Gender-neutral fashion advertising: Trapped in stereotyping

A critical analysis of representations of gender-neutrality on Instagram fashion advertising from 2021 to 2022

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ABSTRACT

Western societies are becoming more accepting of different gender identities, and this is reflected in the fashion industry. In addition to labelling clothes according to the two binary genders, female and male, the industry also promotes more fluid concepts such as gender-neutrality. However, the definition of gender-neutral fashion carries its own fluid connotations since the concept's meaning is not clearly defined apart from the obvious idea that it is, arguably, offering clothing appropriate to all genders. This allows variety in the ways different brands currently choose to represent gender-neutrality. Stereotyping is an essential part of meaning-making processes and even though gender-neutral advertising aims for gender inclusivity this does not necessarily exempts these representational practices from gender stereotyping. However, gender-neutral fashion advertising is not adequately researched as it is a rather emerging phenomenon. Existing literature on gender stereotyping in fashion advertising largely highlights the differences between the representations of men and women. In contrast, this thesis examines how gender is represented by self-described gender-neutral fashion brands on Instagram using the critical lens of an intersectional approach. Thus, different intersecting identities such as sexuality and ethnicity are considered. Instagram is a highly popular social media platform in which the fashion industry is reproducing its visibility through advertising its products reaching a wider pool of consumers.

The representational practices of the most popular gender-neutral brands today are examined through visual discourse analysis. Through an intersectional approach, the results reveal that even though the analysed brands claim gender-neutrality, this does not exclude pre-existing stereotypical gendered and racialized representations in their posts. The analysis shows how these portrayals remain trapped within broader existing hegemonic representations of femininity and masculinity despite their aim to be gender-neutral. Specifically, these representations reflect traditional characteristics assigned to masculinity and femininity that have been defined according to the two binary genders. Nevertheless, this research also illustrates how some advertisements studied challenge existing norms by offering alternative representations. For example, the brands that represent queerness in addition to gender, challenge the most stereotypical depictions through cross-dressing and role reversion as stereotypically feminine bodies are represented in traditionally masculine clothing and vice versa. Additionally, racial stereotyping to some extent is challenged by the representational practices of the examined representations highlighting the aim gender-neutrality has for inclusivity.

KEYWORDS: *Gender-neutrality, Gender performativity, Stereotyping, Femininities, Masculinities, Ethnicity*

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1 Introduction

Throughout modern history in Western societies, specific fashion styles, colours, and fabrics have been culturally and socially marked according to the binary genders of men and women, and therefore, respectively deemed as masculine or feminine (Entwistle, 2015). Binary gender stereotyping according to fashion choices has been overpowering and those stepping out of norms have encountered contempt. However, blurring these boundaries through gender-neutral clothing has become more popular (Walker, 2015). Today, in western contexts, inclusivity is widely more and more appreciated, and thus, this also is reflected in the fashion industry. Namely, for individuals, it is possible even to reject the fixed frameworks of the binary gender identities and choose to embrace differing expressions around gender and fashion without a stigma (The Good Trade, 2022). This can be considered as an inclusive ideal of accepting different ways people want to express themselves. However, research has yet to delve into much depth in terms of in what ways the fashion industry is actually becoming more open to diversity or not, and how via social media it engages in the meaning-making process around contemporary identities.

Increasingly fashion brands are producing fashion claiming to be gender-neutral (Anyanwu, 2019). This perhaps reflects how societies are more accepting of clothing choices that no longer follow stereotypical norms of how men or women are supposed to look. In 2019, 56% of Gen Z consumers, born between the late 1990s and 2010s, bought clothes outside their assigned gender (Anyanwu, 2019). It has been claimed that the fashion industry is going through a transformation in terms of defining femininity and masculinity by offering possibilities to challenge restricting stereotypes (York, 2021). Celebrities such as actor Billy Porter and singer Harry Styles wear skirts and dresses while actresses Kristen Stewart and Zendaya embrace a more stereotypically masculine or androgynous look through wearing oversized suits (Belgaumkar, 2022). These examples seem to break the traditional boundaries between men's wear and women's wear. However, one could argue whether indeed this cross-dressing can be considered as gender-neutrality or if it is just a reversion of stereotyping surrounding gendered fashion.

In this study, the concept of gender-neutral fashion is critically examined as it refers to clothing for all gender identities (Bardey et al., 2020). Gender and clothing intersect with and shift according to, for instance, sexual orientation, class, profession, and social context. Nevertheless, despite this fluidity, gender and gender power relations remain powerfully stable reflecting broader social power relations (Entwistle, 2015). Even so, as it is claimed that the fashion industry is changing from offering fashion to people who conform to binary genders to gender-neutrality it is crucial to consider their relevant representational practices. The existing power relations balancing hegemonic norms are also reproduced by the fashion industry, especially through visual portrayals including representations of gender-neutrality. Even though many fashion brands (e.g., Telfar and Re-Inc) are claiming gender-neutral values, the term gender-neutrality is hard to define as it can mean different things to different

people (Herh, 2021). Additionally, as it has been claimed by Simões (2016), gender-neutrality can be considered a modern-day buzzword as many brands are jumping to claim it due to its trending nature. Therefore, gender-neutrality in the fashion industry, and perhaps beyond, can be seen as a trend that does not really dismantle existing norms but rather shapes them to fit the current popular themes in society.

Against this background, this study examines representational practices surrounding gender in gender-neutral brands' advertising on Instagram taking an intersectional approach (Crenshaw (1989). When conducting research around gender, it is crucial to consider that identities are always constructed through different axes of difference, such as ethnicity, and that these axes of difference intersect with each other. Therefore, key concepts for this research are gender-neutrality, gender performativity, stereotyping, femininities, masculinities, and ethnicity. The specific method applied is visual discourse analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012), seeking to observe the portrayals in gender-neutral fashion brands' Instagram accounts. As a popular visual platform, Instagram has an influence on gender politics through representational practices (Caldeira et al., 2018). The depictions of gender these brands offer are analysed through 150 Instagram posts that illustrate different intersecting definitions of gender-neutral fashion. The specific research question that guides this research is: "How is gender represented by gender-neutral fashion brands on Instagram?" which has been broken down into the following inter-related sub-RQs: "How is gender-neutrality portrayed through performative means?" "How are stereotypical forms of femininity and masculinity reproduced or challenged?" and "How is ethnicity portrayed by these gender-neutral brands' posts?"

1.1 Scientific and societal relevance

The existing academic literature lacks comprehensive research about gender-neutral fashion advertising. This largely can be reasoned due to the recent recognition of it, and the lack of definitions surrounding the fluidity of the concept. Reilly & Berry (2020) are one of the few scholars addressing this topic as they discuss the advertising and brands' representation of fashion that crosses gender boundaries. However, their research does not address gender-neutral clothing directly as it examines 'cross dressing' as a form of shifting binary gender boundaries. Additionally, most research regarding gender and fashion examines the construction of binary gender characteristics considering gender-specific fashion (Paoletti, 2012). Furthermore, these studies examine the construction of fashion garments without considering the implications of stereotyping specifically in fashion advertising. Thus, this research fills in a gap in the discussions regarding gender-neutral representations in the fashion field and online marketing. Particularly, this research offers new insights by examining stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity in fashion brands that declare being gender-neutral.

Research on gender stereotypes in advertising has been originally analysed by Goffman (1976). The findings of his founding research are still prevalent today as stereotypical depictions of

masculinity and femininity in advertising according to these characteristics have been analysed more recently by Tortajada-Giménez et al. (2013) and Heathy (2020). Nevertheless, these studies focus only on the gender binaries without considering differing fluid identities. Additionally, these studies lack an intersectional approach that considers the implications ethnicity and sexuality have on representational practices. This study contributes to the existing framework by providing critical insights that focus on the fashion industry and its importance in identity construction, as well as analysing in-depth representations of gender-neutrality as its own category. Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge that the rise of gender-neutrality is largely linked to the activism of the LGBTQ+ community due to the acceptance of different identities outside hegemonic normativity. Before the current societal changes, the queer community has been underrepresented in representational practices as well as in the scholarly community and literature (Boehmer, 2002). Therefore, due to the intersectional nature of this research, this study fills in a gap in existing fashion research surrounding gender by considering queerness.

The societal relevance of this research is justified by the recent rising popularity of the inclusion of gender fluidity in the fashion spectrum (Walker, 2015). Especially younger generations are more inclined to express identities that do not fit restricting and fixed norms. Therefore, this research provides an important critical lens into looking at the ways brands represent gender-neutrality as they still function within specific different societal patriarchal structures. Gender-neutral brands that openly claim inclusivity across intersecting identities can still reproduce hegemonic norms as, after all their main aim is to make a profit in capitalist western societies. For that reason, it is essential to address the phenomenon using critical lenses offered by an intersectional approach and focus on stereotyping to analyse gender representations. It is crucial to uncover the representational practices that on the surface may look progressive in order to recognize whether the societal power relations surrounding gender are transforming. Through critical concepts and lenses, it is possible to expose how beneath the surface, the fashion industry remains a pillar of the existing social order that is rather unlikeable to seek revolutionary change concerning gender relations and the inequalities they reproduce. Still, fashion is influenced and influences understandings about gender, and therefore it is important to uncover its representational practices.

1.2 Thesis outline

This thesis includes the following five chapters: a theoretical framework, methodology, results, and discussion, as well as a conclusion. First, the following chapter establishes the theoretical foundation of this thesis through reviewing existing literature about relevant concepts for the analysis. Second, the methodology chapter discusses the justification of visual discourse analysis for this research, describes the research design, the data collection process, and the operationalization of the chosen concepts. Thirdly, the results of the visual discourse analysis are presented and their

relationship to literature is discussed. Finally, this thesis is concluded with a presentation of its major findings and a discussion of the broader societal and academic implications of the study conducted.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the theoretical framework of the study by discussing academic literature connecting to the topic of gender-neutral fashion advertising on social media. The following literature review provides theoretical approaches to examine the dataset through the concepts of gender, gender-neutrality, stereotyping, femininities, masculinities, and race/ethnicity. Firstly, the positionality in terms of intersectionality and more general concepts surrounding the topic are discussed. This includes elaborating on the intersectional standpoint that the study adopts as well as the relevance of social media research related to gender and gender-neutrality. Additionally, the construction and performativity of gender are discussed. This study relies on several concepts familiar to gender studies and thus, it is essential to clarify the basic approaches and concepts that guide the overall analysis. Secondly, the concept of gender-neutrality is defined followed by introducing the ways the notion of gender-neutrality is present in fashion and its rising popularity in advertising. Thirdly, more specific concepts around representational practices in regards to gender are discussed. Theoretical approaches around stereotyping and stereotypical characteristics of femininity and masculinity are illustrated as well as more contemporary alternative approaches are introduced. The contemporary approaches partially rely on Queer theory which is essential in this research as gender-neutral fashion gives room for expression outside heteronormative gender norms. Additionally, due to the intersectional nature of this research, literature surrounding racial stereotyping and the importance of acknowledging the representations of different ethnicities in advertising are discussed.

2.2 Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) highlights the importance of intersectionality as an approach that entails that gender always carries ethnic and class significance and that ethnicity always already has a gendered and classed dimension. She discusses especially how Black women are made invisible due to the lack of intersectional approach in different societal and political practices. How models are portrayed by brands in their advertisements carry power relations in terms of societal standards that also have underlying dimensions of for example ethnicity, age, and sexuality intersecting with presented gender identities. When analysing gendered dimensions, it is essential to acknowledge that identities are always constructed through different axes of difference and that these axes of difference do not only exist next to each other but overlap, intersecting with each other (Crenshaw, 1989). Therefore, intersectionality as a theoretical approach will support the analytical process. As stated, this is crucial to examine the dataset in a detailed manner without erasing intersecting identities such as ethnicity, age, sexuality, and class. The main focus of this research, however, is on gender, ethnicity, and sexuality as intersecting characteristics of identity construction in the analysed Instagram posts.

2.3 Social media advertising: Instagram and gender

The continuous and rapid development of technology has led to a shift also in the advertising world and especially in the way brands have had to adapt to digital marketing on social media (Liu et al., 2017). The value of social media is constantly rising due to the growth of audiences and the changeability of platforms (Wardhani & Alif, 2018). User-friendly social media platforms are widely part of people's everyday life and have democratized and simplified the means of distribution, editing, and visual creation (Caldeira, De Ridder & Bauwel, 2018). Social networking sites can track the demographics of users in addition to behavior and needs. These aspects are useful for marketers and therefore, the marketing budget of brands has been moved from traditional media to social media platforms. Social media provide a place for companies to deliver marketing messages to specific audiences (Wardhani & Alif, 2018). Additionally, as Liu et al. (2017) state, the platforms offer features giving users the opportunity to communicate their advertising interests. This, allows more catered content to be delivered for each user.

In 2019, approximately 815 million people were reported to use Instagram, and this number is expected to rise up to 1.2 billion users by 2023 (Statista, 2022). Considering the large reach and impact of the platform on people's everyday lives, many brands use the platform to increase their sales and profits but also to communicate with customers (Hassan, 2014). Instagram offers the possibility for companies to target users in advertisements according to their demographic information. However, these attributes can be considered as limited as Instagram usage logs cannot necessarily track a user's accurate personality, as well as gender identity in addition to the 'biological sex' demographic (Jeon et al., 2020).

Notably, Instagram can play a role in reinforcing and reproducing hegemonic gender norms (Caldeira et al., 2018). As the popularity of the social media platform keeps rising it is crucial to critically analyse and identify the emerging representations and their underlying gender politics. Caldeira et al. (2018) emphasize how Instagram as a space shapes gender representations in specific mediated contexts. However, their study examines gendered representations of women and femininities and their focus is on user-generated content while this research will examine gender representations on the platform of brands that produce and participate in content creation with a particular interest in gender-neutral content.

In conclusion, social media have become a crucial element of communication and revenue source for brands. The number of users on platforms such as Instagram continues rising while brands increasingly utilize the platform for their marketing efforts. Therefore, it is important to analyse the ways brands construct different representations on these platforms. As illustrated above, the platform has been studied from gendered perspectives before. However, gender-neutral representations produced by brands have not been studied to a large extent. The following sub-chapter discusses the

construction of gender in relation to fashion leading to a detailed sub-chapter that provides a discussion around the rising popularity of gender-neutral fashion advertising.

2.4 Gender performativity and fashion

For this research, it is crucial to define the difference between *sex* and *gender* due to the way these two concepts are occasionally mixed in everyday language. Additionally, fashion that is both for women and men is usually referred to with terms such as unisex and gender-neutral which require clarity (Reilly & Barry, 2020). *Gender* indicates a person's identity and *sex* refers to a person's biological bodily attributes (Timke & O'Barr, 2017). Judith Butler (1988) demonstrates how sex and gender are co-constructed, and thus, produced and reproduced by the relationship between individual and society. The designation of a person's sex, male or female, is assigned to a person at birth by a doctor. However, sex is more than just genitalia and reproductive organs as it includes characteristics such as the way a person is built, their height, and their tone of voice (Kaiser, 2012).

In contrast to sex, Butler (1990) argues that gender is performative. This performativity is an act that constitutes itself and has an impact on the way we express ourselves. Gender performativity is executed according to social constructions that are not necessarily dependent on bodily factors, and thus, it is open to change. Butler (1990) states that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 33). Gender is performed by people every day through means of clothing, speech, and behavior. These performances are repetitive, and therefore generate and maintain normative societal standards of the ways in which women and men should dress, speak, and behave (Butler, 1990). The co-construction of sex and gender depends on cultural expectations, social settings, histories, and political practices. Especially in the West, these systems are binary as the two opposites indicate male and female. Traditionally, masculine characteristics are solely assigned to male, whilst feminine traits are assigned to female. Butler (1988) continues to discuss how even though individuals have agency to decide their gender identities among other factors determining identity, they are bounded by forces and threats in terms of social sanctions.

As gender is performative, fashion plays a crucial role in a person's daily performance through taking part in a person's construction of identity. According to Fugate & Philips (2010) consumers are attracted by products that suit their gender identity, and thus gender plays a crucial role in the construction and maintenance of one's identity. This has been the case throughout modern history as, for instance, Vänskä (2016) illustrates how until the 1920s traditionally most women in Western societies wore skirts or dresses whereas men wore trousers. Interruption of these norms has received critique and those paving the way for societal change have experienced harassment, assault, and even arrest (Cunningham, 2011). For instance, when women began to wear trousers in the late nineteenth century in the West it sparked many controversies and judgement, as well as more recently

in Dallas a man was assaulted at the airport for wearing a pink shirt (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Nevertheless, despite resistance, by the beginning of the twenty-first century in Western societies, the concept of gender was disrupting and changing the social and cultural boundaries that construct it (Reilly & Barry, 2020). The cultural and societal standards and expectations around gender were being redefined outside the normative and hegemonic binary oppositions of male and female through laws and social customs. Instead of the two binary opposites, the possibility opened progressively for other possible gender identifications such as agender, gender-fluid, genderqueer, non-gender, and transgender (Reilly & Berry, 2020). Bardey et al. (2020) argue that cultural norms form gender ideals on clothing by continuously labelling and strengthening existing stereotypes. It is also important to consider the cultural aspect of gender performance, for instance, something that might be considered as feminine in one culture might be seen as masculine in another (Bardey et al., 2020). For instance, in Scotland men wearing kilts (skirts) is interpreted as masculine while in other cultures wearing a skirt-like garment is seen as feminine (Morgan, 2019).

In short, fashion plays an essential element in a person's construction of identity and thus, takes part in the construction of gender and its daily performance. The notions of power relations and the changeability of performing gender are important to consider when examining current contemporary representations of gender-neutral fashion marketing on Instagram. These representational practices might be enforced or challenged by the ways brands represent not only clothing but also models.

2.5 Gender-neutral fashion advertising

Advertising is a powerful actor in constructing, influencing, and illustrating the consumers' vision of what a good life looks like (Schoerfer & Borgerson, 2011). The center of the visual world constitutes of advertising images as advertising and mass media contribute to the construction of reality through the visual landscape. Many individuals may feel like they can easily identify with dominant cultural expectations and representations of gender, which are often reinforced in advertising messages (Timke & O'Barr, 2017). However, others might feel like they do not fit into the (current) dominant gender expressions. As Morrison and Shaffer (2003) argue, people whose identity conforms to stereotypical hegemonic gender roles of masculine men and feminine women, are more likely to respond positively to advertising that portrays and targets these roles. Nevertheless, people 'different' from the majority who do not conform to these stereotypes have a more positive reaction to products that are not marketed according to a specific gender (Morrisson & Shaffer, 2003). The concept of gender performativity which was more elaborately discussed earlier in this chapter, and its link to stereotypical societal gender portrayals are crucial to consider when examining the ways brands represent gender-neutral fashion. This is essential because many brands have been recently claiming gender-neutrality in their values and marketing efforts (Morgan, 2019).

Gender-neutrality and unisex fashion as concepts are defined similarly and often used interchangeably (Morgan, 2019). Unisex refers to clothing made and worn by both men and women (Bardey et al., 2020). Similarly, gender neutrality in fashion is defined as fashion items for both men and women. However, the term gender-neutral is seen to be gradually replacing the word unisex as it is used more by brands and media outlets (Morgan, 2019). Due to their definitions, to avoid confusion the chosen term to describe both in this research is gender-neutrality.

According to Åkestam (2017), advertising that does not follow stereotypes regarding gender, ethnicity, or sexuality can have a positive impact on the ways brands are perceived. Global society is experiencing progressive changes in the representations of men and women, according to a marketing report by Simões (2016). Advertising is moving away from underlining hegemonic gender stereotypes and encouraging consumers to be more accepting in terms of representations of gender in consumption today. Many brands are participating in changing societal norms by launching products that endorse gender-neutral concepts. They are promoting freedom of choosing to enjoy products that traditionally might have been associated with the opposite gender. The report claims that consumers are more open-minded about experimenting with products that are traditionally used by the other gender. Especially younger generations are opposing more to traditional sexism in advertising due to the way they have grown up surrounded by values that more or less strive for equality in terms of inclusivity and diversity. However, gender-neutral advertising has been criticized as due to its rising popularity it seems to lack genuineness (Walker, 2015). Brands that participate in gender-neutral marketing or produce products that follow this trend can be criticized for jumping on the bandwagon of inclusive representation to gain more profit. However, this does not minimize the possible positive impact they may have in the construction of more inclusive societal representations of gender.

According to Simões (2016), several factors can be seen as the driving forces behind the rising popularity of gender neutrality. The first is social liberation which indicates the way people have taken a more progressive and gender-neutral attitude towards identity construction and lifestyles. Nowadays, gender is less likely to restrict consumers' product preferences and buying practices. The second trend identified is female emancipation. This aspect is crucial to acknowledge as feminism, in its broader understanding, has been paving a way for decades to dismantle stereotypical gender representations (Gill, 2003). Women today have achieved greater equality in relation to men, and thus, new social roles have been constructed in terms of portrayals of genders (Simões, 2016). This change is forcing brands to rethink the ways they market towards specific genders. Another driving force for change constitutes of the variety of products which refers to the way brands sell a greater range of products that align with different available gender identifications outside of binary oppositions. The final trend is uniformity which indicates the way women and men share common needs that do not necessarily demand brands to invest in stereotypically specific product customization according to the gender binaries (Simões, 2016).

However, Bardey et al. (2020) claim, that especially in terms of fashion, women are more

likely to experiment with crossing gender boundaries than men. Therefore, even though there is a significant trend favoring acceptance of blurring gender boundaries, many people still feel bound to stereotypical expressions and resort to hegemonic gender characteristics familiar to them (Bardey et al. 2020). As Reilly & Barry (2020) illustrate, laws and policies adopted to support gender-neutrality, have received backlash in order to maintain the binary boundaries that have been constructed and regulate hegemonic gender positions. Simões (2016) identifies other inhibitors against the gender-neutral movement in addition to the way some consumers see gender as a crucial part of their identity and construct this by following normative gender indicators. One inhibitor, outside of fashion, is gender specificity in the manner that some physiological characteristics between the two binary sexes require specific products, for example, in the case of reproductive health (Simões, 2016). However, it is crucial to acknowledge here that this inhibitor is constructed by not acknowledging the earlier discussed difference in the definition of sex and gender. As gender regards identity, one born with reproductive organs has the possibility to carry out a pregnancy. This aspect of sex as a gendered factor has been generally constructed by the medical and scientific communities (Fausto-Sterling, 2003). Another obstacle is the cultural stereotypes that heavily influence societies (Simões, 2016). These stereotypes indicate traditional attitudes towards the expressions of femininity and masculinity which remain relevant for many consumers. These attitudes might be co-constructed, for example, with religious beliefs (Petersen & Donnenwerth, 1998). Consumers with these attitudes may express hostility and Othering towards different and more liberal attitudes and those who express themselves in a gender-neutral manner (Simões, 2016).

To conclude, this section has discussed gender-neutral fashion and its rising popularity in advertising via a comprehensive literature review. These perspectives assist in analysing how gender-neutrality is portrayed and the ways brands represent gender inclusivity. In the next sub-sections stereotypical and contemporary gender characteristics and the ways, they illustrate societal power relations are examined as they are part of the rising popularity and construction of gender-neutral fashion advertising.

2.6 Stereotypical representations of femininity and masculinity

According to Hall (2013) representation is the production of meaning between different members of culture by using language, images, and signs. He explains that in representational practices stereotyping is an essential part of meaning-making processes. Therefore, stereotyping is not absent in the portrayal of gender-neutrality either. Especially those considered ‘different’ from the majority seem to be portrayed through sharply polarized binary extremes and stereotypes (Hall, 2013). Thus far, most advertising has represented groups of people through stereotypes (Eisend, 2010). In addition, advertisements usually portray ‘typical’ people to resemble targeted consumers (Schoerfer & Borgeson, 2011). Stereotyping contributes to the maintenance of the social and symbolic order

through reducing, essentializing, naturalizing, and fixing 'difference' (Hall, 2013). The ways people are portrayed in advertising can impact their self-image and the way they view others (Pollay, 1986). Therefore, to study gender-neutral fashion advertising, it is important to consider potential stereotypical binary gender representations, especially in the ways brands portray gender-neutrality as this is also part of creating or reinforcing a certain social or symbolic order, even if it is claimed to transcend it.

As sex and gender are different in essence, people learn masculinity and femininity but are assigned their sex at birth (Reilly & Barry, 2020). Gender stereotypes are learned beliefs about how certain characteristics differentiate women and men (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). These contain, according to Deux and Lewis (1984), four different categories: physical characteristics, role behaviors, trait descriptions, and occupational status. These categories have masculine and feminine components with masculine traits mostly connected with men and feminine associated with women.

Stereotypical feminine portrayals include aspects such as certain beauty ideals, the importance of motherhood (e.g., the predominant role of women is to take care of their children), hair length, emotional sensitivity, and other characteristics considered as merely submissive (Eisend, 2010). Similarly supporting these characteristics, hegemonic femininity refers to traits in women such as emotional, passive, dependent, maternal, compassionate, and gentle (Krane, 2001). Schoerfer & Borgeson (2011) highlight how historically in both art and advertising, the representation of women has consisted of passivity and portrayal of femininity in a negative light. Stereotypically, women in advertising often combine two types of opposing social symbols: aggressiveness and attractiveness (Umiker-Sebeok, 1981). Even though It might seem like female models adopt a powerful stance similar to male models this is accompanied by signals of glamour and submission. In terms of stereotypical femininity in fashion advertising, it includes characteristics such as long hair, make-up, high-heels, and to some extent nudity (Gill, 2007).

The nudity of the female body that has been a prevalent part of art history is appropriated in advertising to sell almost any product. Here the naked, primarily female body, is exhibited according to the male gaze, a concept originally coined by Mulvey (1989). In *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Mulvey examines the function of the male gaze in the cinema of how this gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled according to ideal femininity represented from the perspective of men. In this voyeurism, women are rather passive. Even though applied to cinema, this concept is also useful for analysing other media and thus, also Instagram posts. This means that it can help in identifying the objectification of the bodies presented in the brands' Instagram pages. It is important to consider that the male gaze also applies to men and the ways in which they are usually portrayed in relation to women (Mulvey, 1989). The stereotypical feminine characteristics and the male gaze assist in examining the portrayal of female models but also in analysing the reversion of these stereotypical representational practices onto other gender identities. Specifically, highlighting how previous gendered representation patterns can be broken or reinforced through gender-neutrality in online

fashion marketing.

Masculine stereotypes in contrast to feminine concern leader characteristics, assertiveness, and overall dominance instead of submissivity (Eisend, 2010). Stereotypical masculine characteristics in fashion advertising include an emphasis on power, control, and autonomy, through clothing items most associated with seriousness and correctness (Evans & Thorton, 1991). These traits relate to hegemonic masculinity referring to strength, competitiveness, assertiveness, confidence, and independence of men (Krane, 2001). Hegemonic masculinity is the form of masculinity that is socially dominant and culturally idealised at specific periods of time (Connell, 2005). In the 1980s hegemonic masculinity was understood as a pattern of practice that allows men to continuously assert their dominance over women. Even though not every man might act upon it, it is considered as normative in terms of the way other masculinities would have to position themselves in relation to it. Connell (1987) highlights how "hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (p. 183). She emphasizes that hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type that is everywhere and always the same but rather**,** it is the form of masculinity that conquers the hegemonic position in a given standard of gender relations (Connell, 1995). As a concept, it functions as the configuration of practice that relates to the legitimacy of patriarchy guaranteeing the dominance men have over women.

Culturally dominant forms of masculinity assist in analysing the portrayals of masculinity in this study. Additionally, other non-hegemonic masculinities described by Connell, (1995), are useful for this research to analyse those masculine representations that differ from the dominant, especially in terms of gender fluidity in contemporary society. These masculinities will be further elaborated on later on in this chapter. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has also received critique as, for example, Elias & Beasley (2009) state that 'dominant' forms of masculinity do little to legitimate men's power over women, and therefore, should not be labelled as hegemonic. Additionally, they claim that some masculinities that legitimate men's power over women can be culturally marginalized. Therefore, as already discussed, this study concurs with the argument that hegemonic masculinity is not fixed and it is open for change according to, for instance, cultural, social and political factors.

Historically, specific fashion styles have been culturally and socially marked according to the binary genders of men and women, and therefore, respectively deemed as masculine or feminine hegemonies (Entwistle, 2015). It is crucial to acknowledge that while the term hegemony is used to describe both stereotypical masculinity and femininity, it does not necessarily mean violence as it means ascendancy achieved through institutions, cultural practices, and persuasion. These stereotypical characteristics assist the visual analysis of models, clothing items and the portrayal of historically common masculinity and femininity in the brands' Instagram posts.

2.7 Contemporary masculinities, femininities and queer narratives

Contrary to stereotypical gender roles contemporary modes of femininity and masculinity illustrate egalitarian ideology by portraying men and women as 'equals' and rejecting the idea of one gender dominating over the other (Hamburger et al., 1996). To analyse the masculinities and femininities present in gender-neutral advertising, it is important to analyse the contemporary and alternative examples they represent in addition to analysing the possible stereotypical implications. These contemporary understandings of femininities and masculinities assist in examining the ways in which stereotypes are challenged by the brands studied. Additionally, it is crucial to look over binary oppositions of gender and recognize other gender identities in the spectrum. These identities might also be connected to minorities in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, or other axes of identity underlining the importance of an intersectional analysis.

Connell (2005) identifies different types of alternative masculinities that are constructed in relation to the hegemonic masculinity: complicit, subordinate, marginalized, and protest masculinities. Complicit masculinities do not necessarily embody characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. However, through everyday practices, those identifying with such modes of masculinity enjoy the benefits the hegemonic representation offers to them in the patriarchal society. Subordinate masculinities are divergent from the dominant form of masculinity and are considered to be constructed as inferior to it. Marginalized masculinities are trivialized or discriminated against in patriarchal societies. This form of masculinity considers minorities, for example, according to their sexuality, age, or ethnicity. Protest masculinities refers to alternative forms of hypermasculinity that are constructed in relation to the social position that lack, for instance, economic, social, and political power. However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) readjusted these definitions considering that the non-hegemonic alternative forms of masculinity have agency and revolve around intersectional conditioning of gender with other axes of identity.

In addition to these known definitions of alternative forms of masculinity connected to hegemonic masculinity other masculinities have been researched by multiple different scholars (Gill, 2003; Elias & Beasley, 2009; Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018). These alternative types of masculinities can be considered to fall under the previous descriptions provided by Connell (2005). For instance, the evolution of the metrosexual man (Kaiser et al., 20017) is an example of a contemporary form of masculinity that can fall under subordinate masculinities. This masculinity has been described as young, urban, and heterosexual. Men falling into this category of masculinity ignore the conservative ideas of how men should take care of their looks and are more concerned about the ways they are groomed, their clothing as well as their hairstyles. This form of masculinity offers some relaxation of certain stereotypical masculine ideals though ideals that traditionally have been considered as more feminine (Timke & O'Barr, 2017). Different masculinities will be useful for this research to identify and analyse those masculine representations that differ from dominant ones, especially in terms of gender fluidity in contemporary society.

Apart from this aspect of allowing certain aspects of femininity for men through metrosexuality, it is important to take into consideration representations outside the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1997). Butler (1997) illustrates that definitions related to gender identities also assume definitions of sexuality. Thus, queer representations underline femininity and masculinity as well. Connecting to the notion of queer theory which indicates exploring and to an extent dismantling the power of dominant cultural, social, and political norms relating to sexuality but also gender identities (Marcus, 2005). For example, when analysing contemporary portrayals of femininity in correlation with sexuality this connects to lesbianism. This illustrates how butch women are simplified to the definition of lesbians identifying with masculine traits, and femme women are simplified to the identification of following the patriarchal codes of hyper-feminine femininity (Hollibaugh, 2000). Nevertheless, even though these definitions are seen as opposites it needs to be considered that lesbian femininities do not only fall under these two definitions and that one can alternate their identification.

Dahl (2012) argues that Queer femininities have been stereotypically viewed as superficial due to the way they are expressed through theatricality and irony. For instance, Halperin (2012) has been analysing the general hostility and misogyny related to the expression of femininity among gay men. Gay femininity often revolves around cultural practices such as diva-worshipping that are socially noted as feminine but do or necessarily have much to do with women or femininity. Therefore, gay male culture portrays grotesque versions of femininity. This connects to the general acceptance of masculinity over femininity in Western societies as well as the colonial patriarchal pressures (Hemmings, 2007). However, hyper-femininity can be considered liberating to some gay men which distances them from the hegemonic dominance of hyper-masculinity (Hale & Ojeda, 2018).

During the 1990s, commercial companies began to recognize the potential of the queer marker and started to invest in gay and lesbian-specific media such as magazines (Gong, 2019). However, specific marketing for the homosexual audience did not seem to pay off, and thus, brands began to conduct gay window advertising. In this double marketing strategy, brands aim to attract gay customers by addressing their emotional need to be acknowledged while selling a specific image of homosexuality to the heterosexual consumer (Gong, 2019). This links to gender-neutral advertising due to the way the brands address both heterosexual and homosexual consumers earlier discussed in this chapter. Gender-neutral fashion advertising can be analysed as participating in the contemporary representations of femininity and masculinity as well as considering the intersections of gender and sexuality. Some brands declare implicitly or explicitly their aim to respond to different gender identities and sexualities falling under the LGBTQ+ community.

2.8 The importance of ethnic portrayals in advertising

As this research is conducted from an intersectional standpoint the above-mentioned framework has been constructed around the notion of gender as well as stereotypical and contemporary notions of

femininity and masculinity in connection to sexuality. However, due to the way gender-neutrality claims inclusivity, this research also looks at other axes of identity, especially ethnicities and race as their representations also portray societal power structures and can relate to the colonial past of the West (Crenshaw, 1989).

According, to Hall (2013) stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes 'difference,' and it is part of the maintenance of symbolic and social order. Stuurman (2000), discusses the invention of racial stereotyping, and how since the colonial era human beings were divided into categories according to their physical characteristics such as skin colour, and facial type. Such classifications were considered fundamental and bodies different from Caucasian white reflection were portrayed through stereotyping which continues still to this day. Other ethnic groups were defined as animalistic and 'lazy.' This categorization described by Stuurman (2000), illustrates the way race differentiations are also social constructions. Partly due to the notion of being stereotyped according to animal-like characteristics the Black body has been exhibited and sexualized throughout history. Under this colonial gaze of the West, their bodies have been highlighted to be different, marking them as 'primitive' and hideous (Hall, 2013). However, also overly sexualising them through obsessively portraying them through exoticism. This can be related to the concept of the Other as according to de Beauvoir (1952) and Said (1978) we construct meaning to make sense of the world through establishing oppositions. De Beauvoir discusses Othering as a process in terms of gender. However, in this research, the concept can be related to how establishing oppositions is illustrated in racial stereotyping in fashion advertising as well.

Notably, White people's bodies have been dominating all advertising even though Caucasian people only constitute around 16% of the world's population (Åkestam, 2017). Most studies related to racial stereotyping in advertising have been conducted according to marketing in the United States (Mastro & Stern, 2003; Taylor & Stern, 1997; Maher et al., 2008). Research conducted by Mastro & Stern (2003) illustrates racial stereotyping in advertising such as depicting Asians as passive and thin, as well as portraying Latinos as attractive and sexualizing them. Millard & Grant argue that Black people have been stereotypically portrayed as belonging to the lowest occupational category or inferior to White authority figures in advertising (Millard & Grant, 2006; Taylor & Stern, 1997). Additionally, intersecting ethnic background with gender, a study by Coltrane and Messino (2000), illustrates that White women are used as a standard icon of beauty and femininity in comparison to Black women. However, this excludes the exoticism and hyper-sexualization of the Black female body which reflects back to the history of the representation and exploitation of Saartje Bartmann (the Hottentot Venus). Among many Black people she was exhibited in freak shows around Europe in the 19th century (Crais & Scully, 2021). After the exhibitions, her body was unethically examined by scientists and displayed in museums. This portrayal relates to the continuous reinforced representations in media of Black women as sexually assertive (White, 2013).

To conclude, this sub-section has provided theoretical support mostly in relation to the thesis sub-question about how is ethnicity portrayed in relation to gender by gender-neutral brands. Even though gender-neutral advertising might claim inclusivity in terms of gender it is important to analyse whether the representational practices are truly inclusive or if they still exhibit stereotyping and toxic societal power play in terms of ethnic and race portrayals. Acknowledging different constructive features of people's identities amplifies the intersectional approach of this research.

2.9 Conclusion

The literature discussed provides key insights that inform the analysis. Specifically, this theoretical framework drawing from various critical perspectives allows the data to be analysed through the concepts of gender, gender-neutrality, stereotyping, femininities, masculinities, and race/ethnicity in line with the RQ. The clear distinction between dominant stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and contemporary notions of gender representation help to detect how gender-neutrality reinforces but also breaks certain existing societal power relations. The overall intersectional approach of this research allows the exploration of different queer and ethnic identities within the gender spectrum and the analysis of the inclusion and lack of intersectionality in representational practices of fashion advertising that claims gender-neutrality.

3 Method

3.1 Introduction

This research is conducted taking a qualitative approach and using qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are more suitable to examine open-ended questions in comparison to quantitative methods (Allen, 2007). The strength of qualitative methods is that they assist in understanding certain meaning-making processes and phenomena from a larger societal perspective (Machin & Mayr, 2012). To achieve a more extensive explanation of the explored concepts qualitative methods allow the researcher to decide what is required to be studied and how (Babbie, 2014). Therefore, to study the representation of gender-neutral brands' Instagram posts, visual discourse analysis was used as a method to create a lens to examine the topic on a larger societal scale since it allows to study the underlying meanings of visual images. Visual communication has a crucial role in shaping beliefs in a society. However, society also shapes this form of communication. The indirect meanings of images present existing power relations and it is only through examining images in detail that these implicit meanings can be revealed (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This is also the case with advertisements since as they are mostly visually constructed they include different power-related portrayals. Therefore, it is essential to critically analyse them. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), within a qualitative visual analysis, relations of power are assumed to be discursive. As this thesis works with gender, still an arena of conflict in contemporary society, a method that aims at understanding power relations and provides tools for in-depth visualization is the most suitable. This is also, due to the way the representations in these ads are not neutral but follow forms of stereotyping explored in the theoretical framework.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

To answer the research question, and relevant sub-questions a sample of 150 Instagram posts by gender-neutral fashion brands was collected. In total 10 brands were chosen to be analysed in terms of 15 of their Instagram posts as images. Thus, only pictures were chosen and no videos were included in the visual analysis. Purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling method conforming to certain criteria was used to select the brands and posts (Adams, Khan & White, 2007). The criteria for this study were determined according to the researcher's knowledge of the population in terms of the elements of the sample and the purpose of the study. According to these elements, the researcher can choose which units fit the best for the study (Babbie, 2011). The criteria for the brands and posts are further elaborated on in this chapter.

The universe of existing gender-neutral advertising on all different media outlets is too broad to examine especially within a qualitative approach. Therefore, to keep the sample manageable for qualitative analysis, the study focused on brand Instagram accounts. Instagram was considered an ideal platform because of the rising influence of the platform and its direction towards a more online

shopper-friendly environment (Instagram Business Team, 2020). A total of 10 brands were selected since by analyzing multiple brands more diverse insights will be provided in terms of different brands' representational practices. This provides a wider perspective on the gender-neutral fashion industry as a whole. The brands were chosen according to online magazine articles that present current relevant brands regarding the topic of trending unisex and gender-neutral brands today (Eggertsen, 2019; Siclait, 2021; Stolerman, 2021). As not all of the brands included in the articles claim gender-neutrality, those brands that clearly state this as their mission were selected. These mission statements are further examined in the brand description Table 1 (Appendix A). These were the brands of Telfar, One DNA, No Sesso, ADER Error, Andersson Bell, Official Rebrand, Wildfang, Kirrin Finch, Tomboy X, and Re-Inc.

The brands selected vary in pricing and thus provide different views on how different types of posts might be created according to the desired customer base. This provides a wider insight into the data also regarding the intersection of class in gendered portrayals of how different clothing is represented to different classes and how class is represented in these advertisements. This intersection, although not a direct focus of in this research, still by analysing brands that are aimed for different target consumers gives a broader understanding of different conceptualizations of gender-neutral fashion and class. The pricing of the fashion items sold by the brands varies from 20 euros (e.g., Tomboy X) to up to high fashion prices of 1300 euros (e.g., Andersson Bell). Additionally, as another criterion the chosen brands have a Western customer base even though some of them are located in Asia. This criterion was chosen as the theoretical framework, despite globalization, discusses concepts related mostly with western cultures and from the perspective of the West. This also clarifies the scope of the research as not all cultures around the world will be analysed in terms of the examined theory.

The brands and their goal relate to each other in terms of breaking boundaries in fashion constructed for the binaries of men and women. However, the brands approach this from different perspectives as some of them portray and advocate for more queer-friendly clothing, and others do not address people's sexuality by any means. Additionally, some of the brands described are Black or Korean owned bringing this notion of ethnic representations to the forefront. The brands selected underline the importance of the intersectional stance in this research (Crenshaw, 1989) because they are made by or for people that have different intersecting identities with gender in terms of class, ethnicity, and sexuality. These aspects have also been considered in the collection of the relevant posts for this research.

The 15 posts that were selected from each of these brands are all published within a one-year span starting from March 2021 to March 2022. This criterion was used as this can portray the most current trend in online gender-neutral fashion advertising (criterion of recency). The more recent time span the sample is the more recent trends it displays. Here purposive sampling is the most appropriate as the selected posts follow the criterion of including models wearing the brand items since the representation in terms of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality will have more insights when the clothing is

portrayed on an individual. The selected posts all have a significant reference to advertising the products of the brand as the clothing items included were central in the posts and worn by models. This criterion was chosen as described in the theoretical framework chapter, fashion and clothing are an essential part of gender performativity and a person's construction of identity (Butler, 1990). Specific clothing items assert certain ideas about gender and stereotypical hegemonic ideals in Western societies. Therefore, an essential criterion for this research is that models of all different gender identities are included in the posts. As this research follows a neutral and gender-fluid perspective there is no differentiation made according to the amount of male and female models as other gender identities are also included in the analysed posts. The description of the models according to their genders in the actual analysis is assumed, and therefore, clear binary distinctions of gender in this research relating to the sample are avoided. Additionally, posts that were chosen include models of different ethnic backgrounds to further diversify the research and underline intersectionality. This criterion was also selected according to the theoretical framework as representational practices regarding gender always have an underlying racial significance (Crenshaw, 1989).

The above-mentioned criteria for the posts illustrate the qualitative method of this research as a diverse sample is considered to offer varying insights in terms of intersectionality. To select the posts that fit the theory of this research the best some pragmatic choices were made when collecting data to include the already discussed different ethnicities and genders wearing clothing items by each brand. However, this study does not aim for generalization or statistical arguments and the subjectivity of the sampling is acknowledged. Each of the brands' posts were thoroughly examined regarding the selected one-year time frame, and posts that follow the criteria of this research were chosen to be analysed in more detail. It is essential to consider that not all of the brands have the same number of posts that were published within the time span. Additionally, posts were not chosen according to for example the last 15 posts of each brand. Instead, a more subjectively selective data collection was conducted to avoid the repetition of models and certain clothing items in the dataset. This is because some of the brands post specific models wearing the same outfits multiple times and selecting these posts does not allow diverse sampling. During the data collection process, screenshots were taken of the posts on the brands' Instagram accounts. A complete description of the sample is included in Table 2 (Appendix B). The table includes the brand, link to the Instagram post, and the date of the publication. The selected posts (screenshots) were collected for further analysis amounting to a total unit of 150 posts.

3.3 Data analysis

3.3.1 Visual discourse analysis

In terms of the data analysis, after collecting the 150 posts they were visually transcribed in detail with the assistance of visual discourse analysis tools to track down patterns and specific

representational practices. For this research tools by Machin and Mayr (2012) assisted in the data analysis process. They introduce methods for a more precise and systematic analysis of visual communication. This framework of tools helps to reveal implicit meanings of imagery. Additionally, semiotics supports the tools and makes the analysis process more coherent since it also constructs these methods (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Visual discourse analysis provides ways to analyse the dataset and especially its underlying cultural, social, and political references.

The first tool of visual discourse analysis concerns denotations and connotations. According to Barthes (1968), analyzing these assists in linking what is seen to broader cultural themes, concepts, or meanings. To observe denotations, it is important to observe what is depicted and connect these observations to connotations by analyzing what kind of ideas and values are communicated through what is represented. Machin & Mayr (2012) argue that neutral denotations do not exist as all images connote something to someone. The second tool regards objects that need to be analysed thoroughly as certain values and ideas can be communicated through them. The third tool examines settings through analysing what settings are used in order to communicate general ideas to connote the values, identities, and actions of discourses. To analyse the settings, thorough attention was paid specifically on the physical space as well as lighting. The last tool, salience, contains features such as strong cultural symbols, colours, tones, and sizing, as well as examining what is overlapping, positioned in the foreground or the background. Examining salience, especially in terms of composition can reveal existing cultural symbols through stereotyping regarding gender and ethnicity. It is essential to examine all of these aspects described by these tools since they present what discourses the visuals communicate in order to achieve a deeper level of analysis and understanding of visual communication (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

3.3.2 Operationalization

The operationalization of this research relies on the concepts presented and extensively discussed in the theoretical framework as the sub-questions related to them are examined through the tools of visual discourse analysis mentioned in the previous sub-chapter. The sub-question “How is gender-neutrality portrayed through performative means?” operationalizes the concepts of gender-neutrality in fashion and gender performativity. These aspects can be analysed through the tools mentioned above but especially gender performativity is be examined through clothing (objects) and colours and tones (salience), connecting these to the broader meanings they communicate.

The second sub-question “How are stereotypical forms of femininity and masculinity reproduced or challenged?” portrays an interest in the concepts of stereotyping, femininity, and masculinity. For this question, similar to the previous one, all of the tools provide insights. For example, what is being portrayed in the background and foreground (salience) through, for instance, posing. This assists in examining the stereotypical portrayals related to the masculine and feminine gender characteristics. Additionally, this sub-question examines how gender neutrality challenges the

previously described stereotypical gender characteristics and representations as it considers the concepts related to contemporary representations of femininity and masculinity. For this, the methodology provides insights through, for instance, analysing the settings of the posts because the values, identities, and actions of discourses are communicated through this. This sub-question particularly offers observations of the relying power relations regarding gender representation. However, as already mentioned, all of the tools overlap when analysing and they are used quite similarly in relation to the concepts of this study.

In terms of the final sub-question of "How ethnicity is portrayed by the gender-neutral brands' posts?" Ethnic relations refer to broader systems of meaning that are constructed within societies therefore, this sub-question operationalizes the concept of stereotyping examining it through intersectionality as racial stereotyping is considered. Similar to the previous sub-questions all the tools of visual discourse analysis reveal different dimensions regarding its underlying meanings. Here it is also essential to examine different compositions and the relation of stereotyping in advertising in terms of the ways White bodies are depicted in relation to people of colour. Here in terms of composition, it is essential to examine who is portrayed in the background and who on the foreground. Additionally, other theories discussed in the theoretical framework assist in examining racial stereotyping in terms of the depiction of different bodies for example in terms of the exposure of the skin.

All in all, the tools of visual discourse analysis enables to reflect on the research questions critically giving insights into the underlying meanings of fashion images.

3.3.3 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to examine the suitability of the method for the data analysis and overall research. A pilot study refers to a small-scale version of the full-length research that is performed to test the suitability of a research instrument (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). A pilot study was considered as an important phase for this study as pre-testing of visual discourse analysis tools by Machin & Mayr (2012) provides important insights into critical ways to analyse the dataset. The pilot study also helped the researcher to get familiar with the coding frames constructed according to these tools referring to the denotations and connotations of the perceived visuals. The coding frames used in the pilot study are included in Tables 3-5 (Appendix C).

The pilot study was conducted on five posts in the overall dataset from the brand Re-Inc and they included a variety of model representations. The pilot study showed that all of the tools and the initial coding frame are suitable to analyse the dataset sufficiently. In the pilot, different intersecting identities were present through the portrayal of the models. Therefore, all the concepts that operationalize this research can be applied to the overall dataset. Especially, the coding frames constructed in the pilot study portray models different from the normative White models underlining racial and ethnic dimensions. All in all, the pilot study confirmed the suitability of the method.

Especially, the general coding frame used for the visual discourse analysis was proven well functional for this research due to the way it allows to extensively analyse different aspects of the data while offering clear connections to the theory of this research. By conducting the initial analysis with this table, it helps to systemize the research process. Additionally, the table highlights the importance of data-driven research in revealing power relations that can be connected to the theoretical framework of this study.

3.4 Positionality

When it comes to ethics and positionality, as a Caucasian cis-gender woman, it is essential to acknowledge that this research reflects my background. The dataset includes Instagram posts containing people from differing backgrounds both ethnically and culturally. This study does not intend to speak for or represent the different models present in the analysed Instagram posts but to examine these posts from an intersectional feminist standpoint acknowledging how backgrounds influence research processes. According to Harding (2004), the term standpoint theory is used to categorize epistemologies that emphasize women's knowledge. This means that knowledge comes from a social position and that objectivity is merely impossible to achieve. Haraway's (1988) ideas support this theory as she discusses how feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge allowing accountability for acknowledging the process of learning to observe. Therefore, the researcher's background in this study also aims for this feminist 'objectivity' while acknowledging positionality and conducting intersectional analysis. Intersectionality as a concept was discussed in the previous chapter.

3.5 Reliability and validity of the research

Reliability and validity are relevant in qualitative research to differentiate good research and poor research as well as to avoid skepticism towards the presented results (Brink, 1993). To guarantee the reliability of this qualitative research two aspects need to be considered. Firstly, the research process should follow transparency through describing the strategy of research as detailed as possible (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Secondly, the study needs to follow theoretical transparency by explicitly stating the theoretical stance of the data interpretation linked to the above presented theoretical framework. Therefore, illustrating how particular interpretations exclude others. Both of these aspects are present in this study as the methodology section describes the research strategy and the steps of the study through the elaborate explanation of semiotics and the tools described by Machin & Mayr (2012) in a transparent manner. Additionally, the theoretical stance of this research is examined through detailed a description of the theoretical framework.

The validity of this research is demonstrated through using several tools. The brand Instagram posts are analysed from an intersectional standpoint through constantly comparing the dataset in terms of the similarities and differences in the visual portrayals of the brands. Constant comparison is critical

in qualitative research due to the way it describes the variation that can be found within a specific phenomenon (Boeije, 2010). Additionally, analytic induction is primarily used as the theories and the researcher's knowledge regarding gender representation through the concepts of stereotyping, gender performativity, masculinity, and femininity guide the observations as well as the actual analysis of the Instagram posts. The data is treated thoroughly as the details in the Instagram marketing posts receive extensive analysis, particularly taking into consideration composition and clothing, connecting portrayed denotations to their connotations.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the sampling and collection of the data, the methodological support of the analysis, and the reliability and validity of the research. Additionally, the brief pilot study conducted proves the overall suitability of visual discourse analysis for the study. The coding frames used in the pilot study were applied to the overall dataset which is elaborately analysed and discussed in the next chapter.

4 Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results from the analysis of the 150 Instagram posts by 10 gender-neutral brands. First, this chapter examines the overall gender-neutral fashion advertising on Instagram especially examining the notion of masculine oversized clothes as a manifestation of gender-neutral performativity. The second sub-section discusses feminine and masculine stereotyping focusing on depictions of hegemonic masculinity and the male gaze. The third section discusses alternative representations of masculinity and femininity in the ads examined especially focusing on the portrayals of 'queerness'. The final sub-section focuses on ethnic portrayals in gender-neutral advertising and specifically on the presence or absence of racial stereotyping.

4.1 Gender-neutral fashion advertising on Instagram: An overview of characteristics and practices

Instagram as a user-generated platform can play a role in shaping and challenging gender stereotypes (Caldeira, et al., 2018). It can be argued that due to the growth of social media the selected brands in the dataset have chosen Instagram as their platform to market their products which is in line with Wardhani and Alif (2018). Even though the selected brands use the platform for marketing purposes and communication with their customers they can influence gendered portrayals on the platform through different representational practices (Hassan, 2014).

As gender-neutral fashion is defined as appropriate for both gender binaries or all genders (Morgan, 2019), some of the brands studied represent this more clearly than others by including varying gender identities in their posts. However, brands included in the dataset such as Re-Inc, TomboyX, Wildfang, and Kirrin Finch mostly portray either women or gender non-binary people, leaving out the representation of men in gender-neutrality. This might have to do with the connection of inclusivity with feminism and how the movement has been paving the way for dismantling stereotypical gender norms (Gill, 2003). Additionally, these brands advocate more clearly for LGBTQ+ rights in their mission statements and through their campaigns. Some of the other brands such as ADER Error and Andersson Bell do not include clear representations of people outside the two binary genders, and therefore it can be concluded that they are also interested in attracting the everyday consumer adhering to the predominant societal stereotypes of gender. Consumers who follow these forms of attitudes and see stereotyping as something neutral in societies construct their attitudes accordingly, for example to religious beliefs (Petersen & Donnenwerth, 1998).

In addition, even though the general current trend in fashion is gender blurring some individuals might feel more comfortable following familiar norms (Bardey et al., 2020). Therefore, the brands studied that are not found to portray gender-neutrality through extremely clear efforts (e.g. by including people with clear fluid bodily attributes), can attract also consumers who otherwise might express hostility towards expressions that differ from the hegemonic norms (Simões, 2016).

Additionally, to highlight the inclusive values of the brands none of the clothing items have clear associations with sex or other specific biological bodily factors. This illustrates the clear understanding of seeing gender as something that is constructed rather than assigned (Butler, 1990). This is different from for example, how maternal clothes are required to be produced in a certain way due to the scientific fact that not all sexes are capable of carrying out a pregnancy (Fausto-Sterling, 2003). However, as mentioned the gender-neutral representations in the dataset do not bring out sex in the forefront as its difference with gender is acknowledged.

Notably, the target market according to the portrayed models who are wearing the clothing products is young adults. One exception is an OneDNA post where an older woman is posing in a black t-shirt. Therefore, as anticipated most of the brands in the dataset clearly cater to consumers that are more accepting of various gender identities outside of the hegemonic norms as gender is less likely to affect people's purchasing decisions (Simões, 2016) and especially younger audiences are more inclined to purchase from brands with an overall inclusive image (Simões, 2016; Åkestam, 2017).

In the view of the above, the brands studied make a distinction between people's identities (gender) and bodily attributes (sex) through marketing clothes for all people no matter the way their bodies look (Timke & O'Barr, 2017). The following section examines further the way the brands construct gender-neutral performativity, especially through sizing and styling choices.

4.1.1 Gender-neutral performativity: oversized clothing and feminine erasure

This section discusses the overall performativity of gender in gender-neutral fashion. Gender performativity refers to an act that constitutes itself and has an impact on the way we express ourselves (Butler, 1990). When it comes to the representations of clothing worn by individuals across the gender spectrum, most of the analysed brands have chosen to take the route of 'oversized clothes'. This is not a new phenomenon as clothing portrayed for all genders has long been seen as having more masculine cuts, oversizing, and a more casual loungewear feel to them (Bardey et. Al, 2002). This is perhaps evidence of how women are more open to experimenting with crossing gender boundaries in dressing than men. Therefore, it can be argued that the advertised clothes follow styles more familiar to stereotypically masculine bodies. This type of gender-neutral performativity can be considered most accepted in western societies due to the exact masculine characteristics (Hemmings, 2007). The so-called femininity in clothing is mostly erased as there's rarely exposure of the skin or tight garments. This is noticeable in many of the brands' gender-

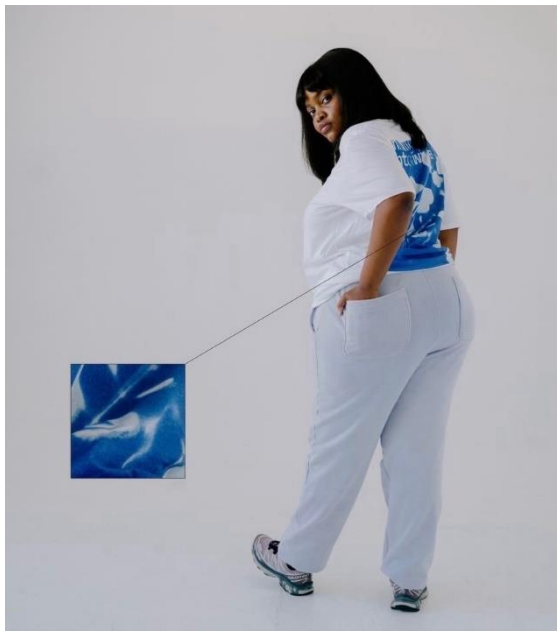

Figure 1. Model posing in a studio setting in a post by Re-Inc

neutral depictions but the most dominant ones are Re-Inc, ADER Error, and OneDNA. However, exceptions to this notion of "feminine erasure" that the analysis grounds, are noted as also more tight-fit clothing, styling, and posing, as well as nudity that can be considered as more 'feminine' are at the core of some of the brands studied (e.g., Telfar and Official Rebrand).

When it comes to the oversized lounge garments they include more loose-fit styles mostly sweatpants, sweatshirts, hoodies, and t-shirts, for example in the Re-Inc advertisements. All of the ads by the brand have a relaxed feel due to the association with portrayed clothing as leisure time wear. The images are taken either in a studio setting or in nature. The simple white background in the studio settings highlights the models as well as the clothing they wear (Figure 1), and the green nature settings illustrate the portrayal of freedom (Figure 2). Neither of the background settings carry specific gendered notions in terms of performativity, and thus, the focus is on the clothing, emphasizing the way the brand sees neutrality in terms of styling choices. The colours do not necessarily indicate a specific gender as well. However, it is noticeable that the colour pink is not present in many of the clothing items apart from one exception (e.g. Figure 2). This can illustrate a conscious decision to leave the colour out due to its association with femininity, as specific colours traditionally have been assigned to specific genders (Reilly & Barry, 2020; Entwistle, 2015). The most dominant colours in the brand's clothing items are earth tones, grey, black and yellow. Additionally, in most of the ads, the models posing are assumed to be women. This highlights the way women are more likely to experiment with different gendered expressions in clothing even though consumers, in general, are increasingly becoming more willingly open-minded in terms of experimenting with products that are traditionally used by the other gender (Simões, 2016). Additionally, these ads do not expose skin which is a familiar portrayal in clothing ads that include female models. In this sense, the performance of gender follows a more stereotypical masculine path of gender-neutral portrayals through specific styling.

Figure 2. Two models running in a flower field in a post by Re-Inc

Other posts also provide similar representations through a more artistic lens (e.g., ADER Error). However, similar to the previously analysed brand the fashion follows more masculine characteristics in terms of the fit of the clothing and the choice of colours. As noted, certain colours have been culturally and socially labelled according to the binary genders of men and women (Entwistle, 2015). The models be can easily categorised as men or women through, for example, hair and makeup styles, and gender neutrality is dominantly illustrated through the clothing rather than including, for example, gender non-binary models. The clothing items are mostly also similar to the previously discussed brand as the clothes are sweatshirts and hoodies. Nevertheless, also suits, wool coats, and accessories such as scarves are included. The colours are mostly black, dark grey, and dark blue, except for a few items being yellow, turquoise, and beige (e.g., Figure 3). Here noticeable is the use of yellow by both brands Re-Inc and ADER Error, as it can be considered as a gender-neutral colour, especially for children (Kidsbury, 2020).

The gender-neutral approach adopted by these representations connects to the most accepted ways of portraying neutrality for all genders by presenting clothes that are known as men's wear. This can be considered as the continuation of a movement that began in the late nineteenth century as women started to wear typical men's clothing such as trousers (Cunningham, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2014: Vänskä 2016). However, at present times this phenomenon is more widely accepted as normal. According to Butler (1990), performances of gender are repetitive and generate as well as maintain normative social standards in the ways men and women are supposed to dress. This form of portraying gender-neutral fashion through masculine features can be seen as a way to adapt to existing norms of masculine acceptance and maintain the existing societal order of masculine dominance. This is due to the way cultural expectations are to see women more likely in stereotypical men's clothes than men wearing stereotypical women's clothes (Bardey et. Al, 2020).

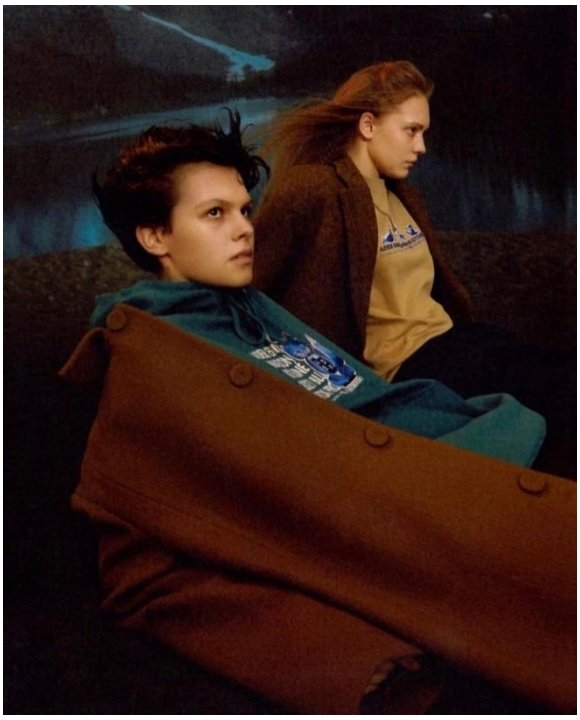

Figure 3. Two models wearing clothes by ADER Error

Cultural norms assist in forming cultural ideas on clothing through continuously labelling, and thus, strengthening existing stereotypes (Bardey et. Al, 2020). Even though the advertising of gender-neutral clothing is somewhat a new phenomenon, this research argues that gender-neutral clothing includes its own stereotypes. This specifically surrounds the portrayal and stereotyping of men's wear as gender-neutral. Nevertheless, here it is essential to acknowledge that what might be considered as feminine or masculine in one culture, can be interpreted as the complete opposite in another (Bardey et al., 2020). Therefore, this result of

gender-neutral stereotyping is observed in the context of western cultures according to the target customers of the brands. However, apart from this expression of stereotypical men's wear represented as gender-neutral the dataset also includes other types of representations where femininity is more visible and represented through acceptance. These representations are less recurrent when it comes to the advertisements studied, however, they still carry a significant role in offering different gendered portrayals in social media advertising. These brands and posts are discussed more thoroughly in the final sub-section about alternative representations and queerness.

To conclude, gender-neutral performativity in most of the representations is characterised by men's wear and colour choices that do not heavily indicate stereotypical femininity. Therefore, at the core of gender-neutral brands' representations is masculinity which connects to the overall acceptance of masculinity over femininity in western societies and how women are more likely to experiment with cross-dressing. The next sub-chapter examines the more specific traditional stereotyping according to traditional masculine and feminine characteristics.

4.2 The persistence of feminine and masculine stereotyping

Gender stereotyping includes different categories such as physical characteristics, role behaviours, trait descriptions, and occupational status Deux and Lewis (1984). This sub-section examines the portrayal of men and women in solo-gender advertisements (e.g., advertisements illustrating only one gender) and their inter-connections when more than one gender are depicted together in an advertisement. Underlying societal norms and power structures are the most noticeable in the studied posts: through different compositions and due to the ways the models' bodies are presented in terms of the exposure of skin and different clothing. Additionally, some stereotypical physical characteristics and trait descriptions are well fitted according to masculine and feminine stereotyping. The dataset does not represent different occupations to a large extent apart from two posts by Wildfang. These posts by the brand will be analysed when discussing the results of alternative queer representations. Many of the brands illustrate prevalent hegemonic masculinities and femininities even if they aim for norm-breaking. Additionally, the voyeuristic male gaze of masculine male bodies and nude female bodies is not absent. The most noticeable examples concern the representational practices of No Sesso and to some extent ADER Error.

Figure 4. A model wearing a dress by No Sesso that exposes skin

4.2.1 Stereotypical femininity: Under the male gaze

This sub-section provides results about the stereotypical representations of women as feminine focusing on patterns of the male gaze. Stereotypical feminine representations are examined, especially considering the two dominant categories of aggressiveness and attractiveness in combination with submissivity (Umiker-Sebeok, 1981). In addition, noticeable stereotypical characteristics of femininity include long hair, make-up, high-heels, and full or partial nudity (Gill, 2007) that are analysed in connection to the representation of traditionally feminine bodies.

The dataset surprisingly includes stereotypical feminine representations of women, especially when it comes to portraying them through nudity and traditional styling choices. A typical example of this is No Sesso, the Instagram posts of the brand are centered around images from their fashion shows that showcase their garments. The positioning of the models or their gaze on camera reflects that setting. No Sesso portrays nudity especially in terms of female bodies through the styling of the runway models. The female models are represented as stereotypically and conventionally attractive through these styling choices. Most of the women walking in the depicted shows are wearing heels while the men are not. This is conforming stereotyping in addition to the exposure of skin since for example one of the models is wearing a dress that only covers one of her breasts (Figure 4) and another model is portrayed through the male gaze as well through for example a sheer dress that exhibits the female body. These stereotypical representational practices show women in a passive and objectifying light (Mulvey, 1989; Schoerfer & Borgeson, 2011). Most of the female models also have long hair, as is the case with most of the brands that represent women who do not look clearly gender non-binary. Even though the gaze of the models seems determined and somewhat dominant in these posts it is accompanied by signs of glamour, nudity, and submission which decrease their power to break the norms (Umiker-Sebeok, 1981).

Apart from the runway models styled by No Sesso, the male gaze as an objectifying practice is recurrently noted across most brands. However, it is essential to consider the intersectionality in this research and the possible implications of sexuality as well as the aim for the normalization of nudity in certain portrayals. For example, brands such as Tomboy X mostly design underwear for the LGBTQ+ community as their target customers. Therefore, as an underwear brand, the models' bodies are exposed and this does not necessarily illustrate the conforming of

Figure 5. Two women sitting on a bed in a post by Official Rebrand

stereotypical portrayals. Kirrin Finch and Official Rebrand are other examples of brands that portray some female bodies in a stereotypical light as some women in the ads are wearing dresses and heels, while others are not. In one of the ads by Official Rebrand, two women are sitting on a bed and the woman seated on the left is breastfeeding (Figure 5). Even though this image can be considered as destigmatizing breastfeeding it also confirms stereotyping in the way a woman is portrayed as maternal and caring (Krane, 2001). However, the ads from these brands are a combination of both stereotypical as well as alternative representations of femininities as most of the models in the ads are assumedly women or gender non-binary.

In conclusion, even though the brands claim gender-neutral values the male gaze in terms of the objectification of the female bodies in the ads is not absent. This connects to the notion of feminine stereotyping as the models portrayed under this gaze can be observed as passive and submissive due to styling choices. The following section presents the results of masculine stereotyping.

4.2.2 Stereotypical representations of masculinity: Between and beyond hegemonic masculinity

This section focuses on the representations of stereotypical masculinity in the studied Instagram posts. Men's clothing advertising commonly depicts characteristics of autonomy, power, and control by clothing items that are most associated with correctness and seriousness (Evans & Thorton, 1991). Additionally, masculine bodies are at the centre of these portrayals in order to emphasize the power, dominance, confidence, and assertiveness of hegemonic masculinity (Eisend, 2010; Krane 2001). In the data studied, despite noticeable exceptions, these representations of hegemonic masculinity are recurrently noted specifically in posts portraying masculine bodies. These depictions do not represent men in clothing that does not reinforce the already existing societal norms or the bodies that usually model men's wear.

The notion of seriousness is mostly present in the dataset. For example, in the case of Andersson Bell, even though the settings of the analysed ads may portray a dreamlike and even psychedelic atmosphere, the clothing remains the most neutral and serious in this artistic realm. Here the clothing portrayed on men are short wool coats with boxy fits to emphasize the size of the shoulders, jeans, button-up shirts, and vests (Figure 6). The clothing follows a general formal men's wear with a twist. The colours of these clothing also remain neutral apart from a one colourful wool jacket in the colours of pink, light blue, and yellow. ADER Error also represents

Figure 6. A model wearing a boxy wool coat by Andersson Bell

formality in the clothing worn by a man through a dark grey suit and a low camera angle that makes the male model appear larger. This angle creates an association with power and dominance. Additionally, the lighting and overall setting of the images by the brand illustrate darkness and seriousness through the colours of dark blue and grey, only allowing small fractures of light into some of the images.

Representations in the ads to an extent reverse the male gaze through the objectification of men. OneDNA represents men in their clothing ads through partial nudity (Figure 7). However, the depicted bodies are mostly masculine (e.g., muscular), and thus, this reproduces existing stereotypes of what in hegemonic masculinity is considered ideal. This idealisation of the masculine and strong body is shown as the male models only wear sweatpants from the brand and have their upper bodies exposed. Since, according to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity is the socially dominant form of masculinity at a specific time, it can be argued that these posts adhere to western portrayals of masculinity illustrating decades-old stereotypes of representing 'strong' and muscular bodies. Additionally, the colours of the sweatpants are either brown or black, and therefore through neutrality, the brand remains within the hegemonic notion of masculinity. Instances of non-hegemonic masculinity are also noted but to a lesser extent. For example, in one of these ads, where the male bodies are shown similarly, a Black male model is seated somewhat delicately on the ground and gazing down. This can be considered as the only exception as it illustrates fragility to an extent that is seen as a submissive characteristic. Additionally, in other ads, men gaze off-camera illustrating this notion of submissivity.

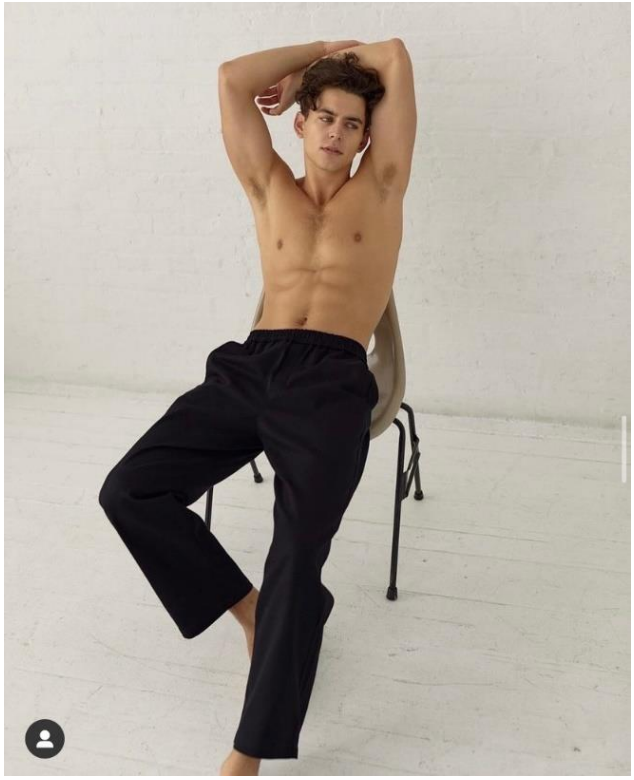

Figure 7. Partially nude male model posing in a post by OneDNA

All in all, the data of this research vastly reproduces stereotyping of hegemonic masculinity even though occasional feminine characteristics are included in the portrayal of male bodies. Nevertheless, in terms of composition, the next section discusses the masculinity and dominance present in the ads examined where men and women are photographed in relation to each other.

4.2.3 Masculine and feminine stereotyping in composition

When it comes to submissivity and dominance characterised and divided by stereotypical femininity and masculinity, composition reveals the most in terms of societal power relations in the

ads. This can be examined through what and who is portrayed in the background and foreground as well as through the gazes of the models. The male gaze applies to men and the ways in which they are represented in relation to women (Mulvey, 1989). This also relates to the way hegemonic masculinity is constructed in connection with women and subordinate masculinities (Connell, 1987).

Notably, in most of the Instagram posts examined those that include clearly masculine models have portrayed them mainly in the foreground as well as gazing at the camera illustrating hegemonic masculine leader characteristics, assertiveness, and overall dominance (Eisend, 2010). This, while most of the female models who are portrayed in relation to men in the ads are portrayed through submissivity as they are positioned in the foreground or gazing off the camera. This represents them in light of a supportive role next to the man in the picture. This notion of stereotypical femininity and masculinity in terms of composition is most visible in the posts of ADER Error. In the posts by the brand, both genders are depicted and the female model is gazing off-camera. In one of the posts, the male model dominantly looks straight at the camera illustrating more dominance (Figure 8). Even though the models seem like teenagers this illustrates a rather adult-like stereotypical composition, as the woman does not portray power and dominance but is either put in the background or shown in the foreground gazing away.

Other stereotyping in terms of composition is also present in the dataset as masculinity is in the foreground while the more feminine dressed models are portrayed in the back of the image (e.g., Andersson Bell). Additionally, in a post by Re-Inc two models are depicted on the sides of a male model putting him in the centre leader position-like composition (Figure 9). In this pose, the female models are also leaning on him making him appear more dominant while the women appear more fragile in terms of stereotypical associations (Eisend, 2010). Even though both of these brands mostly market large fit and casual clothing the overall masculinity of the clothing does not challenge the

Figure 8. Two models illustrating dominance and submissivity through gaze in a post by ADER ERROR

Figure 9. A male model in a leader-like composition in a post by Re-Inc

possible stereotypical implications of the imagery. An exception is when the two gender binaries are portrayed together in their composition, as well as the gazes, are on the same level despite the somewhat stereotypical styling choices of the models (e.g., OneDNA see Figure 10).

Stereotyping can be examined as present due to the way advertisers illustrate familiar imagery in their ads to attract the everyday consumer (Schoerfer & Borgeson, 2011). People are familiar with imagery that portrays the most dominant forms of masculinities and femininities in a certain light, and thus, this can encourage them in further purchase decisions. These brands essentially represent what gender-neutrality as a concept means to them broadly. This underlines the notion of stereotyping reinforcing a certain social and symbolic order of learned beliefs regarding differences between men and women (Reilly & Barry, 2020; Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). Additionally, according to Pollay (1989), as advertising images have an influence on the way people view themselves and each other it is essential to acknowledge that stereotyping in the posts has both positive and negative implications depending on people's self-identities. Thus, next differing representations from the norms will be examined by looking at alternative portrayals of masculinities and femininities.

Figure 10. Gender binaries portrayed as equal through composition in a post by OneDNA

4.3 Alternative representations and queerness

This sub-chapter examines alternative representations of masculinity and femininity in the data in connection to queerness. Not everyone feels comfortable following the stereotypical hegemonic notions of femininity and masculinity, and thus, people different from the mass respond better to advertising messages that are not marketed according to a specific gender (Morrisson & Shaffer, 2003). This can be noted in the dataset through gender-neutral representations that are connected to queerness. As argued by Hamburger et al. (1996), contemporary alternative femininity and masculinity illustrate women and men as equal by rejecting the idea of one gender being more overpowering. This is noticeable especially via the posts by brands that claim values of queerness as it indicates exploring and challenging the power of dominant cultural, social, and political norms relating to sexuality but also gender identities (Marcus, 2005).

4.3.1 Alternative representations of feminine bodies

As discussed, some brands in the dataset are owned by and created for queer women (e.g. Kirrin Finch, Tomboy X, and Wildfang). These brands highlight the contemporary representations of queer femininities the most as the women pictured are dressed both stereotypically masculine and feminine or from the spectrum in between. These brands break stereotypes not only through the garments but also through composition and settings. Queer femininities have been stereotypically represented through theatricality (Dahl, 2012). However, these theatrical representations are not present in the ads by these specific brands as they claim space for gender-neutrality by portraying traditionally masculine clothing on stereotypically feminine bodies.

Considering contemporary representations of women, sexuality is at the centre of these depictions and especially the connection to lesbianism. Here the distinction is usually made between feminine femme women and masculine butch women (Hollibaugh, 2000). These simplifying representations of queerness are present in some brands studied that depict the ways the assumedly female models are represented in relation to each other. For example, some posts include wedding pictures where one of the women is wearing a white dress and another one is dressed in a suit (by Kirrin Finch specialized in suits for lesbian weddings see Figure 11). In these specific posts, it can be observed that on the altar the women are representing certain stereotypical gender norms or rather redefining them to fit their queerness. However, in essence, this is challenging the norms and especially social and institutional practices and power structures connected to the church. This fits the concept of gender performativity as the couples perform certain gendered positions outside the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1997). On the one hand, the portrayals by this brand can be considered as both challenging existing stereotypes and social and cultural norms, on the other hand, they follow stereotyping of lesbian women performing either butch or fem roles in their relationships. Notably, one of the images by the same brand shows assumed lesbians walking down the street while both are

Figure 11. Post by Kirrin Finch of a lesbian wedding

Figure 12. Two models walking down the street in a post by Kirrin Finch

wearing similar clothing mostly associated with masculinity due to its formality and seriousness (Figure 12). These clothing items in this specific post are long wool coats, suit trousers, and light-fit long-sleeve shirts. Therefore, this post can be considered to represent two 'butch' models as a couple challenging stereotypical representations of lesbian couples.

This paragraph will further delve into the representations of women 'in action' such as doing manual work, for example, gardening or doing pottery (Figure 13). These relate to the ways stereotyping has been conducted also through representations of people's occupational statuses (Deux and Lewis, 1984). These representations do not necessarily provide stereotypical femininity as the women are doing mostly physical labour that is usually associated with men and masculine bodies. Similar to Kirrn Finch, Wildfang as a brand also provides formal suit wear as well as overalls for all genders. Most of the models are assumedly women, and thus, this challenges the stereotypical representations of women restricted to stereotypically feminine fashion. Most of the clothing items worn by the women doing physical labour also illustrate this typical form of masculine seriousness, which makes them challenge stereotyping of women in dresses and portrayed as fragile or as the attention of the male gaze through nudity. Therefore, these depictions of women in work strongly challenge existing stereotypes of women in advertising.

Advertisements of lingerie for all genders in the dataset seem to transcend traditional binaries. For example, Tomboy X as a brand portrays a certain balance between stereotypically masculine and feminine garments and reclaims space for queer representation in the fashion industry. This is mostly done through the advertisements for their boxer shorts and bralettes. Boxer shorts traditionally refer to masculinity and bralettes refer to femininity (See Figure 14). In most of the ads, the items are worn together. Through this, the brand illustrates how all bodies can wear the same underwear despite their gender or bodily factors. The balance and combination of traditionally masculine and feminine

Figure 14. A model doing pottery in a post by Wildfang

Figure 13. A model posing in a bralette and boxers by Tomboy X

garments illustrate gender-neutrality through inclusivity. Additionally, the clothing items are available in all different colours from blacks and greys to the colours of the rainbow and the transgender flag. The latter highlights the brand's advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community. The portrayed models in the posts are mostly women or gender non-binary people. However, one of the ads also shows a transman wearing boxer shorts and holding a dog. His scars are visible in his chest area from a breast removal surgery. This post illustrates somewhat genuine gender-neutrality and inclusivity of the brand by representing those who are not visible in the mainstream representations in advertising and are more likely to respond to inclusive advertising messages (Morrisson & Shaffer, 2003). Similarly, the brand, Official Rebrand gives visibility to the transgender community including a known transgender female celebrity in one of their Instagram posts.

The dataset presents alternative representations of women and challenges stereotyping through depicting feminine bodies in physical labour, as well as portraying feminine bodies in traditionally masculine clothing. Since challenging the hegemonic norms greatly relates to the queer values connected to gender-neutrality, the next section examines alternative representations of bodies that traditionally have been associated with masculinity.

4.3.2 Alternative representations of masculine bodies

Alternative representations of masculinity and men incorporate traditionally feminine fashion garments. As discussed in the theoretical framework, Connell (2005) underlines alternative masculinities that are present in relation to hegemonic masculinity. The brands that include differing masculine representations mostly fall under portraying subordinate and marginalized masculinities. This is due to the way the representations consider mostly sexual and ethnic minorities that are discriminated against in patriarchal western societies. These forms of masculinities can be considered inferior to hegemonic masculinity. However, this does not take away the agency of the alternative forms of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Additionally, as Elias and Beasley (2009) argue, even though these types of masculinities are culturally marginalized it does not necessarily mean that they do not have an influence on legitimatizing men's power over women.

Figure 15. A model wearing trousers that expose the backside by Telfar

Instagram posts that portray queer masculinities that include femininity are now discussed. Notably, Telfar is the brand that portrays the most array of different representations of men. The connecting factor in these posts is the worn clothing as they expose skin. However, this is done through feminine cuts, and styling, different from the already analysed hegemonic representations of muscular men. Femininity can be considered liberating to some queer men (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). In a characteristic post, an assumed man's backside is completely exposed as the trousers are cut in a way that they have a whole on the back (Figure 15). This is usually a style that has been worn by women in clubs and music festivals due to the exposure of skin (Nieves, 2019) And therefore, it has a feminine touch to it. Additionally, the brand portrays some of the male or gender non-binary models wearing crop tops, heels, and fishnet tights. All these elements are challenging the stereotypical masculine representations and offer a feminine touch to gender neutrality. Additionally, some of the poses of the male models also represent more feminine characteristics as the models are either leaning on the floor on their side or posing with a hand on their hip. However, what makes these representations dominant and assertive looking are the models' gaze straight at the camera as well as in one of the posts the camera angle is extremely low to create an illusion of a large and powerful figure. It can be argued that these powerful and more masculine like camera angles and gaze points illustrate the balance the brand has in terms of the portrayals of masculinity and femininity. This is noticeable as the posts illustrate both antithetical characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity accordingly: dominance and submissivity. Usually, gay communities have been associated with femininity through harsh stereotyping and superficiality (Halperin, 2012). However, these posts through the balancing factors of femininity and masculinity avoid theatrical stereotyping and misogynistic reinforcement in this manner.

Figure 16. Two men showing intimacy in a post by Official Rebrand

The dataset also reveals other examples of queer femininity in clothing and composition in contrast to covering the traditionally masculine bodies in clothing associated with seriousness. When it comes to the feminine representations of assumed male models Official Rebrand and No Sesso represent it in similar ways as Telfar. For example, in one of the posts by Official Rebrand, a model is posing with legs open in white trousers having his black underwear and his upper body exposed. In another post by the brand two male models are posing seated and close to each other, the other

model has his legs crossed which can be seen as something more feminine (Figure 16). This post illustrates intimacy and vulnerability between two men which is not usual in heteronormative advertising portrayals as they cater to a larger audience used to hegemonic representations (Krane, 2001). Additionally, a post by No Sesso shows a Black male model wearing makeup and posing in a black leather blazer suit. This post can be connected to the concept of a metrosexual man who is young, urban, and assumedly heterosexual (Kaiser et al., 20017). Men falling under this category care more about their looks in terms of hairstyles and grooming. This form of masculinity allows more self-expression that traditionally has been considered as more feminine (Timke & O'Barr, 2017). Even though this post could be considered as representing marginalized masculinities, through styling it still illustrates much stereotypical masculinity through seriousness and assertiveness, and thus, it is more likely to fall under the category of metrosexuality.

Apart from the previously discussed masculine stereotyping that contains feminine erasure the representations of gender-neutrality also depict more accepting notions apart from the hegemonic norms. This section has illustrated how some of the brands embrace femininity that does not fall under stereotyping and thus they challenge existing norms and shape gender-neutrality according to inclusive values. The following section discusses the importance of acknowledging gender non-binary bodies in this analysis and how gender-neutral brands can take advantage of the queer market.

4.4 Ethnicity in gender-neutral advertisements: The persistence of the colonial gaze

In terms of ethnic representations in gender-neutral fashion ads studied, most of the brands have chosen racial inclusivity in addition to portraying different gender identities. However, these ethnic portrayals reflect existing societal power structures (Crenshaw, 1989). Therefore, some brands merely include representations of models that differ from the stereotypical Caucasian models. However, this is not the case in all of the brands.

ADER Error is the only brand that does not include models with various ethnic backgrounds other than Caucasians in their ads apart from one exception. This can be explained as the continuation of the domination of white bodies in advertising (Åkestam, 2017). The brand's use of models with white complexion can be related to the fact that they are Korean based and the beauty standards include pale skin and other Caucasian-related features (Maglente, 2021). However, these ads do not include portrayals of Asian models which further amplifies the domination of

Figure 17. Asian model posing on the back of another model in a post by Tomboy X

whiteness in these ads. In fact, only two brands portray models of clearly Asian descent, Tomboy X and Kirrin Finch. The stereotyping usually occurring in terms of Asian representations is related to portraying these models as passive and thin (Mastro & Stern, 2003). To an extent, the portrayals from these brands can be analysed as challenging these depictions. For example, the posts by Tomboy X show the models in more active roles as in one ad the model is posing on the back of another model (Figure 17), and in the second post, another Asian model is posing next to surfboards smiling which illustrates a more fun and active role related to sports. Kirrin Finch also pictures two models of Asian descent with one of them walking and another one leaning on a fence. The latter is a more passive representation but all in all, this can be considered as posing casually instead of passivity.

Most of the brands recurrently use Caucasian and Black models in their posts. This perhaps reflects the current social and political climate surrounding the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter movement due to the way that these representations have increased in ads and media in general (Hurst, 2020). Some of the brands such as Telfar, OneDNA, and No Sesso are Black-owned and this perhaps explains the ways they have chosen models for their posts. Especially noticeable is how in the dataset Telfar and NoSesso use only non-white so mostly Black people or models with mixed ethnic backgrounds. Due to stereotyping the Black body has been connected to animal-like characteristics and they have been exhibited in a sexualizing manner (Hall, 2013). Some of these depictions reproduce these types of stereotyping as the models are portrayed in ways that their skin is exposed or through poses that traditionally have had sexual connotations. This is the case in analysing the posts by Telfar as already discussed they portray gender-neutrality through stereotypically feminine characterization of their male or gender non-binary models.

The analysis shows that the representations of the Black female body reinforce certain stereotypes of exoticism and hypersexualization (e.g., No Sesso) that can be connected to the history and exploitation of Black women in freak shows where they were exhibited under the colonial gaze (Crais & Scully, 2021). This is evident specifically in two posts by No Sesso that illustrate the sexualization of Black women. The first post has already been analysed in terms of its connotations with the male gaze (sub-section 4.2.1). This objectification appearing in the post due to nudity connects to the sexual portrayal of bodies different from White. Additionally, in

Figure 18. A model posing suggestively in a post by No Sesso

another post a Black assumed female model is sitting on a chair, leaning back and posing with her legs open while a black miniskirt covers her hip area (Figure 18). This pose can be considered as sexually suggestive, and thus, relates to the continuous reinforcement in media portrayals of Black women as sexually assertive (White, 2013). However, even though it can be argued that these representations strengthen certain existing stereotypes it is essential to take into consideration that the owner of the brand and the model are people of colour and thus, they take agency over the way they are represented. Therefore, as according to Coltrane and Messino (2000), White women have been seen as a standard icon of femininity and beauty these posts assert differing representations of feminine beauty that is inclusive to bodies different from these standards. These observations consider more the portrayal of women but since this brand claims gender-neutrality, it is essential to acknowledge the ethnic implications even though they might appear more gender-specific.

Historically, non-white bodies have been deemed as different through practices of Othering (Said, 1978). However, these types of stereotypical representations are not present in the posts apart from the noted absence of different ethnicities of a particular brand, ADER Error. In general, however, and especially in terms of composition there is little to no difference in the ways models are depicted when it comes to ethnic differences. This is specifically noticeable in one of the posts by Re-Inc (Figure 19). In this setting four models, three Black or mixed and one Caucasian model are leaning onto each other. Two of them are seated on the floor while two other models are seated on a wooden bench. The way all the models are in contact with each other illustrates unity and trust in their body language. Thus, this image reclaims Othering by positioning all the models as equal and challenging the way Black bodies have been depicted as inferior to white in advertising images (Millard & Grant, 2006; Taylor & Stern, 1997).

To conclude, racial stereotyping is evident, especially through the sexualization of the Black female body which still, can be considered as a reclaiming practice and taking over spaces for Black women that have stereotypically represented White bodies as the ideal of beauty.

Figure 19. Four models of different ethnicities posing in an ad for Re-Inc

5 Conclusion

This thesis has analysed visual representational practices in advertising to address the research question "How is gender represented by gender-neutral fashion brands on Instagram?" Through visual discourse analysis, 15 brands' Instagram posts were analysed exposing the underlying meanings in their representations of gender and its connections to sexuality and ethnicity. Conducting this in-depth visual discourse analysis with an intersectional approach, allows to argue that gender-neutral fashion advertising on Instagram represents inclusivity in terms of gender but only to an extent as even though the analysed brands claim gender-neutrality, still pre-existing stereotypical gendered representations are noted recurrently in their posts. This is evidence of how gender-neutral fashion, despite its intentions, remains trapped within broader existing hegemonic representations of femininity and masculinity. These representations follow traditional characteristics assigned to masculinity and femininity that have been defined according to the two binary genders (Eisend, 2010; Gill, 2007). Some of the analysed brands' posts represent alternative notions to this. However, these representations to an extent also fall under stereotypical representations of queerness or ethnicity.

Overall, it is concluded that the brands studied attempt to make clear distinctions between people's identities in terms of gender and their bodily attributes by representing clothing for everyone. This due to the way the advertised clothing is marketed for all genders not considering the ways their bodies specific characteristics look like. This shows an overall inclusive mindset that can be identified in all of the analysed brands, in line with their official purpose to be gender-neutral. However, gender performativity is present in the analysed posts as they all represent different understandings of gender-neutrality showing that the concept is not as neutral as perhaps expected. Thus, gender-neutrality is a social construct that is not fixed: each brand offered different and often conflicting representations. For example, gender-neutral performativity can be clearly observed when it comes to the differentiation between the portrayals produced by clearly queer brands versus brands that do not explicitly highlight the intersection of sexuality with gender-neutrality. Brands such as Re-Inc, ADER Error, and OneDNA clearly illustrate a notion of feminine erasure in their understanding of gender-neutrality through portraying oversized garments while Telfar and Official Rebrand embrace more inclusive representations that include stereotypical femininity in clothing sizes as well as colour choices. Nevertheless, this study argues that gender-neutrality has its own stereotypical implications in terms of representing men's clothes as gender-neutral.

In terms of reproducing feminine stereotypes, the male gaze (Mulvey, 1989) is surprisingly present in the ways some of the assumed female models are depicted through nudity. This is noticeable in the way of portraying feminine bodies as objects and as passive through stereotypically gender-specific styling choices and poses. Some of the brands also reproduce stereotypes by depicting the models as dominant through assertive gazes at the camera but simultaneously providing other characteristics stereotypically seen as feminine.

The dataset recurrently reproduces existing stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity. This is specifically noticeable in the ways the clothing advertisements that portray men follow the characteristics of seriousness and autonomy as well as dominance (Evans & Thorton, 1991). This is illustrated especially in terms of the idealisation of muscular 'strong' bodies, clothing items such as suits, and assertive gazes at the camera that reflect hegemonic masculinity which is in line with earlier research in advertising and gender (Connell, 2005; Evans & Thorton, 1991). Additionally, when women and men are portrayed in relation to each other this notion of dominant vs. submissive is present, which has also been noted recurrently in earlier research (Umiker-Sebeok, 1981). The dataset reproduces this stereotypical conception, especially in terms of composition when the two binary genders are represented together. Even though deemed gender-neutral many of these ads represent familiar imagery of the two gender binaries already present in everyday advertising (Schoerfer & Borgeson, 2011). These ads show how gender-neutral fashion can reinforce existing stereotypes while aiming for gender-inclusive portrayals.

However, this research also illustrates how some advertisements studied challenge existing norms by offering alternative representations. The study offers evidence of how the brands that represent queerness in addition to gender, challenge the most stereotypical depictions through cross-dressing and role reversion as stereotypically feminine bodies are represented in traditionally masculine clothing and vice versa. Gay and lesbian-specific advertising has been gaining wider popularity from the 1990s onwards (Gong, 2019). The brands that have chosen these depictions represent inclusivity through queerness and acceptance allowing room for breaking cultural and societal norms through fashion. By including varying representations of masculinities and femininities the queer brands demonstrate a different understanding of gender-neutrality that is more fluid and inclusive in terms of all different gender identities. Here not only the two gender binaries are considered but all different types of expressions are celebrated.

Especially, when it comes to this notion of erasing femininity due to it being less accepted in society, brands such as Telfar embrace femininity as an essential part of gender-neutrality. This finding can be further explained by "gay window advertising" due to the way how gender-neutrality is widely linked to the LGBTQ+ community and therefore, the brands that highlight their queer activism can be considered as catering to both hetero and queer audiences. This illustrates the importance of considering different intersecting identities such as sexuality in relation to gender. It is essential to acknowledge that this analysis mainly focuses on examining portrayals of bodies that have recognizable features to the binary genders of men and women. However, many gender non-binary models are shown in the advertisements by certain brands or some brands clearly cater to this specific demographic. The stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity are used to detect these differing gender identities as they illustrate the challenging of these norms. Here it is of course important to pay attention that all gender identities in this research have been assumed. Someone

might identify themselves as gender non-binary while having characteristics that mostly illustrate one gender over the other.

As this research has an intersectional approach the analysis additionally examines portrayals of ethnicity and racial stereotyping. It is concluded that racial stereotyping to some extent is challenged by the representational practices of the brands studied, but some stereotypes are noted. It is shown how the brand No Sesso sexualizes the Black female body and this can be connected to how black women historically have been overly objectified (Crais & Scully, 2021). However, it is essential to consider who is representing and what. Thus, as the designer of the brand is a person of colour, this can be seen as a practice of reclaiming the sexual representation of Black women. Therefore, it can be seen simultaneously as a practice that challenges the existing colonial gaze in representations on non-white women (White, 2013). Additionally, different ethnicities are mostly represented as equal and practices of Othering are absent. This contradicts racial stereotyping in advertising as throughout history white bodies have been represented as ideal in fashion marketing in the West (Coltrane and Messino, 2000).

5.1 Socio-theoretical implications

This research addresses a gap in academic research regarding gender representations in fashion advertising. Since most research has examined the portrayals of the two binary genders and the fashion catered for these genders (cf. Goffman, 1976) this research has analysed gendered representations from an intersectional perspective in gender-neutral advertising. Limited existing research has been conducted on gender-neutral fashion advertising to examine potential stereotyping across genders and ethnicities. Existing literature surrounding the field of gendered stereotyping and especially related to the characteristics involved in this process focus on the two gender binaries. For example, Paoletti (2012) discusses the construction of femininity and masculinity in children's fashion. Additionally, little research exists about gender-neutral fashion advertising apart from Reilly and Barry (2020) who focus on unisex fashion and cross-dressing. However, their study does not consider advertising images. The results of this research contribute to this field of research about fashion advertising explicating further its role in reproducing gender stereotypes by providing a new lens into the representations of gender-neutral fashion.

As gender-neutral fashion is gaining wider visibility and popularity this research carries great societal relevance as well since this study problematizes the concept of gender-neutrality. The concluding findings of this study offer a critical understanding of gender-neutrality and the construction of the concept different brands aiming for inclusivity have. The stereotyping practices revealed in this study highlight how gender-neutral brands still function under hegemonic norms and therefore, also follow societal trends. As according to Hall (2013) stereotyping 'fixes' and reduces difference it can be considered that this study exposes how fashion advertisements claimed as neutral are not that far from clothing represented for the binary genders. They produce existing restricting

norms, and therefore, their revolutionary claims for neutrality should be assessed critically. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of considering intersectionality in examining gendered representations. Especially, in terms of ethnicity and sexuality as these two intersections carry a great significance in the construction of representations of gender. Some gender-neutral brands not acknowledging this intersecting association are still entering the market and profiting out of a trending movement. Thus, some of the inclusive values can be analysed as more genuine than others.

5.2 Limitations and future research

The analysis has been conducted from an intersectional perspective, however not all intersecting identities are examined as this study focuses on analysing the most predominantly visible identities having a specific interest on sexuality and ethnicity in line with existing literature (Reilly & Barry, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989). Therefore, for example, class and age are left out of the detailed discussions. Examining these intersections in the future can reveal additional stereotyping in gender-neutral fashion advertising that is shaped according to these categories. Additionally, my own positionality as a White, queer, cis-gender woman has its own limitations in analysing different gender identities and ethnicities. This because the researcher does not have the same backgrounds as those in the analysed images. However, as discussed earlier in this research the intersectional approach has been applied to minimize the implications of the researcher's background. Another limitation of this research is the assumed gender identities of the models depicted in the images, and therefore, it is highlighted that this research has analysed representations falling under stereotyped characteristics and this research does not intend to misgender individuals present in the Instagram posts but for pragmatic reasons it had to use some pre-existing definitions, with the necessary flexibility however.

For future research to have further insights into different gendered representations in gender-neutral fashion advertising more intersections should be examined in order to reveal the implications they have, for example, the already mentioned class and age. Additionally, as this study focuses on analysing the ways the chosen gender-neutral brands represent gender in their Instagram posts further research could analyse videos too because this could bring new insights that are not present in still images. In addition, the research could inspire to expand to other platforms such as TikTok which is rising in popularity and has younger users, or Facebook which has older users. Additionally, gender-neutral fashion can be explored across methodologies. For instance, different brands could be examined in a comparative manner including more data from specific brands. This would allow further understanding of the different ways in which neutrality is interpreted by each of the brands and to reach statistically representative conclusions. This research has already touched upon the brands conceptualization of gender-neutrality, however, this could be analysed in more detail through a comparative method to achieve specified quantitative results. Also, in order to achieve deeper understanding of the social implications of gender-neutral fashion advertising interviews could be conducted to examine different people's perceptions about the topic (e.g., through focus groups).

Additionally, a critical discourse analysis could be conducted to examine comments under gender-neutral brands' posts. By exploring the topic through different methodologies wider conception and awareness of stereotyping and the way it constructs gender-neutral fashion can be achieved.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table 1

Descriptions of brands

Brand	Category	Description
Telfar	High-street/Luxury	Unisex clothing line founded in 2005 in New York. The brand is sold internationally and has gained wide popularity among a variety of consumers (Walia, 2022). The brand offers an exclusive selection of clothes and accessories online, for example, jewelry, high-quality belts, and multicolor versions of its world-known Telfar shopper bag. Highlighting the brand's gender-neutrality, their slogan is "not for you, for everyone." The brand is popular among the LGBTQ+ community.
One DNA	Streetwear	Black and queer-owned company that creates clothing for everyone (One DNA, 2022). Their gender-neutral pieces break boundaries between womenswear and menswear. Their designs have appeared in known fashion magazines such as Vogue and other publications around the world. According to Highsnobiety, the brand is currently leading the unisex trend.
No Sesso	Luxury	No Sesso is Italian and stands for "no sex/no gender." The Los Angeles-based high fashion brand celebrates gender nonconformity (Seth, 2021). They aim to empower everyone, no matter their size, shape, or colour. The brand is especially known for its unique knots and patterns.
ADER Error	High-street	This South Korea-based clothing brand focuses on breaking the barriers between gender roles of masculine and feminine. The brand embraces imperfections connecting to everyday life. They portray

		a minimalistic approach to their garments appealing to the Korean Youth. However, the brand is also widely popular in the West (Seth, 2021)
Official Rebrand	Streetwear	As a brand Official Rebrand claims to be gender-free and emerging from the intersections of queerness and sustainability. The non-binary designer, MI Leggett, behind the brand chooses to intentionally challenge binary societal norms. The brand has gained wide recognition through being published in worldwide fashion magazines. The produced garments of the brand are aimed at all different body types and their silhouettes are open allowing people to cherish and embrace their bodies (Li, 2021).
Wildfang	High-street	Creates genderless clothing by proclaiming to rethink gender norms in fashion. They embrace masculinity, femininity, and everything in between. Wildfang means 'tomboy' in German. Their collections include, for example, button-up shirts without boob gaps and blazers with 'real' pockets.
Kirrin Finch	High-street	The New York-based brand provides its customers apparel inspired by menswear. Kirrin Finch aims to produce clothing for all bodies. They vocally support different projects surrounding LGBTQ+ communities and women. Their clothing styles are available for both formal and casual occasions (Walia, 2022).
Tomboy X	Streetwear	The brand redefines the word 'tomboy' by stating that anyone who expresses themselves however they want to can call themselves a tomboy. The brand is famously non-binary. They are known for providing size-inclusive undergarments, apparel, swimwear, accessories, and loungewear. Additionally, they highlight

		how most of their factories are women-owned (Walia, 2022).
Andersson Bell	Luxury	Andersson Bell offers a gender-neutral selection of clothing pieces that embrace difference. In addition to gender, their clothing is defined outside the restrictions of race and cultural background. Their garments include, for example, blazers, paneled trousers, knitwear, and tie-dye shirts alongside with neutral footwear (SSENSE, 2022).
Re-Inc	Streetwear	The goal of Re-Inc is to reimagine the status quo by creating streetwear clothing for everyone, no matter what their gender expression is. The owners of the brand identify as women but underline how their clothes are for all people across the gender spectrum. The looks range from classic feminine to clothing characterized as more masculine (Rivas, 2020).

Appendix B
Table 2

Complete sample description

Brand	Post	Date of the post
ADER ERROR	1. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVUZj5yPGFJ/	October 22, 21
	2. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVUZj5yPGFJ/	October 22, 21
	3. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVUZj5yPGFJ/	October 22, 21
	4. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVUZj5yPGFJ/	October 22, 21
	5. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVUZj5yPGFJ/	October 22, 21
	6. https://www.instagram.com/p/CWsZVLwtLnd/	November 25, 2022
	7. https://www.instagram.com/p/CWsZVLwtLnd/	November 25, 2022
	8. https://www.instagram.com/p/CWsZVLwtLnd/	November 25, 2022
	9. https://www.instagram.com/p/CXI8__fIFsk/	December 6, 2022
	10. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZOk0rIP-bB/	January 27, 2022
	11. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZOk0rIP-bB/	January 27, 2022
	12. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZOk0rIP-bB/	January 27, 2022
	13. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZQ096HM2gJ/	January 28, 2022
	14. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZQ096HM2gJ/	January 28, 2022
	15. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZQ096HM2gJ/	January 28, 2022
Andersson Bell	16. https://www.instagram.com/p/CY-sOZBrTye/	January 21, 2022
	17. https://www.instagram.com/p/CY-gXPopvMQ/	January 21, 2022
	18. https://www.instagram.com/p/CY5S98tr-q5/	January 19, 2022
	19. https://www.instagram.com/p/CY3YOFXpRF8/	January 18, 2022
	20. https://www.instagram.com/p/CY3FPdPLv7C/	January 18, 2022
	21. https://www.instagram.com/p/CY0mQ_WLLyA/	January 17, 2022
	22. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYx7ro-rZud/	January 16, 2022
	23. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYtDA8krFty/	January 14, 2022
	24. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYql5XKJyXM/	January 13, 2022
	25. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYlX2S_L4pS/	January 11, 2022
	26. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYipzBJLc8P/	January 10, 2022
	27. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYghyfMJgBg/	January 9, 2022
	28. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVzU3L6pZ8-/	November 3, 2021
	29. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVpLpjxJBcN/	October 30, 2021
	30. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVhkw4gphdP/	October 27, 2021
	31. https://www.instagram.com/p/CbGItC9vwJc/	March 14, 2022
Kirrin Finch	32. https://www.instagram.com/p/CasXb-yF0_Y/	March 4, 2022
	33. https://www.instagram.com/p/CaSMs7MM-l_/	February 22, 2022
	34. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVN2e7zFjlk/	October 19, 2021
	35. https://www.instagram.com/p/CViGZTVF2uw/	October 27, 2022
	36. https://www.instagram.com/p/CWTnC9UFfX7/	November 15, 2021
	37. https://www.instagram.com/p/CXg9xiVlCvj/	December 15, 2021
	38. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYrbIENFdgv/	January 13, 2022
	39. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYwZ0yCFB1q/	January 15, 2022

	40.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CZCVlmku07o/	January 22, 2022
	41.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CZFQMMol2N2/	January 23, 2022
	42.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CZZ3E4VFqhx/	January 31, 2022
	43.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CZewmpHu0ty/	February 2, 2022
	44.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CZuDfCylJ1e/	February 8, 2022
	45.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CZ9ump_FKTl/	February 14, 2022
No Sesso	46.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CTUsuvpFSrE/	September 2, 2021
	47.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CYVfjl3LoIY/	January 5, 2022
	48.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CYVmQF5rvnE/	January 5, 2022
	49.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CYdAX1BLl7r/	January 8, 2022
	50.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CZzx5g8vt1s/	February 10, 2022
	51.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CaYFcwsviPg/	February 25, 2022
	52.	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cap4POzPwUF/	March 3, 2022
	53.	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cap8hLlvRRq/	March 3, 2022
	54.	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cbf8hMjPFzS/	March 29, 2022
	55.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbgC6CnvhtM/	March 24, 2022
	56.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbgDeyqPAkg/	March 24, 2022
	57.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbgFaOJP5YS/	March 24, 2022
	58.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CXxBlDqputU/	December 22, 2021
	59.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CXxBcOnJMaQ/	December 22, 2021
	60.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CTyDZhots7Z/	September 14, 2021
Official	61.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CSrddvjLGcC/	September 6, 2021
Rebrand	62.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CTkPwDBLgRl/	September 8, 2021
	63.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CTr4fzKL4ll/	September 11, 2021
	64.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CYcOrNiFprK/	January 7, 2022
	65.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CUp68NwFt_i/	October 5, 2021
	66.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CUu0V3Lr4XU/	October 7, 2021
	67.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CVVZopKLnR_/	October 22, 2021
	68.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CVbUOUKF_Q4/	October 25, 2021
	69.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CXMCOdtlyy2/	December 7, 2021
	70.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CXEfmLSlJh8/	December 4, 2021
	71.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CXT-S-Wli9H/	December 10, 2021
	72.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CYFUcscFq_9/	December 30, 2021
	73.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CYRsoGfFdnn/	January 3, 2021
	74.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CYwfxxjLnsv/	January 15, 2021
	75.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CYkLq0rlADk/	January 10, 2021
One DNA	76.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNVd1aNgjoh/	April 6, 2021
	77.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CNSumuZg9Wr/	April 5, 2021
	78.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CR7KGjONJoG/	July 29, 2021
	79.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CSKF2ZgAwt6/	August 4, 2021
	80.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CVn5R_cvmGz/	October 29, 2021
	81.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CXR7OCYA-oy/	December 10, 2021
	82.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CXoXWQiATE8/	December 18, 2021,
	83.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CX3yAPBgcX6/	December 24, 2021
	84.	https://www.instagram.com/p/CYZh_Cau1PH/	January 6, 2022

	85. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYpPwPfOykP/	January 12, 2022
	86. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZVQ8PXgxeS/	January 30, 2022
	87. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZVQ8PXgxeS/	January 31, 2022
	88. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZZu6FZuk8m/	January 31, 2022
	89. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZ9jqMDuwN2/	February 13, 2022
	90. https://www.instagram.com/p/CaIKzqpuREV/	February 18, 2022
Re-Inc	91. https://www.instagram.com/p/CaTWEa6OFLH/	February 22, 2022
	92. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYJpFHesnL9/	December 31, 2021
	93. https://www.instagram.com/p/CW0tIxZssbn/	November 28, 2022
	94. https://www.instagram.com/p/CWeNlWUFf5i/	November 19, 2021
	95. https://www.instagram.com/p/CWbZG5ZM96z/	November 18, 2021
	96. https://www.instagram.com/p/CWLuY6asagG/	November 9, 2021
	97. https://www.instagram.com/p/CTH35KCto9J/	August 28, 2021
	98. https://www.instagram.com/p/CSxSLtWl1dg/	August 19, 2021
	99. https://www.instagram.com/p/CSaly4XL4WS/	August 11, 2021
	100. https://www.instagram.com/p/CSSDG7QJMLE/	August 7, 2021
	101. https://www.instagram.com/p/CSMvV_fjokg/	August 5, 2021
	102. https://www.instagram.com/p/CSIiZYHAinq/	August 4, 2021
	103. https://www.instagram.com/p/CSFFEv6jkEd/	August 2, 2021
	104. https://www.instagram.com/p/CRj7wTGroHe/	July 20, 2021
	105. https://www.instagram.com/p/CQuaUI_rjAg/	June 30, 2021
Telfar	106. https://www.instagram.com/p/CWlm-c_FZ8M/	November 11, 2021
	107. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVseKrYFQ2I/	October 31, 2021
	108. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVseKrYFQ2I/	October 31, 2021
	109. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVseKrYFQ2I/	October 31, 2021
	110. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVnnIhElZ-8/	October 29, 2021
	111. https://www.instagram.com/p/CU-D5sZlbIz/	October 13, 2021
	112. https://www.instagram.com/p/CRJ82RfFwnV/	July 10, 2021
	113. https://www.instagram.com/p/CQ_j9mjFMRk/	July 6, 2021
	114. https://www.instagram.com/p/CR_iClMLpjh/	July 31, 2021
	115. https://www.instagram.com/p/COgnqKjlmef/	May 6, 2021
	116. https://www.instagram.com/p/CMhhU__lAdE/	March 17, 2021
	117. https://www.instagram.com/p/CVA64LUF59c/	October 14, 2021
	118. https://www.instagram.com/p/CViUF__FxfJ/	October 27, 2021
	119. https://www.instagram.com/p/CbnBAPDOwv7/	March 27, 2022
	120. https://www.instagram.com/p/CV8Lr3el-6b/	November 6, 2021
Tomboy X	121. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYenavHsZ6x/	January 8, 2022
	122. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYSK8AfsNBq/	January 4, 2022
	123. https://www.instagram.com/p/CX19CJtlj3k/	December 24, 2021
	124. https://www.instagram.com/p/CXUKOBBM1a7/	December 10, 2021
	125. https://www.instagram.com/p/CXCIlIhMd-x/	December 3, 2021
	126. https://www.instagram.com/p/CP9QMIPDABE/	June 11, 2021
	127. https://www.instagram.com/p/CMvK7_2FcXA/	March 23, 2021
	128. https://www.instagram.com/p/COL9KaUjeYG/	April 28, 2021
	129. https://www.instagram.com/p/CPlbkKLj8S0/	June 1, 2021

	130. https://www.instagram.com/p/CPoox83jruF/	June 3, 2021
	131. https://www.instagram.com/p/CV3JUnEvGtU/	November 4, 2021
	132. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYFPciIFqGH/	December 29, 2021
	133. https://www.instagram.com/p/CXwluyblZ-h/	December 21, 2021
	134. https://www.instagram.com/p/CY2OECys6gu/	January 18, 2022
	135. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYKO36iOgWq/	October, 31, 2021
Wildfang	136. https://www.instagram.com/p/CaIqd3lLxbq/	February 19, 2022
	137. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZ70_axrZ_A/	February 14, 2022
	138. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZVQbveLItz/	January 30, 2022
	139. https://www.instagram.com/p/CSMmCKarORA/	August 5, 2021
	140. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZHgv2ark7d/	January 24, 2022
	141. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZHgv2ark7d/	January 24, 2022
	142. https://www.instagram.com/p/CZHgv2ark7d/	January 24, 2022
	143. https://www.instagram.com/p/CY2iqEdLUOL/	January 18, 2022
	144. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYkTbv3LIcX/	January 11, 2022
	145. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYKvDx4LBc9/	January 1, 2022
	146. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYH2pv7l36N/	December 30, 2021
	147. https://www.instagram.com/p/CYAGrSErtw3/	December 27, 2021
	148. https://www.instagram.com/p/CXCYBluLh1N/	December 4, 2021
	149. https://www.instagram.com/p/CW4PaejLofQ/	November 30, 2021
	150. https://www.instagram.com/wearewildfang/	November 18, 2021

Appendix C
Pilot study examples: VDA tool tables

Table 3

Re-Inc post December 31, 2021

Tool	Denotation	Connotation
General (the image as a whole)	Three models posing in a studio setting close to each other	Chill, calm
Objects (every object in the picture)	Three models cantered in the image, man surrounded by two women	Assertive male, submissive women, steoreotypical
	Yellow/Green/Light blue jogger + hoodie sets	Joy or sun/Earth/Sky
	3 diff. sneaker shoes	Neutral
Setting (background information)	White simple background	Highlights models and products
Salience (what calls your attention in terms of colour, tone, foregrounding, size, focus, overlapping, cultural symbols)	The darkest colour is worn by the male who is posing in the centre	Illustrates steoreotypical portrayal of male dominance as the male is wearing the darker colour and positioned in the centre → ladies' man dynamic
	Different ethnicities but no caucasian	Inclusivity

Table 4

Re-Inc post November 28, 2021

Tool	Denotation	Connotation
General (the image as a whole)	Two women wearing loose fit clothes leaning on each other's upper backs	Chill
Objects (every object in the picture)	Two female models	Union
	Yellow/ Light blue jogger + hoodie sets	Neutral (masc. fit)
	2 diff. sneaker shoes	Neutral
Setting (background information)	White and simple	Highlights models and products!
Salience (what calls your attention in terms of colour, tone, foregrounding, size, focus, overlapping, cultural symbols)	Both models gaze at the camera	Empowerment
	Model wearing bright yellow is smiling while the other model is serious	Contrast
	Different ethnicities no white	Inclusivity

Table 5

Re-Inc post November 9, 2021

Tool	Denotation	Connotation
General (the image as a whole)	Three (assumed) female models posing on the floor leaning on each other, mostly smiling	Chill/relaxed clothing ad
Objects (every object in the picture)	3x sweatshirt + pants set (light blue, yellow/orange, grey)	Neutral (masc./oversized fit)
	2x beanies (light blue, dark blue)	Neutral
	White sneaker	Neutral
Setting (background information)	White floor	Highlighting models and clothing, especially the yellow/orange is saturated
Salience (what calls your attention in terms of colour, tone, foregrounding, size, focus, overlapping, cultural symbols)	The way the three BIPOC models are centered in the picture and leaning on each other	Inclusion/diversity and empowerment
	Smiles	Overall happiness