

**“Am I What I Wear?” An Illustration of
Communication and Identity Construct through the
Lens of Fashion**

Opeyemi Venessa Adegbenro

Submitted to the
Institute of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Communication and Media Studies

Eastern Mediterranean University
January 2023
Gazimağusa, North Cyprus

Approval of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research

Prof. Dr. Ali Hakan Ulusoy
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication and Media Studies.

Prof. Dr. Senih Çavuşoğlu
Dean, Faculty of Communication and
Media Studies

We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication and Media Studies.

Dr. Canan Salih
Co-Supervisor

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aysu Arsoy
Supervisor

Examining Committee

1. Prof. Dr. Metin Erosy

2. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aysu Arsoy

3. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sevilay Ulaş

ABSTRACT

The language of ‘identity’ has different forms of representation, through what we wear, what we do and how we act. In the society we live in, what we wear seems to create an idea of who we are or how we are addressed, as people will say “dress to be addressed”. In this paper we will focus primarily on women’s fashion. Fashion as a practice in media has a way of representing women in different forms, either as an idealized form of representation of the ‘beauty standard’ or the basic representation of a ‘regular’ woman. Although there are different identities and representations of women, this study seeks to find out how women create their own identity with the use of communication through the lens of fashion. The study would be conducted using a mixed method approach, both qualitative and quantitative, to understand how women communicate who they are, how this influences how they feel they are perceived or addressed, how this has created a construct on their identity, and how they represent themselves. The study uses an ethnological scope for 1-2-1 interviews of 10 women from different cultures, religions and backgrounds, with the use of interviews, focus group discussion and questionnaires for data analysis.

This study’s main aim is to understand and analyse the depth in which society, culture, and religion and media representation has influenced women’s their identity construct and how this is being communicated.

Keywords: Media Representation, Beauty Standards, Identity Construct, Fashion Illustration, Body Inclusivity, Cultural and Gender Performativity

ÖZ

'Kimlik' dili, ne giydiğimiz, ne yaptığımız ve nasıl davrandığımız aracılığıyla farklı temsil biçimlerine sahiptir. İçinde yaşadığımız toplumda, giydiklerimiz kim olduğumuz veya nasıl hitap edildiğimiz hakkında bir fikir veriyor gibi görünüyor, çünkü insanlar “muhatap olmak için giyin” diyecekler. Bu yazıda öncelikle kadın modasına odaklanacağız. Medyada bir uygulama olarak moda, kadınları farklı biçimlerde temsil etmenin bir yolunu buluyor; ya "güzellik standardı"nın idealize edilmiş bir temsil biçimi ya da "sıradan" bir kadının temel temsili. Kadınların farklı kimlikleri ve temsilleri olsa da bu çalışma, moda merceğinden kadınların iletişim kullanımıyla kendi kimliklerini nasıl oluşturduklarını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, kadınların kim olduklarını nasıl ilettiklerini, bunun nasıl algılandıklarını veya ele alındıklarını nasıl etkilediğini, bunun kimlikleri üzerinde nasıl bir yapı oluşturduğunu ve nasıl iletişim kurduklarını anlamak için hem nitel hem de nicel bir karma yöntem yaklaşımı kullanılarak yürütülecektir. kendilerini temsil ederler. Çalışma, farklı kültürlerden, dinlerden ve geçmişlerden gelen 10 kadınla yapılan 1-2-1 görüşmeleri için etnolojik bir kapsam kullanıyor ve veri analizi için görüşmeler, odak grup tartışması ve anketler kullanıyor.

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, toplumun, kültürün, dinin ve medya temsiline kadınların kimlik inşalarını ne ölçüde etkilediğini ve bunun nasıl iletildiğini anlamak ve analiz etmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Medya Temsili, Güzellik Standartları, Kimlik İnşası, Moda İllüstrasyonu, Beden Kapsayıcılığı, Kültürel ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Performa

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to God for wisdom, inspiration and strength during this time, to my father Mr. Adetunji Adegbenro and my mother Mrs. Mode Gloria Adegbenro for always pushing me to be the best, and to all my family and friends who encourage me during the process. God Bless you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I will like to accord my gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aysu Arsoy and Dr. Canan Salih for their supervision, guidance and advice throughout the duration of this thesis and also for the knowledge gathered during this period as it set me up for my next phase in my career. I will like to thank the members of the graduate committee for their guidance and most especially their advice in making this thesis a success.

A huge thank you to God the Almighty for helping me through this processes and showing me that '*I can do all thing through Christ who is my strength*' (Philippians 4: 13 NKJ Bible). My thanks to my family and friends for their advice, inputs and assistance.

Finally, I will like to thank all the interview participants and those who answered the questionnaires if it wasn't for you all this won't have been a success. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ÖZ	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study.....	3
1.2 Motivation of the Study.....	5
1.3 Objectives of the Study	6
1.4 Research Problem.....	6
1.5 Research Questions	8
1.6 Research Methodology.....	9
1.7 Research Approach and Paradigms.....	9
1.7.1 Data Collection Methods	9
1.7.2 Data Analysis.....	10
1.7.3 Questionnaire and Interview Format	10
1.7.4 Interview Questions	12
1.8 Significance of the Study	13
1.9 Scope and Limitations	14
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	15
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 Fashion Consumption and Identity Construct.....	15

2.3 Body Discrimination in the Fashion Industry	18
2.4 Semiotic Representations of Clothing.....	24
2.5 Media Representation in Identity	27
2.6 Cultural Influence of Women’s Wear and Perception	30
2.7 Performativity of Gender and Culture through Fashion.....	32
3 METHODOLOGY	40
3.1 Introduction	40
3.2 Research Question.....	41
3.3 Sample Size	41
3.3 Research Design, Population and Data Collection.....	42
3.3.1 Questionnaire	43
3.3.2 Focus Group Discussion	45
3.3.3 One-To-One Interview.....	46
3.4 Limitations of the Study	47
3.5 Methods of Analysing Data.....	49
4 DATA ANALYSIS.....	50
4.1 Demographics.....	51
4.2 Interviews	63
4.2.1 Gender Performativity	64
4.2.2 Culture Performativity	66
4.2.3 Body Inclusivity and Beauty Standards.....	68
5 CONCLUSION	72
5.1 Findings	72
5.2 Summary of Methods Used.....	74
5.3 Summary of Findings	75

5.4 Conclusion.....	75
5.5 Future Recommendations.....	76
REFERENCES	77
APPENDICES	84
Appendix A: Interviews Transcription.....	85
Appendix B: Questionnaire	105
Appendix C: Interview Questions	108

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Questionnaire structure	11
Table 2: Questionnaire question; a statistical table including the responders' ages, sizes and nationalities	51

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure1: SHEIN online store XXL outfit ad and comments driven from the visual .	19
Figure 2: Michelle Elman, an author and life coach known on Instagram.	23
Figure 3: Lizzobeeating	23
Figure 4: Mynamaisjessamy	24
Figure 5: Women more appealing in the ads in contrast to men.....	26
Figure 6: The two masks of the Muslim doll	32
Figure 7: Heat Magazine October	38
Figure 8: Interview advert designed for participants.	42
Figure 9: Visuals used during the Focus group discussions	46
Figure 10: Questionnaire question; Does your clothing express your personality? ..	54
Figure 11: Does looking nice affect your level of confidence?	55
Figure 12: Do you follow trends or create your own style?.....	57
Figure 13: What kind of image do you want to create in other people's minds while choosing an attire?	58
Figure 14: Do you feel sexualized by the way you dress?.....	59
Figure 15: Does your religion affect the way you dress or value clothing?	60
Figure 16: Does a person's clothing influence your first impression of them?.....	61
Figure 17: When getting clothing that fit your style or choice of representation. How often do you find flattering attires?	63

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Identity is an expression of one's likes, dislikes, tastes and preferences. All these make up whom we are. Once in the construction process, identity seeks an outlet for expression and translates into the smallest parts of a person's daily life. One such outlet is fashion. Identity is constantly reinvented and remodelled by multiple factors and an individual's sense of fashion evolves in relation to this. Thus, though one spends his or her days carefully selecting specific outfits, colours and accessories, one tends to dismiss this activity as trivial and insignificant. From the moment a person selects an item of fashion over another, he or she communicates his or her identity. This is the foundation of Kate Bornstein's idea that 'as long as identities are important, fashion will continue to be important'. (Bornstein, 1995, p. 13).

Over decades, fashion has been used as a means of communication thereby creating predispositions as to the role one occupies in society. Clothing reflects rank, financial status, marital status, and class, religious and cultural preferences. In this atmosphere reigned subordination and identity was reduced to societal frames. One such frame was attributed to women. Margaret Jacobs (2008) argues that girls, no matter their cultural background, played with dolls by dressing them up with various accessories. 'Perhaps it is easy to feel a sense of kinship with these girls. Maybe we feel a fond nostalgia for our own childhood', she states (Jacobs, 2008, p. 321).

The love for fashion in many young girls bore from these games and evolved into a voice they are willing to let the world hear. Most dolls fit a certain standard pertaining to their physique, thus some girls may grow up thinking that is the ideal of beauty. The use of dolls in childhood plays affect a child's perception of body image and trigger a need for comparison in the child, between her body and that of the doll (Pedersen & Markee, 1991). It is vital to acknowledge that a person's choice of clothing does not depend solely on how he or she feels but also the society within which one lives.

The perception of one's body (body image), religion, culture, fashion trends and media representation of how one ought to look, are significant determinants of a person's fashion notebook. We consciously or unconsciously absorb elements of our surroundings and find ourselves wearing outfits either made or bought that do not necessarily reflect how we feel inside. However, fashion has also been used as an instrument of power and assertion by women who wish to defy the system and not only look good in outfits that flatter their form but equally feel good about what they see in the mirror. The silent message being passed across in any instance is part and parcel of an individual's identity construct.

According to Cara P. Doiron (2008), whether one is a 'fashion indifferent', an 'anti-fashionist', follows or ignores current trends, is creative with their style, has a relatively low amount of income spent on clothes or simply despises fashion, everyone dresses in a way that signifies something and thus willingly or not participates in the process of fashion (Doiron, 2018). Identity and fashion on a basic scale may not look related but from the lens of fashion a lot of our representation of what we wear portrays much of who we are. As Doiron (2018) points out above, fashion talks intentionally or

unintentionally. As a person, whatever you chose to wear speaks to something about who you are or who you want to become.

This study focuses primarily on women's fashions and how fashion as a practice is communication in different forms, how it represents women either as an idealized form of representation, that is the 'perfect' woman, or the basic representation of a 'regular' woman. Although there are different identities and representations of women, this research seeks to find out how women create and communicate their own identity through the lens of fashion.

The study will be conducted through a mixed method approach both qualitative and quantitative. The main aim is to understand and analyze the depth in which society, culture, and religion and media representation has influenced women's identity construct and how this is being communicated. The research uses an ethnological approach to collect data by studying a group of over 100 women from different cultures, religion and background, with a focus group discussion of 10 women as part of the practice based research approach. With the use of interviews to recruit and study participants, the study will be aiming to engage participants in designing their ideal representation, possibly in contrast with who they perceive themselves to be, in order to understand what their current identity is and how it has been constructed and communicated.

1.1 Background of the Study

Work, lunch, dinner or getting drinks with friends, amongst others, a woman is compelled to select several outfits at different moments of the day for different occasions. This is because the appealing windows of clothing stores succeed in capturing a woman's attention. The fashion industry is predominately saturated by

women's attire, which can be influenced by variation in cultures, religions, and trends, such as those revealed on fashion shows and runways, as well as, social media influencers, who also have great influence on the fashion industry. For example, it is not uncommon that 9 out of 10 stores on a busy fashion street propose women's wear. A woman is thus exposed to a variety of colours, styles and sizes.

In these stores every design and piece of clothing appeals to women differently. What a particular female may find attractive may differ from what may be appealing to her friend, based on personal preference, different cultural background, ideologies, and religion or otherwise. This study aims to understand the reasons behind the decision of what we wear, how this communicates a representation of who we are and how much influence media has on our decisions. As well, looking at how women have built their ideal personal style of identity over time. According to a blog post article titled 'Fashion and Identity' by Susan. B Kaiser, she states;

Identity is one of the most compelling and contentious concepts in the humanities and social sciences. Fashion becomes inextricably implicated in constructions and reconstructions of identity: how we represent the contradictions and ourselves in our everyday lives. Through appearance style (personal interpretations of, and resistances to, fashion), individuals announce who they are and who they hope to become. Moreover, they express who they do not want to be or become. (Susan B. Kaiser, Nov 2021).

From this, it could be argued that the way we choose to dress is not only based on where we are going or the occasion of that day (functional), but is also strongly influenced by one's personal preference which in turn reflects on our sense of identity. Fashion is said to be an indicator of whom we are, who we want to become and how we want to be addressed or seen. Different women from different backgrounds pick an outfit for an event differently. For example, when going to a wedding, depending on the culture a female Nigerian may decide to wear a 'nice' fitted handmade lace or

Ankara dress based on her cultural and social influence. An Indian female however may decide to wear a *Saree* or *Shalwar Kameez*, as per the dress code of the Indian tradition. However, observing a single cultural or traditional event, there is a noticeable disparity among various females, all with different senses of style and representation. These are women from the same culture but still different identities.

1.2 Motivation of the Study

This study seeks to find out how women create and communicate their identity through the lens of fashion. This study is driven by the need to understand how women's identities are constructed and influenced by several social, economic and media communication factors.

As a child you have zero control on what to wear. From when a child is born, the parents or care picks outfits according to gender, economic aesthetic or personal preferences. If the child is a boy, there is a tendency for the parents to dress him in blue, and a girl in pink. These are 'norms' already created by society that individuals subconsciously fit into. The toddler, on the other hand, gives indicators of what they are comfortable in but still have no control on what they wear. Looking at the stages of growing children, individuals realize that, as a child grows so too does the idea of who they want to look or feel like. Over time this is being structured by the prevailing cultural, religious, societal standards as well as family background.

In addition, as an adult, there seems to be a sense of control over how one portrays one's self but subconsciously this is an illusion of control due to the prevailing cultural, religious, societal standards, as well as family backgrounds, which has, over time,

influenced our personal representation. This is predominately projected in women's lives. According to the author Falah Gulzar (2019);

For a majority of women, their choice is a blend of what they find attractive and what their beliefs and cultures count as 'acceptable'. Likewise, most women are influenced by trends and what is considered 'in' when choosing their outfits and making their purchases. (Gulzar, 2019).

As a child evolves into a teen and eventually an adult, he or she is faced with the challenge of 'what to wear', 'what *not* to wear', and 'people's perception of one's self'. The task of understanding the factors that condition the formation of societal standards regarding fashion for women is a tedious one. As a result, a woman constantly needs to find a balance between her desired look, cultural ideals and societal standards.

This study seeks to critically analyze and understand how women portray their identities as a way of representing who they are or who they want to become, despite all the factors affecting them.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to have an in-depth insight of women's experiences that shaped their representation, identity and performativity in today's society. This study aims to answer some or all of the thesis questions with an understanding of the effects of societal construction and media representation and its influence on the identity of women and how this is expressed through fashion.

1.4 Research Problem

Understanding one's identity is important and a form of developing of one's self. Many women are influenced by what is saturated in the fashion industry and media, in particular western media where an idealized form and style is imposed upon a majority of women's sense of identity. Lauren Downing examines the overlooked market of

plus-size fashion and explores the ways in which the fashion industry neglects and marginalizes fat consumers', thereby creating a restriction on their minds and on what women in this category can wear (Peters, 2014).

Although the fashion industry is advancing in certain areas, such as Hijab fashion and aesthetics of Hijabi women's life style (Kavakci and Kraeplin, 2016), this study seeks to understand the basis behind these women's representation, how they communicate who they are, are they their ideological self, and if not, why not? Who determines the parameters?

Many women find themselves dressing more conservatively, not necessarily because of their religious beliefs or culture or to avert the male gaze, thereby using fashion and attire as a means of protection for women with and notions of gendered fashion. In the Film Theory 101 – Laura Mulvey: The Male Gaze Theory Blog Article, Racheal Sampson (2015) gave a summary of the idea behind the concept of the male gaze. 'The Male Gaze theory, in a nutshell, is where women in the media are viewed from the eyes of a heterosexual man, and that these women are represented as passive objects of male desire'. (Sampson, 2015).

Some of the interview questions would be seeking an insight on how culture religion media representation and beauty standards affects their daily representation. The questions include:

1. How much has social media tools and platforms influenced your purchase decision?
2. How well do you feel represented in media's representation of standards of beauty?

3. Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? Either yes or no, please, explain why?
4. Please list the three fashion brands that you buy your clothes from, in order of most to least, with the main one first, the second one next and the third at the end.
5. Which of the following channels do you use to find out about new trends and updates on fashion brands? Please arrange in order of importance, with the most important at the top and least important at the bottom; Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, You-Tube
6. Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?
7. How would you, or how do you feel when someone comments positively or negatively on the outfit you are wearing? Does it determine how you would represent yourself the next day?
8. Does your religion, culture, society or media representation affect the way you represent yourself?
9. Do you feel the need to perform different characters to suit in to the life expected of you by society, social media and or culture?

This study aims to understand how these factors influence women representations, to what extent and how this reflects on the construct of one's identity.

1.5 Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following critical questions;

1. What factors impact women's identity and representation via their clothing?

2. How do women use their clothing to express and represent themselves?
3. Despite these obstacles, how do women represent themselves?

1.6 Research Methodology

This study would be using a mixed research approach for data collection, with the aid of existing literature analyzing what has been said and using questionnaires, focus group discussion and 1-2-1 interviews to understand what is currently influencing in women daily representation.

1.7 Research Approach and Paradigms

With the use of a qualitative and quantitative research approaches, the objectives of this study are to gather data on how identities are constructed and communicated through fashion via interviews, focus group discussion and questionnaires.

1.7.1 Data Collection Methods

This data will be underpinned by theoretical framework and quantitative surveys. For the 1-2-1 interviews and focus group discussion in this study I will first conduct a pre-focus group discussion with women from different cultural backgrounds, such as Turkish, Middle Eastern, South African, Ethiopian and Nigerian women. This process is a means of stream lining women who are willing and open enough to take part in the research. At the end of the pre-interview process, up to 10 women from different cultural backgrounds will be selected to take part in the focus group workshops over a short period of time.

Within the focus group, the study aims to create a comfortable space for the participants to share their experiences and preferences without judgment. Depending on the participants, this study aims to protect and only disclose information approved by them. Through this process, the ideal outcome is to gain a stronger understanding

of each participants identity construct through fashion, how they are perceived through communication channels, and how they are influenced through communication channels. In the course of the P.B.R, the participants will take part in an elaborate visual representation of their identities through the practice of Fashion illustration, advertizing and marketing strategies.

Based on this understanding in the second stage of this study, all illustrations created from the focus group will be presented as part of the data collected.

1.7.2 Data Analysis

This will aid in the analysis, supported by observations and further interviews on what influenced each participant's illustration constructions. All the information gathered will be used to generate findings for this thesis research. This study analyzes interviews conducted with the focus group as well as surveys and polls conducted via social media.

1.7.3 Questionnaire and Interview Format

This section outlines the methods that should be followed while constructing a successful questionnaire, which is based from Malhotra's (2011) 10 phases in the questionnaire development. They include; Specifying the Information Needed, Types of Interviewing Methods, Individual Question Content, Decide the Questions' Structure, Choosing Question Wording, Determining the order of Questions, Form and Layout, Reproduce the Questionnaire, Pre-testing.

Following the preparation and design processes indicated in the preceding section, the questionnaire is separated into two parts. The first question was demographic in nature, inquiring about the respondent's age, clothing size, and background.

Table 1: Questionnaire structure

Questions (Part 2)	Source
Does your clothing express your personality?	Peters L.D (2014)
Does looking nice affect your level of confidence?	
Does looking nice affect your level of confidence?	
Does media representation of beauty and the culture of country you live in affect your purchase decision?	Ahuja M (2017)
Do you follow trend on social media or create our own style?	
What kind of image do you want to create in other people's mind while choosing an attire or dressing to an occasion?	
Do you feel sexualized by the way you dress?	Butler (1988)
Does your religion or worldview affect the way you dress or Value clothing?	
Does your religion or worldview affect the way you dress or Value clothing?	
Does a person's clothing influence your first impression of them?	
How much do you think the media representation of beauty and society you live in affects your style or representation?	
When getting clothing that fit your style or choice of representation, are they easily accessible or hard to find?	
If you're Plus-sized, how often do you find flattering attires?	
How would you describe your ideal representation in comparison with who you really are, if any	

1.7.4 Interview Questions

Interviews may be categorized in every qualitative study according to how they were conducted and the goals they were intended to achieve (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Depending on their format, interviews can be categorized as formal or informal. With the exception of the previous section, where interviews are grouped according to their formality, qualitative analysis likewise generally groups interviews based on their positions. Thus, organized, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews are the three most common types of interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

The structured and transparent questionnaire was used in this study, and the responder received an overview of the subject before beginning the questionnaire.

The research will also engage in a focus group to get the perspective of the respondents and the questions shall include;

- Can you tell me about yourself?
- How much has social media tools and platforms influence your purchase decision?
- How well do you feel represented in media representation of standard of beauty?
- Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why?
- Please list the three fashion brands that you buy your clothes from, in order of most to least, with the main one first, the second one next and the third at the end.

- Which of the following channels do you use to find out about new trends and updates on fashion brands? Please arrange in order of importance, with the most important at the top and least important at the bottom; Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, You-Tube
- Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?
- How would you, or how do you feel when someone comments positively or negatively on the outfit you are wearing? Does it determine how you would represent yourself the next day?

1.8 Significance of the Study

Fashion is one of the most important ways of expressing one's identity because it is full of signs, codes and meanings (Akdemir, 2018). The importance of this research is to find out to what extent fashion influences a woman's identity and how she expresses herself through fashion. Furthermore, to what extent communication and social factors affect women's fashion. There have been several studies on fashion and consumption in its relation to identity, which has been analysed from different points of view (Akdemir, 2018). There is, however a lack of studies that look at how fashion creates an identity construct.

This study will be analysing all aspects of the influence of fashion, such as the type of clothing available for people of different body types and if it restricts their expressions of themselves. It will also be looking at how we, as women, perform gender with the use of Judith Butler's notion of Gender Performativity (2018), with media influencing fashion and identity construct. It would also be looking at how women have used Fashion as a mean of protection in order to avoid abuse or victimization, as well as

how the nature of identity itself is political. With the use of Practice Based Research, this study will have a better understanding of the struggles women may face as well as how they have found ways of navigating around these challenges.

1.9 Scope and Limitations

Due to time limitation, this study will only have a small focus group of up to 10 women. This research understands that this focus group may not represent a macro group, however, this in no way undermines the validity and legitimacy of these women's experiences or expression. Nevertheless, this research will conduct surveys that aim to provide a wider reach of women through the use of social media to support the focus group data. The nature of this study however is predominantly qualitative and sensitive. With this factor in mind the focus group has to be manageable and as private as possible, to create a safe and comfortable environment for these women to express themselves.

This paper will be focusing on understanding the influence our society cultural background and media representation and standard of beauty, and how women construct their identity and communicate it, with the use of major themes such as gender and cultural performativity, theory of the male gaze, body discrimination in the fashion industry, fashion consumption and identity construct.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

As a person, appearance is a form of nonverbal communication which gives signal and cues of one's values lifestyle and personal preference. In other words, what we wear reflects whom we are, where we are going and how we want to be perceived. The different conversations that are had on fashion, body discrimination, feminism, consumption, identity construct and performativity theory will be analysed in this chapter (Butler, 1988). The chapter will be acknowledging these theories and how they create and design a message. Finally, following the summary of the chapter, a model will be proposed describing the connection between the theories.

2.2 Fashion Consumption and Identity Construct

As stated earlier, there are different forms of communication in the language of identity through what we wear, what we do and how we act. Looking through the lens of fashion, it is evident that people do not casually pick an attire, often it is a reflection of what they have seen either on social media by influencers, culture, society or over time, a mixture of all of these, which has been built as their form of representation and communication. It is definitely a different process for every individual but when analysing the subconscious, we find ourselves picking from similar styles with different colours or outfit type daily. In this pattern we all construct our identity, communicated in a subtle, but overtime very evident way. Even easy-going people

have a reason to put on a specific attire, which has over time been affected by different factors such as religion, culture, personal takes and sociological factors.

According to Vladimirova et al., (2021) fashion consumption ranges in three major phases; acquisition, use and disposal (K. Vladimirova, 2021). This study is looking at the *use phase* of attire and how the attires purchased are being used to communicate one's identity on a daily basis. Alison Lurie (2000) reiterates in her book '*The Language of Clothes*' the pertinence of clothing as an item of consumption by explaining that 'it provides a universal language of signs. A stranger communicates information about his sex, age, social class, occupation, ethnic origin, personality, opinions, tastes, sexual desires and current mood by the clothes he is wearing' (Lurie, 2000).

In the article "Hijab fashion: construction of femininity and identity of Muslim women in Indonesia" written by Yessy Hermawati, Aquarini Priyatna and Muhamad Adji the study argues on the impact of new media on the Hijab fashion and how it has become trendy. (Hermawati Yessy, 2016). Looking at this article, we can see how media representation has made wearing a Hijab more fashionable and feminine by creating a lifestyle from it. Although the Hijab fashion has been in existence in countries like Dubai and UK it has not always been accepted. Due to the growing influencers and awareness on social media, on the significance of the hijab and what it represents, the influencers communicate to their audiences how beautiful hijab fashion is. (Hermawati Yessy, 2016)

These social media influencers are now seen as role models and are reaching a large audience, with the help of social media. With this in mind, the acceptance of an outfit

or trend has a big influence on one's daily representation and communication through social media.

Fashion is a form of self-expression and growing number of Muslim women leads to the experimentation of blending modesty and attraction into their looks. This recent interest in Muslim fashion also signals the changing dynamics of the ever-increasing interaction among Eastern and Western cultures. (Zulkifli Abd. Latiff, 2013, p. 52).

This brings to question the role social media and women representation has on our identity, how they express and communicate them. With the strong influence of social media and influencers most people build their style from Instagram influencers or Pinterest for the trendiest style. With a simple search of 'best summer outfits 2022', you can find at least 100 styles 'inspirations. Although trends come and go and are mostly recycled, these social media influencers determined the trends in style. With the help of social media these trends go viral and are subconsciously imbedded in the mind of the viewers. According to Professor Albert Mehrabian's (2017) Communication Theory: Verbal, Non-Verbal and Body Language e-book;

'93% of all communication is nonverbal. Consider how we react to body language or why silent movies are so compelling despite the lack of verbal dialogue. What we see has a profound effect on what we do, how we feel, and who we are'. (Albert, 1972, ebook 2017).

Holland (2013) study also further contributes to this discussion, looking at identity and consumptions (Holland, 2013). In the study, there was an aspect that looked at the consumption of young girls, how they describe who they are, whom they want to be come and how this affects their consumptions.

'The researchers also uncovered a very interesting pattern of behaviour in the girl's story-telling. The girls all used the past and present in explaining their narrative of the self, but they additionally used a fictitious, desirable plot from their future. Not only did these girls dress for the person they believed themselves to be at present, but they actively constructed their wardrobes, or

envisioned the type of clothing they would buy, for the woman they hoped to become.’ (Holland, 2013, p. 19).

In the context of this article, it could be argued that most young women’s build their identity at an early point in their lives. Although this influence is subtle, they are eventually revealed as time goes on and the influence it has on one’s identity through fashion such as the current trends, the representation of women on media, role models and so on.

2.3 Body Discrimination in the Fashion Industry

While shopping on a clothing website there is also a picture of a model in the outfit of choice. In most situations these models are tall, slim, air brushed, and, in certain outlets, perhaps slightly curvy, with thick thighs and bust and a slim waist. Most of these representations do not necessarily look like the person about to purchase the outfit. The problem with this is that, these outlets, at most times, have size ranges that go up to XXL, but with no model to display this size. For instance, there was a post of an online store with a baffling image of the model posing with a bottle. This picture was from the online store called SHEIN. According to popular opinion Shein is mostly considered a plus sized platform. This post went viral and was posted on twitter, captioned ‘SHEIN y’all couldn’t find y’all a plus size model??????? Wtf is THIS?’ (See below).

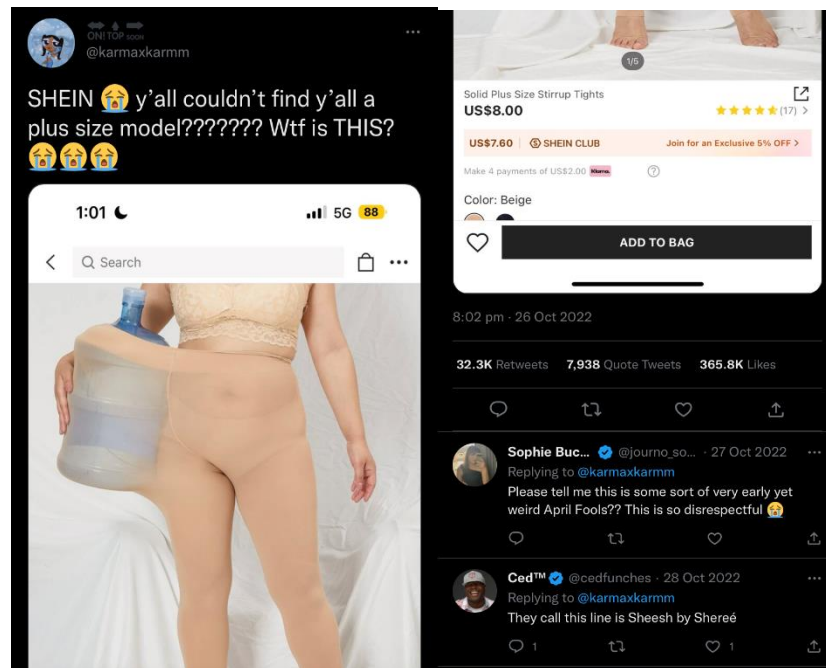


Figure1: SHEIN online store XXL outfit ad and comments driven from the visual

There are thousands of women who would easily fit perfectly into the tights without the outrageous use of a bottle, but due to the limited inclusivity of actual plus sized models, they resort to showing how stretchy this outfit can be, and there are many other instances of this misconduct. Although the fashion industry is trying to be more inclusive, this study finds most of their representation unrealistic. A lot of the models being displayed as plus sized are actually not. They are generally a size 12-16, which is more of an average size for women. According to Mona Ahuja (2017) in her blog post;

Plus size models represent everything that's wrong with the fashion industry and the beauty standards the industry sets, while pretending to be coated in the veneer of diversity and change. Fashion continues to promote extremely unhealthy beauty standards, and in fact, has made this all even worse by labelling women who are average size and weight as PLUS SIZE," says Swati Mehra, a New Delhi-based lifestyle writer. "It's like saying that 'normal' is size zero -- and women who conform to that size are considered regular models -- and anything a couple of sizes bigger is 'plus size', whereas in real life plus size models are just average size healthy women. I don't understand how people can be naive enough to think that this tag represents a form of progress in the fashion industry. (Ahuja, 2017).

The models used as plus sized are not in any way an actual representation of plus sized women, giving them no reference or representation in both the fashion and media industry. Lauren Downing Peters (2014) article '*You Are What You Wear: How Plus-Size Fashion Figures in Fat Identity Formation*' looks at plus-sized fashion or discrimination and its representation of plus-sized women, as well as the availability of clothing. Clothing that doesn't just fit but is also flattering. This can also be seen in Hanna Limatus's (2018) article 'Fat, Curvy or Plus-size? A corpus – linguistic approach to identity construction in plus-size fashion blog.' (Limatus, 2018).

In a clothing store there are different varieties of size charts, this includes the regular S-XL, the petite S-XL, tall S-XL and the plus sized section. In other words, for different body types, there are different size ranges. But in reality, there are hardly great numbers of options. A dress in the regular section of S-XL is often not seen in the plus size section and a majority of the clothing options are not as flattering as those in the regular section. This is because the fashion industry tends to create loose and shapeless, sometimes dark and glum dresses to make plus sized women look skinnier (Peters, 2014). Although over the years there have been a lot of improvements, the industry still lacks easy access to stylish clothing for plus sized women. This gives these women little or nothing to work with, making them turn to bespoke clothing.

In a case where two women need to get a dress for a wedding, the same colour and style but different sizes, there is a higher chance of them finding the same dress in a situation where they both wear the lower size range (size 6, 8, 10, 12). From size 14 upwards, it becomes difficult to find the exact same dress. This isn't because the styles no longer flatter their body but rather the fashion industry tends to create baggy and

dull coloured clothing for plus sized women in the attempt to make them look skinner (Peters, 2014). In this scenario, one of the females, if in the plus size range, would not find a dress identical to the other. This is because they are hardly any flattering clothes for plus sized people, and if there are, they are either really expensive or have to be ordered out of town.

In Peters (2014) three plus sized women were interviewed on their experiences, how they felt and how the experience affected how they dressed. One of the interviewed women stated that she realised how big she was, not from how she thought she looked, but from how it became hard to get the same type of clothes her friends wore. A lot of plus sized people are being told what to wear and what not to wear by the limitations from the fashion industry, thereby forcing them to dress a certain way, not necessarily because that is who they are but because what is either acceptable or available to buy.

A quote from one of the women in the article (Carine) expressed how she felt, and that being plus sized, the first instinct is to hide the body because that is what society has taught us. It's not flattering and doesn't fit the standards built by society. Carine stated in Peters (2014) blog post;

Here's the thing: for an entire lifetime, I've been conditioned to wear black, you know, because it's "slimming" and "flattering" ... Through a combination of boredom and sheer curiosity ... I've been forcing myself to step outside of my comfort zone more and more. It's not the first time I've stepped outside of my boundaries: I only recently decided to start wearing shorts ... [and] allowing myself to wear sleeveless clothes ... after fearing my arms for years (noticing a pattern, maybe? Things that people with my body type or similar are repeatedly told they cannot wear?). And slowly-but-surely, I'm starting to walk away from my all-black safety net. (Peters, 2014).

According to Peters (2014) the above quote was accompanied with a picture of her in a bright outfit which raises the issue of how dull in colours and shapes the plus sized section of a store tends to be. This source, however, has not since been possible to source and verify. How do these women create their own identity when they barely have the means to? Most of these women didn't just experience this at their adult age but since childhood. As growing children, a lot of chubby young girls do not fit in because the fashion industry does not have clothes to flatter their bodies. A lot of chubby girls grow up looking older than their ages because of the clothes created for their sizes. 'The point of capital 'F' fashion is to have a point of view, not to try to conform to an ideal or merely being content in covering oneself. It is about developing a conscious approach to the art of dressing. Oftentimes this means wearing things that might not be flattering but are fabulous nonetheless' (Carine in Peters 2014).

Nevertheless, with the raising growth of influencers and Instagram celebrities there is more of an awareness of the struggles plus sized women face on body discrimination and shaming, with examples of women like Melissa Vivane Jefferson, the musician popularly known as '@Lizzobeeating', Michelle Elman, an author and life coach known on Instagram as @MichelleElman, Jessamine Stanley, a yoga instructor known on Instagram as @mynameisjessamyn (see figure 2, figure 3 and figure 4).



Figure 2: Michelle Elman, an author and life coach known on Instagram.



Figure 3: Lizzobeeating
Melissa Viviane Jefferson, the musician popularly known as Lizzo

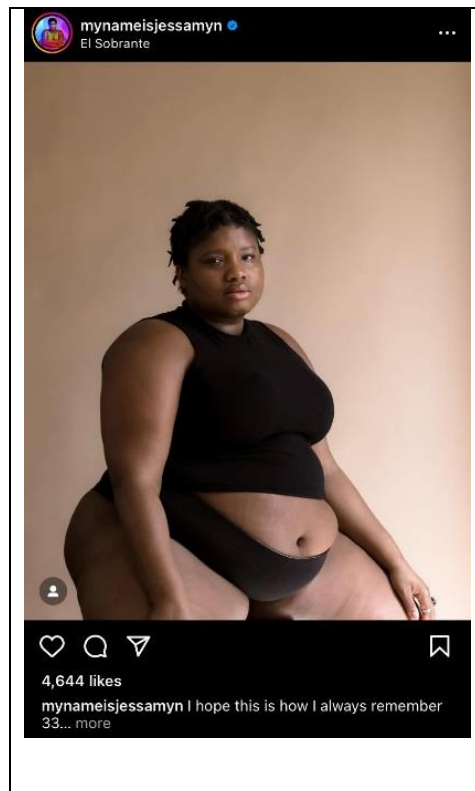


Figure 4: @mynameisjessamy
Jessamine Stanley, a yoga instructor known on Instagram.

The list of these influential women is unending. Although there is a huge improvement in the fashion industry and media representation, there is still a lot of work to be done.

2.4 Semiotic Representations of Clothing

According to Amani Abu Joudeh and Yousef Awad (2018) analysing the semiotic representation of a dress is looking at its relationship between the people wearing the dress and the type of dress being worn. It focuses on the different implications of the dress and shows how these authors have used dress deliberately to comment on important social and political issues in their homelands and/in diaspora (Joudeh & Awad, 2018).

In a fast-moving world fashion becomes a vital representation, an expression of either power or weakness. This is most common amongst females employing luxury fashion

to accentuate the sense of power and seemingly overturn the place they are attributed in society, - a place of weakness and subordination. Exclusive fashion houses such as Gucci, Luis Vuitton and Hermes are part of the strongest luxury brands in the world and act as monopolies in the fashion industry (Deloitte, 2021).

In her research thesis, Ordonez Asenjo (2014) asked the intriguing question: “How is power-dressing and consumption of high-end luxury fashion brands used by female executives/senior managers in an attempt to accentuate power as a part of their social identity?” (Ordonez Asenjo, 2014). She gives an illustration of the wit of a woman - Princess Grace - a symbolic move, which dominated feminist conversations for decades. ‘Over time, those images became part of the feminist discourse, loaded with the symbolic power of one woman on her way to the top through a myriad of men’. (Ordonez Asenjo, 2014). John C. Turner (2012) adds to the argument, stating that ‘Clothes and accessories constitute a cultural medium, specialised in shaping and communicating personal and social identity’ (Turner, 2012, pp. 486-504).

Mehreen Umar and Sarwet Rasul (2015) argued that female models are represented based on certain characteristics or ‘semiotic resources’ such as postures, dressing, gaze, attitude and so on. This is with the aim of representing the ‘sensuality’ of the modern Pakistani woman. In the ads the women expose parts of their bodies ‘to give a corporeal feel’ (Mehreen & Sarwet, 2015, p. 89) Clothes here play the role of sensual inhibitors to make the women more appealing in the ads. In contrast, the same brand for men presents the male figure in a non-sexualized way.



Figure 5: Women more appealing in the ads in contrast to men

According to a study, another significant area where clothing is a means of communication is in the field of business sales. Some argue that the success of a sales person is dependent, to an extent, on their clothing. This is because it is not only the product being sold that is being represented but also the image of the company as a whole (Stuart & Fuller, 1991). At the beginning of the study, Stuart *et al* (1991) point out that an exciting trend in the academic marketing and consumer studies is the emergence of a rich stream of research into the symbolic meaning of items of consumption and the communication aspects of products, that is, the semiotics of consumption. They illustrated in the research a model who was dressed and photographed as a salesman with 7 different outfits ranging from the most formal to the least formal, namely; three- piece suit, dark navy two- piece suit, medium grey two- piece suit, sports coat and slacks, a European look, a casual look and the tourist look. The study concluded that the 4 traditional outfits of the suits cumulated more positive characteristics such as conservative, high ambition, good salesman, and high product knowledge, friendly, optimistic and arrogant. It was equally concluded that

people tend to associate that with a large, good, ethical, high productive company. The casual looks did not encounter similar success. In the discussion, Stuart and Fuller (1991) argue that;

Based on a variety of evaluative dimensions, sales personnel are perceived quite differently depending on the clothes they wear. So long as the salesman wears the traditional “coat and tie” outfit, his clothing provides a positive sign for him individually and for the company he represents. However, far fewer positive meanings are communicated by outfits that vary substantially from what might be considered conventional. (Stuart & Fuller, 1991, p. 272).

From the articles analysed, one can assert that clothing is a significant tool in every field of life, such as a woman trying to establish an image of power in a defined environment, or, again, a salesman trying to cut a good deal. The symbolization created by clothing becomes so impactful that it creates a ‘spill-over’ into related areas, like the clothing of a salesman generating either a positive or negative image of himself and consequently the company for whom he works.

2.5 Media Representation in Identity

Public and private media take different forms and play several roles in the lives of millions of people. It is a medium of expression, discovery, fellowship and research. Media in the 21st century, to an extent, determine who we are either consciously or unconsciously, as reiterated below;

Media has the power to shape perspectives and ideas. Whether it is television, movies, cartoons and comics, or news media, these different forms of media can influence how we perceive others, and how we perceive and value ourselves. Representation of diverse racial and ethnic groups, and sexual and gender identities in media is critically important to more accurately reflect the communities we live in. Lack of, and insensitive, representation can not only perpetuate harmful stereotypes and discrimination, but marginalize identities even further. (Meda, 2022).

De Leeuw and Rydin (2007) studied the influence of media on migrant children in the context of the Children in Communication about Migration (CHICAM) project. In a

documentary, the children talk about themselves and how access to the Internet and private media helped them to re-create the identity and sense of belonging they lost when displaced from their homes. For example, in a Swedish club, two immigrant girls expressed that ‘if you are dark yourself, you prefer a dark person and that such a person is to be trusted’ (De Leeuw & Rydin, 2007). Here they compared ‘dark’ boys to ‘blonde’ boys (a common characteristic of Swedish boys).

Most of these children being native of African countries show a great sense of family, a particular commitment to black rap music, all indicators of cultural identity. Each of them made effective media tools to create a bridge between their past, their present and their future. In their conclusion, the researchers conclude that; ‘media turned out to be a useful expressive means capable of constructing notions of both individual and collective identities’ (De Leeuw & Rydin, 2007).

According to Zhang Lingling and Haller Beth, the representation of social minority groups in the media has an effect on the public’s perception of them and on the group’s perception of itself. In the case of disabled people, media representation of the disability community and disability issues is gap filled and for the most part unrealistic (Zhang & Haller, 2013).

Disability activists have argued that either they were generally excluded from representation in the media, or they were represented with negative stereotypes, which contributed to a misunderstanding of their lives and the social and political issues that affect them’ (Zhang & Haller, 2013, p. 324).

The negative stereotypes attributed to the disability community in the media create a sense of devaluation for disabled people. They might even ‘deny their disability status to avoid negative public judgements’ thus stirring up low self-esteem on their self-

identity. 'This indicates that mass media indeed can influence who we are and what we do' (Zhang & Haller, 2013, pp. 319-334). According to Annie Segarra in Dove (2022), proposals featuring people with disabilities are seen as an act of charity toward the individual with disabilities, and they focus on the 'goodness' of the able-bodied person performing the charitable act (Dove, 2022). Segarra (2022) states 'It almost invalidates the agency of the other person', of the concept of filming someone for a feel-good moment on the Internet. Filming people with disability doing normal things may seem cute and an achievement for them but not when they are being viewed through a pitiful lens. The trend of using people with a disability in movies has become a common sensation, used to gain sympathy from the audience rather than for genuinely compassionate reasons. This is exemplified in movies like *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*, Tiny Tim in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, and even news reports which describe people as 'victims' or 'sufferers' (Disability stereotypes in the media, n.d.)

Another form of media representation in identity can be seen in the popular media constructs of a new identity for women. Karen Moss, a gender journalist and researcher assert that;

Women in the modern period have gained a sense of 'new' femininity which the media depict as 'sexy', challenging the 'traditional' role attributed to men in society, 'for example...new forms of gendered identity... which sees women wearing conspicuous cleavage and bling to the office' (Ross, 2010, pp. 6-9).

This is perfectly represented by women's appropriation of the male sense of clothing and manners on one hand, and the adoption of a 'sassy, savage and sensual' style on the other. However, one may argue that the media representation of the 'new' woman creates limited frames for expression, assuming all women fit in one of the two

categories stated above. This has led to the hyper sexualisation of women on social media, with advertisement campaigns for all sorts of items and popular magazines. Women gain the identity of a 'sexual libertine' (Ross, 2010).

2.6 Cultural Influence of Women's Wear and Perception

Gayle Pitman (2008) argues that the 'ideals of beauty which are upheld in the mainstream culture' to which women have to abide, trigger body dissatisfaction and weight preoccupation (Pitman, 2008, pp. 49-64). The 8 women interviewed were all dissatisfied with their bodies and described them as 'too big', 'too fat', 'sluggish' and 'dumpy'. One woman stated;

I took a lot of dance classes, and have, on and off for the past 7 years. And I always am the fattest person in the class, and that's really hard, because dancers are really small people- very fit, very long, skinny, muscular bodies. (Pitman, 2008, pp. 49-64).

From the statement above one can understand that the culture in which we live promotes the glorification of thinness and this perception impacts on the self-esteem of women who do not fit into the body image ideal or the so to say 'beauty standard'. This was the most common issue pointed out from the interviews of the 8 women (Pitman, 2008). Though the research was limited to 8 women, the same issues are relevant to a lot of women all over the world. Women are always cautious of what they wear and how they look (Pitman, 2008).

It would, however, be unreasonable to assume that cultural influence solely plays a negative role in the lives of women and their perceptions. Yessy Hermawati, Aquarini Priyatna, Muhamad Adji (2016) described the hijab as a 'cultural artefact' for Muslim women. Borisoff, D. and Merrill, L (2003) argue that 'in western society, masculine norms often dictate acceptable fashion for women, such as tight clothing and high

heels, which physically confines women (Borisoff & Merrill, 2003). Women that decide to wear the hijab do so as a result of cultural and religious affiliations. This culture is a significant part of their lives. 'Indeed, Afghan women in the United States who veil describe the veil as a symbol of their religiosity and pride in their unique culture' (Daly, 2001) .

It is not easy to say that the acceptance of the hijab culture was a smooth process following 9/11, because most women, after the incident, could not wear their hijabs outside or they would be harassed as terrorists (Aziz, 2012). According to Aziz (2012);

Whether guilty by association through her marriage to a presumed terrorist or an active accomplice in secret plots to terrorize Americans, some head scarved Muslim women are perceived as incapable of developing their own beliefs and protestations. Instead, they are viewed as mere extensions of familial relationships with actual or presumed male terrorists. (Aziz, 2012, p. 1).

This built huge discrimination, but over time started to become acceptable, the issues with this are how it is seen as an achievement than a norm. The same way in which Indians wear their Saria, westerners wear their suits, Ghanaians are known for their Batik kata fabrics so should Muslim women be accepted for their Hijab culture. The stereotype of attributing Muslims as terrorists did not just take away their representation of what they stand for but also their legal rights of religious freedom, which gave them a back stand for a while until the representation of the hijab culture started becoming a trend on social media.

In 2002 Iranian twin dolls called Dara and Sara were introduced into the Iranian market, these dolls were created to represent traditional values and modesty, helping girls in their society understand that in the home they can be the ultimate fashion

statement yet still have an attractive attire while dressing modestly outside the home.

(Yaqin, 2007)



Figure 6: The two masks of the Muslim doll

This at the time was the only form of representation of this culture for growing girls.

With little or no representation of their values and culture, these dolls were the only thing that represented them in contrast to the regular Barbie dolls. In the article it stated that;

The Syrian doll, Fulla, on the other hand has a similar body type to Barbie and an equally expansive wardrobe. The most noticeable differences between Barbie and Fulla lie in their clothing, lifestyles, and hair colour. The dark-haired Fulla wears a full-length black abaya (thin all-enveloping cloak) that covers her from head to toe when she is outdoors, has a wide selection of headscarves and, most significantly, does not have a boyfriend. For the manager of a toy outlet in Damascus, Mohammed Sabbagh, “Fulla is one of us. She’s my sister, she’s my mother, and she’s, my wife. She’s all the traditional things of Syria and the Middle East.” (Yaqin, 2007).

2.7 Performativity of Gender and Culture through Fashion

It has already been established that fashion is a means of communication. There are different ways in which people may desire to express themselves but they are still influenced, to an extent, by their culture and societal ideals of gender. As a woman there are certain expectations that differ to men. This can be seen in religions such as Christianity and Islam. Christianity values modesty, they promote outfits that cover most sensual parts of the female body, looking good with a level of balance, without

exposing your body. Christians believe that the body is a temple of God, thus it should be treated with respect. (Ward, 2020)

Muslims, on the other hand, are more conservative, especially if you are a practicing Muslim. There is lot of emphases on clothing, covering of major body parts and the use of their religion (Hawting, 2000). The women, most especially, are required to use a hijab to cover several parts of their body, mostly their hair. (Hawting, 2000) Despite the different religions, they both believe in the right usage of clothing and the emphases is more on women than men. These factors go on to play a major role in how this representation is being read and perceived by the society you live in. As a woman in Iran, you have to live according to the religious and cultural norms in the society, regardless of your religion. This has a major influence on how you are addressed or even accepted in the society. This also in in play as a mother what you can wear and not wear is scrutinized by society, putting women in a difficult position on choice of representation.

To be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. (Butler, 1988, p. 523).

The islands of Vanuatu were yet another product of the colonial influence of the West. Decolonization saw the emergence of two core discourses dominating the way things are to be done in the nation, namely Christianity and traditional values referred to as '*kastom*' in Bismala (Brimacombe, 2016). Brimacombe (2016) examines the politics of tradition and the role it plays in the performance of gender inequality within the nation. She analyses the social drawback of this community by reviewing the works of significant authors (Brimacombe, 2016). For Jolly (1997), these discourses of

Christianity and *kastom* stand in contrast with modern values that are well known to Western countries. 'This has fostered tensions whereby *kastom* is equated with male domination, and 'modernity' with female liberation' (Brimacombe, 2016).

One issue where these sets of values clashes is the issue of women's clothing. The globalization of Western values is most relevant in fashion, with most of the world embracing their trends. The appropriate clothing adopted for women in Vanuatu was a loose, shapeless dress referred to as *kastom dres blong yumi*, meaning our traditional dress (Brimacombe, 2016). However, there was a backlash when young girls and women, especially in urban areas, are choosing to wear trousers rather than the traditional dress (Cummings, 2013). This reversal faced a great male opposition, arguing that trousers are 'exposing the contours of women's bodies, they are neither modest nor *kastom*' (Bolton, 2003, pp. 119-140). There was an attempt to institute a constitutional ban on trousers claiming that 'woman wearing trousers were responsible for inciting rape' (Brimacombe, 2016, pp. 17-33). In a society where men are traditionally and culturally given the upper hand, they are left to dictate the performance behaviours of women simply by lack of boundaries regarding their sexual behaviour. Culture in this case uses fashion to communicate gender inequality.

Clothing and fashion have been, since the beginning of time, clear indicators of culture and gender identity. For example, in the 1950's trousers were a clothing indicator of masculinity while women were expected to wear dresses and skirts (Akdemir, 2018). Men and women were culturally conditioned to perform in a certain behavioural pattern. Nihan Akdemir (2018) finds a sensibility in the queer community in regards to what is culturally acceptable and what they actually desire to wear. She describes the body as 'an organism in culture, a cultural artefact even'. (Akdemir, Visible

Expression of Social Identity: the Clothing and Fashion, 2018, pp. 1389-1397). It is generally acceptable that gender is socially constructed thus someone may be biologically born as a male but can feel like a woman. According to Akdemir (2018), nowadays a man is allowed to wear skirts, dresses, heels and 'this wearing style carries a sign about his gender identity' (Akdemir, 2018, pp. 1389-1397). Fashion is slowly deviating from what is traditionally known and becoming a medium of communication and revolutions, either social or political. Singer Maya (2017) explains that 'This gender-bending approach to fashion has begun to achieve critical mass in pop culture and on the catwalk, with Alessandro Michele dressing his Gucci girls in dandyish suits and his Gucci boys in floral and brocade' (Singer, 2017).

As earlier stated, the purpose of this literature review is to investigate what has been said about the topic of interest and examine the gaps in the literature. This research found that the main themes considered by this study had been the subject of academic discussions for decades. However, few of them considered the changing nature of contemporary society. Thus, this study finds a need to discuss these themes by considering new advances in media, fashion shows, and even people's mind-sets and consciousness's. This literature review equally permitted to examine the research methods used by previous works in order to implement those deemed relevant to this research.

2.8 The Difference with Women and Men's Attire

The primary source that provided guidelines for appropriate female portrayal was literature. Feminist critique in the 1970s focused on the cultural mentality and patriarchal mechanisms underlying sexual inequality. It looks into literary works and attempts to evaluate them through with a feminist perspective in order to unearth

hidden meanings and address issues like sexism or patriarchal supremacy. It was a result of the 1960s women's movement, and it assisted critics in realizing the relevance of the literary representations of women.

According to studies, people assume that women utilize their clothing to signal sexual desire or purpose. According to Koukounas and Letch (2001), both men and women believed that women utilized seductive clothing to signal sexual desire, and males saw greater sexual intent than women. Previously, Haworth-Hoeppner (1998) observed that males were more likely than women to assume that women's dress choices were utilized to communicate sexual intent.

A discovery of opposing themes as relics of a cultural period that has created various, often conflicting views about women's bodies and appearances via our dialectical dealing with the aforementioned literature(Tyner et al.,2002). Women frequently make more fascinating fashion choices than males, despite the fact that the shape and fit of women's clothing will vary, as will the selection of colors, textures, and designs. (Anderson, 2020). A flash of vivid coral at a political rally, a vibrant print at a board meeting, even a tweed outfit for a presidential address, or subdued silk at a charity dinner are luxuries that are only sometimes bestowed upon us. Men appear to be constrained to the typically somber suit and tie ensemble, whilst women appear to be establishing their own rules (Owyong, 2009).

Women prefer to shop online on a home computer, but males prefer to shop on their smartphones. Men limit their search to the items they are seeking for at the time of the transaction, whereas women explore for products that are not specifically what they are looking for (Gao et al.,2020). Both genders purchase things when making a

decision, but males are more willing to sacrifice quality for a lower price, whereas women are more price conscious and will buy depending on the best available deal (Lindo, 2016).

In contrast to women, who are more thorough and weigh both subjective and objective information, males value objective knowledge more highly. Males still take into account the viewpoints and experiences of others, but they do it in a different way (Vlassoff, 2007). Before taking it into consideration in their decision-making, women would want to know the motives and reasons behind why others acquired an item and whether their situation is comparable, whereas men utilize the encounters of those with an item they're interested in to develop their own opinion (Croes, 2021).

It's quite simple to distinguish between male and female leaders' attire styles, but it's more challenging to understand why these distinctions occur. Is it just to be heard that women in leadership posts dress in such contrast to males, or is it an extension of their emotional intelligence - the knowledge that the way you dress impacts public opinion massively? One thing is certain: the style of our female leaders will continue to evolve alongside the classic suit (Sharma, 2022).

Post-feminist arguments have also greatly criticised female representation in mass media. They argue that advertisements have attempted to shift attention from the ads mainly directed towards the male gaze through an exploitation of the image of a powerful woman advocated by feminism and pop feminism. The objectification of the female body is thus reinvented but still present. Advertisements adopt a strategy aimed at "validating an image of the 'new woman' defined as independent and equal to men involved a subtle reframing of the 'male gaze' shifting the power in such a relationship

from the surveyor to the surveyed “ (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). Here, post-feminism establishes a strong critique of sexist mass media.

Furthermore, in a post-feminist article, Rosalind Gill maintains that the media culture projects femininity as “bodily property”. The performance of a woman as a mother and a caregiver is not the sole identity given to a woman in this century. “In today’s media, it is possession of a ‘sexy body’ that is presented as women’s key (if not sole) source of identity” (Gill, 2007). A woman’s body is seen as her source of power but that needs to be tamed, disciplined and monitored in order to fit into the beauty standards set for her. Gill (2007) emphasizes that media of all genres creates their content mainly through a “surveillance of women’s bodies (but not men’s)”. Their bodies are evaluated both by fellow women and by men. She denounces magazines like *Heat* that page after page, photograph after photograph, gives disturbing comments about various parts of the bodies of women represented on them.



Figure 7: Heat magazine October 2004 issue 292, November 2004 issue 295 & February 2005, issue 307

The pictures above provide an example of the excoriating tone used by paparazzies and writers to comment on women’s physical appearance in an excessive and judgemental manner: for example; comments that focus on ‘fat’ but do not miss an

opportunity to condemn women deemed 'too thin'. Equally, 'Stars without makeup: Here's what they really look like' is another title of an issue of *Heat* magazine. The conventional woman is torn apart even for having marks as natural as 'laughter line' and 'stretch marks'

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In an era where everything is digitalized and everyone is allowed to give their opinions online, many want to find a voice. The assumed uniqueness of every human being purports a degree of creativity, which is revealed via multiple means, and mirrors one's true self. However, as have several researchers venturing in the assessment of life stories on fashion and identity construct (Woodward, 2007), this research encountered many obstacles in finding a reliable sample. The detailed characteristics involved in communicating one's representation and identifying the influences responsible for one's choice is generally done unconsciously.

This study used ontology which analyses 'what is existence?' and 'what is real and true?' in order to define the frame-work of this study, which has been analysed in chapter 2 with the themes discussed. Due to new themes arising in the course of the interviews and questionnaire, this thesis would also be analysing what was said with epistemology which is concerned with the questions 'what do you know?' and 'how do you know it?' Looking at the why and how behind human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour (Merriam S.B, 2015). This study is analysing what was said during the interviews on certain themes, such as cultural and gendered performativity of women and how they choose to represent themselves and or through their fashion attire, which is a form of qualitative methodology.

With the scientific need to establish a systematic analysis of our core argument in real-time, this paper chose to adopt a mixed method research, in order to achieve a complete overview and to contextualise all findings. This includes qualitative and a quantitative research methodology to investigate the validity of the question asked in chapter one. This section of the paper provides a detailed analysis of the various scientific methods used. The research questions raised strived to determine how much one's representation through clothing is indeed a reflection of one's identity, and if said identity is constructed or influence by culture, religion, trends and societal standards.

3.2 Research Question

The main research question of this study is to identify how women communicate and representation themselves and if this is in any way influenced by certain factors (i.e., religion, culture, society and media representation). Looking at how this is being constructed through the need to perform who they are in order to be accepted in according to societal and media's standard of beauty and cultural/ religious requirements. Also, how this is being analysed and influenced by the male gaze. Although this research has evolved, the research question still stands but with more views and finding in the analysis of this study. This research question would be answered using an epistemology approach, not just asking the question but using the responses gathered from interviews to answer the questions.

3.3 Sample Size

According to Cohen et al. (2000), the sample size in a research project is determined by the population's heterogeneity. For a heterogeneous (diverse) population, a large sample size is required, along with other factors like the research's objective. A sample is a portion of the population that has been selected to take part in the study (Malhotra, 2011). Sample should be carried out in accordance with a plan to reduce sampling

mistakes. The results of the sample can then be applied to the population (Parasuraman, 2005).

As an international university with students from various walks of life, Eastern Mediterranean University served as our research's target group since it provided a representative sample of variety. This study used the non-probability strategy with the convenience sampling method.

The interview was announced with an advert which was posted on Instagram, Facebook groups and was also shared across amongst students in the Faculty of communications and media studies. Attach below is a picture of the advert that was shared;



Figure 8: Interview advert designed for participants.

3.3 Research Design, Population and Data Collection

The design for this research was done in three phases: in the first phase, an online survey was administered in the form of a well-designed questionnaire. Oppenheim (1996) finds that a questionnaire is a reliable means of collecting relevant data because

it induces the respondents to give complete and accurate information. The reliability of questionnaires has also been demonstrated by its multiple use in different fields of study involving social issues, thus was deemed an appropriate method to apply in regards to the question treated in this paper. The second phase was more personal with a small focus group of 8 women, which was conducted in a day. In order to break the ice and create a comfortable zone for these women, this study used some warm up tools to get the participants talking, starting with semiotic representation of images as well as a session on denotation and connotation of each other's physical appearances. This study noticed that with this tool the participants were more open to further questions asked.

The third stage was 1-2-1 interview sessions with a different group of 10 ladies, in order to gauge an in-depth understanding of their views, which allow for more personal expressions and options to the research questions. This study realized that most of the participants interviewed had an idea of the struggles women face in themes of representation and roles of performance, which enlighten the direction to this research, while a very few percentages couldn't relate to the certain questions being asked as they don't fall into such categories.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

This study used questionnaires as a specific form of data collection targeting at finding options on specific topics. A questionnaire is particularly used to measure perception of a group of people, they are mainly used to obtain data in a fast and effective manner (Bhandari, 2022). There are different forms of questionnaires such as web-based questionnaires, telephone questionnaires, and email questionnaires and so on.

For this research, a web-based questionnaire was preferable to reach a mixed pool of participants. An analysis of the literature relevant to the topic done in chapter two brought to light certain themes recurrent in most of the previous researches done on the topic. Thus, this study used these themes as a foundation for the questions that were included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, questions that provided basic information about the respondents were deemed necessary for a proper assessment of the individuals and a comparison of variables. For example, differences in the ages of participants were portrayed in the differences in their experiences and depth of their opinions. Of the 15 questions asked, 11 multiple-choice questions (close-end) and 4 text open-end type questions were drafted. The main point of using a questionnaire is to reach a larger number of people which helps broaden the diversity in responses. The questions asked were centred on social media influences, cultural and religious background, personal fashion choices and the relation between one's ideal and real representation. The aim of the questionnaire was to lay a foundation within a greater sample size in order to reduce the risks of bias in culture and age. As earlier mentioned, this research aims to provide accurate results and progressive answers to an important topic that in one way or the other affects everyone. The average response rate of participants to the questionnaire was 2 to 5 minutes, with 112 participants. The data gotten was compiled and answers were divided into sections according to the most and less frequent answers with a use of bar charts and pie charts. Results and conclusions will be expatiated in chapter 4.

3.3.2 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussions is a small-scale discussion typically carried out between 6-12 people. It is done to see things from the views of the participant's based on a short list of questions (Yayeh, 2021). Focus group discussion was initially meant to be the main form of data collection but due to time constraints and availability of all the participants, a shorter group discussion was conducted in November 2022 and targeted women in the 18-45 age groups. This age group was selected because this study advocates those issues related to fashion do not solely affect young women. An expanded age range allows the research to dive into peculiar experiences from younger to older women and how the topic of investigation affects them. Also, in doing this, this study makes itself relevant to women by practicing inclusivity and recognizing that every woman deserves a voice despite their age. In total, 8 women from different backgrounds and ethnicities were selected. The discussion was for an hour. Participants were informed about the focus group through direct inquiries

The aim of the focus group discussion is to gather personal understandings of women's identity construct through fashion, looking at specific areas, such as media representation of women, the influence culture and religions plays, and how that affect one's identity and representation. Bennett (2017) stated that 'the importance of understanding human perspectives is now centre stage in conservation decision making', thereby researching not just what has been said but individual practical options on a day- to-day basis, thus collecting data on specific topics, as well as increasing participant's involvement in conversations. This was achieved with the use of semiotic representation of images to stimulate and encourage the participants to speak. Also, with the use of connotations and denotations of each other's appearance. The size of the sample is advantageous in establishing and identifying difference in

attitudes and the strength of certain influences are also deemed preferable because a larger group would not offer an ideal setting for deeper and more intimate discussions. Below is a visual outline of the focus group design and the questions asked:



Figure 9: Visuals used during the Focus group discussions

3.3.3 One-To-One Interview

While choosing a primary form of data collection, this study had to focus on what will give inside knowledge and deeper understand of the research question, and there was no better way than to hear from those who are affected by the course. Frances Ryan (2013) stated in his article that;

An individual interview is a valuable method of gaining insight into people's perceptions, understandings and experiences of a given phenomenon and can contribute to in-depth data collection. However, the interview is more than a conversational interaction between two people and requires considerable knowledge and skill on behalf of the interviewer.' (Frances Ryan, 2013, p. 1).

With the limitation of not having as much time with the focus group, this study decided to have 1-2-1 interviews with 10 women of different cultures, religions and societal backgrounds, in order to acquire diverse opinions. These interviews were recorded via audio for an easier analysis. One of the interviews was conducted online and nine were in person. Four of these interviews were conducted in Exile café, Famagusta, Northern Cyprus for a comfortable and most accessible environment, while the remaining 5 was conducted in Eastern Mediterranean University campus, which was convenient for the participants who had to get back to classes in time. Getting people to participate in the interviews was a bit tedious with individual busy schedules, a couple of the interviews were rescheduled a few times to fit into the participants schedules more adequately. The scope of the interview was centred on certain themes, such as cultural and gender performativity, body inclusivity, media representation of standards of beauty, and so on. Each of the interviews was unique and different. The duration, flow and direction of the conversations were peculiar to each participant. Age was also a factor that influenced the depth of the responses of each participant.

3.4 Limitations of the Study

Despite the success of the focus group, there were some constraints worth mentioning. According to Jennifer Mayer (2019), limitations in focus groups may arise from the “social restrictions of any group dynamic. However, accurate results are achieved through the “contributions of those present at the meeting” (Mayer, 2019 p8). The main problem encountered was the unequal time given to each participant to speak.

This problem mainly emerged from the fact that in a group dynamic, there exist different personalities. Thus a few participants were quick to voice their feelings and opinions while others were not so comfortable to speak in a group setting. Those who were more expressive dominated conversations, this resulted in all thoughts not being heard. Furthermore, some participants may express agreement with certain opinions even though they do not agree, “in order to fit in” (Mayer, 2019 p8) or simply to skip the argumentative stress. With this in mind, the researcher made sure each participant was given an opportunity to speak in order for all participants to express herself when a question was asked. Also, the focus group was allowed to flow freely without interference or suggestive comments from the researcher in order to get exclusive opinions from the informants.

Due to the limited time available for this research and the overall restricted sphere of this thesis, a discourse on a topic as complex and broad as fashion communication, representation and identity construct can be considered a mere drop of water in an ocean. Furthermore, considering the fast-changing nature of trends and opinions, future answers to questions posed now may be completely different. Thus, the need for further research may emerge. However, this research can be considered a meaningful start, in hopes that more research will be done covering the topic of fashion communication, representation and identity construct as it is becoming an essential part of people’s lives and choices.

The major limitation faced, as stated earlier, was the mobilization of the participants for the focus group discussion. The researcher had to find an alternative that would still help get the same amount of information needed, which was the use of 1-2-1 interviews. This was significantly successful with 5 participants. Another major

limitation was the lack of existing research done in this field, as most related studies are done in the field of social sciences.

3.5 Methods of Analysing Data

In conducting this study, the data collected is analysed adequately. Due to the mixed form of data collected in this study, each type of data is analysed and interpreted differently. Facts and figures collected from the questionnaires would be examined through systematic and critical analyses, comparing each result and evaluating their significance in relation to the study. With the use of charts, this study compares the comments and answers received from the questionnaire in order to answer the research questions. Responses acquired from both the focus group and the interviews were analysed according to the major themes that were raised, looking at what was said and how these notions were formed. All the interviews are transcribed for reference and a detailed data analysis.

This chapter discussed the choice of using a mixed method research approach of both qualitative and quantitative methodology to gather the necessary data required to address the research questions, with a breakdown of how each phase will be conducted and analysed in the next Chapter.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Examining, handling, categorizing, reducing, transcribing, classifying and overall analyzing the data and evidence requires to be driven by the initial purpose of the study (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Following this concept, restating the main argument and the primary drive of this study is found necessary. The purpose of this research is to determine whether one's fashion sense and choice of clothing communicates one's identity. It equally aims at examining the factors that shape one's fashion choices such as culture, religion, beauty standards, and performativity.

After a review of the literature available on this topic, it was observed that there exist certain misconceptions related to these variables, especially concerning women, that are swept under the 'research rug'. The need to pursue this research then became more pressing after speaking to women, hearing their stories and their opinions about their representation in the media, their choice of clothing which is not always by choice but due to lack of proper representation and ultimately the expectations placed on them by society based on their fashion choices.

This was a reminder of how important communication is to voice-out common struggles and silent screams. It was observed that several women shared the same opinions but never had the opportunity to speak about them in a safe space. Aside from the interviews and focus groups conducted, statistical research methods such as

questionnaires were employed to increase the precision and accuracy of findings. This chapter will focus on dissecting and analyzing the data collected using the various methods mentioned in the previous chapter. Data analysis will begin with the data gotten from questionnaires and move to written-form of data gathered from the interviews of 10 women from varied origin and backgrounds.

4.1 Demographics

A statistical table including the responders' ages, sizes and nationalities can be seen below;

Table 2: Questionnaire question; a statistical table including the responders' ages, sizes and nationalities

Variables	Criterion	Frequency
AGE	19-25	50
	26-35	34
	36-45	16
	46-54	12
	55 or older	0
CLOTHING SIZE	Medium	42
	L (large)	24
	S (small)	14
	XS (extra small)	7
	XL (extra-large)	14
	XXL (extra extra large)	10
	Other (please specify)	1 (4XL)
NATIONALITY	Nigerian	39
	Cameroonian	14
	South African	21
	Swazi	12
	Turkish Cypriot	7

	Mozambican	4
	Ugandan	5
	Zimbabwean	10

The table above shows a compilation of the responses to questions 1-3 which involved “how old are you”, “what is your usual clothing size” and “where are you from and what is your cultural background”. With 112 participants, 54 people answered all the questions 58 didn’t answer some question.

As seen above table 1. most of the participants were between the ages of 19-25. However, responses to the questionnaire were also given by participants in other age groups from 26-54. Such a diversified pool of respondents allows the researcher to draw extensive conclusions on how women of all ages are affected by the topic in discussion. This equally proves the significance of the topic to young and older women alike. The stereotype that associates identity struggles and fashion to solely young women is thus challenged.

In addition, though in previous chapters a lot of attention was given to plus-sized fashion, the survey was inclusive of women of all sizes to permit accurate generalization of findings. It also provides an awareness of the representative challenges of women based on their clothing size. In chapter 2 of this paper, it was established that plus-sized women that is L, XL and XXL women, faced a lack of representation in the clothing options proposed by most stores and in media outlets such as fashion magazines and runways. Thus, this study finds this inclusion and diversification important for a proper assessment of the topic. The third variable on the

table above includes the nationality of participants. The dominant nationality and culture as shown on the table is Nigerian.

Nevertheless, Nigerian participants were from different tribes such as Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Igala and Edo, which means different cultural backgrounds and cultural experiences related to fashion. It would be a mistake to consider all these tribes as one given the striking cultural disparities. On the other hand, other nationalities were equally represented though on a smaller frequency. This question is considered relevant because the role of culture in shaping an individual's fashion choices cannot be undermined. A hijab woman's choice of clothing may or may not depend on her culture, however, due to the preconceived ideas about this fashion choice, one tends to quickly make certain deductions. The next section of this chapter gives more insight through the analysis of the interviews conducted with certain women. Furthermore, each woman identifies differently thus it is important to understand how culture has been a promoter or an impediment to the emancipation of women's expression through fashion. A total of eight different cultures was recorded in the questionnaires with at least one woman from each.

Personality being one of the variables under study in this research, the questionnaire also included the question "does your clothing express your personality?". The answers are displayed on the graph below.



Figure 10: Questionnaire question; Does your clothing express your personality?

From the Figure 3. above it can be seen that most women consider that their choice of clothing reflect their personality occasionally. On the other hand, some women affirmed that the way they dress is a reflection of their personality. One participant went in the opposite direction, according to her, her clothing does not express her personality. This question is deemed relevant for this research because in most cases, a first impression gotten from a person's clothing results in assumptions about the person's personality. From the answers given by the responders, it can be understood that though it can be the case occasionally, it is not always true for some women. As the women perceive themselves, they are not always what they wear.

In more or less the same vein, participants were asked to judge their level of confidence based on the way they dressed. That is if an attractive outward appearance, nice and tidy clothes influenced their level of self-confidence. Confidence here means increase in self-esteem, tackling the issues of the day head on, relative ease in socializing and

generally feeling good in one's appearance. Again, the question was close-ended with three possible choices; yes, no and sometimes. Here, most women answered favorably by asserting that looking nice does affect their level of confidence. A lower number of women argued that it happens occasionally and four women maintained that looking nice does that affect their confidence level. The frequency of the various answers reflects the argument that women are often objectified based on their outward appearance especially by the male gaze. Thus, it follows suit that nice clothes and a good-looking appearance will increase a woman's confidence. The results can be seen on the table 3.below;



Figure 11: Does looking nice affect your level of confidence?

The next question was open-ended which left the responders room to express briefly their experiences. The question was “Does the culture of the country and society you live in affect your purchase decision?”.

The most common response was yes while others stated it does sometimes. Most of the participants who answered yes argued that this is because the society in which they live have a culture that favors small-sized ladies, thus it is difficult for women who do

not fall into that clothing size category to find nice clothes. A responder stated that “yes because they rarely have my size and when they do, it is often ugly and unflattering clothes”. While others explained that after constantly being judged because of what they wear, they had to find a way to fit in by adopting the fashion sense of the society in which they find themselves.

A woman stated “you can’t help but become conscious of the things you wear”. Furthermore, 7 people had a different opinion, asserting that the society in which they live do not affect the clothes they decide to purchase. Some participants maintained that solely their religion influenced their purchasing decisions while for others they simply purchase whatever they want and are comfortable in irrespective of the culture. Next, social media such as Instagram and TikTok have become major platforms for influencers to set trends and establish standards deemed “appropriate” at every point in time.

The fashion industry is no more about what people identify with or what is comfortable for them, rather fashion trends determine who looks good and who does not. Some responders to the questionnaire argued that their style is created through a combination of fashion trends and personal innovation. On the other hand, 23 women maintained that they create their own style independent of the trends of the moment. 3 women were neutral; they do not follow trends and neither do they create their own style. 1 person admitted to relying on what is trending. The responses are summarized in the table 4. below;

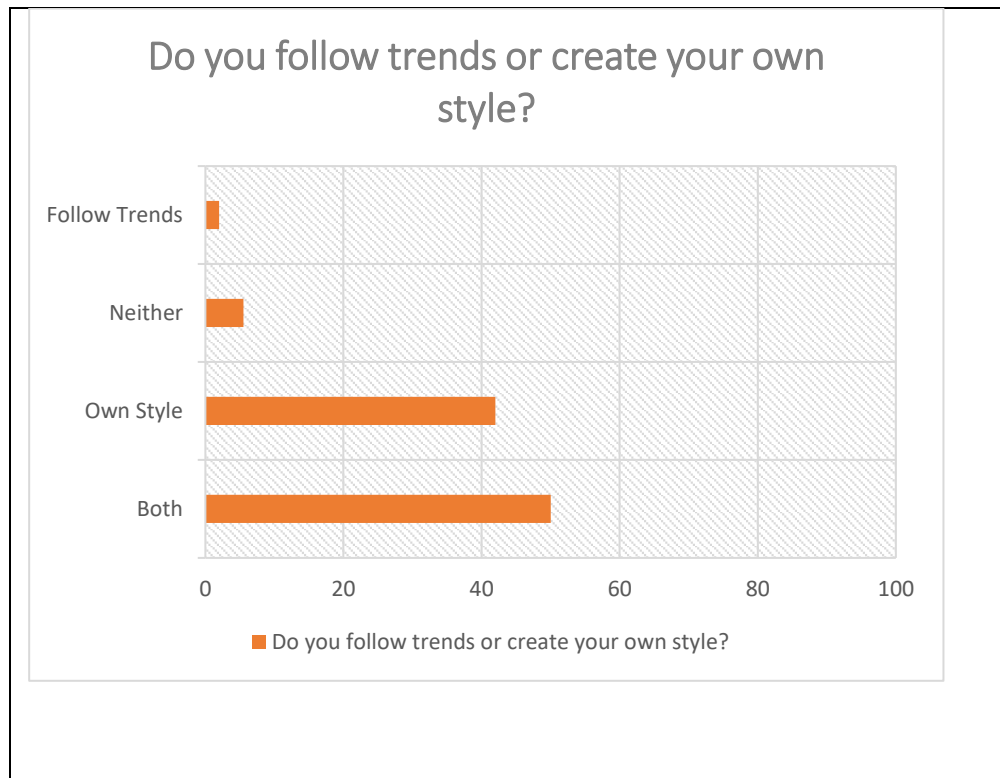


Figure 12: Do you follow trends or create your own style?

Therefore, it can be understood that some women do not relate to the trends promoted on social media. The influence of the media is limited in the face of individual choices. Women still choose what represents them and what they would be comfortable in over fashion trends.

While it can be argued that the clothes one chooses are to feel nice and decent, and overall increase one's self-confidence, there is equally an image the individual expects to generate in the minds of others. All in all, a manner in which the person wishes to be perceived through their choice of fashion. This was a close-ended question with five (5) options from which the responders had to select namely; unique, confident, elegant, beautiful and sexy. The graph table 6. shows the results obtained;

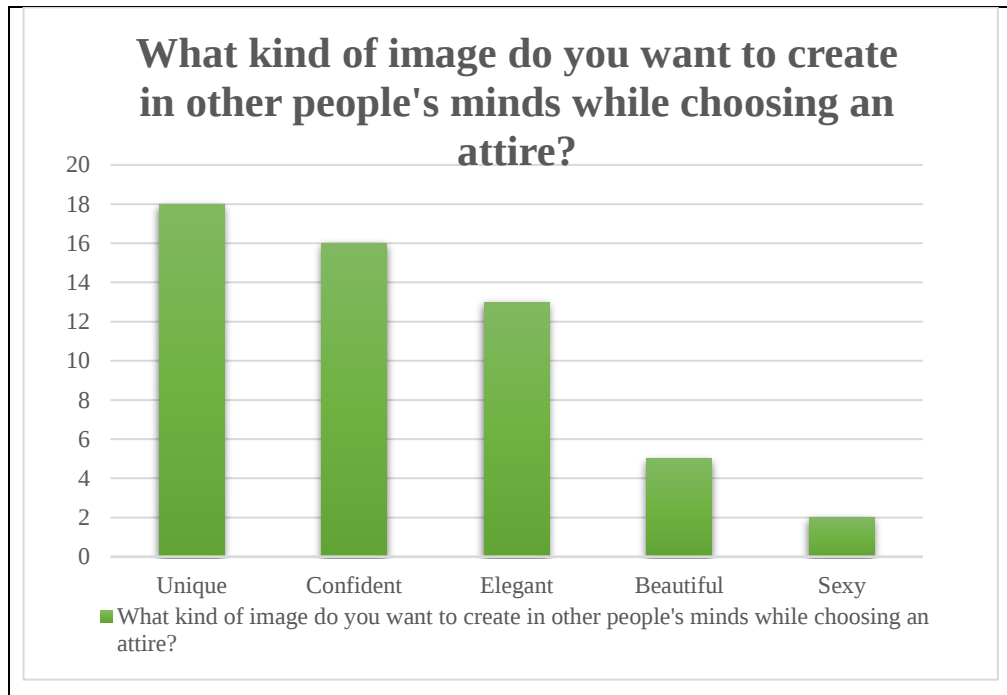


Figure 13: What kind of image do you want to create in other people's minds while choosing an attire?

The most common response was unique indicating that most women would want to stand out rather than fitting in and blending in. To others their appearance should indicate confidence whilst others want to appear elegant, beautiful and even sexy. It can be argued that it is a dimension of their identity that women try to express through their choices of clothing. However, this expression can be limited by certain preconceptions already present in people's minds due to factors such as performativity, religion and culture.

The male gaze being one of the themes of this paper, the questionnaire included the question "do you feel sexualized by the way you dress?" to which most women responded sometimes, others answered no. A small proportion of women responded yes to the question, as shown on the subsequent table 6;

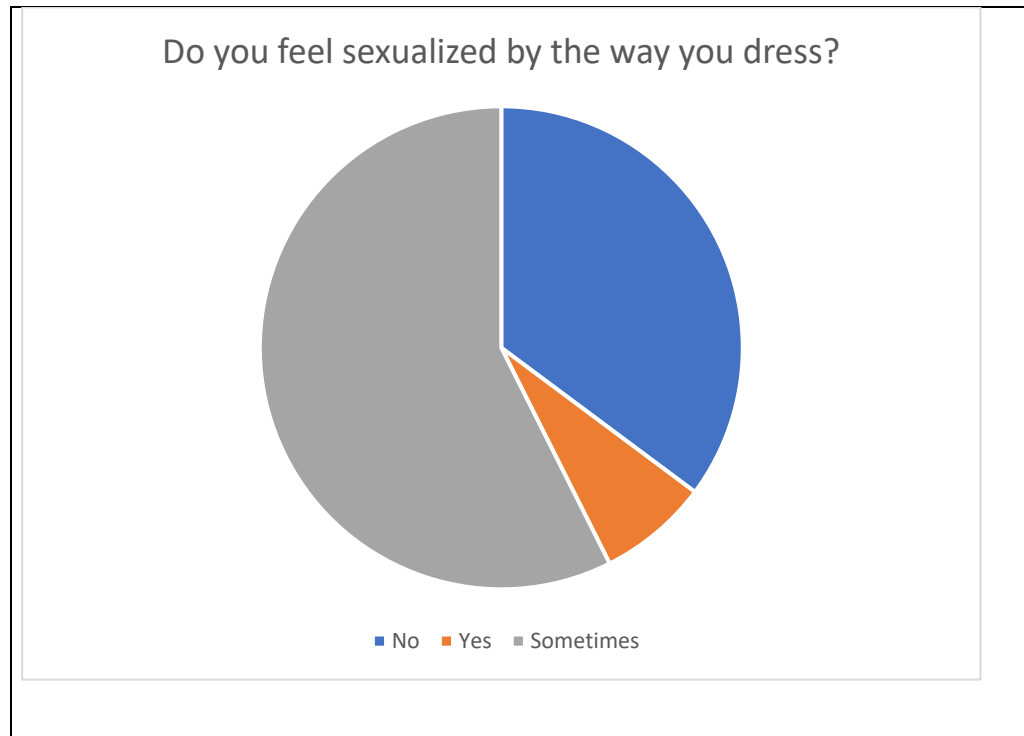


Figure 14: Do you feel sexualized by the way you dress?

Sexualization being one of the major problems women face in society, they are compelled to dress in a “less provocative manner” or in ways that will not attract a man’s attention. Freedom of choice when it comes to fashion might be restricted to a certain extent.

A recurrent factor women cited as a major determinant of the way they dress is religion. The influence of religion is more evident in Muslim women because their choice of clothes quickly reveals their religion. However, this factor is also relevant for women of other religions such as Christian women. This question was close-ended and the majority selected yes.



Figure 15: Does your religion affect the way you dress or value clothing?

Moreover, though clothing does not necessarily determine a person's personality, certain people are influenced by a person's choice of clothing and that determines their first impression of them. 61% out of the participants who answered this question said sometimes and 25% said yes. The rest said no and 2% person was neutral. This is shown on the table 8 below.



Figure 16: Does a person's clothing influence your first impression of them?

The next question was open-ended and was aimed at getting a more detailed opinion on how the culture or society in which women find themselves influence the way they represent themselves. To the question “how much do you think the culture and society you live in affects your style or representation”, 79% of the women were keen to answer very much and others went forth to say that it totally influences their representation. The most common response given by women was that culture is a part of identity and thus cannot be detached from a person. According to them, a person will always dress according to their culture because it is what makes them stand out in the mist of other cultures and is a source of belonging and pride.

However, few added that it is equally necessary to create one’s own style whilst incorporating elements of culture. Also, a few women who agreed that culture has an important influence on their representation explained that to be able to access certain societal privileges such as a good job, it is necessary to conform to the culture of the area in which you live and this has affected their style significantly. By contrast, 24% of the women responded no to the question and did so on the basis that they valued

their personal comfort over the culture of the society they were found in. They do so arguably without fear of judgment from society.

Due to well-known stereotypes in the fashion industry, it is sometimes hard to find clothes that fit in the aimed representation for women. This is mostly the case for plus-sized women and women who fit into the “ideal” body standard but do identity with the clothing style associated with that body type. Nevertheless, in the questionnaire, women were asked to rate the accessibility of clothes that fit their style or choice of representation from “easily accessible” to “hard to access”. 50% of the women found that getting clothes that fit their choice of representation are easily accessible, 40% argued that it is hard to access and 10% of the participants were neutral on this question. The question was then reformulated and specified to plus-sized women as follows “if you’re plus-sized, how often do you find flattering attires?” 55% of the women answered sometimes, 20% never and only 7%selected very often. The most striking point is the contrast between the generalized version of the question and the specified.

This indicates that plus-sized women majorly Deal with the struggle of finding clothes that fit, are flattering to their body type and in which they feel represented. This contrast is displayed in the figure below

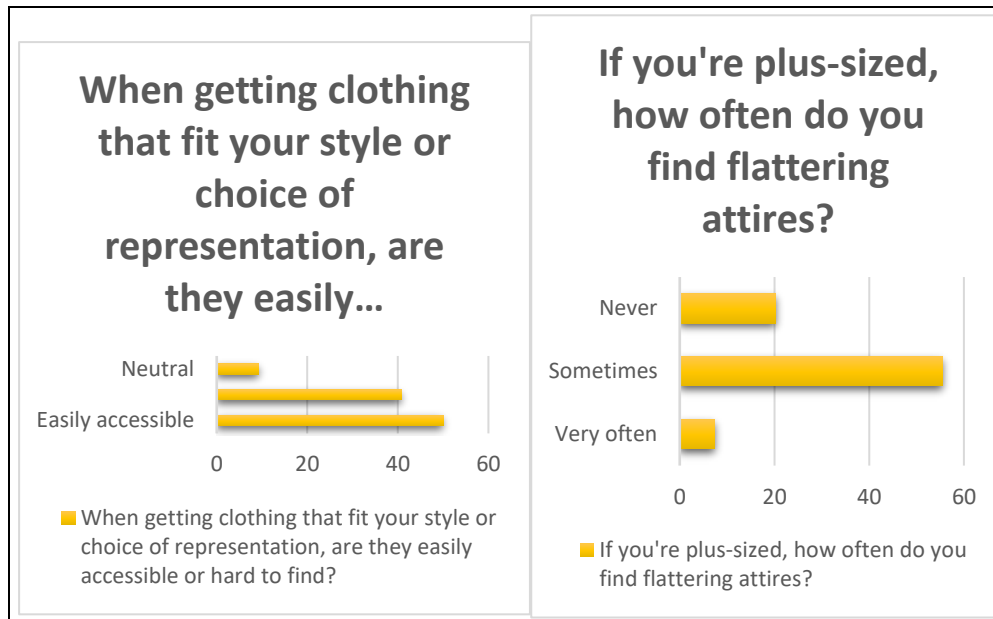


Figure 17: When getting clothing that fit your style or choice of representation. How often do you find flattering attires?

4.2 Interviews

The analysis of interviews will be done in relation to the epistemology and ontology of this study using specific themes that appear across the study and during conversations with the participants. Michael Crotty(1998) stated that the epistemology inherent in the methodology encompasses knowledge and what that knowledge means. That is “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998). The epistemology in the theoretical perspective of this study involves performativity in terms of culture and gender experienced by women whist ontology refers to “what is” already in existence, what is real.

This paper draws on data collected from women ranging from 19 to 54 years old of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. In the interviews, these women were asked questions on their social experiences and their stories highlight unaddressed social conditions and subjectivities. These women emphasize that they do not have a voice

to fight against performativity and thus suppress their identities in an effort to conform to performative roles attributed to them. In the subsequent paragraphs an analysis of how performativity intersects with actual knowledge built in societal frames at the levels of culture and gender.

4.2.1 Gender Performativity

Feminist scholars have made it a life time quest to dismantle the association of gender roles with sex and its overall weight on an individual's identity. This role is even more defined when it comes to women due to the traditional view of women as caregivers involved in social reproduction both at the biological levels, thus becoming mothers, and the social level, nurturing and teaching the child ushering him into adulthood. This traditional portrait has created a box into which women are expected to live and perform. In an article for the New York Times, the author gives a "mother's job description" as follows;

Must be exceptionally stale yet ridiculously responsive to the needs of those around you; must be willing to trail after your loved ones, cleaning up their messes and compensating for their deficiencies and selfishness; must work twice as hard as everybody else' must accept blame for a long list of the world's illnesses; must have a knack for shaping young minds while in no way neglecting the less glamorous tissues below; must have high tolerance for babble and repetition; and must agree, when asked, to shut up, fade into the background and pretend you don't exist. (Angier, 2007).

Motherhood as well as other aspects of a woman's life ought to be understood as performative. This is bound to affect the way a woman views and represents herself. This image of a woman is sold and injected in everyday lives through the media and avoiding the judgmental gaze of others becomes a never-ending task. During an interview, a Cypriot participant maintained that in addition to the cultural restrictions on her choice of fashion she already experienced, she had to take on the burden of gender performativity as well. She explains that;

“And then there is this idea that oh, for example, she’s a teacher, she’s a mother, she should not be dressing like this, and that does have an effect. So even if I wanted to wear something, I would be conscious of what people would say and think”.

Another interviewee who is a model and a Muslim (not practicing) had a take a break once she had children and faced several judgements trying to get back. People expected her to perform solely as a mom and she was regarded as irresponsible for trying to get her life back together. Having experienced this, she feels she cannot be normal anymore because she has to perform the role of a mother. She shares her experience as follows.

“When I went back into the Modelling industry, even on the school run, the mums they would judge me and say; why are you putting all these pictures up about yourself? So, it's not just even about your shape, size or what you wear, it's about your age as well. Once you have children as a woman, you seem to be sterilized and you can't be normal anymore.”

Also, it can be understood that performativity is not limited to “acting stereotypically” masculine or feminine but it is deeply and fully entrenched in individual consciousness (Oh, 2009) From the interview above, she was judged by other mums who have also been groomed by expectation and aspirations designed by society for mothers. Such a mindset indicates the performativity of sex and gender. Thus, to them it becomes abnormal when a woman aims for something other than the “blessing” of performing. Performative role ultimately becomes an identity. “Your mother role is a role you play, but it’s not your identity. And for a woman to find her identity and be able to explore it now is a lot” she says. Of all the interviews conducted, the rhetoric of gender performativity and how it has affected their representation was mainly given by older women who were mothers.

4.2.2 Culture Performativity

Performativity can also be found in culture through the use of judgements and comparisons resulting in trapping a person's worth in the grip of "culture" and limiting expression and representation. A Sudanese participant commented during her interview;

"You feel the under-tone judgment coming through, most people who grew up with a Muslim background have a double life; the one their family and Muslim community sees and the one their close circle sees. A very good played out acting of different personae in order to be accepted and fit into the system"

Performativity for a Muslim woman is heavily directed towards her clothes and fashion choices. She is expected to be dressed modestly and fully covered. Whilst a woman's religious choices are profoundly respectable, people put it within an inescapable field of judgement. As quoted earlier, a woman is forced to pretend and play out who she is not in order to avoid judgmental gazes. Another Muslim Pakistani participant explained;

"As a kid I cared way too much because there were a lot of standards and expectations that were set for me you are supposed to laugh loud, your neck is not meant to show your clothes are meant to be baggy etc. but as I grow up, I realized I wasn't doing all these for myself but because of what people would say. Now I decided not to put so much pressure on myself. I wear what I want."

Getting out of the box prepared for them was an important that had to be taken in order to find who one really is and how one would like to be represented outside the grip of cultural expectations. Whilst the culture in itself is not the problem, the expectations and attributions built around it are. "My mum had to slowly accept the transition from being a fully covered Hijab to not being one. She does not know the extent but has the idea, which we had to have a long conversation because of the expectations she had for me" the Sudanese woman commented.

In an article on performativity, Irene Oh (2009) pointed out that women struggle to achieve the modesty of wearing veil and even go further to alter their behavior to act shyly as expected of them, especially around men. They do not do so because they naturally feel that way but actively and consciously practice these behaviors and appearances (Oh, 2009). Their identity is thus encapsulated and they are given a falsified representation. However, the strong incoming presence of the “modern Muslim woman” on Instagram, educating people on the modern life from their religious perspective aiming at breaking the walls that enclosed veiled Muslim women and addressing their representation in the media. Two researchers during research in Indonesia stated that it should be understood as a “socially progressive move linked to women’s increasing visibility with the expansion of consumer culture, rather than a socially conservative move aimed at preserving long-standing notions of Muslim femininity.” (Pramiyanti & Baulch, 2018). It appears that hijab-wearing women want to remove the limitations pending on them. Even the decision to adopt the veil is presented with several style choices such as the “*jilbab*”, the “*kerudung*”, the “*cadar*” and the “*hijab*” (Pramiyanti & Baulch, 2018).

Furthermore, cultural performativity’s influence is not limited to Muslim women but extends to Christian women. An American woman shared her change in representation because she is a Christian through an interview conducted with her. According to her, she had to become more conscious about how she dresses, the impression she gives when she walks into a place and how that will affect how she is perceived by others. “Over the years I realized that I started dressing more modestly than I would have if I was not a Christian believer” she continues. In answering another question, she says “I try not to dress super reviling just because I know that could happen so I am very conscious of how I am perceived because of my religion”. Again, her chosen religion

is not an object of concern but the gaze of others and how she will be perceived have an impact on her representation and her style. As a Christian lady she is expected to “perform” a certain way and might face judgements if she does otherwise.

From the analysis above, it can be understood that performativity in culture is universal and affects women as all religions and even those who choose not to belong to any religion. The standard is already set and one is just expected to play along irrespective of how you feel. Rebelling makes you an outcast thus most women prefer to play double roles to avoid societal ‘sanctions’. Nevertheless, as seen with the case of Indonesian ‘Hijabers’ the role of a more modern visible woman is slowly emerging. (Pramiyanti & Baulch, 2018).

4.2.3 Body Inclusivity and Beauty Standards

Beauty standards are a norm in today’s society. It does not matter who started them or if they will eventually come to an end but everyone is expected to conform to these ideals that supposedly represent attractiveness. These unrealistic standards have been spread through the use of social media and fashion brands that employ women of a certain caliber to wear their clothes and make them appealing to the ordinary genre. However, this is mostly done in the arena of women’s fashion. Over the years, several women have been expressing their resentment towards these standards and the neglect of these brands for women who do not fit into the beauty standards. Realistically, there exists a great number of body types peculiar to different women, thus portraying a single body type as ideal and “perfect” is disturbing and revolting. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, women were asked during interviews about their opinions on beauty standards and how this has affected the way they perceive and represent themselves. Generally, in answering this question none of the 10 women interviewed expressed that she feels represented in the runways or in the cloth sizes proposed by

the various fashion brands. In one interview, the lady expressed her resentment as follows;

“No, I don’t feel represented. I have a huge problem with the one idea of what beauty is and the female tend to be one generic type, slim not curvy and they are photo shopped. As a curvier lady you feel the need to have perfect skin, perfect hair, perfect makeup and the need to be tall, slim, reducing the things that make us female like hips, thighs and bust.”

This opinion was shared by all 10 women interviewed. Nevertheless, some women explained that the growing awareness of women about this topic has brought some changes and the emergence of body positivity in media representation and runways. They stated ‘Fenty’ by Rihanna, ‘Skin’ by Kim Kardashian and ‘Good American’ by Khloe Kardashian as examples of brands that attempt to value body positivity. A criticism of these brands however stem from the fact that the ladies used though curvy are still “air-brushed”, their stretch marks, spots and double chins are removed to still fit in a way in the feminine beauty standard. “Though there is a new movement of being more inclusive of different sizes, colors and ethnicities, I do feel they are missing the point of representing the real female and be natural” a participant said.

A study examined Rihanna’s Savage and Fenty (SxF) Fall/Winter 2018 collection runway shows using ‘netnography’ and one the main themes appearing from the data collected was inclusivity. The comments praised the show for including different women of several sizes, colors, ages and backgrounds. People were excited to see women who do not fit into the traditional beauty standards on a runway. This event was considered a step forward for the body positivity movement and gave a voice to every woman who feels excluded from the traditional society (Hakeem, 2020).

A lot of models are still asked to wear small (S) or extra small (XS) sizes for clothing brands. Women have to go the extra mile to either modify their bodies to fit in, adopt the seemingly unflattering clothes given to plus-sized ladies or get custom-made outfits. When asked what they would like to change in the fashion industry if given the power to do so, a participant gave the following response;

“There should not be a generic standard of what a model looks like. That’s something we don’t talk enough about. Now, for the media standard of a sexy woman or an appealing woman, small, slim and tall but that’s not the reality. Yes, the media is supposed to mirror the reality, but they haven’t quite achieved this part of it. So, if there’s something that could change, if we can start by changing the way models are portrayed for a certain clothing brand, it’s going to take a cake for me. If the industry can find a small model, a medium model, a large model, an extra-large model, it would be better if all sizes are represented. Because I cannot view a model in size small and you have to imagine another model for a size large or a size medium, I need to have the visual representation of each model for each size because I can get a model who is wearing a large with a particular size of groups that I don’t have”

Also, beauty standards form societal pressures and tapes by which women measure themselves, the value of their bodies and those of others (Zanon, 2018). Rather than finding a voice, creating an identity that can be adequately represented in the media, women are constantly pushed from one frame to the other whereby they are asked to suppress parts of themselves to blend in and still expected to be unique in their daily lives. Young girls loose themselves in the mist of these standards resulting in low self-esteem and body image issues. During the interviews, a participant expressed that "as a mother of an 8-year girl, I’m very conscious of what my daughter sees as beautiful daily, I want her to feel like whatever she turns out to be is beautiful not what she sees on social media, TV and magazines”. Body image and fashion programs should be more inclusive and the media should do well in portraying a representation of women the ordinary woman of all sizes cab relate to and despite her curves, curly hair and marks she is beautiful. The basic representation of a ‘real’ woman.

All in all, the main themes recurrent in the data collected in both the questionnaire and interviews included performativity in culture and gender, body inclusivity, lack of adequate media representation, and unrealistic beauty standards. It has proven that appearance is significant to confidence, first impressions, comfort and beauty. The commonality of the issues faced by every participant warrant that these themes are worth mentioning and discussing. Standards are irrelevant if they are unrealistic, likewise rules are worthless if they cannot be followed by the ordinary woman. However, it is worth acknowledging that there has been some improvement in the problems addressed due to the collective effort of women to raise those issues and confront the standards. There is a crucial role for communication in this endeavour.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Findings

At the beginning of this study, a question was asked AM I WHAT I WEAR, identifying what influences women's representation (i.e., religion, cultural background, society, style, media representation and so on) and if this is in anyway a communication of who they really are? Having analysed all the data collected with various methods and themes discussed, this study has drawn certain conclusions.

Firstly, by answering question AM I WHAT I WEAR? This study with the help of the participants, has come to a conclusion that AM I WHAT I WEAR? Is complex and due to the diversity of individuals there is no straight answer. From research gathered most of the responses implied that most women dress according to mood, comfort, and how they want to be perceived or the character they chose to perform in order to fit in. and others are mainly influenced by the society they leave in and religious standards. This can be since in most of the responses gathered in the interviews and also questionnaire. While some expressed that they do not have an identity, they put bits and pieces of who they think they should be, due to the fact that they do not feel represented in their culture, society they leave in or media representation.

'It doesn't communicate who I am, I don't even know who I am because of this identity conflict...I don't think the clothing article has been produced for somebody like me is...I'm talking in relation to my body image and what I would like to portray. (Appendix: Interview 1, Response 8)

Secondly, the main research question on identifying what influences women's representation (i.e., religion, culture background, society, style, media representation and soon) and if this is in anyway a communication of who they are? This study found that as much as people communicate bit and pieces of their identity, a lot of this is being influenced by factors outside of their control. Most women have found a way to communicate themselves despite all these factors, therefore creating different personas to play at each point in time and those who refuse to adapt to what is called the norm chose to be themselves. Interestingly one of the interview participants mentioned how she couldn't handle the judgment and scrutiny in a country so she left for the sake of her sanity;

‘We lived in Iran for a few years. During that time, I was constantly being judged on how I want to represent myself. And I couldn't understand it because at Home there was no censorship, there was no filtering, there was nobody telling me, like you don't have to dress that way. And I couldn't even understand it. The culture and society didn't have an effect as much on me because I couldn't stand it and left but there is a lot on those who live there and females who abide by these laws.’ (Appendix; Interview 4, Response 5)

As a woman finding who you are and representing it is hard, with all these factors and little to none representation of an ordinary woman, women find it hard to be themselves and they are pushed to become what is displayed as the beauty standard. Despite there being an increase in brands body inclusivity and colour there is still a lot the media industry has to do in making this representation as realistic as possible.

In order to raise a generation that is positive and confident in their skin and not just those who choosing to stand out but those who see representations of themselves daily, there needs to be a change in how much ads representation of models are being photo shopped and race inclusivity as a norm not a privilege. Also, a large scale of clothes

representation for all body types not just for the generic body's, which would create a world where beauty standard is not just what you see on magazines but what we see in the mirror.

5.2 Summary of Methods Used

This study chose a mixed methodology in order to get as much diversity as possible and not just what has been said. This study used questionnaires and interviews as a form of data collection. The use of questionnaire broadened the number of people reached which gave different opinions and views of the research questions. Although most of the questions were closed ended, this study was still able to get the necessary response needed to effectively analyse the questions asked. This study went on to gather more data by using 1-2-1 interview method, although at the beginning of this study the main form of data collection was meant to be a PBR Method (Practice Based Research). But due to time constraints and availability of all the participants a smaller group with a shorter time frame was conducted. This study realized that the data collected were not sufficient enough, so this study conducted a 1-2-1 interview of 10 women. This method of data collection enlightened the scope of this study, bringing more views and rising issues women face on a daily basis.

This form of data collection helped raised significant themes that helped structure this study, such as body inclusivity, beauty standards, performativity of gender and culture amongst others. Equally, it extensively demonstrated the gap existing between the real woman and the one idealized by media. Every woman interviewed desired to be unique while still included and recognised in societal spheres. In view that some of the women interviewed were mothers, the significance of this study for the next generation is being made evident.

There was a lot of self-consciousness about the questions and themes raised which show how aware women are about what they want and in what areas specificity they need a change to be made.

5.3 Summary of Findings

Returning to the problem statement, this study helps to understand how important it is for women to see more of realistic representation of beauty in order to build confidence in their own identity. This is in regards to the large influence culture, society, religion and media representation has on women's identities and how they are being communicated. Peter (2014) examines the overlooked market of plus-size fashion and explores the ways in which the fashion industry neglects and marginalizes fat consumers, thereby creating a restriction on their minds and on what women in this category can wear (Peters, 2014).

In the literature review, this study was able to analyse previous research done in line with the research question but there were not a lot of substantial research done in this field to answer the question asked. This study helps to add to the already existing knowledge and thereby reducing the knowledge gap.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, conducting a study on a real and current issue is both a refreshing adventure and a challenge. A feel of the field, listening to people's opinions and experiences everyone can relate to, brings forth the simple notion that; though these challenges are built differently in terms of personality, desires, religion, culture, likes and dislikes, women face the same impediments in their daily lives. This study is one in a large pool of research topics that have been and are still raised. However, it is realistic to acknowledge that the desired change will not be done in 2 or even 5 years.

Like most revolutionary advancements related to women, dismantling the current standards and removing them from the general consciousness will take quite some time but it can be looked upon from an optimistic lens.

5.5 Future Recommendations

Although the scope used in this study is not broad enough to be a certain generalization, this study proves that these challenges are relevant and cannot be ignored. This study establishes how much work needs to be done in the media and fashion industry. In addition, it raises the question of why there are so many constraints on women's appearance and representation than are on the men.

In one of the interviews conducted, the participants mentioned how male clothing's are created for comfort and women more of pins and needles. Looking at how heels are created to make you look elegant but not as comfortable to run or walk at a faster pace. Although there are more comfortable shoes and outfits now in trend, the thought of the metaphor 'with beauty comes pain' still bring us back to the question on why. Further research is need to enlighten the cause of these stereotypes and its relationship with how women are viewed.

REFERENCES

- Ahuja, M. (2017, July 31). Why 'plus size' models represent the worst of the fashion industry. *The Citizen*, P. 1. Doi:Hocalwire.Com
- Akdemir, N. (2018). Visible expression of social identity: the clothing and fashion. *Gaziantep University Journal Of Social Sciences Volume 17, Issue 4. 1389-1397 . Doi: 10.21547/Jss.411181.*
- Angier, N. (2007, May 1). For motherly x chromosome, gender is only the beginning. *The New York Times*, P. 1. Retrieved From [Http://Www.Nytimes.Com/2007/05/01/Science/01angi.Html?Ref=Science](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/01/science/01angi.html?ref=science)
- Aziz, S. F. (2012). The muslim “veil” post-9/11: rethinking women’s rights and leadership. *Institute For Social Policy And Understanding And The British Council*, 1. Retrieved December 2022, From [Https://Scholarship.Libraries.Rutgers.Edu/Discovery/Delivery/01rut_Inst:Researchrepository/12643421630004646?L#13643502690004646](https://scholarship.libraries.rutgers.edu/discovery/delivery/01rut_inst:researchrepository/12643421630004646?L#13643502690004646)
- Bhandari, P. (2022, July 15th). Questionnaire design; methods ,questiontypes and examples. *Scibbr*. Retrieved December 19th, 2022, From [Http://Www.Scribbr.Com/Methodology/Questionnaire/](http://www.scribbr.com/methodology/questionnaire/).
- Bolton, L. (2003). Gender, status and introduced clothing in vanuatu. *Clothing The Pacific*, 119-140.

- Borisoff, D., & Merrill, L. (2003). Gender and nonverbal communication. *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, 269-278.
- Bornstein, K. (1995). *Gender outlaw: on men, women and the rest of us* . Routledge.
- Brimacombe, T. (2016). Trending trousers: debating kastom, clothing and gender in the vanuatu mediascape. *The Asia Pacific Journal Of Anthropology* , 17-33.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal Vol. 40, No. 4*, 519-531.
- Crotty, M. J. (1998). *The foundations of social research: meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cummings, M. (2013). Looking good: The cultural politics of the island dress. *The Contemporary Pacific* , 33-65.
- Daly, M. C. (2001). The "Paarda" expression of the hejaab among afghan women in a non-muslim community. *Religion, Dress And The Body*, 147-161.
- De Leeuw, S., & Rydin, I. (2007). Migrant children's digital stories: identity formation and self-representation through media. *European Journal Of Cultural Studies*, 447-464.
- Deloitte. (2021). *Global powers of luxury goods 2021 breakthrough luxury*. Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited.

Doiron, C. P. (2018). Constructing identity through the lens of fashion: an honors. *Honors College*, 328, 2. Retrieved From <https://Digitalcommons.Library.Umaine.Edu/Honors/328>

Dove. (2022). Let's talk: ableism and body positivity with annie segarra. Retrieved From Dove: <https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/real-voices/ableism-and-body-positivity-with-annie-segarra.html>

Frances Ryan, M. C. (2013, September 29). Interviewing in qualitative research: the one-to-one interview. *International Journal Of Therapy And Rehabilitation. Reaserch Methodology Series*, 16 No.6, 1. Retrieved From <https://www.magonlinelibrary.com/journal/ijtr>

Gill, R. (2007). Post feminist media culture: elements of a sensibility. *European Journal Of Cultura Studies*, 10(2), 147-166. Doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367549407075898>

Goldman, R., Heath, D., & Smith, S. L. (1991). Commodity feminism. *Critical Studies In Mass Communication*, 8(3), 333-351. Doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039109366801>

Gulzar, F. (2019). Society or self-expression? What influences women's dressing in the uae. Retrieved From Gulf News:

- Hakeem, F. (2020). Examining body positivity in rihanna's savage x fenty lingerie. *International Textile And Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings*, 77. Doi:<https://doi.org/10.31274/Itaa.12011>
- Hawting, G. R. (2000). The first dynasty of islam: The umayyad caliphate Ad 661–750. New York: Routledge.
- Hermawati Yessy, A. P. (2016). Hijab fashion: constraution of feminity. *Research Gate*, 2.
- Hiller, J. (2016). Epistemological foundations of objectivist and interpretivist research (3rd Ed.). (B. Wheeler, Ed.) Barcelona.
- Holland, R. R. (2013). Consuming capital, fashioning identity: *An exploratory study of men's luxury fashion consumption*.
- Jabobs, M. (2008). Playing with dolls. *The Journal Of The History Of Childhood And Youth Volume 1 Number 3* , 321-328.
- Joudeh A. (2018). Dress as a marker of identity construction in arab women's literature from the diaspora. *Acta Scientiarum. Language And Culture*, V. 41, E42346,, 1.
- Vladimirova S. (2021). Conceptual framework for sustainable fashion consumption within the circular fashion system. *International Research*

- Krueger, R., & Casey, M. (2000). *Focus groups: A Practical Guide For Applied Research, 3rd Ed.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Lurie, A. (2000). *The language of clothes.* New York: Henry Holt.
- Meda, K. (2022). How can the media improve representations of diverse identities? Retrieved December 2022, From *The Nexus Powered By Thomas Jefferson University*: <https://Nexus.Jefferson.Edu/Science-And-Technology/How-Can-The-Media-Improve-Representations-Of-Diverse-Identities/>
- Mehreen, U., & Sarwet, R. (2015). Gender representation and identity construction in Pakistani print advertisements of clothing brands: A Socio- Semiotic Analysis. *Pakistan Journal Of Gender Studies*, 87-112.
- Merriam S.B, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation, 4th Edition.* San Francisco: Ca: John Wiley & Sons.
- Oh, I. (2009). The performativity of motherhood: embodying theology and political agency. *Journal Of The Society Of Christian Ethics*, 29(2), 3-17. Retrieved From <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23562795>
- Ordonez Asenjo, C. (2014). *Power, social identity and fashion consumption: A Thesis On How Female Executives Use Power-Coded Dressing As A Tool To Accentuate Power As A Part Of Their Social Identity.* Stockholm University, Faculty Of Social Sciences, Stockholm Business School, Marketing.

- Pedersen, E. L., & Markee, N. L. (1991). Fashion dolls: representation of ideals of beauty. *Perception And Motor Skills*, 93-94.
- Peters, L. D. (2014). You are what you wear: how plus-size fashion figures in fat identity formation. *Fashion Theory, Volume 18, Issue 1, Pp. 45–72*, 45–72.
- Pitman, G. E. (2008). The influence of race, ethnicity, class and sexual politics on lesbians' body image. *Journal Of Homosexuality*, 49-64.
- Pramiyanti, A., & Baulch, E. (2018). Hijabers on instagram: using visual social media to construct the ideal muslim woman. *Social Media+Society*, Pp. 1-15.
Doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118800308>
- Quinlan, M. M., & Bates, B. R. (2010). Are our president learning? Unpacking the enthymematic connections in the speech mistakes of president george w. Bush. *Journal Of Research In Special Educational Needs*, 3-12.
- Ross, K. (2010). Gendered media: women, men and identity politics. *New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.*
- Singer, M. (2017, July 13). Gigi Hadid and Zayn Malik are part of a new generation who don't see fashion as gendered. Retrieved From Vogue.
- Stuart, E. W., & Fuller, B. K. (1991). Clothing as communication in to business-to-business sales settings. *Journal Of Business Research* 23, 269-290.

- Susan B. Kaiser, D. N. (Nov 2021). Fashion and cultural studies. *Bloomsbury Publishing*. Retrieved From Lovetoknow Media.
- Turner, T. S. (2012). The social skin. *Hau: Journal Of Ethnographic Theory*, 2 (2).
- Ward, K. (2020). Is there a christian dress code? Retrieved From New Identity:
[Http://Www.Newidentitymagazine.Com/Live/Is-There-A-Christian-Dress-Code/](http://www.newidentitymagazine.com/live/is-there-a-christian-dress-code/)
- Yaqin, A. (2007). Islamic barbie: The politics of gender and performativity. *Fashion Theory : The Journal Of Dress, Body And Culture Performativity*, 175.
- Yayeh, F. A. (2021). Focus group discussion as a data collection tool in. *Daagu International Journal Of Basic & Applied Research (Dijbar)*, 3, Issue-1, 52-61.
- Zanon, J. (2018). The body: fashion and physique. *Textile History*, 49(2), 244-249.
 Doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00404969.2018.1515839>
- Zhang, L., & Haller, B. (2013). Consuming image: how mass media impact the identity of people with disabilities. *Communication Quarterly* , 319-334.
- Zulkifli Abd. Latiff, A. F. (2013). The roles of media in influencing women. *Journal Of Image And Graphics, Volume 1*, 50-54.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interviews Transcription

Interview 1

Nationality: Turkish Cypriot (Born and raised in UK)

Age: late 40's

Question 1: How much has social media tools and platforms influence your purchase decision?

Response 1: I do see on social media clothing items or accessories that I like, recently I started following some designers like Schiaparelli, Prada. So, I never used to follow designer brands or necessarily pages like Zara or high street fashion but I recently started following celebrity pages. And this was done by Instagram which is the only social media platform I use aside from WhatsApp which doesn't really share content like that.

Question 2: How well do you feel represented in media representation of standard of beauty?

Response 2: No, I don't feel represented, I have a huge problem with the one idea of what beautiful is and the female tend to be one generic type, slim not curvy and they are photo shopped. As a curvier lady, you feel the need to have perfect hair, perfect skin, perfect makeup and the need to be tall slim reducing the things that make us female. Like hips, thighs and bust they are completely reduced the smaller breasted no hips no but female is what is presented as beautiful and an ideal. As a mother of an 8-year-old daughter I'm very conscious of what my daughter sees as beautiful ideally, I want her to feel like whatever she turns out to be is beautiful not what sees on social media, Tv, magazines are the definition of what beautiful is.

Question 3: Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why?

They still don't, they show a curvier lady but not all body types and variations. Although there are other brands like Fenty, Kim Kadarshian's 'Skin' or Good American by Khloe Kardashian but even with the body inclusivity they are completely air brushed with no reality of theses females their spots stretch marks their blemishes if they got white hair or frizzy hair nothing. Rihanna is more real in the sense because Kim and Khloe are completely air brushed in reality themselves but with Rihanna you see her real self on her posts but even I her campaigns you have completely air brushed females, so even though there is a new movement of being more inclusive of different sizes, colours and ethnicity I do feel they are missing the point of representing the real female and be natural.

(My comments: What media calls the ordinary woman should be the ideal representation of beauty standards not an air brush unachievable look that even the models don't recognize themselves as a beauty standard)

Question 4: Please list the three fashion brands that you buy your clothes from, in order of most to least, with the main one first, the second one next and the third at the end.

Response 4: There is no favourite brand that I like, I really like the extravagant look of Schiaparelli but it not anything I can afford anything that I could probably pull off in wearing. I think they're visually beautiful. So really, I think that when the fashion I do follow is only for the art of it and not something that I can realistically go and buy, whether it's for financial reasons, whether I think it would look good, on me or whether it's something that's even wearable on a day-to-day basis or even at an event.

"I think really a lot of the fashion I follow is not something that I feel would represent me or something that I would physically wear. But I like the art of it. There's no brand

out there that I think represents me or a majority of the regular female, but that's not for me to answer.”

Question 5: Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?

Response 5: No, I don't. I used to. And I tell you a little secret as well. Previously, I've had breast reduction done because I was much heavier on top. Much, much heavier. And I think along with the fact that it was giving me physical pain to my neck and back, another reason why I really wanted to have the breast reduction done was because constantly I was being looked at.

A lot of the fashion then didn't suit me. They didn't have fashion for the big breasted lady, especially as I had a slimmer waist and big breast and there was no dress that fitted me that was made from a lady of my curve. So, it wasn't even a case of representation. It physically wasn't being made for me to purchase. So nowadays I don't think I wear anything or I'm uncomfortable by people's gazes. Maybe that's an age thing as well, I remember being in my twenties and being uncomfortable with how people stared at me. That could be because of my size then, or it could be because of the fact that I didn't have fashion that I felt suited me.

Question 6: Do you think culture or your religion affects how you represent yourself?

Response 6: I think when I lived in London, I dressed more comfortably because I knew that if I dressed more open, I'm just one of the very many that are dressing like that in the UK. Whereas when I moved to Northern Cyprus, I do realize that there's a different culture here. Even though Northern Cyprus represents itself as an Islamic nation, it's extremely secular and probably the most secular Islamic nation there is in the world. So, I do think that in that sense, here we're very much more comfortable.

But I am still conscious of what I wear because it's a small island and the culture is more backward.

“And then there is this idea that oh, for example, she's a teacher, she's a mother, she shouldn't be dressing like this, and that does have an effect. So even if I wanted to wear something, I would be conscious of what people would say and think”.

(My Comments: Gender performativity picking up multiple roles and being judged by their standards)

Question 7: Do you think leaving in the UK as a Turkish Cypriot affected the way you saw yourself, like your identity and how you represented yourself?

Response 7: Definitely for sure. See, the thing is when my parents moved to the UK, Northern Cyprus was a different place. So, my dad and my mum, when they moved to the UK, they still had a bit of a backward mind-set and they were very strict with me in my upbringing, in how I can dress and where I could go and what I could do.

Yeah, it definitely has an effect on my identity. Because there's also the fact that when you are somebody that's raised in another country but your ethnicity is different. You have not a split identity, but an identity confusion of who you are in the first place. Because you're raised at home with a different culture. And the streets that you go out to and the world you live in is a different culture. When I'm in the UK, I'm a completely different person and how I dress reflects that. And when I come to Northern Cyprus, I'm a completely different person and how my dress reflects that.

Question 8: Do you think how you dress communicates who you are?

Response 8: No, it doesn't, it doesn't. It doesn't communicate who I am because I don't even know who I am because of this identity conflict. That's A and B, I don't think the clothing article has been produced for somebody like me is, you know and I'm not even talking about identity wise. I'm talking in relation to my body image and what I

would like to portray. I don't even think they have been I can't find them on social media, on the Internet, and in the stores here. Yes, we're very limited here in Northern Cyprus on what we can purchase, but even to order online, I can't find them.

Question 9: What would you like to change in the industry if you had a power to?

Response 9: To completely stop using tools like Photoshop, because they've started with Body Inclusivity which is great, but you're still airbrushing these ladies completely and Body Inclusivity. Like when you look at campaigns by again, when we're talking about the Rihanna, the Kim Kardashian, the Good American with Khloe Kardashian and there's many other examples. When you look at those and there's like a group of ten ladies standing together, there's only two or three ladies that are larger or curvier, and they're not even completely curvier. And then the rest of them are slimmer ladies who are a lot closer to what is accepted as the beautiful body in today's portrayal across the media.

“So, more Body Inclusivity show all sides to allow women to think; okay this lady is a lot like me, if it looks good on her it's going to look good on me too. Look, despite her stretch marks, she looks beautiful. But despite her blemishes, she looks beautiful. I would. I'd like to see real women.”

Interview 2

Nationality: Nigerian

Age: Mid 30's

Question 1: How much has social media tools and platforms influence your purchase decision?

Response: In percentage I will say 70% because I am a heavy user of Instagram and currently Instagram has the highest Advert frequency. If you scroll on Instagram, even if you're chatting with someone you find out that before you scroll like three four

profiles on your feed there is a sponsored ad. These sponsored ads also have to do with clothes just last week I ordered a bunch of clothes, like three winter jackets because I saw it on Instagram sponsored ad, clicked on it, liked it, went through it and I purchased it online. Instagram is doing a lot more of ads.

Question 2&3: How well do you feel represented in media representation of standard of beauty? Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why?

Response: No, I'm not. I'm not going to say I am, because you don't see models style these dresses in my size. For example, every time you see an ad on Instagram, you find out that model is wearing a size small motor is wearing extra small. I'm a medium sometimes but mainly a size large and I have never seen a Models for this clothing brands in my size. So, I don't think I am a bit represented. However, you can also find pages that are your physical appearance or your kind of style that is if you would want to go the extra mile to search or get them custom made. It's not something that just pops up and you just see it on Instagram, you have to refine your search.

Question 4: Please list the three fashion brands that you buy your clothes from, in order of most to least, with the main one first, the second one next and the third at the end.

Response: Shein, Mind you it is not an accurate representation. Shein is just something close to it, Zara on the other hand, is nothing like what is close to it also. "Also, Shein is represented as a website for plus sizes" their models as not really slim models like most brands.

Question 5: Which of the following channels do you use to find out about new trends and updates on fashion brands? Please arrange in order of importance, with the most

important at the top and least important at the bottom; Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube.

Response: YouTube Haul videos and Instagram recommendations. It wasn't easy to pick Shein, I have to go the extra mile to do the research before I pick an outfit. Now, before you pick a brand in the first place, you have to investigate the brands. YouTube is like the best place to be if you want to do online shopping. So, you can just type on Hauls for Shein on YouTube and do your research.

Question 6: Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?

Response: No, I must say that I actually really dressed differently for my age grade, first of all. So yes, no male gaze per se, but yes, I have them. I would not necessarily wear what my mates are wearing. I don't appear the way they are supposed to appear in the first place. I don't even dress for the male gaze in the first place. There's nothing sexy or not even revealing, my style is more corporate no matter where I'm going to.

Question 7: Does your culture, religion or society have any influence on how you represent yourself?

Response: Yes, it does. So, I'm a Nigerian and there is something called home training. So, there's a certain way someone who has been brought up in my society should appear. So, yes, you love fashion, but you have a guide just because culturally there is like a rail towards what you should do and what you should not do, how you should appear and what you should not appear. So, a huge chunk of the way I dress can be attributed to where I'm from culturally. Also, there is somewhat a Christian like way of dressing, we are more open, and however, you must be modest. My religion is part of my cultural attributions, so culturally, religiously, ethically, values, norms they all contributes to the way I dress.

Question 8: What would you like to change in the industry if you had a power to?

Response: Model shouldn't be a certain way, there shouldn't be a generic standard for what a model should look like. That's something that we don't talk enough about. Now, for the media standard of a sexy woman or an appealing woman, small, slim & tall. But that's not the reality. Yes, the media is supposed to mirror the reality, but they haven't quite achieved this part of it. So, if there's something that could change, if we can start by changing the way models are portrayed for a certain clothing brand, it's going to take a cake for me. If the industry can find a small model, a medium model, a large model, an extra-large model, you understand it would be better if all sizes are represented. Because I cannot view a model in size small and you have to imagine another model for a size large or a size medium, I need to have the visual representation of each model for each size because I can get a model who is wearing a large with a particular size of groups that I don't have.

Question 9: Are you what you wear?

Response: Yes. You are what you wear. To a large extent. Because I will like to believe that everybody practices "Dress the way you want to be addressed" So if you exhibit a certain style in your fashion, I automatically assume that your personality is linked to the way you dress, even though I don't know you. So, you're what you wear, if you dress casually or you dress corporate, automatically assume that for casual you are a playful person and for corporate you have this serious job or a serious lifestyle that you need to keep up with. Yes, you are to a large extent maybe 90%. We are what you wear.

Interview 3

Nationality: Turkish Cypriot (Born and raised in UK)

Age: 45

Question 1: How well do you feel represented in media representation of standard of beauty?

As a model from an early age this was something I personally had to deal with in order to fit in for years, I dealt with being extremely slim which enables me into the fashion industry. *I personally think media representation has to be real. There has to be some sort of real element within it for it to be inclusive. We need to reflect almost like where Shakespeare said, the world is a stage. We need to do that in the fashion industry. We need to reflect the real world a lot more.*

Question 2: Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why?

Response: I'm a great believer of diversity and inclusion and actually having representation of all shapes, sizes, ethnic backgrounds within the fashion industry. It's getting better. I've seen a great improvement from the time that I started to know. But I think we've got a long, long, long way to go, because when it comes to high end fashion, big labels and the big houses, the fashion houses, they still are of the mind-set that you have to be a certain height, you have to be a certain weight. I feel like representation of different ethnic backgrounds is a lot better, but it's certainly not where it should be. Sure. It's almost like when they have somebody of a dark skin on a front cover, it's like sensationalized. Oh, look at us, we're so inclusive. When it should just be the norm.

Question 3: Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?

Response: As a model and a Muslim (not practicing) I've had many struggles to get to where I am. And the thing is, I actually had a break as well to have my children and even when I went back into the Modelling industry, even on the school run, the mums

they would judge me and say; why are you putting all these pictures up about yourself? So, it's not just even about your shape, size or what you wear, it's about your age as well once you have children as a woman, you'll seem to be sterilized and you can't be normal anymore. You can't have a life I used to have anymore, your mother role is a role you play, but it's not your identity. And for a woman to find her identity and be able to explore it I now am a lot.

Interview 4

Nationality: Palestina (Raised in USA)

Age: 34

Question 1: How much has social media tools and platforms influence your purchase decision?

Response: Actually, it's the other way around. Usually I'm looking for something, and it's not fashionable yet so I cannot find it, then it gets fashionable and I'm like thank God they're actually producing this and buy them. For example, I love Hugs the shoes and it took a while for them to become fashionable and available to get it everywhere. Now on Instagram they are on a lot of ads regardless of the country the ad is coming from.

Question 2&3: Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why? How well do you feel represented in media representation of standard of beauty?

Response: Well, I mean to be honest, I don't even think about that because I know how disturbed the whole industry is. But I have a definition. You have a definition. Everybody has a definition of what is beautiful. Then we see some weird presentations, at least we are seeing that nowadays it's a bit better because now we see women of colour. Now we see women of different size to an extent, but at least we're seeing

them. You know, it's not like, oh, they didn't exist in the industry, because about 20 years ago, it was like, no one of colour could be a form of representation. So that kind of censorship was insane. And finally, I think it was the public opinion that actually forced the fashion industry and also the media to try and show some diversity. So, there is diversity but there can be more.

Question 4: Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?

Response: Maybe not now because I dress mostly in loose and comfortable clothes but I was attacked about ten years ago in this university by Six Palestinian men. Apparently, I had a tattoo on my neck that somehow offended them. Which was why I started dressing in comfortable clothes. I couldn't really defend myself the way I wanted to; my jeans were so tight they beat at me so bad that I ended up in the hospital. Back then I was ahead of my time so what I wore then is what is being worn now in a more circular Northern Cyprus than it was 10 years ago. So, with how conservative it was then I was most definitely judged, but I didn't care

Question 5: Does your culture, religion or society have any influence on how you represent yourself?

Response: I am not religious; I don't believe in anything I'm an atheist. But I come from a mixed culture, my parents also grew up in Europe and we lived in Iran for a few years. During that time, I was constantly being judged on how I want to represent myself. And I couldn't understand it because at Home there was no censorship, there was no filtering, there was nobody telling me, like you don't have to dress that way. And I couldn't even understand it. The culture and society didn't have an effect as much on me because I couldn't stand it and left but there is a lot on those who live there and have females who abide by these laws.

Interview 5

Nationality: Sudan

Age: 26

Question 1: Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how? (Do you feel you are put in a box with how you represent yourself?)

Response 1: Growing up yes, I was because I grew up in Saudi Arabia which means you have to be covered up completely despite what you wear. When I left Saudi, I had to figure out what my style was, what was okay and what was not okay but still trying to maintain the modesty aspect of it due to religious beliefs. Now, I'm in a place where I wear what I want to wear as long as it feels comfortable for me.

People would always have something to say, if you are covered up, or not enough or if your body regardless of being covered up still looks sexy. It's a habit of them not necessarily an outcome of what I'm doing. I learn to do me because people would talk regardless. I'm not focused on getting the Male Gaze as I was growing up.

Question 2: Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?

Response 2: You feel the under-tone judgement coming through, most people who grew up with a Muslim background have a double life the ones their family and Muslim community sees and the one their close circle sees. A very good played out acting of different personae in order to be accepted and fit into the system. My mum had to slowly accept the transition from being a fully covered Hijab to not being one. She doesn't know the extent but she has the idea, which we had to have a long conversation because of the expectations she had for me. (My comment: A form of cultural performativity is played out, in order to fit in to the societal standards set)

Question 3: How do you chose to represent yourself?

Response 3: I dress mostly according to my mood, either masculine or feminine depending on how I feel or what character I chose to play that day.

Question 4: Do you find you style accessible in the various fashion brands both big and small Brands?

Response 4: In Northern Cyprus, yes and no. Yes, because there are different styles that appeal to me that I would not find in Saudi normally. For instance, the Zara in Saudi is different than in Turkey which is mostly a cultural thing. No because it is harder to find the quality of clothing's here in Northern Cyprus. Same style but different quality, no sustainability.

Question 5: Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why?

Response 5: No for me it's a matter of figuring out what works for me and what doesn't. As someone who is on the shorter end of the spectrum there are certain things that I can't wear that won't be flattering on my body. I don't put a lot of emphasis on it but I try to experiment to find what works for me.

Question 6: How well do you feel represented in media representation of standard of beauty?

Response 6: Not necessarily, some brands like Fenty Savage has tried to be more inclusive of all the body spectrum but for the more mainstream stuff there is the same pattern of body types slime waist, large thighs, extremely thin body and so on.

It also differs based on the country, for instance shops from the eastern region has really thin models because that is their beauty standards, the USA has the slime thick body type, so it varies. So, it is not inclusive at all.

Question 7: Are You What You Wear?

It is not completely who I am, it is just an outlet. So, if we lived in an ultra-universe where clothes do not exist who would I be in that world. It is a small part of who I am.

Interview 6

Nationality: Pakistani (UAE Born/Raised)

Age: 26

Question 1: Are you what you wear?

Response 1: this is really difficult because being a hijab there is a lot of responsibilities that comes with it. How you dress what you wear and how you behave and so on. If you would say I am what I wear and most definably yes.

Question 2: Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?

Response 2: Most definitely, I wouldn't say I am the perfect hijab for instance my necks are not supposed to be out and some people might pass by and be like oh you don't represent and all. I personally don't care I feel like it is more of a personal thing and I am going to do what makes me feel comfortable.

Question 3: How well do you feel represented in the fashion industry and media representation of standard of beauty?

Response 3: In Northern Cyprus specifically I would say no because most of the shops here are not hijab friendly at all so I don't shop here, there are only two shops I can find something presentable. But back in the UAE it's the exact opposite, there are mostly Hijabs, Abayas and all. So, you find what you want there. With social media I would say the hijab influencers are on the up raise so it is beautiful to see.

Question 4: How would you, or how do you feel when someone comments positively or negatively on the outfit you are wearing? Does it determine how you would represent yourself the next day?

Response 4: As a kid I cared way too much because there were a lot of standards and expectations that were set for me you are supposed to laugh loud, your neck is not meant to show your clothes are meant to be baggy etc. but as I grow up, I realized I wasn't doing all these for myself but because of what people would say. Now I decided not to put so much pressure on myself wear what I want too.

I found myself having different representations based on where I am though mostly for my parents, but to be me in general.

With The Male Gaze No matter what you wear men would always look and cat call but I have decided not to let it affect how I look.

Interview 7

Nationality: American.

Age: 35

Question 1: Can you tell me about yourself?

Response 1: I think I'm very unique, my style can be said to be influenced by my cultural background. I am American and we try to flock to something unique and different.

Question 2: How much has social media, culture or religion influence your representation?

Response 2: Over the years I realized I started dressing more modest that I would have if I was not a Christian Believer, I would dress more open or not even think about it. I'm conscious about how I would come across when I walk into a place, how I am portraying myself and how that would affect how I am seen.

Question 3: How well do you feel represented in media representation of standard of beauty?

Response 3: I feel like my style is hard to find, social media and the fashion industry has as this very clear description or standard of who we are supposed to be or look like. I just try to work with what is available and make it me. I don't follow trends really but I have an idea on what looks good. To look how I really what I would love to have someone to make my style that would be so cool for me.

Question 4: Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why?

Response 4: I'm a weird US Size 2 on my upper body but have a broader hip, so it is weird to get a full outfit that fits completely. There aren't exactly outfits for specific body types so it too stream lined with the standard of beauty, to get a really good outfit to fit I need to get the altered by a seamstress to fit all parts of my body.

Question 5: Please list the three fashion brands that you buy your clothes from, in order of most to least, with the main one first, the second one next and the third at the end.

Responds 5: I mostly look for what would fit in to my style so to speak no place in particular bur if I would have to pick mostly Zara because I think they are up-to-date with their styles.

Question 6: Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?

Response 6: I try not to dress super reviling just because I know what could happen so I am very conscious of how I am perceived because of my religion.

I think what I wear represent parts of who I am. Although, with the restrictions in the fashion industry there is only so much you can express with what is available. So, to some extent I think I represent who I am with what I wear.

Interview 8

Nationality: Nigerian

Age: 20

Question 1: Do you think you are what you wear?

Response 1: I do believe you are what you wear, People see you first before they are able to make any judgment about you, and so based on what you are wearing they can get an idea of who you are. For instance, you and know some who is artistic from what they wear and how they represent themselves. But not everyone communicates who they are through what they wear, I will say that some people especially women do pick out their outfits according to their moods so in a way they are communicating who they are or what role they are playing that particular day.

Question 2: How much has social media, culture or religion influence your representation?

Response 2: Initially because I grow up in Kuwait, I always felt very conscious of wearing things that show skin because in the Arabic society they dress more modestly. Coming to Northern Cyprus and seeing how the culture is different and more relaxed and expressive, it took me quite some time to get used to people showing skin and myself also. So, Culture does have a great influence on how one represents them self. Social media used to be quite intimidating to me at first especially with the luxury brands I could not afford but I found a way around it and started experimenting with what was available to me. Now using social media ideas but recreating them with what I have available.

As a Christian there is also like a limit to how much skin I show, I feel conviction.

Question 3&4: Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why? How well do you feel represented in media representation of standard of beauty?

Response 3& 4: I would say that they are being a lot more inclusive of most body types now but there is still a lot more work to be done. As someone who is a size 2, I'm so what inclusive in what is being represented on media physically but not all is exactly my style.

Question 5: Which of the following channels do you use to find out about new trends and updates on fashion brands? Please arrange in order of importance, with the most important at the top and least important at the bottom; Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube

Response 5: Instagram is all about pictures with a lot of celebrities, brands and it is a platform people promote themselves on, so I would say it has a lot of influence as one of the biggest platforms people follow trends.

Interview 9

Nationality: Ukraine

Age: 25

Question 1: How much has social media tools and platforms influence your purchase decision?

Response; Usually I don't really check the social media for the clothing's and things like that. Sometimes yeah, I go to the Instagram most of the time that I'm checking is because there are the ads. Most of the time it benefits from my interest due to the data they collect on how profile.

Question 2: Do you think you are what you wear?

Response: Sometimes yes, sometimes no because it depends on how I chose to dress that day.

Question 3: Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why?

Response: Not really, it doesn't exactly affect me because I don't care about it honestly.

Question 4: Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?

Response: There are too many judgments that come from different people, male, females. I don't know if it's too personal or not, but still, when they see me, for example, when I'm dressed in a formal, they say, oh, you're dressing formal. So, the way you walk, the way you act, the way you behave is changing or when you're wearing sports clothing. The way you act, then even your speech changes. I don't know if it's the true.

Question 5: How much has social media, culture or religion influence your representation?

Response: I think it's mostly inspired from media on the other side. My first background is graphic design and since my childhood I was very interested in this kind of thing. So, I tried to create my own things like doing DIY stuff on my clothes.

Sometimes culture is part of the influence because I get inspired from cultural as well, but it's small. Because I kept changing my place, from country to country. It may change for a moment, but in the end, I realized that I still didn't find my own way to represent myself. I'm not sure yet, but I don't feel that I found it already. Maybe for a moment but then it changes suddenly my idea to totally different style.

Interview 10

Nationality: Kazakhstan

Age: 19

Question 1: Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why?

Response: Not at all, it more of if I trust the clothes I want to buy, the models look tall and I'm not although I fall in the standard of beauty so to speak.

Question 2: How much has social media tools and platforms influence your purchase decision?

Response: if I dress the way I see myself, nobody would talk to me so I try to keep myself updates with Instagram, checking what goes together and what doesn't. But mostly I use old movies as a huge reference to my style and purchase decision replicating outfits., I check for example, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, some pictures of models as well. And whenever I see the same clothes that I also have, I check how they wear it with what.

Appendix B: Questionnaire

THESIS QUESTIONIARE

This researcher choose the use of questioner in other to understand how women represent themselves and how much the society they live in and the representation of women in media influences their individual representation which is also a form of communication.

These question aim to find what influences women's representation of who they are and how media and the culture around them plays a major role. With the use of a Theoretical Framework this questions will be analysed in accordance with the theories discussed in this research. Analysing how women response to different situations and circumstances that influence their representation aid the theory on how most individual have built their representation based on what is projected around them.

“AM I WHAT I WEAR?” An Illustration of Communication and Identity Construct through the Lens of Fashion.

1. How old are you?

- | | |
|---------|---------------|
| a)19-25 | d)46-54 |
| b)26-35 | e)55 or Older |
| c)36-45 | |

2. What is your usual clothing size?

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| a) <u>XS</u> (extra small) | e)XL (Extra-large) |
| b) <u>S</u> (Small) | f)XXL (Extra extra-large) |
| c)M (<u>Medium</u>) | g)Other (Please specify) |
| d)L (Large) | |

3. Where are you from and what's your cultural background?

Type one or a few words...

4. Does your clothing express your personality?

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| a) <u>Yes</u> | c)Sometimes |
| b) <u>No</u> | |

5. Does looking nice affect your level of confidence?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Sometimes

6. Does media representation of beauty and the culture of country you live in affect your purchase decision?

Type one or a few words...

7. Do you follow trend on social media or create our own style?

Select one or more answers

- a) Follow Trends
- b) Own style
- c) Neither
- d) Both

8. What kind of image do you want to create in other people's mind while choosing an at or dressing to an occasion?

Select one or more answers

- a) Confident
- b) Unique
- c) Beautiful
- d) Sexy
- e) Elegant

9. Do you feel sexualized by the way you dress?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Sometimes

10. Does your religion or worldview affect the way you dress or Value clothing?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Sometimes

11. Does a person's clothing influence your first impression of them?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Sometimes

d) Other... (Please specify)

12. How much do you think the media representation of beauty and society you live in affects your style or representation?

Type one or a few words

13. When getting clothing that fit your style or choice of representation, are they easily accessible or hard to find?

a) Easily Accessible

b) Hard to Access

If possible specify

14. If you're Plus-sized, how often do you find flattering attires?

a) Very often

b) Never

c) Sometimes

15. How would you describe your ideal representation in comparison with who you really are, if any? Type one or a few words...

16. How often do you see your body type, colour and culture represented in clothing brands and media representation? Type one or a few words...

Appendix C: Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS [Focus Group incl.*]

This research will be using activities and questions to get the perspectives of the participants

- 1.Can you tell me about yourself?
- 2.How much has social media tools and platforms influence your purchase decision?
- 3.How well do you feel represented in media representation of standard of beauty?
- 4.Do you believe clothing brands representation of women and their body types affects the way you see yourself? If yes, explain why?
- 5.Please list the three fashion brands that you buy your clothes from, in order of most to least, with the main one first, the second one next and the third at the end.
- 6.Which of the following channels do you use to find out about new trends and updates on fashion brands? Please arrange in order of importance, with the most important at the top and least important at the bottom; Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, You-Tube
- 7.Do you feel that people view you differently with how you represent yourself? If yes, how?
- 8.How would you, or how do you feel when someone comments positively or negatively on the outfit you are wearing? Does it determine how you would represent yourself the next day?

*Focus Group Inquire will address the above questions through activity and group discussions.