

# Undressing the Androgynous Body

Analysing Gender Equality in the Representation of Androgynous Bodies within Contemporary Swedish Fashion

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# Abstract

Stemming back thousands of years, the term androgyny continues to raise uncertainty regarding its definition in contemporary society. Simultaneously, the term has come to represent a body ideal and fashion that signals gender equality. Analysing gender equality in relation to androgyny, the aim of this study is to address power relations within gender in the construction of androgynous bodies in contemporary Swedish fashion. Building on feminist theories by Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray, along with Pierre Bourdieu's idea of habitus and Sara Ahmed's ideas, questioning what is considered natural, the historical connection between the straight male body as representation of a standard, gender-neutral body is highlighted. Through visual analysis of campaign images produced by Acne Studios, Filippa K and Tiger of Sweden, the masculine domination of the androgynous ideal is revealed and further problematized using focus groups and separate interviews to include consumers and retail workers, in order to answer the questions; how the androgynous body is represented in contemporary Swedish fashion, and in what ways the androgynous body represents gender equality versus inequality. Although the results show that androgyny questions traditional gender roles and encourages to express individuality in dress, the ideal also prioritizes the masculine, using the male straight body as sign of a gender-neutral and thus natural human body, making the female curvaceous body appear unnatural and sexualized.

Keywords: Androgyny, Body Ideals, Gender, Equality, Power

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# 1. Introduction

The model's body is androgynously slim. Her right hand is clasped above her waist, pulling up her hot pink cashmere vest to reveal her flat stomach and narrow hips.<sup>1</sup>

Dress historian Rebecca Arnold's words describing the body of a female fashion model are hardly shocking for the 21<sup>st</sup> century reader, considering that fashion and model industries' promotion of slim body ideals have been a criticized and widely debated subject for decades. However, this is not only what caught my attention with the body description above. Seemingly hidden within language, the phrase describes and takes for granted the androgynous body as the body without curves. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term androgynous implies that there is a fusion of masculine and feminine elements, disrupting traditional gender norms.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the androgynous fashion and body ideal appears to strive after an equal ideal between men and women.

Androgynous and gender-neutral fashion has become an essential part of the Scandinavian style and the attempt to create a gender-neutral fashion in Sweden is not a new idea. Since its international success in the early 2000s, often referred to as the "Swedish fashion wonder", Swedish fashion has mainly been represented by minimalistic fashion based on function, sober colors and gender-neutral clothing, a democratic fashion not only in relation to economic conditions but also in representing gender equality.<sup>3</sup> Considering the social context in Sweden, this comes as no surprise since the country was ranked as the fourth most gender equal country in 2015, only to be surpassed by its neighboring countries.<sup>4</sup>

However, what is problematic about the androgynous body ideal, as I will argue, is that the ideal does not incorporate female curves and therefore is based solely on the male body, a body norm which consequently becomes manifested as neutral. An androgynous body norm that by its definition should combine masculine and feminine aspects equally is contrary excluding female shape, making the curvaceous body unfashionable, even vulgar through its sexual objectification

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 99.

<sup>2</sup> "Androgynous," Oxford Dictionary, accessed December 1, 2016, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/androgynous>

<sup>3</sup> Karin Falk, *Det Svenska Modeundret* (Stockholm: Nordstedts, 2011), 27–31.

<sup>4</sup> "Global Gender Gap Index 2015," World Economic Forum, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/rankings/>

as the marked gender. In *Seeing through Clothes*, art historian Anne Hollander argues that the fashion of clothes effects the fashion of bodies.<sup>5</sup> This relation between fashion and body is further explored by sociologist Joanne Entwistle in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. The importance of the body is highlighted from the first sentence where Entwistle states that; “Fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies.”<sup>6</sup>

Although an important subject, there is still limited research on the topic of androgynous bodies within fashion studies. Rather than questioning why the androgynous ideal is constructed this way, it is taken for granted. Therefore, the focus of this study is not only the representation of androgynous fashion, but primarily the bodies and norms that are produced by this gender-fusing fashion. Furthermore, the study will focus on the subject situated within a Swedish social context by analysing visual material produced by contemporary Swedish fashion brands and combine this with an ethnographic methodology to include consumer responses.

## 1.1 Aim and Research Questions

Building on critical and feminist theories the aim of this study is to analyse power relations within gender in the construction of androgynous bodies in contemporary Swedish fashion. Guiding my inquiry are two interrelated research questions: How is the androgynous body represented in contemporary Swedish fashion; and in what ways is the androgynous body representing gender equality versus inequality?

## 1.2 Previous Research

Even though fashion as a phenomenon is very much dependent on physical bodies there has been limited research on the relationship between fashion and human bodies within the field of fashion studies. Fashion often comes across as an abstract phenomenon, lacking any physical shape. Although it is important to distinguish between fashion, as a cultural phenomenon, and clothes, as the physical garments we wear, they are nevertheless intertwined in our modern culture. What is considered fashion will consequently affect the way clothes look and how they are worn.

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 85.

<sup>6</sup> Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2000), 1.

As briefly mentioned, Hollander argues in *Seeing Through Clothes* how these shifts in fashion not only affect how we dress but also the way we look at bodies.<sup>7</sup> Although approaching the subject from an art historical view, Hollander successfully situates the physical body within the world of fashion and dress, exploring the ways clothed figures become more appealing in art than reality.<sup>8</sup> Relating the issue to a more contemporary context, idealization through images is still prominent, although the role of art can be substituted by media and advertising. Using traditional painting as material, Hollander follows the changing beauty ideals, visible in every epoch. When addressing the importance of clothing and the impact of fashion changes on the physical body she argues how; “Clothes make, not the man but the image of man”.<sup>9</sup> Relevant for the subject of this thesis is also the argument she makes in relation to differences in styles between epochs; that the naked body is perceived more realistic if influenced by fashion ideals.<sup>10</sup> However, based on the material containing static historical paintings, Hollander limits the discussion within a larger historical context and do not consider the impact of the body ideals within contemporary everyday society.

Turning to a more contemporary context within fashion studies, the relation between body and fashion has been explored by Entwistle in her work *The Fashioned Body*.<sup>11</sup> Entwistle covers various aspects of the body and fashion, but most relevant for this study is her chapter about fashion and gender. Applying a theoretical perspective, Entwistle highlights different approaches towards understanding the relationship between body and fashion. In relation to gender, fashion’s fascination with gender is made prominent, not least in commenting that “while it would seem that today’s fashions are more androgynous, even ‘uni-sex’ clothes display an overriding obsession with gender”.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, even when trying to avoid gender categories the result becomes the opposite. Categorizing gender identity through the use of clothes and physical appearance is part of the first impressions when meeting someone for the first time.<sup>13</sup> What is left unexplored by Entwistle is the resistance against categorization through gender-neutral clothing and not only, as

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<sup>7</sup> Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, 85.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>11</sup> Further research regarding the relation between bodies, gender and fashion has been conducted by for instance Patrizia Calefato in *The Clothed Body* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) and by Maja Gunn in her dissertation *Body Acts Queer* (University of Borås, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 140.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-141.

she gives example of, through the concept of cross-dressing. What happens when you cannot immediately define someone as male or female, and what does it really imply to be seen as male or female in our society? Tracing the birth of the androgynous look to the ‘flappers’ of the 1920s, Entwistle follows in line with the introductory quote by Arnold, taking for granted the connotations between androgyny and the body without curves.<sup>14</sup>

Arnold continues investigating fashion’s fascination with gender and the physical body in *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. She distinguishes between unisex and androgynous fashion, arguing that unisex attempts to mask the gendered body, erasing any distinction of male or female gender identity, while androgyny seeks to combine male and female in one.<sup>15</sup> However, although questioning fashion’s connection to femininity she does not really question the ideal behind the androgynous body. Rather she uses the term as a fixed concept clearly connected not only to slimness but more specifically to a boyish look. This tendency to take the androgynous body for granted, shown both by Entwistle and Arnold, further reveals the gap within fashion studies to question the construction and reinterpretation of gender-neutral fashion and its underlying power structures.

Fashion’s tendency to see the male as basis for gender neutrality has recently been addressed by the fashion scholars Vicki Karaminas and Adam Geczy in *Critical Fashion Practice: From Westwood to Van Beirendonck*, where gender-neutral garments like jeans and T-shirts are taken as examples of clothing originally worn by men and adopted by women.<sup>16</sup> Relating to a contemporary discourse about fashion and gender identities, the increasing use of trans models as well as designers’ ambition to create genderless clothing points to the many ways gender becomes progressively problematized, not only in fashion but in society as a whole. The connection between gender and culture is also important, showing the instability of gender as the assumptions of masculinity and femininity are not universal but rather based on cultural discourses.<sup>17</sup> While questioning gender roles and norms, there is still a lack of how this fashion is understood by its consumers, how it affects the people wearing the garments.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 122.

<sup>16</sup> Vicki Karaminas and Adam Geczy, *Critical Fashion Practice: From Westwood to Van Beirendonck*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 105.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 107.

Moving away from previous fashion research, the subject of power and gender has been widely researched within areas such as sociology and gender studies. In order to understand the complexity behind gender roles one must first consider the concept of sex and its historic evolution. This historical discourse has been researched by the historian Thomas Laqueur in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Laqueur traces the evolution of the idea of biological sex, arguing that the female sex was not acknowledged as a sex of its own until the enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> Until then the female sex was seen as a less developed version of the male, the man was therefore seen as the norm for human being and the human body.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, woman, connected to a curvaceous body shape, becomes gender while man, representing the body without curves, is perceived as the standard and neutral human. These ideas of dividing sexes and placing them hierarchically are still present in patriarchal society and are thus relevant to understand as a basis for understanding the power relation between genders.

Using clothes and specifically the color pink as an example of the differences between gender roles in Swedish society, queer theorist Fanny Ambjörnsson's ethnographic study *Rosa – den farliga färgen* from 2011, explores the relation between sex/gender following the binary roles described by Laqueur. Arguing that color preferences are a cultural phenomenon but believed to be a biological difference between two sexes, she sees pink as a particularly loaded color, making an important distinction between what is seen as appropriate for women versus men, according to their biological sex and expected gender.<sup>20</sup> Since clothes are the very first we see of a person it becomes a vital component in this gender marking. Studying the behavior and attitudes towards dressing children in these categories of traditional gender roles, Ambjörnsson reveals the ambiguity in society and how norms are constructed and repeated as natural. Although using clothes and fashion as part of the research, Ambjörnsson does not go deeper into what affect these issues has on the physical bodies.

Stating that “The body has become a central subject in gender studies”, the linguistic scholar, Heiko Motschenbacher studies how different body parts and physical features are considered masculine or feminine.<sup>21</sup> Illustrating how individuals' subjective feelings towards the

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Fanny Ambjörnsson, *Rosa: den farliga färgen* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2011), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Heiko Motschenbacher, “Speaking the Gendered Body: The Performative Construction of Commercial Femininities and Masculinities via Body-Part Vocabulary,” *Language in Society* 38, no. 1 (2009): 1.

body are affected by how the body is talked about in a public discourse, the study compares different vocabulary used in relation to male and female bodies in lifestyle magazines, pointing towards distinctions in using for instance the word *physique* when talking about the male body and *figure* when talking about the female.<sup>22</sup> As an example Motschenbacher compares how the word *muscle/muscular* is being used, appearing only 9 times in the women's magazine while used 135 times in the men's magazine.<sup>23</sup> Motschenbacher's study indicates the importance of male and female discourses created around gender and bodies, which is relevant when further investigating the power relations of gender and the impact of language.

Although there has been research on fashion and gender as well as on gender and power, there is a significant gap in combining the aspects of fashion, gender and power focusing on androgyny. Considering that dress is used as everyday practice to express gender identity, it is relevant to look at the impact of fashion, not only in relation to power and gender, but also how we relate to our physical bodies.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

Since the study is concerned with the relation of power and gender, the theoretical framework will apply a postmodern and critical perspective based primarily on feminist and queer theories. This will be done by combining queer theorist and philosopher Judith Butler's theory of gender construction and the performance of gender, with the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's idea of habitus, in order to understand how the idea of an androgynous body is reproduced and normalized in society. To further problematize the normalizing process, feminist scholar Sara Ahmed's queer theory about orientation will provide a useful point-of-view, as will the feminist theorist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray's theory of women as the non-existing sex within a patriarchal discourse.

#### 1.3.1 Gender Performance

Butler's feminist theories offer a relevant perspective when dealing with the complex relation of gender and power. Distinguishing between sex as biological factor and gender as a cultural construction, Butler's theory sets the foundation for a broad discourse on how gender is reproduced

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 16.

in society. Building on the theory of philosopher Michel Foucault, Butler sees the human subject as formed by structure and discourse, thus simultaneously forming and reproducing the same patterns.<sup>24</sup> From this perspective it becomes possible to study the role of women within a patriarchal discourse.

According to Butler, the construction of gender is based on culture rather than biology, leading her to pose the question whether there can only be two binary genders? Claiming “gender is a free-floating artifice”, Butler instead suggests that there can be an endless variation of genders.<sup>25</sup> However, by continuing the same discourse, gender roles are constantly reproduced and perceived as natural. You are not free to determine your own gender but compelled to become and perform a specific gender. Nor is it possible to completely reject the mark of gender since it appears to signal qualification of bodies as human bodies.<sup>26</sup> From the very moment a baby is born the question appears whether it is a boy or girl, immediately placing the newborn within the categorization of gender identity.

However, Butler is not only relevant regarding her ideas about performative gender but also in relation to how language works to undermine women, arguing that feminist theory needs a language that represents women and makes them visible.<sup>27</sup> Language has performative aspects, we can look at what language does, not only what it is. Being addressed as woman or man, or described as masculine or feminine simultaneously forms what gender is expected of us. Situating language within discourse Butler highlights that we not only use language, we are also formed by language.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, this perspective provides an understanding regarding how the term androgynous is continuously being used to describe a boyish look.

### 1.3.2 The Sex Which Is Not One

Butler’s work on gender theory has been largely influenced by the feminist theories of psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, often referred to by Butler as offering an opposite view of the feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir. While de Beauvoir argues the distinction between sex and gender, making the point that one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman, Irigaray on the other hand

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<sup>24</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 1997), 2.

claims woman to be the non-existing sex.<sup>29</sup> Irigaray does not argue against an idea of two sexes and two genders. However, she criticizes the inequality of these positions in society, arguing there is no place for women within the masculine discourse, thus making woman the non-existing sex.<sup>30</sup>

Consequently, as long as the discourse is male and men continue to be seen as the natural human, there can be no female subject. Likewise, Irigaray states that language and discourse are intertwined and sexed, arguing in relation to language and male versus female discourse that “you can’t change one without changing the other”.<sup>31</sup> This male discourse in society is referred to by Irigaray as hom(m)o-sexuality, representing a society which exclusively valorizes men and where the sameness of men becomes the essential base of social structure.<sup>32</sup> These male relations are upheld by the alibi of women’s bodies, avoiding any physical contact or erotic relation between men that would imply homosexuality while still providing them with accepted, straight social relations.<sup>33</sup>

Irigaray does not wish to position woman as the other of man, rather she seeks to raise her value and status making her equal to man.<sup>34</sup> Stating that “Making equal opportunities for women possible does not mean that women should simply model themselves on masculine ways of being and doing”.<sup>35</sup> Applied to the subject of androgynous bodies, Irigaray’s theory offers an understanding of how the male body constitutes the neutral body as opposed to the female curved body.

### 1.3.3 Habitus and the Assumption of Natural Genders

According to Bourdieu the choices we make or our preferences do not emerge from an independent thought, rather they are directed and shaped by our bodily mind and conditions of existence represented by our social class, what he refers to as habitus.<sup>36</sup> Habitus can be seen as the way individuals are unconsciously shaped and influenced by habits as well as the social, economic and cultural capital one possess. Bourdieu’s theory of habitus has proven useful within fashion studies

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<sup>29</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Je, tu, nous: toward a culture of difference* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 171.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>34</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Democracy Begins Between Two* (London: Athlone, 2000), 123.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Social Taste* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 170.

from various perspectives and subjects. Applied in relation to the subject of androgynous bodies, habitus is relevant when analysing how gender is actively reproduced through the clothes we wear. Furthermore, the idea of habitus enables questioning perceptions of what is considered masculine or feminine. Also, focusing on the connection between androgynous fashion and social context, Bourdieu's theory about habitus and taste can provide valuable insight regarding the relation between Swedish fashion and gender-neutral clothing.

The idea of habitus bears resemblance to feminist ideas, including both Butler and Irigaray, in repetitive elements. Butler refers to habitus in relation to language, seeing it as both formed and formative at once by this repetitive act.<sup>37</sup> However, while Bourdieu relates to habitus as something inscribed upon our bodies and therefore practically inescapable, feminist and queer theories seek ways to challenge this perception in order to change society norms and gender roles. Although Bourdieu can be criticized for excluding any discussion about the social construction of gender and its relation towards habitus, Bourdieu does acknowledge gender inequality in his work *Masculine Domination*. Here he poses the idea, in line with feministic theories, that men and women are unconsciously embodying a masculine order of society.<sup>38</sup>

#### 1.3.4 Striving towards Disorientation

Sara Ahmed's queer theory of orientation bears resemblance to Bourdieu's habitus in the sense that she addresses the issue of how we become directed or orientated towards some things rather than others. But unlike habitus which appears to be inescapable, Ahmed encourages us to get disorientated, putting aside what is familiar. Ahmed's idea of disorientation has similarities to Butler's queer theory, both advocating that cultural norms must be broken by deliberately rejecting what appears to be natural. In order to question the perception of what an androgynous body should look like we must first become aware of what this perception is and where it is coming from. Why do we take for granted that an androgynous body should resemble a look of "boyishness"?

Ahmed argues that our orientations depend on how we take certain points of views as given, believing them to be natural.<sup>39</sup> Only by distancing ourselves, embracing the subject with an open mind, can this pattern be broken and the dominating discourse revealed. Following the philosopher

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<sup>37</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 155.

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 14.

Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach, Ahmed concretizes these arguments using a table as metaphor, suggesting we should address it as an object never encountered before.<sup>40</sup> In order to become objective Ahmed encourages to lose sight of the function of objects and walk around the table, acknowledging it from every angle.<sup>41</sup> Approaching objects with an open mind means recognizing that "The work of repetition is not neutral work; *it orients the body in some ways rather than others.*"<sup>42</sup> Again, the connection to Bourdieu becomes apparent, based on how our choices and our way of apprehending the world are inscribed within our bodies and upheld by repetitive acts.

## 1.4 Definitions

Before going further into the research subject, a few terms need to be clarified in relation to gender, dress and bodies. As explained, the focus of this study is the representation of androgynous bodies, an ideal meant to combine both feminine and masculine elements. However, when talking about gender and fashion there are several other terms often used to describe similar ideals. Therefore, it is relevant to argue how these concepts differ, making it clear why I have chosen to focus on the term androgynous. While androgyny very much accentuates gender by playing with gender roles, the term *unisex* neglects what is seen as masculine or feminine in order to create a completely gender-neutral uniform, equal for all.<sup>43</sup> Still, there is a close connection between androgyny and unisex as they are both rejecting traditional gender roles in clothing, trying to make fashion more equal. Important to stress is also that neither androgynous nor unisex fashion make any attempt to pass as the opposite sex through clothing.

The increasing trend of androgynous and unisex fashion over the last decades has had impact on language where terms such as *gender-neutral* and *no gender* are often used as substitute, not least in relation to Swedish fashion. These terms are generally more closely connected to the idea of unisex than androgyny in their ambition to disguise gender by rejecting ideas of femininity and masculinity. Still, as I will argue, the idea of creating a gender-neutral body can be applied in relation to all terms mentioned. Consequently, it is problematic to strictly divide between the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>43</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 118, 122.

different concepts considering they are often used synonymously, not least regarding that they all consider the male body as norm.

Although slightly different from the other terms, the concept of *cross-dress* is also relevant and frequently used within the discourse of fashion and gender. Rather than disguising gender, cross-dressing brings attention to gender performance by intentionally wearing clothes typical of the opposite sex, a concept for instance adapted by transgender and drag people. As argued by Entwistle, cross-dressing reveals the cultural construction of gender as “Gender is thus dislocated from the body and shown to be performed through style”.<sup>44</sup> Separating the terms even further, *drag*, although sometimes included within cross-dressing, can be distinguished to focus more specifically on adapting the full attire of the opposite sex. Although trying to achieve a physical resemblance to another gender identity, similar to the gender play of androgyny and unisex, neither cross-dressing nor drag should be mistaken for trying to pass as the opposite sex.

## 1.5 Material

The empirical material will consist of campaign materials from three Swedish fashion brands, promoting both menswear and womenswear. Since the study focuses on contemporary ideals all campaigns have been produced to promote collections from 2015. The selected brands include Acne Studios, Filippa K and Tiger of Sweden. Each brand has been selected due to its prominent role within Swedish fashion, their production of both menswear and womenswear, as well as their visual connection to androgynous fashion displayed in their collections. Important to stress is that I do not focus on the specific brands or their brand identities, they are foremost used as visual examples within this criterion of selection. It should also be noted that although the brands have been connected to androgynous fashion both nationally and internationally, the specific campaigns have been subjectively chosen to represent the straight body ideal associated with androgyny.

The different brands are selected to represent how the androgynous fashion is constructed and represented in contemporary Swedish fashion. In order to make the study representative I have chosen to compare different brands as well as campaign images featuring men and women. The campaign material will not be reviewed in its whole but represented by a few images or spreads

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<sup>44</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 178.

from each brand, resulting in a total of eight images. However, in order to position the brands within contemporary Swedish fashion, a brief introduction of them will follow.

The success of Acne Studios, Filippa K and Tiger of Sweden has been recognized by fashion scholar Karin Falk as contributing parts of the story behind the “Swedish fashion wonder”, established in the early 2000s.<sup>45</sup> Although each brand has its specific image and style, they all represent a look that is considered typical of Swedish fashion. The importance of the brands within the Swedish fashion industry has also been acknowledged as they were featured in the 2014’s exhibition “Svenskt Mode: 2000-2015” at Sven-Harrys Art Museum in Stockholm. In relation to the fashion exhibition, Acne Studios, Filippa K and Tiger of Sweden were all used as examples contributing to the international success of the Swedish modern man, a fashion ideal rejecting traditional masculinity, instead borrowing feminine elements and building on a slim silhouette.<sup>46</sup>

Acne Studios originated as a jeans company under the name Acne in the late 1990s.<sup>47</sup> Still known for their jeans, the brand has since expanded to include prêt-à-porter as well as launching its own artistic paper, *Acne Paper* and reached international recognition by appearing on Paris Fashion Week. The brand, following the motto of “branding by doing”, tends to stay away from traditional promotion strategies and advertising.<sup>48</sup> However, they do regularly produce fashion campaigns for their collections. With the promotion of Fall/Winter collection 2015 Acne Studios made headlines by using the founder and creative director Jonny Johansson’s 11-year-old son to model the womenswear collection.<sup>49</sup> Two images from this campaign showing the model dressed in different coats against a white background will be used as part of the material for the study. Since the campaign focuses on the women’s collection it can be argued there is a lack of male representation. However, considering that the brand has chosen to be represented by these images for the specific season of Fall/Winter 2015, I argue they too can be analysed in relation to men’s fashion and ideal, not least in the choice of a young boy as model.

Filippa K is often referred to as the predecessor of Swedish fashion, leading the way for brands such as Acne Studios and Tiger of Sweden. Based on the concept of creating well-made,

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<sup>45</sup> Falk, *Modeundret*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Björk, ”Moderna Män”, in *Svenskt Mode: 2000–2015*, ed. Susanna Strömquist (Stockholm: Elanders Fälth & Hässler, 2014), 54–55.

<sup>47</sup> Falk, *Modeundret*, 71.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>49</sup> ”11-årig Pojke Frontar Acne Studios Höstkampanj!”, Axel Scholtze, ELLE, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.elle.se/jonny-johanssons-11-ariga-son-frontar-acne-studios-hostkampanj/>

clean cut and minimalistic garments, the brand became successful in the 1990s. The specific style even gave rise to its own term, “the Filippa K girl”, an ideal that reflected the minimalistic Scandinavian design.<sup>50</sup> The brand produces both men’s and women’s campaigns, always in connection to each other, resulting in images that work cohesively. As material for this study two spreads, one from menswear collection and the other from womenswear, have been selected from the Fall/Winter 2015 campaign. All images are in black-and-white and photographed indoors against a minimalistic background.

Although the story of Tiger of Sweden already began in 1903, it took a relaunch in the 1990s for it to become a successful part of Swedish fashion industry.<sup>51</sup> Originally focused on menswear and mass-produced suits, the brand launched its first womenswear collection in 1996. Due to lacking funds, Tiger of Sweden initially collaborated with influential people and celebrities in order to get recognition and free advertising. As it became more successful the advertisements progressed and often reinterpreted stories from Swedish history. Today the brand displays a more conventional look in their advertisements. The Spring/Summer 2015 collections for men and women were photographed against a high wire-netting fence in what seems to be an abandoned facility. As men and women are photographed separately the material will consist of two images of each, displaying two looks for each collection.

## 1.6 Methodology

Based on the research questions and theories, the methods need not only to provide answers to how the androgynous body is represented, but also how it is received by consumers. Therefore, the study will apply a mixed methodology, combining ethnography and visual analysis. The primary method consists of an ethnographic approach, which allows for interaction with consumers and retail workers, whereas a complementary visual analysis focuses on the empirical material. Deriving from anthropology, ethnography, meaning “the study of people”, is an important methodological approach within social science, dealing with the study of culture and understanding of social actions.<sup>52</sup> Considering the wide range of research areas, ethnographical methods can be applied in

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<sup>50</sup> Falk, *Modeundret*, 84.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-102.

<sup>52</sup> Kerry E. Howell, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Methodology* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2013), 118, 121.

several ways, including participant observation, the use of personal documents and interviews.<sup>53</sup> For this study a qualitative approach will be applied, analysing the subject inductively from a micro-level and going deeper into the meaning of the phenomenon of an androgynous body ideal.

Therefore, whereas a quantitative approach would have applied an ethnographic method using surveys to gather a larger amount of data, this study will instead focus on raising a few voices through interviews. In order to include different perspectives of the fashion industry the interviews are divided into two parts, one focusing on the experiences of those working in the fashion industry and the second part which will represent the consumer side. Combining these different points-of-views will provide valuable insight not only to personal experiences regarding body norms but also create a deeper analysis taken into consideration different roles within fashion, retail versus consumer. As argued in relation to the selection of material, the brand images of Acne Studios, Filippa K and Tiger of Sweden are not essential for the analysis. Consequently, the ethnographic study will not incorporate interviews regarding the brands' own visions or intentions about the production and outcome of the campaign material, or thoughts about their connections to androgynous fashion.

The purpose of using interviews is to find out how consumers respond and react to the androgynous body ideal, both by consulting them directly as well as through the experiences of sales assistants, working on the floor. The main part of the ethnographic approach consists of interacting directly with consumers, which will be done by assembling two small focus groups, interviews with retail workers will on the other hand be conducted individually, using e-mail correspondence. Although different in several ways, both interview techniques will incorporate semi-structured questions, this approach enables the respondents to further elaborate their opinions while keeping to predetermined questions. Semi-structured interviews also present the interviewer with possibilities to add or delete questions as the interview progresses.

A focus group usually consist of a small number of people, conducting an informal group discussion regarding a specific topic.<sup>54</sup> For this study, the focus group is divided into two minor groups, consisting of a total of six respondents between the ages of 20 to 31 years old. Since the focus is on both menswear and womenswear, it is relevant to consult both men and women. In order to make the groups representative, the first group (A) therefore consist of two male and one

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>54</sup> Yuniya Kawamura, *Doing Research in Fashion and Dress: An Introduction to Qualitative Methods* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2011), 66.

female respondent, while the second group (B) is made up by two female and one male respondent. Another important aspect when assembling members for the interviews is their knowledge of Swedish fashion and more specifically their role as consumers of at least one of the brands chosen as material. This knowledge indicates that the respondents are accustomed with the body ideal displayed in the campaign material which is important for the discussion.

Consumer responses could alternatively have been gathered through individual interviews. However, there are two main reasons for why I consider the choice of focus group more useful in this study. Firstly, the gathering of different opinions among consumers, both men and women, would require a large number of interviews and data collection. Consequently, I find that this method would go beyond the scope of the study. Secondly, the intention is to create a more dynamic discussion with the consumers, both relating to the visual campaign material but also to their personal feelings and experiences of androgynous fashion and body ideal, incorporating a phenomenological approach. Whereas the face-to-face interview could end up becoming too subjective, the focus group enables the researcher to take a step back and let the group discuss more freely among themselves. Within the focus group the respondents are able to agree and disagree with each other while the interviewer take on the role of a moderator, observing the discussion and posing the questions.

The reason for dividing the focus groups in two is mainly to make sure that each member has the possibility to actively engage in the discussion by keeping it small. Furthermore, by posing the same questions, any differences or similarities between the responses and reactions of group A and B can be analysed. By not dividing men and women in different groups I believe the discussions will be more dynamic, focusing on both menswear and womenswear and not becoming strictly about one or the other. Each discussion will departure from the visual campaign material, focusing on the reactions towards both androgynous fashion and body ideals. Masculine and feminine elements will be discussed as well as the identification with the body ideal displayed in images. Thereupon, the discussion will continue, dealing with the equality aspects of androgynous fashion and addressing the issues of power.

Semi-structured interviews with retail workers will work as a complement to the focus groups. Speaking from their experiences in their professional roles and through their meetings with consumers, these interviews will give further insight to how androgynous fashion and bodies are interpreted. Working as a form of mediator between brand and consumer, the retail workers are

dealing with experiences of how the androgynous fashion fits onto different body shapes and can therefore supply a relevant perspective of how consumers deal with body norms associated with androgynous fashion.

When sampling respondents for retail interviews, the main requirement is that they are, or have been working with at least one of the selected brands and have experience of dealing directly with customer interaction on the floor. Since the study considers both men's and women's perspectives, respondents must represent both voices, thus it is relevant to include sales persons from both menswear and womenswear. For these interviews, respondents are therefore solely selected based on their working positions and not their personal opinions or identity. Since these interviews are not the focus of the ethnographic study, but rather a complement to the focus groups, a small number of respondents are sufficient to incorporate the retail perspective. Therefore, the retail interviews are limited to two separate interviews, both conducted using the same questions via e-mail correspondence.

Respondents for separate interviews and members for focus groups will primarily be acquired through snowball sampling, starting by searching within my personal social network and asking people to pass along my request for participants within their own social networks. Using this snowball technique, I gathered five members for the focus groups and two retail workers for separate interviews. In addition, the last respondent was acquired by consulting the selected brands on social media platforms. The ages of the respondents were limited to 20 – 40 years old, in order to focus on the main target group of the brands, ending up with the youngest participant being 20 years old and the oldest being 31 years old. It should also be noted that the men's ages were less diverse than the women's, stretching between 20 – 22 years. Although this can affect the outcome of the study, I consider the selection representative since the androgynous ideal not only addresses gender but also youth. To assure the anonymity of respondents in the study all names will be changed. Likewise, it will not be revealed what stores are part of the retail interviews, only that they are in some way retailers of at least one of the brands used as material and located in larger Swedish cities. Apart from one email interview which was partly conducted in Norwegian, due to the nationality of the respondent, all interviews have been conducted in Swedish. For this thesis, all quotes have been translated to English.

The last part of the methodology consists of a shorter visual analysis of the campaign material which will work as a complementary method to the interviews. This will combine

theoretical approaches with my personal analysis as well as the responses from interviews. Each image will be briefly described and further interpreted in relation to how the body is displayed and constructed. Working with several images, including both men and women, allows for a comparative analysis of how the bodies are interpreted and how the body norms may or may not differ between men and women. Relating to the outline of the project, described in more detail in the following section, the visual analysis will focus primarily on aspects of power and gender representations as well as the appearance of the physical body and its associations to marked versus unmarked gender.

## 1.7 Outline

The analysis is divided thematically into three parts. Beginning with a brief historical background of androgyny, relating to representations of androgynous bodies and fashion's connection to gender, the first section provides the reader with an important foundation for further understanding the phenomenon from a contemporary perspective. The second part of the analysis relates to contemporary issues of power and gender, questioning gender norms and the differences between man dressing as woman versus woman dressing as man, also relating androgynous fashion to a Swedish social context. The third part will focus primarily on the physical body in relation to an androgynous body ideal, discussing whether a neutral body can exist, how the male body continues to be seen as norm, as well as incorporate sexual aspects in relation to gender identity and bodies. Each part will focus on these specific topics in relation to the visual material and discussions gathered from the focus groups and interviews. Lastly there will be a discussion connecting the different parts, followed by a separate section, consisting of concluding remarks and pointing towards further research within the field.

## 2. The Development of Androgynous Fashion and Body Ideals

### 2.1 Historical Approaches to Androgyny

According to the Oxford Dictionary the term *androgyny* can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century via Latin from Greek origin, combining the words of *andro*, man, and *gyne*, woman.<sup>55</sup> The androgyny thus combines male and female physical characteristics into one human being. Apart from this brief description, the concept itself tells us no more of what an androgyny creature should look like, giving no answer to how a body would appear to be assigned a physical resemblance that combines male and female. However, by tracing the development of androgyny and its representation throughout history, a physical ideal appearing to be practically unchanged emerges.

Long before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of androgyny was featured in Plato's *Symposium* through Aristophanes' monologue on human sexuality, written around 300 BC, in which he claims that originally there were not only man and woman but a third sex, a union of the other two; the androgyny.<sup>56</sup> Looking at body ideals from a historical perspective includes relating them to their contemporary social and cultural discourses. Whereas androgyny in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is often connected to issues of gender equality and creating gender neutrality, it should be made clear that an equality aspect has not always been prominent in relation to the term.

Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was believed that only one sex existed, the male, and women were consequently seen as undeveloped men, meaning sexual difference was a matter of degree and not kind.<sup>57</sup> Considering that women were not recognized as a sex of their own within Western society before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is no surprise that the male body represented the standard human body. Consequently, the male genitalia became a status symbol whereas the female genitalia lacked any equal symbolic power. Historically, nude representations of men and women reflect this imbalance, as the male genitalia has usually been depicted, while the female genitalia seem to be non-existing in images and sculptures.<sup>58</sup> Within such society, believing in the idea of a one-sex model,

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<sup>55</sup> "Androgyny," Oxford Dictionary, accessed January 12, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/androgyny>

<sup>56</sup> Karaminas and Geczy, *Critical Fashion Practice*, 114 - 115.

<sup>57</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 26.

androgyny would not have signified gender equality, since the female body would never become as perfect as the male, and therefore never its equal.

This glorification of male bodies has been clearly visualized through Western art history where the heroic male nude is considered the foundation stone of classical art theory, a recurring motif not only within traditional painting but in sculptures as well.<sup>59</sup> Paintings of female nudes on the other hand were not a common subject until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, possibly pointing towards the tendency to view the male body as neutral while the female body became gendered and thus sexualized. However, art history's representations of ideal male bodies offer not one unified ideal, but several. Studying historical paintings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by Ingres and David, art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau points towards different ideals of masculinity, combining muscular figures with more slender and youthful men.<sup>60</sup> While arguing that both ideals represent masculinity within their own period, Solomon-Godeau describes the body of the slender and youthful man as androgynous, making no clear resemblance to a female body but rather focusing on a homosexual reading of the slim bodies.<sup>61</sup>

Studying the representation of bodies through art in this way reveals how the concepts of masculinity and femininity are not to be seen as natural and static, but as socially constructed ideals that shift according to time. Arguably, the slender male body can within its historical context appear as masculine as the most muscular men depicted in art. However, while the illustrations of male bodies connote heroism, the female bodies appear more erotized in their depictions. Both male and female bodies have been more or less idealized in art, but it is important to recognize for which aim and through whose perspective. Relating to social culture, women were for a long time excluded from the practice of art, resulting in that the representations we see are foremost made by men and for men. Even subjects of femininity were marginalized within art, enhancing the hierarchy between men and women in society.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the representations of human bodies in traditional painting and sculptures mainly follow the idea of the one-sex model where the male body signifies complete human form. Furthermore, as Arnold argues, the androgynous body has always been a union of the sexes based on the flat and waistless figure of the male athletic youth.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 43.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>63</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 122.

Making connections between androgyny and homosexuality is far from unusual.<sup>64</sup> As with the concept of cross-dressing, androgyny has through its gender confusion often been seen as an indicator of homosexuality and/or a desire to become the opposite sex. By disrupting the expected gender roles within society, androgyny creates a sense of uncertainty, not only in relation to gender, but also sexuality. This blurred sexuality is for instance suggested by Stella Bruzzi, professor of film studies, when describing the role of androgyny within film, stating that “androgyny sexualises the transvestite by increasing the eroticism of their ambiguous image”.<sup>65</sup> However, cross-dressing and androgyny should not be assumed to imply homosexuality, nor should the terms be used synonymously as cross-dressing involves intentionally wearing items, or dress in a style that is typically associated with the opposite gender, whereas androgyny indicates a combination of both male and female characteristics.

Arguably the most famous androgyne is also a fictive one, the character Orlando in Virginia Woolf’s novel of the same title. The novel expresses not only the sexual ambiguity of Orlando, but the emotional transformation between the male and female sex, making it difficult to categorize the androgyne Orlando as either man or woman. Orlando’s transformation is not only expressed through the physical body or his/her emotions but further enhanced using clothes, as described by English scholar Marjorie B. Garber; “Whatever Orlando *is*, her clothing reflects it: the crossing between male and female may be a mixture (a synthesis), but it is not a confusion”.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, Orlando him/herself feels that the personal identity is left intact regardless of gender, showing the social constructiveness of gender roles and how fashion can be used as a tool to create and enhance gender identity.

## 2.2 Fashion’s Obsession with Gender

As stated by Elizabeth Wilson, professor of cultural studies, fashion’s obsession with gender is not a new phenomenon and has involved different perspectives throughout history, both by clearly differencing between men and women’s dress as well as the opposite, trying to eradicate gender

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<sup>64</sup> For instance, in 1979 sociologist Richard R. Troiden published an article titled “Androgyny: A Neglected Dimension of Homosexuality”.

<sup>65</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1997), 147.

<sup>66</sup> Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 135.

roles through unisex fashion.<sup>67</sup> In order to begin talking about an androgynous fashion, the importance and complexity of a gendered fashion in history must therefore first be sorted out.

Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fashion was as much part of male as female clothing. In fact, in early modern civilization and classical antiquity gender differences in clothes were less marked than in modern society. Although still similar in style, separate patterns for men's and women's clothes were established in medieval Europe, making sexual difference clearer. This might appear contradictory to Laqueur's interpretation of the one-sex model, but even though men and women were considered belonging to the same sex, it is important to recognize that women had lower status since their bodies were considered having the same organs, but in the wrong places.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, the division of male and female clothing that began taking shape in medieval Europe can be connected to cultural aspects rather than biological ones.

Following centuries consisted of an alternation between which silhouette was more conspicuous and adorned, the male or female. Both women's and men's bodies were covered and molded into ideal shapes with the use of for instance farthingales, bifurcated and padded garments that would draw attention to different parts of the bodies according to the current ideal. Decorations like bows, ribbons, hats, wigs and heels were as much part of the male wardrobe as the female, although these kinds of extravagant fashions should not be mistaken as an opportunity for individuals to dress as they liked. Fashion has historically been guarded by gender regulations as well as class sumptuary laws. Even though Queen Elizabeth I historically has been said to cross-dress herself, contemporary women in the 16<sup>th</sup> century wearing male clothes would have been prosecuted and sentenced.<sup>69</sup> However, a loophole for cross-dressing did occur through the theatre. Not only has plays, such as Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, been relating to the subject of cross-dress, but both male and female actors have throughout history been cast in roles as the opposite sex.<sup>70</sup>

The "discovery" of the female sex as a sex of its own also caused changes in society to more clearly separate the two sexes and their expected gender roles, one way was through fashion and by linking it to the superficial interest of women. Men who displayed an exaggerated style had already been ridiculed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as the *Macaronis* in England or the *Incroyables* in

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<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, rev. ed. (London: Tauris, 2003), 117.

<sup>68</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 26.

<sup>69</sup> Garber, *Vested Interests*, 28, 30.

<sup>70</sup> Women were originally not allowed to perform in public, therefore were also the female roles played by men at the theatres. On the contrary, later on, the role of Hamlet has often been performed by women. Garber, *Vested Interests*, 38-39.

France.<sup>71</sup> Men's excessive use of fashion and ornamentation was commonly viewed with suspicion and believed to be a sign of weakness and effeminate vanity. The richly-decorated men's fashion of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were also tied to the elite and the aristocratic court life, a lifestyle which was much criticized by the growing bourgeoisie and working class at the end of the century, leading up to the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. Taking a stance and showing their distance from the aristocrats also meant disregarding their extravagant fashion.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the separation of male dress and fashion was carried out through the 'great male renunciation', enforcing a new sober dress code for men, based on what would become the modern three-piece suit.<sup>72</sup> Never before had fashion been more divided between the sexes.<sup>73</sup> Whereas masculine became synonymous with unmarked gender, femininity signified the opposite; marked sexuality.<sup>74</sup> Fashion became an essential part in this division, using the woman as a vessel to flaunt the wealth and status of her husband through her excessive fashion.<sup>75</sup> Fashion also played a crucial part in separating between the men's sphere of work life and public space and women's sphere, secluded to the privacy of the home. Through the impracticality of women's fashion, even the clothes themselves signaled that the woman physically could not, nor needed to, work.<sup>76</sup> Dressing like a man thus meant dressing as an active subject while dressing as a woman implied passivity, the becoming of an object, distinguishing between the fundamental gender roles of man as producer and woman as consumer.

Not all women approved of this social development and its restricted fashion, and although living in a patriarchal society with little opportunity to make their voices heard, dress reform movements managed to make some progress incorporating male aesthetics and its more practical elements into female dress. Although more democratic than before, this fashion was not representative for the entire society, but foremost members of the aristocracy and the growing bourgeoisie. For some working-class women, trousers were common even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and

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<sup>71</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 111-112.

<sup>72</sup> The term "great male renunciation" was introduced by J. C. Flügel, who considered the shift in men's dress in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to be a sign of their abandonment of fashion and the thought of being considered beautiful. From this point, a man's ambition should solely focus on him being useful. Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 154.

<sup>73</sup> Barbara Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist: Trends and Cycles in the Fashion System*, English ed. (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 12.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> The phenomenon was referred to by sociologist Thorstein Veblen as conspicuous consumption, reflecting a leisure class where a woman's function was to exhibit the wealth of her husband. According to Veblen fashion was primarily a tool for gaining social status. Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 59.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

a more masculine attire was also early on favored by lesbian circles in Paris, whose style in the late 1800s derived from male tailoring.<sup>77 78</sup> Dress reform movements, of which the Bloomerists, named after Amelia Bloomer in the 1850s, has made perhaps the biggest influence in fashion history, were early adaptors of trousers for women, although strongly criticized for their unfeminine look. However, the greatest progress for women's liberation from the corsets, crinolines and bustles of 19<sup>th</sup> century fashion was to come from sport and bicycling. The structure of the bicycle made it impossible to ride dressed in women's clothes, which gradually led to the adaption of trousers into even the more respectable women's wardrobes. Seeing how men and women until the 18<sup>th</sup> century had dressed almost identical for riding and sport, it would explain how physical activity could have such an impact on changing female fashion.<sup>79</sup>

Naturally women's adaption of menswear did not go unchallenged in society but was heavily criticized for being unmoral and inappropriate. However, the 20<sup>th</sup> century would continue to break down the barriers between men and women, not only regarding fashion but by questioning the binary gender roles themselves. For androgynous fashion, the 1920s became the revolutionary start by introducing the concept of the new modern woman, *la garçonne*, a woman characterized by her androgynous features and independent attitude, she was a woman who resembled and acted more like young men than her earlier female counterparts.<sup>80</sup> Women's greater independence and economic freedom were effects from the rising work opportunities in the early 1900s.<sup>81</sup> But entering the work environment also meant entering what had previously been a man's world. For a woman to be accepted in the public work life it commonly acquired an adoption of the masculine dress code.

As described by Entwistle, "androgyny has been a persistent theme in twentieth-century fashion and took on numerous forms over the course of the century".<sup>82</sup> However, the figure of the female androgynous body has been more or less consistent since the 1920s, portraying a slender body with no suggestion of curves, neither in the form of breasts nor hips. Combined with the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>78</sup> Valerie Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 24.

<sup>79</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 153.

<sup>80</sup> The term *La Garçonne* [boyish] is believed to have derived from the novel *La Garçonne* by Victor Margueritte (1922), telling the story about a promiscuous woman, having relations with both men and women. Although the style was associated with lesbianism, it was favored and worn by many heterosexual women as well. Steele, *A Queer History*, 26-28.

<sup>81</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 169.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 171.

1920s fashion of cropped hairstyles, the ideal girl was considered boyish in her look, a look which rather enhanced youth than masculinity. Over the past hundred years the gendered dichotomy of menswear and womenswear has gradually diminished due to developing societies, where women have become more included in the public and work life, successively gaining rights to vote in Western countries. Perhaps the most fundamental shift within women's fashion was displayed through the adoption of trousers. The clothing item symbolizing masculinity and male authority caused social critic, claiming women to be unfeminine.<sup>83</sup> However, through a growing popular culture and film industry, the role of actresses as style icons became increasingly influential for fashion. Not only portraying a masculine and androgynous look on-screen, actresses like Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich were early adaptors of trousers also in their private lives.<sup>84</sup>

Apart from Hollywood, the designers themselves came to be more influential, gaining higher status in the early 1900s. One who successfully sought to liberate women from their corseted past was Coco Chanel, launching an androgynous fashion for women which favored function and mobility over excessive adornment. Chanel's clothes did not only change the look of fashion but also the shape of the body. Accentuating her own body type, which was very much in line with the 1920s ideal, straight and completely absent of feminine curves, she claimed that her ambition throughout her career was to turn men's clothes into women's, dressing like the man she had always dreamt of being.<sup>85</sup>

Fashion's development through the 20<sup>th</sup> century should not be mistaken for a straight road towards a gender-neutral fashion and equality. The fashion styles have been as varied as the body and beauty ideals of each decade, exemplified by the revolutionary launch of Dior's "New look" in 1947, celebrating a body ideal much resembling the corseted women of the 1850s. But each time the androgynous fashion has been in focus there has been a tendency to look towards the same male-inspired ideal, regardless of it being in the 1920s or with the launch of Yves Saint Laurent's female tuxedo, *le smoking* in the 1960s. The constant being women dressing in clothes and adapting looks that previously have been exclusive for men. Unisex fashion became increasingly popular during the 1960s and 1970s. Clothes were less fitted than in previous decades, creating a distance between the shape of the clothed body and the body underneath, consequently constructing both women's and men's bodies according to a similar shapeless ideal.

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<sup>83</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 102.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Steele, *A Queer History*, 24.

The unisex fashion of the 1960s and 1970s did not only change women's fashion, also menswear was affected by the more liberating and genderless fashion, adapting a style that, within a Western culture, was more associated with women, such as long hair and colorful, flowing kaftans.<sup>86</sup> In Sweden, the unisex fashion were symbols of a new life-style, challenging structures of class and gender discrimination.<sup>87</sup> The Swedish designer Sighsten Herrgård became the face of unisex fashion, and internationally recognized, by launching the unisex-jumpsuit, in line with the contemporary idea that men and women should share wardrobe.<sup>88</sup> As explained by art historian and fashion scholar Patrik Steorn; "Unisex fashion was about clothes which in themselves are so neutral that the wearer would stand out on their own terms."<sup>89</sup> However, Steorn also argues that unisex fashion was connected to creating a new type of masculinity which questioned the old dress codes of a heteronormative masculinity, strengthened by Herrgård encouraging men to dress more sexy for themselves.<sup>90</sup>

Unisex and androgynous fashion continued to be popular in the 1980s and 1990s, influenced by various trends such as power dressing and grunge. A slowly increasing openness towards homosexual and transgender communities in society also contributed to a more playful and individualized fashion scene, containing less strict gender roles. Celebrity culture and pop music icons such as David Bowie, Boy George and Madonna were all influential in questioning fashion, gender and sexuality norms through their provocative appearances.<sup>91</sup> Although each trend came with its specific trademarks, the male inspired looks still dominated the genderless ideal. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century jeans, T-shirts and shirts were as much part of the female wardrobe as the male, signifying their genderless status. Seemingly Chanel's dream had come true, women were now free to dress as men. Importantly, all these items were originally exclusive for men and as such their masculine connotation should be taken into consideration when relating them to androgynous or gender-neutral fashion.

This does not mean that there have not been any attempts to feminize the look of men's fashion or that they would have failed to do so. Several designers have played with traditional

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<sup>86</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 115, 121.

<sup>87</sup> Patrik Steorn, "Men can be Attractive and a little Sexy..." Swedish Unisex Fashion in the 1960s and 1970s", in *Nordic Fashion Studies*, ed. Peter McNeil and Louise Wallenberg (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2012), 19.

<sup>88</sup> Falk, *Modeundret*, 58.

<sup>89</sup> Steorn, "Men can be Attractive", 28.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-28.

<sup>91</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 175.

gender roles by dressing men in skirts and dresses on the runway, but apart from few exceptions and subcultures, these looks have tended to be secluded to the artistic fashion scene and not yet become part of mainstream fashion. Looking at contemporary fashion the “no gender” trend is growing rapidly. While the Swedish brand Hope in 2016 declared that they would begin mark their collections in both men’s and women’s sizes, the prestigious brand Louis Vuitton chose young actor Jaden Smith to model a brocade skirt from their women’s line in the ad campaign for Spring/Summer 2016.<sup>92</sup> Former Tiger of Sweden designer Christian Lippich launched his own men’s fashion brand Dailyroutine in the Fall of 2016, stating that although it might appear traditionally masculine, he has consciously worked with the cut and fit of the clothes to question the masculine norm.<sup>93</sup>

Still unclear is whether the “no gender” trend is progressively making gender irrelevant, or contrary, drawing even more focus to gender construction. Entwistle suggests the latter, relating to the ambivalent relation of fashion and gender as “while it would seem that today’s fashions are more androgynous, even ‘uni-sex’ clothes display an overriding obsession with gender”.<sup>94</sup> Moving on from the historic development to a more contemporary discourse of androgyny and fashion, let us take a closer look at the fashion campaigns produced by the Swedish brands Acne Studios, Filippa K and Tiger of Sweden.

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<sup>92</sup> Lisa Corneliussen, “Bara Kläder,” *Styleby*, no. 40 (spring 2016): 117.

<sup>93</sup> Pernilla Hansson, “Tiger-designer lanserar eget varumärke”, *Habit*, published May 26, 2016. [http://www.habit.se/article/view/348092/tigerdesigner\\_lanserar eget\\_varumärke](http://www.habit.se/article/view/348092/tigerdesigner_lanserar eget_varumärke)

<sup>94</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 140.

## 3. Power and Gender

### 3.1 The Dominating Discourse

Photographed against a white background a child is pictured wearing a heavy, pink wool coat with black trimmings, almost completely covering the body. The photo is combined by two different pictures, one frame places the child with the back towards the viewer, showing how the coat nearly touches the ground had it not been for a pair of high heels. In the second frame, the child has turned around to meet the viewer face to face. However, the gaze is hidden under a pair of large sunglasses and as if not hidden enough the child puts up a hand, decorated by oversized rings, to cover the rest of the face. The same child appears in yet another photograph, this time dressed in a multicolored jacket and a pair of grey trousers. Once again, the face is half covered by the sunglasses, disrupting any eye contact between viewer and child. Contrary to the other two images, the child is now positioned in full-length, directed towards the viewer. Although the outfit is different, the clothes are still disproportionately large for the child, dressed in trousers far too long and sleeves that reach down, covering the hands. Apart from the sunglasses, both outfits are also accessorized with a matching handbag. There is nothing in the photos that indicates the model's identity, at the same time it is difficult to define whether the child is a boy or a girl. The linguistic signs in the images tell us only that the sender is Acne Studios, as their white logo is clearly visible in the pictures. With the body and face covered, all that is really left to judge the sex of the child, is by the hair. However, the gender confusion is further problematized when assembling the connotations of model and clothes. Although the shortcut hairstyle has a strong connection to boys, the clothes themselves are more likely to be seen on a woman.

Clearly the model is not the target group of the fashion which is displayed in the photos. In fact, consulting background information it is revealed that the child is the 11-year-old son of Acne Studios' founder and creative director Jonny Johansson.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, the clothes can be traced to the women's collection of Fall/Winter 2015, which suggests that there is an obvious intention of playing with gender roles when choosing a boy to model clothes which are intended for female consumers.

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<sup>95</sup> "11-årig Pojke."

Contrary to the Acne Studios campaign, the Fall/Winter campaign produced by Filippa K presents a more traditional division in the promotion of men's and women's fashion by photographing them separately. In one advertising, promoting the men's collection, a man is seen wearing a suit, photographed from two angles, displaying him from the front and a close up, featuring the back of his head. The photos are coherently shown in black-and-white, with a background as minimalistic as the fashion itself, rather focusing on creating effects by using light and shadows. By slightly turning his body from the light he falls halfway into the shadows, making it difficult to see the outfit as well as the face, which glances into the distance with a look that could be interpreted as either serious or rather apathetic. Far more clearly presented is the straight silhouette which appears in bright contrast against the illuminated background. The sharp angles created by the use of light repeats itself in the stiff shape of the body, enhancing the cut of the suit. Although the model is clean-shaved and the face partly disguised by shadows there is not really any confusion as to whether it depicts a man or a woman. Similar to the Acne Studios' images the shortcut hair contributes to connote the model as a man but in this case, it is also enforced by the clothes he is wearing, the suit, which traditionally has been a male costume.

The women's campaign uses a similar photographic aesthetics in black-and-white, although the shadows are brighter, making face and features more visible and slightly softer. The model is dressed in a black high neck T-shirt and a straight black skirt, photographed in two frames, one standing from the front and the second one sitting relaxed and supporting her elbows on the knees. The second frame reveals a detail at the back of the top as it opens up, showing the skin of her back, which along with her bare arms creates a clear contrast between the bright skin and the black clothes. Although the female model uses a slightly different body language from the male model, posing in ways that causes the body to curve, the actual physical shape of the model is very much similar to the straight body presented by the man. There is no clearly marked waist, no indication of breasts or use of cosmetics, differencing these images from the previous, consequently the main elements that signify the model as woman is caused by the long hair and that she is wearing a skirt, associated with women's clothing.

Compared to Acne Studios and Filippa K the models are more visible in the Tiger of Sweden campaign images, as they are not disguised by shadows or in any way trying to cover their bodies. Similar to Filippa K, the representations of menswear and womenswear are divided but photographed using the same setting and aesthetics, even the clothes themselves resemble each

other. Facing the camera from the front, a man is photographed standing relaxed against a wire fence, wearing a striped suit and a white shirt underneath. Another frame shows a woman sitting at a bench in front of the same fence, dressed in an almost identical outfit, same colored striped suit with a white top underneath. Although the woman is sitting down and the man is standing, the silhouettes appear to follow the same straight shape. By the look of their relaxed poses, indifferent attitudes and rather casual styling, for instance they are not wearing any tie or high collar shirt, they appear to be informally dressed even though they are wearing suits.

In a second photograph of the male model, he is sitting at the back of a bench with his feet placed on the seat. This time he is dressed in the same white shirt, matched with a pair of narrow, dark trousers and sneakers. In the rather large spread between his feet there is also a black bag which he loosely holds on to. He is no longer in front of the fence but placed in front of a wall covered in graffiti, still clearly connected to the same unpolished environment as the first image. The same wall is used as background in a second photograph displaying the female model. Photographed in full length she stands with her body towards the viewer, holding her hands in the pockets of her low waisted, yellow printed trousers. The trousers are matched with a short white, pleated top, leaving the lower part of her stomach exposed. No accessories are worn other than a pair of black high-heeled shoes.

Looking at the bodies in all four photographs, they follow the same straight silhouette, showing no indications of curves either in the form of breasts or a marked waist. However, there is a division of gender roles following the previous pictures of women wearing long hair and men being clean-shaved and short-cut. Another aspect that is apparent in the difference of representations of women and men in these images is how the man in both photos meets the eye of the viewer while the woman, even though her body is turned against the viewer, turns her head away, gazing into the distance. One possible interpretation based on the different gazes is that the men are portrayed as more active since they engage with the viewer, while the women poses as passive objects, a technique which has often been used in the different representation of genders.<sup>96</sup>

All campaign photographs described above can be seen as different examples of displaying an androgynous fashion, whether by intentionally playing with gender roles as Acne Studios or subtly blurring the lines between menswear and womenswear creating similar silhouettes. But in

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<sup>96</sup> Jean Kilbourne's documentary series **Killing Us Softly** explores gender representation in advertising and the ways in which women are objectified and dehumanized. "Killing Us Softly 4 – Trailer [Featuring Jean Kilbourne]", ChallengingMedia, published August 24, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWKXit\\_3rpQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWKXit_3rpQ)

order to understand how the term androgyny is used within contemporary culture, these images need further deconstruction. As pointed out, the word androgynous has often been used to describe bodies and fashion without clearly defining or problematizing what the physical body ideal represents. When speaking about Swedish fashion and the brands mentioned here, the word androgynous can be seen as one example often used when describing the fashion as gender-neutral, minimalistic and functional. These features are strongly connected to the Scandinavian style and Swedish fashion, both nationally and internationally, highlighted at the Swedish fashion exhibition at Sven-Harrys Art Museum in 2014, where editor Susanna Strömquist described Swedish fashion saying “We like comfort and a kind of gender-neutral design – a look that reflects the democracy and equality in our society.”<sup>97</sup> Important to consider when analyzing the androgynous fashion in Sweden is therefore the cultural connection, addressing the bond between Sweden as one of the leading countries for gender equality and its representation of and preference for a gender-neutral and androgynous fashion. However, as proven by history, gender equality and androgyny is not synonymous and consequently, the power relations between genders imbedded in the androgynous ideals are important to break down.

In order to analyse the perceptions of what an androgynous body looks like in contemporary Swedish society two small focus groups were consulted to share their personal thoughts in relation to the campaign images. Importantly, using consumer responses reveals not only how the androgynous body is physically shaped but also how a gender-neutral norm might be established. To begin with, each respondent was asked to fill in a short survey regarding their background and whether they themselves considered their personal style to be androgynous. Before seeing the campaign material, they were also asked to individually respond to what they imagined an androgynous body to look like. This question was posed in order to determine how their original conceptions might change during the discussion, as well as reveal any similarities or differences compared to other respondents. Furthermore, what they believed an androgynous body to look like would not only suggest what features were considered androgynous, but consequently which features were not.

Analyzing the answers highlights what Ahmed refers to as the dominating discourse, making visible the underlying structures that dominates our understanding of an androgynous body.

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<sup>97</sup> Original quote translated from Swedish by author. “Vi gillar komfort och ett slags könsneutral design – en look som speglar det demokratiska och jämställda i vårt samhälle.” Susanna Strömquist, “Inledning”, in *Svenskt Mode: 2000–2015*, ed. Susanna Strömquist (Stockholm: Elanders Fälth & Hässler, 2014), 5.

By raising awareness of this discourse, the concept of androgyny and its ideal features can be further problematized. As pointed out by Ahmed, our perceptions are guided by repetitive patterns of thought which comes to affect what we believe to be natural, in order for this to change we must therefore first question what is assumed to be natural.<sup>98</sup> This procedure might seem quite abstract at first but applied in relation to the material and the respondents' answers, regarding the physical appearance of an androgynous body, a similar body ideal soon begins to take shape. In responding to what an androgynous body looks like, all respondents showed an ambivalence towards emphasizing physical features, rather painting an abstract body stating it could be anyone, both male and female and a body that objectively incorporated what is generally seen as masculine and feminine. Two respondents, both male, further elaborated the physical traits of an androgynous body, describing it as "a body without curves" and "tall and slim".<sup>99</sup> Although describing the body using different words, the answers show that the androgyne as a fusion between male and female becomes an important aspect. The lack of further elaboration of the physical features can be interpreted as if they were unimportant, referring to one respondent claiming it "could be anyone, fit in most things" or as stressed by another, that it involves personal identification to not one, but two genders.<sup>100</sup> However, it could also indicate that there is an insecurity in describing what a combined masculine and feminine body could look like.

As mentioned, the focus groups were divided into two small groups, containing three members in each. Group A was the first group to be assembled and the discussion was conducted in late January 2017, at Stockholm University. The members of group A consisted of: Simon, 20 years old and consumer of Acne Studios, Filippa K and Tiger of Sweden, Martin, 21 years old and consumer of Acne Studios and Filippa K and Anna, 20 years old and just like Simon, consumer of all three brands. Group B gathered for a discussion in mid-February, also being held at Stockholm University. Group B was made up of Sara, 30 years old and consumer of Filippa K, Victor, 22 years old and consumer of Tiger of Sweden and Julia, 31 years old and consumer of all three brands. After describing their perception of an androgynous body, the respondents were introduced to the eight selected campaign images from Acne Studios, Filippa K and Tiger of Sweden. When giving their first impressions of the visual material the word androgynous was barely mentioned, but still implied by relating to the images in similar ways as they did when asked to describe an

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<sup>98</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 14.

<sup>99</sup> Interview survey, focus group A and B.

<sup>100</sup> Interviews, focus groups A and B.

androgynous body in writing, focusing on the similarities between menswear and womenswear in terms of presenting a straight silhouette, mixing femininity and masculinity. Anna 20, is the only respondent who actually uses the term androgynous when first describing the images, explicitly saying “they are very androgynous”, while Julia 31, prefers using the term unisex, arguing it is an easier expression used to describe the combination of women adopting male features and men adopting female features.<sup>101</sup> This initial discussion regarding the images reinforces the idea that there is an uncertainty about using the term androgynous, whether unconsciously or as Julia, by consciously choosing a similar, but easier applied term.

Important to recognize is also how none of the respondents argued against any of the images being used in relation to androgyny. Consequently, this shows that there is an approval of the images as representing androgynous looks. A possible explanation to why these images appear androgynous can be found in relation to Ahmed’s discussion of the dominating discourse, arguing that our conceptions do not emerge from individual opinions, but are shaped by the underlying structures of society.<sup>102</sup> This would suggest how the androgynous body ideal, representing the same straight and slim body as shown by Chanel during the 1920s, has been able to remain intact throughout history. By not questioning the dominating discourse, in this case why we assume that these bodies are androgynous, we are simply following what Ahmed refers to as the “straight line”, accepting what appear to be natural by “follow the line that is followed by others”.<sup>103</sup>

Ideally, an androgynous body would appear to be combining feminine and masculine traits equally, thus making no distinction of valuing men or women more than the other gender, however, by analysing both images and answers from the focus groups this is clearly not the case. Looking at the images they contain both women and men but the physical, curvaceous shape associated with a female body is absent, an observation that is reinforced by the respondents, describing the bodies as straight and slim. A female feature that was brought up in response to what was considered feminine in the images, was the marked waist featured in one of the Acne Studios images.<sup>104</sup> However, the body shown in the image is the body of an 11-year-old boy and the voluminous shape is formed by the clothes he is wearing, rather than the physical shape of his body. Importantly, both groups agreed that an androgynous body ideal and fashion does not represent equality for men and

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>104</sup> Interview, focus group A.

women, as argued by Martin 21: “an androgynous style leans more towards the male [...] more aimed at a male body”.<sup>105</sup>

### 3.2 “What I See as Normal Clothes is Really Boys’ Clothes”

When addressing the issue of gender equality in relation to an androgynous ideal, several aspects need to be considered. The physical shape of the body ideal benefits the male body over the female body, which can be related back to the historical one-sex model where the male body was considered representing the natural human body. Looking at the androgynous fashion and body ideal this notion of the male body as neutral seems very much present and referring to a unisex fashion Arnold states that “Although promising equality, unisex dress has always been essentially masculine in style.”<sup>106</sup>

Beginning by looking at the clothes worn by the women in the images they appear in three different outfits, whereof two are dressed in trousers (Tiger of Sweden) and one is wearing a skirt (Filippa K). Although the Filippa K woman is seen wearing a skirt, traditionally a women’s garment in the Western world, she does not appear very feminine as she is completely dressed in black and showing a straight silhouette, in fact, had it not been for the female garment, her gender identity would have been far less clear. Portrayed sitting in a relaxed pose, slightly spreading her legs, the woman in the Tiger of Sweden campaign is seen dressed in a suit, combining both a traditional male garment with a masculine pose. In the second frame, she is dressed more feminine, wearing bright colored trousers, a pleated top and high heels. Although the overall impression of the clothes worn by women is rather masculine in style, there is nothing controversial or surprising about it, instead they appear to be quite normally and neutrally dressed.

Turning to the men, and the boy, they are dressed in five different outfits. Tiger of Sweden display two different looks worn by the same man, one dressed in a suit, thus a traditional male garment and the other wearing a white shirt, narrow trousers and sneakers, again displaying clothes typically worn by men. The only female attire present is represented by the model holding a bag, but due to its practical size, simplistic design and black color it does not appear as if he is carrying a women’s handbag. Similar to Tiger of Sweden, Filippa K also show a man dressed in a suit, connoting masculinity. Finally, there is the Acne Studios campaign featuring the young boy

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 121.

modeling clothes from the women's collection. Contrary to the other men who are dressed in traditional men's clothing the boy is deliberately dressed in womenswear, bringing attention to the gender play. But seeing the clothes are intended for a female consumer the gender play arguably comes across more as a marketing tool than an ambition to dress men as women.

When consulting the focus groups regarding their responses towards the images, the overall impression points to a masculine domination in gender representations, visible both in images of men and women. In group B both Julia 31, and Sara 30, commented on the masculine poses and confident attitudes displayed by the women. Considering the historic representations of women as objects and passive it suggests the transformation of women into active subjects, previously known as male representation. When describing the clothes worn by the women, as well as their opinions about androgynous fashion in general, both groups stressed casualness and practicality as parts of androgynous fashion, relating it to menswear and basic clothes for both men and women. As explained by Sara 30:

[...] it is accepted to have a more masculine style, what counts as regular clothes like trousers and a shirt or jeans and a T-shirt, male coded garments, is also regular clothes for girls [...] What I see as normal clothes is really boys' clothes.<sup>107</sup>

The argument recalls Karaminas' and Geczy's statement about contemporary gender-neutral clothing being items that originally have been worn by men and later adopted by women for their functionality.<sup>108</sup>

As indicated by previous studies as well as the responses from the focus groups, the association between male clothing and basic or regular clothes goes far beyond the concept of androgyny. One related field in which gender identity and dress has been analysed is within film studies where Bruzzi argues; "Women dressing as men is frequently viewed as a political act", whereas men dressed in women's clothes signals parody and is often used for comic effect.<sup>109</sup> Similar argumentation occurred during the interviews, pointing out that it is considered more acceptable for women to wear men's fashion than for men to be wearing women's fashion, indicating a power imbalance, problematic for both men and women. This power balance also

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<sup>107</sup> Interview, focus group B.

<sup>108</sup> Karaminas and Geczy, *Critical Fashion Practice*, 105.

<sup>109</sup> Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, 179.

effects how androgynous fashion is apprehended, following a masculine appearance considered neutral for both men and women. Although both groups pointed out that men are more encouraged to dress feminine today, they all agreed that it is still rare for men to dress feminine or adopt a more curvaceous silhouette. When initially reacting to the images even the two men wearing suits were considered more or less androgynous, although wearing perhaps the most masculine connoted garment possible, a problematic later raised by Anna 20, arguing “it is not androgynous that the men are walking around in basic suits”.<sup>110</sup> In group B, Sara 30, shared similar ideas, acknowledging a male norm in the androgynous ideal and adding that androgyny for men is more about a look, for example wearing long hair, than being dressed in feminine clothes.

What Bruzzi refers to as a political act of women dressing as men can historically be connected to the growing women’s rights movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, of women trying to gain power within a patriarchal society by adopting a more masculine look. The concept of dressing as a man in order to gain power has remained a visible strategy in society, not least in the 1980s with power dressing making its way into fashion. The idea of women dressing as men should not be confused with any desire to become a man, but it is important to remember the different connotations of the male versus female dress that was established during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where men’s clothes indicated their subjectivity and unmarked gender, while women’s clothes suggested their frivolity and made them an object of display as well as a symbol of marked sexuality.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, the association of masculine attire with professionalism and respectability can be seen to derive from this period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women’s adoption of menswear thus, quite contradictory, imply a motion towards gender equality, by dressing as a man also being treated equal to men and gaining equal rights. However, women should not have to dress like men to become their equal, no more than men should be required to dress like women for the same reason, but the connection between masculinity and power is difficult to completely reject as it is still visible, not least in relation to dress.

Although I disagree with Irigaray’s clear separation of gender, stressing the binary differences between men and women, rather than seeking equality, I find her ideas about the masculine domination and the accompanying power imbalance relevant to discuss in relation to the subject of androgyny. Irigaray argues that society is structured on a patriarchal foundation, creating

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<sup>110</sup> Interview, focus group A.

<sup>111</sup> Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 12-13.

a masculine discourse resulting in women becoming incapable of acting as subjects, as they are considered less valued than men by society.<sup>112</sup> Contrary to Butler who considers gender to be performative, Irigaray stresses that humans are divided into two separate genders, believing men and women to be different and argues that for women to gain power, the female sex and the values of belonging to the female gender must be defined and valid for both genders. Although this would suggest some kind of equality between genders, however constrained by presuppositions of what each gender identity entail, Irigaray rejects women's demands for equality, claiming it to be a utopian dream, for there is no real objective.<sup>113</sup> This interpretation would imply rejecting androgynous and unisex fashion, aimed at combining feminine and masculine traits or determining gender irrelevant. While disagreeing with Irigaray on this point, she continues by stating that: "For centuries, whatever has been valorized has been masculine in gender, whatever devalorized feminine", pointing out a gendered power imbalance that, as shown by this study, becomes visible also in clothing and body ideal and linking what is considered neutral to a masculine ideal.<sup>114</sup>

Even though clothes may appear neutral or basic, each garment carries certain associations which makes us categorize them as masculine or feminine.<sup>115</sup> The close relation between clothing and gender can also be seen in the separation of stores for menswear and womenswear, clearly signaling which gender identity belongs to which department.<sup>116</sup> Naturally, customers are free to choose whether they want to shop at the menswear department or the womenswear department but as indicated by the discussions from the focus groups, these choices may be looked upon differently depending on whether you as a woman, dress more masculine or as a man, dress more feminine. Although no physical stores have been visited as part of this study, the subject of its relevance within gender separation was brought up by respondents in focus group A. Group A stated that the Acne Studios' images were seen as most androgynous due to the difficulty of deciding its gender identity and Anna 20, felt this was also reflected in the physical stores were it was more difficult to separate menswear and womenswear from each other compared to Tiger of Sweden, whose

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<sup>112</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 171-172.

<sup>113</sup> Irigaray, *Je tu, nous*, 12.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>115</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 180.

<sup>116</sup> Not all stores divide between menswear and womenswear, but unisex lines are commonly following the same pattern for neutral clothing as adopted from originally masculine clothing and are still more rare in contrast to the separation between gendered departments. A separation between men's and women's fashion can also be seen by the lines traditionally being presented at different fashion shows.

gender roles was considered more clear, both in relation to the images as well as actual store display.

### 3.3 Dressing as Woman versus Dressing as Man

As mentioned, two interviews were also conducted with sales employees. The first interview was held with Alice, 31 years old, with ten-year experience of working part-time at a department store, reseller of Acne Studios, Tiger of Sweden and Filippa K among others. The second interview featured Erica, 23 years old, working as a sales assistant at Acne Studios for the past few years. Although Alice had only worked within the women's department, her experience of consumer responses in relation to androgynous fashion and body ideals were similar to Erica's, who had worked with both menswear and womenswear. Both considered the brands they had personal experience of working with to be more or less androgynous, as exemplified by Alice saying: "I understand it as if they are all representing an androgynous fashion ideal when it comes to the basic clothes and some parts of the collections".<sup>117</sup> Without seeing any of the material for this study, Erica mentioned the Acne Studios' campaign displayed here as an example of how the brand often works with androgyny, pointing out it is not only about dressing women in male clothing but also the opposite.<sup>118</sup> When asked whether they considered androgynous fashion to be gender equal the answer was no from both parts, criticizing how an androgynous fashion was foremost represented by women dressed as men, as well as the responsibility images and commercial campaigns have in reinforcing the same ideal of masculinity as synonymous with gender-neutrality.<sup>119</sup>

To further clarify the stereotypical ideas about women dressing as men versus men dressing as women, one needs to look at the power balance in ways of either gaining or losing power through our clothes. What does it mean for women to dress like men? This question has already been brought up in terms of women historically using menswear, trying to make a place for themselves within a patriarchal world. Once again, Ahmed's theory proves relevant, as we choose to follow the straight line of what power is supposed to look, or rather dress like, blindly accepting the masculine power norm. When commenting on masculinity in the campaign images both group A and B considered men's and women's poses to be masculine, connected to words such as

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<sup>117</sup> Interview, e-mail Alice.

<sup>118</sup> Interview, e-mail Erica.

<sup>119</sup> Interview, e-mail Alice and Erica.

“authority”, “strong” and “confident”. The lack of objectification and passivity were considered increasing their masculine appearances, indicating that there is still a tendency to link femininity with the role as passive objects.

As important as posing the question regarding what it means for women to dress like men, is also to reverse the question, asking: what does it mean for men to dress like women? Recalling the campaign images, only one male model was seen wearing items more associated with a feminine look, importantly this model was however not an adult man, but a child. Displaying a child in this way can have various intentions but one way of interpreting the image in terms of power and gender is that it is neutralizing the idea of a grown man losing power by dressing as a woman, by instead letting the man be represented by a more powerless child. Regardless of its intention the idea of men dressing as women is considered far more provocative than the opposite. Sara 30, argued that the positive associations of women dressing masculine, for instance represented by the power woman and career woman wearing suits, lack equivalent positive aspects when it comes to men dressing more feminine.<sup>120</sup> In group A, Simon 20, felt it was more acceptable for women to wear menswear, a subject which was picked up by Anna 20, referring to the critique directed towards a gender-neutral campaign launched by the Swedish company Åhléns during the fall of 2016, featuring men and women dressed in reversed gender roles. While considering the women to be dressed in a basic way, Anna 20, argued that the men received much critique for being too feminine, while according to her opinion they could have taken it much further.<sup>121</sup>

Although it was acknowledged by group A that there had been several attempts from the fashion industry to introduce womenswear into the men’s market, for instance through skirts and high heels, they also pointed out that these items, so far, never have been picked up by the consumers and high street market, which has created a disparity between what is shown on runways and what is actually produced for and bought by consumers. Comparing the androgynous fashion of Paris and Stockholm, Martin 21, considered that although there can be a strong sense of androgyny during the male fashion shows on Paris Fashion Week, this androgyny is not as implemented into the everyday fashion of Paris. Arguing that “you do not see the most extreme clothes on the streets”, instead he considered Swedish fashion to be less extreme but representing a higher degree of androgynous men’s fashion on the actual streets.<sup>122</sup> Whereas women can rise by

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<sup>120</sup> Interview, focus group B.

<sup>121</sup> Interview, focus group A.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

dressing as men, the historic idea of women as the weaker sex seems to live on, resulting in an attitude and fear of men losing power by appearing more feminine. Not only is this problematic for women's equality prospects but it also limits the options regarding what is considered appropriate for men to wear, increasing the risk of being ridiculed if not following the rules.

In Sweden, this problematic regarding an accepted male dress code tends to surface each summer, debating whether it is appropriate for men to wear shorts in urban spaces. The issue seemed to culminate in 2013 when employees, working within public transportation in Stockholm, demonstrated against the company's prohibition against wearing shorts by instead dressing in skirts.<sup>123</sup> Considering there were no regulations against wearing skirts, male employees chose to disregard the skirt as a woman's garment, rather finding it a better functional alternative than long pants during the warm summer months. Both positive and negative aspects can be found within this story, regarding gender roles and clothing. First of all, a positive aspect can be seen in the men's willingness to overcome any judgement about not being able to wear what is considered a woman's garment and instead focusing on the positive qualities of the skirt. However, turning to the problematic part, the men's decision to wear skirts were considered exceptional enough for several Swedish media companies to turn it into news reports, choosing headlines that focused primarily on the phenomenon of working men wearing skirts, rather than highlighting the company's policy against shorts. Important to remember is also that this situation was not about men freely choosing the skirt in favor over a corresponding item, such as shorts, but only occurred due to the lack of equivalent men's clothing. As shown by this example and the respondents reactions towards men wearing traditionally female clothing, the male wardrobe is considerably stricter and overstepping the boundaries of what is accepted as menswear is, within the Western world, far more controversial than women dressing in menswear.

As famously stated by de Beauvoir, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one", a statement which has been picked up by several feminist scholars, not the least by Butler, arguing that gender is a performative act and not a natural feature.<sup>124</sup> In her study, Ambjörnsson found that clothes were an important factor in how parents choose to represent their children in relation to gender, when observing a photo shoot of children, less than one year old, all but one could be easily

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<sup>123</sup> Kalle Holmberg, "Kjolklädda män kör tåg på Roslagsbanan," *Dagens Nyheter*, published June 7, 2013. <http://www.dn.se/sthlm/kjolkladda-man-kor-tag-pa-roslagsbanan/>

<sup>124</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1, 191.

identified as boy or girl solely by their clothes.<sup>125</sup> How we so easily can divide boys and girls based on clothes like this can be explained by relating it to Bourdieu's use of habitus, there are no official rules on how to dress according to a specific gender, but still there seems to be a social code which keeps upholding this separation, making it appear as if it is caused by natural, rather than cultural distinction. This social practice is thus not based on natural reasons but on society's continuing patterns of repetition. The fact that the idea of genders in clothing is a social construction and not a stable trait, can be exemplified by the common application of gendered color coding. As argued by Ambjörnsson, the color pink appears to be more controversially loaded in contemporary Western society, particularly when it comes to men dressing in pink. However, what may appear as a natural distinction, coding blue for boys and pink for girls, is historically a fairly new gender coding. Until around the 1920s and 1930s the roles were reversed, stating that pink was the acceptable color for boys and blue was more appropriate for girls.<sup>126</sup> These shifting ideas of what is considered masculine or feminine is continuously recurring in fashion, but whereas the masculine assumes the symbol of neutral, what is associated with femininity is still considered as the other, upholding the binary gender positions.

Returning to the campaign images this cannot only be seen in the overall soberness of the color scheme but also in the realization that of the male figures it is only the child who dress in a more feminine attire. Wearing high heels and a pink coat can historically be symbolizing as much masculinity as it does femininity, but placed within contemporary context, few modern men dress this way. Once again, the youth of the model becomes essential as he almost appears to be playing dress up, possibly in his mother's clothes. It does not come across as potential that he would walk down the street in these outfits. His youth makes him already more powerless compared to the older male models, who if dressed in the same way would risk losing the power signified by the masculinity, provided by their assumed to be neutral clothes. Although the men featured in both focus groups showed positive responses towards the Acne Studios images they all rejected the idea of personally wearing the actual garments, as explained by Martin 21, "I think that the Acne images are very aesthetically appealing, I love this coat for instance", but still stressing that although he

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<sup>125</sup> Ambjörnsson, *Rosa – den farliga färgen*, 16.

<sup>126</sup> During the First and Second World War the color blue became associated with the soldiers' uniforms and was thus considered a sign of masculinity. It is unclear how pink became associated with femininity but one theory, by the language scientist Veronika Koller, suggests that blue and pink were already symbolizing opposites and therefore the roles were simply switched. Ambjörnsson, *Rosa – den farliga färgen*, 10.

loved it he would probably not wear it himself and that he would rather buy less extreme clothes from the brand.<sup>127</sup>

Consequently, by comparing what it means for women to dress as men and men to dress as women several inequalities can be stressed. Foremost the connotation between power and masculine wear continues to play an important aspect in the different gender roles where the masculine is presumed the norm, or as described by the focus group members, the neutral clothes. With the male clothes assuming the norm, the women's clothes become the other, much like the inequality of gender roles themselves, as described by Irigaray, where man is norm and woman the other.<sup>128</sup> The media coverage and chosen angle on the story of men working in skirts indicates that it is still considered controversial and something odd or comedic about men dressing as women, a pattern of thought which can also be seen in Martin's description of the more feminine clothes as "extreme".

Arguably it is essential to uncover the cultural meaning of gender coding in clothing when it comes to the understanding of a gender equal fashion. Important to acknowledge in relation to this gender coding is how the feminine is more closely tied to the female gender as marked sexuality while the masculine is connected to the genderless and neutral, positions that has impact on how we come to interpret not only androgynous fashion but also the body ideals that accompanies.

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<sup>127</sup> Interview focus group A.

<sup>128</sup> Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 23.

## 4. Reconstructing a Neutral Human Body

### 4.1 The Physical Body and Gender Norms

As a woman with curves myself, in my experience I have often found androgynous fashion to be rather unflattering or difficult to wear due to its straight cut and boxy figure. When interviewing the sales assistants for this study it became clear that my experience and ambivalence towards wearing androgynous fashion was far from unusual. Both Alice and Erica stated that they often felt like consumers had a more negative preconception, believing the clothes to be intended for a specific body ideal which represented a slim body that did not match their own figure.<sup>129</sup> According to Alice, this ambivalence was most common when interacting with consumers who had a more curvaceous body type, yet not defined whether it was a more common reaction among men or women. However, they both stressed that when trying the actual garments many consumers were positively surprised by the fit, disproving their initial reaction.<sup>130</sup> Although this shows that the clothes themselves may actually fit different body types well, the initial ambivalence shown by those with more curvaceous bodies should not be neglected, as this indicates that these body types are believed to be unsuited for an androgynous look.

The connection between slim bodies and an androgynous ideal appears to be deeply embedded in our minds, as suggested not only by the respondents in this study but also by previous literature, recalling the words of Arnold describing a model's body as "androgynously slim".<sup>131</sup> Describing her idea of an androgynous body, Alice defined it as a "typical model's body where neither female nor typically male forms is emphasized".<sup>132</sup> Her response highlights an important factor when it comes to gender and androgynous fashion; the ideal body does not appear to resemble a traditional female body but neither does it correspond completely with a male body. This conception was further stressed during focus group B where Victor 22, consumer of Tiger of Sweden, pointed out that he often had difficulties fitting into the brands' clothes due to his tall height and more muscular and broad body type, saying: "I know there are some clothes from Tiger of Sweden where it does not matter which size I wear, it will never look good on me".<sup>133</sup> During

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<sup>129</sup> Interviews, e-mail Alice and Erica.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 99.

<sup>132</sup> Interview, e-mail Alice.

<sup>133</sup> Interview, focus group B.

the same discussion Sara 30, noted a connection between the images and the slim and straight body ideal which could be equally excluding to male curves as to female curves, stressing that “men can also be curvaceous”.<sup>134</sup>

Without going into details regarding what the androgynous body looks like it becomes clear that the ideal favors a certain slim body type which causes both men and women to feel excluded, regardless of whether you have tried on the clothes or not. Consequently, it becomes problematic to link androgyny to equality as long as our perceptions of it, excludes a wide range of body types. However, as pointed out by Entwistle the meanings of garments are never stable, “but subject to constant change and reintervention”.<sup>135</sup> The same argument can be applied in relation to our perception of what an androgynous body should look like, seeing there is no clear description of its characteristics other than combining what is traditionally male and female. Likewise, which characteristics that constitutes as masculine or feminine is culturally and historically specific, and therefore subjective to change.<sup>136</sup> To reconstruct the perception of an androgynous or neutral body is therefore possible, although not an easy task.

Once again, both Bourdieu and Ahmed provide useful theories regarding how we apprehend gender norms in society, accepting the same ideals, which in this case is the slim and straight body as representation of the genderless human body. Although the respondents in this study all agreed that one should be able to dress as one like, regardless of sex, the discussions also highlighted how Ahmed’s idea of following the straight line is present in our behavior. Both focus groups raised several examples where departing from the accepted gender roles and clothing, here representing the straight line, would cause discomfort or even the possibility of being ridiculed. In group A, Anna 20, gave examples of the individual discomfort occurring when steering away from the norm, stating that “it can be uncomfortable wearing a shape that accentuates too much towards the male”. Disregarding the gender norms can also cause negative public reactions as pointed out by Sara 30, arguing that there are few feminine coded garments that are acceptable for men to wear.<sup>137</sup>

As encouraged by Ahmed, some people do intentionally steer away from the straight line, rejecting what is seen as normative. However, to achieve any major change these new paths need

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 173.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>137</sup> Interview, focus group B.

to be accepted and followed by others. Although Ahmed highlights the possibility to change what is considered natural, the everyday relation between gender norms and clothing might be more comprehensible using Bourdieu's habitus. To simply talk about steering away from one line and create another path may come across as too easy, habitus however suggests how our repetitive behavior forms our apprehension in a more stable way, which we do not naturally question. Our perceptions of masculinity, femininity and genders, as well as how we picture an androgynous body to look like, are consequently all effected by our habitus and continue to be actively reproduced. These ideas bring us back to the importance of acknowledging the dominating discourse, realizing as Ahmed points out, that the work of repetition is not neutral, but directs us in certain ways.<sup>138</sup>

In relation to how society apprehends gender and dress, Entwistle states that "Clothing is one of the most immediate and effective examples of the way in which bodies are gendered, made 'feminine' or 'masculine'."<sup>139</sup> Looking at the examples of this study, even what is accepted as androgynous by the respondents and therefore sought to reject traditional gender roles, still evokes comments about gender, femininity and masculinity. The favoring of masculinity in androgyny should at this point be undoubtful and is supported by the words of Karaminas and Geczy as they point out that "androgyny prioritizes the masculine signifier and its gender-associated sartorial stylings".<sup>140</sup> However, to understand how an androgynous fashion can be seen as treating genders unequal we need not only to consider the styling, but primarily the physical body ideal.

To claim that the androgynous ideal mirrors the male body and not the female body would suggest a rather simplified conclusion, neglecting the fact that the human body, both men's and women's, come in different sizes and shapes. Looking at the campaign images they share the similar straight silhouette, apart from the Acne Studios campaign, where curves are enhanced by the clothes and not the physical body. It should be noted that these slim models' body type is regularly featured in fashion, which favors a slim body ideal, but they also represent a body type which is often described as androgynous in relation to both men and women. Although the androgynous ideal can be difficult for men to adopt, as exemplified by Victor 22, struggling to find garments that fit a broader body, the physical shape is still more resembling of a male physique reaching back to the slim, classical antique body ideal. Just as the male body has historically been

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<sup>138</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 57.

<sup>139</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 141.

<sup>140</sup> Karaminas and Geczy, *Critical Fashion Practice*, 113.

the symbol of the natural human body, it is still used as symbol for gender-neutral representation. But establishing one specific body type as ideal and referring to it as neutral, bears the risk of deeming unlike body types unnatural.

By excluding any curves from the androgynous representation, Irigaray's argument that women lack any role as subjects in society, becomes highlighted. By continually linking the neutral human body to a male ideal, the female figure is repeatedly positioned as something else, considered less neutral or natural than the male figure. Although Irigaray does separate male and female genders, believing them to be fundamentally different, she also points towards the importance of equal value in representation.<sup>141</sup> In this case, the curvaceous body needs to be considered as much a representation of a human body as the slim and straight body. Following Irigaray, in order to reach an equal level, each body type must be valued for its own traits and not compared in relation to each other where one ideal is considered norm. Although, as stated, both men and women can be curvaceous the following section will focus primarily on the exclusion of a female curvaceous body shape, since the shape as well as the female gender has never been given the same representation of a human body as the male has.

So how does the androgynous fashion and body ideal oppress the female body? Simply saying androgyny prioritizes masculinity seems insufficient to understand the complete relation. Androgyny not only signals the gender fusion of male and female but also highlights a youth ideal, an ideal reaching back to the 1920s and the new woman.<sup>142</sup> Consequently, the neutral body is not only considered male, but more specifically it represents a young male. Looking at the actual bodies in the campaign images, as well as listening to the respondents' definitions of androgynous bodies, they physically fit the same description of a young and slim male body, all agreeing that curves are not part of the ideal. During discussions in focus group A, Martin 21, considered the clothes in the images and an androgynous fashion to present a simple silhouette to achieve, adoptable for all genders. Referring to the silhouette as simple and adoptable was not uncommon during the discussions held with either focus group. However, the words are quite misleading as the straight cut of the clothes will fit differently depending on body type. Since the images do not contain any model with a more curvaceous body it cannot be said whether the clothes displayed in these campaigns would fit well or not. The important issue however, is not whether the clothes actually

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<sup>141</sup> Irigaray, *Je, tu, nous*, 12.

<sup>142</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 122.

fit different body types, but the exclusion of curves in the representation of androgynous fashion altogether.

Claiming that an androgynous look is adoptable for most people also neglects that many women develop curves as they become adults and therefore might find it more difficult to fit the straight ideal past the age of puberty, consequently strengthening the connection between the young body and an androgynous ideal. With youth becoming the norm, the adult body suddenly takes on the role as other, making it unfashionable. To clarify, the youth norm is not restricted to an androgynous fashion, but a visible ideal within the entire fashion industry, not least regarding the use of young models. However, what distinguishes the youth norm in androgyny, as opposed to many parts of the industry, is that youth has been a constant trait throughout, focusing on and describing the early androgynous women in the 1920s as “boyish” in their appearance. That youth can be seen as norm within contemporary society becomes visible during the interviews, when neither respondents of group A or B make any comments or question using an 11-year old model for the marketing of adult women’s clothes.

When asked whether they consider any image to be more androgynous than the others it is also the Acne Studios’ images that are being singled out. Interestingly, they all show difficulties motivating their choice. In group B, Victor 22, admits he connects the term mostly to Acne Studios but that he does not know why. In group A, on the other hand, Simon 20, motivates his decision based on the fact that he find it most difficult to identify the gender of the model in the Acne Studios campaign and therefore considers these images most androgynous. Even though Simon believed the images from Acne Studios to be the most androgynous, after sharing his opinion he quickly followed his motivation by questioning what was really meant by the concept of androgyny, whether it involved moving towards the opposite gender or reaching a midpoint, equally signaling male and female.<sup>143</sup> Simon’s response shows that while we may not be completely sure of what androgyny means or how to properly apply the term, there is still an idea of what it should look like and as such using the term accordingly.

Besides simply describing the androgynous body as a slim and straight body ideal, some respondents did in fact highlight that the ideal explicitly excluded curvaceous bodies, as exemplified here by Julia 31, in response to how the images can be interpreted as androgynous,

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<sup>143</sup> Interview, focus group A.

[...] they show that you might should look a certain way, a specific body type to be able to wear these clothes, if you are then curvaceous you may not fit in them as well.<sup>144</sup>

Relating to the visual material along with the reactions expressed during the interviews points towards a distinctively straight ideal, not only in relation to androgynous fashion and clothes themselves but an ideal that is also visible in the physical body. But if the androgynous fashion and gender-neutral ideal supposedly are connected to a Swedish sense of democracy and equality, according to earlier statement by Susanna Strömquist, how come we do not question that the physical ideal follows the shape of a slim man? One way of explanation is to follow the concept of habitus and repetition, continuously establishing the ideals as natural, not even aware that we are orientated in a certain direction. However, it is hardly a coincidence that it is the male body that continues to be seen as natural within society.

Irigaray's ideas about women lacking a voice in society can at times be considered outdated or exaggerated within a Western discourse, but the masculine domination within the gender-neutral ideal suggests that her theory regarding the oppression of women is still very much relevant in contemporary society. Similar to Martin 21, arguing that an androgynous body is physically very straight and therefore more difficult for women to attain, since it is about trying to obtain a male body; Irigaray clarifies the unequal gender distinction by stating that "For centuries, whatever has been valorized has been masculine in gender, whatever devalorized, feminine".<sup>145</sup> Continuously linking a male physique to a supposedly gender-neutral or gender balanced ideal, consequently further valorizes the male gender higher in relation to the female gender. That the feminine lacks the same value as the masculine is also supported by the previous chapter, showing the differences between women dressing as men as a method to gain power whereas men dressing as women in a much higher degree would lead to ridicule. Surely most people are aware that gender inequalities still exist in society but the issue here is foremost how it becomes hidden within a gender-neutral concept, ironically often used as an expression for equality itself.

When looking closer at how the androgynous ideal is referred to in relation to women's bodies it has often been described as making them look "boyish" rather than using the phrase "manly". This may seem trivial or random but fact remains that by linking the woman to a more

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<sup>144</sup> Interview, focus group B.

<sup>145</sup> Irigaray, *Je, tu, nous*, 68.

powerless version of a man, she does not become his equal but remains less powerful. In order to illustrate the argument, the Acne Studios campaign can be consulted where it is a boy and not an adult man who is associated with a female appearance and used to marketing clothes for women. Even though the clothes are clearly too big for the boy's body it is relevant to consider how his slim body is combined with the sculptured garments, enhancing their role as responsible for creating the curves onto a straight body. The images and choice of model are certainly extreme and should rather be considered as a way to gain attention than actively push women to look like boys, or for boys to dress like adult women, but the overall appearance still sends out an important message regarding which body type is suitable for the clothes.

## 4.2 Male or Female Breasts?

Irigaray and Butler both stress the importance of language from a feminist perspective, a factor which should be further analyzed in relation to the concept of androgyny and its effect on the bodily representation. As mentioned the word androgyny itself derives from Greek origin, combining the words of man and woman. Although seemingly neutral, considering the term does apply to the combination of masculine and feminine traits, the importance of putting the man first, secondly adding the woman, must not be underestimated. The masculine domination within language becomes even more apparent when looking at words such as human, mankind, female and woman, all based on using the man as the neutral symbol of human species. This correlates to Irigaray's argument that women lack a place within language since they are always portrayed as the non-masculine instead of equally valued as a separate subject.<sup>146</sup> Irigaray further connects language with women's feelings of not being heard and finding it difficult to speak, due to the patriarchal linguistic order in society that continuously excludes them.

How we talk about bodies also enforces the binary separation of a male and female gender, as indicated by Motschenbacher's study about how male and female bodies are talked about using different language. While some traits are biologically connected to a male or female sex, such as penis or vagina, other terms are commonly used exclusively in relation to one sex or the other, even though the physical traits or body parts are as much part of both sexes.<sup>147</sup> As an example,

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>147</sup> It should be noted that the physical, biological differences between male and female genitalia cannot be strictly divided and do not represent all humans, as some bodies do not relate explicitly to either male or female sex, but are instead referred to a third term known as intersex.

Motschenbacher compared the difference of talking about male and female breasts, arguing that talking about man's breasts are as much of a social taboo as addressing the man as girl.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, he argues that even though men can have larger breasts than some women, this is a topic that is usually avoided talking about. The study showed that language not only was used to describe the genders differently but also directed the bodies towards different behavior, encouraging men to exercise their bodies while women were pushed towards making themselves appear more beautiful.<sup>149</sup> Summarizing the importance of creating such binary illusion between bodies: "This illustrates that the way the body is talked about in public has consequences for how the body is subjectively felt by individual people".<sup>150</sup>

As a way to test how well the results from Motschenbacher's study can be applied to a Swedish discourse regarding androgynous representation let us take a closer look at what language was used by the respondents to describe the bodies. When discussing why the images could be interpreted as representing androgynous bodies, Martin 21, distinguished between male and female bodies by commenting that:

But if you talk bodies, a female androgynous fashion might be more about representing a male body, and a male androgynous fashion about resembling a female body, for instance broad shoulders at the women in Tiger while they are rounded in Acne [...] <sup>151</sup>

That broad shoulders indicated a shape that was leaning more towards a male body was supported by Anna 20, raising the concern among some women to become too masculine in their appearance and thus making them feel uncomfortable.<sup>152</sup>

Unlike the material used by Motschenbacher, who compared the language in magazines specifically directed towards a male versus female reader, the material used for this study can in a higher degree, due to their androgynous appearance, appeal to both men and women. Apart from the broader shoulders more associated with a male body, most respondents found it difficult to distinguish between the masculine and feminine traits in the images. Consequently, the physical bodies were discussed using a similar language, although differences were pointed out between the

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<sup>148</sup> Motschenbacher, "Speaking the Gendered Body", 4.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>151</sup> Interview, focus group A.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

genders in relation to visible skin, marked waists and body language. The discussions surrounding masculinity and femininity in the images further revealed a difference between group A and B where group A, although hesitantly, considered the physical appearances to be more gendered than group B, where none of the respondents made any comments about their appearances other than their posing.

Although the responses show an open-minded attitude towards gender roles, their choices of words still reflected a sense of established ideas regarding male and female bodies. Both groups used long hair as an example of a female trait, supporting the norm of women traditionally wearing long hair and men being shortcut. In group A, Anna 20, considered long hair to be a typical feminine trait, whereas it was more subtly expressed in group B by Sara 30, saying “What is feminine and masculine is very subjective”, illustrating the complexity by relating to her head-banger friends who have a female body language and long hair but she still considers them masculine due to other masculine aspects. The second feature which was naturally tied to the female body in both groups was curves. Again, this was more explicitly expressed by the respondents in group A who regarded the marked waist as a typical feminine trait. In group B, Sara 30, connected the androgynous ideal to a slim, non-curvaceous body, adding that “men can also be curvaceous”. However, adding the phrase to include men rather highlights the immediate connection between curves and the female body.

When relating to our own bodies it is not only the physical body that is considered but perhaps more often, the gendered body. Consequently, just as there are body ideals regarding how a female body should look like or what characterizes a male body, there is also ideals tied to the androgynous and gender-neutral body. The establishment of these ideals as natural traits thus effects how bodies are deemed appropriate or not. As recognized by the discussions taking place during the focus groups in this study, it also enables us to talk about bodies and ideals in a certain way even though we may find it difficult explaining what the ideal contains. Seeing there is not one female body and one male body that can represent all variations of physical shapes, nor can there possibly be one body shape that objectively represents androgyny or gender-neutrality. Distinguishing between the physical body and the gendered body is essential when discussing androgyny, as the physical body is natural whereas the gendered body is socially constructed. A clearer way to comprehend this distinction is offered by applying Butler’s theory of the biological

sex and cultural gender.<sup>153</sup> Gender thus becomes performative, it is something we continuously ‘do’ in our daily lives, rather than something we ‘are’.<sup>154</sup> Agreeing with Ahmed and Bourdieu, Butler considers society’s norms and comprehensions of what is natural to be produced by constant repetition. Clothing is one of the most obvious ways to perform a certain gender identity but as pointed out by Entwistle:

Gender is thus dislocated from the body and shown to be performed through style: femininity and masculinity are not the product of female or male bodies and there is no natural connection between female bodies and femininity or male bodies and masculinity.<sup>155</sup>

Seeing gender as a performative act would thus imply that it is not only male and female gender identities that are performed, but also the “no gender” and androgynous identities. When Entwistle talks about clothes’ baggage of associations to either masculinity or femininity she simultaneously raises a problem with “no gender”, an issue that ultimately should result in questioning how it can be possible to become genderless if everything we know is already marked by gender.<sup>156</sup>

### 4.3 Becoming Genderless

Following Laqueur’s argumentation that:

Woman alone seems to have “gender” since the category itself is defined as that aspect of social relations based on difference between sexes in which the standard has always been man.,<sup>157</sup>

it appears as if we are to become genderless, we need to become men. Looking at the physical representations and ideals of androgyny, both historically and contemporary, these follow the same pattern of prioritizing man over woman rather than treating them equally. The issue becomes even more complicated considering that fashion has not typically celebrated what is natural, quite the contrary, it has tested women’s ability to defy it by concealing the real organic body.<sup>158</sup> Taken this

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<sup>153</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 8.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 45.

<sup>155</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 178.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>157</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 22.

<sup>158</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 85, 89.

into consideration it seems hardly surprising that the female body and its different shapes still lack equal value in human representation in relation to the male body. One main reason why men's and women's bodies are viewed differently has already been briefly mentioned, regarding the binary positions signaling marked versus unmarked sexuality that were established in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>159</sup> Although these ideas date 200 years back in time, they are still visible in contemporary society, where the woman's body is considered more sexually loaded than the man's body. Again, the example showing the different attitudes towards displaying female versus male breasts can be used to illustrate this, whereas female breasts become interpreted as a sexual symbol the male breasts are more often seen as example of the opposite.

Apart from describing what they believed to be masculine and feminine about the campaign material, the respondents were also asked whether they considered the fashion and bodies displayed to be sexualized in any way, as well as if they noted any differences between the representations of men and women. Overall the models were not considered to be sexualized, although Sara 30, raised an important point in arguing that the model body itself is a sex symbol in modern society and therefore automatically sexualized in some way.<sup>160</sup> One possible interpretation as to why the bodies were not considered sexualized is provided by relating to the masculine domination within the images and the male body as unmarked gender, thus making it appear more neutral than feminine traits. This is further supported by the respondents overall finding it difficult to point out feminine characteristics in the images. According to the respondents, the body language, clothes and physical body shapes all signified masculinity in much higher degree than femininity. As exemplified by Victor 22, saying that "she [pointing at photo of woman sitting in the Tiger of Sweden campaign] is sitting very unsexy", a pose that was considered by all to be masculine, therefore making her appear less sexy.<sup>161</sup>

In group A another feature was highlighted in connection to the sexualized body, regarding who was showing skin. Simon 20, raised the issue by arguing that the women were the only ones seen to be showing any skin, a fact which he claimed was not a coincidence. He was also supported by Martin 21, agreeing that "in comparison, the men are very dressed".<sup>162</sup> The reactions clearly show that there is still a tendency to view the male body as unmarked gender, while the female

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<sup>159</sup> Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 12.

<sup>160</sup> Interview, focus group B.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Interview, focus group A.

body becomes more sexual and loaded. Going through the images it is apparent that, although the female body is in no way close to be naked, it does show significantly more skin than the male bodies. Looking at the images of the boy, dressed in Acne Studios, his body is almost completely covered by fabric and accessories, leaving nothing but parts of the face and hand visible. Dressing a child in adult clothes may of course itself signal a kind of sexualization regarding the young body, but as far as the visual appearance is concerned, nothing really seems to enhance a sexual connotation.

The male Filippa K model becomes almost absorbed by the shadows, adding a mysterious air to his physical appearance. The use of light and shadows, making the images more mysterious, can be interpreted as a way of enhancing the sexiness, but important to point out is that this illusion is created by the photographic effects, not by revealing or enhancing the body itself. With the male bodies in Acne Studios and Filippa K nearly completely disguised, it comes as no surprise that the man dressed in Tiger of Sweden reveals most of his body in comparison to the others. However, that does not mean he exposes much of his body, rather the opposite, as the most revealing photo only reveals “neutral” parts of his body, in the case of forearms and ankles.

As implied by the respondents, showing skin is more associated with the female body, which is also the case when looking at the campaign images. When comparing the material by Filippa K it is clear that the female model, although seemingly quite dressed, reveals more skin than the male model. In fact, the use of shadows and light is used to enhance the white skin of her arms and back, making it focus of attention. Similar to the photo featuring the male model, the use of light and shadows add a sense of mystery to the image, which can be interpreted as a way of increasing the sex appeal. However, in the photo of the woman, the clothes themselves are contributing to making the female model more sexualized, as the back of her top suddenly separates, revealing the skin on her back.

Lastly, let us take a look at the Tiger of Sweden women’s campaign, where the female model appears in two separate images. While the first image position her, sitting on a bench and fully dressed, not even showing her hands as they are kept in the pockets of her trousers, the second image displays somewhat more skin. With the hands once again held in her pockets, it is the center part of her body that is left revealed, creating a horizontal line of exposed skin, featuring forearms and stomach. Although the naked stomach makes her appear undressed, most parts of her body remains covered up. In order to further highlight how the male and female models are represented

differently, the picture can be put in contrast to the image of the man sitting at back of the bench, both distributed by the same brand. Comparing the two images it is difficult to distinguish which model actually show most skin. However, more importantly is to consider which part of the body that is left exposed. In this case, I would strongly argue the bare stomach to be a more sexualized body part than the ankles. It seems highly undoubtful that the roles would have been reversed, exposing the stomach of the male model in a similar style, which further strengthens the connection between the female body as the sexually loaded body.

From this perspective, it is easier to understand how dressing a curvaceous body in “neutral” menswear can work as a method of disguise, distancing oneself from the sexual connotation of the curved body. Karaminas and Geczy address the issue, talking about the style of the second wave feminists in the 1960s, whose androgynous appearance were considered ‘ant-fashion’ and characterized by loosely fitted clothes, such as baggy pants and flannel shirts.<sup>163</sup> The look signaled women’s liberation and stressed their self-identity, with the intention to “hide” women’s curvaceous bodies that had been objectified by the male gaze and by media representations of women”.<sup>164</sup> The problem with adopting a masculine look to achieve liberation for women and striving for gender equality, is that it actually further stresses the neutrality of the male as norm. An argument which can be linked to Irigaray, claiming that women should not strive towards becoming more like men, but in order to liberate themselves their differences must be considered of equal value to male characteristics.<sup>165</sup> Although gender identity is more complex than this, Irigaray does prove a point, women cannot be considered liberated when forced to hide their bodies from the objectifying male gaze.

Studying contemporary representations of androgyny, the female curves are still hidden, since the look typically idealizes the straight body shape. During the focus groups this was clearly exemplified by Julia 31, arguing that you would need a special body shape to fit into “the straight and boxy designs” also adding that if you as a woman want to wear tighter clothes you need to look for clothes made specifically for the female body.<sup>166</sup> Consequently, following both historical and contemporary androgynous and gender-neutral body ideals, it seems as if to become genderless you need to adopt a straight silhouette, if not biologically achieved, you can always try to hide your

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<sup>163</sup> Karaminas and Geczy, *Critical Fashion Practice*, 113.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Irigaray, *Je, tu, nous*, 12.

<sup>166</sup> Interview, focus group B.

curves underneath the boxy design, to erase any trace of them and avoid the risk of being objectified.

Fortunately, these roles are not stable and the sexualization of the female curvaceous body is possible to break, starting by admitting that what we talk about as a “neutral body” or “neutral clothing” are in fact based on masculine ideals and the male body. The adoption of masculine attire as a strategy for women to blend in and be less objectified, has been somewhat more studied within work place environments, through studies by for instance sociologists Joan Acker and Kirsten Dellinger.<sup>167</sup> Both Acker and Dellinger stress the male domination within work organizations, establishing the male as norm. As pointed out by Acker, “gender is difficult to see when only the masculine is present”, supporting the notion of the male body as the unmarked gender.<sup>168</sup> Following the work of Acker, dealing with issues of how gender inequality is created and maintained within work culture, Dellinger also incorporates the aspect of dress codes. Dellinger’s study shows that even when dress codes are informal, they are still being used to embody and represent one’s work position, signaling a separation between work life and private life.<sup>169</sup> However, this also means distancing oneself from the sexually loaded (female) body, in order to be considered appropriate and professional,

While many women navigate these dress norms successfully most of the time, women are less able to pass as objective and rational workers where objectivity and rationality are defined as heterosexual and male.<sup>170</sup>

The study by Dellinger, illustrates the disturbance arising when workers are considered inappropriately dressed, exemplified by women dressing in tight clothes or short skirts, making them appear too sexual and therefore unprofessional.<sup>171</sup> Adapting to the masculine norm thus becomes an important strategy if one wishes to be taken seriously, and as previously indicated, it has been a visible strategy ever since women first gained access to the male-dominated work place. Once again, women’s role in society diminishes, as these assumptions degrade and objectify

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<sup>167</sup> Joan Acker, “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations,” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (1990). Kirsten Dellinger, “Wearing Gender and Sexuality ‘On Your Sleeve’: Dress Norms and the Importance of Occupational and Organizational Culture at Work,” *Gender Issues*, Vol. 20, no. 1 (2002).

<sup>168</sup> Acker, “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies”, 142.

<sup>169</sup> Dellinger, “Wearing Gender and Sexuality”, 9.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

women's bodies. Illustrated by the quote above, the unmarked gender identity is not only defined as male but more specifically, a heterosexual male. Applying Ahmed's concept of the straight line, what is assumed to be the natural condition, this heterosexual male would seem to define the representation of a natural human and thus constitute the straight line.

Although androgyny prioritizes the masculine and neutralizes the objectified female body by disguising curves and covering the body, androgyny does not necessarily imply heterosexuality. As argued by Bruzzi, androgyny suggests blurred sex as well as blurred sexuality, "a softening of the contours – between [...] male and female, straight and gay".<sup>172</sup> Seemingly, while the concept fails to provide equal conditions regarding its representation of gender roles, it does however display an openness towards multiple sexualities.

Sexuality was not discussed in depth in relation to the androgynous ideal during the interviews, but certain issues around sexuality were still brought up, signaling the close connection between blurring gender identity and sexual identity. The respondents stressed the importance of being able to make individual choices in relation to dress, regardless of gender identity and that this was an important part of an androgynous fashion. However, at the same time they were aware of the masculine domination within the ideal, indicating that too much emphasis on femininity could easily result in an appearance that would be deemed gay by certain parts of society, thus indicating not only the gender identity of the wearer but also the sexual identity. The reactions suggest that even though an androgynous ideal can incorporate feminine traits, the straight line within society is still considered to represent a heterosexual male as norm, and therefore making other sexualities and genders inferior.

As previously indicated, androgyny has historically had a close connection to homosexuality through its adoption by lesbian circles in Paris and the androgynous appearances of *la garçonne* in the 1920s, as well as film stars such as Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, combining the femininity of the curvaceous figure with masculine clothes, also in their private lives. Both Garbo and Dietrich have continuously been surrounded by rumors questioning their sexuality, an issue often tied specifically to, or explained by linking their sexuality to their masculine and androgynous appearances.<sup>173</sup> The ambiguity around androgyny further suggests that gender and sexuality are very much seen in relation to each other, as the confusion around gender

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<sup>172</sup> Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*, 175–176.

<sup>173</sup> Vicki Karaminas, "Born This Way: Lesbian Style Since the Eighties", in *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk*, ed. Valerie Steele (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 200.

identity often corresponds in a confusion regarding sexual identity. However, as indicated during the focus groups, this blurring of lines between genders created by androgyny, can be an important part in changing how we come to view gender, prioritizing individual expression over gender identity.

When asked whether they considered gender differences to be important in clothing, none of the respondents answered yes. While some argued that binary gender roles would continue to be further erased, fusing the lines between what is considered male or female, others stressed that everybody do not need to aspire an androgynous style, but that it brings to light important issues regarding gender roles.<sup>174</sup> The overall response was unanimous, gender was not considered important and furthermore, each individual should be able to dress as one chooses. One comment that especially highlighted the importance of an androgynous fashion in relation to gender, was made by Anna 20, arguing that androgyny opens up ways for playing with genders and making it more acceptable.<sup>175</sup> Without explicitly mentioning gender as a performative act, this was still very much implied in both focus groups. The power of dress and its associations with masculinity or femininity became evident as the members discussed the images.

Although Irigaray has proven helpful in relation to how women and the female shape is still inferior when it comes to representing the human figure, it is Butler whose ideas about gender performance provide most usefulness when it comes to actively dealing with the issues from a contemporary perspective, embracing the possibility of multiple gender identities. Contrary to Irigaray, Butler does not distinguish between men and women as fundamentally different. According to Butler, “Genders can be neither true nor false”, stressing that they are socially and culturally constructed rather than natural human conditions.<sup>176</sup> As indicated by the Swedish fashion discourse and the campaign images used for this study, androgynous fashion and gender play is a prominent feature within contemporary fashion. As the androgynous and gender-neutral ideal continues to grow rapidly, not only within a Swedish fashion scene but also internationally, it becomes more important to question what the ideal really represents.

Consequently, we must ask: what does it mean to have an androgynous body? Considering the way, in which the word has been used, androgyny has historically signaled a slim and straight body, connected to the male figure. Although the respondents were hesitant towards describing the

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<sup>174</sup> Interviews, focus groups A and B.

<sup>175</sup> Interview, focus group A.

<sup>176</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 193.

physical appearance of an androgynous body, their responses and discussions clearly highlighted the masculine domination in relation to both clothes and body shape. Preferring the term unisex instead of androgyny, Julia 31, addressed the ambiguity surrounding the term androgyny, an ambiguity which was further stressed by several respondents raising the question of its true definition.<sup>177</sup> Clearly the meaning of androgyny raises confusion, but is simultaneously often used to describe what supposedly represents a more gender equal ideal. This proves to be problematizing since, consulting both consumers and retail workers, none of the respondents believed androgynous fashion to be gender equal, all agreeing that the ideal prioritized masculinity over femininity.

In order to make androgyny more gender equal and representative for a wider range of physical body shapes, we must therefore begin by recognizing the masculine domination, taken for granted as a sign of neutrality, whether dealing with the physical shape of the body, connoting a powerful body language or the masculine versus feminine associations tied to the clothes we wear.

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<sup>177</sup> Interviews, focus groups A and B.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The aim of this study has been to analyse power relations within gender in the construction of androgynous bodies in contemporary Swedish fashion. Based on visual material, consisting of campaign images produced by the Swedish brands Acne Studios, Filippa K and Tiger of Sweden in 2015, the representation of androgynous fashion and bodies has been problematized in relation to gender equality. Applying a mixed method, using focus groups and semi-structured interviews to include consumers' and retail worker's perspectives, combining this with supporting visual analysis of the material, has allowed for a broad discussion regarding the subject.

While the visual material has continuously guided the discussion, the subject of androgynous bodies has not been limited to these brands. The brands have primarily been used as examples to illustrate the close connection between an androgynous look and Swedish fashion. Considering that Swedish fashion often is described to be favoring a gender-neutral and androgynous look, representative of the Swedish society as democratic and gender equal, it becomes relevant to take a closer look at the fashion and body ideals that are supposedly reflecting this. Following the aim of the study, the focus has been to answer the questions, how the androgynous body is represented in contemporary Swedish fashion and in what ways the androgynous body is representing gender equality versus inequality.

The study was divided into three parts, beginning with an introduction to the history of the androgynous concept. An historical connection between the male body as representation of the standard human body was highlighted, as was also women's lower status, due to the societal belief in the one-sex model, not acknowledging the female sex as a sex of its own. This was followed by a closer look at how gender has been expressed through fashion, proving there to be a constant change in what has been considered masculine or feminine. Importantly, the historical view also showed that the idea of neutral or genderless clothing, since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, has derived from a masculine look.

While the historical section intended to provide the reader with an overview of the development of an androgynous ideal, the second section titled "Power and Gender" focused on the contemporary discourse, using the campaign images as examples of androgynous representations. Through visual analysis and by consulting the focus groups, the dominating discourse was revealed to be following the historical ideas of representing the man as norm. By deconstructing and challenging the assumptions of what was considered natural, the androgynous

body and fashion was seen to be based on a straight male body and masculine connotations. This was explicitly expressed by one respondent saying, “What I see as normal clothes is really boys’ clothes”. The masculine domination within androgyny was further traced to issues of gaining versus losing power, arguing that while women dress as men to gain power and acceptance, there is no equivalent positive aspect regarding men dressing as women. Again, this highlights gender inequality, considering that the feminine connotation is less valued than the masculine. As suggested by the respondents, this resulted in androgyny for men being more about adopting certain traits of femininity, rather than dressing as women.

The last section investigated the relation between androgyny and the physical body, following Hollander’s argument that fashion not only affects our clothes, but also has impact on how we perceive the bodies underneath. Both the retail workers and the consumers consulted, connected a straight and slim body shape to androgynous fashion, excluding a more curvaceous figure, typically associated with the female body. Consequently, the physical ideal associated with contemporary androgyny follows the same shape that was first introduced for women through the androgynous fashion of the 1920s. By continuously representing the same ideal, perceiving the androgynous body as a slim and straight figure, we come to accept this as norm without questioning what it really entails, making it problematic to use as a symbol of gender equality, since it renders other body shapes appearing less natural. Further discussing the separation between physical bodies and gendered bodies, sexuality also needed to be considered as causing inequality between genders, since the male body signaled unmarked gender while the female body in higher degree signaled marked sexuality, and therefore was considered more sexually loaded.

The study raises the problematic of using androgyny as a sign of gender equality. Although the concept, by its definition, is said to embrace both masculinity and femininity, it is historically connected to a male domination, still very much imbedded in our idea of what the term implies. As long as the natural human body is represented by the single shape of a straight male body, excluding the body with curves, there can be no gender equality. However, the concept of androgyny is based on social construction and can therefore be reinterpreted to represent a wider range of bodies, thereby making it more equal. Although still not gender equal, androgyny is an important part in questioning traditional gender norms, implied by the respondents as they believed androgyny to be aspiring to break down binary gender roles and encouraging expressing individualism in clothing.

By raising awareness of the dominating discourse and its masculine domination, this study has been a feministic attempt towards highlighting gender inequalities in society, dealing with questions of how we relate to the seemingly gender equal concept of androgynous bodies and fashion ideals. However, there are still several aspects that need further research on the subject. Although the genderless and androgynous ideal has historically been connected to the male ideal and a recurring subject within fashion, the “no gender” trend is growing rapidly within contemporary society, often expressed in relation to establishing equality. Therefore, it is important to continue questioning and research how the power relations between gender is expressed within gender-neutral fashion, not only within a Swedish context but internationally as well. Following Butler’s idea of multiple gender identities and societies progress towards acknowledging a wider range of gender identities, the binary positions of men and women will need to change, thus affecting how we use clothes to dress according to specific gender identities. The subject of sexuality and androgynous ideal can also be further researched in relation to fashion, questioning the heterosexual male as norm, as well as the degrading connotations of femininity and homosexuality. Lastly, I advocate for studies to continue reclaiming the curvaceous body as a human body, acknowledging the female body as a standard human body, equal to any male body.

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## 6.4 Interviews

All interviews featuring focus groups are recorded and available in audio-format.

Focus group A: Anna 20, Simon 20, Martin 21, interviewed Monday, 2017-01-30.

Focus group B: Julia 31, Victor 22, Sara 30, interviewed Thursday, 2017-02-16.

E-mail interviews with retail-workers.

Alice 31, interviewed Tuesday, 2016-12-20.

Erica 23, interviewed Friday, 2017-03-03.

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# Appendix

## Interview Questions for Focus Groups

1. What are your first impressions when you look at these images?
2. Do you consider these images to represent an androgynous body or an androgynous fashion? Why or why not? Does any image represent androgyny more than the others?
3. Can you identify or relate to the body ideals in the images?
4. What is masculine in the images?
5. What is feminine in the images?
6. Do you consider the fashion and/or the bodies to be sexualized in the campaign material? Is there any difference between how men and women are portrayed?
7. Would you say that an androgynous body an androgynous fashion is gender equal? Why or why not?
8. Why do you believe that the androgynous and no gender fashion is popular in contemporary Sweden?
9. Are gender differences important in fashion? Why or why not?
10. Do you have any final thoughts about androgyny that has not been expressed during the discussion that you would like to add?

# Interview Questions for Sales Assistants

1. Name?
2. Age?
3. During which period of time have you worked within the fashion industry and what was/is your position? Including which city, you have worked in?
4. Which of the following brands have you worked with (Acne Studios, Filippa K, Tiger of Sweden)?
5. Do you have experience of working with womenswear, menswear or both?
6. How would you briefly describe:
  - a. An androgynous fashion?
  - b. An androgynous body?
7. Do you consider the brands mentioned to represent an androgynous fashion or ideal? Why or why not?
8. What are your experiences of consumers' reactions to an androgynous fashion or body ideal?
9. Based on your experience, do you believe men and women have the same reactions to an androgynous or gender-neutral fashion?
10. Have you felt that consumers make comments regarding their own bodies in relation to an androgynous fashion ideal, if so, has there been recurring comments?
11. Who was/is the typical consumer in the store?
12. Do you consider an androgynous fashion and body ideal to be gender equal? Why or why not?

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