

THE REPRESENTATION OF PLUS-SIZE MEN IN HIGH FASHION



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MA Fashion Studies
MA Thesis
Spring 2023
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ABSTRACT

The introduction of plus-size models in high fashion has been a highly discussed topic in recent years. Plus-size female models are slowly breaking their way through the boundaries of fashion's standard for thinness and this can be observed through their visibility within major runway shows. However, this change does not seem as prevalent within high fashion menswear shows since plus-size men are barely being included. Nevertheless, plus-size men exist and fashion can no longer choose to ignore them as they deserve to be acknowledged and represented. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to include the plus-size male body within the scope of fashion. A multimethodological approach, combining critical visual analysis, semi-structured interviews and critical theory by Susan Bordo, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu are used as a way to examine to what extent plus-size men are being included in high fashion, and how this influences the field of fashion. The outcome of the visual analysis reveals that there is still a large lack of inclusion of plus-size men. Furthermore, the field analysis reveals that there is an imbalance within the current field of fashion, and this is one of the main reasons why there is a lack of inclusion of plus-size men within (high) fashion.

Keywords: plus-size, men, fat, body, inclusion, representation, runway, high fashion

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Louise Wallenberg for her endless support. I am very grateful for all the time and effort that you have put into guiding me through this process and for carefully reading and correcting my drafts. I also want to thank you for introducing me to literature that will forever stick with me. I would like to thank the Centre for Fashion Studies for giving me the opportunity to participate in this master programme and I am especially grateful for the teachers and my fellow students who shared their great knowledge with me in the past two years. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude for my interview participants who were willing to share their personal stories with me. Your contribution to this thesis has been vital and for that I am very grateful. Lastly, I would also like to thank my dear family and friends for their endless encouragement and support.

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INTRODUCTION

Every plus-size person can probably relate to the moment when they went into a store, tried on different jeans and found out that none of them were going to fit past their knees.¹ This is something that I have experienced plenty of times, especially when growing up as a teenager in a time when skinny jeans were highly popular. I remember having to buy bootcut jeans from the woman's section or plus-size stores and having them tailored at the bottom to emulate the skinny silhouette. As a plus-size person who loves fashion, I always had to navigate between the world of plus-size and "straight-size."² As I write this, I realise that this is how I became aware of my body and how bodies like mine were often excluded from fashion. Fortunately, this changed in 2018 when fashion brands like H&M started to expand their clothing sizes, mainly for women's wear.³ For the first time, I was able to go into a conventional clothing store and buy all my clothes in one place. As a person whose body has always been on multiple sides of the plus-size spectrum, I noticed that being on the thinner side of the spectrum was rewarded by having more access to interesting and fun clothes. Being on the larger side of the plus-size spectrum often still means having less access to clothes, even though brands have expanded their size ranges, plenty of plus-size people are still being left out.

When observing the current fashion industry, it becomes clear that plus-size men tend to be overlooked as they are included to a lesser extent.⁴ Plus-size women have started to be included within fashion more often.⁵ Models like: Precious Lee, Ashley Graham, Jill Kortleve and Paloma Elsesser are popular plus-size models who have grazed the runways of major fashion houses such as: Versace, Fendi, Lanvin and Chanel.⁶ The same changes are not as visible within menswear, and especially not within men's fashion shows. Researching how plus-size men are included in high fashion runway shows is important as high fashion has a

¹ Plus-size refers to clothing designed for people who are larger than the average sizes in store, or used to describe someone who is larger than 'average' in size.

² The sizes that are often available in stores, size extra small to size large, sometimes size extra-large is included.

³ Josh Barry, "H&M is finally going to make its sizes bigger after years of customer complaints," *iNews*, Accessed November 15 2022,

<https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/hm-clothing-sizes-bigger-161693>.

⁴ Lucy Maguire, Maliha Shoaib, "Why menswear is falling behind on size inclusivity," *Vogue Business*, Accessed November 15 2022,

<https://www.voguebusiness.com/fashion/why-menswear-is-falling-behind-on-size-inclusivity>.

⁵ Amanda M. Czerniawski, "Real bodies in plus-size fashion," in *Fat Studies*, Vol.11, issue 3 (April 2021), 14.

⁶ Alyssa Kelly, "Where Was the Plus-Size Representation on the Fall/Winter 2021 Runways?" *L'officiel*, Accessed March 03 2023,

<https://www.lofficielusa.com/fashion/plus-size-models-representation-fall-winter-2021-runways>.

significant influence on how one is ‘supposed’ to look, this standard then trickles down to other areas such as stores, and (social) media. The relationship between fashion and the plus-size male body seems to be a topic that offers a lot of room for further exploration, especially within Fashion Studies where the majority of research has been focused on analysing fashion in relation to the female body. This is likely due to the fact that, throughout history the female body has been linked with the ‘triviality’ of fashion, and men have been associated with more ‘serious’ business, such as work.⁷ Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to include men within the scope of fashion (research) and my aim is to do this by analysing how plus-size men are being included in high fashion runway shows during New York, London, Milan and Paris fashion week. Understanding how brands include plus-size men within their fashion shows might lead to understanding how plus-size men are represented in (high) fashion. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to explore: 1) how the ideal male body has evolved throughout history, 2) plus-size men’s perceptions surrounding fashion and their relationship with their bodies, and lastly, 3) the implications of including plus-size men in high fashion.

RESEARCH AIMS & QUESTIONS

As mentioned earlier, there has been a limited amount of research on the inclusion of plus-size men and fashion. Therefore, with this thesis, I aim to position the plus-size male body within fashion research. Exploring the inclusion of plus-size men in high fashion can lead to uncovering how bodies that are perceived as outside of the norm can be used to reconstruct the current paradigms in fashion. This is of importance as the demand for body diversity and inclusion is growing.⁸ The inclusion of plus-size male bodies will be explored through the research questions formulated below.

- 1. How did male body ideals develop throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s?*
- 2. How are plus-size men currently being included within high fashion?*
- 3. How do plus-size men feel about their body and the inclusion of plus-size men?*
- 4. What are the implications of including plus-size male bodies in (high) fashion?*

⁷ Joanne Entwistle, “The fashioned body Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory,” (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 173.

⁸ Alicia Stevens, Scott Griffiths, “Body Positivity (#BoPo) in everyday life,” in *Body Image*, Vol. 35, issue 1, (December 2020), 181-191.

METHODS

The methods that I will use to collect my empirical material are: Critical *Visual Analysis* and *Semi-structured interviews*. These methods can be used as a way to collect data in a detailed way. According to Jonathan E. Schroeder “Critical visual analysis offers researchers an interdisciplinary method for understanding and contextualizing images.”⁹ Contextualizing images is important as the images that are analysed for this thesis are all taken within the same context; during fashion shows. However, by comparing and relating the images to time and other context-dependent influences, one might come to learn about the overarching narrative that is being communicated through those images. When it comes to semi-structured interviews, Kerry E. Howell mentions that “Interviews provide data collection mechanisms that enable description, interrogation, evaluation and consideration of personal accounts or biographical and historical data.”¹⁰ To add to this, Torkild Thanem and David Knights write about the importance of the embodied experience during interviews.¹¹ Therefore, I intend to use a phenomenological approach combining both Howell, Thanem and Knights’ texts as a backbone when conducting the semi-structured interviews. Doing this will help me to conduct the interviews in a more personal and embodied way.

CRITICAL VISUAL ANALYSIS

The critical visual analysis will be conducted through some of Schroeder’s key variables for critical visual analysis. The variables are: *description*, *subject matter*, *form*, *medium*, *style*, *genre* and *comparison*.¹² *Description* is used as a way to describe what is visible within the images and elements such as colour, tone and contrast of the image are taken into consideration. When observing the *subject matter*, one is supposed to describe: people, objects, places or events that might be happening within the photograph. *Form* is used as a way to observe how the subject matter is presented. *Medium* refers to the material that is used for the image. *Style* indicates a resemblance among diverse art objects from an artist, movement, time period, or geographic location.”¹³ *Genre* relates to the type or category of the image that is being analysed

⁹ Jonathan E. Schroeder, “Critical visual analysis,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, ed. Russell W. Belk, (Oxford: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2006), 303.

¹⁰ Kerry E. Howell, “Interviews,” in *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Methodology*, (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015), 198.

¹¹ Torkild Thanem, David Knights, “Embodying Interviews and conversations,” in *Embodied Research Methods*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019), 78-91.

¹² Schroeder, *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, 304.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 305.

and *comparison* is a crucial variable in my analysis as it will help to examine how the brands in question might differ or relate to each other when it comes to their inclusion of plus-size men. Even though description, medium, style and genre are relevant when studying images that are meant to be interpreted as artistic, these variables do not apply to the type of image that will be analysed within the visual analysis of this thesis. Therefore, I will not consider them when conducting my analysis.

Furthermore, Schroeder mentions that there are three more variables that should be taken into account when analysing images. Schroeder explains that “*gender, race and class* have emerged as three crucial contextual issues for interpretive work.”¹⁴ Especially, *gender* or rather assumed gender, and *race* will be of importance within my analysis. Gender is of importance as I aim to analyse the number of plus-size men that are being included and race is of importance as it will reveal a lot about the cultural diversity on the catwalks. Furthermore, these variables can be observed within a visual analysis. I have decided not to include the element of class within my visual analysis as this is something that cannot be observed from runway images and doing this could point the analysis in a direction that might be highly based on assumptions rather than visual observations. The critical visual analysis is a direct representation of how plus-size men are being included within high fashion since the images are taken from the field in question. Therefore, the outcome will help with uncovering to what extent plus-size men are included within high fashion.

EMBODYING SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

According to Howell, “Investigation through questions and answers involves ambiguity; interpretations of answers will always involve a level of subjectivity.”¹⁵ Therefore, I would like to start by acknowledging that although I wish to be unbiased when conducting and analysing the interviews, achieving complete objectivity is not realistic, especially when dealing with a topic that is personal to me. I am aware of possible biases that I might have, hence why I use semi-structured interviews as a research method. Semi-structured interviews centralize the experience of the interview participants and this makes it easier for me to put my own biases aside, as my main purpose is to understand their lived experience. One could argue that understanding their lived experience already starts during the interview process since the body

¹⁴ Ibid., 312.

¹⁵ Howell, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Methodology*, 197.

language of the interview participants can reveal a lot about how they feel when sharing their stories. According to Thanem and Knights, “embodied encounters between people, which trigger emotional responses, actualize power relations [...] much of what is communicated [...] through our gestures, facial expressions and body language.”¹⁶ Hence why I will include some of the body language within the analysis of the interviews.

Furthermore, I want to acknowledge that all the interviews were conducted through video conversations that have been recorded. Aside from 1 participant who was not comfortable with turning their camera on, everyone had their camera switched on during the interviews. Conducting the interviews through video conversations could have made it more difficult to read body language as there was a physical barrier between myself and the interview participants. Nevertheless, holding the interviews online meant that both the participants and myself could select a location that we felt most comfortable in and perhaps this helped the participants to feel at ease with sharing their stories. Another benefit is that the interviews were recorded without the interference of a physical camera, which meant that participants were able to feel less aware of their body language. Additionally, the fact that almost all the interviews were video and audio recorded means that I was able to play them back and solely focus on the body language of the participants for each question that was asked. Therefore, I can say that conducting the interviews online had more positive benefits than negative.

MATERIALS

The selected images for the critical visual analysis will serve as a representation of the plus-size men that are being included in high fashion. The interviews are conducted to gain a detailed understanding of how plus-size men feel about their bodies and the inclusion of plus-size men in high fashion. The outcome of both methods is used as a way to help with answering the aforementioned research questions.

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF PLUS-SIZE MEN IN FASHION SHOWS

The images collected for the critical visual analysis are mainly retrieved from *Vogue Runway*.¹⁷ However, when images from certain fashion show collections are not displayed on the Vogue Runway website, they are supplemented by fashion show images from the website of the brands

¹⁶ Thanem, Knights, *Embodied Research Methods*, 83.

¹⁷ Website where fashion shows can be viewed as individual images.

in question. The selection of the brands is based on the information that I acquired through articles that I read when I started researching the inclusion of plus-size men in high fashion. I first came across a *Vogue Business* article which highlighted the lack of inclusion in menswear fashion shows by displaying the only seven brands that included plus-size men in their Autumn/Winter 2022 fashion shows.¹⁸ The brands in question were: “Kidsuper, Études, Casablanca, Magliano, Kiko Kostadinov, Maison Mihara Yasuhiro and Doublet.”¹⁹ These brands were my point of departure as they were the only ones to include plus size men in their Autumn/Winter 2022 runway shows. Henceforth, I searched for all their fashion shows on *Vogue Runway*. My criteria for selecting the brands was based on the fact that they had to include at least one plus-size man in at least one of their fashion shows. Furthermore, some of their shows had to be available on *Vogue Runway*, as it is the platform where major fashion shows get displayed. Maison Mihara Yasuhiro’s fashion show was not available on the *Vogue Runway* website, hence why I decided not to include it in my visual analysis. According to the *Vogue Business* article, Kiko Kostadinov included plus-size men in their show. Since I was not able to find the plus-size men within the show that they were referring to, I excluded the brand from the analysis.

Additionally, I decided to include three more brands that have included plus-size men within their fashion shows: Tommy Now, S.S Daley and LGN.²⁰ Including these brands meant that I could analyse at least one brand for each of the major fashion weeks.²¹ Examining brands that show their collections during these fashion weeks is of importance as Fashion Week is the time where new standards within fashion are presented. Considering the fact that I only found nine brands that included plus-size men in their runway shows, out of more or less seventy-seven menswear fashion brands, speaks volumes about the way that plus-size men are being included and excluded within high fashion.²² The selected images are of plus-size men that were included in fashion shows between 2018 until 2023 which means that they span a time frame of five years. The reason why 2018 is chosen as a starting point is that 2018 marks the time when changes towards diversity and inclusion were starting to become more prevalent due to the popularity of the body positivity movement.²³ Additionally, some of the selected brands

¹⁸ Lucy Maguire, “Plus-size men: “Luxury, we are ready for you,” *Vogue Business*, Accessed November 15 2022, <https://www.voguebusiness.com/fashion/plus-size-men-luxury-we-are-ready-for-you>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Tommy now is one of the branches under the Tommy Hilfiger brand.

²¹ New York, London, Milan and Paris Fashion week.

²² Maguire, “Plus-size men: “Luxury, we are ready for you.”

²³ Alissa Chiat, “Body Positivity Movement: Influence of Beauty Standards on Body Image,” (dissertation., St. Catherine University, 2020), 28.

did not exist or did not include plus-size men within their runway shows prior to this time, hence why I will use the five-year period as a demarcation, rather than a criterion.

Analysing five consecutive years might seem like a short time. However, when taking into consideration that some of these brands have only existed for two to three years means that excluding certain years, can lead to missing out on beneficial information that can be used for the analysis. Analysing these images will offer a detailed insight into how fashion brands include plus-size men in their fashion shows. Following this throughout a timespan of five years can also show how brands might have progressed or regressed in terms of becoming more diverse in their inclusion of plus-size male models. To add to this, focusing on brands that are included in the major fashion weeks reveals a lot about the general state of fashion in terms of the inclusion of plus-size people.

INTERVIEWS ABOUT THE INCLUSION OF PLUS-SIZE MEN

Interviews were used as the second method to collect material for this thesis. They were also used as a way to gain a better understanding of how the inclusion of plus-size men in high fashion is perceived amongst other plus-size men. Additionally, I also wanted to understand how being plus-size influenced different men in their daily lives. Therefore, I conducted four individual semi-structured interviews with an ethnically diverse group of cis-gendered plus-size men between the ages of 20-60 who have different levels of affiliation with fashion. My aim was to interview a diverse group of people as I wanted to understand how different cultural backgrounds can influence the experience of being plus-size, especially since various cultures might view plus-size bodies in different ways. Two of the interview participants were acquired through Instagram, one participant is a close friend and the fourth participant is a family friend of a friend. More information about the interview participants will be presented later on in this thesis.

The purpose of the interviews was to centre the experience of being plus-size and how this has an influence on one's relationship with fashion and their body. Therefore, I used a phenomenological approach, as a way to focus on the lived experience of the participants. I have ensured that the interview participants are anonymised due to the sensitive personal information that they shared. The topics that were discussed acquired the participants to share vulnerable stories about themselves, hence why I did not put a strict limit on the time frame of the interviews. However, I did limit the number of interview questions to a maximum of 11 as

a way to keep the interview process as clear and concise as possible. I asked open questions as a way to allow the participants to feel free in constructing their answers. Furthermore, I structured the questions into four categories and started with an opening question by asking the participants to share their views about the term plus-size. Then I moved onto asking questions about their relationship with fashion, their body and the fashion industry. The structure of the order in which the questions were asked was of high importance to me as I wanted the participants to feel comfortable with sharing their stories. Therefore, I decided to start with an opening question that revealed just enough about the participants and their feelings towards the notion of plus-size, without forcing them to reveal information that they might not have been comfortable with. Henceforth, I asked more personal questions, some of the questions were slightly adjusted or removed according to the participants' affiliation with fashion, however in essence all the interview questions led to understanding the lived experience of the interviewed men.

The findings of the interviews are important as they reinforce the analysis in mainly the third chapter of this thesis. Nevertheless, I also want to acknowledge that the experience of the interview participants is not intended to represent all plus-size men. My reason for choosing a small group of plus-size men is that I want to focus on individual lived experiences rather than generalized ideas and assumptions of what it means to be a plus-size man.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that will be used within this thesis consists of a mix of concepts and theories that stem from the fields of body studies and sociology. From the field of body studies, I intend to include Susan Bordo's books *Unbearable weight* and *The Male body*. They will be used as a way to reinforce my analysis on the (plus-size) male body and how it has been shaped by culture. Furthermore, I intend to draw from Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu's theories which are related to the field of sociology. I will use Foucault's concept of panopticism and Bourdieu's field theory as a way to examine the effects of the inclusion of plus-size men within the field of fashion. This combination of literature, theories and concepts will serve as the backbone of this thesis.

THE CULTURAL CONSTITUTION OF THE BODY

Susan Bordo is a feminist philosopher who has influenced the field of body studies through her literature about the influence that culture has on our bodies. This has been analysed in her books *Unbearable Weight* and *The male body*.²⁴ Bordo describes the cultural influence on the body as “the direct grip that culture has on our bodies, through the practices and bodily habits of everyday life.”²⁵ This alludes to culture being an influence that teaches our bodies how to behave, and therefore, what we come to perceive as our bodies are internalized and embodied routines and habits that construct both our mental and physical idea of the body. Bordo uses the notion of culture’s grip on the body to analyse the male body and the fat body. This is explored through how portrayals of the male body and fatness in history have shaped our current ideas about the ideal (male) body and fatness. She elaborates on this by explaining how the latter has been portrayed as something that is “threatening to overtake the self.”²⁶ Therefore, our collective fear of fatness results from anxieties about the loss of control over internal processes within our bodies. Thus, the fat body is seen as a physical representation of the inside risking to come out hence why we tend to physical regimes as a way to try and take control of what lies within.

This is especially prevalent within western society where different institutions such as the field of medicine have regularly declared an obesity epidemic.²⁷ Due to this people are stimulated and required to control their body weight in order to achieve health.²⁸ Within the West body weight is often used as a marker of one’s health and this is also reflected in other areas of society. Therefore, being plus-size is often seen as having a resistance against the cultural norms that have been imposed upon the body. By including Bordo’s body of thought, I aim to display how the (ideal male) body has been shaped by culture and how it has influenced plus-size men.

²⁴ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight, Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, (Berkley: University of California, 1993), 362.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁷ Philip T. James, Rachel Leach, Eleni Kalamara, Maryam Shayeghi, “The Worldwide Obesity Epidemic,” in *Obesity Research*, Vol. 9, issue 11, 228S-233S.

²⁸ Deborah Lupton, *Fat*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 137.

SOCIAL CONTROL OF THE BODY

Where Bordo uses her theory to explain the influence that culture has over the construction of the body, Michel Foucault uses his theory of panopticism to uncover the various techniques that are used as a way to gain power over bodies. The concept of panopticism is based on the panopticon, which is philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham's invention of the "perfect prison where inmates exist in a state of permanent, total visibility. The architecture is itself a technology of surveillance."²⁹ The panopticon is an architectural building that allows for an inherent system of control. The building is usually ring shaped with a tower in the middle. This tower has windows that look out on the inner side of the ring, the inside of the ring is divided up into sells with windows that look out on the tower and the outer side of the ring. The people in these sells can see the surveyor in the tower, however they are not able to see what is happening in the cells next to them.

Foucault describes this surveillance of the people in the cells as "He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication."³⁰ The panopticon can serve as a metaphor for culture or social constructs, as they shape and dictate our way of behaving within society. Therefore, the body becomes used as a tool of control towards the self and others. However, Foucault also explains how within this system of surveillance class plays an important part in deciding who gets subjected to power or domination. This is visible when analysing the prison system which was introduced at the turn of the 18th century. The idea behind the prison was to create a system with "the power to punish [...] exercised in the same manner over all its members, and in which each individual was equally represented."³¹ However, what became prevalent is that people from the lower class were being punished more frequently than people from the upper class.

Foucault described this by explaining that "if born poor, today's magistrates would [...] be in the convict-ships; [...], if they had been well born, 'would be presiding in the courts and dispensing justice.'"³² With this Foucault shows that although the prison system intended to treat everyone 'equally' the reality of the constructs in society meant that the upper classes always

²⁹ Jane Tyrnan, "Foucault's Conceptual Framework," in *Thinking through Fashion A Guide to Key Theorists*, ed. Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik, (London: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016), 221.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, tran. Alan Sheridan, (Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1995), 129.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

³² *Ibid.*, 270.

had the power and privilege over people from the lower classes and therefore this system was not as equal as it was intended to be.

When using the concept of the panopticon to analyse the interviews with the plus-size men and the structures within fashion, one can come to understand how governed the appearance of the body is especially if this body is in opposition to dominant cultural norms. The governing of the body is enacted by the bodies that produce fashion and the bodies that promote it. According to Jane Tyrnan the panopticon is used as a way to constantly view our bodies through a critical lens and this results into the anxiety of not being able to achieve the idealised version of what society deems to be the “perfect” body.³³ Applying the concept of the panopticon to examine fashion can teach us about the regimes that are used to maintain constructed ideals within the field of fashion and how they punish certain bodies.

POSITIONING PLUS-SIZE WITHIN THE FIELD OF FASHION

Bordo’s notion of cultures’ influence on the body and Foucault’s panopticon come together in this paragraph, especially since they are both structures that can be observed in the field of fashion. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the field is a “structured space of positions and forces informed by specific rules of functioning which shape the trajectories and practices of the agents that belong to it.”³⁴ He explains how a field is a place where new and old players fight for the power to be perceived as authentic. A field is also the place where one comes to shape ideas about “aesthetic, taste and norm.”³⁵ This can be achieved by gaining a powerful position within the field. The field of fashion is written about by Pierre Bourdieu and Yvette Delsaut in the French article “*Le couturier et sa griffe*.”³⁶ They construct and examine the dynamics within the field of high fashion during the 1970s in France. Bourdieu and Delsaut analyse the field of fashion by showing the positions of established players and newcomers, whilst observing the “strategies and values, and the rules and struggles” that emerge within the field of fashion.³⁷ They describe how established players have a high symbolic and economic value, whilst newcomers gain their position by subverting the structures that were imposed upon the field by

³³ Tyrnan, “Foucault’s Conceptual Framework,” 222.

³⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l’Art*, (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 97.

³⁵ Rocamora, *Thinking through Fashion A Guide to Key Theorists*, 270.

³⁶ Bourdieu, Delsaut, “*Le couturier et sa griffe*,” in *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, Vol. 1, issue 1, (1975), 7-36.

³⁷ Rocamora, *Thinking through Fashion A Guide to Key Theorists*, 273.

the established players.³⁸ The concept of the field will be used as a way to construct an analysis of the field of fashion as it is today, especially in relation to (high) fashion brands that include plus-size men. This will reveal how plus-size men are being included within the field of fashion and to what extent.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

FASHIONING FATNESS

The inclusion of plus-size bodies in fashion is relatively new, especially the inclusion of plus-size male bodies is still at its beginning stages. Within Fashion Studies there has been a tendency to focus on the female body, especially the slim female body is often discussed, therefore the plus-size (male) body has not been awarded the same attention. Paolo Volonté is one of the scholars who does write about the exclusion of plus-size female bodies in his book *Fat fashion*.³⁹ He explains how within fashion, fat bodies are often excluded from the mainstream fashion system and their inclusion is only allowed to a certain extent.⁴⁰ Volonté goes on to explain how the inclusion of plus-size models in fashion can be considered a “new trend regarding the female body ideal.”⁴¹ He views the inclusion of plus-size bodies in fashion as “tokenistic” and argues that the inclusion of plus-size bodies has not led to significant changes within fashion.⁴² Furthermore, he explains that the plus-size bodies that are being included in fashion still hold up to conventional beauty ideals such as being relatively “young, toned and moderately overweight.”⁴³

According to Volonté, the fact that the inclusion of plus-size bodies has been awarded such attention in recent years, shows how they are still marginalized. Therefore, he states that the inclusion of plus-size bodies alone is not enough, there needs to be systemic change for the fashion industry to truly accept plus-size bodies.⁴⁴ Although many valid points are made, Volonté seems to put less emphasis on the positive impacts that the inclusion of plus-size bodies in fashion can have. Multiple media studies such as; *The impact of inclusive fashion advertising with plus-size models on female consumers*, *The Effect of Experimental Presentation of Thin*

³⁸ Ibid., 276.

³⁹ Paolo Volonté, *Fat Fashion*, (Great Britain: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022), 228.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 185.

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴² Tokenism is the practice of admitting an extremely small number of members of a racial, gendered or specific group. In this case plus-size women, and give the impression of being inclusive, when in actuality these groups are not welcomed.

⁴³ Volonté, *Fat Fashion*, 186.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 194.

Media Images on Body Satisfaction, I think she's truly beautiful': Celebrity, gender and body positivity in plus-size fashion blogs and Have Ideal Female Bodies in the Media Changed? have shown that the representation of plus-size bodies in fashion and advertising can lead to a greater acceptance of the self.⁴⁵ Therefore, including the positive aspects of the inclusion of plus-size bodies could lead to a more thorough understanding of the beneficial impact of the inclusion of plus-size bodies within the field of fashion.

Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco question how fatness has been constructed through “different historical, cultural, and economic positions” in their book *Bodies out of bounds*.⁴⁶ In contrast to Volonté, they seem less sceptical about the inclusion of fatness and aim to illustrate how within the West there has generally been a vilification of fat. They advocate for a new way of theorizing fatness by moving away from the idea that fatness is synonymous with illness.⁴⁷ This notion is inspiring for this thesis as it questions a popular debate within fashion that frames the inclusion and exposure of plus-size bodies as a glorification of obesity.⁴⁸ However, one can question if this is a true concern about health or if it is just another way of spreading fat-phobic rhetoric. The fact that we seldom criticise the representation of thin bodies as a glorification of anorexia might allude to our extreme fear of fatness. It also shows how we equate fat bodies with medical issues whereas thin bodies are automatically perceived as healthy even when they might not be. The focus of the book is to spread narratives against anti-fatness. The authors do this by studying how essentialist and anti-essentialist positions can be used as a way to recreate the narratives surrounding fatness.⁴⁹ Furthermore, they describe the power of images and language as important tools within the framing of fatness in society as they can be used to create narratives that can cause harm.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Joo, Woo, “The impact of inclusive fashion advertising with plus-size models on female consumers: The mediating role of brand warmth,” in *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, Vol. 12, issue 3, 260-273.

Gross, Levine, Murnen, “The Effect of Experimental Presentation of Thin Media Images on Body Satisfaction: A Meta-Analytic Review,” in *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, Vol. 31, issue 1, 1-16.

Limatius, “I think she's truly beautiful': Celebrity, gender and body positivity in plus-size fashion blogs,” in *Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, Vol. 17, issue 2, 372-392.

Goodman, “Have Ideal Female Bodies in the Media Changed? A Content Analysis of Women's Representation in Magazine Editorial and Ads,” in *Journal of Magazine Media*, Vol. 22, issue 1-2, 112-136.

⁴⁶ Jana Evans, Kathleen LeBesco, *Bodies out of bounds: fatness and transgression*, (London, University of California Press: 2001), 360.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁸ Barbara Santamaria, “Study says plus-size could be adding to obesity epidemic,” *Fashion Network*, Accessed February 24 2023,

<https://uk.fashionnetwork.com/news/Study-says-plus-size-could-be-adding-to-obesity-epidemic,991129.html#fashionweek-paris-loewe>.

⁴⁹ Evans, LeBesco, *Bodies out of bounds*, 84.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 76.

PERFORMATIVITY AND THE BODY MIND RELATION

Not only images and language are powerful tools used within the representation of fatness, gender also plays a significant role, especially since the inclusion of plus-size bodies in fashion is highly gendered. Currently, plus-size women are being included more than plus-size men. Therefore, it is necessary to highlight philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler and her theory on gender performativity as a way to display the gendered discrepancies that are placed upon men and women. A central theme in Butler's work is questioning what we deem as the natural body. She explains how the body is not just shaped by nature but rather shaped by culture as the majority of knowledge that we have about the body has been constructed through existing power structures that have been spread through cultural norms and values.⁵¹ These structures are used as a way to create narratives around how one is supposed to perform gender.

Butler describes the concept of performativity as a "stylized repetition of acts referring to conscious choices we make about gesture, clothing and style," however, performativity is not solely linked to the aforementioned acts.⁵² These repeated acts or constructs are used as a way to make sense of the physical human body as one would not be able to comprehend the human body without knowing about these acts. Therefore, she explains that rather than being something that comes natural, gender is manufactured and embodied through acts.⁵³ Since these constructs and acts are closely linked to culture and culture is ever-changing, we continuously have to rebuild the narratives that have shaped our notion of how a body is supposed to perform. This is even more heightened within fashion where the notions around what we deem as fashionable bodies are significantly linked to performativity and acts that are quite unattainable to live up to. Applying the notion of performativity and especially the embodied aspect of it can be used as a way to explore how male and female (plus-size) bodies try to assimilate themselves within fashion.

Elizabeth Grosz is a feminist philosopher whose work has been used to study the body, as well as other subjects such as feminism, architecture and art. Grosz writes about the body in her books: *Volatile bodies* and *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*.⁵⁴ In *Volatile bodies* she investigates the social construction of the sexually specific body by

⁵¹ Elizabeth Wissinger, "Judith Butler: Fashion and Performativity," *Thinking through Fashion A Guide to Key Theorists*, 326.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 327.

⁵³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 15.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, (New York: Routledge, 1995).

following Jacques Lacan's model of the Möbius strip. Lacan is a "psychoanalyst and philosopher who used mathematical symbols to illustrate his theories of psychoanalysis."⁵⁵ Lacan uses the Möbius strip which is an inverted three-dimensional figure eight, "to illustrate the way psychoanalysis reconceptualizes certain binary oppositions (inside/outside, before/after, signifier/signified)."⁵⁶

Grosz uses Lacan's theory of the Möbius strip as the backbone in her book *Volatile bodies*.⁵⁷ She uses the first opposition inside/outside as a way to rethink the relations between body and mind. According to Grosz the Möbius strip resembles the relationship between the body and the mind as they are often perceived as two separate parts of the body however, they are linked and they constantly interact with one another. Grosz also uses the Möbius strip to display how the sexually specific body has been colonized by the natural sciences and goes on to explain how natural sciences such as biology and medicine have tried to dominate when it comes to the theorisation of the body.⁵⁸ Gender plays a large part in Grosz's work as she questions how both in natural and social sciences, as well as the humanities, gender is used as a way to understand how male and female bodies are instructed to operate. In relation to this, she also studies how bodies tend to "always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them."⁵⁹ Therefore, Grosz's analysis is highly applicable when researching plus-size bodies.

MASCULINITY VIEWED THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF THE NEW MAN

Fashion Studies scholar Joanne Entwistle writes about the body in her book *The Fashioned Body*.⁶⁰ Entwistle advocates for the inclusion of the body in relation to the study of fashion whilst arguing that fashion researchers have had the tendency to exclude the body from their research. The female body is central within Entwistle's analysis, perhaps for the reason that, throughout history, women's bodies have been linked to fashion, therefore, the focus on men's bodies and their relation to fashion has been overlooked.⁶¹ Even though Entwistle uses the

⁵⁵ Catherine Yang, "Lacan and his Mobius Strip," Accessed May 16 2023, <https://chroma.mit.edu/p/lacan-and-his-mobius-strip>.

⁵⁶ Vesna Petresin, Laurent-Paul Robert "The Möbius Strip in Architecture," *Nexus Network Journal*, Vol.4, issue 2 (2002), 54–64.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, "*Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*," (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 12.

⁵⁸ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 251.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁰ Joanne Entwistle, *The fashioned body Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 320.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

female body as her focal point, her research still serves as an important basis for the exploration of fashion and the body, as it recognizes that all bodies are socially and culturally constructed. Entwistle briefly writes about men in the paragraph; *Menswear and the New Man*, here she explains how “modern men’s fashions have been largely neglected” and how the research on men’s fashion is usually limited to clothes and their utility.⁶²

Entwistle explains that this certainly changed with the introduction of the concept of “the New Man in the 1980s.”⁶³ Men started to break away from traditional ideas surrounding masculinity and their bodies became hyper sexualized.⁶⁴ Although traditional norms around masculinity changed in the sense that men were allowed to openly tend to their appearance, the standards that were put onto the male body became overtly masculine, and bodies that did not conform risked exclusion and criticism as they were seen as subversive of dominant body ideals. The introduction of the New Man enforced the idea that “value is ascribed or taken away depending on people’s physical appearance.”⁶⁵ Therefore, the concept of the New Man can be used as a starting point for the research of the inclusion of the male body within fashion. By looking into the evolution of the male body throughout history, one can gain a better understanding of the relationship between fashion and the male body as it is today.

Tim Edwards, is a scholar within the field of masculinities who has also written extensively about the concept of the New Man and New Lad in his book *Cultures of Masculinity*. He explores how both concepts have influenced the ways in which masculinity is expressed through the male body and examines this through images and portrayals of men in health and fitness magazines of the 1980s and 1990s.⁶⁶ Both concepts represented a new idea of masculinity that was highly driven by media and consumption, Edwards discusses how their invention led to a rise in designer fashion, grooming products and a large focus on health and fitness for men.⁶⁷ Especially the latter became a cause for concern since men were now expected to achieve or maintain a muscular physique resembling that of body builders, and this led to a generalized obsession with gaining muscle mass.⁶⁸ Although Edwards’ does not overtly discuss the plus-size male body, his work offers valuable information that can be used to analyse how

⁶² Ibid., 199.

⁶³ The concept of the new man marks a significant moment in the history of men’s fashions, representing a break in traditional notions of masculinity.

⁶⁴ Joanne Entwistle, *The fashioned body*, 201.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁶ The new lad represented a return in hyper masculine ideals of manhood.

⁶⁷ Tim Edwards, *Cultures of Masculinity*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), ch6.

⁶⁸ Ibid., ch.8.

the ideal male body developed from one ideal to another. His research also shows the consequences that can occur from not being able to live up to unrealistic body standards.

THE RISK OF OBTAINING THE IDEAL BODY

Here I will display previous research from other academic fields that can be linked to the unrealistic portrayal of body ideals, how they are centred on whiteness, but also how these ideals can influence people into disordered ways of dealing with their bodies. The research that will be displayed in this paragraph are related to the fields of: *Film Studies*, *Black Studies* and *Eating Disorders*, these fields are highly relevant to this thesis as they offer research that can be applied within the analysis of this thesis. By including previous research from the field of Film Studies I aim to gain a better understanding of the visual ways in which male bodies have been portrayed in film. I also intend to include research from the field of Black studies, as a way to question the dominance of whiteness in the creation of the ideal (male) body in Western culture. Furthermore, I will present relevant research from the field of Eating Disorders since disordered ways of eating can be a direct result of what happens when people try to live up to unrealistic body ideals.

The portrayal of unrealistic body standards is something that Film Studies professor Richard Dyer writes about in his book *White*. He analyses the representation of the ideal male body through depictions in film as a way to question how whiteness has been depicted as a standard. He advocates “for the importance of analysing images of white people” as a way to deconstruct the idea of whiteness as the norm.⁶⁹ Feminist activist and writer Bell Hooks refers to Dyer in her article; *Micheaux: Celebrating Blackness*. Throughout the article she refers to Dyer’s notion of questioning whiteness as a way to examine how author and film director Oscar Micheaux created “screen images that would disrupt and challenge conventional racist representations of blackness.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, Dyer’s chapter on “*The white man’s muscles*” can be used as a way to examine how male body ideals have been constructed through whiteness. In this chapter he explains how in contrast to white men, Black, Asian and Latin men’s naked or semi-naked bodies have always been on display within popular fiction such as “Westerns, plantation drama’s and jungle adventure films” the white male body on the other hand was rarely pictured in the same conditions. Dyer goes on to explain how the distinction of

⁶⁹ Richard Dyer, *White*, (Oxford: Routledge, 1997).

⁷⁰ Bell Hooks, “Micheaux’s Films: Celebrating Blackness,” in *African American Review*, Vol.50, issue 4, 815-824.

the naked and clothed bodies was used by white men as a way to exert their dominance over men of other races.⁷¹ Another example of the ways in which the white man applied its dominance is through bodybuilding. The body shape that the sport cultivates emulates Greek statues by attaining a muscular, hard and hairless physique.⁷² According to Dyer the position of a “hard, contoured body” did not run the risk of being merged into other bodies and this gave white men the sense of “separation and boundedness that fed into their male ego.”⁷³ When analysing the depiction of the white man’s body through Dyer, it becomes clear that throughout history the white man’s body has been a shaky concept leaning on a tight regime of discipline and punishments that were used as a way to distinguish themselves from other men.

The black male body on the other hand has often been presented within popular culture as something to fear yet objectify.⁷⁴ Art historian and writer Kobena Mercer writes about the objectification of the black male body in his book *Welcome to the jungle*. Here he analyses how the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe reveal something about the way that “white people ‘look’ at black people and how, in this way of looking, black male sexuality is perceived as something different, excessive, other.”⁷⁵ In Mapplethorpe’s photographs the black men are depicted in the nude and often engaging in some sort of gay S/M ritual. Although they are pictured in a way that might be perceived as glorifying since they emulate the nude women that are depicted within “fine art traditions in Western art history,” they cannot be measured to the same extent.⁷⁶ The black male body has not had the same social connotations ascribed to it as the white female or male body and therefore it can be argued that the men displayed in Mapplethorpe’s photographs become fetishized commodities in the eye of the beholder. In this case the fixation on the black male body emphasises the idea of the black body as something other than the norm.

Sociologist Stuart Hall writes about this fascination or rather fetishization of ethnic bodies in his book *The Spectacle of the other*. Hall examines how the representation practices in media have often resulted into the stereotyping of people with ethnic backgrounds that are other than white, which again, can be related to Dyer’s notion of whiteness as neutrality.⁷⁷ Rather than analysing the representation of the male body, the field of eating disorders deals

⁷¹ Dyer, *White*, 146.

⁷² Ibid., 150.

⁷³ Ibid., 152.

⁷⁴ Cassandra Jackson, *Violence, Visual Culture, and the Black Male Body*, (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁷⁵ Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the jungle*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), ch.6.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Stuart Hall, “Spectacle of the other,” *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London: SAGE, 1997), 223–259.

with the consequences that emerge from failing to live up to unrealistic body standards. Richard A. Leit “et al,” examine this in their article, *The media's representation of the ideal male body*. Here they explain that the portrayal of unrealistic body ideals “has caused a surge in body and muscle dysmorphia amongst men”, which is a disorder where men become obsessed with building a muscular physique. The research also shows that men who are frequently exposed to hyper muscular bodies can show signs of a reduced body satisfaction in comparison to men who have not been exposed to these ideals.⁷⁸

The following study: *Fat Phobia: Measuring, Understanding, and Changing Anti-Fat Attitudes* conducted by Beatrice “Bean” E. Robinson “et al,” shows that fat people are mainly viewed through negative stereotypes such as being “undisciplined, inactive, and unappealing,” and on top of that they are often stigmatized and ridiculed.⁷⁹ In our society fatness is seen as a “condition” that one inflicts upon oneself, hence why ridicule or stigmatization is not sanctioned as much as it would be in other situations. This is highly problematic as it implies that bodies that do not conform are to be punished.⁸⁰ This sentiment is highly prevalent within our society and especially within the fashion industry where there is a tendency to punish fat bodies by excluding them.⁸¹ Therefore, I argue that the study of body related issues should not solely be limited to the field of Eating Disorders, as body issues can occur in all fields where one specific body type is put on a pedestal.

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided into four analytical chapters that all lead to examining how plus-size men are included in (high) fashion. The purpose of the first chapter is to position the ideal male body within fashion through historical accounts. Therefore, Susan Bordo’s literature will serve as a way to examine and question how the ideal male body has been constructed throughout different moments in time. The second chapter of this thesis explores how plus-size men are currently included in high fashion; this is examined through a critical visual analysis. In the third chapter semi-structured interviews are used as a way to examine how plus-size men view their bodies

⁷⁸ Richard A. Leit, James, J. Gray, Harrison G. Pope, “The media's representation of the ideal male body: A cause for muscle dysmorphia?” in *International Journal of Eating disorders*, Vol.31, issue 3 (2002), 334-335.

⁷⁹ Beatrice “Bean” E. Robinson, Jane G. Bacon, Julia O’Reilly, “Fat Phobia: Measuring, Understanding, and Changing Anti-Fat Attitudes,” in *International Journal of Eating disorders*, Vol. 14, issue 4 (1993), 476.

⁸⁰ George L. Maddox, Kurt W. Back and Veronica R. Liederman, “More than a “Overweight as Social Deviance and Disability” bias,” in *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol. 9, issue 4 (1993), 288.

⁸¹ Deborah A. Christel, “It’s your fault you’re fat: Judgements of responsibility and social conduct in the fashion industry,” in *Clothing Cultures*, Vol.1, issue 3 (2014), 303-320.

and the inclusion of plus-size men in fashion. Additionally, Michel Foucault's theory on *Panopticism* will be used as a way to analyse the findings, as well as to question how fashion imposes certain norms and values on the body. The final chapter of this thesis presents the implications of including plus-size men in high fashion. Here, I use Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and in particular the field of high fashion, as a way to explore what happens when high fashion brands allow plus-size bodies into the scope of fashion. This will be studied by presenting my own interpretation of the current field of fashion in relation to the inclusion of plus-size men. The aforementioned theories and literature have been divided solely to provide clarity within the explanation of the chapters. However, I intend to mix and match the theories if they prove to be relevant to apply throughout multiple chapters in this thesis.

1) MALE BODY IDEALS THROUGHOUT THE 1980s, 1990s & 2000s

In this chapter I will examine how male body ideals have developed throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. The aim for this is to understand how the ideal male body has changed throughout time and how these changes have shaped what we have come to see as the ideal male body of today. As a starting point I will discuss the male body ideals of the Ancient Greek however, other male body ideals that occurred throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th century will also be discussed. Furthermore, I will explain how these body ideals have influenced the ideal male body of the 1980's, 1990s and 2000s. The concept of the New Man will be central when discussing the ideal male body of the 1980's as it led to a vast cultural shift that influenced men to change their bodies and lifestyles. Henceforth, the male body ideal of the 1990s will be studied through the concept of the metrosexual man as it signifies the popular stereotypical portrayal of the ideal male body of the 1990s. Lastly, the ideal male body of the 2000s is studied through the androgynous look as established by designer Hedi Slimane who was vital in the creation of the male body aesthetic of the early 2000's. Since this thesis is focussed on plus-size men I will also include a paragraph about the glorification of "bears" through designer Walter van Beirendonck's runway shows.⁸² Throughout this chapter I will refer back to Bordo's books *Unbearable weight* and *The male body* as they explain how culture shapes and constructs our ideas about the (male) body.

MALE BODY IDEALS THROUGH SCULPTURES AND A PAINTING

Most people are probably familiar with male sculptures that stem from the Neo-Classical age, take Michelangelo's David for instance (figure 1). When compared to the Riace Bronze which is a classical male sculpture from Ancient Greece (figure 2) it becomes clear that there are many similarities amongst the depicted men. Both have a similar physique with clearly defined muscles in the upper body. Aside from the fact that both sculptures are made out of hard materials (marble and bronze) it is clear that one is looking at what Bordo would describe as "hard bodies."⁸³

⁸² Within gay culture a bear is a hairy and chubby or plus-size man who perpetuates the traditional image of the way that masculinity is often portrayed in culture.

⁸³ Bordo, *The male body*, 58.



Figure1: Marble sculpture of Michelangelo's David (1501-1504 CE)

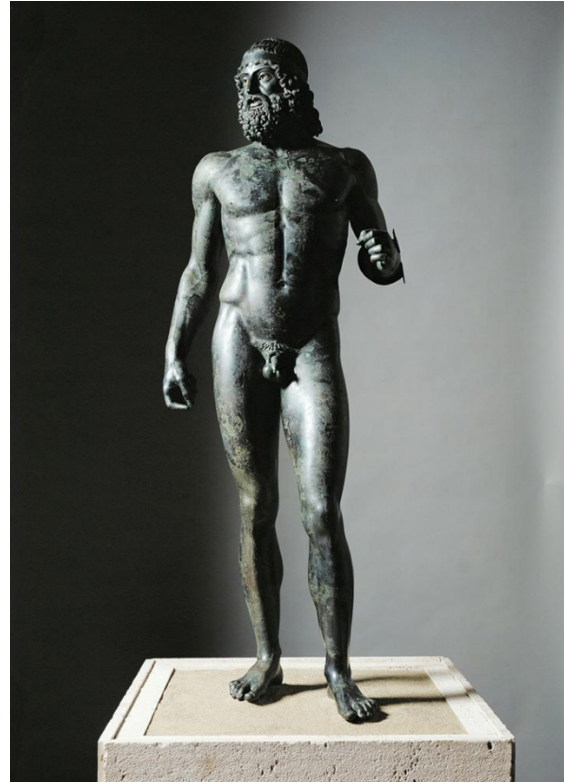


Figure 2: Riace Bronze also referred to as Riace Warrior (460-430 BCE)

The torsos are tight, and contained and this is in line with the ideal aesthetic of ancient Greek and the 16th century, which is also the time when the statue of David was sculpted. According to Foucault, the classical age marks the time where the body was discovered “as object and target of power.”⁸⁴ Therefore, building a hard body became the norm as it signified that one was able to take control, not only of their body but also of their mind. Achieving “spiritual purification and domination of the flesh, was seen as something reserved for the select few, aristocratic or priestly.”⁸⁵ However, this all changed in the 17th and 18th century, when “disciplines became general formulas of domination.”⁸⁶ The progress of society and individuals led to new ways of exerting dominance, and the constraint of one’s body signified discipline, thus having a lean and preferably muscular physique became a representation of power when embodied by people from the ‘right’ social class. Up until the late 19th century and as I would argue beyond, “class, race, and gender” played a central point in discrimination.⁸⁷ Mainly class in combination with the body were used as a way to distinguish oneself and to signify a person’s

⁸⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 127.

⁸⁵ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 185.

⁸⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 129.

⁸⁷ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 191.

place in society.⁸⁸ However, this does not mean that the ideal male body was solely limited to hard bodies. Men who belonged to the Bourgeoisie in the 17th century were allowed to have slightly protruding stomachs as it was seen as a sign of success and wealth. The ideal bourgeois male body shape of that time was also emulated by external influences such as the introduction of new styles of clothing which helped to enhance or emulate the body into this ideal. As explained by Anne Hollander in *Seeing through fashion*, men would wear clothes that narrowed the shoulders and elongated the torso, and shoulders, waist and hips had to be of a similar width (figure 3). Even though, the shape of the body was quite narrow, men were allowed to have larger bellies and “potbellies were not concealed but even emphasized.”⁸⁹ For the men of the upper class having a slightly larger physique was seen as something positive whereas the same body type on someone who belonged to the working class would be seen as a marker of bad health “laziness, lack of discipline, unwillingness to conform” or the general loss of control of their body.⁹⁰ Here the judgement of the people of the lower class can be linked to Foucault’s explanation of how people of the lower classes are punished harder within the criminal justice system. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault mentions that “There is [...] a play of forces which, according to the class to which individuals belong, will lead them to power or to prison.”⁹¹ Therefore, it can be said that the positive or negative judgement of one’s physical body is not solely related to the state of their body, one’s social position in society plays a large part in how their body is perceived.

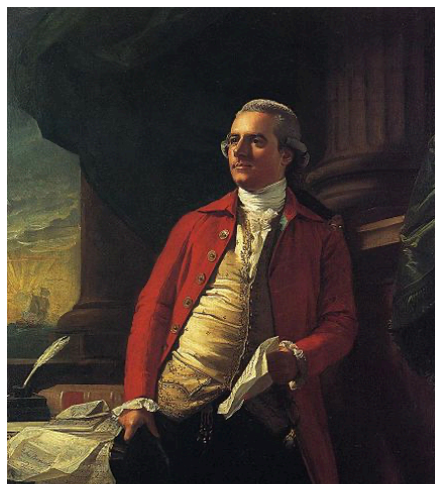


Figure 3: Painting of writer Elkanah Watson in the Princeton University Art Museum, 1782

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Anne Hollander, “Nudity,” in *Seeing through clothes: fashioning ourselves an intriguing new look at image making*, (New York: Avon Books, 1980), 123-124.

⁹⁰ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 195.

⁹¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 270.

On the contrary this body type was not preferred amongst the aristocrats; they favoured a slender body as it distinguished them from the bourgeoisie who felt the need to show their wealth through their more voluptuous bodies. In this case the constraint of appetite implied that one was wealthy enough to abstain from eating and this again showed that they had the discipline and therefore power over others who were not able to do the same. Since thinness had become the new way to mimic the aristocrats and the Bourgeois men could or did not manage to achieve this body ideal themselves, their wives became the ones who had to copy the elite. This meant that they became the slender “showpieces of their husbands' success.”⁹² However, as one can imagine the ideal body of the bourgeois men and the aristocrats were quite the opposite and within the late 19th century this difference led to a general shift where people of the Bourgeoisie were engaging with various practices of body management as a way to emulate the thin body ideal of the aristocrats. According to Bordo;

Concern with diet becomes attached to the pursuit of an idealized physical weight or shape; it becomes a project in service of body rather than soul. Fat, not appetite or desire, became the declared enemy, and people began to measure their dietary achievements by the numbers on the scale rather than by the level of their mastery of impulse and excess.⁹³

Going off on Bordo's quote it can be said that the strive for thinness in the late 19th century influenced the (male) body ideal and diet culture as we know it today.

THE NEW MAN

As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, I will be discussing the ideal male body in relation to the concept of the New Man. In order to explain the context in which the concept of the New Man emerged, one has to understand the influence that feminism, gay culture and marketing and consumption had in its creation. Feminism led to the creation of the concept, gay culture established the look of it and marketing and consumption turned the concept into a physical manifestation of products that men could buy.⁹⁴

⁹² Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 191.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁹⁴ Rosalind Gill, “Outline for a genealogy,” *Power and the production of subjects: a genealogy of the New Man and the New Lad in Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines*, Vol.51, issue 1, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 41.

“Since the late 1960s feminism has had an enormous impact on every area of social life from paid employment to intimate relationships, and the transformations of gender relations,” especially the latter was a great point of critique.⁹⁵ Up until the 1970s gender roles amongst men and women were strictly divided, as men went out into the public sphere to work and women stayed limited to private sphere of the home.⁹⁶ This divide but also the traditional notions around masculinity and femininity led to criticisms from second wave feminists who were against the hegemonic portrayal of masculinity. Raewyn Connell explains hegemonic masculinity in her book *Masculinities*, here she defines the term as the “configuration of gender practice which embodies the [...] legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”⁹⁷ The aforementioned criticism was therefore directed at the unequal treatment of men and women as well as the portrayal of masculinity as something “distant, uninvolved, unemotional and uncommunicative.”⁹⁸ This criticism together with the rise of various social movements such as “the peace movement, anti-racist organizations, environmental movements, movements for sexual liberation, postcolonial struggles and a variety of identity-based political organizations, e.g., disability rights groups” paved the way for a new kind of masculinity.⁹⁹ The influence of both feminism and social movements helped people to realize that politics were just as much about democracy as personal issues, hence why the “personal became political.”¹⁰⁰ This also meant that cultural discourse around new ways of revisioning traditional masculinity started to gain significance and this is what led to the creation of the New Man.

According to Rosalind Gill, The New Man differs from the traditional man as he is “fairly pro-feminist, sensitive, emotionally aware, egalitarian in outlook and, in some accounts, narcissistic and highly invested in his physical appearance.”¹⁰¹ Especially the latter is of significance for this study as I aim to examine the body and therefore the aesthetic and physical personification of the New man rather than his personality traits. The commercial “interest in matters of men’s fashion and appearances” became relevant in the 1980s as the introduction of designer fashion, catwalk collections, magazines, fitness and grooming products for men emerged.¹⁰² As mentioned in the first section of this chapter the emergence of new styles of

⁹⁵Ibid., 42.

⁹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox and Frank Lennox, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article,” *New German Critique*, Vol. 03, (1974), 49.

⁹⁷ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005), 77.

⁹⁸ Gill, “Power and the production of subjects,” 42.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ A saying that was coined by feminist and political philosopher C. Wright Mills.

¹⁰¹ Gill, “Power and the production of subjects,” 37.

¹⁰² Ibid., ch.6.

clothing often emulates the ideal male body of the time and one of the main designers who captured the aesthetic of the New Man was Giorgio Armani. His designs became the uniform of the New Man and someone who embodied this concept was Richard Gere, especially in the movie *American Gigolo* (directed by Paul Schrader, 1980). In this movie Gere's Physique and Armani's designs were combined into creating an aesthetic that would become synonymous with the representation of the New Man.



Figure 4: Richard Gere wears Giorgio Armani in 'American Gigolo' (1980)



Figure 5: Richard Gere's muscular mesomorph body in the movie 'American Gigolo' (1980)

“The cut of Armani suits was strong and characteristically “loose”; the cut suggested that the material was heavy, sumptuous and roomy.”¹⁰³ Armani's designs also allowed for one's muscular physique to peak through the garments (figure 4). As can be seen on the aforementioned image, Gere's body is covered however, one can still see the muscular shape of his upper legs coming through the trousers. Richard Gere in *American Gigolo* embodies all the physical features of the New Man as described by Tim Edwards in his book *Men in the Mirror* (figure 5). He defines the New Man as, “always young, usually white, particularly muscular, critically strong-jawed, clean shaven (often all over), healthy, sporty, successful, virile, and ultimately sexy.”¹⁰⁴ The ideal body type of the New Man could be described as the

¹⁰³ Sean Nixon, *Hard Looks*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 37.

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, *Men in the Mirror*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 41.

muscular mesomorph; this is “a man with an average but well-proportioned build.”¹⁰⁵ The upper body of a muscular mesomorph resembles the shape of a triangle or V-shape as the shoulders are wide, and the waist is small in comparison. Furthermore, muscular arms and legs are important as they help to signify that one is in good shape. When comparing the body of the muscular mesomorph to the body of the previously discussed sculptures, one can find the resemblance of the V-shape.

Henceforth, it has to be acknowledged that the aesthetics of the ideal male body of the 1980s was highly linked to gay culture as gay men invented the “Clone” look. This look was a reaction against straight men who were embracing a more flamboyant way of dressing in the 1970s.¹⁰⁶ The clone look perpetuated the “stereotypically macho man – the farmer, the trucker, the biker, the athlete, the cop, the soldier, the construction worker.”¹⁰⁷ The Clone had the V-shaped body of the aforementioned muscular mesomorph, and signifiers of his look were: facial hair, buzz cuts, jeans, “Tank undershirts and plaid work shirts, prototypical clothes of the heterosexual, blue-collar man, were layered under leather motorcycle, bomber or athletic letterman jackets.”¹⁰⁸ (Figure 6). By embracing this traditionally heterosexual aesthetic, gay men were “perhaps unconsciously, making a statement.”¹⁰⁹ This was in the sense that it called the notion of heterosexual masculinity into question and showed that heterosexuality was not innate but rather something that one could ‘perform’ with their looks.¹¹⁰ Therefore, this revealed how fragile the concept of heterosexuality was. Which could explain why the body ideal that emerged after the clone look was even more extreme in its masculine portrayal, as it was possibly used by straight men as a way to remove any doubts that one might have had about their sexuality.

This new body ideal was that of a bodybuilder, it had some similarities with the clone look since the V-shape of the body was still prominent however, there were also clear differences. Bodybuilding was about obtaining a more extreme version of the muscular mesomorphic built, it became the new way of achieving the ideal male body.¹¹¹ Arnold Schwarzenegger who starred in the movie *Pumping Iron* (directed by George Butler and Robert

¹⁰⁵ Barbara B. Stern, “Masculinism(s) and the male image: What does it mean to be a man?” *Sex in advertising: perspectives on the erotic appeal*, ed. Tom Reichert (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 2003), 222.

¹⁰⁶ Steven Stines, “Cloning fashion: Uniform gay images in male apparel,” in *Critical Studies in Men’s Fashion*, Vol.4, issue 2 (2017), 135.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 138.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 137.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 130.

¹¹⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 12.

¹¹¹ Stines, “Cloning fashion,” 148.

Fiore, 1977) (figure 7) became the embodiment of this ideal. The goal of bodybuilding was to gain a more defined V or triangle shaped body and therefore, muscle mass and specifically clearly defined muscles, became the norm. Other than looks, the built body also “carry the signs of hard, planned labour, the spirit reigning over the flesh. The built body is a wealthy body. It is well fed and enormous amounts of leisure time have been devoted to it.”¹¹²



Figure 6: The clone look on the street (1970)

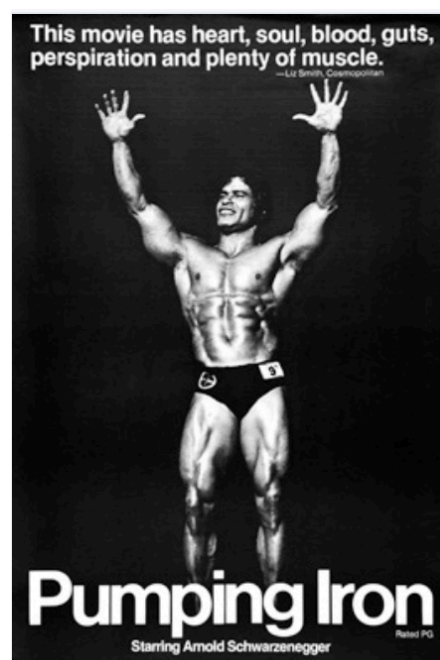


Figure 7: Arnold Schwarzenegger on the official release poster of the movie Pumping Iron (1977)

According to Bordo, the idea that one can exercise and diet themselves into obtaining the ideal body is proof that they have the “privilege, money, and time that prohibit most people from indulging in these practices.”¹¹³ It also relates back to Bordo’s notion of culture’s influence on the body as the dominant culture within the 1980s dictated that the ideal body was to be ‘hard’. Therefore, this body became distinctive in the sense that it signified wealth, health and exclusion towards people who were not able to partake in the aforementioned practices. Furthermore, it also has to be mentioned that; Although the pursuit of the lean and muscular look probably contributed to involvement in health-promoting activities such as exercise and weight lifting, achieving this body ideal meant that one had to take on an extreme exercise regime which could have also led to an obsession with managing one’s body.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Dyer, *White*, 155.

¹¹³ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 191.

¹¹⁴ Bordo, *The Male Body*, 248.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the New Man was a controversial development that emerged within the realms of male identity since the concept led to an unrealistic and idealized portrayal of the male body.

THE METROSEXUAL MAN

In this part of the chapter, I will use the concept of the Metrosexual man as a way to study the ideal body off the 1990s. This means that I will not be including the concept of the New Lad, which is a male portrayal that also emerged in the 1990s.¹¹⁵ The New Lad is not as much of an ideal as he did not hold the same aspirational status in society. Furthermore, the focus on body ideals was not as prominent within the portrayal of the New Lad as it was within the concept of the Metrosexual man. Hence why, in this section I will solely focus on the portrayal of the Metrosexual man. The term Metrosexual was coined by journalist Mark Simpson in his 1994 article about the metrosexual man.¹¹⁶ He described the metrosexual man as:

The typical metrosexual is a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis – because that’s where all the best shops, clubs, gyms, and hairdressers are. He might be officially gay, straight or bi, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference.¹¹⁷

From this description one can imagine that the metrosexual man was someone who was highly conscious of their appearance. In the 1990s new lifestyle and consumption patterns of men had made their way into mainstream media. Personal grooming products for men made a rise in sales and media representations and marketing campaigns perpetuated the dominant muscular body ideals that were established in the decade before.¹¹⁸ Bordo explains that “Portraying the male body as sexually supplicated became the norm within the 90’s.”¹¹⁹ However, this was controversial as in the years before this, positioning oneself to be “passively dependent on the

¹¹⁵ The New Lad was the counter reaction to the New Man he signified traditional masculine norms that the New Man negated.

¹¹⁶ John Mercer, Feona Attwood, *The Routledge Companion to Media, Sex and Sexuality*, (London: Routledge, 2017), 343.

¹¹⁷ Mark Simpson, “Meet The Metrosexual,” *marksimpson.com*, November 15th, 1994, <https://www.marksimpson.com/meet-the-metrosexual/>.

¹¹⁸ Sarah Gee, “Bending the codes of masculinity: David Beckham and flexible masculinity in the new millennium,” in *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, Vol. 17, issue 7 (2013), 917.

¹¹⁹ Bordo, *The Male Body*, 172.

gaze of another person for one's sense of self-worth" was seen as not being a real man.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, this all changed due to the strong influence of gay culture. Within the 1990s queer designer Calvin Klein and photographer Bruce Weber played a central role in the portrayal of the Metrosexual look both in fashion and advertising. They established an aesthetic that could be described as sensuous and sexual. Calvin Klein "was inspired by portraying men as gods. His ideals were: straight-looking, masculine men, with chiseled bodies, young torsos."¹²¹ This alone was highly problematic as it set an unrealistic and hyper sexualized standard. A common theme amongst Bruce Weber's images for Calvin Klein was that the male bodies were always on display and usually half naked, especially the bronzed muscular torsos of the male models were highly visible as a way to reinforce the sexiness of the image (figure 8). Yet again we see the resemblance with the body ideal of the 1980s and the ancient Greek as the V-shape makes its return.



Figure 8: Tom Hintnaus by
Bruce Weber for Calvin Klein (1982)

As we can see, this portrayal of the Metrosexual man just like the idealized body of the bodybuilder was highly idealized and quite problematic as they were unrealistic and thus hard to live up to. Hence why marketers and advertising professionals started to look for someone who could embody this ideal in a more realistic yet at the same time unrealistic way. This person was David Beckham, he became the Metrosexual poster boy of the 1990s. Beckham was "represented as an ideal of what men can and should strive to be and achieve: fame, fortune,

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 180.

fatherhood, fashion sense, and football skills.”¹²² He was relatable in the sense that he both reinforced yet refused conventional norms around masculinity. His fluid way of accepting and negating masculinity and femininity was also visible in his appearance. He was not afraid to switch between wearing traditional ‘feminine’ pieces of clothing such as a sarong or his hyper masculine football tenue (figure 9, 10). Nevertheless, Beckham’s social status and heterosexuality gave him the privilege to get away with switching between gender codes and this was certainly not the case for all the men that admired him. As Butler explains in *Gender Trouble*, people are called into question when their behaviour is “incoherent or discontinuous” with traditional gender norms.¹²³ In this case wearing a piece of clothing that is deemed as feminine can then be interpreted as failing to live up to traditional gender norms and someone without Beckham’s ‘secured’ heterosexuality or social status could have been ridiculed for doing the exact same thing.



Figure 9: David Beckham wearing a sarong (1998)



Figure 10: David Beckham in his football tenue (1996)

As we can see on the images throughout this section, the Metrosexual body ideal of the 1990s was significantly smaller than the one of the bodybuilders in the 1980s however, still unrealistic. Henceforth, certain portrayals of the body such as the images of Steven Weber for Calvin Klein

¹²² Gee, “Bending the codes of masculinity,” 921.

¹²³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23.

reinforced Bordo's notion about culture's influence on the body. The images demonstrate how culture and, in this case, gay culture and its aesthetic had such a strong influence on the creation and portrayal of the ideal male body and the latter is something that became even more prevalent in the decade that followed, although in a different way than one would have predicted.

THE ANDROGYNOUS MAN

The year 2000 marks a time when the ideal male body completely changed from all the body ideals that have been presented throughout this chapter. Due to designer Hedi Slimane's influence in fashion, the new standard became ultra-thin.¹²⁴ Slimane's work for Christian Dior depicted a new ideal of the male body and went back to resemble the androgynous male aesthetic that emerged with the introduction of indie rock music in the 1970s.¹²⁵ Slimane used his influence in fashion to challenge the traditional masculine body norms of the decades before the early 2000s. He reinvented the concepts of the New Man and metrosexual and turned them into the androgynous man. Slimane's shift from Yves Saint Laurent to Christian Dior in the early 2000s marked the start of the 'skinny' silhouette, both in fashion and for the male body. "The Dior man was stripped of any overtly sexual allure principally through the youthful androgyny, a relatively asexual graphic model."¹²⁶ (Figure 11). This androgynous aesthetic follows Butler's notion of seeing the body as a construct on which can be built, meaning that there is not necessarily a male or female body but rather a body that has been inscribed by culture. Therefore, Slimane's aesthetic became a symbol of rebellion against the traditionally gendered aesthetic of the body.¹²⁷

The models that Slimane worked with were, extremely thin and pale, often resembling indie rock artists like David Bowie, who was a big inspiration for Slimane.¹²⁸ Two of Bowie's looks have been cited by Slimane as an inspiration for the creation of his aesthetic for Dior. The suit that Bowie wears at the Live at the Tower Philadelphia concert album of 1974 (figure 12) and the look for his persona of the Thin White Duke for the Station to Station album in 1976 (figure 13).¹²⁹ Bowie was inspirational as he wore "designs and bold colors that were much

¹²⁴ French Fashion designer and photographer.

¹²⁵ Nick Rees-Roberts, "Boys Keep Swinging: The Fashion Iconography of Hedi Slimane," in *Fashion Theory*, Vol.17, issue 1, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 8.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹²⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 12.

¹²⁸ Rees-Roberts, "Boys Keep Swinging," 13.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

more likely in women's clothing."¹³⁰ He was also known for ignoring the codes of "the body, the body's expected clothing" and this idea is also visible in Slimane's work as he goes beyond the boundaries of gender and what is deemed masculine or feminine.¹³¹ Next to David Bowie, Slimane was also inspired by the indie rock look where "Androgyny was expressed by men with long hair, thin bodies, and lack of muscular definition, taken as a statement against normative masculinity and femininity."¹³² Where the previous male body ideal was about gaining muscle mass and emulating the masculine mesomorph, this body ideal dictated that one should have no distinct signifiers that alluded to a masculine or feminine body.



Figure 11: Dior model walking in Slimane's Spring Summer 2002 Red/Boys Don't cry runway show (2002)



Figure 12: David Bowie in a pale blue suit during the Live at the Tower Philadelphia concert album (1974)



Figure 13: David Bowie as the Thin White Duke (1976)

THE GAY 'BEAR'

As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, I will include the gay bear in my analysis of the ideal male body. Generally, one might not think of a plus-size body as an ideal, as the general body norms in the West have taught us not to. Nevertheless, although quite niche, there was a moment in the early 2000s where the plus-size male body was glorified within fashion, this was again due to the influence of gay culture and fashion designer Walter van Beirendonck's inclusion of gay bears in his high fashion runway shows: *Wonder*.¹³³ The gay

¹³⁰ Shelton Waldrep, *Future Nostalgia: Performing David Bowie*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 58.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² B. Stern, *Sex in advertising: perspectives on the erotic appeal*, 220.

¹³³ Lulian Suman, "Scruffy Masculinities: Gay bear representations in the runways of Walter Van Beirendonck's Spring/Summer 2010 Wonder collection," in *Medienobservationen. Macht. Mode. Männer*, (2022), 1.

bear movement emerged in “big American cities such as San Francisco and New York.” During the 1980s, the bear was a counter reaction against the highly popular clone look with its portrayal of the ‘perfect’ body.¹³⁴ The gay bear was the opposite in the sense that he did not have a ‘perfect’ body. The gay bear was often chubby or fat however he was still traditionally masculine and kept a clothing preference for flannels and denim shirts which reinforced the idea of masculinity (figure 14).¹³⁵

The bear movement started to find its feet in Europe during the 1990s and exactly 20 years later is when Walter van Beirendonck introduced the gay bear aesthetic to the world of high fashion. Not only was he the first and only designer to include gay bears in his runway shows, he also used the aesthetic of the gay bear as an inspiration for his clothing designs.¹³⁶ Specifically the *Wonder* runway shows which were held in San Francisco and Paris were ground breaking as they included plus-size men who had previously not been included within high fashion runway shows. “In a backstage interview in Paris, Van Beirendonck admitted that his casting was a statement towards the body politics of the fashion industry.”¹³⁷ “The idea was as a reaction to all the skinny models in the fashion world, to those girls with anorexia. I wanted to put on the catwalk these big men with beards.”¹³⁸

Van Beirendonck's glorification of what could be considered as the plus-size male body reinforces Bordo's notion of culture's influence on the body. It shows that even specific niches within a culture can influence the way that one perceives a certain body. Where the gay bear's body might not have been seen as an ideal in the mainstream culture there was still a small area within culture where this body was not only visible but also glorified. The portrayals of the bears on the catwalk were radical and unapologetic, plus-size men with large hairy bodies walked the runway in their underwear (figure 15). This was a drastic change compared to the slender Slimane models that dominated the runways in the early 2000s. Therefore, it can be said that Walter van Beirendonck paved the way for body inclusivity amongst plus-size male models in high fashion runway shows.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Eric Manley, Heidi Levitt, Chad Mosher, “Understanding the Bear Movement in Gay Male Culture,” in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 53, issue 4 (2007), 90.

¹³⁶ Suman, “Scruffy Masculinities,” 3.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁸ Beth Hughes, Sylvia Rubin, “Hip Belgian Designer Brightens BAMscape,” *SFGate*, June 1st, 2010, <https://www.sfgate.com/living/article/Hip-Belgian-designer-brightens-BAMscape-3262669.php>.



Figure 14: Cover of Bear Magazine No. 21 (1992)



Figure 15: Bear model during the Spring / Summer 2010 Wonder runway show in San Francisco

When looking at the representation of the general ideal male body throughout this chapter, one can conclude that almost each male body ideal has influenced the one that came after it, they have resembled the classical body ideal of the Greek but also the body of the gay clone. However, it cannot be ignored that all the body ideals mentioned throughout this chapter were highly rooted in whiteness. This is due to the fact that I have been studying the ideal male body from a Western perspective as a way to delimit the scope of this research. However, it is important to highlight that these body ideals could have differed for men in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, the fact that the ideal male body of the West has been remarkably white can also tell us something about the ways in which other races have been excluded from it. Finally, it also explains why ideal bodies in the West are still highly rooted in whiteness.

2) THE INCLUSION OF PLUS-SIZE MEN IN HIGH FASHION

In this chapter I will present and discuss the findings from the visual analysis which will help to examine how plus-size men are currently being included in high fashion runway shows. However, before this I will continue where I ended the first chapter. I explained how Walter Van Beirendonck was the first designer to include plus-size male models in his 2010 Wonder runway shows. Exactly ten years after this is when Rihanna included plus-size men in her 2020 fashion show for her brand Savage X Fenty. This could have been the second push that fashion needed to start including plus-size men however, three years have passed since Rihanna's fashion show and significant change is yet to come.¹³⁹ The discussion about the inclusion of plus-size men in fashion has gained some prominence this year as influencers and male plus-size models like Silvano and James Corbin are using their social media platforms to speak up about the lack of inclusion of plus-size male models in high fashion runway shows.¹⁴⁰ To add to this a variety of articles have been dedicated to this topic yet, to my knowledge there has not been a visual analysis of the plus-size men that are being included within high fashion runway shows.¹⁴¹ Hence why, my aim is to document this.

PLUS-SIZE MEN ON THE RUNWAY

As mentioned within the introduction of this thesis the 8 brands that will be included within this visual analysis are: TommyNow, S.S Daley, LGN (Louis Gabriel Nouchi), Doublet, KidSuper,

¹³⁹ Christopher Rosa, "In Rihanna's World, Plus-Size People Aren't Just Welcomed. They're Worshipped," Accessed October 02 2020

<https://www.glamour.com/story/rihanna-savage-fenty-2020-show-plus-size>.

¹⁴⁰ James Corbin, (@corbincaptures), "representation in menswear fashion. from my heart," Instagram, Accessed February 01 2023.

Silvano Coltro, (@sl.vno), "Hi everyone I realized one of my dream please go read my article and share," February 02 202.

¹⁴¹ Silvano Coltro, Hugo Compain, "Je suis mannequin homme plus size et je vous explique pourquoi l'industrie doit changer," *Vogue France*, Accessed May 01 2023,

<https://www.vogue.fr/news/article/mannequin-homme-plus-size-absent-fashion-week-paris-silvano-coltro>.

Carmen Bellot, "Meet the Plus-Size Models and Influencers Shaking Up Menswear," *Esquire*, Accessed May 01 2023, <https://www.esquire.com/uk/style/fashion/a42799451/plus-size-menswear/>.

Dominic Cadogan, "Where are all the plus-size femme-presenting male models?" *Dazed*, Accessed May 01 2023, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/59686/1/where-are-all-the-plus-size-femme-presenting-male-models-sam-smith-harry-styles>.

Études, Casablanca and Magliano).¹⁴² The starting point of this visual analysis is the Spring/Summer 2018 season however, none of the aforementioned brands included plus-size male models in their shows during this time. This changed in the following season as the Italian brand Magliano was the first and only one to include a plus-size male model in their 2018 Autumn/Winter runway show, the plus-size model walked amongst a group of 21 straight-size models (figure 16). This could have been the start of the inclusion of plus-size male models in high fashion however, no brands followed in the Spring/Summer 2019 runway shows. It took six more months before the French brand Casablanca included a plus-size male model in their debut fashion show of the Autumn/Winter 2019 season, the model walked amongst a group of 50 straight sized models (figure 17). After this the number of brands that included plus-size men stayed the same, American brand TommyNow included plus-size male models in their Spring/Summer 2020 runway show. There was a total of 7 plus-size models in TommyNow's runway show, 2 of them were plus-size men and the remaining were plus-size women, this was in relation to 74 straight-size models (figure 18, 19).

Despite the Covid pandemic that started in 2020 all the brands except for French brand LGN (who had not started showing their collections yet) found another way to present their collections, however French brand Doublet and American brand KidSuper were the only one to include plus-size male models in their Fall/Winter 2020 runway shows. Doublet included 1 plus-size male model and Newcomer KidSuper included a total of 2 plus-size male models in their first ever runway show, which had a total of 39 straight-size models walking in it (figure 20-22). In the following Autumn/Winter season of 2021, KidSuper was the only brand to include 4 plus-size male models in their runway show (figure 23-26). In the following season KidSuper, Doublet and Magliano included plus-size male models in their Spring/Summer 2022 runway shows. KidSuper included 6 male plus-size models and this was in contrast to 3 plus-size female models and 22 straight-sized models (figure 27-32). Whereas Doublet and Magliano included 1 male plus-size model (figure 33, 34).

The inclusion of plus-size men went up in the Autumn/Winter 2022 runway shows since 5 out of the 8 brands included plus-size male models. TommyNow included 2 plus-size male models (figure 35, 36). Doublet included 1 plus-size model (however all the models wore masks in this show and therefore it cannot be said if the model was a man or a woman), Études and Magliano included 1 plus-size male model (figure 37, 38) and KidSuper who has been the most inclusive in terms of including plus-size male models included 8 plus-size men in their show

¹⁴² See appendix for all the analysed images of the runway shows.

(figure 39-46). The runway shows of Spring/Summer 2023 showed a slight decline as 4 out of the 8 brands included plus-size male models. Doublet and Magliano included 1 plus-size male model in their runway shows (figure 47, 48). Furthermore, the London based S.S Daley and KidSuper included 2 plus-size male models in each of their shows (figure 49-52). The Autumn/Winter 2023 runway, which is the most recent one to date, shows a slight increase in inclusion as 5 out of the 8 brands included plus-size men in their show. S.S Daley and LGN included 2 plus-size male models in each of their shows (figure 53-56). KidSuper 2 (figure 57, 58) and Magliano and Doublet 1 (figure 59, 60).

When analysing the previously mentioned runway shows, I notice that in general all the shows are quite inclusive in terms of racial diversity, however it has to be noted that white models are still the majority on the runways also when it comes to the inclusion of plus-size male models, in total there are 21 white plus-size male models included in all the analysed runway shows. This is followed by 16 black plus-size male models, 3 Latino, 2 Asian and 3 Middle Eastern plus-size male models. Furthermore, KidSuper is the most inclusive when it comes to the inclusion of plus-size male models, and they are one of the few brands to include more than 2 models with a Latino or Middle Eastern background. However, just like most of the brands their inclusion of plus-size (male) models has decreased, especially when looking at their last 2 fashion shows. The limited inclusion of plus-size (male) models solidifies that straight-sized models are by far the norm in the analysed fashion shows and beyond. The amount of plus-size male or female models never exceeded the number of straight-sized models and during this analysis it becomes clear that in some shows such as the TommyNow fashion shows (which is a mix between menswear and womenswear) plus-size women are the majority in comparison to plus-size men. However, when compared to the number of straight-size female models, plus-size female models were a clear minority.

The total number of plus-size male models that were included in all the analysed runway shows between 2018-2023 is 45 and this is divided over 12 fashion shows from 8 different brands. The total inclusion of plus-size male models in this five-year period is generally less than the average amount of straight-sized models that are included in a single fashion show. To add to this, apart from KidSuper there were no brands that included more than 2 plus-size male models per show and the only 3 brands that were consistent in their inclusion of plus-size male models were: KidSuper, S.S Daley (in their last 2 shows) and Magliano, (which did exclude plus-size models in their Spring/Summer 2022 runway show). Therefore, it can be said that the inclusion of plus-size men in high fashion runway shows is certainly limited. Overall, there is a large gap of inclusion when it comes to models with body types that are different than the

usual straight sized models that we are used to seeing on the runway. This analysis reveals that major change still needs to happen and if we want to achieve equal inclusion of various bodies in fashion. According to Elizabeth Grosz one of the ways to do this is to;

Refuse singular models, models which are based on one type of body as the norm by which all others are judged. There is no one mode that is capable of representing the “human” in all its richness and variability. A plural, multiple field of possible body “types,” no one of which functions as the delegate or representative of the others, must be created, a “field” of body types—young and old, black and white, male and female, animal and human, inanimate and animate—which, in being recognized in their specificity, cannot take on the coercive role of singular norm or ideals for all the others.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 22.

3) PLUS-SIZE MEN ABOUT THE INCLUSION OF PLUS-SIZE MEN

As displayed in the outcome of the visual analysis the inclusion of plus-size men in fashion is still at its beginning stages. In this chapter I will present and analyse the findings from the interviews that were held with 4 plus-size men. I will combine the findings from the interviews with Foucault's concept of panopticism and in particular his notions of discipline and punishment. This will be used as a way to create a better understanding of how the experience of the interviewed participants is closely linked to fashion as a system or rather institution that exerts control over bodies. Furthermore, we gain an understanding of what happens when these bodies reach beyond the construct of this fashion system. Throughout this chapter, I will also refer to Butler's notion of gender performativity, and Grosz's concept of the body mind relation will be used as a way to reinforce the analysis. Lastly, a short conclusion will be given at the end of this chapter to reflect on how the findings from the visual analysis can be brought in relation to the findings from the interviews.

WHO ARE THE PARTICIPANTS?

The interview participants are Jayden, Fela, Göran and Nagesh (names are changed for anonymity purposes).

- 1) Jayden is a black British man in his early twenties, he has Caribbean and Kenyan roots and works both as a high fashion plus-size model and producer in television and radio.
- 2) Fela is in his mid-twenties and identifies as a black queer Dutch man with a Ghanaian background. He works as a fashion photographer and is highly involved within the queer fashion and ballroom scene in the Netherlands.¹⁴⁴
- 3) Göran is a straight white Swedish man in his late fifties. He has worked with computers throughout his adult life and is currently a software engineer who does not have a close affiliation with fashion.

¹⁴⁴ The Ballroom Scene is an African-American and Latino underground LGBTQ+ subculture that originated in New York City. The ballroom scene consists of events that mix performance, dance, lip-syncing, and modelling. Events are divided into various categories, and participants "walk" for prizes and trophies.

4) Nagesh is an Indian American man in his late twenties. He identifies as gay and studies law and works as a plus-size influencer. The main social media platform that he works with are TikTok and Instagram.

THE EXPLORED THEMES

WITHIN THE INTERVIEWS

Throughout the interviews the participants briefly express their opinions about the inclusion of plus-size male models in high fashion. However, mainly their experience as plus-size men are discussed in detail. When analysing the answers from the interviews it becomes clear that the inclusion of plus-size men in high fashion does not have the same significant influence on all interview participants. Where most of the participants are highly aware and somewhat influenced by the inclusion of plus-size male models in fashion, one of the participants mentions not to be influenced. The interviews reveal that the inclusion of plus-size male models in fashion has not become significant enough to influence the participants in their daily lives. Other factors such as their engagement with fashion, their relationships with their body and the way that they try to control their bodies play a larger role in their everyday lives. This is also reflected in the following common themes that emerged from the interviews: the hardships and pleasures of participating in fashion, the relationship with their bodies and the exertion of control on their body.

THE HARDSHIPS AND PLEASURES OF PARTICIPATING IN FASHION

According to the participants the first and foremost reason for not feeling included in fashion is due to the limited offer of clothes available to plus-size men, whether online or in physical stores. According to Jaden and Nagesh, the availability of clothing for plus-size men is mainly limited to a couple of fast fashion brands. Jaden mentions that plus-size fashion is mostly visible within the “high street rather than high fashion and high fashion is almost non-existent.”¹⁴⁵ He expresses the hardships of wanting to dress up in relation to not being able to purchase the clothes that he likes, by saying; “I feel like I've been robbed of an experience of shopping.” This also refers to him having to order his clothes online due to the lack of expanded sizes that are often not available in high street stores. Fela mentions that he shops at the same online store

¹⁴⁵ A commercial shopping street or store.

as Jaden, a web shop called ASOS.¹⁴⁶ However, he elaborates that some of the clothing in the plus-size range only go up to a size 4XL, which means that some of the clothes still do not fit him. He describes his process of online shopping as “It is always just order, try it on and take the package back to the post office and send it back.”¹⁴⁷ When brought into relation with Foucault’s terminology in reference to the panopticon, the lack of availability in sizes could be perceived as a discipline by the fashion industry. Foucault describes discipline as the “methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body,” when applied onto this situation the limited availability of expanded sizes can be seen as a way to try and control people into restricting their bodies to fit into the standard sizing system of the fashion industry and therefore, keeping up the ideal that a body should not go beyond these constraints.¹⁴⁸ The feeling of being robbed from an experience could then be related to what Foucault explains as punishment which he describes as “everything that is capable of making someone feel the offence that they have committed.”¹⁴⁹ This explains how the plus-size body is then punished for failing to stay within the restrictions of the fashion system. Unlike Jaden, Fela and Nagesh, Göran explains that he refrains from purchasing clothes online and mentions that he only shops at plus-size stores, he prefers to go there as it allows him to feel the texture of the fabric of the clothes. He explains that;

If the fabric is too soft and too thin, my men's breasts will show and it doesn't look good at all and I think that's part of the reason why I avoid online shopping. If I don't go there, I constantly get disappointed, if there are other stores that had my size, I would never go to a plus size store.

Another issue that is brought up by the participants is that they do not feel the freedom to express themselves through clothes as there are limited amounts of clothing available in their size, specifically the lack of “fun and expressive” clothes are mentioned. Göran explains this by saying;

I mean, today there are clothes for men that are like that, but they are expressed by, you know, hip hop guys. They can be very fat, you know, and have lots of colours

¹⁴⁶ Asos is a British fashion and cosmetic retailer.

¹⁴⁷ In Dutch: “Het is inderdaad gewoon altijd bestellen, passen en dan gewoon met het pakket naar het bezorgpunt gaan en dan weer terugsturen.”

¹⁴⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 129.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 168.

and if you are gay, certain gay communities where they you know, paint their hair in some colours and they have very colourful stuff. But ‘normal’ men, you have very strict categories. You have these men that really look good. They dress very good in suits and they can have this, you know, very manly clothes that I can't because I would just look like a penguin and then you have us that are just trying to find what's, what doesn't make you look that awful. So, there is not that room that you have for women, there is lots of flowers in the woman world. But of course, there is not for all as well I mean, it's of course, there is always those that are victims of what people expect.

Although this quote describes one experience, it can be brought into relation with what Entwistle explains as;

Bodies which do not conform, bodies which flout the conventions of their culture and go without the appropriate clothes are subversive of the most basic social codes and risk exclusion, scorn or ridicule,” and this relates back to the notion of being punished.¹⁵⁰

Creativity plays a big part in the reason why three out of four participants still feel the pleasure to engage with fashion. Jaden explains that he has had much more of a positive headspace since he has been working in fashion, as fashion has allowed him to confront himself.¹⁵¹ With confronting himself he alludes to his relationship with his body, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Fela describes his relationship with fashion as a love hate relationship. He uses fashion as an inspiration in his own work however, at the same time the hate comes from the frustration that he feels about the lack of representation in bodies. His answer uncovers a complicated duality as it reveals that although he enjoys the creativity that comes with fashion, it is still a system that excludes and punishes bodies like his own, therefore fashion keeps up the notion that bodies that are not represented are bodies that do not exist. For Nagesh, self-expression through fashion is a part of his livelihood as he uses his body, style and social media platform to inspire others by being plus-size whilst wearing ‘fabulous clothes.’¹⁵² He mentions that he

¹⁵⁰ Entwistle, *The fashioned body*, 36.

¹⁵¹ “I have a much positive headspace now since being in fashion. It's allowed me to confront myself.”

¹⁵² Expressive clothing such as romantic blouses and skirts.

often buys clothes from the women's section as there is more availability of expanded sizes and the options of fun clothes feel truer to the way that he wants to express himself. However, wearing skirts, corsets or blouses does not always come without criticism, his last social media post reached over two million views and about 90 percent of the comments were hateful comments about his outfit which consisted of a blouse and vest top. Nagesh said about this outfit "I have done so much worse." He goes on to explain that a lot of the comments said something about him being less than a man or asking, "is this guy gay" to which he responded "It's like I am gay, but that doesn't mean anything." This situation describes how the commenters did not seem to understand why Nagesh was not dressing and therefore acting in a way that they deemed appropriate for a man. Butler explains the confusion that arises when one does not 'perform' in accordance to their gender as;

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist' — that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender.¹⁵³

When applying this onto the situation that Nagesh describes above it can be said that the commenters' ideas around gender were highly linked to their perception, but also cultural ideas of traditional heteronormative expressions of masculinity. Therefore, they did not allow for other portrayals of self-expression that were not aligned with these ideas. Nagesh elaborates on the aforementioned situation by saying;

There is a large toxic masculinity that's been like, just like holding on to like all the growing boys especially, and if they don't learn it at a very young age it's going to be very difficult for them to grow out of it and many of them think it's okay to like talk and to have this kind of mindset, where it is not. It's very closed minded, it's not, it's not very opening to like the rest of the world, and to the real world. So, it's like you really, really have to expand on like men's education, I guess. Like the education of living and lifestyle like, for them to actually understand you know there is a lot more to the world than the small little minded mindset.

¹⁵³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 15.

In this part of the chapter, we can see that although the hardships and pleasures that these men describe are based on individual experiences, they are still related to more general issues such as highly gendered ideas around masculinity and dress, but also the lack of freedom to express oneself due to restricting practises which can also be seen as punishments by the fashion industry.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BODY

Now that we know how difficult it can be for plus-size men to find clothes that fit, it is not unimaginable to think that this might impact the way that they relate to their body. The relationship between fashion and the body is very intertwined, and as Entwistle explains “Fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies. It is the body that fashion speaks to and it is the body that must be dressed in almost all social encounters.”¹⁵⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising that the body emerges as a central topic throughout all interviews. To gain a better understanding of the participants relationships with their body the aim is to grasp how their relationship with their body evolved throughout the years. Hence why, the following interview question was posed: How would you describe your relationship with your body? Jaden was the first person to answer this question and he shared that;

So, when I was younger, I wasn't appreciative of myself at all even my skin tone being a dark-skinned black man. I didn't understand I thought it was, it wasn't a blessing. I thought that it was like I was the brunt of the pile, you know? And at school growing up, I used to hear a lot of negative things about the way that I looked and even though I did appear very confident, I was very, I internalized a lot of negative things about the way I saw myself and since being in fashion I've had to confront those things. Even though I thought I was confident, what am I hiding? What was I hiding behind and addressing these things and even though I'm a model now, even though I'm in fashion, even though people see me and I get to see myself in so many different ways, it's still about every day and just like everybody else everybody's not 100% confident every day. There's days you look at yourself and you're like, this could be better I wish I was like this and some days I have rubbish

¹⁵⁴ Entwistle, *The fashioned body*, 31.

days. I'm like, I don't feel my best self and I speak affirmations and I like, I have a much positive headspace now since being in fashion. It's allowed me to confront myself.

When Jayden speaks about feeling “like the brunt of the pile” his eyes look down at the floor and in that moment he appears vulnerable. He also speaks about being discriminated against for his skin-colour and this adds another layer to the experience of being plus-size because as LeBesco explains in *Bodies out of bounds*,

In terms of identity, the lived experience of fatness inhabits the same space as, and yet diverges from, other influential subject-marking experiences, such as the embodiment of race and sexuality.¹⁵⁵

Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that on top of being plus-size, men of colour have to deal with additional layers of discrimination that white plus-size men do not have to face. Kobena Mercer describes this mechanism in relation to masculinity in his book *Welcome to the jungle*. Here he explains how;

[...] black men subjectively internalize and incorporate aspects of the dominant definitions of masculinity in order to contest the conditions of dependency and powerlessness which racism and racial oppression enforce.¹⁵⁶

When applied onto plus-size bodies, it shows that even though all plus-size men can become subject to discrimination for their body, factors such as race or class can lead to a difference in the ways in which plus-size men of colour are perceived and treated. This also relates back to the first chapter of this thesis where men of the working class were judged for having the same body as men who belonged to the bourgeoisie.

Similar to Jayden, Fela and Nagesh also grew up with people voicing negative opinions about their body. Fela mentions that his classmates teased him or mentioned things about his weight and he rationalizes this by saying: “Probably because we would look at each other [the classmates] and think he [Fela] does not look like me.”¹⁵⁷ This shows that “bodies

¹⁵⁵ Evans, LeBesco, *Bodies out of bounds*, 80.

¹⁵⁶ Mercer, *Welcome to the jungle*, ch.5.

¹⁵⁷ In Dutch: “Waarschijnlijk omdat je dan naar elkaar kijkt en denkt hij ziet er niet uit zoals ik.”

speak, without necessarily talking because they become coded with and as signs.”¹⁵⁸ Here we can see that being plus-size is not something that one comes to deal with as an adult, even in childhood a larger body is seen as something that can be ridiculed and it shows how from a young age one learns to have negative thoughts and feelings towards plus-size bodies.

Henceforth, Fela goes on to explain that when growing up these comments did not really affect him because the changes in his body were quite gradual but when he grew up and started to see the physical reminders of his changing body such as clothes that no longer fit he started to think. “I don’t know what to do, and you start to think oh shit! I am getting heavier.”¹⁵⁹ He struggles to find his words as he says this and there is a slight hesitation in his body language, he leans back and then forth in his chair before proceeding to continue with his answer. In contrary to Fela, Nagesh was affected by the comments that other people made about his body. A significant incident that happened within his childhood had a lasting impact on the way that he started to view his body. He talks about this by saying;

And it's like, since then I was twelve, I didn't really have the best view of my body and that's when like the, that's when I like kind of split. I was like, okay, it's me and my body, I guess. I guess it's not one and it shouldn't have to be that way it's always one. You are your, you are your body. Yeah. The body is you. I'm like, ever since that time, it was like a little traumatizing, a little [laughs ironically] and it was just like, it made me grow up, grow up very like not insecure, but like just quiet. It was like, okay, I don't want to like put myself out there completely. But at the same time, I still had my mother's nature and what my mother taught me where it's like, I shouldn't hide myself completely and it was always like a battle to push, push. And like in middle school, it wasn't the best, and I was like dealing with bullying same thing, about my body and then it kind of grew me up to not have the best relationship. Yeah, and I was still big, even though I like took on not eating too much and like not taking care of myself completely with eating and like starving myself. I still grew up big. I was a big guy. So, it came to the acceptance of I’m a big guy and it shouldn’t define who I am and at the same time it doesn’t matter what other people say. That's kind of where like my relationship now is with my body, is

¹⁵⁸ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 35.

¹⁵⁹ In Dutch “Nou zo in het begin toen ik nog jong was had ik hier nog geen moeite mee omdat ik de veranderingen in mijn lichaam nog wel mee vielen. Maar toen ik ouder begon te worden en aankwam zag ik kleding die ik al een tijd niet meer heb aangehad en dan aandeed en merkte van oké het past niet meer en je weet niet wat je moet doen en dan zit je te denk van oh shit ik ben zwaarder aan het worden.”

like my body and I are one, it's nothing, nothing separate. I shouldn't be looking at it as it is something else. Um, so yeah, that's where I am now.

The relation between the body and the mind that Nagesh describes here is something that Grosz explains through Schilder's model of the conception of the body.¹⁶⁰ Grosz writes that "The body image, for him, is formed out of the various modes of contact the subject has with its environment through its actions in the world."¹⁶¹ She goes on to explain that "The image of the human body means the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves."¹⁶² This can explain why Nagesh started to view his body in a negative way after being bullied, he internalized the negative opinions about his body and as a way to deal with this he started to disassociate from his body by seeing it as a separate entity. This resulted into body-image disturbances that affected the ways in which he perceived and experienced his own body.¹⁶³ It also resulted into bad eating habits and as Bordo explains, this is not uncommon, "boys and girls when abused or shamed, often turn to their bodies in an attempt to establish a private domain in which a sense of control and self-esteem can be reestablished."¹⁶⁴

This punishing of oneself due to not being able to conform to what society deems as a 'regular' body also relates to the influence that discipline has on the body and how this turns bodies into what Foucault would describe as docile bodies. A docile body is a body that is under "uninterrupted, constant coercion" and supervision.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, partaking in a restricting diet became Nagesh his way of supervising and controlling his body. A commonality between Jaden, Fela and Nagesh is that they have been plus-size all their lives, Göran has not, he grew up very thin and started gradually gaining weight at fifteen. He says that the gradual increase in weight might be the reason why he did not realize that it was happening and could possibly be the reason why he never put a stop to it. He goes on to explain that "he did not realize the relation between his life, how he was eating and his weight." When answering the question about his relationship with his body he answers;

So, it's kind of but so, I have a very bad relation and I haven't accepted it [his body] and I struggle, always struggle with trying to find a way to lose weight because this

¹⁶⁰ Paul Ferdinand Schilder was a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and medical researcher that argued that body image should be studied from neurological, sociocultural, and psychological viewpoints.

¹⁶¹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 67.

¹⁶² Ibid., 68.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 70.

¹⁶⁴ Bordo, *The Male Body*, 57.

¹⁶⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 127.

is just not me. You have to go through some sorrows or what you say, there's some sadness things that you have to accept at some point and recently I had to start using braces to keep my pants up because I don't have anything to – with the ordinary belt, it just goes down and that's really, really hard to accept that you have to change the way you dress because of how you're built. So, I will never, never give up. [referring to weight loss].

The way that Göran describes his relationship with his body is similar to the way that Nagesh started looking at his body after the incident. Both of them describe how their body and their sense of self became two separate parts. However, Göran's disconnect was linked to his gradual weight gain which was harder to grasp as it was not instigated by outer influences but a process that was happening within his body. His answer shows that his body is something that he cannot come to terms with as it does not align with the view that he has of himself in his mind. This duality is described by Foucault as a disciplinary coercion as it “establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.”¹⁶⁶ In Göran's case this leads to a struggle with accepting his body for what it is whilst also feeling like it is something that he has to ‘fix’.

THE EXERTION OF CONTROL OVER THE BODY

Throughout this chapter there are brief mentions of the ways in which the participants have tried to reduce their body weight and, in most cases, this is instigated by negative comments that are made in response to the participants appearance. These incidents play a large part in understanding why the participants engage in restrictive diets or (consider to) participate in excessive exercising. The shared experiences show that words can cause harm and the emotional control that is exerted on the Participants' bodies both by themselves and others serve as an example of why plus-size people can be led to take such extreme physical measures. As previously mentioned, most of the participants went through bullying about their weight in their childhood and Nagesh shared a traumatic experience that affected the way that he viewed and treated his body. During his teenage years he used to be involved in multiple sports, he played baseball for thirteen years and “loved it” however, as school was becoming more demanding,

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 130.

he mentioned that his parents kept trying to convince him to pick golf over baseball. He explains that;

I never understood why and at the time, apparently the coaches [baseball coaches] had been like, I don't want to say harassing but berating my parents on like questions about my health, about what I'm eating and I never knew because they never came up to me. But until one point, one of the travel ball teams had pulled me to the side, it was three coaches and they had pulled me to the side and I was twelve. All the kids were practicing on another field and they were asking me, a twelve-year-old about what do you eat? Are you taking care of your health? You need to lose weight.

Grown adults confronted a twelve-year-old-child about his weight after they had already spoken to his parents. Therefore, it seems like the intervention was not purely intended to help Nagesh, other than shame him for his body size. When writing about institutions such as schools, workshops and army's, Foucault mentions that;

By the word punishment, one must understand everything that is capable of making children feel the offence they have committed, everything that is capable of humiliating them, of confusing them.¹⁶⁷

In the case of Nagesh the offence that was committed was being overweight and the only solution to this was then to punish the body into losing weight, which is why he began to starve himself. According to Bordo;

The attainment of an acceptable body is extremely difficult for those who do not come by it 'naturally'. Constant watchfulness over appetite and strenuous work on the body itself are required to conform to this ideal, while the most popular means of 'correction'—dieting—often insures its own failure.¹⁶⁸

This struggle is also visible in the following paragraph when Fela speaks about his experience with negative comments from family members. As an example, he describes the way that his mother speaks to him about his weight, "When are you going to exercise you are getting fatter

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 168.

¹⁶⁸ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 202.

and fatter.”¹⁶⁹ According to Fela this happens almost on a daily basis and often leaves him to think, “There are other words or sentences that are better options to use.”¹⁷⁰ He is tired of correcting her and the words do get to him at times and this results into self-doubt, he starts to think “Yes you are getting a bit bigger and bigger but at the same time I think no don’t do that because you don’t want other people’s opinion to influence your feelings about yourself.”¹⁷¹ This shows that the saying: *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me* is clearly untrue. According to Butler “power of language isn’t purely abstract, either; it enacts physical and material violence on bodies.”¹⁷² This shows, because although Fela seems very strong in his stance, he does mention the following;

But still, I am planning to start exercising but it is like the motivation is still not there. I am 25 and soon to be 26 in a years’ time and I do believe that there should be a moment where I have to change, but like when?¹⁷³

Whilst saying this his facial expression shows that he seems a bit tired about this ever happening. According to Foucault exercise assures, in the form of continuity and constraint, a growth, an observation, a qualification.¹⁷⁴ However, Fela fears that this qualification or rather approval that others might award him when he starts exercising, will not be the solution for him to achieve body acceptance. He gives an example of his friend who has recently lost a lot of weight and says;

He looks very good but he says that he still feels insecure, which makes him want to exercise more. Then I think okay I understand that it might still be complicated but then I also think but look at me, I get so much shit for the way that I look and you look good and you are still saying that you feel insecure.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ In Dutch: “Wanneer ga je trainen. Je bent dikker en dikker aan het worden.”

¹⁷⁰ In Dutch: “Je hebt toch wel andere woorden en zinnen die je het best kan gebruiken.”

¹⁷¹ In Dutch “Ja je bent wat zwaarder en zwaarder aan het worden. Maar dan denk ik ook weer van ja nee doe dat maar niet. Want ik wil niet dat andere mensen hun mening mijn gevoel over mezelf beïnvloed.”

¹⁷² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 116.

¹⁷³ In Dutch: “Maar ik ben dus alsnog wel van plan om te gaan sporten. Maar het is zo van de motivatie is er nog steeds niet. Ik ben 25 en word 26 over een jaar en ergens vind ik dat er een moment moet zijn waarop ik gewoon moet veranderen. Maar like when?”

¹⁷⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 151.

¹⁷⁵ In Dutch: “Hij ziet er gewoon helemaal goed uit. Maar hij zei wel een keertje dat hij zich nog steeds onzeker voelt. Waardoor hij meer gaat sporten. En dan denk ik ook van oké ik begrijp het wel, dat het nog wel lastig is. Maar aan de andere kant denk ik ook wel weer van ja maar kijk dan naar mij, ik krijg vaak shit over me heen en Jij ziet er wel goed uit en zegt nog steeds van ik voel me nog steeds onzeker.”

He also explains that as a plus-size person going to the gym can be quite a daunting experience as he fears that he will be judged. He mentions that as a plus-size person people tell you to go to the gym all the time but once you are there it does not feel like a safe space.¹⁷⁶ Going to the gym or tending to diets as a way to lose weight seems to be a commonality amongst the interviewed men, they use these practices not only as a way to lose weight but also to gain control over their health. When relating this to Foucault, these practices can be seen as what would be described as methods to control the body.¹⁷⁷ When speaking about health, weight and body acceptance, Göran who has struggled with his weight since his mid-teens mentions that;

I mean, I'm one of those that eats because of emotions and the bad thing about it is, I eat when I'm happy, I eat when I'm sad, I eat when I have anxiety, I eat when I'm bored. Every emotion is connected with eating. So, I have found the right way for me to lose weight and I even got to the place where my body is not complaining at all. But still, after three or four days, I start eating again because of the emotions. I actually once managed to go down 20 kilos in weight, and I could just stop taking my medication. So, I mean, there is a strong correlation between your health and your weight, unfortunately. But of course, there are people, I noticed that, I mean, some people seem to be built, their bodies seem to be built to handle the weight and others' bodies are not. So, I think it's very different. Some will not get the health problems, at least having some weight, but others will. So, it's very simplified to say that be as you like, and it's okay, and it's natural to be big.

As posed within the introduction of this thesis the inclusion of plus-size bodies is often questioned, or seen by some as a promotion of obesity. However, as shown by the recounts of the participants and especially Göran's aforementioned quote, (plus-size) people are more than aware of the health risks that can come with being plus-size. Therefore, I argue that when it comes to the context of fashion and the representation of plus-size bodies there should not be a concern for the promotion of obesity as we still live in a society where being plus-size is not seen as an ideal. As explained by Bordo "cultural attitudes toward the anorectic are ambivalent, however, reactions to the obese are not" and therefore, there is no such thing as the glorification

¹⁷⁶ "Ik heb ook weer die onzekerheden met wanneer je naar de sportschool gaat mensen je judgen omdat je dik bent en zo. Maar dan denk ik ook wel van ja ik doe dit allemaal voor de eerste keer dus judge mij niet of zo."

¹⁷⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 129-130.

of obesity.¹⁷⁸ What should be a cause for concern is the fact that plus-size men are generally being excluded from fashion. At the start of this chapter, I mention that the inclusion of plus-size men in high fashion is something that the interview participants are not influenced by in their daily lives, this makes sense since there is a lack of visibility of plus-size men in (high) fashion. This absence of visibility translates to the limited offer of clothing available for plus-size men and this has a significant influence on the participants day to day lives. Therefore, it can be said that the inclusion of plus-size men has to start on the runway as it will then trickle down to mainstream fashion and therefore expand the (size) restrictions that currently dominate the fashion industry.

¹⁷⁸ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 205.

4) THE IMPLICATIONS OF INCLUDING PLUS-SIZE MEN

Throughout the previous chapters we have seen how the limited inclusion of plus-size men in high fashion has evolved to become what it is today. As can be observed from the outcome of the visual analysis five out of the eight analysed brands included plus-size men in their most recent runway shows. Although, some progress has been made and the amount of included plus-size men has slightly gone up in recent years, there is still a dominance of straight sized models within the field of high-fashion. In order to understand why the inclusion of plus-size men has not progressed to a significant extent one has to examine the dynamics of the current field of fashion. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to use Bourdieu's analysis of the field of high fashion as an inspiration to create my own interpretation of the current field of fashion and to analyse why the inclusion of plus-size men is still behind. I will position the eight brands that were included within the visual analysis of chapter 2 and three additional brands: ASOS, Savage X Fenty and Walter van Beirendonck, which were previously mentioned within this thesis will also be included. However, the analysis will mainly focus on the following brands: KidSuper, ASOS, Savage X Fenty, Tommy Hilfiger and Walter van Beirendonck as they are the most significant players within the field. Analysing the current field of fashion in relation to the inclusion of plus-size men will reveal why plus-size men are barely being included. I will use the findings from the field and the previous chapters as a way to propose possibilities for the future of fashion. The latter will be presented within the second part of this chapter, which is also where the final findings from the interviews will be presented.

THE FIELD OF HIGH FASHION ACCORDING TO BOURDIEU

In order to establish the current field of fashion one has to understand the notion of the field as established by Bourdieu, he describes the field as, “an area, a playing field, a field of objective relations among individuals or institutions competing for the same stakes.”¹⁷⁹ This is the general description of a field however, when applied onto fashion one can define the area or playing field as the fashion industry and some of the individuals that make up this field are fashion

¹⁷⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Haute Couture and Haute Culture,” *Fashion Theory*, ed. Malcolm Barnard (London: Routledge, 2020), 47.

designers and consumers. Bourdieu explains that within the field of high fashion/haute couture the people with the highest influence are the designers, since they have the power to decide what is in and out of fashion. The established designers who possess the most power in the field are challenged by new designers whose aim is to gain a dominant position within the field. Therefore, the established designers use their dominant position and established heritage as a way to reinforce their influence, whilst new designers use opposite or subversive strategies to differentiate themselves from the established designers, as a way to break into the field.¹⁸⁰

THE CURRENT FIELD OF FASHION AND THE INCLUSION OF PLUS-SIZE MEN

In the article, *Critical insights into Bourdieu's sociology of culture*, scholar Agnès Rocamora argues that Bourdieu fails to include popular fashion (which could now be considered as fast fashion) within his analysis of the field of high fashion and therefore he does not “explore the many ways through which they “exist through each other.”¹⁸¹ Rocamora makes a valid point, especially when looking at the current landscape of fashion where fast fashion has become dominant. High fashion as well as fast fashion consumers are no longer restricted to a specific section of the field of fashion and therefore, I aim to analyse the contemporary field of fashion whilst including both high fashion and fast fashion brands as a way to examine their influence on one another in terms of including plus-size men.¹⁸² Furthermore, Rocamora explains that Bourdieu also fails to include the influence of consumers, she explains this by highlighting that Bourdieu does not include the influence of subcultures in fashion.¹⁸³ Hence why, I intend to include the consumer as an active player within the field. Throughout this thesis there have been many accounts where the field of fashion changed due to the influence of consumers who were parts of social movements or sub cultures, this proves that including the consumer in the current field of fashion is vital.

Bourdieu's sociology of the field of high fashion draws on the conceptual tools position, distinction, capital and struggle.¹⁸⁴ Thus I intend to use them to establish my

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Agnès Rocamora, “Fields of Fashion: Critical insights into Bourdieu's sociology of culture,” in *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 2, issue 3, (November, 2002), 354.

¹⁸² Ibid., 361.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 350.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

interpretation of the current field of fashion.¹⁸⁵ However, it is important to note that due to the scope of the general field of fashion I am not able to include all brands that have included plus-size men. Therefore, I delimit the scope to the 11 aforementioned brands and five of them will be analysed more thoroughly, as they are the most important players within my interpretation of the field.

POSITION

Every designer or fashion brand occupies a certain position within the field of fashion. The position that they occupy marks their significance within the field. Bourdieu explains that;

In a field (and this is the general law of fields), the occupiers of the dominant position, those who have the most specific capital, are opposed in a whole host of ways to the newcomers, the new entrants to the field, parvenus who do not possess much specific capital.¹⁸⁶

When positioning the eleven aforementioned brands it becomes clear that the current field of fashion is largely made out of newcomers. In this case, I will define newcomers as all the brands that were established after the year 2000, the reason for this is that they came up in a time where the internet and therefore digitalization of fashion was in full development.¹⁸⁷ The brands with the dominant position who I will refer to as the old-timers were all established in the midst of the 1980s, pre domination of the internet. The divide of the current field of fashion can be seen on (figure 61).¹⁸⁸ Here we can see that both of the old-timers which I consider as high fashion brands were established in the middle of the 1980s, ASOS which is the only online brand amongst the newcomers was established in the year 2000 furthermore, all the other newcomers which are mostly high fashion brands except for Savage X Fenty were established after 2010. Bourdieu defines those in the dominant position (the old-timers) as the ones who hold the highest degree of power, since they have the ability to “define objects as rare by means of their

¹⁸⁵ When mentioning the current field of fashion, I am referring to my interpretation of the field of fashion in relation to the eleven brands and the inclusion of plus-size men. Therefore, I am not referring to the general field of fashion.

¹⁸⁶ Bourdieu, “Haute Couture and Haute Culture,” 47.

¹⁸⁷ Science+Media Museum, “The origins of the internet in A short history of the internet,” *Science+Media Museum*, Accessed May 18 2023, <https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/short-history-internet#:~:text=Consequently%2C%20the%20number%20of%20websites,around%2010%20million%20global%20users.>

¹⁸⁸ See appendix.

signature, their label. ”¹⁸⁹ This also means that if unchallenged by the newcomers they can continue to govern and dictate what is in and out of fashion, and this can explain why the current paradigms within the field of fashion are structured in a specific way.

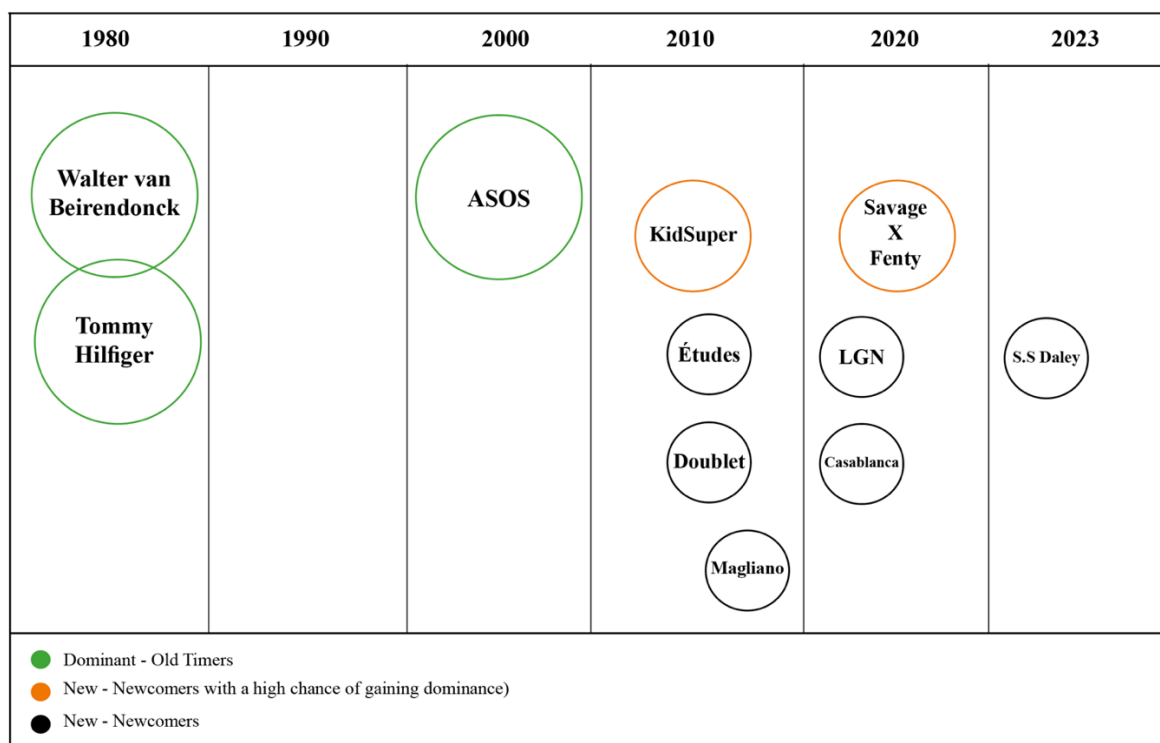


Figure 61: The current field of fashion in relation to the inclusion of plus-size men

However, before I move onto revealing the structures within the current field of fashion it is important to understand how it has been shaped by the influence of the old-timers. Therefore, I will look into how both Tommy Hilfiger and Walter Van Beirendonck have made their mark in the field of fashion through their fashion aesthetic. Additionally, Savage X Fenty, KidSuper and ASOS (newcomers) will also be included within this analysis as they emerged into the field of fashion in a distinct way.

¹⁸⁹ Rocamora, “Fields of Fashion,” 351.

DISTINCTION

In his book *Sociology in Question*, Bourdieu defines distinction as;

[...] those behaviours that distinguish themselves from what is common and vulgar, without any intention of distinction. They are the ones that consist in loving what has to be loved, or even 'discovering' it, at every moment, as if by accident.¹⁹⁰

When applied onto the field of fashion distinction can be brought into relation with the aesthetic of a designer or brand, or anything else that makes them stand out. To start I will analyse how Tommy Hilfiger and Walter van Beirendonck managed to gain their position within the field of fashion when they emerged in the midst of the 1980s. As mentioned within the first chapter of this thesis the 1980s marked the time where the concept of the New Man was at its height, I also mentioned that it was the time where Giorgio Armani's designs became the uniform of the New man. Four years after the aforementioned movie *American Gigolo*, is when Tommy Hilfiger emerged into the field of Fashion. His traditional all American design aesthetic was a stark contrast to Armani's clean and minimal designs. Next to this the middle of the 1980s is also when hip-hop music was starting to become mainstream.¹⁹¹ Many hip-hop artists were fond of Tommy Hilfiger's all-American sporty looks and started to wear his designs, mainly the Tommy Hilfiger jeans line was popular.¹⁹² The 1990s is when Hilfiger's designs were highly popularized by world famous hip-hop artists, and one could say that this is what helped newcomer Tommy Hilfiger to gain his position as a dominant player within the field of fashion (figure 62).¹⁹³

At around the same time in 1983 is when Belgian designer Walter van Beirendonck emerged into the field of fashion. This is three years after graduating from the Royal Arts Academy in Antwerp. Where Armani and Tommy Hilfiger were quite traditional in the sense they had a minimalistic or in the case of Hilfiger, a more traditional all American aesthetic, Walter van Beirendonck introduced bold colours, playful prints and especially his unapologetic

¹⁹⁰ Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1993), 14.

¹⁹¹ Aaron J Beach, "The Rise and Fall of Hip-Hop," Accessed May 18 2023, <http://aaronbeach.com/papers/hip-hop.pdf>.

¹⁹² One Block Down, "How TOMMY JEANS Established Itself as A Staple of Street Culture," One Block Down, Accessed May 22 2023, <https://eu.oneblockdown.it/blogs/archive/tommy-jeans-hilfiger-hip-hop-subculture-90s-rap-music-editorial-history>.

¹⁹³ Complex, "Top Gear: The Oral History of Hip-Hop's Love Affair With Tommy Hilfiger," *Complex*, Accessed May 18 2023, <https://www.complex.com/style/2016/08/tommy-hilfiger-hiphop-oral-history>.

gay aesthetic (figure 63).¹⁹⁴ Van Beirendonck's contribution to the field of fashion was different in the sense that it went against the general fashion aesthetic of that time, in Europe Japanese designers like Johji Yamamoto, Rei Kawakubo and Issey Miyake held the dominant positions within the field of fashion and therefore it could be said that his playful colourful signature made him stand out from the established designers within the field of fashion of the 1980s and 1990s (figure 64).¹⁹⁵ With both brands it can be said that they established their dominant positions by going against the grain however, this was always done with the support of a community, hip-hop artists in Hilfiger's case and the gay community in van Beirendonck's case. When reflecting back on Rocamora's critique on the fact that Bourdieu does not consider the power of consumers within his analysis of the field, examples like this show exactly why it is valuable to include consumers or in this case consumer/communities, as they can lead to a brand's success.



Figure 62: Rapper Sean Combs also known as P. Diddy (left), wearing Tommy Hilfiger and posing with Tommy Hilfiger (right), (1994)



Figure 63: Looks from Walter van Beirendonck's Cosmic Culture Clash collection, for Wild & Lethal Trash, fall (1994)



Figure 64: Issey Miyake Spring Summer collection (1992)

To bring this discussion to a more contemporary perspective I will use Rihanna's Savage X Fenty and High fashion streetwear brand KidSuper as an example of how newcomers establish or try to establish themselves within the current field of fashion. As mentioned within the second chapter of this thesis, Rihanna was one of the first people after Walter van Beirendonck

¹⁹⁴ Walter van Beirendonck, "Inspiration," *Walter van Beirendonck*, Accessed May 18 2023, <http://www.waltervanbeirendonck.com/HTML/home.html?/HTML/CV/cv.html&l>.

¹⁹⁵ Dorinne Kondo, "Through Western Eyes: Japanese Fashion in the 1980s," Accessed May 18 2023, https://www.kci.or.jp/en/research/dresstudy/pdf/D57_Kondo_e_Through_Western_Eyes.pdf.

to include plus-size men in her runway shows. This was ground breaking as to my knowledge no other major brands were doing this (figure 65). Plus-size women were already being included a bit more within the field of fashion however men were not, and by doing this Rihanna created and conquered her position within the field of fashion. I use the word created as it reflects back on what Bourdieu says about distinction being something that can be related to invention. In this case, the combination of Rihanna's status as an artist/fashion icon, and the inclusion of plus-size men in their underwear on the runway led to a reinvention of an already existing strategy as previously used by Walter van Beirendonck, and this led to her victory within the field of fashion.



Figure 65: Plus-size model Sououzz in the Savage X Fenty Vol. 2 runway show. (2020)

Another brand that has the potential to become a dominant player within the field of fashion is KidSuper. The outcome of the visual analysis in chapter 2 already revealed that KidSuper is the most inclusive when it comes to including plus-size men however, their current position within the field of fashion does not seem significant enough to dominate the old-timers within the current field of fashion. Nevertheless, that does not mean that one cannot learn from the way that they distinguish themselves from other brands. What differentiates KidSuper from the other newcomers, as well as old-timers, is that they mainly choose 'normal' people to model during their fashion shows.¹⁹⁶ This means that they include people who are not models, people of all sizes, heights and races are included and although there is still room for more inclusion they could be considered as the most authentic in their representation of people with various body shapes and sizes.

¹⁹⁶ Lily Templeton, "KidSuper Men's Fall 2023," Women's wear daily, Accessed May 18 2023, <https://wwd.com/runway/mens-fall-2023/paris/kidsuper/review/>.

One brand that completely differentiates themselves from the aforementioned brands is fast fashion brand ASOS. What makes them stand out is the fact that they solely operate online, therefore catering to a large group of people. Additionally they also have a wide selection of trendy clothes available in a wider size range than is usually available in high street stores.¹⁹⁷ Next to this their clothing is affordable as they operate according to a fast fashion model where the clothes are produced for relatively low costs.¹⁹⁸ During the interviews two of the participants mentioned that they shopped at ASOS, even if this was not always successful it was the only place where they felt that they had a high chance of finding clothes that would fit their body. Therefore, it can be said that ASOS has quite an important position not only within the field of fashion but also in the lives of people who purchase clothes in extended sizes. The brand has gained their position in the field by filling a gap that most brands with physical stores are currently not covering.

CAPITAL

In the previous paragraph I mentioned how Rihanna's influence as an artist and fashion icon helped her to establish a dominant position within the field of fashion. Her influence could also be seen as what Bourdieu would describe as capital. According to Bourdieu capital "consists essentially of familiarity with a certain milieu and of the quality conferred by the simple fact of belonging to it."¹⁹⁹ He explains in *Le Couturier et sa Griffe* that "The designers who left famous couture houses to create their own companies, such as Yves Saint Laurent, are endowed with an 'initial capital of specific authority.'"²⁰⁰ The same can be concluded in Rihanna's case however, Savage X Fenty is not the only brand that is led by someone with significant capital. Walter van Beirendonck who as previously mentioned graduated from the prestigious Royal Arts Academy in Antwerp, has a significant amount of capital as he belongs to the renowned *Antwerp six*.²⁰¹ Having a well-known person at the forefront of a brand can be beneficial when one is trying to gain their dominance within the field of fashion however, this is not always a possibility. Gaining fashion capital can also happen when one becomes an old-timer within the field of fashion. Here the duration of one's time at the top can lead to gaining symbolic capital

¹⁹⁷ They sell clothes in more than 30 sizes.

¹⁹⁸ The fast fashion model is problematic as it relies on cheap labour and exploitation of workers in developing countries. However, due to a limitation of space this discussion will not be included thoroughly within this thesis.

¹⁹⁹ Bourdieu, Delsaut, "Le couturier et sa griffe," 16.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ A group of six Belgian fashion designers who all graduated from The Royal academy of Antwerp and became successful immediately after.

and this is the case for brands such as Tommy Hilfiger who have almost gained status as an American heritage brand.

In the field of fashion (and beyond) capital equals power and dominance, and within my analysis of the current field of fashion, the brands who seem to have all the power are: Tommy Hilfiger, Walter van Beirendonck, Rihanna's Savage X Fenty and ASOS. The reason why Tommy Hilfiger and Walter van Beirendonck are mentioned is because they have been the longest standing dominant brands who have made different impacts within the field of fashion, the latter could also be said about Savage X Fenty and ASOS. However, when reflecting back on the idea that all these brands have included plus-size men on their runways or in the case of ASOS in their product offer, it still seems like the impact has not been significant enough to lead to radical change. The possible reasons for this will be discussed within the following paragraph, where the struggles within the field of fashion will be revealed as a way to understand the implications for including plus-size men in (high) fashion.

STRUGGLE

The struggles which take place within the field are about the monopoly of the legitimate violence (specific authority) which is characteristic of the field in question, which means, ultimately, the conservation or subversion of the structure of the distribution of the specific capital.²⁰²

Exactly, this reveals why it can be difficult for brands to not only gain their position within the field but also to create significant change once they become dominant players within the field, because if the rules are that one has to be distinctive, however still play by the rules, then how does one manage to create lasting change? As can be seen in the previous paragraph even the big players are not able to create the lasting change that is needed for the inclusion of plus-size men. However, it has to be mentioned that 2 out of three of them were not consistent with their inclusion of plus-size men in fashion shows.

From the findings of the visual analysis, we can see that Tommy Hilfiger included a total of 4 plus-size men in 2 fashion shows in the past 5 years. From the information that is available online, both on Walter van Beirendonck's own website and vogue runway, Walter van Beirendonck never included plus-size men in his shows again after the 2010 Wonder

²⁰² Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, 155.

fashion shows.²⁰³ Which is surprising considering the fact that he is known for his radical approach to fashion. Nevertheless, the newcomers have proven to be more consistent with their inclusion of plus-size men, even if it has only been for a short time. This still shows that there is a signal being communicated to the established players within the field. However, at this moment the newcomers do not have the dominance and therefore power to destabilise the field and this will prove to be difficult as long as the dominant players within the field of fashion only or mainly include straight sized models. It can be said that the ideal male bodies as presented in chapter 1 still seems to be the ideal male body of today, especially on the catwalk, and in order for this to change the rules of the field of fashion have to be reconstructed.

THE IMPLICATIONS

The reason why the inclusion of plus-size men has not become a normality is due to the fact that the field has been governed by rules that prescribe that;

[...] the precondition for entry to the field is recognition of the values at stake and therefore recognition of the limits not to be exceeded on pain of being excluded from the game.²⁰⁴

Which means that brands who choose to be radically different and, in this case, radical would mean including as many plus-size models as straight size models, risk being excluded from the field. To bring this back to the findings in the first chapter of this thesis and Foucault's notions of discipline and punish in the interview analysis of chapter 3, it becomes clear that fashion as a system or field has been constructed in a way where the inclusion of anybody who is not straight sized will be disciplined or punished. The hyper masculine body ideals as presented in chapter one of this thesis are still the male body ideals of today and this explains why the inclusion of plus-size men has not become the norm yet. The analysis of the dynamics of the field of fashion shows that if people are not willing to go against the system, and go as far as breaking it, this 'radical' change will not happen. Therefore, I argue that it is important to remember that every system was once constructed and this means that it can also be reconstructed. In reality the reconstruction of the current field of fashion would start in high fashion through the equal inclusion of plus-size men. This would then trickle down to other

²⁰³ Some videos and images between 2010 and 2011 were not visible as they did not play or appear.

²⁰⁴ Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, 48.

parts of society such as (social) media where the visibility of plus-size men would become normal and not just a way to portray them as part of fat jokes. Furthermore, if we truly want to accept the inclusion of plus-size but also other bodies that are often portrayed as the 'other' we will have to start with teaching our children not to look at them as something negative. Because, as Bourdieu once said "cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education."²⁰⁵ Lastly, the expansion of size ranges in high street stores would become the norm not only for women but also for men. As mentioned earlier this was one of the main hardships that the interview participants had to face in their daily lives and therefore, this change would make a significant impact in the way that plus-size people live their lives. When I asked the interview participants about their hopes for the field of fashion, they gave the following answers;

Jayden: It would be a normality to see different bodies, to see different body sizes on runways, in campaigns, in stores for buying and e-commerce, high fashion specifically I'm referring to.

Fela: There have to be more opportunities. More availability of clothing sizes and more plus-size people and especially plus-size men within the fashion world. Also, when it comes to advertising.²⁰⁶

Nagesh: I really hope social media starts getting more plus size men's advocacy and realizing there are different bodies and like body positivity accepting more plus size men.

Göran: If they open up that in the advertisement and how they promote clothes, of course, people's mind in general would change and that would benefit me, of course. Because if more people see this and more people dress like this, then I also can do it.

These final recounts show that it can be concluded that the inclusion of plus-size men in (high) fashion is of importance as it can lead to a more realistic and broader representation of what male bodies look like. Furthermore, it also shows how it would change the field of fashion into a place that is more inclusive for a larger group of people.

²⁰⁵ Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (Oxford: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1984), 26.

²⁰⁶ In Dutch: Er moeten meer mogelijkheden komen. Zoals meer maten als het gaat om kleding. En meer plus-size mensen en vooral plus-size mannen in de mode-industrie. Ook als het gaat om modellen in reclames.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction of this thesis, I shared a reflection of my experience as a plus-size woman growing up in a time where the fashion industry was not catering to people that looked like me. I also mentioned that through time this changed, as clothing companies slowly started to include wider size ranges for plus-size women. To this day I can say that this has had a lasting impact on me in the sense that I am now able to take part in fashion without having to question my body as regularly as I used to. Therefore, my experience with fashion has become much more positive however, as great as this has been for me, the inclusion of plus-size women and plus-size men has certainly not reached its full potential yet. This thesis has shown that especially plus-size men have been let down by the fashion industry, as they have been ignored and punished for not fitting into the boundaries that currently govern the fashion system. Additionally, to my knowledge the field of Fashion Studies has not questioned this issue to a significant extent yet and therefore the aim of this thesis was to include the plus-size male body within fashion research. My main concern when writing this thesis was to question the inclusion of plus-size men however, through the outcome of the research questions I have come to realize that the question of inclusion is highly linked to what in essence could be described as the quest for equality amongst straight sized models and plus-size models of all genders.

The first chapter of this thesis has shown that throughout history the male body ideal has gone through some changes however, apart from the Bourgeois men and the gay bears the inclusion of plus-size men has not been that prevalent. Additionally, the acceptance of plus-size male bodies as examined within this chapter has always been conditional. The bodies of the bourgeois men were only accepted because they had the social status to justify their bodies and the bears were only accepted since their community embraced them, outside of this community the ideal male body was still either hyper masculine and muscular or ultra-skinny which meant that most men were not able to resemble this.

Furthermore, we have also seen how the ideal male body was extremely white and therefore exclusive towards people from other races. The idea of whiteness as the standard was also visible in chapter 2 where I conducted a visual analysis of the plus-size models that are currently being included in high fashion runway shows. The analysis revealed that from all the plus-size men that were being included, plus-size white men were at the majority on the catwalk followed by black men, and other races were included to an even lesser extent. The total inclusion of plus-size men in the timespan of the 5 years that were analysed proofed to be rather poor as the total number of plus-size men failed to surpass the amount of straight size models

that are often included within a single fashion show. This alone reveals how (high) fashion brands have not managed to make a significant change towards inclusion of plus-size men and therefore, it can be said that plus-size (male) models and straight size models are not treated equally, at least not when it comes to their inclusion in high fashion runway shows.

Henceforth, the research in the third chapter also revealed that high fashion is not the only place where plus-size men are being treated unfairly. Throughout the three themes that occurred during the interviews it can be concluded that plus-size men also face inequalities when it comes to participating in fashion within their daily lives. Something as simple as purchasing clothes in a clothing store has proven to be a large inconvenience when those stores do not cater to plus-size people, and the lack of available clothing also led to the feeling of missing out on an experience that most people get to take for granted.

Additionally, we have come to learn that for some plus-size men, their relationship with their body is highly intertwined with how their environment treats them. The examples of the stories of the participants show that in most cases they started to view their body negatively due to opinions from others. This shows that as a society we do not accept plus-size bodies as a normality and therefore to go back to Foucauldian terms we feel the need to discipline and punish them. Whether if this is a self-imposed discipline due to the feeling of being othered or a punishment from people or institutions that disapprove of plus-size bodies. Furthermore, as discussed in the last chapter of this thesis the cause for the lack of inclusion can be linked to the current field of fashion and the way that it is constructed. My interpretation of the field of fashion revealed that there seems to be a disbalance between newcomers and old-timers, this prevents the fight or struggle for dominance. The brands that could be considered as most progressive in their inclusion of plus-size men are currently all newcomers and as has been discussed previously, the current field of fashion is structured in a way where the old-timers/dominant players have all the power to decide what direction the field will head into.

Although, it has to be acknowledged that both the old-timers and the newcomers have included some plus-size men within their fashion shows, this has not been enough. The inclusion has not been radical enough to restructure the paradigms of the field and the reasons for this can be linked to the inherent structure of the field, which puts a constraint on how far brands or companies can go when it comes to distinguishing themselves. However, as I argued within the final chapter, if no one is willing to push those boundaries to an extent where they will lead to real change, this change will simply not happen. Therefore, I encourage especially the newcomers who have shown to care about the inclusion of plus-size men, to become more radical and unapologetic in their inclusion of plus-size men. They can do this by not just

including 1 or 2 plus-size male models within their fashion shows, but an equal number of plus-size male models as straight size male models. If all the newcomers worked together it would send a clear signal to the old-timers within the field and this could possibly lead to the disruption that is highly needed within the general field of fashion.

I argue that the inclusion of plus-size men on the runways will have a trickle-down effect into other areas of society. As mentioned by the interview participants there is a large need for representation of plus-size men in media and advertising as the current portrayals of plus-size men in these areas has been far from ideal. Furthermore, companies have to start acknowledging plus-size men as consumers, as they have bodies like everyone else which means that they need access to clothes that fit. That alone should be enough reason for brands to expand their size ranges. Finally, our general perception of plus-size people and the way that we treat plus-size bodies (in the West) needs to change. True change can only be achieved if everyone accepts that plus-size bodies do not exist to be ridiculed or criticised, and as mentioned previously this starts with educating people from a young age that fatness does not have to equate to the bad connotations that have been put onto it. If our views around fatness were to become more neutral it would be reflected in the way that plus-size bodies are treated, and this is what would create the lasting change towards equality that is needed.

As aforementioned the aim of this thesis is to contribute to the field of Fashion Studies by including the plus-size male body within the current scope of fashion research. Although this thesis has covered the way that plus-size men are currently being represented within high fashion, there is still a vast arena of research that has not been covered yet. The following topics that I was not able to cover within this thesis could lead to interesting research opportunities for the future: The inclusion of plus-size men in fast fashion, studying plus-size male bodies through history from a Western and international perspective, Availability of clothes for plus-size men, Sustainable fashion for plus-size men and the representation of plus-size men in fashion advertising. I highly recommend for these topics to be researched as they could be a great contribution to the field of Fashion Studies. Furthermore, I would like to conclude this thesis with the following statement;

“The lack of inclusion and equality of plus-size people is not just a fashion problem it is a social problem. Therefore, I encourage everyone who reads this thesis to become active in questioning their own biases towards plus-size people but also to

actively ensure that plus-size people are treated as equal to straight size people, whether if this is in fashion or beyond.”²⁰⁷

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²⁰⁷ Daniëlla Asare, 2023.

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APPENDIX

RUNWAY IMAGES

VISUAL ANALYSIS



Figure 16: Plus-size model in Magliano Autumn/winter 2018 runway show (Magliano, 2018)



Figure 17: Plus-size model in Casablanca Autumn/winter 2019 runway show (Casablanca, 2019)



Figure 18: Plus-size model in Tommy Now Spring/Summer 2020 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2020)



Figure 19: Plus-size model in Tommy Now Spring/Summer 2020 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2020)



Figure 20: Plus-size model in Doublet Autumn/Winter 2020 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2020)



Figure 21: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2020 runway show (KidSuper, 2020)



Figure 22: American rapper Action Bronson in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2020 runway show (KidSuper, 2020)



Figure 23: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2021 runway show (KidSuper, 2021)



Figure 24: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2021 runway show (KidSuper, 2021)



Figure 25: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2021 runway show (KidSuper, 2021)



Figure 26: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2021 runway show (KidSuper, 2021)



Figure 27: Plus-size model in KidSuper Spring/Summer 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 28: Plus-size model in KidSuper Spring/Summer 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 29: Plus-size model in KidSuper Spring/Summer 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 30: Plus-size model in KidSuper Spring/Summer 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 31: Plus-size model in KidSuper Spring/Summer 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 32: Plus-size model in KidSuper Spring/Summer 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 33: Plus-size model in Doublet Spring/Summer 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 34: Plus-size model in Magliano Spring/Summer 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 35: Plus-size model in Tommy Now Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 36: Plus-size model in Tommy Now Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 37: Plus-size model in Études' Autumn/Winter 2022 collection presentation (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 38: Plus-size model in Magliano's Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 39: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 40: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 41: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 42: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 43: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 44: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 45: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 46: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2022 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2022)



Figure 47: Plus-size model in Doublet Spring/Summer 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 48: Plus-size model in Magliano's Spring/Summer 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 49: Plus-size model in S.S Daley's Spring/Summer 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 50: Plus-size model in S.S Daley's Spring/Summer 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 51: American Comedian Kenan Thompson in KidSuper Spring/Summer 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 52: Plus-size model in KidSuper Spring/Summer 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 53: Plus-size model in S.S Daley Autumn/Winter 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 54: Plus-size model in S.S Daley Autumn/Winter 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 55: Plus-size model in LGN Autumn/Winter 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 56: Plus-size model in LGN Autumn/Winter 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 57: Plus-size model in LGN Autumn/Winter 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 58: Plus-size model in KidSuper Autumn/Winter 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 59: Plus-size model in Magliano Autumn/Winter 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)



Figure 60: Plus-size model in Doublet Autumn/Winter 2023 runway show (Vogue Runway, 2023)

APPENDIX 2.

MAIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Opening question

How do you feel about the term plus-size, do you identify with it?

1. Questions about your relationship with fashion

How would you describe your relationship with fashion?

How was your experience with fashion growing up and what is it like now?

2. Questions about your relationship with your body

How would you describe your relationship with your body?

How has fashion influenced your relationship with your body?

3. Questions about thoughts on the industry

What is your perception of plus-size fashion?

What do you think about the representation of plus-size men in fashion?

How do you feel about the tokenism of plus-size bodies within fashion?

What are your hopes for the fashion industry and especially in relation to plus-size fashion?

APPENDIX 3.

ADJUSTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GÖRAN

Opening question

Are you familiar with the term plus-size and do you identify with it?

1. Questions about your relationship with clothes

How do you feel about buying clothes?

How was your experience with this when growing up?

2. Questions about your relationship with your body

How would you describe your relationship with your body?

3. Question about thoughts on fashion

What should clothing companies change to improve your experience with buying clothes?

APPENDIX 4.

ADJUSTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS JAYDEN

Opening question

How did you get into modelling?

How do you feel about being one of few plus-size, male models in the industry?

How do you feel about the term plus-size, do you identify with it?

1. Questions about your relationship with fashion

How would you describe your relationship with fashion?

How was your experience with fashion growing up and what is it like now?

2. Questions about your relationship with your body

How would you describe your relationship with your body?

How has fashion influenced your relationship with your body?

3. Questions about thoughts on the industry

What is your perception of plus-size fashion?

What do you think about the representation of plus-size men in fashion?

How do you feel about the tokenism of plus-size bodies within fashion?

What are your hopes for the fashion industry and especially in relation to plus size fashion?

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