparison to 40% of black Americans (Kluck & McCarthy, 2020).

Socioeconomic status is another factor observed to determine how it impacts one's sense of safety when deciding which Kroger to shop at. When determining if people feel safe when walking on the street, results showed disparities amongst people in different income households. To measure people's perception of safety respondents got asked questions similar to:

“How safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?”

“Would you say you feel very safe, a bit safe, or very unsafe?” and

“How safe do you feel when you are alone in your own home at night? Would you say you feel very safe, fairly safe, a bit safe, or very unsafe”?

Answers to the following questions revealed that in nearly all neighborhoods, “poor households are roughly twice more likely to feel unsafe compared with rich households” and “poor people living in ‘striving’ neighborhoods (neighborhoods characterized by local authority and multi-ethnic, low-income households) experience the highest levels of feeling unsafe”, almost 60% of poor people in striving neighborhoods feel unsafe compared to 34% of rich people (Pantazis, 2000). People of lower socioeconomic status typically feeling unsafe more frequently than people of higher socioeconomic means lower socioeconomic individuals will typically feel more concerned about safety since they are more likely to attend grocery stores in close proximity which are in low-income neighborhoods and thus increase safety concerns.

DATA AND METHODS

AIM

The aim of this study is to identify if there is a relationship between demographics (age, gender, race, SES) of Kroger shoppers and their justification for utilizing one Kroger over the other. This paper examines under what conditions a person mentions “self-belonging”, “prejudice”, or “sense of safety” as a reason to justify their belonging at one Kroger over another.

SCOPE

For the purpose of this research, rapid ethnography and open-ended interviews were used as a means to collect data. Rapid ethnography is a “collection of field methods intended to provide a reasonable understanding of users and their activities given significant time pressures and limited time in the field” (Millen, 2000). Rapid ethnography gives insight into social phenomena and has the advantage of making readers “feel as if they are hearing the interview or seeing the scene unfold in their presence” (Lareau and Rao, 2016). Rapid ethnography is an effective means to collect data since open-ended interviews will allow for follow up questions to be asked which will give insight into why people are inclined to use one Kroger over the other. Qualitative research serves the purpose the paper is aimed to achieve since this study asks about experiences of the specific store, giving deeper insight into reasons why communities form.

Grocery stores were used as the case study since grocery stores appear to be a neutral space that is accessible to everyone, and each of the stores are similar in both layout and products stocked. However, in reality communities form in these spaces, ultimately including some while excluding others. Studying a common space like a grocery store will give insight into reasons why strong taste preferences occur even when two spaces are almost identical. Grocery stores

have an impact on the surroundings economic development making it an essential part of society to observe.

When deciding which grocery store to observe, staying consistent with the corporate company observed was important. If a Kroger was compared to a Fresh Thyme, for example, there would be a lot of uncontrollable variables including different products, different price points, and the different marketing strategies, leaving little room to measure reasons people feel a belonging beyond the actual differentiating store. Since observing the same corporate grocery store was important, Kroger was chosen as the grocery store to further delve into. Kroger is a valuable retailer to observe since it is one of the largest grocery store chains in the U.S. and many Bloomington, Indiana residents use it as their main source of grocery shopping. Being located in Bloomington, Indiana made it accessible to visit both Krogers on numerous accounts and collect insightful information about each store and the communities that utilize them. Visiting only Kroger allowed for many variables to be controlled, since almost all store decisions for Kroger are made at the corporate level, such as what product the store needs to carry and price points of the inventory. Being able to control these variables eliminates differences that stores might implement to affect consumer experience, allowing the study to be more valid from taking a deeper look into external social factors effecting consumer preferences rather than internal store differences.

Sense of belonging, prejudice and feelings of safety were chosen to further examine taste preferences, since literature pointed to these social factors impacting everyday decisions and being interrelated to one another. All factors measure a degree in which someone feels part of a community. For instance, if one feels a heightened sense of safety, they will often feel little prejudice and a strong sense of belonging, making them inclined to be an active member of that

community. While all factors measure something slightly different, they correlate to one another allowing for strong inferences on why people chose one Kroger over another.

STUDY DESIGN

To understand the reasoning people choose one Kroger over another, customers were approached at both Kroger locations. Prior to any interviews, grocery store managers were informed of the type of information being collected and asked for permission to interview customers. While approaching Kroger customers, they were asked if they mind being asked a few questions for a school project along with permission to voice memo the conversation to allow the person asking questions to be engaged with the conversation instead of focusing on all the details to write down. Voice recording the conversation allowed the conversations to be more free range and unstructured, giving the opportunity to ask deeper questions. To start off the conversation they were asked if they have shopped at both the Kroger on 2nd street and the east side Kroger to determine if the person being interviewed deliberately chose a store because of preference or if they had only been to one location. The next question asked was “why do you shop at this particular Kroger?” to give insight into the broad reasoning why someone chooses to shop at a particular location.

The next series of questions further looked into feelings of belongingness, prejudice, and safety to determine if these social factors had an impact on store choice. To determine a sense of belonging a question asked was, “do you feel a part of the community at this particular Kroger and how does it differ from the experience of shopping at the other Kroger?”, “if you always shop at this location, what is it that makes you a loyal customer?” These questions allow for one to establish if one shops at a particular location from a sense of belonging to that space and community. To determine if prejudice impacts store choice, questions asked were, “when

walking through the store do you feel that people are observant of you and if so, what do you think people are thinking?” “do you feel a different experience of the judgment when at this store in comparison to the other location?” These questions allow one to determine if one feels like they are being criticized when walking through Kroger. To measure safety, some questions asked were, “do you feel safe when in the parking lot of the store at dusk”, “do you typically grocery shop alone or with someone”, “do you consider the surroundings of the Kroger when picking which one to shop at?” Depending on how the person responded, follow up questions were asked. At the end of the conversation, every person was asked how they identify in age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status to determine if there is a relationship between these demographics and one's sense of belonging, prejudice, or feelings of safety. To ensure everyone felt comfortable identifying personal demographics, they were told if they do not feel comfortable to leave out any piece of information.

METHOD STRATEGY

TABLE 1. QUESTIONS

Area of Interest	Questions
General Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you shopped at both the 2nd street and South College Mall Road Kroger? • Why do you shop at this particular Kroger?
Sense of Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel a part of the community at this particular Kroger? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How does it differ from the experience of shopping at the other Kroger? • If you always shop at this location, what is it that makes you a loyal customer?

Prejudice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When walking through the store do you feel that people are observant of you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If so, what do you think people are thinking? ● Do you feel a different experience of the judgment when at this store in comparison to the other location?
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do you feel safe when in the parking lot of the store at dusk? ● Do you typically grocery shop alone or with someone? ● Do you consider the surroundings of the Kroger when picking which one to shop at?

Table 1 illustrates questions asked by area of interest. General questions were first asked to customers to obtain a general sense of the reason why one shops at a particular store. Then, questions were asked to determine if a sense of belonging, prejudice, or safety impacts one's choice of Kroger.

TABLE 2. CODEBOOK

Taste Preferences	Definition	Examples
Sense of Belonging	Security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I feel similar to the type of people that shop here” ● “ I am around people who are similar to me” ● “I feel that I am a member of the community” ● “I have shopped here my whole life” ● “I feel comfortable with the store layout” ● “I would choose this Kroger over again”

Prejudice	Preconceived ideas or feelings about people in a certain group affecting the way someone views and treats people of that group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I feel judged” ● “I get looked at weird” ● “I feel intimidated by them”
Sense of Safety	Hazards and conditions leading to physical, psychological or material harm are controlled in order to preserve the health and well-being of individuals and the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I go alone” ● “I worry about being approached” ● “I often think about my belongings” ● “I usually shop at night” ● “Its in a bad neighborhood” ● “I go with my boyfriend” ● “I go when it is crowded”

Table 2 examines how people's responses might indicate either a sense of belonging, prejudice, or feelings of safety. Past literature was used to assist in how people's responses might indicate a sense of belonging, prejudice, or safety. While this case study specifically looks into these three social factors, any reason a person prefers one Kroger over another was written down to acquire as much information on taste preferences between the two Krogers.

Limitations

This paper specifically examines taste preferences between two Krogers in the Bloomington, Indiana area. Examining two Krogers makes the sample size small and thus not generalizable to an overall population. If one replicates this study, it is important to consider this as this study only looked at two Krogers. Along with a small sample size, findings did not shed light into how race impacts sense of belonging, prejudice, and safety as much as predicted from the limited number of black people shopping in Kroger at the same time interviews were conducted. To better incorporate race and get a deeper understanding on how all demographics

impact sense of belonging, prejudice, and safety a survey should be sent out to a sample of black people to further establish how race impacts the social factors being measured.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Observations

Bloomington residents who use Kroger as their grocery store might be familiar with being asked the question, are you going to “Kroghetto” or Krogucci”? As a freshman at IU being asked this question, I was not aware of the reasoning Kroger had nicknames implying one location was lavish while the other location was seen as neglected and poor quality. Talking with Indiana University students allowed for a realization that everyone who lives in Bloomington, Indiana is aware of the Kroger nicknames.

“Kroghetto” is located on 2nd street and has a Wendy’s located in the same lot. To the right of this parking lot stands a run-down Bloomington Car Wash Center and when researching more about it, it was learned that this business is permanently closed leaving this area looking abandoned. Next to the Car Wash Center is a large park with tents located in the middle and people experiencing homelessness congregating in the park. Homeless shelters, rehab centers, and the Greyhound bus stop on this particular side of Bloomington encourages people experiencing homelessness to this park and other nearby areas. According to a cashier at this Kroger, people experiencing homelessness change the type of person that wants to shop at this particular Kroger. People walking the B-Line avoid coming into this store due to people experiencing poverty surrounding Kroger or the stores in close proximity. On the other side of the park where people experiencing homelessness reside, is a Big Red liquor outlet store and Rally’s fast food, both feeling deserted from the minimal upkeep of signs and an underwhelming experience when inside the stores. Entering this Kroger, one first encounters the fresh produce

section which is easy to navigate from the small section. All Krogers have a similar planogram of the store leaving it easy to assume where products are, such as pistachios being the first end cap when entering the fresh produce section. This store was poorly stocked as almost every produce bin had limited inventory which was seen on multiple occasions when visiting the store. The fresh cut fruit section was full of vacant shelves, single green peppers that all appeared to be mushy, and a few displays with the listed inventory not present to even purchase. This Kroger is physically smaller than the east side Kroger causing it to have a limited alcohol section, less areas dedicated to products outside the food category such as house appliances, and smaller amounts of a product carried.

Driving away from this Kroger and into the neighborhoods to reach my next Kroger on the east side, neighborhoods appear with houses that are poorly maintained. Windows with long cracks, neglected front lawns with weeds running wild and random grass patches, and houses with dull appearances from the minimal personality between the homes. As I get closer to the east side Kroger, neighborhoods become more upscale. Houses are vibrant from the well-kept landscape and buildings become more intriguing from the modern architecture. To the left of this Kroger is a fine dining restaurant, Truffles Fine Cuisine & 56 Degrees Bar, and to the right is a massive Hobby Lobby. Across from the Kroger is a modern, white stone development with retailers such as Crumble Cookies and Athletico Physical Therapy, making this Kroger feel more approachable from the notable surrounding stores.

Entering this Kroger, it is seen that this location has the same layout as the other location, with the fresh produce section being the first encounter. Similar to the other location, the fresh produce section has a shortage of inventory as the apple display is almost depleted, the organic green leaf section with empty shelves and numerous display bins in need of replenishment. To

the right of the fresh produce section is a Starbucks station along with a dining area welcoming customers to sit and dine in their store. Across from the Starbucks is a garden and olive bar with an abundant amount of vegetables, fruits, and olives to make your own salad. This Kroger being physically bigger allows for them to provide larger and more sections such as pastries, school supplies, and house appliances. While there are a few extra sections added to this store, both locations carry majority of the same edible inventory, have similar displays to help customers navigate the store, and a dilemma of empty shelves but the experience of being at one Kroger drastically differs from the experience at the other.

Talking with Kroger customers revealed reasons people prefer to shop at a certain Kroger in Bloomington, Indiana. Numerous people mentioned the names “Kroghetto” and “Krogucci” when referring to the store without the interviewer mentioning nicknames. A male researcher shopping at 2nd street Kroger informed me that “Kroghetto” is now called “Krogentrification” to be conscious of how “Kroghetto” is offensive in that it refers to the location as being equivalent to a ghetto. Convenience and ability to navigate were two recurring answers provided when asked why one shops at the Kroger one does. Convenience meaning the store that is in the closest proximity to one at that particular time or which is easiest to get to on public transportation. Ability to navigate indicating that one feels the Kroger on 2nd street is easier to navigate due to the smaller size of the physical store.

Major Themes

Differences in the communities that utilize each Kroger is a major theme that customers discussed influencing their choice of Kroger. When asked the reason why someone decides to shop at the east side Kroger a 20-year-old middle/upper class white female said, “I like this one because it’s a lot more college students. I notice every time I come here there are lots of college

students getting their groceries for the week.” A strong sense of belonging arises from this young woman being able to relate to the other individuals shopping at the particular store. Knowing that the people around her also look like college students makes her have a stronger appeal towards this store knowing that there is a common connection between people utilizing the space, although she knows nothing about the person other than they look somewhat similar in age to her.

Whereas this girl felt a belonging to this location from the college students, a 21-year-old lower class white female said she goes to 2nd street Kroger since “there are less students” and she gets “anxious in stores” so she has her boyfriend accompany her. This young female feels disconnected with the student population, so she decides to use a space in which she does not identify with other students. A general understanding that students shop at the east side Kroger while Bloomington locals shop at the 2nd street Kroger makes certain communities more inclined to shop at specific locations based on the group they yearn to identify with. One woman was reluctant to share the reason she avoids shopping at 2nd street Kroger (“Kroghetto”) to prevent herself from sounding hateful. This woman ended up discussing how this Kroger bothers her because individuals experiencing homelessness are close by and she feels that they come in the store to use the restrooms and that bothers her because it makes her feel like the store is dirty from them utilizing the space (white 61-year-old female). This woman feels disconnected to this location from the association she makes with the store and people experiencing homelessness and as a result makes it feel dirty to her.

Whereas this particular woman feels a lack of belonging due to the others that use the store, a young male expressed that people's sense of belonging depends on their personal desire to be classified with a certain status. A 22-year-old white male said “wealthier professors I know

go to College Mall Kroger. Although the produce seems to be the same, the basics are the same, the price is the same, I think it's a status thing going out to the College Mall Kroger. It means something to different people, I particularly don't really care, but some people make it a huge deal to make a journey out there because it's the "best one". This young male alludes to the fact that individuals pick a Kroger to shop at based on the status that the Kroger is perceived to hold, ultimately labeling the people that shop there a certain way. For instance, the east side Kroger is considered to be of higher status so in order for high/middle class people to feel like they can keep their status and sense of belonging they feel obligated to shop at this Kroger. It is seen that "insiders" and "outsiders" form in public spaces depending on the community utilizing the space, which is seen in the Krogers in how people identified themselves with particular locations based on who else utilizes the space. Some outsiders strive to find a way to be on the "inside", such as the girl who thought one Kroger felt dirty from the homeless population, thus making her avoid this one and inclined to shop at the east side one to be included in the east side community. Others accept they are not in the "in" group such as the guy who mentioned one location holding a status which does not faze him showing his ability to not conform to the "other" community. While people have different opinions on how certain communities are perceived, some people have a strong feeling on the community they want to be associated with, making them inclined to use certain public spaces in which they will be grouped with their wanted community. Kroger customer responses revealed that age, gender and socioeconomic status have a bigger impact on reasons people prefer a certain Kroger whereas race did not have as big of an influence in terms of sense of belonging. Age was implied as a strong determinant when numerous people mentioned going to the east side Kroger to be with college students (young people) or avoiding 2nd street to avoid Bloomington locals (more middle and upper age). Gender was a determinant

factor as many more women mentioned the idea of wanting to be with people who they wish to associate with whereas men seemed unfazed from being associated with a different group. Socioeconomic status was discussed when a recurring theme noted was high/middle class individuals felt that in order to experience a strong sense of belonging and maintain their status, it was perceived that they needed to shop at the east side Kroger which held a higher status.

Along with a sense of community influencing store choice, people used words such as “intimidating” and “overwhelming” to describe how they felt when grocery shopping at the east side Kroger (“Krogucci”). When asked more about what this person meant by the word “intimidating” he mentioned “the size is intimidating, the population, more people being there” as reasons he felt discouraged from shopping there. Feeling that the population of the other store is intimidating points to the fact that this 53-year-old middle class white male felt that he did not have a strong sense of belonging at the east side Kroger since he did not feel included with the population. Another customer mentioned how she feels that the east side Koger is

“considered fancier, nicer and definitely feel that people with higher income you are going to see all those people on the east side and so I don't really care like I'm not like I need to go to the east side to be around these great people like I'm more comfortable in this one because I can come in sweatpants or hungover on a Sunday and it doesn't matter. At the other location I feel like I couldn't look like actual crap like I would need to brush my teeth before I went and I wouldn't feel like that when coming to this one” [white female, age 24]

This young female implies that in the east side Kroger she feels perceived to be in one socioeconomic class, ultimately compelling her to perform a specific social class behavior. Her description of the east side Kroger feeling fancier due to higher income makes her feel like she

has to present herself a certain way, indicating that in certain communities there is prejudice if not conformed to the social norms. Her noting “I don’t really care like I’m not like I need to go to the east side to be around these great people” shows the idea how some individuals use certain spaces not for what the space has to offer but to conform to the community that utilizes the space to establish themselves as identifying with that community. She notes that she feels more comfortable shopping at the 2nd street Kroger so she can wear sweatpants showing how she does not wish to conform to the “other” group. Whereas she views the east side Kroger as a place of judgment, other customers expressed a different opinion. One 22-year-old white female noted that “I call this one Krogucci because it is way nicer and has a Starbucks which I appreciate...I come here when I am treating myself.” This young female mentioning that the east side location is a place where she treats herself shows that this Kroger to her is seen as a luxury. Different people expressing contrasting feelings about certain spaces points to the fact that certain people feel as if they have to behave a certain way to conform to the community using the space, ultimately decreasing their sense of belonging. Kroger customers mostly discussed socioeconomic status as a means of being judged upon ultimately affecting their choice of Kroger.

Safety is another theme that emerged when talking with Kroger customers. Numerous people mentioned avoiding the Kroger on 2nd street due to safety concerns. 2nd street Kroger is located in an area with a lower income, along with people experiencing homelessness, which many people have had encounters with. One 26-year-old low/middle white male mentioned how the 2nd street Kroger is “known to have rough personnel and everyone knows there is large homeless population, so everyone knows more likely to be harassed more at that Kroger and I’ve had the experience where someone followed me around this Kroger before and it’s not their fault

but that's just part of being at the Kroger." This is just one of the few men who mentioned safety being a reason to abstain from the 2nd street Kroger. Another 20-year-old white male said he chooses the east side Kroger because there "is better selection and it feels a little more safe" and when asked what makes him feel more safe he said "it's not even like that it's just I don't know the homeless population there and what not my car and stuff." Lack of control of the surrounding environment and what will happen to one's self makes people feel a lack of security and safety, drawing them away from this particular Kroger. When asking people at the east side Kroger why they shop at this location a 21-year-old middle class white female immediately said, "my dad tells me not to go to the 2nd street Kroger alone because I am a young female and I'm a college kid but coming here I feel like at least half are young college kids that come alone." People continuously mentioned safety concerns as drawing them towards the east side Kroger and thus making them part of a certain community. One 22-year-old middle class Asian female mentioned how she feels safer in the east side Kroger and that in the 2nd street Kroger she feels nervous to shop there alone since someone typically stops her to ask for money. Having to worry about being approached by someone random, experiencing higher amounts of theft, and an overall anxious experience in a particular place will decrease your sense of safety making one inclined to go to a place where safety is not a deterrent. Kroger customer responses revealed that age and gender have a heavier influence on feelings of safety than race and socioeconomic status. Most people interviewed who mentioned concerns of safety in regard to being approached by random people, having an incident in the parking lot, or feeling unsafe were young adults whereas very few people 40 years or older mentioned anything about safety, showing that younger people in this scenario consider safety more often than older people. In terms of gender, both females and

males mentioned safety on numerous accounts disproving the assumption that females would consider safety more often than males.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Conducting informal interviews with Kroger customers to determine one's sense of identity with different Krogers in Bloomington, Indiana revealed a major societal issue of stereotypes that people hold regarding different groups, in particular about people experiencing homelessness and people of lower income. People alluded to the Kroger on 2nd street feeling dirty, having a garbage scent, appearing as if it is smoky, and other similar attributes to describe the location, confirming the negative stereotypes that people experiencing homelessness often receive. While only a few Kroger customer's responses in this paper indicated avoiding the location from people experiencing homelessness, almost every person referenced something in regard to the homeless population or people of lower income and how it affects the store.

Negative stigmas surrounding homelessness and lower income individuals leads to a reluctance to communicate with these individuals and support the assumption that these individuals are less "valued" than others. Individuals trying to further isolate this population further perpetuates the stereotypes that people hold of the population being less important. Respecting these individuals and normalizing them as actual citizens can help break down the stereotypes held by the general public. While it is considered to be more normal to hold negative beliefs of a population if one has had a bad experience, many people mentioned avoiding this location to separate themselves from the lower socioeconomic population without any prior interaction. It is these negative stereotypes that can keep people from offering their help, when these are the people that need it the most. Eliminating stereotypes regarding this population,

along with any other negative stereotypes, is essential in order for communities to feel they can be integrated with one another.

If stereotypes continue to persist with the general public, certain communities will continue to be and feel isolated putting them at a disadvantage in comparison to other communities. In terms of class status, the upper/middle class not being able to coexist with the lower class, leads to lower class individuals being put at a disadvantage from the experience of concentrated poverty. Upper/middle class individuals feeling as if they maintain high status by using only high-status spaces leads to these individuals putting resources only into their own healthcare systems, education, and other facilities leading to a bigger gap in inequality. If something as simple as a grocery shopping experience is effected by upper and lower classes ceasing to coexist, society will never be able to overcome inequality from communities not willing to cooperate with the perceived “them” group. One solution to try and address negative stereotypes is to increase assistance, education, and awareness of those living in poverty to educate the general public and thus help eliminate stereotypes from the increased awareness.

While those experiencing poverty was a major reason people avoided a space in this particular case study, it is seen that how people identify will always affect how they feel towards people in the “other” group. Categorizing people is not harmful until one uses these categories to exclude people- even without intentionally meaning to. Social identification creates individuals to have an “us” vs “them” mentality, grouping people in their own community as “us” and people who don't identify similarly as “them.” This mentality is threatening to society since it allows for people to make quick, mental shortcuts in making quick decisions based on what you already know about a group, rather than spending time getting to know people individually. This leads to further segregation between different communities and creates an environment where the

“them” group is seen as a less valued community. Rationalizing negative preconceived notions on the “them” group can validate unethical treatment of others, leading to stereotypes and discrimination. “Us” vs “them” mentality seen in something as simple as grocery shopping reveals a larger societal issue that society faces.

While this case study takes a closer look into why nicknames of different Krogers in Bloomington, Indiana have formed, the issue of inequality is a bigger issue that society is left to deal with. Daily life choices, such as where one decides to grocery shop, based on wanting to keep status is leading to an ongoing dilemma of inequality. When upper/middle class individuals are choosing a grocery store based on reasons to keep their status and low income individuals feel prejudice from going into the areas where upper/middle class individuals utilize, it leads to an ongoing cycle of inequality. If something as simple as grocery shopping is viewed in a status manner, how are people supposed to view salient structures like healthcare and education?

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