An Investigation into Male Adoption of Androgynous Fashion

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A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Commerce in Marketing

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2023

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Abstract

Androgynous fashion is a growing trend as we see more and more adopters such as celebrities, influencers, and everyday people, especially men following the trend. This is also reflected in the high-end fashion market and runways of luxury fashion houses (Madsen, 2022). A review of the literature related to androgynous fashion, fashion theory, gender roles in marketing and men's fashion adoption shows several gaps. The current literature provides many theories for how fashion diffuses and is adopted (Sproles, 1974) and the influence of celebrity culture and fashion influencers on fashion trends (Nouri, 2018). However, there is no conclusive literature that can explain the phenomena that is occurring with male adoption of androgynous fashion. This study explores the male androgynous fashion phenomenon within the New Zealand context. To tackle this research a qualitative exploratory study with twelve semi-structured interviews was used to bridge this gap in the literature. This research follows an interpretivist paradigm using inductive reasoning to allow the themes to emerge from the data set and was analysed with thematic analysis. From the analysis several models were proposed to illustrate the phenomena of male androgynous fashion adoption.

The findings indicate male adopters have a distinct desire for self-expression through their fashion. The findings also indicate that there are other factors outside of the participant's self-expression which have had an indirect effect on their adoption of androgynous fashion. These consist of changing social values, celebrity, and pop culture influences. The study raises several theoretical and managerial implications relating to male adoption of androgynous fashion. This thesis contributes to the literature on androgyny, risk mitigation when adopting androgynous fashion, and proposes a male androgynous fashion adoption model that captures various elements of the phenomenon.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and say thank you to my supervisors. Firstly, Sussie Morrish thank you for all your help, guidance, and expertise throughout the master's course. You went above and beyond supportive when things went wrong and helped me to become grounded again. You have encouraged me to keep going and focus on the next task from the beginning. I valued our conversations and laughs we have had which helped me decompress at times. I truly cannot thank you enough!

I would also like to thank Lucie Ozanne, your advice, expertise, and support has been invaluable. You have given me confidence when I started to question things, but your guidance would renew my outlook and help me stay on track. You both have inspired me with your passion for what you do, how you teach, and professionalism have been aspirational.

I want to give thanks to my family for your love and encouragement throughout my university career. Especially to my mother, without your support and belief in me I would not have made it this far. To my father, thank you for instilling in me the attitude to never give up and to apply my skills and capabilities in everything I do. Thank you both immensely.

Also, I would like to thank my colleagues, Siobhan and Sukie for your understanding and care during the last few years. You both have supported me and given me the time to focus on my studies and I do not take that for granted.

To my friends, thank you for the support, bringing joy, love, and laughter into my life. The friendships made over these years have kept me going and reminded me to have fun and enjoy the memories we have made together.

Finally, to JP you have been my rock and helped me get through some of the toughest parts of my life. There are simply not enough words to say how much I appreciate our friendship. You inspire me to believe in myself and live authentically, thank you so much.

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Problem orientation

Androgyny and androgynous fashion have occurred at numerous points in history (Chen, 2011) as well as forming a part of many cultures. The androgynous concepts have changed over the years and had a recent renaissance. Examples of this resurgence can be seen during the women's liberation movement when Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) introduced the women's pantsuit which has now become a staple of the women's closet but at the time was extremely controversial (Aghagyulyan, 2021). However, today we are now seeing males adopting more feminine attire. This can be seen through multiple levels of society for instance within celebrity culture. An example of this can be seen from the headline "Timothée Chalamet Borrowed His Oscars Look From the Womenswear Runways" (Allaire, 2022). More examples include celebrities such as Billy Porter and Jaden Smith (Pollard, 2019).

However, it's not just celebrities it is also designers who are re-interpreting menswear through a feminine lens as seen by Dior during their Autumn/Winter menswear 2022 collection which featured re-interpretations of the Dior women's bar jacket, wrap dress and Lady Dior dress but in the menswear context (Madsen, 2022). Vivienne Westwood was ridiculed in an interview for her designs in a 1998 interview, one comment in particular which mocked her for her menswear collection featuring a pearl necklace for men (Wynne, 2022). Ironically however, she had in fact successfully predicted that menswear would feature pearl sets as seen now on celebrities like Harry Styles (Wynne, 2022).

There has also been a rise within the fashion realm of the genderless or gender fluid fashion shows, no longer are the men's and women's fashion segregated but instead the growing trend is to showcase more gender diverse fashion shows (Mollard, 2022). The speculation here is that this is due to the younger generations of millennials and those from Gen Z who have more fluid beliefs on gender are weakening the chokehold that the gender binary has had on the fashion world. This is despite androgynous and gender fluid presentations being present within society for substantial periods of time (Mollard, 2022). Not only through celebrities and designers are we seeing further

adoption of feminine attire, but this has now trickled into the streetwear fashion of the everyday male (Singh, 2023). It is evident that there are frequent and numerous cases of this adoption occurring within society however there is no clear explanation in the literature of why this is happening.

It is important to understand why this trend is happening because the male fashion market is a growing industry with the global men's fashion market predicted to grow by 153.87 billion US dollars between 2020 to 2024 (Maida, 2020). As a marketer it is important to understand what is happening within the industry to be able to better serve this new segment of consumers. As marketers it is important to understand how androgynous imagery and brand can affect the overall perception of the brand as well as understanding the effect that this will have when trying to attract customers to your brand (Cowart & Wagner, 2021). Due to rapidly shifting political and legal landscapes it is important to understand how this may affect people's ability and willingness to adopt different fashion styles. The example being the changes within the legislation that once forbid the impersonation of females that originally prevented men from adopting traditionally female attire (News Desk, 2015). Now that there are more extreme adoptions of androgynous fashion researchers and marketers need to pay attention to the phenomena and rapidly changing fashion landscape.

1.2 Research objectives

Current literature has not kept up with the latest developments in men's fashion, and this thesis looks to bridge some of the gaps in the literature. The current literature has investigated the male adoption of the Scottish kilt although the findings of the study point to a felt sense of cultural obligation (Aghagyulyan, 2021). However the qualitative study from Aghagyulyan (2021) is not able to explain why males are adopting androgynous fashion on a wide scale.

An interesting study from Hemetsberger and Weinberger (2012) looked at the male adoption of the handbag which has been traditionally viewed as a feminine accessory. However, the adoption has now surpassed just accessories and is widespread through celebrity and pop culture, mainstream and designers. Some other areas that literature has explored with relation to androgynous concepts is through gender presentation in marketing, more recently some brands

such as ACNE Studios a Swedish luxury brand have found a strategic position through their androgynous marketing, branding and product development (Sanz Alvarez, 2019). However, this may only indicate or support the claim that there is a market for androgynous fashion products, but this alone is not sufficient for describing why people choose to adopt androgynous fashion.

This thesis seeks to capture a snapshot in time of the current male adoption of androgynous fashion and explain why males are adopting as well as their opinions and experiences when choosing to adopt androgynous fashion. How this thesis may contribute to the literature through developing models which illustrates the following. The first is a model that describes the types of androgynous fashion in terms of male, female, hyper, and subtle which are the axis which androgynous looks could be measured. The second model looks at the influences of adoption on today's males which takes into the various influencing factors from macro to micro influences on the participant. Finally, the discussion chapter ends with the proposed model that describes the over-arching reasons for why males adopt androgynous fashion.

The practical and managerial implications of this research have the potential to impact marketing managers when they are segmenting their target markets. There is a market for gender bending fashion and within the New Zealand context the availability of such items is not easily accessible despite the growing trends and demand. Hence the findings of this research may help manufacturers and suppliers make decisions when looking to manufacture and import into New Zealand. This thesis also provides further research areas within the topics of male fashion adoption and androgynous fashion which can be further explored to bridge more gaps within the literature.

1.3 Thesis overview

This thesis is broken down into five chapters. The first chapter provides background to the research and introduces the research questions that this thesis strives to answer. Chapter two looks at what the current literature has to say on androgyny and androgynous fashion, gender expressions through fashion as well as gender in marketing, celebrity culture and the adoption process. The third chapter discusses the methodology used in the research to answer the research objectives. The methods chapter also discusses the choices of the research approach and why they are suitable for this thesis, as well as further describing the method, interview process, participant selection

and data analysis. Finally, this chapter ends with the techniques used to ensure rigour with the method, and the ethical considerations given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic. Chapter four details the findings and uncovers the common themes brought forth from the data. Finally, chapter five discusses the findings and provides three different models that help to illustrate the phenomena and answer the research questions. This chapter ends with conclusions, limitations and future research directions.

Chapter Two – Literature review

2.1 Androgyny Concepts

      To begin this literature review it is important to understand the concept at the heart of this thesis which is Androgyny. By looking at the definitions from Hearn and Hein, (2015) we make some sense of the phenomena that is occurring with males adopting more classically female clothing. The mixing of male and female clothing manifests a level of androgyny (Hearn & Hein, 2015). The following sections look to describe what is currently in the literature in order to provide a working definition for androgyny to be used in the thesis.

2.1.1 Androgyny

      Androgyny has been defined in some literature as an ambiguity of masculine and feminine gender presentation (Reichert & Lambiase, 2013, P. 321). Interpreting this definition from Reichert and Lambiase, (2013, P. 321) this means that the gender presentation of a particular individual is not definable as one end of the gender binary, male or female, but still falls within a grey area on the gender spectrum. Androgyny as a concept is significant to further explore because it is and has been ingrained within societal subcultures throughout periods of history (Marcangeli, 2015). Bazin and Freeman, (1974) comment how the androgynous concept needs to be re-explored considering the historical developments at the time liberation movements being of note. The article supports the idea of androgyny as a combination of male and female experiences and that society is trending towards a unique androgyny, in terms of equally shared male and female experience by all members of society regardless of their gender assigned at birth (Bazin & Freeman, 1974). This is what Bazin and Freeman, (1974) call "the androgynous vision." In their final remarks they comment on the importance of the individual motives and the change within society that has the potential for the androgynous vision to come to fruition. Bem (1974) argued that the combination of masculine and feminine traits represented a psychological androgyny. This androgynous idea poses a challenging view on the idea of binary gender, instead gender is a social construct that is fluid and not fixed in a binary (Hearn & Hein, 2015). Androgyny has been explored in a variety of other contexts, such as advertising, explored in the article by Cowart and Wagner (2021), androgynous leadership (Blake-Beard et al., 2020), green consumption (Phillips & Englis, 2022), and in the androgynous fashion context (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2023). So the definition of androgyny

that will be used in this thesis is the expression of an ambiguous gender that blurs the binaristic boundaries of male and female (Reichert & Lambiase, 2013).

2.1.2 Androgynous fashion

This section takes the concepts of mixing male and female gender presentation tropes and looks at how they manifest through fashion. When discussing gender bending or androgynous fashion there are some subtle distinctions that can be made. On one hand, unisex fashion seeks to remove the binary of male and female, while androgynous fashion combines aspects of the two (Arvanitidou & Gasouka, 2013). Both fashion styles distort the ideas of classical dichotomous gender binary. These examples show the diversity of gender expression and the integration with fashion. For instance fashion has been used to eroticise women's bodies, accentuating the bust and hips, which Marcangeli (2015) describes as the Women's erotic zones whilst the men's erotic zones were the legs. This is an early example of the gender binary being expressed through fashion. However, Marcangeli (2015) also points to the concept of gender borrowing as exemplified by the painting of King Louis XIV wearing frills and bows and a lady wearing masculine riding attire in a French fashion journal. This idea of gender borrowing can be seen later in the article where it is stated that Gabrielle Chanel styled herself like a boy (Marcangeli, 2015). When considering androgyny as the mixing of masculine and feminine tropes Marcangeli (2015) concept of gender borrowing can then be classified as a form of androgynous fashion. An issue when trying to define gender is the persistence of dichotomies (Hearn & Hein, 2015). Zosuls and colleagues (2011) pointed to an increase in the amount of gender research that suggests that men and women are not bipolar opposites, but they have aspects of both masculine and feminine traits.

Crepax (2016) is one of the more recent researchers examining androgynous fashion. In their second study they look at images of androgynous fashion and evaluate them through the lens of masculine and feminine ideals. They raise important issues with androgynous fashion, while there are mixed gendered themes within a look there is often an overarching feminine or masculine ideal that supports notions of classical heteronormative gender roles. Notably this was with more conservative affluent fashion styles. There also exists another subculture of androgyny which is the "punk" aesthetic (Crepax, 2016). This aesthetic is perhaps an even more pure form of

androgyny as not only are the classical gender roles blurred aesthetically but the rebellious nature breaks the confining social structures as attitudes are ingrained further into the aesthetic. The punk aesthetic not only disrupts the confines of gender but it is a departure from all social classist systems (Crepax, 2016). One of the limitations of previous definitions of androgynous fashion is the posturing of the body when describing androgynous fashion and how that in itself will affect the overall perception of an androgynous look.

The current literature on androgynous fashion expresses the mixing and swapping of masculine and feminine clothing but what the literature does not tell us is how more diverse gender orientations fit into this definition of androgyny. It also does not currently tell us how the gendered body affects the presentation of androgynous fashion. In some regards androgynous fashion has been summed up as if a male adopts classical female clothing, then this is androgyny.

Based on the concepts of gender borrowing and the definition of androgynous fashion from(Marcangeli, 2015; Hearn & Hein, 2015) the working definition of Androgynous fashion used in this thesis is as follows: Androgynous fashion is the mixing of both traditional feminine and traditional masculine fashion items and accessories. It is important to note that the person's posturing may affect the perception of an androgynous look however, this does not affect the working definition of androgynous fashion because it is only referring to the actual clothing or accessories.

2.2 Cultural Context

Now that there is a working definition for androgyny the following literature review highlights the importance of the cultural context in which gender and fashion are enacted. Cowart and Wagner (2021) stress the importance of understanding the socio-political sphere should androgynous advertising be designed for mass exposure. Having an understanding of the shifting social-political landscape is vital in assisting marketers to predict the wider reception of their campaign. As exemplified in the article from Saha et al. (2021) where they have several examples of how gender neutrality (type of androgyny) within fashion is at the core of abolishing gender discrimination within Indian society. Also illustrated within this article is how in postmodern western culture the androgynous aesthetic is becoming more widely accepted (Saha et al., 2021).

An and Lee, (2015) discuss how the cultural background is significant when deciding to adopt fashion. Countries like South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong have stronger collective ideals versus countries like Australia, USA, and Canada have stronger individualism ideals (An & Lee, 2015). These different ideas are important to understand when talking about cultural context as collectivism focuses on the individuals desire to fit in within society while individualism focusses on the individuals desire to be independent from the pack and express their freedom of thought (An & Lee, 2015).

For the purposes of this thesis androgynous fashion will be viewed from the western perspective of fashion. Western fashion has served the purpose of distinguishing social class (Belfanti, 2009), the term fashion itself also implies some element of western influence, given the definition "thus fashion is modern, western, meaningful and communicative bodily adornment" (Marzel & Stiebel, 2017). The views of western and eastern fashion have often been reduced to modern versus traditional respectively. However, Jackson et al. (2007) debates that this modern versus traditional binary is antiquated and that modernity exists in both western and eastern fashion. To summarise, the western view for the purposes of this research is fashion that seeks to 'other' itself for the purposes of signalling social status as well as being a communicative bodily adornment. There is also the focus on the individualistic goals with the western perspective which relate to the independence of thought and fashion expression.

The New Zealand context of fashion is often influenced by western European fashion, as Molloy (2004) describes in their research how the most successful New Zealand fashion shows between 1997 to 2001 used iconic European motifs as the inspiration. The fashion sector within New Zealand has declined over the past few years, not many New Zealand clothes are being worn overseas and if they are, they are mostly by Australians (Catherall, 2021). There is currently little research that looks at male identity construction and how clothing plays into that identity (McNeill & McKay, 2016). And when considering the New Zealand males they have been described as overtly masculine which are a result of the ingrained cultural ideologies from rugby and farming backgrounds (McNeill & McKay, 2016). Hence this growing trend of androgyny runs in

opposition to these masculine identity tropes and calls for further research into why it is fashionable to adopt more androgynous styles in male fashion in recent years.

Research within the western perspective on fashion tells us that this fashion is a method of communicating one's social class however the phenomenon is occurring through a multitude of social class systems to varying degrees of adoption. The New Zealand context also raises more questions as to why this phenomenon is occurring within the context when the literature points to an overtly masculine fashion presentation and therefore does not confirm why the culture in New Zealand men's fashion has shifted. This leads to the gap within the literature where the suggested social context should not allow for the phenomena which is occurring despite this. It requires further investigation to explore why males are adopting androgynous fashion.

2.3 Role of Gender in Marketing

A common gender signifier in marketing is the use of specific colour palettes that are gender coded. Pink has been a significant colour when used in the marketing of girls' clothing and toys (Auster & Mansbach, 2012). Contrarily Auster and Mansbach (2012) also mention that in 1918 a ladies home journal came up with the generalised rule that pink was for boys and blue for girls which subsequently influenced American department stores to promote boys clothing in pink. This instance of gendered marketing is an example of how colour has been previously used to signify a consumer's gender as well as noting a change in the coded meaning of said colours, indicating how fashion changes and evolves. Not only has marketing used colour to code gender, but colour has also been used to code behaviour. There is another gender coded implication in marketing, when marketing portrays the inherent masculine and feminine behavioural traits that the messaging would suggest are desirable for example males are masculine and therefore should be muscular versus females are feminine and should then be thin (Tylka & Calogero, 2010). These are examples of how gendered marketing has influenced consumer behaviour and societal values for what traits are desirable to be a man or woman.

Previously beauty regimens were traditionally aimed exclusively at women (Del Rosso, 2017). However, Kraft and Weber (2012) note there has been an increase in the number of men electing to get cosmetic surgeries and beauty treatments such as hair removal. These are often

initiated by a significant female figure but provide an opportunity for marketers to think further than the dyadic binary of gender when considering their target audience. Van Tilburg et al. (2015) also show the trickle effect of gender in marketing, flowing into the products themselves taking on masculine or feminine traits. This can be successful for marketers when the societal expectations to behave in accordance with social values is part of the consumption criteria. However, this can also create challenges for marketers as not all consumers identify with a gendered marketing approach. Neale et al. (2016) finds that males often reject products that are feminine gendered, however it is inconclusive if androgynous and gender diverse consumers experience dysphoria with both products. Or if like the female respondents they are somewhat comfortable using male gendered products. The research from Neale et al. (2016) may need to be updated as we are finding within the fashion industry that men are now consuming products that have been coded as feminine such as pearl necklaces and designer bags (Hemetsberger & Weinberger, 2012). This somewhat contradicts the research from Neale et al. (2016) and provides an opportunity for further research.

Zawisa (2019) conducted a study of 500 print media advertisements and described how the models were portrayed in terms of their poses. The study found that women models were portrayed in ways that were perceived as submissive and vulnerable. While on the other hand men were portrayed as confident and intimidating. This study was conducted in the 1970's however since the 2000's more research has been published that shows that these gender stereotypes are still being perpetuated in advertising. Zawisa (2019) describes this as a "cultural lag" considering that the women's liberation movement was in full effect during the 1970s (Steele, 1997). This does support Zawisa's (2019) idea of cultural lag in marketing. However, further research into this phenomenon in a contemporary context would be insightful as with the speed of media in the 21st century and a collective consumer voice may show a cultural shift in the way women and men are portrayed in advertising. Further research into how women and men are portrayed in contemporary advertising may be reflective of social movements that seek to re-examine issues of the past.

Holt and Thompson (2004) also discuss the idea of the masculine man-of-action hero from the American male perspective and look at how they pursue the idea of heroic masculinity through their everyday consumption. This is an interesting article because it shows almost an extreme side of masculine ideals and perspective on how some American men have gravitated towards them.

This is when men feel they are emasculated by being the 'breadwinner' of the family. These masculine ideals have been perpetuated through media messaging as Holt and Thompson, (2004) describe the glorification of the western cowboy through western literature and film. These glorified 'fictional' men exemplify the classical masculine ideals and is another example of the societal influence on gender expectations. From the literature, it is clear that a common problem in gendered research is that the terms gender and sex are used interchangeably hence, it is a challenge to attempt to untangle these terms. In an attempt to detangle gender or break the construct, fashion can provide an artistic medium for self-expression (Tong, 1989).

From the literature it is evident that previous marketing efforts have sought to further cement a gender binary and perpetuate traditional, and in some cases, misogynistic gender roles. However, while binary marketing still exists, growing with the androgynous trend is also the androgynous marketing approach which is covered in the following section.

2.3.1 Androgynous marketing

Flowing from what the literature says about traditional binaristic gendered marketing, androgynous marketing appears to be becoming more pervasive in gendered fashion marketing (Cowart & Wagner, 2021). Androgynous marketing is described as ambiguous by Cowart and Wagner, (2021) where the gendered messaging expressed in a campaign does not fall within the traditional gender binary. Cowart and Wagner (2021) go further when describing how featuring androgynous models and styles in a marketing campaign can be advantageous to the firm as the ambiguity of the model can appeal to the mainstream as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community. This creates a unique middle ground of advertising engaging larger and smaller market segments.

Interestingly from Cowart and Wagner, (2021)they found that using androgynous models may support the conveying of luxury and extravagance. However, when applying this to non-luxury brands the opposite effect may occur (Cowart & Wagner, 2021). Relating to brand positioning, Clark (1991) in their article highlights how the gender ambiguity within a marketing campaign has a unique strategic position where the interpretation is placed solely on the consumer

and thus the intent of the firm also becomes ambiguous. In other terms this can provide access to more profitable market segments within the fashion industry due to the firm's choice to remain neutrally ambiguous (Clark, 1991). Sanz Alvarez (2019) conducted a case analysis of the brand ACNE Studios, within their research they discussed how ACNE Studios uses combinations of traditional gendered construction techniques that do not always match the gender of the intended wearer. The examples they used was the male or female cuff stitching and removal of "darts" that traditionally accentuated the woman's bust; as well as colour choices that allowed for more neutral presentation also known as colour sharing (Sanz Alvarez, 2019). This shows how the fashion house ACNE Studios, from a product point of view are adapting to cater towards numerous gender presentations through gender neutrality or the blurring of gender tropes within their designs. This is further supported within the article by the brands global social media manager who commented that,

"We focus more on the product than on the person that would wear it" - (Sanz Alvarez, 2019).

This research is one example of how at both the design and marketing levels the movements towards gender neutrality are impacting both of these industries. Acne Studios has invested in their brand equity to reflect these modern gender bending values through not just the design process but through their marketing efforts as well (Sanz Alvarez, 2019). Here we can see the statement from (Clark, 1991) playing out with the case study from Sanz Alvarez (2019). Where the strategic goals of the firm have been supported through their androgynous approach to design and marketing. While some brands have turned androgynous fashion into a strategic capability this alone does not support the rational for the male adoption of androgynous fashion. Further research is required to invest the impact that androgynous marketing has on males when choosing to adopt androgynous fashion.

2.5 Fashion Concepts

The following section gets closer to the adopters of androgynous fashion by looking at what the literature provides on gendered fashion theories.

2.3.1 Fashion theory

Sproles, (1974) states that fashion is both an object and a behaviour. Sproles (1974) also goes on to describe rules for defining fashion items. One of these rules is that current fashion is defined by collective public tastes. This is not only reflective of the changing fashion trends but also alongside the gender roles in society. This supports the previous notions that gender expectations formed as part of society and culture influence the way people dress.

As previously mentioned, fashion is an object and a process (Sproles, 1974). From the classical fashion theory view, the upper class create a fashion trend. Subsequently, this is then picked up by the lower class and then the upper class will promptly stop adopting the trend and will move onto the next trend and so-on. From the classical view, Sproles (1974) describes the fashion diffusion process. This is a social mechanism and is described as having the following steps: adoption leadership by "consumer fashion change agents", social visibility stage, conformity across social systems, market and social and social saturation and finally the decline and obsolescence stage forced by emerging new fashion alternatives.

This shows how ingrained fashion is with society, in a semi-symbiotic relationship where fashion culture and societal expectation/acceptance perpetuate each other. However, it is dependent on how much adoption of the fashion phenomenon by social agents occurs and whether the trend sticks. This is also slightly countered by West et al. (2021) who acknowledged the occurrence of fashion trends from a top down approach starting from fashion houses at the high end and then trickling down into mainstream. To build off of the concept from West et al. (2021) this implies that the creative directors of high end fashion houses have a key role to play within the fashion adoption framework as innovators of new fashion trends. This is important to this research, given the increase in fashion houses that feature gender diverse fashion (Stolerman, 2022).

There are several authors who in their research have identified terminology to describe several different influences on changing fashion. Ahmed et al. (2018) use the term social agents to describe individuals who are influencers in the purchase decision of fashion within the Muslim community. A similar term is used by other authors. For instance, fashion change agents was used

by Workman and Kidd, (2000) and consumer fashion change agents from Sproles (1974). Social agents encompass those who are knowledgeable with the given context and are able to communicate to other agents, and those that are not (Ahmed et al., 2018). Fashion change agents is similar to social agents however, more specifically are those who are knowledgeable of fashion (Workman & Kidd, 2000). Finally, consumer fashion change agents are those that fall in the fashion consumer category where they are both a consumer and influencing agent on fashion trends (Sproles, 1974). For the purpose of this exploratory thesis these concepts of social and fashion change agents are important to consider as terminology when describing and categorising the influencing agents on the current male adoption of androgynous fashion. These can be consumers, celebrities, bloggers, influencers and opinion leaders (Sproles, 1974). The next section now layers the gender concepts with the fashion theories to explain how gender is often performed through fashion.

2.3.2 Gender expression through fashion

Crane (2012) examines how fashion, identity and social culture are uniquely intertwined with each other. Fashion can emphasise our biological sex accentuating hips, shoulders or coding via careful colour selections. Conversely this is why women in business wore padded blazers to accentuate the shoulders to seem more powerful, which Solomon and An and (1985) describe as a totemic emblem. Their research describes how gender is performed through fashion accentuating parts of our characteristics and personality or characteristics we want to embody. In other terms fashion is communicative, and can help portray or signal personal identity, social class and gender or lack thereof.

Historically, fashion has often subverted the cultural and social norms and innovated new silhouettes, such as Gabrielle Chanel, who is renowned for removing the women's corset to free up the movement of the body (Koda & Bolton, 2005). At the time, this was new wave thinking to show the natural lines of the woman's body. The literature points to the importance of 'radical' designers who sensed the gap in fashion culture and sought to innovate (Koda & Bolton, 2005). One could argue these were expressions of counter-cultural movements, as Paoletti (2015) identified in the 1960s and 1970s. Notably, there was a redefinition of masculinity and femininity

in terms of fashion and the YSL "Le Smoking" Tuxedo is a fashion manifestation of this gender-redefinition (Akdemir, 2018). In 2016 the Gucci menswear collection could also be considered a revival of the gender borrowing concept as discussed by Marcangeli, (2015), where men wore blouses with bows. These are examples of men and women pulling from gendered fashion and innovating new silhouettes (Marcangeli, 2015).

The following section looks at some of the history of adoptive fashion moments, this relates to the previous section as it illustrates how fashion tropes and trends are diffused through society and are often run in conjunction with social developments or cultural change.

2.3.3 Previous adoption fashion movements

Fashion is a symptom of the cultural and socio-political environment the consumer resides in. As illustrated during the 1970s which Steele (1997) describes as "confused" in the sense that there was no singular trend of the 70s that defined the era. Narumi (2000) also acknowledges a different type of counterculture, the orientalism of fashion. Described as a counter to western fashion culture. Narumi (2000) also acknowledges that western fashion culture seeks to 'other' itself and re-invent fashion styles. This western 'other-ing' concept may provide context for the need of counterculture movements in fashion. In terms of social agents of the 1970s David Bowie has been singled out as a notable perpetrator of fashion counterculture (Mills, 2015).

Sproles (1981) has provided further contributions to the literature on fashion by looking at fashion diffusion through mass market theory. The mass market theory is essentially the combination of mass production and marketing on mass. When applying this concept to fashion diffusion it means that a trend can be distributed through all classes at the same time (Sproles, 1981). Aspers and Godart (2013) also support this concept by acknowledging the importance of the mass market on fashion. This becomes an important concept when looking at modern fashion adoption in a digital age of social media. The accessibility of fashion houses to social media and mass marketability may explain how fashion houses are able to influence adoption of new trends such as androgyny.

What the literature on fashion tells us here is that fashion trends are influenced by the social environment around the subject. As well, historically fashion has often subverted the socio-cultural norms of the time. This subversion has often been from the womenswear perspective where Gabrielle Chanel and YSL womenswear being the examples. While the literature describes these subverted fashion adoptions as grounds for innovation the literature does not fully detail why these phenomena have occurred. The literature hints that these adoptions of subverted fashion are for the purposes of just countering the social norms in an attempt to differentiate oneself. However, this does not fully illustrate the reasons why these trends are picked up by the masses. Thus, leading to another gap in the current literature.

2.5 Adoption and Self Expression

It is evident from the literature that fashion is communicative, the following section looks at how fashion is adopted specifically from the male context. Another key area of focus for this research is the concept of fashion adoption, this is significant because the phenomena that is occurring is biological males dressing themselves in softer clothing, style, colours and traditionally feminine accessories. Previous research from Aghagyulyan, (2021) points out that current celebrities have added and played with female fashion elements in their aesthetic but are somewhat still grounded in masculine fashion. Aghagyulyan, (2021) goes further to say how women's fashion has previously integrated masculine elements such as the suit, before the 1960's this was a staple of men's fashion however, in 1966 YSL created the controversial "Le Smoking" tuxedo which became a controversial statement of femininity. Fast forward to the present day these feminine suits are now staples of female fashion (Aghagyulyan, 2021).

Male fashion adoption has been an under researched area for some time (Holland, 2013). But is being more researched in recent times (Aghagyulyan, 2021). When looking at fashion consumption there are conflicting adoption principles, males may conform to societal values influenced by mass marketing principles while also fostering a unique fashion identity (Hemetsberger & Weinberger, 2012). This paradox was looked at within the context of male handbag adoption. The findings of this research showed three occurrences; wilful ignorance, performing non non-conformity and de-familiarization (Hemetsberger & Weinberger, 2012). These three occurrences explain how males in Europe have specifically adopted male handbags

and may contribute to the wider aspects of androgynous fashion adoption however further investigation is required to confirm this.

What is interesting from this article is the idea of non-conformity and changed perspective on gender roles from the findings of the article. This indicates a societal change in the perceived gender roles within clothing (Hemetsberger & Weinberger, 2012). This article investigates the adoption of the handbag on the grounds that the adoption is a medium for creating a more unique self-expressive style. Essentially the adoption is characterised in some way as a form of breaking away from social expectations and thus is a form of expressing one's attitudes on the social norms.

The article from Aghagyulyan, (2021) is one of the few and more recent, that discusses the topic of male fashion adoption especially on gender blurred fashion. However, it is limited by only looking at the adoption of the men's kilt, which resembles the women's skirt. In terms of adoption the kilt was adorned predominantly when cultural obligations such as weddings call for traditional dress. This does not explain why males are adopting feminine coded items for an androgynous look, and thus calls for further investigation into why males are adopting androgynous fashion and what their perceptions around this is. This research does further highlight the significance of the cultural context in how fashion is perceived. It shows that in the cultural context of Scotland this is a normal or traditional cultural occurrence. However, it does not explore the perceptions of such outside of this cultural context and therefore more investigation is required to fully understand a wider social perception.

Workman and Lee (2017) adapt the diffusion of innovations model from Rogers, (2003) to the fashion adoption context. The diffusion of innovations theory consists of four parts; the innovation, communicated through one or more channels, among members of a social system and over a period of time (Rogers et al., 2008). Fashion is diffused in a similar way, it is innovated, or a new trend/style is formed, this is communicated through media channels such as social media and print media to name a few. This is then adopted by members of the social system for a period of time. To add to this theory, Workman and Lee (2017) redefined the terminology of the original diffusion model, using the term consumer change agents which combines the innovators and fashion opinion leaders of the original model. Consumer change agents are those that influence

the adoption of fashion by deeming what is desirable or in other terms what is fashionable to wear (Workman & Lee, 2017). The next two segments of the diffusion model are the early adopters and the late adopters which make up 60 percent of the adoption population (30 percent each). Finally, the reluctant adopters were adapted from laggards due to the negative connotations associated with the previous terminology. The reluctant adopters do not include those that did not adopt the fashion change because the model is specific to adopters, it is a limitation that the model only works for a singular fashion adoption. This literature on adoption shows the importance of cultural perceptions when normalising adoption as well as detailing how fashion is diffused through society. However, this research cannot elucidate fully the influencing factors as to why males are adopting androgynous fashion now. This literature does go some way to explaining how fashion trends are captured by the masses, but it fails to explain what leads to the initial adoption.

2.5.1 Celebrity and Pop culture influences on fashion

Gibson (2012) in their book mention the pervasiveness of celebrity culture, asking the reader if they want to be immune from witnessing the phenomenon means to cut oneself off from all forms of media and avoid cities. In addition, recent research points to how consumers change aspects of their lives, from diet and exercise to lifestyle and appearance, inspired by following celebrities on social media (Carrington & Ozanne, 2022). Gibson (2012) mentions the significance of Madonna who was remarked as not only making fashion but is fashion and serves as an early example of the importance of celebrities. US *Vogue* magazine editor Anna Wintour further supported this by mentioning how important street style and popular culture influence fashion and Madonna is a reflection of this (Gibson, 2012). Another key point brought up within the book is how celebrities have a much larger financial access to the luxury market as well as personal assistants who are able to liaise with luxury brands, this is a significant point when considering that consumers are also looking for 'sameness' to imitate what fashion is seen on screen (Gibson, 2012). Other notable fashion icons who subverted cultural norms include David Bowie and Grace Jones. Weidhase (2015) talks about how Grace Jones was disruptive or counterculture with her multiple identity configurations in terms of gender, sexuality and race. This made her an icon of the disco era, Kershaw, (1997) discusses the iconic performance art of Jones who combined masculine and feminine tropes into her performances. Examples of these include playing a 'male' jazz player rather than the female jazz singer (Kershaw, 1997).

In addition to the indirect influence of celebrities, celebrity endorsement has been a commonly used tool to create positive brand imaging and influence customer purchase intention (Min et al., 2019). However, it is also noted that this goal of positive brand imaging can be negatively swayed if the celebrity becomes negatively perceived by the consumer (Min et al., 2019). Chen (2019) looks at the impact of celebrity endorsements on purchase decisions for fashion and utilises the diffusion theory as the framework to describe the effects of celebrity endorsement on fashion adoption. The results showed that the participant's desirability of a product was not influenced by celebrity endorsement, the one influencing factor that celebrity endorsement had on fashion adoption was if the celebrity had negative behaviour, then the perception of that fashion item or brand would also be negatively skewed.

Gender-bending concepts have become more accepted and widespread through social media platforms and are largely influenced by pop culture, notably the view on gender norms has seen a broadening (Jairath & Daima, 2021). Manifestations of this broadening of gender norms can be seen with the rise of the male beauty bloggers, some of which go onto launching their own makeup brands and become beauty ambassadors (Jairath & Daima, 2021). When talking about celebrity influence today, the significance of the social media influencer must also be discussed. Related to the beauty bloggers from (Jairath and Daima (2021), is the role of the social media influencer. In some instances, the role of the social media influencer may be more influential on fashion adoption than a celebrity. This is through the influencer's ability to create communities where the members feel closely connected to the influencer in some way (Nouri, 2018). Relating this to the fashion context, there are numerous fashion bloggers that create fashion communities, these fashion influencers are able to influence the purchase behaviour and opinions of the fashion followers (Chetioui et al., 2020). The stronger an influencer's credibility then the stronger the e-word of mouth and thus the likelihood of purchase and adopt the fashion item also increases (Chetioui et al., 2020).

Pop culture icons show the influence they have on pop culture and in turn the influence they have on fashion as consumers strive for 'sameness' (Gibson, 2012). On the other hand you have the fashion influencers who are able to influence opinion and purchase behaviours (Chetioui

et al., 2020). These may be contributing factors to why males of this day and age are adopting androgynous fashion however, further research into this area of adoption is required.

Social movements may be an influencing factor on fashion as Steele, (1997) acknowledges how the women's liberation movement had an indirect impact on fashion. Gendered media messaging may have also had an indirect effect on fashion as previously mentioned, media messaging has perpetuated the ideals of masculine and feminine identities (Holt & Thompson, 2004), (Zawisa, 2019). Further research into a media messaging shift that looks at contemporary messaging of gender may also be needed.

What the literature on pop culture and celebrities shows us is that it is deeply ingrained within society and nigh almost impossible to avoid, the literature also suggests that celebrities are almost aspirational lifestyles that the public strives to emulate. The public will strive for "sameness" with what is observed on the screen and through the celebrity culture lens. The literature also suggests but does not confirm if social media influencers have more influence on adoption/purchase decisions than celebrities as well as the role of social movements are only confirmed as indirect influences on fashion adoption and change. What this means is that there are a multitude of gaps within the literature, while celebrity and social media may have strong influence on a purchase decision it does not take into account the other multitude of factors that may be influencing the intentions of the adopter. Hence no one theory from the previous literature can confirm why males are adopting androgynous fashion.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

After reviewing the literature pertaining to the areas of men's fashion, androgyny, adoption and fashion theory it is clear there are multiple gaps in the literature that warrant further investigation. This research aims to fill the specific gap that addresses why New Zealand males have adopted androgynous fashion. From the literature review there is no one conclusive theory or explanation that explains why today's males are adopting androgynous fashion. There is also very little research conducted into this area other than in some specific instances or when recounting the lives of pop-culture icons such as Grace Jones (Weidhase, 2015) or male adoption of kilts (Aghagyulyan, 2021). Thus, this research seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are they perceiving as androgynous fashion?
2. Why are New Zealand males adopting androgynous fashion?
3. How are they adopting this fashion?

3.1.1 Research purpose

The fashion world is referential, meaning it is often reflective of the world around us (Vilaca & Lopez, 2021). From understanding why fashion is adopted and integrated into society we gain unique insight into that point of time and what is going on within society (Vilaca & Lopez, 2021). Over the last few years there has been much social commentary on sustainability, inclusivity, and diversity within fashion as seen with some brands commenting on the sustainability of the fashion industry by using recycled materials within their collections (Nast, 2020). Perhaps the core value of fashion is to be expressive of oneself aside from being protective bodily adornment. But maybe now with the rapidly growing conversations that challenge the classical notions of fashion it adds another layer to the adoption of fashion. While fashion is expressive of the self it can also be a commentary on what is going on within society (Vilaca & Lopez, 2021). Hence by looking at the fashion adoptions we may gain an insight into the changing perspectives within society. A lot of the articles from fashion institutions are speculative, while the literature is somewhat disjointed and points to individual reasons but very few showcase the

wide range of potential influences on gender bending fashion adoption. Let alone on male fashion adoption which has not kept up with the current trends where males are mixing masculine and feminine fashion to varying degrees (Hemetsberger & Weinberger, 2012). The question is why and how do males adopt androgynous fashion? What has changed that they are enabled or restricted in their adoption?

3.2 Research Approach

3.2.1 Qualitative vs Quantitative

If quantitative methods are used then this will be for testing or statistically assessing the objective of research through experimental or survey methods (Jackson et al., 2007). Qualitative research on the other hand relies on the responses from participants to express their experiences, how they have understood or been a part of the phenomena (Jackson et al., 2007). This is also a disadvantage of qualitative research as it is hard to make generalisations from the data as the difference in number of participants when comparing qualitative and quantitative methods is significantly higher in quantitative than qualitative (Jackson et al., 2007). Stake (1995, p.37) also compares the differences between qualitative and quantitative research, where quantitative seeks to understand from the inquiry, discover knowledge and takes a more impersonal approach as a researcher. Conversely, qualitative research takes on a more personal approach to explain the phenomena and construct the knowledge from the inquiry (Stake, 1995, p.37).

Qualitative is the most appropriate for this research to explore the phenomena of androgynous fashion adoption. Qualitative research offers deeper insights into real world problems and seeks to answer open ended, how and why questions (Tenny et al., 2017). Through quantitative it can be hard to capture the processes, thoughts, and feelings of the participants whereas for qualitative research this is easily achieved (Tenny et al., 2017). Qualitative research in the case of this thesis is able to detail the wider adoption factors of androgynous fashion which quantitative would struggle to do (Calder, 1977). The literature that has been conducted within the androgynous fashion realm has also used qualitative methods but has not explored the depth of androgynous fashion adoption by only looking at individual pieces of fashion (e.g., kilts). In

order to explore the subject matter further than what the current literature has, it makes sense to use qualitative methods to illustrate why and how males have been adopting androgynous fashion.

The approach that was taken for this study was an inductive approach whereby the data is collected and a framework to explain the phenomena is created afterwards. This allowed for a much wider scope of analysis and discovery which lends itself to an exploratory study. There may be many factors which contribute to explaining the male adoption of androgynous fashion and hence a qualitative inductive approach was suitable for researching the wide possibilities of the topic.

The qualitative approach of this study used an interpretivist paradigm which was useful in deciphering what is occurring with the adoption on androgynous fashion. Interpretivism is a suitable lens to view the phenomena through because the interpretivist goal is to generate an understanding of the behaviour not to predict the behaviour (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). It also makes it easier to develop an emic perspective, or an insider's perspective, the perspective that comes from within the culture or community where the project is situated (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). For there to be an understanding of the behaviour it is important that the researcher has some immersion within the research context to be able to interpret and understand insider knowledge (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The researcher has immersion because they are an adopter of androgynous fashion themselves and have been observing androgynous fashion trends in a prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Immersion makes it easier to express the insider's perspective from a shared understanding point of view between researcher and participant (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

The interpretivist paradigm lends itself well to understanding the phenomenon of androgynous fashion adoption as previous literature has looked at this phenomenon as a cause of celebrity and influencer effectuation. However, the interpretivist perspective allows for exploration outside of the current literature for uncovering the reasons why males have adopted androgynous fashion.

3.2.2 Epistemology

The epistemology concerned with this thesis is constructivism. Constructivism is a mode for how we learn things (Cobern, 1993). The intention of constructivism is to describe learning by way of interpretation (Cobern, 1993). Constructivist understand that phenomena are experienced and lived by social actors (Schwandt, 1994). The constructivist is thus concerned with knowing and interpretation of the individual constructions of the social actor (Schwandt, 1994). Schwandt, (1994) states that from the perspective of the constructivist, knowledge and truth are created not discovered by the mind. This can be exemplified by the participant who is cognitive of the world around them and interprets the truth instead of happening across the objective truth (Schwandt, 1994).

The constructionist view suggests that phenomena are constructed through human conversation and cultural process (Jha, 2012). Constructivism also is concerned with creating a shared understanding of each participants interpretations of individual realities (Crotty, 1998). The constructivist view is that reality is constructed by the participants and this reality is a result of the context where the phenomena happens, which in turn is influenced by the social norms that surround the participant (Jha, 2012). It is imperative that the individual realities from the participants are viewed holistically, taking into account the social context which they are constructed otherwise the meaning is fragmented and not fully comprehended (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The social norms which the participant is subject to will shape the way they perceive and create their reality, for example for some participants it may be socially normal to adopt androgynous fashion and others it may not be within their perceived social norms to adopt androgynous fashion however, both versions represent their reality (Jha, 2012). Thus, the participants provide their perspectives and experiences and how they came to conclusions, and it is the culmination of those realities that creates a collective understanding of the phenomena (Crotty, 1998). In the case of this thesis, it is the participants own constructed realities that provides reasoning for the phenomena occurring with androgynous fashion adoption. It is the role of the researcher to interpret each of these realities and report the shared constructed perspective of the participant (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

3.2.3 The role of the researcher

The goal of the researcher is to gain rich understanding of the phenomenon within the study (Polit & Beck, 2010) with qualitative studies the researcher is the instrument which the study is conducted and analysed through (Stewart, 2010). It is thus important for the researcher to be "reflexive" meaning the researcher is aware of their social, political, cultural values, and perspective when undertaking research (Stewart, 2010). thus, the following text looks to be transparent about the objectives of the researcher as well as the propensity for bias within the research (Stewart, 2010).

It is acknowledged that the researcher is also an adopter of androgynous fashion to some degree, which allows for an insider understanding, but this will create some potential researcher bias in the study. However, due to this cognition, the researcher strived for objectivity through the interview guide which was evaluated several times by expert judges prior to conducting the study. The goal is to understand what is occurring with male fashion adoption not to promote and influence further adoption. I tried to reduce potential bias by using participant-driven photo elicitation by asking for the participants own reference points of androgynous fashion as a first touch point when observing androgynous fashion which will be discussed later in this chapter. This removes potential for the researcher to influence what the participant will reference as androgynous fashion prior to their choice.

3.3 Methodological Approach

This section of the methodology details how the participants were selected and how data was acquired through the use of semi-structured interviews, including the processes of data analysis which the researcher used to answer the research questions as listed above.

3.3.1 Selection criteria

The study required male identifying participants, the procedure for selecting eligible participants is they had to declare themselves as male and be adopting some form of androgynous fashion. From the working definition of androgynous fashion, the mixing of masculine and feminine coded fashion, participants had to exhibit combinations of masculine and feminine

fashion items. To further clarify this, there did not have to be an even split of masculine and feminine clothing or overtly feminine either. To be considered for the study, Individuals would have to showcase some form of androgynous fashion adoption which was aided by the use of participant-driven photo elicitation. Compounding on the selection criteria, adoption did not need to be every day. Adoption during event-like settings is also important to understand the supportive setting for this adoption to occur. In addition, participants had to be adults over 18 so they could consent to participation in the study.

3.3.2 Sampling

Constantinou et al. (2017) suggest, purposive data sampling is highlighted as one that can bring the richest qualitative data, this is important considering the small New Zealand population of androgynous fashion adopters. Creswell and Poth (2016) recommend a sample size from 5 to 25 participants while Clarke et al. (2015) suggests for the size of a master's thesis 6-15 participants are acceptable hence, for the purposes of this research a minimum of twelve participants of varying degrees of adoption are required. This number intersects the median of Clarke et al. (2015) and is close to the median of Creswell and Poth's (2016) suggestion. Snowball sampling proved to be an effective tool for not only gaining participants from this small community but in understanding the collective social knowledge that describes why males adopt androgynous fashion (Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling has been cited as an effective method for reaching "hidden populations'' which given the New Zealand context the population of androgynous fashion is relatively hidden, and snowballing will be an effective approach for reaching members of this population (Noy, 2008). A social media post was used to gain the initial interest in the study in which five participants reached out to be a part of the study via direct message to the researcher. From these five participants the remaining interview participants came from snowballing where the participants suggested friends or acquaintances who they thought might participate in the study. They then contacted these individuals, on behalf of the researcher, to see if they could share contact details (e.g., name, phone number, email). Saturation of the data occurred at the minimum point and no new themes were uncovered by the end of the twelfth interview.

3.3.3 Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Location	Ethnicity	Education	Occupation	Country of origin	Pronouns
Sebastian	26	Wellington	Mixed	Diploma	Professional entertainer/Dancer	Karlstad & NZ	He/They
Riccan	26	Christchurch	Afro-Caribbean	Postgraduate	Student	Jamaica	All Of Them
Leo	28	Nelson	NZ/Euro	High school	Self Employed	NZ	He/him
Leonardo	26	Wellington	NZ European/Māori	Tertiary	Administrator	NZ	He/Them
Blair	30	Wellington	Mixed	High school	Board Member/Performer	NZ	He/They/Them
Jimbo	27	Christchurch	NZ/European	High school	Assistant manager	NZ	He/Him
Aria Heart	25	Christchurch	NZ/European	Post Graduate certification	Support Worker	NZ	He/Him
Ida Know	32	Christchurch	Caucasian	Bachelor's Degree	Software project delivery	Australia	He/Him
Jacque	26	Wellington	NZ/European	University	Engineer	NZ	He/Him
Rich	32	Christchurch	Pilipino	University	Health Worker	Philippines	He/Him
Max	28	Christchurch	NZ European	University	Student	NZ	He/Him
Scott	22	Christchurch	NZ European	Tertiary diploma	Retail	NZ	He/Him

3.3.3.1 Participant Summary

The age of participants ranged from 22-32, predominantly participants resided in Christchurch and Wellington, one participant resides in Nelson. The participants were mostly from New Zealand however, four participants were not originally from New Zealand. The participants had a mix of ethnic backgrounds but mostly were New Zealand Europeans. Every participant had

at least a high school qualification and there was a wide array of professions from dancers, engineers, support workers, and students.

3.4 Data collection

This section explains the steps leading to the data collection such as creating the interview guide and the interview processes. The main data collection technique was through semi-structured interviews. Within the interview process the researcher also utilised photo elicitation techniques to collect data and to aid in achieving deeper insights into the adoption behaviour of the participants. These photos also were used to triangulate the data to assess trustworthiness.

3.4.1 Data Collection - Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the method for collecting data to help identify the reasons why males are adopting androgynous fashion. Semi-structured interviews are effective when addressing more complex social behaviour which lends itself well for an exploratory study into why males are now adopting androgynous fashion habits (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Semi-structured interviews are also suitable for this type of study as they allow the researcher to go back further and question the participant for more in-depth understanding (Dearnley, 2005). The semi-structured nature can aid with keeping the flow of the conversation and allows participants to occasionally flow into later interview questions (Dearnley, 2005). The researcher should also be attuned to building rapport with the participant (Elmir et al., 2011). Steps should be taken to make the participant feel enabled to talk truthfully about their experience (Dearnley, 2005). Steps such as preparing the setting and location, how the researcher dresses to create a private and informal setting that provides a low-pressure environment for the participant (Dearnley, 2005). Given that this study is looking at androgynous fashion the researcher could adopt subtle androgynous items to establish trust with participants and remind them that they are in a supportive environment. For example, the researcher wore a Jacquemus handbag, womenswear high waist trousers, and several pink hoodies through various interviews.

According to Elmir et al. (2011) open questioning within semi-structured interviews are important not only for qualitative enquiry but also when considering the potentially sensitive nature of the subject. Ultimately semi-structured interviews were decided as the best option for

this course of study. There could have been other methods such as observational studies within different New Zealand regions to observe the types of fashion adoption that are occurring. However, this was not suitable for answering in detail why the phenomenon of male androgynous fashion is occurring. Semi-structured interviews allow for more in depth discussion for uncovering the participants' reasons for adoption.

Thus, the method for collecting the data is qualitative semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews are used for the purpose of garnering a deep understanding of the phenomena, by analysing the common themes across the interviews. Interviews were conducted until the data reaches saturation point (Dworkin, 2012); In other words, the interviews were conducted until there were no new themes that came forward.

3.4.2 Development of an interview guide

The interview consisted of seventeen questions (see Appendix A for the full list of questions). This provided a rough script but was not followed formulaically, as per established methods (Dearnley, 2005). The questions were designed to be open ended to allow the participants to answer in depth. The interview started with more broad questions concerned with the participants' overall fashion style(s) and progressively got closer to talking about specific cases by using photo elicitation techniques discussed below. After the first interviews it was clear the participant-driven photo elicitation provided unique insight into the adoptive styles of the participant however, the photos did not always reflect the width of potential androgynous fashion. Thus, the interview structure was slightly altered to include the researcher-driven photo elicitation technique as well as the participant driven to gain more insights into the wider androgynous fashion phenomenon (Copes et al., 2018).

3.4.2.1 Photo elicitation / Visual aid selection

As part of the interview process the participants were asked prior to the interview to bring photos of examples of androgynous fashion items they have chosen for themselves or photos of what androgynous fashion means to them. Photo elicitation can elicit deeper understanding and themes especially when used in conjunction with a standard interview process (Padgett et al., 2013). Copes et al. (2018) uses photo elicitation in their research and utilises both researcher-

driven elicitation and participant-driven elicitation (Also known as Auto-elicitation) in conjunction with interviews to describe in much more detail the experiences of one participant from their research. In researcher- driven, the researcher brings examples of the phenomena of interest so the participants can comment on and discuss. In participant-driven, the participants bring photos that represent the phenomena from their perspective (Copes et al., 2018).

Importantly Copes et al. (2018) notes how the photo elicitation can empower the participant which does not often happen when conducting interview research alone. The other significant point from Copes et al. (2018) is the participant-driven elicitation removes some of the bias of how the researcher may perceive and analyse the participant and enables the participant to express how they and others may perceive themselves to be. In the case of this research, this enables participants to share honestly what their perception of androgynous fashion is and what types of androgynous fashion they are comfortable adopting. Photo elicitation was also a useful tool for keeping participants engaged during the interviews and aided in eliciting their first-hand experience with androgynous fashion. This helped to break up the monotony of the interview procedure as well as capture the wider array of androgynous fashion styles that words alone cannot fully describe (Harper, 2002).

The researcher found that some participants may forget or not come up with any photos so as a contingency the researcher had selected several photos as examples to encourage further discussion (see Appendix B) Hence the interview used both participant-driven and researcher-driven photo elicitation techniques to ensure a deep and thorough discussion was able to be achieved (Copes et al., 2018). By utilising both methods this allowed the researcher to see the range which the participants were comfortable adopting (i.e., participant-driven) and then what types of adoption the participant may not have considered (Researcher-driven) or a wider range of androgynous fashion adoption (Copes et al., 2018).

3.4.3 Pilot interview

Prior to launching the interview process the interview protocol was tested on three individuals, one being a woman, the other two being males. After the initial testing the researcher was in contact with their supervisors on how the interview guide could be improved. From the pre-

testing the suggestion was to use some form of photo elicitation to gain deeper insight into the participant's feelings on how they adopt androgynous fashion. This was reworked into the interview procedure as the participants would need to provide photos before the interview started. A few questions were removed or reworded as they did not garner any new information and repeated previous questions.

3.4.4 Interview preparation

Eight of the interviews were conducted in person due to the advantageous location to the researcher however, four were conducted online through Zoom due to the participant's location restrictions. The protocol prior to the interview was not too dissimilar from the Zoom interview or in-person interview. The date and time at which the interview would be conducted was decided via virtual communication (i.e., Email, or Direct message). The participants who had the Zoom interview were given a slightly more flexible time period to start the interview to allow for any issues that may arise when using Zoom of which there was none. All participants prior to the interview were emailed the same information and consent form (See Appendix C) to be read over and signed prior to the interview. Once these were returned via email the online interview participants were sent a link with the date and time which the interview would be conducted. For the in-person interview participants were offered the choice to bring the documents in person but encouraged to email them prior to the interview.

3.4.5 Interview process

At the interview the participants were given the chance to re-read the information sheet although this was sent via email along with the consent forms prior to the interview. Prior to the first question of the interview the participant was also reminded of the general procedures and how their information may be used, and that if at any point they were uncomfortable they may stop or pause the interview as well as withdraw should they wish to do so. During the interviews field notes were recorded including observations of what the participants might have worn, feelings and attitudes to androgynous fashion. Towards the end of the interview the photo elicitation technique was used. Participants were either asked to discuss the photos they had brought, or participants were given images of androgynous fashion and asked to comment on them, if they liked the styling or even if they thought it was androgynous fashion at all. The purpose of this was to evoke their

feelings towards different levels of adoption, some going as far as talking as to when and where they would wear the look if they owned it. At the termination of the interview the participants were thanked for their participation and for the purposes of snowball sampling they were asked to provide names of potential participants who would qualify for this study. This is when they were handed a Koha, or a shipping address was arranged in cases where the interview was conducted over Zoom. Participants were offered a small Koha or a $25 Westfield Mall voucher to thank them for their participation. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, at this stage of transcription, hand-coding of themes began as an initial analysis before being further analysed. Once the transcription was finished this was sent to the participant for review over a two-week period.

3.5 Data analysis

Qualitative studies lend themselves to several types of methodological analysis such as phenomenology and grounded theory to name a few (Thomas, 2006). However, for the purposes of this study an inductive approach was used. The goal of inductive research according to Thomas (2006), is to reduce raw data into summarised formats, to link these summarised findings to the research objectives and develop a framework of the underlying experiences from the raw data. This is a bottom-up approach rather than starting with the theory base and working towards the outcome (Thomas, 2006; Trochim, n.d.). This is suited for exploratory research as the objective of this research, to explore why males have adopted androgynous fashion choices and collate the commonalities between interviews (Thomas, 2006).

3.5.1 Thematic analysis

The method of analysis is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of extracting themes from a qualitative data set, this is appropriate for this research as the themes are not yet known to the researcher and need to be drawn out from the primary data from the interviews (Clarke et al., 2015). Thematic analysis works well with an inductive rationale as described by Thomas, (2006) it seeks to describe the phenomenon primarily and then construct and draw upon theory. There are a set of six procedures of thematic analysis which were followed to ensure the studies reproducibility (Clarke et al., 2015).

The six procedures to be followed are, familiarisation, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally, writing the report (Clarke et al., 2015). To become familiar with the data set, field notes, re-reading and listening to each of the interviews were used to fulfil this requirement. Coding is the second phase of analysis; this is where key behaviour and responses are recorded prior to theme identification. Prior to theme identification the interview responses and field notes are processed with key information related to androgynous fashion adoption extracted and tabulated.

Searching for themes is the following step, Clarke et al. (2015) suggests no more than three levels of themes to ensure the analysis is clean and cohesive. A review of the themes is then initially mapped out however it is often necessary to simplify the initial thematic map which may be too complex. During this stage the themes are identified from the key participant responses and ordered by participant. Aggregation of the common themes across participants then occurs, with themes collated based on the areas they fit into which becomes the second phase of coding. To help with identifying themes the ideas are colour coded. In the third phase of analysis quotes from the participants are then added in the place of the coded themes. Defining the themes occurs once there is a solid thematic map (Clarke et al., 2015). The aggregation makes identifying the thematic map easier. Aggregated themes such as self-expression and internal emotions can be mapped together as internal characteristics of the participant. Finally, the thematic analysis is written up, as discussed below in the findings of this research.

3.6 Establishing trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is imperative to qualitative research in order for credibility to be established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve qualitative data that is of good quality the criteria discussed by Constantinou et al. (2017) will be used as a guiding principle, this is also appropriate when considering the paradigm that this research has used. The researcher is open to the possibility of multiple realities in which the phenomenon can occur and hence assessing the trustworthiness aligns with the approach of this research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The proposed criterion for assessing trustworthiness consists of four elements these being; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Constantinou et al., 2017). The following sections detail how the researcher has met the requirements of establishing trustworthiness within the research.

3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent at which the phenomena is described, for credibility to be achieved the phenomena will be described in full detail (Constantinou et al., 2017). To achieve greater credibility the researcher utilised the triangulation technique from Lincoln and Guba (1985). The researcher worked closely with supervisors throughout the data collection process as a point of contact to assist with interpretation of the findings. The supervisors worked as an expert judge examining the created codes from the twelve interviews. The researcher also used the previous literature as another touchpoint in creating triangulation of the data alongside trawling the internet for images of males adopting androgynous fashion. These images also provided another touchpoint for triangulation, and some were used as part of the researcher driven photo elicitation technique, as discussed above.

In addition, to achieve credibility, the researcher spent a substantial amount of time learning and analysing a variety of types of androgynous adoptions that have manifested within society to gain a wider perspective of the phenomenon. Including an understanding of what types of items are being adopted. This is useful when deciphering whether or not a type of adoption is a perceptual distortion from the participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process is described as prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement is useful to avoid distortions or inaccuracies to creep into the data as well as establishing trust with the participants through sharing a deeper understanding of the subject material and to build rapport (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability in this research context refers to how generalizable the data is, in other terms can the principles be applied in every given scenario? (Constantinou et al., 2017). In order for transferability to occur the context in which the phenomena are occurring must be detailed, an example of this may be describing the occurrences of androgynous fashion during special events or within everyday life as examples of different contexts in which adoption may occur. The requirements of transferability have been met through "thick description" of the participants and what types of adoptions including the contexts which they did or would adopt androgynous fashion are detailed in the methodology and within the findings respectively.

3.6.3 Dependability

Dependability of the data refers to how the study may be repeated by other researchers. This means a future researcher may use similar methods in their research with similar participants and achieve a similar result (Ford, 2020). In order to combat the risk of irreproducibility, the researcher used expert judges as a form of audit to ensure the methodological processes were dependable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure dependability is met the procedures used to analyse, code and collect the data are detailed to a quality that can be used by other researchers in future research.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Finally, the last criterion of qualitative research is confirmability. Essentially this is ensuring the data is free of bias and the responses from the participants are not lead-on or influenced by the researcher (Constantinou et al., 2017). How this has been achieved in this research is through triangulation with the expert judges to assess the researcher's interview structure, transcripts, field notes and coded themes to ensure these were reflective of the gathered data and free of bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also had trawled internet spaces for photos of androgynous fashion to be used in photo elicitation which also was another point of triangulation, this was used to confirm what was considered androgynous fashion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, confirmability can be assessed as all aspects of the research have undergone audit and examination from the expert judges (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the research the researcher complied with all the ethical considerations of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, (see Appendix D for the approved ethics form). This research gained approval from the Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (HEC) on the 24/11/2022. The main concern from the HEC was how the participants would initially be identified, there were potential negative implications from simply approaching people based solely on how they look. To avoid this a social media post was used to garner initial interest in the study and from these initial participants snowball sampling enabled the researcher to meet the minimum participants and reach the point at which the data collection was saturated.

Overall, the HEC deemed this research as low risk despite this, the researcher had resources at the ready to assist the participants if they became distressed with the line of questioning. The interview participants have been given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. In addition, no personal information was collected aside from general demographic information such as age, pronouns and nationality. The participants were given the opportunity to review their statements and withdraw from the research at any time and upon the completion of the transcriptions they were emailed a copy of their transcript to review within a period of two weeks. On the information sheet it details how the participants' information will be used and more importantly how the information was securely stored. I will now turn to discussing the research findings.

Chapter Four – Findings

In the findings section the following concepts will be discussed in accordance with the research questions; Firstly, defining and understanding the participant perspective of androgynous fashion; why do males adopt androgynous fashion? How are they adopting? And finally, the outliers of androgynous fashion adoption.

4.1 Defining Androgynous Fashion.

When talking about what androgyny meant to the participants the common theme was that the mixing and blurring of gender in terms of fashion would create an ambiguous gendered expression whereby the clothes and persons gender underneath were hard to categorise within the classic gender binary. Androgynous fashion is a concept that while not fully defined in literature, practiced in the world of fashion. Hence it was important to discover what the participants viewed as androgynous fashion. The quotes below are from Sebastian and Riccan, when asked to speak about the outfit they were wearing. Sebastian explains the mixing of masculine and feminine within an androgynous look. Riccan also supports Sebastian by commenting how they construct their own androgynous looks by mixing classical male and female fashion.

> *"I think I was really interested in kind of, I suppose bringing those two kinds of masculine and feminine energies together…. so, I would say this, this image is really androgynous."*
> *– Sebastian*

> *"I would define it as fashion that incorporates normally what people view as feminine clothing, and masculine clothing, coming together on the same body." - Riccan*

When elaborated on, the majority of participants also expressed that androgynous fashion is not just crossing gendered codes and presenting masculine or feminine but within androgyny, there also exists a gender neutrality. As Leo explains below, a male bodied person may adopt more feminine attire to enhance the more masculine features. Aria also adds how this mixing of gender can also have no overall presentation of a specific gender and be gender neutral.

"The woman said to me, oh, my gosh, my husband and I have just been gawking over your outfits. And he's so surprised to see that lace can actually make you look masculine" - Leo

Also uncovered from the interviews is how androgynous fashion can manifest as a gender-neutral presentation completely devoid of gender as Aria supports in the following quote.

"You could look at it and be like that as they're both very feminine, but you could also look at it and be like, that also looks very masculine. And then it also looks like neither." - Aria

What these quotes highlight is that for androgynous fashion to be considered, there is often a requirement of mixing gendered fashion items which is in line with the classical definition of what androgyny is. But an interpretation from the interviews is that there exists a gendered fashion spectrum. Closer to the middle of this spectrum, the combination of fashion items can also exist as a gender-neutral presentation and farther out from the centre, you have masculine androgyny or feminine androgyny. Several participants also stated that you can have more extreme fashion to the point it is confusing to decipher the image. And contrarily you can also have more subtle adoptions of androgynous fashion which are perhaps just as hard to comprehend as expressed by Riccan:

"That's what people have in their minds when they think androgynous. I think in general, that's what people see on the hyper side. But I feel like androgyny can also be quite subtle." – Riccan

"You can have some that have like super hyper feminine, hyper masculine, they can smash together ... I think this is like one of my more tame looks, in terms of mixing those different normatively feminine and masculine things." - Riccan

As Riccan explains, combining heavily masculine clothing with heavily feminine clothing will often result in a "hyper androgynous look". Ida also supports these hyper and subtle concepts when describing the example looks provided at the interview. The hyper androgynous look described by Ida is a photo of Annie Lennox where she wore a business suit and tie in the

Eurythmics Sweet Dreams music video (see Figure 1), and the subtle look that is described by Ida is of a person wearing a grey jacket and black button up shirt (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Annie Lennox in Sweet Dreams music video.

Figure 2. Victoria Beckham wearing a grey suit.

"...In that the first example is highly contrasting. Whereas it's almost like hyperbolic, hyperbolic in, in that representation, and in the second instance, it's not bland, it's just like, fluid enough or flexible enough that it works for either." - Ida

Some examples of items that could be adopted when crossing gendered codes, and displaying androgynous fashion, would be, pearls, handbags, crop tops, blazers, heels and softer fabric like lace or satin. One participant photo incorporates several elements such as pearls and satin fabric (see Figure 3), As well as colours, the colour of which is of course pink. Interestingly items such as Dr Martens boots also commonly came up from the interviews and were described as androgynous because they were not perceived to be for one male or female gender and are worn by "everyone". Thus, Dr Martens as described by the participants are a gender-neutral adoption of androgynous fashion where they do not expressly communicate one gender. This is likely due to the shoe-styles and marketing around the shoes do not change with the gender that wears them. These gender-neutral fashion items contribute to the ambiguous or neutral androgynous fashion where one gender is not easily identifiable.

Figure 3. Leonardo's photo elicitation

"Like I've got a few pairs of Dr Martens and I think part of why I zoned in … because there seems to be a sort of androgyny to 'Docs' … the most popular styles are marketed to men and women, and they don't really feel like they've got like a strict binary to them … same with Converse as well." – Leonardo (See Figure 4 for an example of Dr Martens)

Figure 4. Dr Martens boots example.

While the line of questioning focused on fashion and clothing, the participants often brought up the effect the gendered body had on the overall androgynous look, where not only mixing gendered clothing but also the masculine or feminine body presentation also had an effect on the perception of androgynous fashion. For example, when discussing the photos that Sebastian brought to the interview, they talked about how the posture in the photo reads as more feminine (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Sebastian's photo elicitation

(Source: Nara Toktoshova)

"That also kind of led to a bit of androgyny and sort of makeup. So yeah, no, I think. And I think it's something in the gaze and the persona as well. Or the kind of posturing feels feminine." – Sebastian

The following quotes further support the importance of posture and how the gendered body is perceived when presenting an androgynous look.

"Yeah, I think, I think it's so interesting, because I think it depends on the energy at which you carry, and I think the way that we identify masculinity and femininity these days actually has a shit tonne to do with body stature and posture and how we can physically see people in nature…" - Leo

"I probably consider androgynous fashion. And one of them would be fashion when someone looks at you, they see, like feminine, traditionally feminine clothing, but they still see like a man underneath it. And they're like, oh, yeah, I see both parts…. "- Max

"...for me personally, because my current body shape is more masculine. And the way that I have my facial hair is a lot more masculine. So, I think wearing something that is designed to be won by someone who has a woman more of a feminine body shape, I think that's where the mixing occurs." -Aria

When the participants talk about androgynous fashion, it appears that inherently there will be some consideration made to the gendered body underneath the clothing that will alter how items of fashion are perceived regardless of the clothing. This may be where male celebrities' intentions of wearing classically feminine clothing originate to question the dialogue on classically gendered clothing. Despite their gender, they choose to wear whatever they want regardless of whether the clothing was intended to be worn by female or male identifying people.

The confusion of body types was brought up by two participants, from the Western perspective such that we will almost always assume the gender of the person underneath the clothing before deciphering whether they are crossing gendered codes or not. As participants discuss, this becomes extremely problematic when considering people who identify with non-binary or gender non-conforming identities. How does the perception of androgynous fashion change with these types of adopters? Is androgynous fashion then only for those who identify with the gender binary of male and female? Thus, the definition of androgynous fashion as described by some informants, was also extended to the absence of gender presentation within the fashion adoption. As described by participants this would take the form of a fashion look where the adopter's gender presentation is unidentifiable.

"... But I would also consider it to be androgynous fashion, if and then put on feminine clothing, and reached a point where someone looked at them and was like, I can't really gender you. And that would hit almost like a really true androgynous point of not even part female part male, but like just a blur. But I think that's very, very hard for most people to achieve. "- Max

Posturing and the perception of the gendered body underneath the clothing were brought up as contributing to an androgynous fashion look. Makeup and hair styles were also mentioned

by a few participants as other factors which can alter the perceived gender within a look. These were not expanded thoroughly as these were outside of the scope of the research which is looking at fashion presentation. However, it is noted that they can play a serious role in changing an individual's aesthetic.

> *"I suppose it was interesting that your viewpoint on fashion was purely limited especially for androgyny is purely limited to clothing fashion also I find also falls into something into makeup into hair and other ways to accessorise and change a look into something else because that can make and break an outfit." - Scott*

The participants described androgynous fashion as the mixing of masculine and feminine clothing and identify that androgynous fashion exists on a spectrum. This spectrum also accounts for androgynous presentations which remain ambiguous in gender presentation which is at the centre of the spectrum. The participants also contributed the idea that androgyny can have hyper and subtle attributes which also exist on a spectrum ranging from the highly contrasting hyper androgyny to a more subtle ambiguous androgyny. This section also identified some elements that the participants commonly associated with women's wear which have crossed over more frequently into the androgynous spectrum. Section 4.1.1 describes the participant's cultural context in which they are adopting and highlights the importance when considering adopting androgynous fashion.

4.1.1 Importance of Cultural Context

The participants all reside in New Zealand in the North and South Islands. When describing the types of androgynous fashion, they are exposed to, two participants brought up the notion that what they view as androgynous may in fact mean something else in another cultural context.

> *"Throughout kind of different cultures, like a lot of East Asian cultures, and Pacifica cultures, like have a very different concept of what gender is, … So, I think our flavour of androgyny is very, kind of I suppose filtered through how we understand gender as a western society." - Sebastian*

"I think the types of androgynous fashion that comes up on my feeds, and I think is sort of most prevalent in pop culture is definitely held a lot more by the skinny majority. But for men's androgynous fashion, like you're skinny, you're fit. ... Examples of it that's very relevant at the moment would be like Sam Smith ... But that's kind of like different body type in an androgynous fashion, whereas other androgynous popular fashion, you know, it would be Harry Styles or little NAS X, or Billy Porter, like, outside of the bounds of race, they're still skinny, very skinny, very fit." - Max

Here Max highlights another important point that the Western perception of fashion has often favoured – the "skinny majority". The implications of this is that if you do not fit the particular body standard, when you adopt androgynous fashion, it is less likely to be perceived as such because there is much less exposure to plus sized fashion models in general. Sebastian also highlights the Western perspective that androgynous fashion is viewed from. These quotes suggest the significance of the cultural context in which the person chooses to adopt androgynous fashion. As it will be perceived differently and carry with it a different meaning given different cultures and social settings. This leads onto how the participants described the cultural context within New Zealand. The responses from the majority of participants point to a shared common idea that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon within their socio-cultural context.

"I think gender is very much a construct, and we're constantly like learning and failing gendered body language and gendered thought processes that we choose to adopt to kind of, I suppose fit into the society we're in." - Sebastian

"I mean clothes really like clothes aren't really gendered we put that on the clothes a little bit, it's a societal thing" - Jacque

When comparing the regions in which the participants adopt androgynous fashion, it was interesting to see the contrast in their experience. Coming from different countries, one participant found moving to Christchurch to be liberating while another found it constricting, again highlighting the importance of the cultural context which the participants have adopted.

"Yeah, like public judgement and stuff here in Christchurch. Yeah. But when I was on holiday, I was wearing everything" - Rich

"Because I know, my background comes from a place where those things are not celebrated, and not socially allowed. And almost doing that is an invitation for discrimination, and low-key violence." – Riccan

These two quotes reflect how a negative social setting can inhibit the adoption of androgynous fashion, both participants are Christchurch-based however, they have different views given their cultural background and country of origin. One participant explains how returning home is enabling for their preferred androgynous fashion adoption, while the other participant explains how in leaving their country to come to Christchurch, they felt more enabled to adopt androgynous fashion which is different from the upbringing in their country of origin. In a way, this illustrates that there is perceived social value on what will be acceptable within a social setting that is relative to each person. Both participants now live in the same city however they have different views on what will be accepted by the wider public. This can also stretch to the other participants who live in Wellington who found that within their city or particular social setting, this type of adoption was a normal occurrence.

"And being in Christchurch, I haven't actually dressed up that as much just because I don't really have any events to go to like that. Or like, I just don't go out as much in Christchurch. But when I do I have I have dressed up still. And you do tend to get a lot more looks or stares. … But then for the likes of Wellington, where it's quite normal for this to be seen." - Aira

This goes to show that it is likely that each region will have its own version of what is deemed socially acceptable in terms of androgynous fashion. Adding to this, regional adoption paradigms is the concept of availability of boundary pushing fashion items. Several participants noted that within the New Zealand context, the availability of androgynous fashion clothing in brick-and-mortar stores leave a lot to be desired. While there is demand for this fashion now, the market within New Zealand does not enable adopters to easily access androgynous fashion or the desired styles that they witness online and through pop culture.

"I'm like man I'd love to party in something like that, but you cannot find it, no like any of that. ... Where am I going to access them? ... the accessibility of it and Christchurch even that's probably even worse." - Max

The common themes that deterred the participants from shopping exclusively in men's sections was the lack of variety in colour, pattern and styles. Because of this, the participants pivoted to shopping in women's clothing stores, op-shopping and in some cases constructing their own looks. This shows strong intentions to adopt androgynous fashion styles and being more creative and expressive with fashion. This is elaborated more in the following section which addresses self-expression.

"I started to come across wearing clothes that came from shops that are usually found to have all purchasing from women's section, because I found that those clothes were more enjoyable, more fun, more colourful, and actually quite fitting. Whereas, you know, in the male section, it's like there's box shirts then there's nothing that allows for very little that allows for artistic flair outside of shoes." – Leo

4.1.1.1 Social changes in the wider cultural context that surrounds androgynous fashion

The participants commented on the socio-political changes that have been occurring and how these trends can affect the widespread adoption of fashion. While these are not direct influences on their adoption of androgynous fashion, a change in legislation will not suddenly inspire androgynous fashion adoption. However, within the social context, a legislative change makes these adoptions more widely acceptable.

"I think it's with like, laws changing, like a wider and diverse kind of group of sexualities. It's about its accumulated with kind of the feminist movement with the gay rights movement. Kind of with people becoming more aware of are they think themselves and how they sit in, in society" ..." it's like we're at a point where it's less dangerous like it's more of a conversation rather than your kind of social exile," - Sebastian

"Yeah. I feel like it is because of how there a lot of genders are being presented into the public. Okay, people are more confident, more comfortable doing it. Like, I mean, connecting to the fashion side of it." - Rich

These quotes highlight the snowball effect of social change. Sebastian mentions feminist and gay rights movements as social change movements or agents which question the classical boundaries of gender and fashion expression. Another interesting point that Sebastian brings up is how society has changed from when being different does not mean expulsion from society but instead there is more conversation about such topics. Rich supports these notions when they say people are more confident to adopt androgynous fashion and that there are more expressions of gender within society. This points to the idea that due to change in legal systems and acceptance within society of people which fall outside of the cis-hetero binary can create safer spaces for exploration of the self-concept and exploration of fashion as well. The participants then related this to increased visibility expanding the view on what can be classified as androgynous fashion and increasing the amount that it occurs and thus the acceptance.

"Like a freedom of thought. I think because the only thing stopping people, everyone else dressing androgynous and I'd argue actually, a lot of people dress really androgynously now, but I suppose like the, the main examples of like, the biggest discussion at the moment is, of course, Sam Smith and about sort of fat bodies also being considered androgynous"
- Sebastian

"I really feel like in the past couple of years like there's definitely been a breakthrough at some point where fashion has become slightly more androgynous. Especially for but I feel like you also see skirts a bit now like, I think Kanye West or wore a skirt, not that he's just comes to mind is like a very straight sort of figure. Or like a much-idealised figure. And so, I've heard him wearing a skirt once and that was like a trendy thing." - Jacque

A common commentary on fashion expressions and gender is breaking down the like-with-like binary for example, blue is for boys and pink is for girls. These next quotes look at how the

commentary on fashion has shifted to question why it is that there are exclusive items of clothing for gendered people? What is to stop me from wearing a classically feminine piece of clothing? This discussion around gender roles in clothing is indicative of changing social values, where the participants are actively perpetuating the removal of gender from clothing by wearing clothing irrespective of the gender that it was originally intended for.

> *"So, it's just a lot of fashion for men who are once again trying to break the social perception of men's fashion. And it's just catching on, you know?"* - Jimbo

> *"Because society tells me that if this person is wearing a skirt, or wearing makeup, then that's apparently really feminine at this day and age. But it doesn't have to be, and I don't think inherently it is if someone who identifies as cis male and goes by, he him pronouns. I don't think that it's a feminine thing for someone like that to wear, it is part of their masculinity and also part of femininity and the way they express themselves."* - Sam

Not only do these participants showcase how feminine coded clothing is being adopted but also, they illustrate the 'new wave' commentary when choosing to adopt androgynous fashion. These quotes highlight the discussion around perceived importance of gender within clothing which is that feminine or masculine it doesn't matter anymore. The participants in this section had a shared understanding of what androgynous fashion is, which is the mixing and blurring of gendered fashion items which creates an ambiguous gender expression. The social context which the participants reside is mixed in terms of environments which they feel comfortable to have more regular adoptions. In Wellington, it is not unusual to see people wearing androgynous fashion. Christchurch is more conservative, and it is rare to see androgynous fashion being worn openly. This is relative however to the individual's feelings of perceived risk. Within the wider social context, the participants also comment on how there is widespread discussion that is questioning the gender roles within fashion. While this does not directly influence the participants fashion choices, it does contribute to normalising the occurrences of androgynous fashion adoption. This leads to the next section which looks to shed light on why males are adopting androgynous fashion.

4.2 Why Males Adopt Androgynous Fashion

Fashion is cyclical by nature with new fads and trends changing frequently. Is androgynous fashion just the latest trend in fashion being picked up by males? To some degree this is the case. However, the overwhelming majority of participants did not acknowledge if they actively followed trend cycles and, in some cases, they were avoiders of fashion trends. From the interviews all the participants mentioned that their fashion was a medium for expressing themselves. The following section is divided into two parts, the first looks at the internal factors and reasons for adopting androgynous fashion. The second looks at the external factors which influence the types of fashion adoption and also contribute to perpetuating the androgynous fashion trends.

4.2.1 Internal factors

When discussing why the participants might dress up, the commonality between the majority of participants was a sense of self-expression. Self-expression that is not necessarily limited to their own gender identity. In other terms, the choice to adopt androgynous fashion was not a felt obligation to communicate a certain gender, but as a medium of expressing their emotions, personality and a form of escapism from constrained societal norms on fashion. Alongside this desire for expression is the positive emotions the participants felt from adopting different androgynous styles which affirms their adoption choices.

4.2.1.1 Expression, Escapism and Experimentation

Participants who dress for self-expression will often want to express their individuality and not directly copy the outfit choices of another. They will want to put their own take on the look. When analysing the interviews, there appears to be three types of adoption modes that the participants had. These were self-expressive, escapist and experimental. For example, self-expression was a common theme for the majority of participants, understanding that clothing is communicative and can express parts of their character, such as mood and personality thus, they would adopt clothing that would aid in communicating attributes like confidence or sex appeal. Where escapism was a mode for departing their everyday style in a manner, they stepped outside of themselves to show off a different side of their personality. Finally, experimentation was a mode for exploring aspects of their character where in some ways, adopting androgynous fashion can be exploring the femininity while being masculine. These modes of adoption are not fixed attributes,

as participants would often incorporate aspects of multiple modes when adopting new fashion. In some accounts, the participants described their fashion as a medium for communication or commentary on social issues. More detailed accounts on how the participants used fashion in these three ways are described below.

4.2.1.1.1 Expression

The characteristics of the expressive mode are ideas such as expressing an emotion or feeling with their fashion. Participants also described that this expression could be related to aspects of their personality that they wanted to express. The participants that fell in this type of adoption chose items that aligned with their internal characteristics and the adoption falls within their sphere of comfort. The participants further noted the desire to be different from everyone else to express their own unique character and style through their fashion.

"That I think look cool, look different. ... Yeah, I like getting a lot of my personality and vibrancy. Doing something different." – Jimbo

"I don't want to be dress exactly the same as someone else wants just be like carbon copies, or like follow like, every trend and just be the same as everyone else." - Scott

However, while participants will want to distinguish themselves as individuals through adopting unique fashion, there appears to be a threshold of what people will accept with androgynous fashion adoption. It is important to understand that there are boundaries within fashion adoption as one participant notes how they felt somewhat ostracized from the group of people they were around.

"I picked some really out there kind of outfits, one that I would describe as like a pirate at a cocktail party. And that was really fun. It was, it was, I really enjoyed it. But I got a lot of looks from and quite a few comments from my family, and from Mitchell, my brother's friends. And just generally, it does kind of ostracise me a little bit from the social interactions." - Aria

So, while the desire to be unique is the first thing participants would comment, the later thought is not so unique that people are put off by the clothing that they are wearing. This becomes almost paradoxical where the participants are wanting to express their uniqueness and be different from the herd, yet not too different that they will be rejected entirely from their social groups. The below quote from Riccan highlights the balance of being different but within the social limit of what is acceptable.

"If everyone is going casual, I try to go casual, but I add a little spice to it. Like I got a crazy shoe. Or, like, weird top to kind of just stand on top. And I just feel like you don't want to be too out of the people you're around more times not to just be like whatever people are wearing." – Riccan

These quotes illustrate that there is at times a delicate balancing act with fashion adoption and what is acceptable within society. So, the relationship may tend to combine the level of fashion adoption multiplied by the adopter's confidence but removing the wider social expectation of what is acceptable to wear.

4.2.1.1.2 Escapism

Escapism can be described as fashion adoptions that fall in opposite sides of the participants sphere of adoption but not outside the sphere. Participants might wear clothing that shows an opposing aspect of their personality. For example, adopting a crop top and baggy pants after wearing a suit and tie for work as a form of escape. This hypothetical example illustrates there may be two or potentially multiple expressions of androgynous fashion adoption through escapism. The escapism mode is not only for contrasting aspects of the adopter's personality, but the escapist mode could also be escapism from the confining social norms. Using the escapism mode of androgynous fashion adoption is to break free of confining normative gendered fashion, in other words to be a fashion rebel. As these participants describe:

"I do it for the freedom of mind that I have for myself being like, oh I can actually wear this." – Riccan

"I guess it just it feels like I'm taking parts of myself that I guess at one point or another, like I might have kept hidden away. And I'm kind of just like, putting them out there." - Leonardo

This escapism mode also introduces the idea that we can be escaping into different fashion identities with an infinite number. The quotes below show the different levels or manifestations of the participants' fashion choices and supports the idea that an adopter can escape into different fashion identities that suit their objectives.

"And when I put on certain types of clothes, there's this, there's this confidence for this energy that comes out. If I'm in a suit, I'm like, okay, I'm feeling very formal. ... But if I'm wearing like, if I'm like, full mesh, crop top, short jeans, glitter all over the place, then I'm a bit more like, ... I'm feeling a lot more confident." – Riccan

"I think is probably a probably is like, a real mix. Like, it's probably like a spectrum, but I think I like I tend to like to go for like one side than the other." – Jacque

The above quotes highlight the contrasting and multiple fashion identities that the participants escape to depending on the desired effect, projecting confidence or fun, and depending on the social setting.

4.2.1.1.3 Experimentation

Experimentation is classified as choosing new aspects of the participant's character or fashion identity that are questioned and explored further. Participants who choose to experiment or "play" with aspects of their personality might adopt items that are outside the sphere of their self-concept. The participants who experiment are often afraid of negativity from strangers, hence the common thread with experimentation is risk mitigation and the participant's own volition to adopt a more experimental fashion style. The below quote highlights the link between the self-concept and the participants volition to experiment with their fashion.

"If they want to be themselves, experiment with who they really are, or some people are like, oh, Its only clothes, I'm just going to wear whatever. Or I guess I'm the opposite of that. It's like, I'm going to wear what I want to." – Blair

The following quote from Max explains the analysis of the environment prior to settling on the androgynous fashion look. Max explains how the rainbow friendly events are more enabling for experimentation and playing with fashion. Not only the type of event can be enabling but also knowing the people to gauge the potential reactions also make experimenting with fashion easier. This touches on how males are adopting androgynous fashion which will be covered in a later section.

"If I'm going to queer events of any type, whether that's like events hosted by Christchurch pride like proper, like ticketed event of things, or especially if I'm going to friends, parties, where I know that the majority of people they are going to be rainbow friendly and far more likely to put on something that's like a little more fun." - Max

The final quote from Ida also talks about their motivations for experimenting with fashion to enable others to also be comfortable in adopting androgynous fashion. The belief here is that by adopting something outside of your comfort zone can increase awareness and make others feel a bit more comfortable to adopt something similar.

"As a personal choice, … I try and wear clothing that is a little more adventurous in different situations so that other people who are less comfortable, feel comfortable to [Adopt]." - Ida

This section identified three different modes for adopting androgynous fashion and the reasons why males adopt androgynous fashion. The reasons are using fashion as a medium for expressing aspects of their character, mood or what they want to project. Males adopt androgynous fashion as a form of escapism from parts of their identity into other forms of their identity as well as escape from normative social boundaries. Finally, it is a form of experimentation and

exploration of their character. One thing this does not directly answer is the motivations for doing so, the following section reports the outcomes for adopting androgynous fashion.

This section looks at the internal qualities that the participants experienced from adopting androgynous fashion. These are the feelings and emotions that participants felt during adoption of androgynous styles and the emotions that in a way encourage the participant to adopt androgynous fashion. Almost all participants experienced a confidence boost within themselves when they chose to adopt androgynous fashion. Other emotions that were evoked during the interviews were beautiful, sexy, powerful, cute and good.

"I think the through line is definitely confidence. ... I think it allows you to almost be yourself more because you've got this kind of protection in a way. ... Yeah, it kind of gives you empowerment in this situation." - Sebastian

"Definitely made me feel felt very empowered, because I suppose you want to embody some of that, you know, iconic-ness of those kinds of people." - Scott

"What I have had that more hyper than in an affirming environment, I feel confident, I feel sexy, I feel beautiful, I feel. Honestly, I feel powerful." - Riccan

The participant quotes that overall, they felt very positive about themselves when choosing to adopt. However, while participants may choose to wear androgynous fashion to experience positive emotions, there were a few other reasons where the participants noted they would adopt more androgynous fashion styles; these being, to be complimented on their look by their peers and strangers; to have fun and be provocative; as well as to be affirmed in who they are. This differs slightly from the inward positivity felt by participants as the following quotes explain the other reasons for adoption of androgynous fashion other than to feel good.

"Like people message me like hey you look good with your outfit. Oh, thanks. Yeah, it's cool, though. And, you know, it's good to have compliments from strangers, especially at the airport." - Rich

"And I wouldn't call it a pretty look, because I don't try to look good. I just try to have fun" - Aira

"I quite enjoy kind of trying on different looks at home and being able to mess around with that and be like, oh, like do I like how this frames my body is actually how I want to be perceived." - Max

There can be feelings of anxiety associated with making this conscious decision to adopt androgynous fashion, especially when venturing out into unpredictable public spheres.

"... if I'm going anywhere, public, which like going to the theatre and there was just anxiety of just that I'm about to be out in public wearing this and people are going to look at me for that. I just have to say like, no, fuck it."- Max

An interesting perspective when talking about how participants feel when they dress in androgynous fashion, is a rebellious attitude. This is perhaps signifying a core attribute ingrained in the history of androgyny which the participants are trying to emulate. The rebellious attitude when adopting androgynous fashion is a combination of the participants own confidence in themselves to adopt fashion which might provoke others. This is combined with a sense of breaking the social rules, *i.e.,* who is society to tell me how to exist?

"There's like a slight sense of rebellion to it. Like I don't feel like I'm wearing, or they wear to actively induce outrage in other people but it's nice to go out there and do it just for myself and without taking others desires into account" - Leonardo

When talking about the photo they brought to the interview Blair comments on how males adopting pink in their outfits are rebelling against the normative gendered standards within society

that blue is for boys and pink is for girls. Blair stated how this was giving gendered society the middle finger and incorporated pink into their denim look (see Figure 6). Aria supports the rebellious attitudes through androgynous fashion in their statement that explains how with their outfit they get glared at because of their clothing choices.

Figure 6. Blair's photo elicitation

"I think it's cool because it's sort of the middle finger to society's gender … Pink is for girls and blue is for boys." - Blair

The glares I actually felt really entertaining, entertaining, they were like you have to be really insecure in your own masculinity to be challenged … because of their clothing choices, like I'm not I'm not you know, I'm not going around naked." - Aria

To summarise, the feelings and emotions play a part in the adoption of androgynous fashion. Participants can be adopting to gain more confidence within themselves and project that outwards, as well as experiencing euphoria with positive emotions like feeling sexy and powerful. The other less common occurrences that participants would dress in androgynous fashion would be to gain compliments, have fun and affirmation. There were several participants who also had a sense of rebellion when they chose to adopt androgynous fashion which showed a combination of internal confidence within themselves and resistance against classical ideals imposed by society.

This section looks at the influences on fashion adoption that the participants are exposed to through various channels. The interviews pointed at several types of media and influencers which the participants noted that had significant influence when deciding and constructing their fashion presentations. These external factors help to explain why males are adopting androgynous fashion as direct and indirect influences. Some participants will see what is being worn by celebrities, influencers, friends, and through their social media algorithms and will choose to adopt what they see online, where others will see this type of clothing and then be inspired to wear something similar to what they see. It is important to understand the role of external influencing factors as the previous section looked at the internal reasons for adoption. This section covers what types of messaging participants are subjected to through the use of media, marketing, and designer influence. These influencing factors have been broken down into the following categories: pop culture influences, social media, TV media, marketing influences, and fashion designer influences.

4.2.2.1 Pop culture influences/celebrity

When discussing questions relating to style influences or trends, the subject of celebrities emerged. Male celebrities such as Harry Styles, Damiano David, Timothée Chalamet and Machinegun Kelly were credited as people who not only dress androgynously but as their current male fashion influencers. These celebrity influences are in some ways icons for the participants to aspire to and dress in a similar style taking attributes and motifs from what the celebrities wear and incorporating that into their own fashion styles. Hence, it is significant to understand what is trending within celebrity culture. Blair notes how celebrities are often inspirations for their aesthetic choices.

> *"Andy black Machine Gun Kelly. That's my vibe at the moment. It's just like these, they sort of have like these masculine silhouettes, but then this like, ... I think his colour palette he wears a lot of hot pink with pops of silver chrome year, and he says he has his nails done and he's covered in jewellery and stuff ... Andy Black ... But they were a lot of this*

with this. Denim with the sleeves cut off. Pulled mesh under the dress shirts, suspenders
Tight, tight jeans with heaps of dangly bits and applicators." - Blair

Rich is also influenced by celebrities. They desire to emulate the aesthetic choices of Måneskin's lead singer who is described as below.

"So yeah, Harry Styles, Måneskin*? Yeah, like edgy, leather, rock sex like showing most of his skin tattoos, piercings." - Rich*

Another participant emulates Rihanna when describing their fashion adoptions which is an interesting point to make where it is not just men influencing men but also women influencing men to adopt androgynous fashion. In a way, the participants are not only adopting androgynous fashion but also choosing celebrities who resonate with their own identity and aesthetics.

"Incorporating something very, like hyper feminine with a very, like, more Masculine Streetwear-look. ... I would describe it like kind of like very Rihanna-esque. Rihanna is you know, very street fashion. Yeah, that's probably something that inspired me." - Scott

The examples of celebrity style influencers, appears to support the 'stereotyped' western perspective on androgyny, described by several participants as thin and white. Other celebrity figures who adopted androgynous fashion mentioned include, David Bowie, Grace Jones, Billy Porter Sam Smith and Lil Nas X to name a few. However, the distinction between the two groups is that the participants would consider adopting similar styles that celebrities like Harry Styles and Damiano David would wear. This is not to say that the other celebrities are not influencing personal style, they were just not directly linked to specific participants as personal influences on their own style. Participants would not necessarily always mimic the fashions of the celebrities but emulate the rock star attitude, "wearing whatever you want" as Blair describes.

"They're not caring what they're wearing. They're just wearing it. Because to make like, they are making a statement, but they're not forcefully trying to make a statement." - Blair

"So, if you're just wearing something down the street, you shouldn't be like, Ah, I need to cover up. I can't show my midriff and stuff like that. I can't, I can't wear a skirt down the street because people look at me. I think like obliterating those thoughts, when you're into androgynous fashion, as well, as should be there. So, you shouldn't have you shouldn't have to question yourself when you're wearing clothes with confidence as well." - Blair

Two participants expressed how although celebrities are now making headlines for androgynous fashion adoptions, this is not a new phenomenon for celebrities. That in fact due to a lack of immediate reference, people have forgotten how commonplace androgynous fashion was and is.

"But because it is such a subculture that it's taken now to like, people who are big stars and who already have the spotlight, to then have to come out and then go through the scrutiny. Suddenly, people are like, wow, this has never existed before." - Sebastian

Sebastian highlights here how the celebrities go through considerable scrutiny when they publicly adopt fashion which goes against societal expectations. Despite the scrutiny, it is likely that the celebrity adoption of androgynous fashion has influenced and supported the androgynous trend overall. This could be supported on multiple levels, increasing the normalisation of androgynous fashion on a societal scale, and on individual adoption where people are inspired to adopt similar androgynous styles. This resembles a type of celebrity endorsement whereby because they adopt androgynous fashion, it makes it seemingly okay for others to follow suit. Jimbo then supports the notion of celebrities twisting social expectations in their interview by commenting.

"Yes and no. Kind of related to the like Harry Styles kind of twisting and social perception of clothes." - Jimbo

Jimbo then goes further to support the significance of celebrities on this trend by saying how fashion is often reflective of what is going on in pop culture.

"It's kind of more of a reflection on pop culture in a way. You know, you have your Timothée Chalamete's, you know Harry Styles." - Jimbo

This raises the question: what is driving this change in fashion? Are 'radical' celebrities responsible for this resurgence? Ida notes that celebrities may choose to adopt androgynous fashion, in order to be on the current edge of fashion or adopt things that are not mainstream. However, it is not known whether they do so for acceptance from particular groups or as a ploy for normalisation.

"[Harry Styles] I think he chooses to wear like floral or femme, flamboyant or forward clothing, in order to be different. Now, whether the reasoning behind that is to look different or for acceptance, or to normalise that particular type of question, like, I don't know why he does it, but he certainly does it anyway he pulls it off." - Ida

The interviews highlighted this separation of influences and the importance of both. While celebrities might not directly influence males to adopt fashion items as in *like for like*, they are crucial in stimulating conversations and buzz within the realms of fashion which can create normalisation and visibility (such as Madonna appropriating vogue dance). The influence of celebrities is undeniable; however, this was not the participant's first point of reference when asked who influences their fashion. In some ways, celebrity culture was still somewhat aspirational than practical for everyday adoption and thus further removed from the participants influence of adoption. Stronger influences come from the proximity to the adopter which is explored further in the following sections.

4.2.2.2 social media - micro influences

While celebrities play an influencing role in fashion adoptions, more commonly the participants had referenced their own social media feeds as places for outfit inspirations and the influencers they choose to follow as sources for inspiration. These social media influencers are distinct from celebrities as the perception of these influences is that they are closer to the actual participant. They are a closer reflection of what the participant's fashion reality could be like. Although the participants did not mention if they follow celebrities as part of their social media, it

is highly likely that there is overlap from celebrities and influencers appearing on their social media feed. The quotes below solidify the significant role that social media plays into influencing the participants adoptions of androgynous fashion.

> *"I follow another person on Instagram. Who just takes a lot of just ideas and just different clothes and just kind of blends them together has so many different looks. Oh, a lot of skirts as a man, and I love it." - Jimbo*

> *"What's around me and then on Tik Tok itself, I guess you could call them like micro celebrities, I guess. ... They definitely aren't individual people on Tik Tok, where I'd be like, oh, like, I follow them for their fashion. It's more that within the content that I see. I see so many looks, that sort of vibe." – Max*

> *"I'm definitely influenced a lot by what you see on Instagram, Tik Tok more of the like, like trend cycle and like, Y2K fashion." - Scott*

The quotes illustrate how social media plays a significant role in how adopters are exposed to new fashion trends. From this, we can argue that the individual influencers the participants follow will have an impact on how they adopt androgynous fashion. These share come aspirational qualities that the celebrity influences have in the sense that these influencers are adopting fashion that is not readily available in New Zealand. However, they are not as highly stratified within society as celebrities and therefore these types of adoption are more 'possible' for influencee's. From this theme, is it likely that there is more mimicking of a social media influencer's fashion than a celebrity for the participants in this study.

4.2.2.3 TV media

Another influence on the androgynous fashion is the exposure to fashion through TV/streaming media. In some cases, what the participants saw through these channels would inspire their outfit choices. In a way this is similar media channel to social media where there is a combination of celebrity and influencer that people follow and aspire to be like. Another

participant observed how other adopters around them would make reference to themes from a particular TV series.

"It'd be a lot of TV that I'd watch. That'd be like oh like ELITE like God some of the queer fashion is beautiful." - Max

But star influences. For me a lot of it's like people I see on TV like it could be like real housewives or something like because you get to see them come in all sorts of states of life and you're like, Oh, I'd like that outfit they wore in the club in the scene or to dinner or just when they had like at their job and kind of just seeing other people's personal styles. .... And I really, really liked what and McAfee Westbrook wore on the Politician, which is this, Ryan Murphy Netflix show. ... I think seeing that kind of encouraged me to take risks with my own style. And I guess also kind of like, for me come up with a sort of style, like blueprint for myself." - Leonardo

Here Leonardo supports the previous statement that the gender of the influencers does not affect the adopter and is not prescriptive. In other words, men are not exclusively influenced by men, it is dependent on how the adopter resonates with the influencer. The quote below from Blair also lists more media influences and notes that we are in the "Euphoria era". Euphoria is a TV show which was trending heavily on social media when the new season premiered to the point where people would host Euphoria themed parties to emulate the show. The people would dress up as characters from the show or in the theme of the show.

"You know, in recent I very strongly think that I call it the Euphoria era. Okay. Yeah, so it's like heavily influenced by media like Netflix, I think. So, all those are those like heartbreak high? Shows like that where the audience now is super relatable to the narrative of the show. ... Yeah. And also, the Euphoria era is heavily influenced by Tik Tok, as well." - Blair

This is a substantial finding as it showcases another medium for which participants are influenced to adapt their personal style and also further integrates the synergy of pop culture and

fashion expression. This time from the adopter level, where the participants create looks that are inspired or make reference to characters on popular television shows. Blair notes in their interview how the audience relates to the narrative of the show which leads to the adoption of similar fashions that the viewer resonates with. Thus, these looks are seasonal and trendy with the popularity of the TV show.

4.2.2.4 Marketing influences

Another theme that was uncovered from the interviews is how marketing has an effect on fashion adoption. One participant in particular did reference clothing brands' marketing efforts towards gender neutrality in their campaigns. This was a contributing part of their evaluative criteria when considering the brands, they shop with. They would be more likely to shop with brands that cater towards minorities in their marketing efforts. Brands that include gender diverse messaging towards the queer communities from the participant's evoked sets featured the brands Calvin Klein, Zara, Dr Martens, I Love Ugly, Dangerfield and ASOS. Interestingly, no specific high end/street designers were brought up, although high end designers were noted to be driving and influencing the current fashion trends.

> *"I buy things from Dangerfield quite a bit I've gotten quite a few things from there ASOS as well. I feel like ASOS has a really good broad range of stuff and I feel like if they had like a physical store, I would be in there like every weekend dropping half my pay check."*
> *- Leonardo*

> *"Yes! If this was Dr Marten's with a crop top and a backpack on, I could see this being like as Punky, streetwear look. So, it depends on what you're styling." - Riccan*

Blair noted how product placements within celebrity performances also influence trends. The participants also noted the subtlety of product placements at celebrity events and the use of influencers as more subtle marketing tactics to promote fashion items.

> *"Yeah, I think that they're quite like super subliminal, right? Because they're not like at the forefront. But when you see like a group of like, 20/30 people behind, like, who you're*

seeing at concerts, like that's going to get stuck in your mind. … That's like unintentional advertising. There's always a plan." - Blair

Ida also supports these marketing concepts in their interview by saying how influencers, media, and celebrities are all part of the marketing machine of fashion. These influencers are essentially marketing and selling the newest fashion trends.

"Influences are Just another type of conveyance as websites or other forms of media and marketing, like their monthly or weekly Vogue magazine, you know that that's just another example of fashion being conveyed outwards and, and the size of your audience, whether you are the Vogue magazine or a Tik Tok influencer or Harry Styles attempting to push a collection, the size of your audiences is going to matter." - Ida

In this case, Ida talks about the marketing concepts of celebrity endorsement as well as social media marketing influencers; referencing Harry Styles, influencers and Vogue magazine as examples of channels for product placement and promotional tools as used by institutions.

4.2.2.5 Fashion Designer Influence

A few participants not only commented on trends forming at the adopter level but also that trends are also largely influenced by what fashion designers create at the high fashion level.

"I suppose, a kind of an addition to, and you look at high fashion as well, and sort of what Alexander McQueen was doing and John Paul Gautier has been doing for years and kind of Vivienne Westwood rip was like doing and like, so many, it's been in the public perception, but because it's not like mainstream, … and they were arguably incredibly androgynous - Sebastian

The quote from Sebastian's interview also points out the role of the fashion designers who have stimulated androgynous fashion and at the time these designers may have been shunned for their designs, such as Vivienne Westwood who created a capsule collection to predict what male fashion would look like which included a set of pearls for men. This was poorly received by the

audience and in fact the audience laughed! It is ironic today, one of the larger trends has seen males adopting pearl necklaces. But this does add support to the claims from Sebastian, not only did a designer meddle with the normative gender roles within fashion but they also predicted what men would be wearing in several years' time. This quote shows the awareness that comes from the designer level does have a role in influencing the androgynous fashion trends.

> *"It seems like a lot of designers are pushing some more normally feminine pieces. on their models I think I saw literally saw on Instagram yesterday was where the male models were wearing these cropped looks that had like a more masculine look to it but had skirts on."* - Riccan

> *"Really the big labels obviously decide this. But where does that decision come from, you know, and people set trends and the fashion blah blah."* - Leo

From these quotes one participant describes how designers are "pushing" the androgynous fashion trends meaning that the designers dictate what the next cycle of fashion will look like, androgynous or not. The other participant notes that fashion trends do not always start from the designer level but actually from the adopter's level too. It is evident from these interviews that the designers do have a considerable deciding factor in what fashion is trending or what styles are perpetuated within society. However, in terms of adoption, the designers are indirectly influencing the adoption of androgynous fashion. Fashion designers are impacting the fashion industry through their choice of design that then diffuses through to the early adopters then through society. The designer's role in the adoption process is as the proprietor or instigator that create clothing that then gets adopted by individuals. In other words, they help to enable the androgynous fashion trends.

4.2.2.6 Proximity influence

Another external factor in the adoption of androgynous fashion is the people closer to the participant. These people were found to highly influence the adoption of androgynous fashion. The people within the participant's friendship group create safe environments which allows them to adopt different styles. This influence can be distinguished through the proximity or importance

that the adopters place on them. Thus, they are called proximity influences. Essentially this term encompasses both the people you may surround yourself within an echo-chamber as well as the external media influences you elect to follow. This allows for social media friends to be a form of intangible friend that can still influence the adopter.

> *"But I think it's more depending on the, your social standing, and the people that you surround yourself definitely help influence your expression." - Aria*

> *"Or you say go for friends or sort of like friends and then there's kind of like these kind of like male fashion models that I follow on Instagram and stuff. And then yeah, I guess there's like there's this is the kind of the musicians and actors that you see on TV and stuff like Harry Styles and Brad Pitt and stuff like that. And then I guess also people you see on the street as well that you will pass them and you're like, that looks cool. It somehow might whatsoever be problematic, might try and replicate it". - Jacque*

These quotes detail how someone who has smaller influences from social media will in turn be influenced by the people they choose to surround themselves with. Ida also supports this idea of proximity influences by noting how in their own friendship circles they will have a subculture of fashion adoption and that will affect how they adopt individually. Where Jacque takes into account the wider variety of factors that influence their fashion adoption.

> *"I think that a lot of the people that just inherently hang out that I hang out with are like white cis het. And then that is its own subculture of fashion." - Ida*

These influences have more effect on the individual's adoption of androgynous fashion as this is where the adopter will garner positive or negative feedback. Seeing others wearing similar styles will affirm their decisions. The following section looks to describe this affirming environment in more detail. As discussed earlier from looking at the influencing factors on males who adopt androgynous fashion, there are several reasons as to why they may adopt. They may choose to do so purely because androgynous fashion is currently trending or because it is what they see within their immediate environment, and they want to perpetuate these ideas. Finally, they

may choose to adopt it as a form of individual self-expression. The evidence points to multiple factors which influences the adoption of androgynous fashion, not only the social environment but the influences within the participant's proximity which may be their social media following and the people they surround themselves with.

4.2.3 Summary

There was an overwhelming commonality between the themes that highlight the significance of visibility with fashion trends on media channels. In short if participants are exposed to androgynous fashion adoptions from a variety of media the likelihood of adoption will increase. Among all the potential external influences that drive participants to adopt androgynous fashion, the significant factors were the participants' social media following. However, other influences such as celebrities, TV media, marketing as well the designers within the fashion industry all had some influence over what the participant could potentially adopt. This research has identified the different media that influence adoption, but they differ from participant to participant given some participants want to emulate the celebrities and mimic what they see on social media and TV. However, the most noteworthy of these is the people which they surround themselves. One key point that becomes clear from these interviews is that while fashion is communicative, the adopters are not solely trying to communicate their gender expression. They are communicating feelings and emotions and projecting confidence within themselves and to other people through their fashion choices. The internal reasons why males adopt androgynous fashion are for the need of self-expression through escapism, experimentation and expressive means, and to feel positively about themselves and the way they dress.

4.3 How are males adopting androgynous fashion? Enablers/inhibitors

How males are adopting this androgynous phenomenon is through echo-chambers, despite having a level of confidence within themselves, there is still some considerable thought that goes into what setting the participant will be entering prior to the adoption choice. This section looks the enabling and inhibiting factors that lead to androgynous fashion adoption.
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4.3.1 Echo-Chamber effect

The term echo-chamber is used in this case to describe social settings where the values of the group members are shared. In other words, these are safe spaces for pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable in terms of fashion adoption. In this study these echo-chambers are described as places where the participants feel they will not be judged negatively and are encouraged to express individuality and creativity with their fashion adoption. This term is first brought up by one participant and is used to describe the social settings in which the participants adopt androgynous fashion because it succinctly encapsulates the social dynamics of the participant groups.

> *"Because if you're, you're in your bubble of like-minded people who support whatever you're doing, then it's it is an **echo-chamber** and humanity has a way of going to crazy places. So, I think androgyny is similar in the sense that if, if everyone I know is wearing brand dresses, I'm going to think of that as normal? And then someone else is going to be like, what the fuck is this?"* - Sebastian

An echo-chamber in this case consists of the people you are surrounding yourself with and the social setting such as a themed gathering you are going to. These echo-chambers are significant because they provide a level of safety for participants to adopt for experimental or expressive fashion. Echo-chambers explore this balance between self-expression and dressing in accordance with the social setting more, as discussed in the previous section on the cultural context which describes that when choosing to adopt androgynous fashion, it is important to understand the social context lest you are socially rejected. Of note, when talking about the social environment, if the participant knows the types of people who will be there, and what types of fashion will be well received by said peers then it is easier to adopt androgynous fashion. The interviews highlighted that if the participant understands the environment they are going into, they are more likely to push the boundaries of their fashion adoption. And contrarily if the environment is unknown, they are more likely to wear something more conservative. Examples can be seen in comparing Figure 3 and Figure 5 where the adoption in Figure 3 is more subtle than the adoption in Figure 5 This is also reflected in the settings, Figure 3 is an everyday adoption and Figure 5 was for the purposes of a photo shoot.

"... I said, I want to like dress up. But I don't know, to what extent that I can. Because I want to kind of wear this top. But you might look a bit too feminine and blah, blah, blah. Because you don't enter your space. You don't know you're like, I got to be careful ... In this specific environment. That stuff is celebrated people expressing themselves how they want to they celebrate it." - Riccan

The following quote from Riccan was a comment from the researcher driven photo elicitation, where they would adopt the items in (Figure 7) for a business/professional look. This was under the assumption that their professional environment celebrates diversity and self-expression.

"I could wear this and it would be fine. Because, again, my environment empowered me to be able to do that." – Riccan

Figure 7. Black pleated skirt/pants with blazer and pussy bow from researcher driven photo elicitation.

Blair notes how coming from a small town into a bigger city with more likeminded individuals has more allowance for provocative fashion.

"I think there's both definitely depends on the environment. So, I would say from my experience, if you're like, flamboyant, or different in a small town of like, 3000, and you have no friends or support and your, your, your family that are like 40 or something, they don't get it. But when you're in a big city, and you're out around people like you, like, the allowance is, more extreme?" - Blair

These quotes describe the consideration of the social environment prior to adoption and also illustrate the change from precautious to empowered when the environment allows for more freedom of expression. This adds another step when evaluating how one dresses which is the evaluation of the social context. Deepening this evaluation is predicting how the outfit might be received by peers and strangers, if the group members are unknown to the adopter, then in some cases this will hinder the adoption of androgynous fashion. However, if they are known then this can enable the adopter if the people are also supportive, which is illustrated in the following quotes:

"When you're with your friends or like certain friend groups, it's like, you all together like, know that you all have a kind of like a have fun with what you wear. … And then I think when you're with someone new, it's not like I think you're more worried about a negative reaction." – Jacque

Here Jacque brings up their photo from a party they organised where the theme was pink (see Figure 8). This was in some way a push back at gender reveal parties to challenge normative gender roles around colour. In this situation Jacque had created an echo-chamber which enabled and encouraged people to dress in more 'feminine' clothing. This meant people going to this event would face less social risk of rejection if they adopted an androgynous look.

Figure 8. Jacque's photo elicitation

"More effort if it's just me alone, going out or with my friends. But if I'm with my partner, they just do basic shit. So, I need to change my clothing to adapt into his. ... But if I'm like with people who likes clothing fashion like you might I can be myself." - Rich

The previous quote shows how there are two 'groups' with different values on fashion, one group has more adoption and expression while the partner chooses not to adopt much, and this influences how the participant will dress up. The more enabling group creates this echo-chamber where creative expression is allowed and the second inhibits the level of creativity not wanting to stray from the normative fashion. Here we may see a split in the concept with echo-chambering, where the enabling environment has more creative expression, the more confined environment features some mimicry. Mimicry means the participant will try to copy the style choices of the other parties where fitting in is more important than standing out. Social media plays a role with echo-chambers in introducing the idea of aspirational copying, which is similar to mimicry where participants will imitate what social media influencers (and even celebrities) do to emulate their confidence within themselves.

"Yeah, like I've been checking his Instagram like God he's so confident. I mean, he is a model the restaurant we're in crop top like, I look fucking good. Yeah. So yeah, like literally when I was cutting those crop tops my Nana was there like, oh, it's very sort of like, I know that's the purpose. Yeah, and you I mean like his sense of style. Mixing both masculine and feminine clothes." - Rich

This illustrates how social media in a way can be its own enabling echo-chamber. The participant is shown people who are adopting desirable fashion and with confidence because they see a person adopting such a style online and gains social capital in the form of 'likes' which can be validating for one's own adoption of similar styles because they have seen it being successful from someone else. This section shows how participants have been enabled to adopt androgynous fashion through accepting social environments and people which we call echo-chambers. The following section looks closer at the risk mitigation that the participants undergo prior to adopting androgynous fashion.

4.3.1.1 Risk Mitigation

An influencing factor in the level of androgynous fashion adoption is the perceived risk of social rejection. What this looks like in this context is when someone adopts androgynous fashion that is outside of their norm and receives negative critique from their peers. To avoid social rejection the adopter will consider the context of the event and the people there and weigh up the types of adoptions they can wear without being a social outcast. Within this section the enabling and inhibiting factors of the social environment when adopting androgynous fashion are discussed. The quotes below illustrate the consideration by the participants prior to adopting androgynous fashion.

*"Yeah, like that Miu Miu mini skirt. I do love that, but I have to be definitely the right setting. It has to be some somewhere where I know the type of people that would be there. I feel very comfortable because yeah, whereas somewhere where there's a lot of straight people who I don't know, you know?" – Scott (*See Figure 9)

Figure 9. Miu Miu Skirt from researcher photo elicitation.

"Inhibiting factors, I think is knowing that there's a section of society that just aren't going to agree with it at all, are going to be very confronted by them and potentially angry. And those the kind of, I suppose the ignorance scares me, like, it always becomes very loaded."
- Sebastian

Here the participants explain how knowing the people within the environment is an important factor for them when deciding to adopt androgynous fashion. Which shows a fear of social rejection based on how they may express parts of themselves and the potential negative results of such expression. The example here where one participant is discussing where they would wear one of the example looks which featured a miniskirt. The criteria for wearing such an item of clothing in particular is a positive and accepting social setting and likeminded people that would be there.

"Enablers? Spaces where I feel like there's a queer majority is very enabling, or if I'm attending an event with someone else, who's likely to be doing the same thing. And then

there's just kind of like, even if the event overall might not have that much androgynous
fashion, or even queer people at it, knowing that you're like, with someone who's just going
to back you, and you can kind of ignore everything else. I think that's quite helpful. And
anytime you see other people dressed in similar ways, there's always Yeah, enabling." -
Max

Max also supports the idea of mitigating social rejection when they illustrate how having people who will support you then the perceived risk of social rejection is lessened because you will already have that support network to protect you. When talking about what enables males to adopt androgynous fashion it is clear from the analysis that the social context has a lot to say in terms of how often and much they will adopt, as well as the people around the adopters who create enabling spaces through shared values and low risk of social rejection. From these concepts it is clear that there is desire to be unique and express oneself through fashion but within the constraint of what the social setting will allow. This supports the notions from previous sections that looked at the social context within New Zealand. The overarching factors revealed from the interviews are supportive groups also known as echo-chambers as well as an understanding of the social context/setting and an understanding of the potential rejection from wearing such an outfit. When these factors are all positively skewed the likelihood for androgynous fashion increases. Contrarily the negative skewed factors lead to more conservative adoptions.

4.4 Outlying adopters

4.4.1 Trend adopters and Trend rejecters

The study revealed that some participants would consider themselves trend followers. This group of participants are heavily influenced by what they observe on social media, and what they perceive to be 'trending' on their curated social media feeds.

"Look trendy I guess, but also its fun just like mix and match and be like oh, well, that
looks actually kind of like fun." - Jacque

"I usually go for trends." - Rich

On the other hand, some participants expressed that they do not observe or participate in fashion trends.

"I think the fashion industry, the size and money, I think, I find really fascinating because I'm so far removed from or like, I'm a part of it still, but I don't keep up with it." – Aria

"I think in mainstream culture and men's fashion, I have no idea what's happening in men's fashion." – Max

Those who seek to distance themselves from what is trending in fashion would still be considered androgynous fashion adopters. These types of adopters will have a different take on how their androgynous fashion looks which may differ from what the current fashion trend is. The question, here was to describe their fashion and what types of trends they have observed in male fashion, to gauge their participation and observation of current fashion trends. However, the responses were a mixed result of trend followers, trend avoiders and some who were none the wiser. All groups were adopters of androgynous fashion despite their involvement in the current androgynous trends. These examples counter the argument that because androgynous fashion is trending, that males are only adopting to stay up with the current trends. It is likely that the trend avoiders are still subject to fashion trends but have other means of picking up the trends. Where a trend follower may follow several main fashion pipelines, like designers or fashion magazines, the trend avoiders may get their fashion inspirations from proximity influences that are not specific to any mainstream fashion media outlet.

4.4.2 Competition and the intent of the wearer

One participant acknowledged a competitive element for dressing up which is dressing with the intent to be the best dressed or to out-dress the other people in social settings. This is a way of increasing their social standing through wearing the most provocative, eye-catching look.

"But then for the likes of Wellington, where it's quite normal for this to be seen. It's more of almost like a competition with some of my friends, or at least that's how I feel it sometimes." - Aria

This could be an extremist attribute of the participant, but what it illustrates is another reason for adopting boundary pushing fashion to compete with their peers. This comes down to the intent of the wearer which was referenced by another participant but not pertaining to competition specifically.

"Yeah, I think I guess it's the intention of the wearer again. So, it's if they, if they want to be themselves, experiment with who they really are, or some people are like, Oh, Its only clothes, I'm just going to wear whatever." - Blair

What this dialogue shows is that while the participants dominantly responded with self-expression as their main reason for adopting androgynous fashion, there is also potential that there are multiple or compounding reasons for adopting androgynous fashion. In the case of competition, it is likely that the adoption is on the outlying or extremist adoptions where the most ground-breaking fashion occurs. If the purpose is to push the boundaries of their fashion expression, then the adopter may utilise more niche fashion in an attempt to other themselves. However, this raises the point of social boundaries of what is acceptable to wear and will be perceived as such. Given different social settings, there are comfortable limits which people will accept which are socially constructed boundaries. However, the nature of androgynous fashion lends itself to deconstruct and break such barriers. It is up to the intention of the wearer if they are trying to be inflammatory and disrupt these imposed norms or if they are simply expressing themselves. Despite this, there must still be some element of comprehension of the disruption. As in the look itself must still make sense even if it is in direct opposition with the social context.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This section discusses the findings in relation to the current literature and answers the research questions which were at the start of the methodology section. This chapter ends with theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations, future research opportunities and concluding statements.

5.2 Interpretation and discussion of findings

The literature review points out several gaps concerning the male adoption of androgynous fashion. This thesis seeks to bridge some of these gaps to help describe and explain the phenomena of male androgynous fashion which is occurring in society. Section 5.2 ends with the overall model that describes the influences on the male adoption of androgynous fashion.

5.2.1 Research Question One:

The first research question is: What are males perceiving as androgynous fashion? This illustrates the phenomenon and provides the reader the necessary information to understand what the participants describe androgynous fashion as. Ultimately this leads to the development of an androgynous fashion spectrum from the male adopter's perspective.

5.2.1.1 What are males adopting?

The participant photo elicitation technique was a useful tool for gaining insight into what types of clothes the participants wore and more importantly considered as androgynous fashion. As discussed in the findings the commonly adopted instances of androgyny feature more feminine colour palettes, softer fabric choices, and accessories like pearls. Dr Martens boots were a specific case described as androgynous due to the gender-neutral portrayal of the shoe. The way participants describe androgynous fashion by incorporating elements of feminine clothing is supported by Reilly (2020 Pg. 7) who also suggests that pairing feminine fabrics with masculine fabrics creates androgynous fashion.

5.2.1.2 What do males perceive androgynous fashion to be?

The participants described androgynous fashion as the mixing of masculine and feminine clothing. This description is supported by the literature as Paoletti (2015) describes, androgynous fashion to be the mixing of masculine and feminine fashion. The participants also considered the absence of gender within a look to be androgynous in nature. However, the current literature on androgynous fashion has sought to split these two concepts, keeping androgyny as gendered and unisex fashion to be gender neutral (Arvanitidou & Gasouka, 2013; Paoletti, 2015). However, the concept of androgyny also takes into account an ambiguous presentation of gender according to Reichert and Lambiase (2013). From the findings it was not explicitly clear what the majority of participants thought about unisex versus androgyny however, a few participants would consider the gender neutral or unisex fashion as part of the androgynous spectrum. This research suggests the idea that unisex fashion should be integrated as part of the androgynous fashion spectrum. The participants also noted how not only the clothing contributed to an androgynous look but also how the posing and gendered body underneath the clothing also contributed to the androgynous portrayal in fashion. This aligns with research from Zawisa, (2019) who analysed print media and looked at the way the different genders were often portrayed. In this case the findings align with Zawisa (2019) because they both highlight how posture can be communicative of stereotyped gender traits. Later this section discusses how unisex fashion could be integrated with androgynous fashion concepts with the description of the male androgynous fashion spectrum.

5.2.1.3 Hyper and subtle

The literature has not yet discussed how androgynous fashion occurs along a spectrum from hyper to subtle types of adoption. Eladwi et al. (2016) come close to this idea when describing extreme fashion, described as excessive, outlandish, and verging on the unacceptable. However, this is importantly noted as being subjective to the individual's interpretation of what is fashionable (Eladwi et al., 2016). Outlandish fashion is another term used to describe fashion styles that were foreign at the time (Burghartz, 2015). However, these terms do not fully encapsulate what the participants have described through the photo elicitation technique. Hyper androgynous fashion would be fashion that is blatant, contrasting and much more provocative for the purpose of stirring responses from on-lookers for an example (See Figure 6 in Chapter 4). Subtle androgynous fashion is harder to decipher as a crossing of gendered fashion, as this type of androgynous fashion will

still 'pass' as somewhat more normative fashion within society (See Figure 3 in Chapter 4) The participants describe the hyper and subtle adoptions to be opposites of each other and exist on a spectrum. Hence, from the spectrum concepts the mix of masculine and feminine, and hyper and subtle androgyny create a cross axis that describes androgynous fashion, which I explain next.

5.2.1.4 Figure 10. Model of an androgynous fashion spectrum

The model (See Figure 10) is derived from the participant interviews and illustrates how they perceive androgynous fashion to exist. The horizontal axis is the spectrum from masculine to feminine. As discussed in the findings while some aspects of androgynous fashion appear to remove all traces of a gender presentation (Centre of the model.) An androgynous look can still have an overarching masculine or feminine presentation. Thus, the horizontal axis takes into account the gendered spectrum of androgynous fashion. Some participants often exist closer to the centre of the model and have an even combination of masculine and feminine elements incorporated in a look but acknowledge the spectrum of androgynous looks.

Androgynous Fashion Spectrum

Hyper

| Machine Gun Kelly/ Embellishment | Billy Porter/ Skirts |

Masculine — Feminine

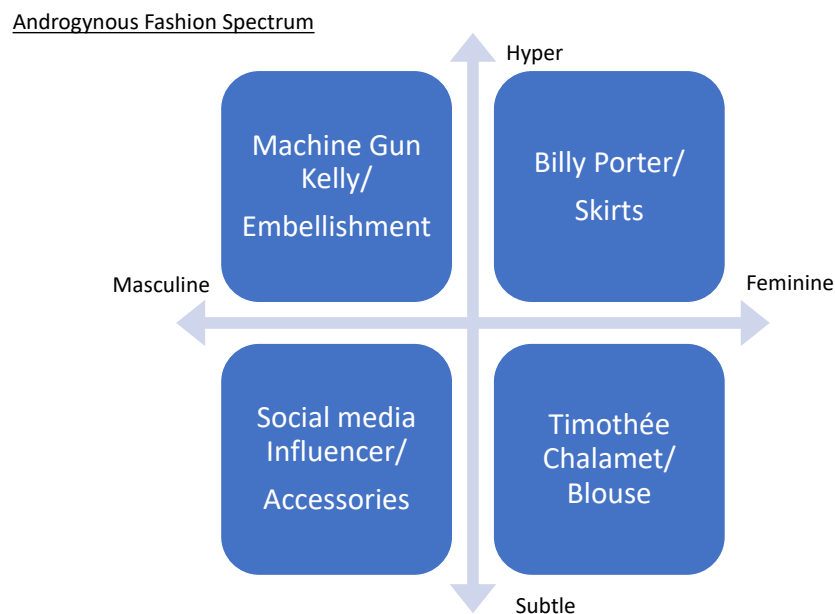| Social media Influencer/ Accessories | Timothée Chalamet/ Blouse |

Subtle

Figure 10. Androgynous fashion Spectrum

The vertical axis is a spectrum from subtle to hyper refers to the level of androgynous adoption. Subtle looks are not as expressive as hyper looks and are more likely to be attributed to

everyday occurrences of androgynous fashion. Hyper on the other hand refers to more intense manifestations of androgynous fashion, these are more likely to occur with a specific purpose in mind. An example to illustrate this would be special events which allow for an intense adoption of androgynous fashion. However, it is important to note that while these are the more common occurrences the adoption of hyper or subtle androgynous fashion is not exclusive to special events or everyday respectively. Some participants will adopt relatively hyper androgynous looks because that is within their internal characteristics and motivations despite the higher likelihood of perceived social scrutiny and rejection.

This model is designed to classify and help to identify androgynous looks not to predict them. When combing the horizontal and vertical axis the androgynous fashion spectrum, we can simplify the four quadrants which form from two axis. The top left quadrant is the masculine – hyper, what this looks like will be an overly masculine portrayal of androgynous fashion. There is minimal adoption of feminine clothing, and the outfit will still read as masculine, what may be adopted is embellishments like studded spikes, bright colour palettes. An example would be Machinegun Kelly (See Figure 11).

Figure 11. Machinegun Kelly

Figure 12. Billy Porter

      The top right is the hyper - feminine, this type of adoption often will involve skirts and have a more dominantly feminine presentation as exemplified by Billy Porter (See Figure 12). The subtle - masculine quadrant in the bottom left has a dominantly masculine presentation but with small incorporated feminine elements, such as accessories like pearls and necklaces (See Figure 13).

Figure 13. Shawn Mendes

The final quadrant is the subtle - feminine in the bottom right. This fashion will have a more feminine presentation but still be somewhat passable. The adoptions here involving greater adoptions of feminine accessories or styles as exemplified by Timothée Chalamet wearing a backless top in red satin fabric (See Figure 14). It is important to note that this model while having four distinct quadrants is meant to be fluid. Meaning that the adoptions of androgynous fashion range and vary outside and inside of the proposed categories.

Figure 14. Timothée Chalamet

5.2.2 Research Question Two:

5.2.2.1 Internal factors influencing androgynous fashion adoption.

Research question two looks to understand why males adopt androgynous fashion. This section uncovers the reasons why males choose to adopt as well as the external factors which also contribute to the adoption of androgynous fashion. An assumption of this research maybe that the adoption of androgynous fashion is occurring purely because it is trending (Sproles, 1974). However, the findings somewhat contradict this idea. Although fashion is likely still diffusing through similar processes as the fashion diffusion model proposed by Sproles (1974), the findings indicate that there are internal and external factors which the fashion diffusion model does not describe fully.

The participants describe that the main reasons why they adopt was the felt need of self-expression. However, this does not align well with the literature currently on male fashion adoption. The previous literature has predominately looked at fashion adoption as a causality of the socio-political landscape (Koda & Bolton, 2005). However, the findings here stress that while fashion is influenced by societal and political factors, the locus of adoption is strongly held by the individual. In other words, it is how the adopter identifies with particular fashion items and how they enable them to express themselves that will be the ultimate deciding factor when adopting androgynous fashion.

The responses on self-expression can be further segmented into three modes of adoption - expression, escapism, and experimentation. These are ways that the participants describe adopting androgynous fashion, to express themselves, to escape from other more conservative identities and to experiment with their own identity. Some of the self-expression concepts are partially supported by Marzel and Stiebel, (2017) who describe western fashion as a communicative bodily adornment. In this study, the communicative elements of fashion are supported by the expression mode of androgynous fashion. The participants describe expression as a mode for expressing their personality or mood. Thus, this aligns with the definitions from Marzel and Stiebel, (2017). This can also apply to the escapism mode because the participants describe escapism as showcasing other aspects of their character through their adoption of androgynous fashion. However, the communicative element from Marzel and Stiebel, (2017) does not fit well with the experimentalism mode. This is because the participants experiment and explore their fashion and identity in order to discover more about themselves, rather than communicating aspects of their character.

The experimentalism mode when adopting androgynous fashion could be used for identity discovery and building rather than expression. Parmentier and Rolland (2009) looked at how consumers create and experiment with building identities on virtual reality platforms. They uncovered that experimenting with virtual identities gives the user a medium for testing how viable a created persona is in social and individual contexts (Parmentier & Rolland, 2009). This supports the experimental mode whereby the participants who adopt to experiment with androgynous fashion are testing the viability of a created fashion identity. While the adoption of androgynous

fashion is communicative it is also is a medium for experimenting with their self-concept and fashion identity.

5.2.2.1.1 Positive emotions

When delving deeper into the self-expressive reasons for adoption the participants point to the positive feelings they felt when adopting androgynous fashion. These include feelings such as confidence, joy, empowered, and good within themselves. Hamenda, (2012) talks about how the eroticism of woman's fashion was an assertation of strength, as a way to reclaim power and freedom and project that into society. This aligns with what the participants have described when adopting androgynous fashion. When they adopt androgynous fashion, there is a sense of empowerment as well as a sense of rebellion which is then projected into society. Hamenda, (2012) talks about specific androgynous fashion items such as the tuxedo which are adopted by women, specifically to project their associated attributes such as intelligence into a social setting. This somewhat aligns with the participants' statements. However, the participants don't explicitly confirm this by stating they adopt certain androgynous fashion items for the confidence boost. Instead, they state that through adopting androgynous fashion, they experience a boost in their confidence. This puts the origin of the positive emotion onto the adopter rather than the clothing which re-interprets the work of Hamenda, (2012). Workman and Kidd (2000) also support the notions that dressing for acceptance or uniqueness will have positive emotional reactions depending on the individual's intentions. Most participants adopt androgynous fashion as a medium for self-expression which does somewhat align with Workman and Kidd (2000). Workman and Kidd (2000) suggest that there is a private need for uniqueness to be different which when achieved will gain a positive emotional response. This also is somewhat supported by the participant responses where some participants desire to be different and not dress the same as everyone else. The following section discusses the external influences on androgynous fashion adoption.

5.2.2.2 External factors influencing androgynous fashion adoption.

5.2.2.2.1 Pop culture

When asked what influences their fashion, the majority of participants did not mention celebrities as a personal influence on what fashion they choose to adopt. However, there were a few who mentioned celebrities such as Harry Styles, Machine Gun Kelly, and Rihanna that were

style influencers. Gibson, (2012) highlights the significance of celebrity culture on society and pop culture. The findings support the work of Gibson, (2012) stating that some participants are directly influenced by celebrities, while the other participants note how celebrities are indirectly influencing the trends and social culture.

5.2.2.2.2 Designers

A few participants brought up the significance of the designer as an indirect influence on fashion adoption. These participants acknowledge that designers are part of the fashion machine as innovators which aligns with the analysis from West et al. (2021). It is suggested that designers are the drivers of change from a top down approach with fashion trends starting at the high end designer level and diffuse through society (West et al., 2021). There is not enough evidence to conclude if this a cause of the androgynous fashion phenomenon as trends can also start from the societal or bottom level (Sproles, 1974). From the findings and literature however, the role of designers does impact the overarching androgynous trend in some regard however further investigation is required to understand just how impactful the designer is.

5.2.2.2.3 TV and social media

Another source of inspiration when choosing to adopt androgynous fashion was the participant's social media feeds and TV shows. These platforms had the greatest positive reaction from participants when talking about the types of androgynous fashion they would and choose to follow. Shephard et al. (2016) investigate the influence of mass media versus personal media on fashion adoption. They find that mass media is the most significant when evaluating men's fashion consciousness (Shephard et al., 2016). The respondents also support these claims as they were most influenced by the widespread coverage from multiple channels of TV and social media that feature androgynous fashion.

5.2.2.2.4 Proximity

The most substantial factor when looking at the adoption of androgynous fashion was the participants own social spheres that are in close proximity to them. For instance, in a social setting such as a party or special event, the people that are within the adopter's social group will have an influencing effect on the types of fashion they would view as acceptable. The literature from Miller et al. (1993) supports this. In their research they identify how the individual who desires to stay up with the trends will observe the fashion of the individuals around them. Relating the literature to this case, if the participant saw their friends or people they saw in the street or at events adopting

androgynous fashion then they felt more secure in adopting such fashion themselves. There is a slight difference here where instead of observing the latest trends the participants note the comfort which relates to the desire to fit in with the social setting as mentioned by Miller et al. (1993). Not only the people but the social setting was influencing factors on the adoption of androgynous fashion according to the participants.

A concept which could be used to view all these external factors on adopting androgynous fashion would be the actor network theory. Whereby according to Finsterwalder (2018); Martin and Schouten, (2014), all the actors behave in a way that influences the adoption of androgynous fashion. From the data it is clear that there are multiple influencing factors behind the adoption of androgynous fashion hence, when describing why males adopt androgynous fashion the wider environment of androgynous fashion needs to be considered. One participant in particular brought up how legislative change also affects androgynous fashion. So there appears to be a fluid environment of conditions which leads to the adoption of androgynous fashion. Starting from the socio-political environment, then to the media and marketing environment and then to the participant's social sphere.

5.2.3 Research Question Three

This section focusses on creating understanding of how males adopt androgynous fashion. This section discusses the factors which affect how androgynous fashion manifested with the participants. At the end of this section a model of influencing factors is discussed to elucidate how males adopt androgynous fashion and describe how these factors interlink and affect the outcome of androgynous fashion adoption.

5.2.3.1 Echo-chamber

The term echo-chamber was used by a participant to describe the social setting including people who shared and supported the same values as the adopter. These shared values dictated then what types of fashion adoption were acceptable. If the participants were in an enabling echo-chamber where a common value or view of how gender is a social construct and is meant to be played with; then the adoption of androgynous fashion would be much more likely. On the other hand, if the echo-chamber was not enabling, then the adoption of androgynous fashion would not

be encouraged and likely end up manifesting in minimal adoptions or not at all. Onitiu (2022) supports this in their research which looked at the effects that filter bubbles and echo-chambers had on identity building from a digital point of view. Onitiu (2022) discuss the implications of social media algorithms that inadvertently stimulate an echo-chamber effect whereby the individual is re-enforced with similar messaging from their algorithm. In this context if the individual follows androgynous fashion tags and influencers then this will have an echo-chamber effect where this becomes the only reality which the individual is subjected to (Cinelli et al., 2021). Cinelli et al. (2021) notes how this echo-chamber effect can be harmful in some circumstances and perpetuate bias through how trends in information are diffused.

The differing point in these findings is that the participants mostly spoke about offline presences, in other terms friends and real-world people in social situations. At the end of the day, the actual scenario and people they choose to surround themselves with had a larger influence over their adoption than social media. This however does not mean that social media has no place in creating an echo-chamber. In fact, it is likely that social media has an indirect effect on these echo-chambers whereby the notion of androgynous fashion adoption stems from social media and are then affirmed in social settings by social group members. This builds off of the literature by Onitiu, (2022) adding another layer to the literature on echo-chamber effects.

5.2.3.2 Risk mitigation

Prior to adopting androgynous fashion, the participants noted how they would assess the likelihood of social rejection depending on what items of clothing they would adopt. Things the participants would consider prior to adoption would be the type of event, the people they would be surrounded by (i.e., the echo-chamber), and then given the social setting how the people would react to androgynous fashion in that space. This relates to the echo-chamber effect but adds another dimension which is the individual's perceived risk within the echo-chamber. Sproles (1974) somewhat supports this when they describe the social conformity of fashion trends, where the fashion object is either socially accepted or rejected. According to the participants this acceptance or rejection also relates at the individual adoption level not only the larger trend level. There is limited research that looks at mitigation of social rejection when adopting new fashion styles and further investigation is required to gain deeper insight into how the risk mitigation

process is used. Participants mitigate the risk of social rejection by tailoring their adoption of androgynous fashion. By considering the following factors in the androgynous spheres of influence (See Figure 15). The model below describes how males are influenced to adopt androgynous fashion, the model starting at the macro-societal level leading to micro at the participant level.
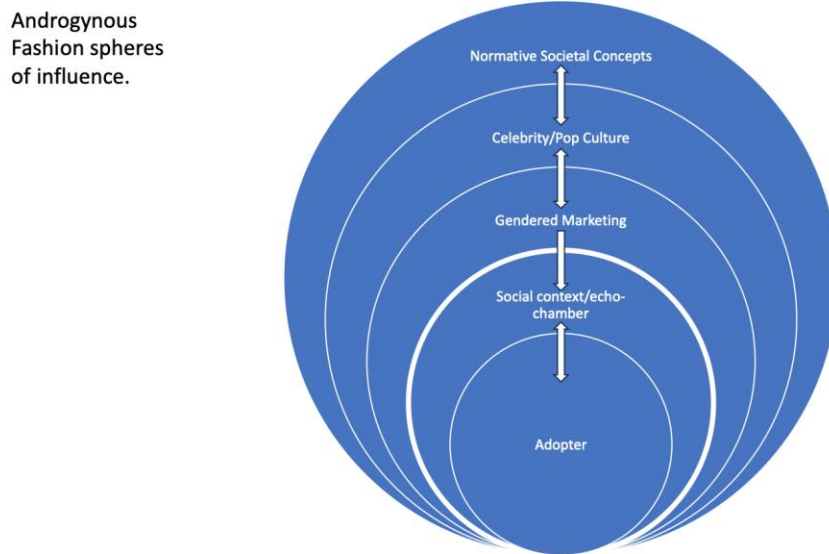

Figure 15. Spheres of influence on androgynous fashion adoption.

The findings suggest that the context of adoption is important when considering the environment, the adopters of androgynous fashion reside in. The outermost layer of the model is the normative societal concepts. This is essentially the shared view on gender and fashion in the society. In this case this is the western perspective as previously mentioned in the literature review and discussed by participants. At this layer it overarches the adopter and is the first layer when forming what androgynous fashion will look like. Celebrity pop-culture is the next layer of influence, this point is in-between gendered marketing and normative social concepts as celebrity culture is a considerable factor of influence on fashion and social commentary as supported by Gibson (2012). The two-way arrow in-between these two spheres shows that the two spheres have some interaction with each other. The following sphere is gendered marketing, this sphere encompasses the gendered marketing and social media marketing through algorithms that reflects

the social concepts and celebrity and pop culture messaging that participants are exposed to. Then the model has a one-way directional arrow which shows how these three external factors then penetrate into the participant's social sphere. This is where those values enter in an echo-chamber effect and perpetuate into the social context. Then finally into the participant sphere. There is a two-way arrow here to show how the participants own values will also extend into the echo-chambered social context. This leads into the next section which looks at describing the overall phenomenon of male adoption of androgynous fashion.

5.2.4 Adoption Model

This section now combines the results of the three research questions and describes why and how males are adopting androgynous fashion. Illustrated through the use of a proposed adoption model (See Figure 16) that takes into account the wide array of internal, external, and social factors which have led to the male adoption of androgynous fashion. Each of the points below can have an enabling or inhibiting effect on the adoption of androgynous fashion.
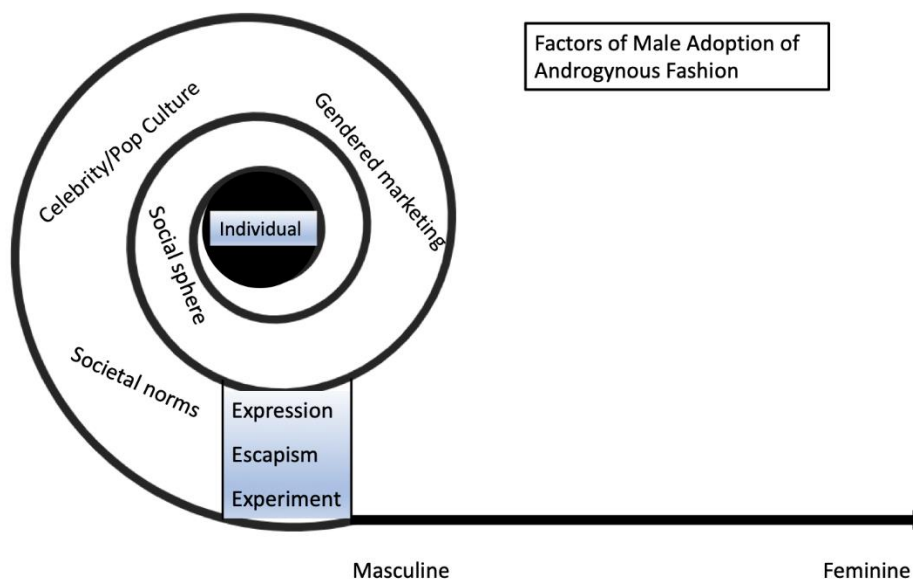

Figure 16. Model of the male adoption of androgynous fashion.

5.2.4.1 Individual

At the centre of the adoption model is the individual, this aspect of the model holds the adopter's internal motivations for self-expression, the individuals personal style concepts, and the individual's gender presentation in other terms this is how the individual's physical body will be perceived by society also taking on masculine and feminine traits. This is the baseline for androgynous fashion adoption. Given no other filters the possibilities of androgynous fashion adoption are endless. However, in reality the participants have described there are several environmental factors which will affect how androgynous fashion adoption manifests.

5.2.4.2 Social sphere

One revolution from the centre of the model is the individual's social sphere. At this point this is the first place where the adoption of androgynous fashion starts to be moulded. The social sphere includes the individual's friendship circle, both virtual and real-world circles are included. The social setting is also included at this this stage is where there is a context for adopting androgynous fashion such as everyday adoption or adoption for an event. Chrisman-Campbell, (2015) describe the unisex and gender-neutral fashion phenomena that have mirrored broader social changes. Which leads to the next section that looks at gendered marketing.

5.2.4.3 Gendered marketing

At this point of the spiral is gendered marketing this includes messaging through social media, influencers, fashion houses, and other outlets. This contributes to normalising androgynous fashion and cementing the trend as a socially acceptable phenomenon. The frequent impressions from marketing media perpetuate the social commentary on gendered clothing.

5.2.4.4 Celebrity/pop culture

At this point of the adoption model the individual takes into account what the pop culture phenomena that is happening. An individual may want to draw from the pop culture phenomena that is occurring or reject it. In this case of androgynous fashion, the celebrity and pop culture phenomena are currently enabling for males to adopt androgynous fashion and thus, stimulates an environment that aids in males adopting androgynous fashion.

5.2.4.5 Social Norms

This is the widest macro factor which leads to adoption. Here the adopter will consider the wider view of society, how normal is it for the adopter to wear a skirt? Versus something more subtle such as a necklace? Here is where regions of adopters fit into the model for example, as the findings indicate in the region of Wellington it is more normal to see androgynous fashion adoptions when compared to Christchurch which it is not common. At this point the adopter considers the fashions which are already accepted within a larger area. This final point then follows into the modes of adoption described in the next section.

5.2.4.6 Three e's leading to adoption.

At this threshold to adoption are the three modes of adoption. Where the participants filter their own values, social sphere, marketing impressions from social media and celebrity culture through the three modes of androgynous fashion adoption. This flows into androgynous fashion continuum were given the constricting or enabling factors from the spiral the individual will end up at a point on the continuum. This point on the continuum would then in theory be able to be categorised on the male androgynous fashion spectrum mentioned earlier in research question one.

5.2.4.7 Masculine – Feminine Continuum

This section of the model going from masculine to feminine illustrates the progression of adding and mixing masculine and feminine clothing. This is influenced by the previous factors within the spiral. Depending on the inhibiting or enabling nature of the factor will thus dictate how far along the continuum of masculine to feminine the adopter will fall. If there are more inhibiting factors then the adopter may adopt feminine fashion on the subtle side of androgynous fashion, where if there are more enabling factors then the adoption may be hyper. The following section covers the academic contributions from the discussion chapter.

5.3 Academic Contributions

5.3.1 Theoretical contributions

There are some gaps in the literature on gendered fashion that this research has aided in bridging. In particular, gaps related to androgynous fashion particularly with male adoption. This research has also expanded the literature on fashion diffusion.

The literature has talked about how fashion diffuses where the adopter is the subject of diffusion (Sproles, 1974). The findings contribute a somewhat different view on the diffusion model which takes into account the adopters' own motivations to express themselves. Rather, the individual has some autonomy in the fashion they choose rather than being subject to diffusion. This is a different perspective than what has previously proposed and thus, expands the literature. Hemetsberger and Weinberger (2012) come close to the idea of self-expression however, their findings focus on a rebellion from social gender norms when looking at adoption of the handbag. The findings of this research expand the literature on fashion adoption and adoption of androgynous fashion from the New Zealand context. This is achieved by contributing different internal motivations for adopting androgynous fashion which are the three modes of adoption discussed in the findings chapter, self-expression, escapism, and experimentation.

Miller et al. (1993) looks at the behavioural elements of fashion where there is a balance of mimicking and individualism which leads to adoption of fashion. However, the findings of this research contribute the idea of risk mitigation. Within this context there is a perceived higher risk of social rejection with androgynous fashion adoption. Which leads the adopter to strongly evaluate the social setting and possibility of social rejection prior to adoption. This slightly differs from the research where the adopter evaluates the fashion which is appropriate or inappropriate. In this case the adopter not only looks at the fashion but the context in which they adopt and the people that will be observing their fashion adoption which expands on the research from Miller et al. (1993). Another contribution of this research related to the diffusion of fashion in society is how social media plays a vital role in perpetuating current fashion and social norms. In a digital age the reference point where adopters seek out fashion inspirations has changed since the research from Miller et al. (1993). This research contributes to the idea of mimicry however instead of the physical individual, social media is also an important touch point of fashion adoption.

The findings of this research have also contributed to the literature by providing two figures to aid in describing the phenomenon and one proposed model which illustrates the overall phenomenon of male androgynous fashion adoption. These contributions can be further examined within different contexts. Aghagyulyan (2021) is one researcher that examined androgynous

fashion within a cultural context, however this was somewhat limited as this was only researching the adoption and perception of the Scottish Kilt by men. This research expands on the androgynous fashion adoption literature by providing a model that explains the phenomenon of male's adoption androgynous fashion much more broadly. This model considers a wide array of factors which have led to adoption including the cultural context which Aghagyulyan (2021) references in their research.

This research also contributes to the literature on androgyny where the findings have confirmed previous theories on androgyny. In this case the participants sought to include unisex fashion as part of the androgynous fashion spectrum which expands the literature. As well this research also supports previous literature that describes androgyny as the mixing of masculine and feminine attributes (Hearn & Hein, 2015).

This research has also expanded the investigative field of male androgyny, where previously the adoption of handbags and kilts have been researched (Hemetsberger & Weinberger, 2012; Aghagyulyan, 2021). In the case of this research a wider lens of androgyny has been used including fashion and accessories.

5.3.2 Practical and Managerial implications

This research has many implications for managers. Some significant implications concern the segmentation of potential markets, the types of channels when promoting new fashion trends, reducing the barriers to adopting androgynous fashion, and how managers position clothing within brick-and-mortar stores to allow for the gender crossing of fashion items.

First this research is that it highlights that there are additional and important factors on fashion trend adoption than just designers. Previous literature has often placed designers as the driving force in top-down change in fashion trends (Marcangeli, 2015). However, this research has uncovered a network of forces that have enabled the androgynous fashion trend in male fashion adoption to bloom. Hence brand managers and manufacturers should consider a wider array of influences when promoting and constructing new fashion. For instance, they should use multiple micro influencers to promote trending fashion. Hosting smaller scale fashion shows or events as a

method for increasing brand and trend awareness could also be another strategy for managers to consider as these create safe spaces for attendees to see the fashion but also experiment with androgynous fashion items.

Fashion media may also be impacted from this research such as *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar.* The fashion platforms may consider the types of fashion messaging they are wanting to perpetuate into society. This is in light of the echo-chamber effects formed from participant's social circles including their social media platforms as discussed in the findings. Extending on the importance of fashion media, the research highlighted the participants were significantly influenced by the fashion adopters in close proximity to them. The people they saw on the street, at events, and those in their friend circles. This may be another factor that fashion media considers when promoting the latest trends is through the use of micro influencers.

If there is a desire to venture into this consumer segment, then managers should consider the social landscape in which they operate. The research suggests that for greater adoption to occur the inhibiting barriers need to be lowered for adopters to feel secure enough to adopt androgynous fashion. Some aspects of the social landscape may be out of the manager's control such as social acceptance of androgynous adoptions. However, as normalisation increases this barrier will lessen which may be incentive for managers to venture to this segment. Stakeholders could also work towards lowering risk for the adopters, this may be through stimulating echo-chambers within androgynous fashion communities or hosting events that support those in male androgynous fashion communities to participate in.

Brands may also consider segmenting their male market further to accommodate for those whose attitudes align favourably with androgynous fashion. This research could also have implications for brands who have gendered clothing product lines, brands may consider how they structure their product displays and placements in store to allow for gendered fashion crossovers. In other terms having the more classically feminine accessories and clothing items that male androgynous fashion adopters choose closer to the male section and vice versa for females. This is in light of the findings which show there is a segment of consumers who are motivated to adopt androgynous fashion but struggle to find these items.

Within the New Zealand context this research questions the masculine stereotypes of New Zealand males. Specifically, within the New Zealand market several participants had commented on the availability of androgynous fashion items was lacking. In some instances, the participants sought to create their own androgynous looks or to shopping in op-shops for such fashions. This knowledge can have further implications for New Zealand brand managers, when considering the types of fashion, they may want to promote and merchandise.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

5.4.1 Limitations

A potential limitation of this research is the size of the New Zealand community that adopts androgynous fashion. Although the data reached saturation at the twelfth interview it is hard to make generalizations about the population of male fashion adopters from twelve interviews (Jackson et al., 2007). Thus, there is a need to expand the scope of future research using additional methods in other settings. For instance, through the use of surveys or focus groups.

This study only looks at male adopters, but the existence of many different gendered adopters is noted by the researcher, and it is encouraged for further research to investigate the other fashion adoptions of such genders. A limitation of this research was through the sampling method. While snowball sampling was an effective way of reaching participants, it may also skew the data as the participants collected from snowballing are known in some way to the previous participant. Thus, they may be from the same friend group and share similar views on androgynous fashion. To counter this the researcher had several primary participants which formed the first snowballs and were not known to each other to avoid getting one perspective from a niche group. The research may be limited as the researcher is also an adopter of androgynous fashions in some regard. This may create some researcher bias; however, the researcher has consulted with expert judges to ensure objectivity within the interview procedures as mentioned within the methodology chapter.

5.4.2 Future research opportunities

The first future research proposal would be to use the androgynous fashion spectrum from the discussion chapter to gain the perspectives of how images of androgynous fashion fit onto this spectrum as a form of testing. Further research may also include testing the complete androgynous fashion adoption model in other social contexts. One finding of this research was the social context in which the participants reside needs to be considered prior to adoption. Hence, further research could look at how different social contexts affect the adoption of androgynous fashion.

Further research could also include researching risk mitigation in fashion adoption. Research questions could include at what point is an outfit deemed too risky to adopt? An interesting future research could utilise an eye tracker and see what parts of an outfit are analysed when deciphering androgyny in fashion magazines or advertisements. This could further support the significance of the gendered body assumptions when considering androgynous fashion. Future research may look to confirm a potential generational spread of experimentation, escapism and expression. The theory is that when you are in the younger generations you are more likely to experiment with your fashion, and as the generations get older, they solidify into expressing their personality.

> *"When they are the teens and early 20s, because I feel like that's sort of when you start experimenting with fashion and trying to figure out what you're most interested in and sort of how it works into your identity and how you want to be perceived and the people you hang out with and how it sort of reflects the groups you're a part of." - Max*

In fact Hamenda (2012) also called for investigation into the male adoption of androgyny to discover more about the world of androgyny. Bazin and Freeman (1974) also comment that androgynous concepts should be re-evaluated when there is considerable change in societal values. Future research could further investigate the role of social movements that have been turning points in the social and cultural values surrounding fashion.

One of the limitations from this research is by only looking at male adopters, future research however may look at how androgynous fashion is adopted by other diverse gender groups.

5.5 Conclusion

To summarise the content of this thesis, there are many real-world cases of androgynous fashion adoption from males according to fashion texts such as *Vogue* magazine (Madsen, 2022). These adoptions have been witnessed on runways, print and social media, and on the streets. It is not just male celebrities who are adopting these fashion trends, fashion influencers, designers and the general public have all succumbed to the androgynous fashion trend. Hence, this thesis had three research questions to answer, what are males perceiving as androgynous fashion? Why do males adopt androgynous fashion? How are males adopting androgynous fashion??

Unfortunately, the current academic literature has not kept up with the growing significance of men's fashion. There is also limited research on male androgynous fashion that can explain the phenomenon occurring within society. Paoletti (2015) notes in their book that it is mostly women who are buying unisex garments, so why are males adopting androgynous fashion now? The literature covered in this thesis has looked at androgynous concepts where androgynous fashion exists as a mix of masculine and feminine clothing (Reichert & Lambiase, 2013). How gendered marketing has perpetuated stereo types. Where males and females are reduced to individual colours, blue is for boys and pink is for girls (Auster & Mansbach, 2012). Not only colours but also with their posing within print media (Zawisa, 2019). Fashion theories were also discussed within the literature review and identified how fashion diffuses through society. From top-down or bottom-up approaches. Where the trend starts by early adopters which becomes the early majority, then the late majority and finally the laggards (West et al., 2021). Building on the fashion theories was research from Crane, (2012) who describe fashion intertwined with social dynamics and identity. Finally the literature covered adoption of fashion, Aghagyulyan, (2021); Hemetsberger and Weinberger, (2012) are authors of note who had looked at specific adoptions of androgynous fashion. However, this literature did not fully encompass the full spectrum of androgynous fashion within their respective settings. Which is a gap that this research sought to bridge.

This research used a qualitative inductive approach. There is no one theory that can describe the phenomena that is occurring from the literature hence, an interpretivist paradigm was suitable. The interpretivist paradigm does not believe in one truth, but the possibility that there are

multiple truths given a certain context (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Inductive reasoning was used to start from the adopter level and work towards a theoretical framework. There were twelve interviews conducted with male participants at which saturation of the data occurred. The interviews utilised photo elicitation which served as another point of triangulation to expand the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To analyse the data, thematic analysis was used to collate the themes to then build a theoretical framework that explains the phenomena.

The findings of this research show that there is a group of people who are willing and able to purchase androgynous fashion or gender non-conforming clothing. What is inhibiting them is the availability and awareness of such items within the New Zealand context. This is supported by the fact that the participants from this study have opted for shopping in women's sections, op shops and creating their own garments in place of actual stores that cater to this demand. The most significant findings from this research were how the participants have three different modes of adopting androgynous fashion. Through self-expression, escapism, and experimentation. Another key finding is how male adoption of androgynous fashion is influenced by several factors. These factors included the social norms, celebrity and pop culture, gendered marketing, and the adopters own social sphere. There becomes a point where the messaging or values from the macro influences crosses over into the individual's social sphere and their own sphere. In the case of androgynous fashion this may be illustrated by the social commentary on gendered clothing that seeks to remove the gender roles from clothing. Which celebrities adopt which supports this commentary this then trends on media platforms and finally into the individuals' own spheres.

This research provides a model that explains the overall phenomenon of the male adoption of androgynous fashion (see Figure 16). It takes into account the factors which have influenced the adoption of androgynous fashion. Starting at the individual level and gradually spiralling out to the macro influences which then lead to an adoption of androgynous fashion.

The practical implications of this research include implications for managers in retail environments. Retail managers may consider ways they can lower the social risk or contribute to the androgynous trends within the retail space. What is clear from this research is that there is no one reason for the male adoption of androgynous fashion. The phenomena are a fluid mix of social

change, echo-chamber effects, and personal motivations that explain why males have adopted androgynous fashion.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview guide

Interview Questions.

Initial icebreaker questions:
1. Tell me about yourself
   a. Your lifestyle, interest, etc.
   b. What do you do for fun?
2. How would you describe your fashion?
3. Tell me about your favourite item/s of clothing? Why? (Describe and photo)
   . How does it make you feel when you wear it?
   a. When and how do you wear it/them?
4. Tell me about your least favourite item/s of clothing? Why?
5. When do you "dress up"?
   . What sort of occasions? How often?
6. What's your favourite part about dressing up?
   . What's your least favourite part?
7. Tell me about the best time you went out, what was the experience like?
   . How did your outfit contribute to that experience?
8. What is your dream outfit?
   . Where would you wear it?
   a. What stops you from wearing it?

Broader questions:
1. Are you familiar with androgynous fashion?
   a. How do you feel about it?
2. What's trending right now?
   . What have you been noticing that males around you are wearing?
3. How often do you follow a new trend?
4. Who are your style influences
   . Where do you follow/observe them?
5. If you were to put your fashion on a spectrum from masculine to feminine, where would you place yourself?
   . Why do you put yourself there?
6. How often do you incorporate androgynous styles?
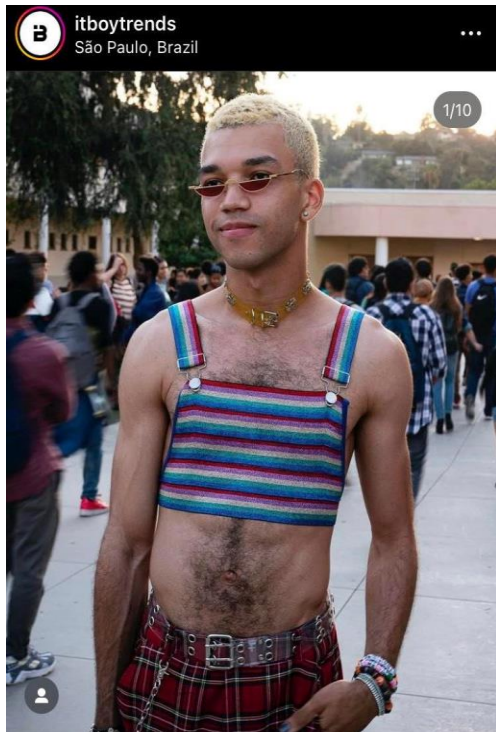
Final questions:
1. What should have I asked you about this?
2. Is there anything you want to talk about that I haven't asked you?

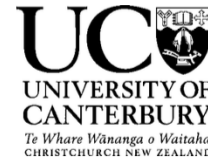Appendix B. Researcher driven photo elicitation exhibits.

Hotel Cafe Royal

1/2

itboytrends
São Paulo, Brazil
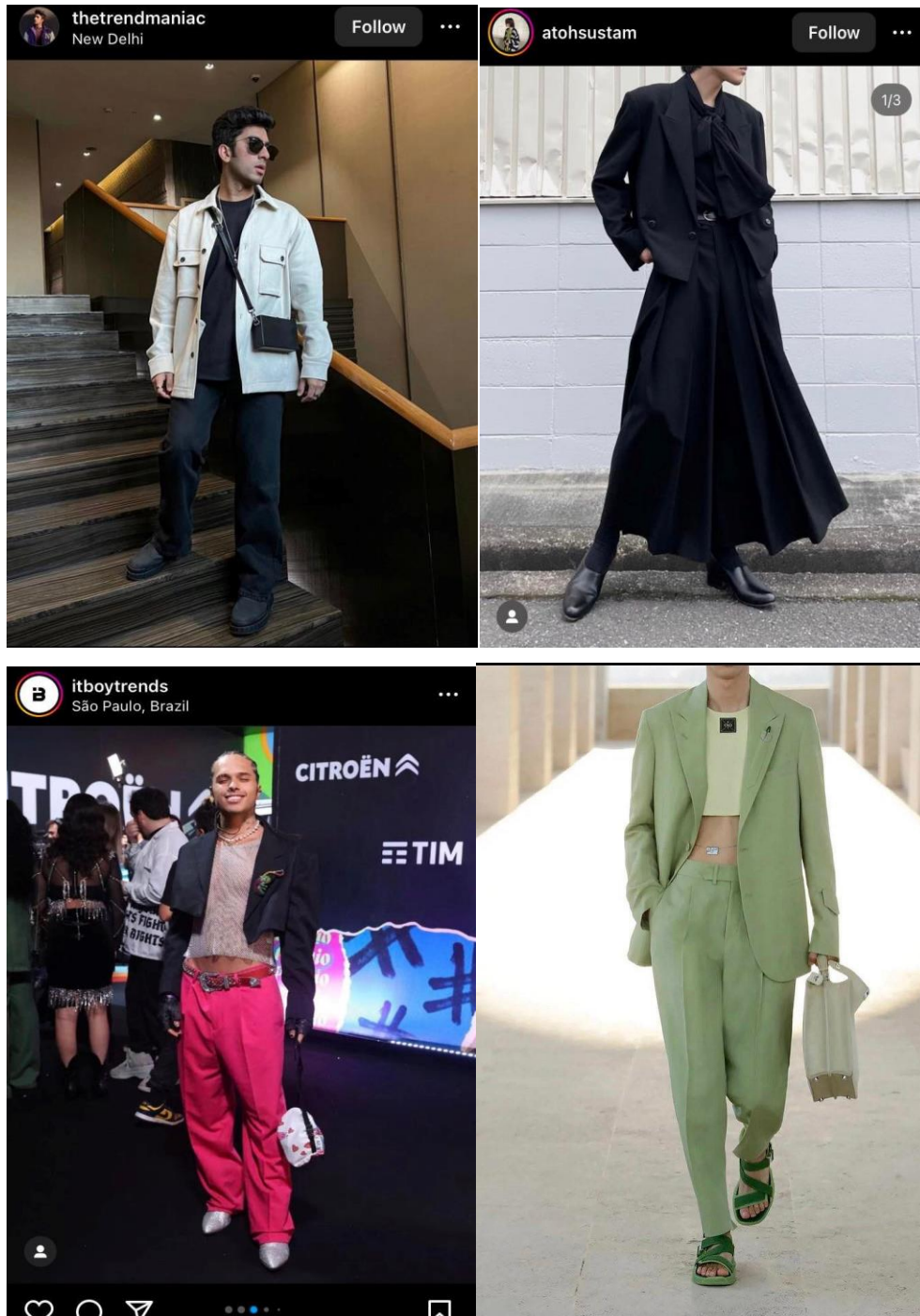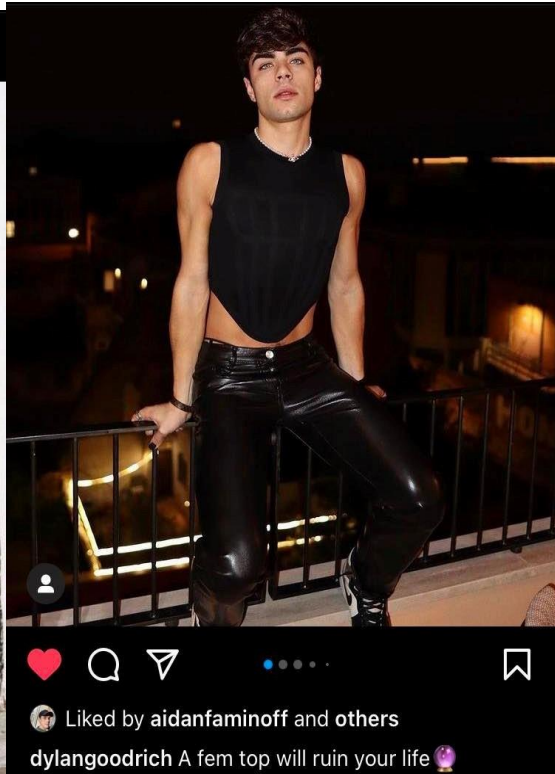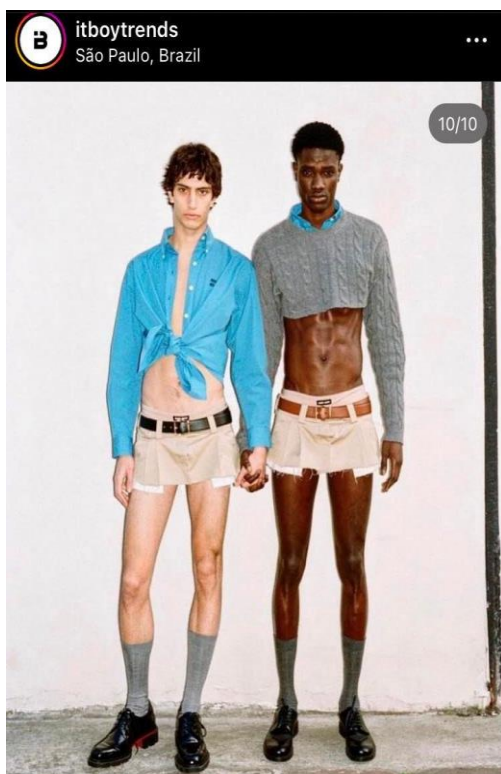
10/10

Liked by **aidanfaminoff** and **others**
dylangoodrich A fem top will ruin your life 🔮

Appendix C. Information Sheet and Consent forms

University of Canterbury
Phone: +64 3 369 3794
Email: Ctu23@uclive.ac.nz
10/10/2022
HREC Ref: [Provided by HREC when study approved]

An Investigation Into the Male Adoption of Androgynous Fashion
Information Sheet for participants

Kia Ora
You are invited to participate in a research study on Androgynous Fashion This study is being conducted by Callum Turner from the University of Canterbury l Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha (UC). Other research team members include Sussie Morrish and Lucie Ozanne. The study is being carried out as a requirement for Masters of Commerce.

What is the purpose of this research?
This research aims to determine Why males have begun to adopt more gender bending fashion. I am interested in finding out about the barriers and enabling factors that lead to the adoption. The information from this study will help to create a framework that explains how this adoption of male fashion has occurred and why.

Why have you received this invitation?
You are invited to participate in this research because you have indicated interest in participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary (your choice). If you decide not to participate, there are no consequences. Your decision will not affect your relationship with me, the University of Canterbury, or any member of the research team.

What is involved in participating?
If you choose to take part in this research, you will participate in an interview. This interview will take place face-to-face or online via Zoom. I will contact you to arrange a suitable time and location. The interview will involve me introducing myself, answering any questions you have, and confirming your consent to participate. Then, I will begin the interview and will ask you questions about your fashion habits. I estimate the interview will take around 1 hour to an hour and a half.

Will the interview be recorded?
With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded using a portable recorder or using Zoom's audio-recording feature. The recording will be used to create a written transcript of the interview, which I will transcribe and analyse as part of the research. If you choose to review a copy of the interview transcript, I will provide this to you within 1 month of the interview. I will ask you to provide any amendments or additions via email within 2 weeks.

Are there any benefits from taking part in this research?
We do not expect any direct benefits to you personally from participating in this interview. However, the information gathered will potentially benefit how retailers view men's and women's fashion.
At the conclusion of the interview I will provide you with $20 Koha. You will get this inducement even if you withdraw from the study.

Are there any risks involved in this research?

Some questions or topics discussed may involve sensitive information about gender and identity. This may cause some participants to become upset or distressed. If you become upset or distressed you will be offered time to consider if you wish to continue or withdraw from the study. I/we will also suggest you consider using the online resources provided by HealthEd which has resourses for the initial signs of distress and provides further resources for after the incident care.
https://www.healthed.govt.nz/resource/helplines-and-mental-health-services

What if you change your mind during or after the study?
You are free to withdraw at any time. To do this, please let me know either during the interview or after the interview has finished. I will remove any information you have provided up to that point from the data set if it is still possible. Once data analysis has commenced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen to the information you provide?
I will transfer the audio recording to a password-protected file on the University of Canterbury computer network and then delete this from the recording device as soon as practical. All data will be confidential. Your name will be changed to a pseudonym (a fake name) whenever it appears in the transcript and anywhere else. We will store the file that links your real name and your pseudonym individually on a password-protected, secure device.

All study data will be stored in password-protected files on the University of Canterbury's computer network or stored in lockable cabinets in lockable offices.

All data will be destroyed five after completion of the study/publication of study findings I will be responsible for making sure that only members of the research team use your data for the purposes mentioned in this information sheet.

Will the results of the study be published?
The results of this research will be published in a Master's thesis. This thesis will be available to the general public through the University of Canterbury library. Results may be published in peer-reviewed, academic journals. Results will also be presented during conferences or seminars to wider professional and academic communities. You will not be identifiable in any publication. A summary of results will be sent to all participants who request a copy.

Who can you contact if you have any questions or concerns?
If you have any questions about the research, please contact: Callum Turner: Ctu23@uclive.ac.nz

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). If you have a complaint about this research, please contact the Chair of the HREC at human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

What happens next?
Please review the consent form. If you would like to participate, please sign, scan/take a photo of, and return the consent form to Ctu23@uclive.ac.nz, or by hand

Name:_____Sign:_____Date:_____

Email address for report of findings:_____

An Investigation Into the Male Adoption of Androgynous Fashion
Consent Form for participants

o   The project information has been explained and understood with the opportunity to ask

    questions.

o   I understand that this research is voluntary, I may remove myself from the research at any

    point. This will also include the removal of any contributions to the research

o   I understand that the research is a public document and will be available through the UC

    Library.

o   I understand that documents related to the research will be destroyed within 5 years.

o   I understand I will be audio recorded.

o   I understand how the audio recording will be used and stored in a password protected

    electronic form and/or within locked facilities.

o   I understand that I can contact the researcher Callum Turner: ctu23@uclive.ac.nz or

    supervisor Sussie Morrish: sussie.morrish@canterbury.ac.nz for further information.

o   If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human

    Research Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, (email: human-

    ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

o   By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name:_____Sign:_____Date:_____

Email address for report of findings:_____

Please scan/email or send a photo of the completed form to Ctu23@uclive.ac.nz

Appendix D. Human Ethics Committee approval form

UC
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HREC 2022/88/LR

24 November 2022

Callum Turner
UC Business School
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Callum

Thank you for submitting your low risk application to the Human Research Ethics Committee for the research proposal titled "Investigation Into the Male Adoption of Androgynous Fashion".

I am pleased to advise that this application has been reviewed and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 20th November 2022.

With best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Dean Sutherland
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee