AESTHETICISATION OF ADOLESCENT REALITIES

HOW FASHION FUNCTIONS FOR AN INCREASING SOCIAL AWARENESS OF THE GENDER FLUID GENERATIONS Y & Z

Bachelor Thesis

Alina Luisa Schroeder :: June, 2017
BACHELOR THESIS

::

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HOW FASHION FUNCTIONS FOR AN INCREASING SOCIAL AWARENESS OF THE GENDER FLUID GENERATIONS Y & Z

International Fashion & Management
June 2017

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Declaration of Authorship:
Hereby, I, Alina Luisa Schröder declare that thesis I am submitting is entirely of my own original work, except from otherwise indicated. Any use of the works of any other author or provider, in any form, is properly acknowledged at their point of use.
I would like to thank all the people who I have been able to interview for this bachelor thesis for their interesting insights.

Rose Brouwer :: Jan Van Casteren :: Marnix Dorrestein :: Céline De Jong :: Dennis Fontaine :: Guus Van Vugt (NHTK) :: Myrto Semimoh (BONNE Suits) ::
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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate how does fashion function for an increasing social awareness of the gender fluid Generations Y and Z? In order to answer this question and to get a found understanding of the researched consumer group, in the first two chapters, it is explained who the respective gender fluid generations are, what gender identity is, and what kind of gender identity forming issues they face during adolescence. In order to provide suggestion of what is important within gender-neutral fashion concepts that are specifically serving the consumer groups of Generation Y and Z and to enhance social awareness for the topic, in the article, the last two chapter focus on the questions what kind of function does fashion and do fashion brands have within an adolescent identity forming process, and how do the brands NHTK & BONNE Suits address the gender fluid Generation Y & Z?

Fashion could be a critical identifier and social informant of gender, along it has the ability to re-inform modern society to perceive the importance of gender diversity, fluidity and equality. Manifestations of public figures’ statements being gender fluid or transgender, great media coverage of the topic of gender diversity, as in global magazines like the National Geographic, and the involvement of the issue within creative industries, are evident for an existing social awareness of gender diversity, hence gender fluidity in modern times.
1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale & Relevance

This January issue of National Geographic was called the ‘Gender Revolution’. It dealt with “the shifting landscapes of gender” and explored the topic from different angles and in a very candid manner (National Geographic, 2017). The magazines’ voice is not the first, one picks up in terms of the gender discourse. In recent years gender diversity within all kind of disciplines, naming a few; science, sociology and civilisation, has been greatly discussed and has become more and more relevant. Especially, in the current western society’s adolescent Generations Y and Z the binary gender categorization seem not to be as dominant as ever before. Both generations have been confronted with the question of identity and the ‘self’ far more than previous generations (Stahl, 2016). Not without reason, Generation Y is described as self-centred and among other named GenerationMeMeMe (Hurrelman & Albrecht, 2016). Aspects like globalization, digitalization, economic and political instability makes the world in where adolescent members of Generation Y and Z have been growing up uncertain, and less defined in terms of boundaries (Bolton, et al., 2013). Furthermore, they have been raised to ‘become anything’. Consequently, they do not feel the need to determine themselves to ‘be anything’. Social labels do not seem to be as important as they may use to before - Generation Y and Z are considered to be the most ethnically and socially assorted since the middle ages (Possamai, 2014). One of the generations’ joint and outstanding trait is the disapproval of conformity and the questioning of almost everything (Bund, 2014). So they do with the debate of gender diversity. They challenge conventional gender stereotypes by interpreting what gender means to them personally (Anon., 2014).

Due to this gender role blur, the human’s sense of self seems to be evolving, as Anne-Marie Slaughter (2017) states in a commentary of the National Geographic’s special issue on gender. Nevertheless, there are still obstacles, disrespect and disapproval that Generations’ Y and Z gender fluid individuals face. Social awareness for this topic exists in 2017, but as with any social topic, especially with LGBTQ1 rights, Generation Y and Z, and society in general will still have to encounter great work.

However, the social awareness for this cultural phenomenon increased as well in the fashion and beauty industries. Observing the fashion business in recent years, gender-fluid and neutral collections have become conspicuous on the western hemisphere’s catwalks, public figures’ statements being gender-fluid or transgender gained international media coverage and substantially contribute to the gender discussion (Murdoch, 2016). Back in the days the sociologist Georg Simmel (1997) pointed out already that the fashion system would encompass modern socio-cultural occurrences. Jessica Ciarla (2016) enhances Simmel’s argument as she contends in an article in the Dallas News, clothing would be one of the critical social informants on gender, and it could be possible that fashion as a subject of art, has the ability to re-inform on how modern society perceives the world.

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1 LGBTQ: Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, according to Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2017).
Taking this assumption as a foundation for this study, the questions rise what is the meaning of fashion for the gender fluid Generations Y and Z? Do gender fluid adolescents use fashion to show their gender identity? And what role do fashion and fashion brands have within an adolescent identity forming and orientation process regarding the subject of gender identity?

This is particularly interesting for marketers in the fashion industry, as the new consumer uses brands in a liberal manner to express their own individual identity, likewise due to the generations’ changing thinking patterns and values, their buying behaviour appears to have become less predictable (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013). Moreover, trend forecasting agencies have foreseen, brands and companies will be and have been facing blurred and less defined consumption patterns, due to a far-reaching “reassessment of conventional identity signifiers” (Anon., 2015). Due to the generations’ Y and Z representation of tomorrow’s consumer group, and their vital purchasing power, they respectively have become the focal point of interest in marketing.

The leading question of the research report is specifically directed to how does fashion function for an increasing social awareness of the gender-fluid Generation Y and Z, as above stated notions like gender fluidity and diversity never have played such a crucial role as in the respective generation’s identity-orientation and forming (Marsh, 2016).

1.2 Thesis Aim

The research report investigate the topic of gender identity within the adolescent Generations Y and Z in a fashion-related context, in order to address a contemporary issue and to build an analysis that is supportive in the fields of fashion marketing / consumer research. Furthermore, it adds relevant information to the disciplines of the sociology of fashion and sociology of generations, since often there can be noticed a great deal of crossover between social research and market research / practices.

Research Aim

The first two chapters aim to constitute a foundation for an understanding of who the gender fluid Generations Y and Z are, and what kind of gender identity issues the adolescent members of the respective generations face. The second part of this paper intents to point out what the function of fashion is within this examination - do fashion and fashion brands represent a supportive role in terms of the identifying process, do adolescent gender fluid individuals use fashion to show their gender identity, and how does the landscape of gender fluid brands look like in 2017 based on the analysis of the fashion brands NHTK – Nobody Has To Know and BONNE Suits.
**Thesis Aim**

The overall thesis' objective is the exploration of how fashion functions for an increasing social awareness of the gender fluid Generations Y and Z. In order to find this out a mini-ethnographic case study design is used to examine how the gender fluid brands *Nobody Has To Know* and *BONNE Suits* address the Generations Y and Z, and with what (aesthetical) characteristics they establish their identity, hence an ethnical footprint\(^2\) towards more social awareness of a gender fluid generation.

**Practical Aim**

The paper is addressed to brand managers and marketing professionals, operating in the fashion industry and will therefore result in an academic article that outlines the main issues and findings the thesis particularises. The focus here is to provide suggestion of what is important, within gender-neutral fashion concepts that are specifically serving the consumer groups of Generation Y and Z and to enhance social awareness for the topic. On account of this, it would be worth striving for to publish the article in form of an advice in the Global Journal of Fashion Marketing – Bridging Fashion and Marketing.

1.3 Research Questions

The main question for my bachelor thesis will be; *how does fashion function for an increasing social awareness of the gender-fluid Generation Y & Z?* This question will be supported by the following subordinated research questions:

1. Who are the gender fluid Generations Y & Z?
2. What kind of gender identity forming issues do the adolescent Generation Y & Z face?
3. What kind of function does fashion and do fashion brands have within an adolescent identity forming process?
4. How do the brands NHTK & BONNE Suits address the gender fluid Generation Y & Z?

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\(^2\) Ethnical footprint: the manner a company contributes to ethnical or social matter within society (Anon., 2014)
1.4 Methodology & Limitations

Methodology

The methodology approach of this research paper has two main focuses, for one the analysis of the demand side, namely the current gender fluid adolescents of Generations Y and Z.

The second part of the approach examine how the supply side addresses these generations, and what kinds of characteristics and brand identity traits are used to enhance the social awareness of the topic of gender identity / fluidity. The overall method used for this paper is a mini-ethnographic case study, a multi-method approach, as the combination of ethnographic research methods with the method of case study seemed most applicable to the design of my research question and the overall structure of my paper.

For the first part a literature review is used to constitute an understanding of who these gender fluid Generations Y and Z are, what kind of adolescent gender identity issues they face, furthermore what the role of fashion and fashion brands is within this adolescent identity forming- and orientation process. In combination with the method of an ethnographic approach valuable outcomes could be gained. The latter was reasonable to choose, as qualitative research reveals valid insights in how targeted people perceive their worlds. Through this research design, ambiguities (literature review) can be clarified and potentials for business implementations could be discovered (Fusch, et al., 2017), referring here to the practical aim of the paper, the advice. The results for the second part of the report are constituted by the method of case study which consists of multiple additive data collection methods; the interviews, casual conversations, observations and associated field notes, additional images, as well as the visual analysis of the latter. The author of the book “Case Study Research – Design and Methods”, Robert K. Yin states that research questions used in a case study method imply the interrogatives ‘what’ and ‘how’ (2014), which is applicable to the style of my main research question ‘How does fashion function for an increasing social awareness of the gender fluid Generations Y & Z’, and the subordinated questions. The two gender fluid Amsterdam based brands NHTK and BONNE Suits are used as the case study’s subjects, and are examined upon their approach towards a gender fluid consumer group, whereby the focus on the representation of the brands is set.

The blend of both methods allow to explore causality links, which is not exemplary for exclusively utilize ethnographic research methods, and the application of the studied content in the real world, what is constituted in the practical goal of the research paper, the article in form of an advice directed to fashion professionals, marketers and entrepreneurs (Fusch, et al., 2017). [For a more detailed insight on the chosen method, I refer to the process book p. 4].

Limitations

The overall paper might be limited in the following four identified scopes of limitations, namely the scope of geography, societal and demographic scope, the capacity of time and last the scope of transferability. They will be further presented on p. 5 in the chapter 2.2 Continuation of Limitation part Research Report in the supplementary process book.
Suggestion for future research:

Further research on this topic could investigate an extended consumer group, referring to the amount of interviewees and their demographics, as nationality and age. Moreover, the amount of case studied brands can be extended, as well as the amount and form of brands used for juxtaposing. With extended gathered data, the suggestions that are made in the article of what is important within gender-neutral fashion concepts that are specifically serving the consumer groups of Generation Y and Z, can be developed in such manner to provide suggestion on how to establish a gender fluid brand, thus how to enter the (niche) market successfully.
2. Who are the gender fluid Generations Y & Z?

2.1 How do we define the term generation?

diving into the subject of the sociology of generations, one comes across a lot of names, definitions and explanations for the respective generations studied in this research paper. To clarify who these particular generations with the names Y and Z are, what the notion of gender fluid means, and what it actually is that makes them ‘gender-fluid’, this chapter starts with giving an answer to the question ‘how do we define the term generation?’.

The word generation defines a group of individuals born in a certain period of time in a sociological context. In the respective study, the sociology of generations, this time span is normally confined by 15 - 20 years. Due to social, political, economic and environmental occurrences in society in the defined time of the generation’s people being born, growing up and eventually producing own offspring, certain characteristics and behavioural forms in the respective humans are developed through experience and observations of their surroundings. This consequently shape the foundations of the generations’ joint thinking and value patterns, hence make them to a collective that is denoted as a social generation (Hurrelman & Albrecht, 2016; McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009; Possamai, 2014). According to the authors of the book “How cool brands stay hot”, the during adolescence developed values, beliefs and attitudes will stay non-interchangeable throughout life (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013). Others argue that a generation is highly swayed by the current Zeitgeist, which led to the conclusion that within a generation certain segments could exist (Pilcher, 1994).

In the previous passage the term of generation has been defined for the context of this research paper, we intend in the following to explain who the Generations Y & Z are.

2.2 How can we define the Generations Y & Z?

In order to pass over to the description of Generation Y and Z, we refer here to the sub-chapter’s delimitations that can be found in the supplementary process book on p. 11.

To describe Generation Y accordingly, first and foremost the label ‘Generation Y’ is explained in the following. The generational nomenclature has mainstreamed in the post- WWII years, when the first generational term, namely ‘baby boomers’ was established, alluding to the birth boom in the years from 1946-1964 (Possamai, 2014). The following generation’s name was then based on the Canadian’s author Douglas Coupland’s first published novel – “Generation X: Tales for an accelerated culture” (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). The label got internationally approved, generating the markers for Generation Y and Z. Additionally to the term Generation Y, the literature also refers to expressions, like Millennials, Generation Now, GenerationMeMeMe, Generation Facebook, NextGen or Internet Generation (Hurrelman & Albrecht, 2016). Nonetheless, the label Generation Y has been generally accepted and is chosen for this paper. Sociologists are not in complete agreement about a standardized extent of time, members of Generation Y were born in however, for this research report we frame the period for the respective cohort from 1980 until 1995. Whereas, the still adolescent³ part of this generation is confined to the years of 1990.
until 1995, aged 27 – 22 today. The western society’s Generation Y in size is similar to its parental generation (baby boomers), according to Van den Bergh & Behrer, they make up almost half of the world’s population (2013). Yet, in nature they distinguish themselves considerably. One of the key formative traits for Gen Y is their early exposure to technology. Especially the internet is used for generating knowledge, instant and global communication and connectivity as well as entertainment (Kleinschmit, 2015). Due to the digitalization, globalization, the economic crisis couple of years ago, as well as the western world’s political circumstances and their consequences, Generation Y has grown up in an era where subjects like uncertainty and a fast-moving nature are ordinary. Shaped by these world occurrences and ever ongoing changes, members of Generation Y are facing a world of insecurity, which they take for granted. They think anything and everything is possible and the word determination seems vague for them, which is also attributable to the fact that they have been raised by their parent’s to embrace individual empowerment (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013). Social identifiers and stereotyped labels are challenged and newly interpreted to Gen Y’s individual needs (referring to chapter 1.4 How important is the notion of gender for these generations). Generation Y (and Generation Z) are considered to be the most ethnically and socially assorted at all times (Possamai, 2014). This is also reflected in the fact that they are auxiliary of social matters, and that they likely would choose a socially responsible company over an ordinary firm (Valentine & Powers, 2013). Moreover, Gen Y’s sense for identity is significantly more distinct than in previous generations which is representative within their consumption behaviour, too. They intent to choose the brands and products that fit their individual and that facilitate self-expression (Valentine & Powers, 2013), wherefore their brand awareness is very high. Nevertheless, Generation Y is considered to be generally not brand loyal but they do like to experiment. The here studied adolescent part of society symbolize among other, the group of tomorrow’s consumer with vital purchasing power which will only increase over time (Vijay & Varsha, 2013). According to Valentine and Powers the majority of money is spend for goods like clothes and shoes, sport gear, beauty and health as well as technology and food. People of this generational segment have a sound understanding of how marketing works and is used in these days (2013). With regard to advertisement strategies, Gen Y likes to be addressed in an experimental, experience-based, innovative manner, which does not make it easy for marketers to target this cohort (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013). Linda Morton, author of the article Targeting Generation Y, asserts the cohort’s people react most likely to humorous and emotional advertising (2002). Van den Bergh and Behrer argue further that the “need for stimulation and instant gratification” (2013), resulting out of the joint belief - everything is possible, would also be representative in their consumer behaviour.
After having a look at Generation Y, we will define in this paragraph the notion of Generation Z. This new generations’ members were born after 1996 until the year 2010, although different sociologists and authors utilize different data, and research is still in beta (Kingston, 2014). Yet, we also have to state here that solely the adolescent part of this cohort is the targeted group for this research report, namely the individuals born from 1996 until the year 2001 (aged 21 – 16). Mainly, they are the offspring of Generation X, and as above already mentioned, the name Generation Z derives from the alphabetical order that implies from the previous generations’ names Generation X and Generation Y. They are many, in 2014 they counted two billion worldwide (Kingston, 2014). In the specialist literature it is also referred to them as Centennials because the generation’s already adolescent segment was born around the turn of the century (Rodriguez, 2015). The author Larry Rosen named the respective generation iGeneration due to the fact that they have been growing up with gadgets like iPods, iPhones and the gaming console Wii (Snyder Bulik, 2011). Don Tapscott, author of the book Grown up Digital (2009), says; "it's like air to them", they would not only consume technology as a life necessity, but also forcing yet another shift in how humans apply culture, access information, and communicate with each other (Tapscott, 2009). They have been growing up during economic recession, acquainted with global warming and depleted resources in a world encountering terrorism. Nonetheless, Generation Z is among others characteristics, considered as empowered – collaborative and eager to make the world a better place – environmentally and socially (Kingston, 2014). Their community-focused mind set is also illustrated in what the New York City based advertising agency Sparks&Honey found out; 60% of the insider of Generation Z would want a career that has a social impact (Rodriguez, 2015). Compared to Generation Y, Gen Zers are less self-centred but more self-aware about the civil role to fill-in in this world (Merriman, 2015). They express themselves, very much like Generation Y, tolerant towards social signifiers, as for instance ethnicity, age, sexuality and gender. Their value consciousness is reflected in their consumption behaviour as well - articles in respective marketing journals suggest that companies should amend their practices in order to reach out, and more important to connect with this target segment right and well (Washkuch, 2016). Generation Z perceives marketing activities and advertisement easily. Joeri Van den Bergh and Mattias Behrer, the authors from the book How cool brands stay hot (2013) argue the ‘i’ of the name iGeneration could also stand for the generation’s requirement of individualization and customization. That is linked to the group’s urge for uniqueness and ‘real’ connections. Connectivity is a key trait in the Generations’ Z description, as in great measure through social media their exchange of information takes place. Next to finding out about certain brands and products and being able to purchase them via apps, the aspect of sharing respective content is the most appealing for marketers. Just like the previous generation, they test all considerable elements of form and function – they are steadily on the hunt for the better in all aspects of life, authenticity and more experience (2013). Their influence in social media spheres, and their high disposable income in already adolescent years makes Gen Z to the consumer of tomorrow (Washkuch, 2016).

We conclude that both generations exhibit different kinds of beliefs and values shaped by certain for each generation relevant world events and the current ‘zeitgeist’ that make them to be ascribed with their particular generational traits. However they demonstrate some resemblance which makes them play a crucial role regarding fashion marketing business, and the discussion of gender. Generations Y and Z are marked to their early exposure to technology. They use the internet to communicate, connect, entertain and educate themselves, to create and
share content. Generations Y and Z understand marketing practices, and consumption aspects like customization and individualization play a crucial role. Innovation, experiment and experience, as well as authenticity are key words to reach out to the respective consumer group with an already in adolescent years high disposable income. By their parental generations they have been raised to empower themselves, and to experiment in order to find out what they want in life and who they truly are. They are the most socially and ethnically assorted generations ever, and other than in previous generations, boundaries that social signifiers like age, nationality, sex and gender impose, play less a role in their lives.

In the course of this paper we focus on the social signifier of gender, as on gender identity, hence in the following sub-chapter we will be defining the term gender fluid.

### 2.3 How do we define the term gender fluid?

In the last paragraph of this chapter we aimed to explain the notions of Generation Y and Generation Z to get an idea who we are talking about when mentioning the respective terms. Within this sub-chapter we intend to explain term gender fluid in the particular context of this study. Whereupon, we then go over to the question what it is that makes the particular generations gender fluid and therefore different from previous generations and relevant for this study.

This section consists out of a definition given by literature, as well as individual ideas of the notion *gender fluid* from people interviewed for this thesis. It was important to implement their concepts into the text, as they feel respectively gender fluid or similar but may do not identify with the firmly term mentioned in the literature. As stated previously, Generation Y’s and Z’s members putting considerable focus on identification, own interpretations and customization, which leads to the conclusion to let them have a say in this, consequently form this definition more tangible and legitimate. The delimitation of this sub-chapter can be found in the process book, p. 11. Gender fluid is an expression that belongs to the register of genderqueer terms which forms part of the topic gender identity. The latter will be elaborated in the further course of the paper, see chapter 3.2 *How do we define the term gender identity?*

The LGBTQ community and the National Geographic’s special issue on gender, “Gender Revolution” (2017), describe the term as the following; with the word gender fluid an individual “whose identity or expression shifts between man/masculine and woman/feminine or falls somewhere along the spectrum.

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5 To clarify the context of genderqueer terms it may be necessary to state here that ‘genderqueer’ functions as an umbrella term and is used in the form of an adjective to refer to people that do not necessarily identify with the sex assigned at birth and expressing their gender identity in a non-normatively manner, not corresponding to the binary gender roles – female and male (Dahir, 1999).
The interviewees mention, that the rigidity of being put in a box or following gender stereotypes is either not what they feel comfortable with, or what they personally confirm with. The binary gender system, as we know in our western society does not seem to feel legit for them, they do not value the social constructionism of gender, and either they challenge the given societal boundaries or they believe in an individual qualitative experience.

We conclude that the term ‘gender fluid’ will be used for this study in the context that it could describe someone, a concept (referring to the case study’s subject NHTK and BONNE Suits) or a broader group of people, in this case the gender fluid Generations Y and Z, that is ranged in between the notions of man/masculine and woman/feminine and or that belongs somewhere along this spectrum of gender. Furthermore, gender fluid refers here also to the related term ‘gender nonconforming’, as all participants mentioned that their expression does not necessarily confirm to be consistent with cultural norms and behavioural forms expected or socially determined for their sex.

2.4 How important is the notion of gender for these generations?

In the description of Generation Y and Generation Z at an earlier stage, we already came across the fact that they have been raised to embrace their individual empowerment. Thus, they express themselves tolerant towards social identifiers, as ethnicity, race, sexuality and particularly gender, and can be considered as the most ethnically and socially assorted generations at all times. Stereotyped labels that come along with the discussion of gender identity and diversity, are challenged within these generations and are newly interpreted, accordingly to their individual needs. The New York based advertisement agency Honey &Sparks confirms with the results of a study about Generation Z, that they are “less likely to subscribe to traditional gender roles”, (Kingston, 2014). Additionally, Generation Y’s individuals think of the notion of gender as non-binary6. Half of the one thousand surveyed Gen Yers of a recent conducted study, believe that gender is a spectrum, and that by all means a certain amount of people do not designate themselves as part of conventional categories (National Geographic, 2017). All, for this paper interviewed adolescents do see gender as a spectrum as well. They seem to be very interested in the topic of gender identity and diversity, as four of them mentioned they would have been confronted with the topic lately more often, either due to their studies (Céline does her minor in gender studies), through their friend’s group (mentioned by Céline, Jan, Marnix and Rose), and certainly due to their own identifications as gender fluid or similar.

Mega influencers, like Miley Cyrus, Roby Rose and Jayden Smith enhance the confrontation with the topic by stating and expressing publicly their gender fluidity. According to the facts that the subject of gender identity has entered the public square (National Geographic, 2017), that the Generations Y and Z are conspicuously mentioned in connection to the topic, and the points set out prior, leads to conclusion that the notion of gender is evidently important to the Generations Y and Z.

6 Non-binary; gender identities & expressions seen as a spectrum, opposite to what gender expectations of the binary concept mean in where strictly an either-or option of male/man/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on sex assigned by birth, is dominant (National Geographic, 2017)
What it is that makes both generations more gender fluid and how this may be manifested through challenging and questioning conventional gender roles, is elucidated in the following sub-chapter.

2.5 What makes the Generations Y & Z gender fluid? To what extent do Generation Y & Z challenge conventional gender roles?

Referring back to the last sentence of the sub-item 2.3 How do we define the term gender fluid; gender fluidity in the context of this study, is attributable among other, to the idea that the gender expression of gender fluid individuals does not confirm with cultural behavioural forms and norms expected or socially determined for either the female- or male gender.

This, certainly could be seen as a result of the following reasons stated, that are seen to be apparent in terms of what makes the Generations Y and Z gender fluid. As we learned earlier, one of the main traits of Generation Y and Z is the conflict with the subject of identity. No other generations have been so engaged with themselves and the search for meaning in life. Jordán-Conde and her colleagues uphold the argument, saying that there is an “increasing amount of identity playfulness allowed” (2014), and especially the virtual world makes this possible. In the prior text section, it is mentioned that both generations have learned from their parents to embrace their individual empowerment, and that there is not anything that ought to hold them back, particularly not when one grows up in the western society's world. Globalization, hence digitalization supports the exploration of the self, as people that may feel different and stick out of the mainstream, here in regard to the issue of gender, do not need to fear loneliness neither the need to oppress their feelings, nor smother their self-expression, as the internet facilitates to find peers who one can identify with (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013). Due to facts that the subject of gender is handled as a trend, referring to public figure’s statements and fashion expression of gender fluidity (Bosanac, 2016), and members of Generation Y and Z imply to be concerned of social matters, since they talk about ‘gender’, the debate seems to have found a pillar in current mainstream discussions. The urge of both generations, to be different, to express individualism and the questioning of almost everything, leads them to challenge the conventional, hence the stereotyped gender labels. The responses of the interviewees express the same frame of mind, whether this is constituted in questioning traditional thinking of parents, asking why one as a person solely inheriting the female sex would be different than the brother in their parent’s mind-set, or mentioning the idea of experimental freedom – everyone should have the right to explore oneself in terms of sexuality and gender.

The previous examples showcase, the participants are collectively open-minded and tolerant as they call on embracing diversity, and do not want to determine themselves to be ‘something’ that was made up socially. They do not approve with the construction of gender defining who one truly is. They question their parents’, and in general society’s thinking of one’s individual sex and culturally constructed gender roles.

Gender expression; will be revisited in the further discourse of this research report.
We can conclude that due to their identification and general behaviour Generations Y and Z can be called gender fluid.

The upcoming chapter 3, *What kind of gender identity forming issues do the adolescent Generations Y and Z face?* intends to define the terms adolescence and gender identity foremost. Furthermore, it is discussed what kind of gender identity forming issues adolescents of Generation Y and Z face and how this could be in conflict with the search for a social identity. This illustrates the matter of acceptance of the respective topic within society, as well as aims to constitute a deeper understanding of the particular consumer group.
3. What kind of gender identity forming issues do the adolescent Generations Y & Z face?

3.1 How do we define adolescence?

Adolescence is the period that a human being encounters when they transition from childhood to adult life. Within this transforming period the individual faces changes from biological nature (puberty), psychological nature, whereby the focus lays on the achievement of a personal identity, and lastly social nature by which the status or role of the adolescent person within society is designated (Cobb, 2010; Erikson, 1959; Jordán-Conde, et al., 2014; Long, et al., 1968; Pickhardt, 2010). Within this first part of the chapter we will set the focal point on the psychological side of the definition, the biological- (briefly) and societal definition will be emphasized in the further course of this chapter. According to the psychologist Erikson (1959) young people establish their "sense of self identity" within the time of adolescence. He states that the construction and shaping of personal identities, as well as the event of solving identity crisis are part of the process and will occur in various forms of social interactions, and at abundant stages of adolescence. These three stages typify notably developmental experiences and affairs and are titled *early adolescence, late adolescence or moratorium*⁸, and *emerging adulthood* (Cobb, 2010). Within the stage of early adolescence mainly biological changes in form of puberty take place. Yet, the psychologist Carl E. Pickhardt argues that adolescence does not necessarily depend on the beginning of puberty. In the phase of late adolescence or moratorium they are exposed to self-discovery – they haven’t committed to their identities yet. Additionally, the achievement of affiliation and intimacy in relationships with other people take place (Cobb, 210; Erikson, 1959). Others may obligated to a settled identity, according to Erikson (1959) are said to be in “achievement”, which would point out that these are situated in the last stage of adolescence, namely the emerging adulthood. Heiner Meulemann, Professor for sociology at the University of Cologne calls intention to the fact that every adolescent person individually and independently to the matter of time achieves self-commitment - some may find themselves in their early twenties, other in their late twenties (2003). Therefore, adolescence cannot be restricted to a distinct or standardized period of time, referring to the targeted adolescent group of Generation Yers and Generation Zers aged 16 – 27 in this research report. Furthermore, within the process of finding oneself, issues like culture, ethnicity, race, sex and for this research report relevant – gender, are encountered and acknowledged for oneself. We conclude that in the context of this study the term adolescence is defined as the period of time, which can be time framed from even before puberty to one’s early or mid-twenties, and in which an individual commit to an identity in terms of cultural and social backgrounds and individual believes. The time of adolescence is also the time in where one is conflicted with the question of sex and gender which is the crucial point for this report.

The next sub-items of this chapter will be elucidating the notion of gender identity, what gender identity forming issues the adolescent youth of Generation Y and Z face and how this conflict with the social identity forming process, due to acceptance issues of gender diversity within society.

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⁸ Moratorium; (psychosocial moratorium, coined by the psychologist Erik Erikson), means the lack of success to accomplish ego identity during the period of adolescence (Cherry, 2016)
3.2 How do we define the term gender identity?

In order to go further along with the exploration of what gender identity forming issues the adolescent Generations Y and Z face, we have to clarify the notion of gender identity, foremost. According to the book Fashion & Theory – A Reader (2007), sex and gender are among ethnicity and social class, the most complex and contentious debated topics in the discussion of identity and differences. In this context, it is critical to mention that there exist a disparity between sex and gender. In short theory, the term sex is referred to biology and the physiological difference between male and female bodies. The notion of gender is attributed to cultural occurrences and gender origins in cultural differences, behavioural forms and re-creation.

Following the theory of social constructionism, compared to sex, gender is not inherited but socially constructed, and reconstructed. The meaning that is appointed to the differences of sexes, differs from society to society, and determines at a time behavioural forms and typical features, character traits that said to be appropriate for the sexes of female and male in each cultural context (Barnard, 2007).

The philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler’s theory goes beyond the fact that gender would alone be a product of society, she argues that gender exists of one’s own repetitious behaviour and individual morals, it would consist of bodily and non-verbal performance (Butler, 2006). She does not confirm a set definition of gender identity, and contends that gender would be “a stylized repetition of acts (…) which are internally discontinuous (…) so that the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (Butler, 2006). To clarify her thoughts, there is a difference between gender performance and gender performativity. Gender performance is related to the concept of adopting a role – “acting in some way” (Butler, 2011). Gender performativity differs from this, as the meaning of performativity implies, creating and recreating a series of effects; “(…) we act and walk and speak and talk that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman…we act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or simply something that is true about us (…)” (Butler, 2011). Further, she explains that the performance per se is the pre-dominant deed, thus the individual carrying out the deed, simultaneously be “produce” and only additive in this context (Butler, 2006).

According to genderspectrum.org, an organisation that aims for more gender-inclusivity for all children and adolescents in this world, gender is a “complex interrelationship between three dimensions” (2017). Namely, the dimension of body, identity and expression. The latter is evidently decisive in terms of the topic’s correlation to fashion.

The organization introduces the dimension of body, saying that the sex binary that western societies know does fail to apprehend the whole biological aspect of gender, referring to the fact that there are also intersex conditions of genitalia that can occur next to the classified forms we conceive as ‘female’ and ‘male’ (Anon., 2017). In the respective blog entry “Dimensions of Gender” on the association’s website, they argue further that the relationship of an individual’s gender and their body goes beyond the biological and physiological characteristics. Research suggests that the human’s brain plays a major role in how we perceive gender. Daphna Joel, a professor of psychology explains in her study about brain sex differences that the brain is not reduced to be male or female, as it appears to be rather individual (Daphna, 2012). Bodies are gendered subjects, as people are labelled to be more
male or female by the peculiarity of certain physically characteristics which are culturally assigned to be either more manly or feminine (Anon., 2017).

Gender identity is according to genderspectrum.org the internal experience and designation of one’s gender. A cis-gender\(^9\) person’s gender identity corresponds with the sex assigned at birth, whereas, for instance a transgender person’s identity does not match with the sex assigned at birth. Most children sense their gender identity by the age of four, it is discussed that one does not choose a gender, nor one is made to change it, hence the forms of how somebody communicates their gender identity can change over time. The process of designation one’s gender is a complex one, as there only exist yet limited language of gender. Hence, it can take a certain amount of time to figure out what language suits one best in order to communicate their gender, which elucidates that a gender identity forming process is an ongoing one (Anon., 2017).

Gender expression is the third dimension defined by the organization, and it means how individuals represent their gender identity to the outside world. This dimension comes closest to the idea of Judith Butler’s gender performance mentioned earlier.

Gender can be expressed through clothing, hair-dos, mannerism like language, gestures, and interactions with other people. Our environment genders almost everything in daily life. Nevertheless, within society, norms around gender expressions change in the course of time, hence the expectations that come along with them (Power, 2011). The stereotype that the colour pink is meant for the female gender and the colour blue is considered to be male, is taken here as an example, as prior, in the 20\(^{th}\) century, pink was associated with boy’s clothing and blue with apparel for girls (Power, 2011). A more recent example would be the fact that men wear earrings and women tattoo whole body parts. Even though, expectations of gender expressions can change over time, they are first and foremost definite in a certain time span, commonly society assumes to identify someone’s gender by the way someone dresses, their bodily and verbally expressions, moves and overly presentation (National Geographic, 2017). But identity is distinguished from somebody’s expression, and therefore we should not judge somebody’s gender identity by someone’s outer presentation – a cis-gender boy, for instance, likes to wear skirts or dresses, which does not necessarily imply he identifies with anything else than being male.

His choice of clothing is merely a sign for his preferences of apparel that society normally would assign to be female clothing items (Anon., 2017). However, if a person’s gender expression does not confirm western society’s expectations, most of the times they would assumed to be homosexual. As clarified already earlier, gender and sex are two different matter, so are gender identity and the sexual orientation a person has. They both belong to the subject of identity, notwithstanding gender is related to how people see themselves, thus a personal matter, whereas the sexual orientations defines who humans are attracted to, and that could be emotionally, romantically and physically. For that reason sexual orientation is an interpersonal matter (Anon., 2017). Confounding both can be especially stressful for an adolescent within their gender identity orientation and forming process.

\(^9\) cis-gender; a term to define a human whose gender identity conforms the biological sex of either female or male, assigned at birth (National Geographic, 2017).
In the first part of this sub-chapter we clarified the difference from sex and gender. Moreover, we looked at the theories of social constructionism of gender which concluding and in essence says that gender is made up by society and meaning is appointed to the difference of the binary sexes male and female. In comparison, we also had a look at Judith Butler’s theory of gender performance and performativity, whereas with gender performance she means that gender exists in terms of “acting in some way” – as in playing a role. Gender performativity, instead would imply a series of behavioural acts that reinforce an impression of being a man or being a woman. 

In the last part we mentioned the concept of gender of the organization genderspectrum.org which is broken down in three gender identity components; the body, identity per se and gender expression. This approach ties onto Butler’s concept, since it states that gender is one’s deepest and intimate self-concept as female, male, a fusion of both or neither. It is about how individuals see themselves in terms of gender, and how they communicate this through self-expression including behaviour, gestures and mimics, language and outer appearance. It was chosen due to its tangible approach and clear idea. The following sub-items, will be further elucidating this substance. Findings from the literature review, as well as statements from the interview respondents will be utilized, as a foundation to answer the questions; **3.3 what gender identity forming issues do Generation Y and Z face, and 3.4 how does this conflict with the search for social identity.**

### 3.3 What gender identity forming issues do Generation Y & Z face?

As we learned in the previous text division, gender identity is a complex subject and expressing one’s gender identity an ongoing process, since it is majorly influenced by external factors. Young people that conform to the expected gender roles and expression, may do not think about the topic of gender at all, they presumably would not question their gender, or ask themselves how gender is constituted, communicated or reinforced in one’s life. The adolescents that do express their gender identity in different manners, not perceived as the norm, however experience the topic of gender differently. In this section of the paper, we will be focusing on the issues gender fluid adolescents of Generation Y and Z face while forming their gender identity. These issues are mainly attributable to the expression and communication of one’s gender identity, since “for many young people, whether typical in their presentation or not, expression is the most tangible aspect of their gender experience, impacting them in many, if not all, of their interactions with other” (Anon., 2017). 

In the first part of this paragraph we are taking upon the subject of adolescence again, as this period of development is one of the factors that influences the (gender) identity orientation immensely. Stanley Hall, who coined the notion of “adolescence”, characterized the respective time simultaneously to be a stage of “storm and stress” (Jordán-Conde, et al., 2014). The psychologist Pickhardt argues that this certain time is accompanied by puberty which makes the process of transformation emotionally intensified, thus generally more complex (2010). As mentioned earlier, puberty appears in form of biological changes, and for young people it may create the problem of self-consciousness on one hand, whereat the question rises – how to deal with the bodily modifications. On the other
hand, there is the outcome problem which is recognizable in form of how to learn about gender performance labels – how to act womanly or manly, or in any other case the way one feel according their gender identity (Pickhardt, 2010). Regarding this, Pickhardt further states that especially in the period of early adolescence, intolerance is likely present, as perceived differences from the dominant and the conformity, are often not accepted, hence treated accordingly (2010). For example, young people may be mistreated from peers by not fitting into stereotyped boxes, or the fact that gender identity is mistaken with a person’s sexual orientation, thus people who express themselves accordingly their gender identity, are assumed by society to be homosexual. The answers the interviewees gave regarding what kind of issues they would have been facing expressing their gender identity, affirm these given examples. The interviewees have been experiencing mistreatment due to their gender identity expression in verbal manner. Due to Rose’s facial hair growth, she was called ‘moustache’ when attending high school. She states she has a quite androgynous body which she has been problems with, as it sometimes appears difficult for her to feel beautiful and sexy, in a more feminine way. Jan has been verbally abused a few weeks ago, when he visited a small town in Belgium. Due to his gender and visual expression at time being, a guy was yelling at him “hett kip, hett vlees, hett kip” – hot chicken, hot beef, hot chicken [referring to the process book, p. 27]. He also encountered problems when living in the rural part of the country, his long hair was not accepted in the soccer team, he joined in order to integrate himself. Due to this certain gender expression he was assumed to be homosexual or female, which confirms what being said in the theory on p. 22 of this research report.

Aside from, encountering problems and obstacles within their closer environment, adolescents that identify as gender fluid or similar, might feel also disapproval from the broader society. How these gender identity forming issues conflict with the search for a social identity, will be elucidated in the next paragraph.

3.4 How does this conflict with the search for social identity? Acceptance of gender diversity within society

Adolescence is the time, when young individuals are confronted with the question of how to present oneself in society, hence this period illustrate simultaneously the peak of when socialization occurs (Pickhardt, 2010). A social identity is defined by the part of a person’s self-concept coherent from the perceived belonging of a relevant group (Turner & Oakes, 1986). Within the section 3.2 How do we define gender identity, we learned that in essence, society genders a broad variety of aspects of life, and who we are and what we will become, seem to be decided in advance (Power, 2011). The authors of the book “Language and Gender”, Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet underpin the latter, as they contend whenever a child is born, people want to know the infant’s sex above all, and normally social convention gives enough indicators to even prevent the obligation of asking (2013). Further, they state that the sex determination of an individual at birth is critical of how this future person will present themselves in society, it “sets the stage of a lifelong process of gendering” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). However, as found out during the interviews, members of Generations Y and Z challenge these determinations, as they push for not being put into boxes.
The fact that individuals from Generations Y and Z challenge the gender binary concept could be seen as an act of social rebellion which would further indicate that social acceptance for the topic of gender diversity is not accomplished yet. Erikson would explain the matter as followed; adolescents long to “find a niche in some section of (...) society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for (...) them” (1959). The interviewed adolescents affirm the fact that they rather find themselves among like-minded people and peers, where the discussion about gender identity is apparent and the binary concept is questioned for their individual natures as well as in a broader context. Furthermore, during the primary research phase, while searching for gender fluid persons to conduct interviews with, it appeared noticeable that the targeted people, either could be found in the gay and lesbian community, or among other gender fluid or similar expressing persons, as in most of the cases the contact could be made through an already interviewed person. However, the Generations Y and Z are more tolerant towards diverse social signifier than any other generation before, and the current ongoing discussion within the western worlds' civilization might liberalize the view society has in regard to the conformity of a gender binary concept.

In the next chapter 4. What kind of function does fashion and do fashion brands have within an adolescent identity forming process? we will be discussing what the meaning of fashion is for Generations Y and Z. Furthermore, we will be having a look to what extent they can identify with certain fashion brands and if fashion brands play a supportive role within the identity forming process of gender fluid adolescents. The last two sub-chapters will be focusing on the questions if gender fluid individuals use fashion to show their gender identity, and what kind of aesthetical features are representative for an adolescent gender fluid consumer group.
4. What kind of function does fashion and do fashion brands have within an adolescent identity forming process?

4.1 What is the meaning of fashion for Generations Y & Z?

The New York Times reported in an article in 2015, referring to a survey made by FuturesCompany, questioned adolescents between age 12 and 17 – part of Generation Z, that the young are concerned about their looks and the fact whether their clothes are in style (Williams, 2015). Viewed from a business perspective, the fact that Generation Y and Z spend its majority of money for fashion – clothes and shoes, as we learned earlier implies the importance of this subject to the generational segments. The answers of the interviewees given to the question what the meaning of fashion would be for them present a consistent pattern. Predominantly, it means visual expression and living out creativity which could go so far that they slip within different kinds of roles every day. The roles performed through visual expression would be linked to certain fashion items, and are referable to a particular mood or occasion. Fashion as a subject means a lot in order to express their individual identity, their personality and even a mood as Marnix states during the interview [referring to the process book p. 30]. The Gen Yers and Gen Zers see fashion as a catalyst of feelings and values, as well as canvas that be painted by themselves every morning again [referring to a statement of Jan, see process book p. 34].

We conclude that essentially fashion means visual expression and acting out creativity. In the next sub-chapter we will be having a closer look to what extent the members of Generations Y and Z identify with certain fashion brands.

4.2 To what extent do these generations identify with certain fashion brands?

According to Schroer, members of the studied generational segments are less brand loyal, and due to globalization and digitalization they are likewise amenable in changing fashion and style consciousness (Schroer, n.d.). This is also what the primary research affirms, members of Generation Y and Z do generally not identify with particular brands, the actual good has more relevance for them and is superior. The products they chose have a symbolic meaning, and are most of the times not consumed solely due to their function, but rather due to the symbol the product holds. The products' meaning matches with the individual's values and believes (Schroer, n.d.). In case members of Generations Y and Z are in favour of a brand, the company either has a very convincing, sustainable orientated background / brand story, or they own the patent of an innovative product. Pike states that nowadays adolescents chose brands more carefully by informing themselves prior about the brand's stories. For the cohorts it is highly important to make within the immense amount of choice, the right selection suiting best their individual identity and their financial status (2016). It is further stated in the article that in past decades adolescents highly identified with brands, indicating the belonging to a certain group. However, in current times they care less about fitting in, but about making conscious consumption choices that are in line with their identity (Pike, 2016). Marnix support the argumentation found in the literature, as he explains that it depends on the brand's story, the treatment of him as a customer and what life stage he finds himself in, to favour a certain fashion brand [referring to the process book pp. 31 & 32]. Yet, he explains he likes to have a diverse wardrobe and to exchange clothes with
friends or buy them in a more sustainable manner – in vintage-, second-hand stores, on flea-markets. This is applicable to the other respondents as well; Jan calls the market place where he purchases his clothes from as the ‘brand’ he identifies with, because this place would fit his needs. Dennis is alone, having a clear opinion about identifying with “fashion brands that are androgynous or have an alternative look on fashion and beauty. Lately, I have also been getting more interest in ethical and smart fashion.” However, he leaves it open what kind of fashion brands that might are. [Referring to the process book, p. 31].

In this sub-chapter we learned that members of Generations Y and Z are less brand loyal than previous generations’ adolescents. They pick brands carefully, and set a strong focus on identification with the brand, as they should match the person’s values and be representative of the respective lifestyle. Identifying with a certain brand is a conscious and intimate choice for both generations, as the aspect of belonging catalysed through the brands’ consumption plays less a role. In the next sub-chapter we will discuss if fashion brands do represent a supportive role in terms of the identity forming process.

4.3 Do fashion brands represent a supportive role in terms of the identity forming process?

The author Helena Pike, builds onto the previous stated, as she contends that adolescents would still use the subject of fashion to explore their identities. However the days when groups of young people could clearly be pinpointed by their outer appearance are bygone (2016). Gen Yers and Zers have too much choice in terms of determine themselves to stick to one or more brands that fits their personalities best (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013). The aspect of experimentation is from important nature to them, and this is seemingly referred to every aspect of adolescent life. The adolescent period is a crucial period in the individual’s identity development process, and clothing would symbolize “the singularity and subjectivity of individual tastes” (Muzinich et al, 2003), which the respondents prove with the statements to the chapter’s compatible interview question. They argue that for instance mainstream brands with ordinary binary departments would not facilitate to learn or explore one’s gender identity, because the generations’ contemporary view of gender seen as a spectrum is not incorporated within their concepts. Marnix and Jan are both conscious that fashion brands could play a role finding one’s identity within certain sub-cultures but for the mainstream youth it rather would not be applicable. Generally, all interviewed individuals share a rather discouraged opinion about the fact that fashion brands would have the ability to help with the gender identity forming issue. However, the specialist literature reasons that identity construction indeed is accomplished through consumption, as humans naturally make buying decisions upon their identity or the identity they wish to convey to their surroundings, arguable whether this is a conscious or unconscious process (Phillips, n.d.). The same applies to the subject of (fashion) brands as they play a considerable role next to the meaning of products within the system of consumption. Dennis explains that the gender fluid brands that are available and accessible may have the capability to help adolescents to find their gender identity, because they would include the challenging character that is so decisive for Generation Y & Z, and question gender as a concept per se, while leaving enough space for own interpretations, experimentation and discovery of oneself.
We can conclude that the new consumer, depicted by adolescents of Generations Y and Z uses brands in a liberal manner to express their own individual identity (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013). In the following sub-chapter we will be having a look whether gender fluid adolescents use fashion to show their gender identity. Within the discussion we will be referring back to the question on how we define gender identity, as both sub-chapters are linked in terms of the meaning of gender expression.

### 4.4 Do gender fluid adolescents use fashion to show their gender identity?

Referring back to the chapter 3.2 How do we define the term gender identity? we picked up the notion of gender expression, and its meaning of representation of a person’s gender identity to their surrounding and the outside world. Gender expression can be performed through mannerism like language, gestures and interactions with other people. Throughout this chapter we focus on the visual expression conveyed through clothing, hair-dos and make-up, as the headline of this sub-chapter implies whether gender fluid adolescents show their gender identity. Fashion means a lot in order to express their gender identity as the respondents tell in the interviews [referring to the process book, pp. 30 & 33. It might happen rather unconsciously with one part of the respondents; for instance Jan does not intend to be too aggressive with the message he sends out through his visual expression. The others use fashion to show their gender identity more intentionally. Rose and Céline both state that they have been experimenting greatly with fashion during their early and late adolescent years, in order to explore a suitable way to express their gender identity. Both have been playing one time more with masculine- and other times feminine expressional features. Sometimes, they have faced the challenge to combine both sides in that way for instance, to have exteriorly a holistic masculine appearance but achieving the feeling of being sexy and beautiful at the same time [referring to the process book, p. 26].

Gender fluid adolescents use fashion to show their gender identity, as in the Generations Y and Z fashion can be seen as a source of creativity and empowerment concerning gender, as one is able to live their gender identity more freely through a visual expression facilitated by apparel and fashion items, hair-dos and make-up. Subsequently, the primary research has been analysed in order to give an answer to the next connecting question; what kind of aesthetical characteristics are representative for a gender fluid consumer group.
4.5 What kind of aesthetical characteristics are representative for an adolescent gender fluid consumer group?

With aesthetical features the following listed characteristics of a clothing item are meant; colour, shape and cut, material as well as patterns and prints. In his social marketing report about Generation Y, the researcher Schroer contends that through the fast-pace nature within our world, especially within the fashion industry, trends and fashions change rapidly, hence the style consciousness of the respective generation (n.d.). The respondents reply to the question what kind of aesthetical features would be of matter within their gender fluid clothing style, that it depends on the occasion, how they feel in terms of gender while dressing which is related to the mood visibly, the look and feel of the whole outfit and the experimental state they are into at time being [referring to the process book, pp. 33-34]. The aesthetical characteristics of clothing items that appear predominantly to the interviewees are colour, shape and cut as well as material. Bulky, oversized and clean shapes, crooked edges and tight cuts, as in dresses for example were named in the category of shapes and cuts [referring to the process book, pp. 34-35]. The generations appreciate colour a lot and two of the five interviewees name this aesthetical feature as the most crucial for them. Céline, currently has the tendency to match her tops with her bottoms, material and colour wise to achieve a suit kind of appearance [see image no. 1]. For her the look and feel of the garments’ fabrics are important, too.

Apparel that consists of natural and organic material would be in line with her vegan identity. Jan prefers clothing items that are ‘off’ the norm; while interviewing him he wore light denims with vast holes in there [see image no. 2]. Marnix wears jewellery almost every day, and experiments with lipstick and henna when he feels like it. For all the respondents the aspect of quality was important [referring to the process book pp 32 & 34]. Rose named the aspect of durability, and all adolescents agree on the matter of fact that the purchased garments should be socially and environmentally sustainable. They favour wearing features from both sides of the spectrum to let their appearance speak a fluid language - diversity within their aesthetical expression is key.

**Image no. 1**
Céline, wearing matching colours to achieve a ‘suit’ look.
We conclude that generally spoken, we cannot unify the aesthetical expression of a gender fluid generation as the status of being fluid, not conforming to one gender makes every individual to like different aesthetical characteristics. Furthermore, the zeitgeist of current times, hence the influence of fashion trends and other external impacts is short term by nature, and therefore hard to grasp as translated into a preference of a whole segment. If there would be one aspect commonly liked, it would be the desire for aesthetic diversity. In the next chapter 5. *How do the brands NHTK and BONNE Suits address the gender fluid Generations Y & Z*, we have a look on the landscape of gender fluid fashion and fashion brands in general first. Whereas, we then analyse the above brands NHTK and BONNE Suits upon their ID. We intend to highlight what kind of aesthetical features are representative for both brands, and how these mentioned companies differ from fashion brands with a gender binary concept, namely H&M and Zara. In the last sub-chapter we will be focusing on their ethnical footprint towards a more social awareness of the topic of gender fluidity.

![Image no. 2]

Jan, wearing denims with huge holes in them, intending to look ‘off’ the norm.
5. How do the brand NHTK and BONNE Suits address the gender fluid Generations Y & Z?

5.1 How does the landscape of gender fluid fashion brands look like in 2017?

Observing the fashion business in recent years, gender-fluid and neutral collections have become conspicuous on the western hemisphere’s catwalks, public figures’ statements being gender-fluid or transgender gained international media coverage and substantially contribute to the gender discussion (Murdoch, 2016). In this chapter of the research report, we will be examine the landscape of gender fluid brands first, whereupon we have a closer look at the Amsterdam based brands NHTK & BONNE Suits. We will be analysing how both brands address the gender fluid Generations Y & Z, in terms of distinguishing themselves in their brand ID and branding features from brands with an ordinary binary concept. Furthermore, the last part of the chapter intends to clarify whether and how these brands’ ethnical footprint achieves to enhance social awareness for the topic of gender identity and gender fluidity.

As stated earlier, society and especially the fashion world encounters a trend concerning the subject matter of gender fluidity, since public figures and media personalities as for instance, Miley Cyrus, Ruby Rose and Jaden Smith have stated their gender fluidity verbally in public, and have been expressing their particular identity through fashion statements (Callewaert, 2016). Moreover, design houses like Givenchy, Gucci, Hedi Slimane, Prada and Raf Simons, to name a few, have been playing notably with gender aesthetics in their last couple of collections, displaying a blurring of conventional binary fashion characteristics (Fox, 2015). Miuccia Prada, founder and head designer of the luxury brand Prada, states, “more and more it feels instinctively right to translate the same idea for both gender”, (La Ferla, 2015). Commercial brands follow the trend and launch ‘ungendered’ and gender neutral collections; Zara received critics for its ungendered line however, as according to an article in Euromonitor International, it hasn’t been progressive enough (Kissane, 2016). Weekday, affiliated company of the H&M group, launched a gender neutral collection, named MTWTFSS/HE already a couple of years ago with the intention to open society’s mind, and redefining and deconstructing the notion of gender (Ter Haar, 2013). The British department store Selfridges introduced a pop-up retail concept, called ‘Agender’ within their sales floor in 2015, and promoted the discussion with their campaign video ‘The Film’, featuring the transgender model Hari Nef (Agender, 2015).

These fashion collections and retail projects, temporary in nature, seemingly have been perceived by society, and had an effect on the industry, as more permanent ideas involved – brands that focus on gender fluid apparel and a target market with heterogeneous consumer identities (Murdoch, 2016; Sheets, n.d.). The landscape of gender fluid fashion brands is still assessable, therefore the description of a niche market is applicable (Knoepp, 2017). The number of gender fluid (or differently titled, e.g. gender queer, gender neutral, agender) brands and labels that exist yet across the western’s hemisphere, however is in majority haute couture fashion and high priced.

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10 “A pattern of gradual change in a condition, output, or process, or an average or general tendency of a series of data points to move in a certain direction over time, represented by a line or curve on a graph,” (BusinessDictionary, n.d.)
Assumingly, this might be exclusively accessible to a very small segment of the adolescent Generations Y & Z. [There can be found a range of gender fluid brands in the process book on p. 68]. Most of the in the process book listed gender fluid brands' fashion are either exclusively available through wholesale or/and in the brand’s respective web shop [compare with process book on p. 68]. Merely, a few labels are established brands yet and serve their consumer also through retail. It could be argued here that the new consumer (referring especially to Generation Z) is solely attainable through online business. However, the primary conducted research has shown that a gender fluid consumer group is in favour of a physical shopping experience (referring to statements of the participants mostly shopping in vintage stores or on flea markets, and that the touch and feel of a garment is highly important to them, compare process book pp. 31-32). Furthermore, it was evident that the knowledge about gender fluid brands is limited, as only the respondents with a closer background to the fashion business have known about some gender fluid brands in general, as well as about NHTK and BONNE Suits in particular [process book p.36].

In 2017, we have seen already a range of gender fluid collection on the big fashion worlds’ catwalks, as well as in certain high street chains, as for instance, at Zara and Weekday. The analysis showcases as well, that there exist yet, a niche market for gender fluid fashion labels and brands, and some of them are even established retail brands.

The two Amsterdam based brands - NHTK and BONNE Suits were chosen for the study’s methodology. The argumentation for the choice, as well as the limitations that shall be stated in this context, can be found in the process book, p.14. In the following sub-item 5.2 What are the ID’s of the brands NHTK and BONNE Suits we will be introducing the two cases.

5.2 What are the ID’s of the brands NHTK and BONNE Suits?

NHTK or NOBODY HAS TO KNOW

The Dutch brand was found by Hannah van Dijk and Jiske Snoeks in 2014 with the idea to give matters like age, size and gender more social awareness with apparel made for everyone. With their concept they protest against a judgmental attitude from society. They represent themselves as a warehouse for gender fluid, multi-ethnical and multi-subcultural fashion. The brand NOBODY HAS TO KNOW is a retail concept, simultaneously offering collections from their in-house label NHTKSTUDIO. Foundation for the versatile fashion collections and items is the seeking for a more receptive and tolerant society in where acceptance, appreciation for each other and their differences, above all respect are manifested. They believe in the power of their concept and clothing items, empowering their customer to break with social norms and to embrace their individual diversity (NHTK, 2017).

These words mean a lot to the concept of NHTK and are therefore implemented within their retail environment and overall appearance [referring to the process book-visual analysis, and images in the further course of the paper]. NHTKSTUDIO. clothing represents itself in a minimal and conceptual manner with an understated and contemporary look with the regard to material and quality. NHTKSTUDIO.'s limited collections are produced in Amsterdam, and the founders lay great emphasis on values like long lasting products, sustainable work ethnics and the take-back from the fast moving rhythm of the fashion industry. Aesthetical features within their garments enable the wearer to feel free in latitude. Together with the written elements in their overall branding concept which
speak for less boundaries in terms of age, size and gender are the key elements of the brand’s ID. Their plea – “Wear what you love. The rest? NOBODY HAS TO KNOW” (NHTK, 2017).

During the observations and casual talks with the founders, employees and the store manager, one gets their passion behind the cause of the brand, and the sensibility

BONNE Suits

The founder of BONNE Suits, part of Generation Y himself (born in 1990), Bonne Reijn saw a niche market three years ago, as he thought there was an indispensable clothing item absent in the great variety of clothing available. The reason to create such item was to establish a garment that could be used to any kind of occasion at any time. His idea was to produce a clothing item with a high standard material quality that could constitute a key piece in everyone’s wardrobe. Reijn developed a two-pieced suit suitable for every kind of moment or experience, for everyone regardless their age, size, sex or/and gender (BonneSuits, 2017). To who this clothing item might be addressed, referring to the target audience came along with the concept in an organic manner, but not intentionally (Semmoh, 2017). This is valid for almost everything that BONNE Suits does. Myrto Semmoh, employee at BONNE Suits states “the company goes with the flow”, they are committed to the approach of ‘trial and error’ which is attributable to Bonne Reijn’s and Generations Y’s the joint character trait of experimentation. The brand is a personal project and this is very much visible throughout the brand’s ID and branding features, the latter will be elucidated further in 5.4 What kind of aesthetical characteristics are representative for these cases. The store environment can be described as bold and happy [see process book pp. 59 - 64]. When entering the intimate BONNE Suit space at Zeedijk in Amsterdam one feels a ‘good vibe’ which is foremost attributable to the colourful clothing pieces displayed in the store. The items’ design speaks for itself presenting the key identification characteristic of the brand. BONNE Suit offers the suit, made in sizes that fit all women and men - 3XS to XL, in various colours and fabrics (BonneSuits, 2017). Myrto Semmoh explains that Bonne Reijn had a great network before starting the brand and his relation to the label PATTA helped him with production capabilities. “Serving this niche market is easy. Bonne had a name here in Amsterdam before, due to his occupation of being a stylist, the network was evident for his success. But all that matters and what we care about is doing cool things, and the rest is just a logical and organic outcome,” (2017).

In the previous text sections, we had a look at the ID’s of the Amsterdam based brands NHTK and BONNE Suits that sell gender fluid clothes, and consider themselves as such. Through their brand descriptions, vison and mission statements they make clear that they stand for more tolerance and less boundaries in terms of gender. NHTK claims this in a louder way as their vision and mission statement is very much straight directed to their customer and society, as we will see in the analysis of their aesthetical characteristics in a later stage. BONNE Suits, however does not claim anything but being “oblivious to any occasion, sex, age, or social expectation” (BonneSuits, 2017). Their vision and mission statement regarding the topic of gender is a more a subtle one.
In the following, we will be looking at the brands’ aesthetical characteristics, which implies the overall branding concept, including garment features like colour, shape and cut, material, as well as the appearance of their retail environment’s.

### 5.3 What aesthetical characteristics are representative for these cases?

Within their retail environment NHTK’s clothing items are assorted by colour, shape or material but not by gender. The aesthetical features of shape and material are very crucial to their identity of a gender fluid brand. The designer play with different cuts and shapes, whereas bulky forms, squares and the boot cut are critical within their current collections [see image no. 3]. Choosing these shapes and forms enable the wearer to feel freer in terms of one’s latitude and boundaries [referring to process book p.56]. Some of the items are particularly presenting female or male characteristics, while other items exhibit more of a multi-sexed or unisex character [see image no. 4]. NHTKStudio does not do fittings on bodies or mannequins, thus particular female or male body features are left out. Their clothes do not indicate sizes, but have the features to be altered by miscellaneous as straps, buttons, ribbons etc. (Vugt, 2017). The material palette ranges from natural fabrics like wool, a lot of cotton, leather and linen, to synthetic materials as polyester, nylon, several polyester and acrylic blends, as well as latex. The NHTKStudio line’s collection always features one particular material. Currently the focus is set on light denims.
Whereas the rest of the assortment subsists of various kinds of material choices, adapted to the respective season. Colours are plain – black, grey and white hues. According to Guus van Vugt this is an unconscious decision and depends on the team’s preference at time being, for instance the next collection could be very bold and colourful (Vugt, 2017). Within the retail environment they play with words a lot that rather have a serious tone of voice, underlining the devotion to the social topics [see image no. 5 & 6 and process book p.55]. Light and a generous store space play a crucial role concerning utilized aesthetical features as well as the uniformity of interior elements. Throughout the whole environment the square shape plays a major role, as only a few elements exhibit a more roundish character. To sum up the aesthetics of NHTK the word minimalistic is applicable.

Image no. 4
Sweater and denim shorts that exhibit a unisex character.

Image no. 5
Written elements on a shop wall. Visible from outside as well as directly when you enter the retail space. The section “Made for everyBODY” is especially relevant in terms of approaching the issue of gender diversity / fluidity, and which is a plea to their customer and society.
BONNE Suits represents itself in a different manner, as the subject of colour is the predominantly aesthetic. The garments’ principles are very minimal in sense of the shape. The item exist only in one completion. It is called the work men’s suit, thus the shape of the trousers is rather lose which depends on the wearer’s body shape though [see image no. 7 & 8]. The jacket or blazer’s cut is squared but not bulky. It is equipped with a number of pockets which is attributable to the origin of a workman’s suit. Miscellaneous are kept simple. The overall shape appears rather clean and plain, which correspond with the suits’ property suiting any kind of occasion. This multifaceted trait is accomplished on point, as the suit seems cool and casual, but at the same time elegant in an understatement manner. The garment is available in a size range from 3XS to XL and there is no distinction made in female or male shape. The size chart is a customized one and differs from what other brands call standard (Semmoh, 2017). The BONNE suit can be bought in a wide colour palette from basic colours like black, grey and wide to more extravagant and bold colours like violet, red or pink. The material is a 400gr/m2 cotton fabric handcrafted in Portugal. Depending on the offer, suits are available in different materials, as this is the way the product innovates itself – material and colour (Semmoh, 2017). The store does not show garment related imagery, nonetheless the look book images are very important to the brand’s ID [compare with process book p. 64]. They are all depicted in the web-shop, as they showcase the suit on diverse people which reinforces the fact that the item is legit made for everyone [see image no. 8 & 9, next pages]. The imagery has a very personal character as it is always shot at the same locations, mostly in front of the founder’s front door, and shot analogue, hence the photographic style in always the same.

Image no. 6
In this example we see how NHTK plays with the stereotyped gender roles made up by society, as it pleases for diversity and acceptance regardless your gender or occupation like written on this newsletter.
The retail space at Zeedijk in Amsterdam, adapted the colourful features of the brand’s key item. The floor and counter is painted red and exhibit the BONNE Suit logo. Apart from that one finds a rather simple environment. Some cartoon balloons and flowers do the details. The personal character of the brand is visible within the store design as well, since painting from relatives are featured [compare with process book pp. 59-64], and the overall store functions as a community meeting place, as friends of the founder and employees seem regularly to be on side which naturally attracts people. The overall aesthetic of BONNE Suits is bold, every aspect of the brand conveys a good 'mood/ vibe'.

Image no. 8
In this example we see the suit fitted on a woman, whereas the trousers have a more straight fit than in the previous image no. 6. Even though the general cut is more lose, the emphasise lays on the fact that the suit adapts to several different body types and shapes. Image: (BonneSuits, 2017).

Image no. 9
This image showcases the brand’s mission that the garment is made for everyone, regardless gender, ethnicity and age. Image: (BonneSuits, 2017).
As prior stated, the aesthetics representative for the two cases are either minimalism or they appear in a bold manner, conveying a good mood / 'vibe'. Compared to the answers the interviewees have given concerning what kind of aesthetical features would be representative for a gender fluid generation, we can conclude that they match which each other. Marnix, Céline and Dennis mentioned the minimalism as an aesthetic that would be interesting and crucial to the respective generations. By contrast, Jan, Rose and Céline mentioned that colour are very decisive. Furthermore, all interviewees value the shape and cut of gender fluid garments which is in both cases considered and played with, as NHTK uses a lot of oversized and square cuts, play with aspects like tightness and the baggy style [compare with process book, pp. 56], which depict either more cliché female or male aesthetical features. Moreover, both brands do not put considerable focus on sizes, as the garments are for any gender oblivious of body features. NHTK plays with miscellaneous in order to reshape or re-size a garment, BONNE Suits' androgynous garment shape adapts to the respective wearers' body shape. Since lately, Céline likes to match her tops with her bottoms colour-, and material wise, the BONNE Suit could represent the perfect clothing item for her in terms of aesthetical characteristics and social mission. Both brands play with eye-catching features, in the case of BONNE Suits it is the garment itself and the bold colours, in NHTK's case the eye-catching aspects can be found in details or the choice of material [compare with process book, pp. 56] which meets with the statements of the respondents and expresses their nonconformity to one gender.

Further, we will be juxtaposing the stated cases with the high street retailers / fast fashion chains H&M and Zara, to make clear where the difference between a gender fluid brand and a brand with a gender binary concept lay.

5.4 How do these brands differ from fashion brands with a gender binary concept?

Upon the foundation of the description of the aesthetical characteristics that are representative for the cases within the previous sub-chapter, we will be clarifying in the following how NHTK and BONNE Suits differ from brands with a gender binary concept. The fashion retailer H&M and Zara are used for this purpose, see p. 13 and p. 55 for this choice’s reasons. NHTK and BONNE Suits differ highly in terms of their unique brand ID and statements towards the gender discussion from the mainstream brands Zara and H&M. Zara and H&M do not feature the topic of gender diversity explicitly within their brand description, mission or vision (Inditex, 2017; H&M, 2017), even though Inditex, holding company of Zara states that they aim to share their fashion with a "broad spectrum of people, cultures and ages" (Inditex, 2017). Neither, there is any social commitment made towards more social awareness of the theme, even though Zara launched a gender neutral collection last year, which was perceived as not progressive enough (Kissane, 2016), and seemingly a trend reaction. Within their retail environments we can see some but not determining differences; the fast-fasion chains are divided in departments for the binary gender [compare with process book pp. 65-67], whereas NHTK and BONNE Suits have only one, rather intimate space where there is not made any distinction in terms of gender or sex. Compared to the gender fluid brands, H&M and Zara use signage to indicate the different gendered departments [compare with process book pp. 65-67], and experience of one of the interviewees shows that Zara has a strict policy concerning the trial of clothing in the other gender's
department [referring to a statement of Marnix in the interview, process book, p.34]. However, it can be seen that the interior is heterogeneous within all departments for all cases. The most decisive element that indicates H&M and Zara as gendered stores, is the fact that female mannequins wearing clothes associated with female features cannot avoided be seen by the customer when entering the stores [compare with images 10, 11 & 12, this and the next page]. Both stores in Amsterdam have their female departments on the first floors. Next to this, the shop floor itself indicates evidently through its homogeneous nature that one finds themselves either women’s- or men’s department. The latter is not attributable to the gender fluid brands NHTK and BONNE Suits as mentioned before. NHTK and BONNE Suits’ product assortment is among other attributes the crucial aspect to express their differentiation from fashion brands with a gender binary concept.

Image no. 10
Depicting the entrance area, simultaneously the women’s department of the H&M on the Kalvertoren in Amsterdam. The mannequins showed here are an indirect indicator for a gender binary department division.

Image no. 11
Depicting the entrance area of the BONNE Suits store on the Zeeuwijk, in Amsterdam. There are no mannequins used neither signage that would indicate any gendered department. The retail space consists of one single room.

Image no. 12
This image showcase the men’s department in the Zara on Kalverstraat, in Amsterdam. You enter the space from the escalator and the first thing that is eye-catching are the male mannequins, as shown here in the right picture. They are used as an indication for the client in which department they find themselves in. Image: (Zara, 2016).
Concluding, we can say that in terms of product assortment, visual merchandising (including the presentation of the mannequins), usage of the retail space and signage NHTK and BONNE Suits differ distinctively from the high street retailer H&M and Zara.

In the last sub-chapter of this paper, the case study subjects’ ethnical footprints towards a more social awareness of the topic gender diversity / fluidity is analysed and displayed.

5.5 What are the brands’ ethnical footprints towards more social awareness of gender fluidity?

In this last sub-chapter we intend to clarify whether these brands’ ethnical footprint achieves to enhance social awareness for the topic of gender identity and gender fluidity.

Foremost, we will elucidate what the ethnical footprint of the studied brands looks like, whereupon we then conclude with taking into account the previous discussed results, whether the NHTK and BONNE Suits achieve with their social responsibility more social awareness for the topic of gender diversity, hence gender fluidity.

NHTK has a clear point in terms of giving the issue more social awareness. They play a lot with written elements and pleas that call for more tolerance, acceptance of differences and appreciation of one’s fellow human beings [compare with process book, pp. 51 & 55]. These written elements speak out loud within their store concept and are directed to the brand’s customer, store visitor and society in general. Next the usage of their retail space and the message their clothes convey that is the freedom of movement and latitude in terms of playing with social boundaries. The written elements and branded language are the most decisive features within their brand ID.

NHTK’s social media accounts are devoted to spread the company’s message, as their Instagram account call intention to local events that have the topic of gender diversity within their agenda [see process book, pp. 57 & 58]. They support local gender fluid and similar persons with featuring their stories. The gender fluid individuals Lisa and Anne Bosveld celebrated the launch of the documentary ‘Genderbende’ in where they played crucial figures, promoted by the NHTK social media accounts [see image no. 13]. Furthermore, they seem to be interested to work together with artists that define themselves along the spectrum, referring to the collaboration with the singer, songwriter IX alias Marnix Dorrestein. Together, they designed a gender fluid jacket that is simultaneously the new album of the singer [see process book, pp. 57 & 58]. By purchasing the jacket one gets a code with what the download of the IX’s new album is exclusively possible (NHTK, 2017). Talking to the store manager Guus van Vugt about their social mission, it gets clear that the brand intends to have a voice towards social issues like gender diversity in and around Amsterdam, as well as in the whole country (2017).

BONNE Suits, by contrast does not do specific things in order to achieve a social footprint regarding the gender debate. As one of the employees stated in the casual conversation, things happen organically, nothing is forced or intended (Semmoh, 2017). The company sells the suit promoting the creation of a universal key piece of clothing that is made for everyone (BonneSuits, 2017) which is currently the only reference that is attributable to the fact that BONNE Suits might be seen as a gender fluid brand. Social messages that are used are from implicit nature.
Nonetheless, alluding their genuine nature and the fact that the ‘gender fluid’ product, the suit speaks for itself, the brand has established a statement, and by any means seems to be open to whatever might organically evolve. By demonstrating the brands’ ethnical footprints and taking previous discussion results into account, we can conclude that at least NHTK enforces their demand for more tolerance and enhances with their design statements and voice, social awareness for the topic of gender diversity to a certain extent. The reached audience is still small and consists predominantly of tourists that do not perceive the social concept of the brand, as observations confirmed they mostly attracted by exclusively certain items. As Bonne Suit’s does not take any action in terms of gaining a voice within the gender debate, they do not contribute to more social awareness of the theme yet. The companies’ position within the market and also within the city of Amsterdam is strong however, which represents potential in achieving certain social awareness if the topic would be addressed in a reinforced manner.

In the following conclusion of this research report we will be summarising and concluding the main findings, as well as answering the main research question to an adequate level to simultaneously lay the foundation for the practical aim of the paper, the article in form of an advice. Which is addressed to fashion professionals, marketers and entrepreneurs that are interested in the respective topic, and do see the demand reacting upon the social trend accordingly.
6. Conclusion

How does fashion function for an increasing social awareness of the gender fluid Generations Y and Z? The social occurrence of “shifting landscapes of genders” (National Geographic, 2017), manifested through public figures’ statements being gender fluid or transgender, great media coverage, as in global magazines like the National Geographic which published a whole issue dedicated to the topic of gender, and the involvement of such within creative industries, are evident for an existing social awareness of gender diversity, hence gender fluidity in modern times. As discussed in chapter 2. *Who are the gender fluid Generations Y & Z*, we could determine that the current western society’s adolescent Generations Y and Z are conspicuously mentioned in connection to the topic. For them the binary gender categorization seem not to be as dominant as ever before (Possamai 2014). Quite the contrary is noticeably, as one of their joint and outstanding generational trait is the disapproval of conformity and the questioning of almost everything (Bund, 2014). So they do with the debate of gender diversity. They challenge conventional gender stereotypes by interpreting what gender means to them personally (Anon., 2014). The members of both generations have been raised with the notion of individual empowerment, and have been confronted with the question of identity and the ‘self’ in early and late adolescent stages far more than previous generations (Stahl, 2016). Growing up in times where digitalization supports the exploration of the self and has the ability of equalization, people who may feel different and do not conform normative social expectations, here in regard to the issue of gender, do not need to fear loneliness (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013). Due to the subject’s trend factor, and the fact that members of Generation Y and Z imply to be concerned of social matters, since they talk about ‘gender’, the debate seems to have found a pillar in current youth discussions (Rodriguez, 2015). However, gender fluid members of the studied generations face obstacles, as they experience the topic differently. Accordingly, they do express their gender identity in different manners, not perceived as the norm, yet. The period of adolescence, described in chapter 3.1 *How do we define adolescence*, is a crucial period in one’s development, and effects the gender identity orientation process immensely. Chapter 3.3 *What gender identity forming issues do Generations Y & Z face* elucidates that questions rise ‘who am I’ and ‘how to learn about respective gender performance labels’. In chapter 4.3 *Do fashion brands represent a supportive role in terms of the identity forming process*, we concluded that the interviewed individuals share a rather discouraged opinion about the fact that fashion brands would have the ability to help with the gender identity forming issue. However, the specialist literature reasons that identity construction indeed is accomplished through consumption, as humans naturally make buying decisions upon their identity or the identity they wish to convey to their surroundings, arguable whether this is a conscious or unconscious process (Phillips, n.d.). In chapter 4 *What kind of function does fashion and do fashion brands have within an adolescent identity forming process*, it was proven that Generation Y and Z spend its majority of money for fashion – clothes and shoes, and the answers of the interviewees given to the question what the meaning of fashion would be for them present a consistent pattern. Predominantly, it means visual expression and living out creativity. It became clear that fashion is highly important for gender fluid individuals of both generations, since they use fashion as the predominant source in order to express their gender identity. As described in chapter 5.1 *How does the landscape of gender fluid fashion and brands look like in 2017*, in recent years, gender-fluid and neutral collections of recognizable designer names have become conspicuous on the
western hemisphere’s catwalks, and have even been adapted of high street fashion retailers, like Zara and Weekday, subsidiary company of H&M (Murdoch, 2016). Next to gaining international media attention and seemingly being perceived by society, these fashion collections and retail projects, temporary in nature had an effect on the industry, as more permanent ideas involved. Brands, dedicated to the topic, emerged focussing on gender fluid apparel and a target market with heterogeneous consumer identities (Murdoch, 2016; Sheets, n.d.). However, the niche market of gender fluid and similar named brands is still manageable (Knoepp, 2017), and the plurality of the brands are not available to most of the adolescents of Generations Y and Z, as their price point implies haute couture stage. Merely, a few labels are established brands yet and serve their consumer next to the inevitable online business also through retail. Two of the latter are the Amsterdam based brands NHTK and BONNE Suits which lay their focus on fashion that fits numerous sorts of occasions and events, is affordable for the adolescent cohort, and is especially made for the whole gender spectrum, excluding nobody. Analysing the two gender fluid brands NHTK and BONNE Suits from Amsterdam, as well as juxtaposing their approach with the gender binary concepts of the fast fashion retailers H&M and Zara, exhibit that next to the gendered free retail space, the aesthetical characteristics of the garments as shape, cut and colour, are the decisive features which match with the gender fluid consumer’s taste and demand, as Generations Y and Z lay considerably more focus on the product. The respondents tell that the product should be as ‘loud’ as possible in order to reach them, which is attributable to the fact that Generations Y and Z are both not brand loyal and do not identify with fashion brands as previous generations did (Pike, 2016), as learned in the description of the generations, as well as in chapter 4.2 To what extent do these generations identify with certain fashion brands. Furthermore, it is linked to the argument of Washkuch that it is crucial for nowadays brands to connect right and well with their target audience (2016).

Considering this, and the fact that the segment’s members like to be addressed in in an experimental, experience-based, innovative manner (Van den Bergh & Behrer, 2013), we can conclude that NHTK and BONNE Suits do reach their target audience preferably through their products that fit the audience individual needs and that facilitate self-expression. Both brands could be relevant for the gender fluid Generations Y and Z as their brands’ mission and vision matches, with the values of being open-minded, and more ethnical and socially tolerant and responsible. The garments’ decisive aesthetical characteristics, like shape and cut, represent the joint belief - everything is possible, as they are either made for any kind of occasion, moment or experience (BonneSuit, 2017), or to be adapted to any kind of body shape through miscellaneous and heterogeneous cuts. NHTK and Bonne Suits’ aestheticisation of apparel speaks literally for less boundaries. So does their social footprint, as especially the brand NHTK pleads for more social awareness of the topic of gender diversity and fluidity within their branding concept. Their vision and mission statement for a more tolerant society with less judgement is repetitive not only within their ID, but retail environment and promoting strategy, as the chapter 5.3 What kind of aesthetical characteristics are representative for these cases, proves.

Both, NHTK and BONNE Suits represent their target audience’s changing thinking patterns and values, and react with an outstanding concept to the trend of blurred and less defined consumption patterns, due to a far-reaching “reassessment of conventional identity signifiers” (Anon, 2015), which the analysis within chapter 5 confirms. The studied cases acknowledge that fashion and the overall industry implements modern socio-cultural occurrences, as it happens currently with the debate of gender diversity. The conducted and analysed research demonstrates
an existing common desire for aesthetic diversity, and the fact that fashion indeed is a critical identifier and social informant of gender, along with its ability to re-inform modern society to perceive the importance of gender diversity, fluidity and equality. In 2017, fashion functions for an increasing social awareness of the gender fluid Generations Y and Z as an aesthetical facilitator in order to express respective adolescents’ realities, namely self-identification and individuality.
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