

INVESTIGATING PURCHASE INTENTION OF GENDER-FLUID FASHION PRODUCTS:
AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER, IDENTITY, SELF-CONGRUENCE, AND RISK VARIABLES

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ABSTRACT

With the significant social influence of gender and changing gender views, current marketing behavior around the gendering of products and brands is an important topic under study. The following master's thesis explores gender-fluid products within the fashion industry. This research aims to provide empirical insights into how consumers' gender, social identities, concept of self, and the theory of planned behavior constructs combine to influence overall intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.

This master's thesis is divided into six main sections. Firstly, the introduction highlights the interest in this topic, background information about current gender research, and the associated research gap being filled. Section two focuses on the four main theories under investigation: the theory of planned behavior, gender schema theory, identity theory, self-congruence theory, and perceived social risk and how these relate to consumer purchase intention. This research hypothesizes that attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, self-identity, social identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, and ideal social fashion self-congruity will increase purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products and that perceived risk will decrease it. An online questionnaire with convenience sampling methods was used to obtain 398 usable responses from consumers in the United States and internationally. The results demonstrated that consumer attitude, subjective norms, social identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, and perceived social risk significantly impact the purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products. Furthermore, our analysis found that consumer gender expression impacted all variables under study. Feminine consumers had more positive attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, self-identity, social identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, ideal social fashion self-congruity, and purchase intention towards gender-fluid fashion products and lower rates of perceived social risk with masculine

consumers displaying opposite results. This study concludes that there is a need for further research on gender-fluid products in other industries with more diverse populations. The relevance of this topic is growing both in literature and the business world as the topic of gender fluidity and androgyny of products and brands continues to gain recognition.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender has a powerful societal influence worldwide and is an important variable when studying consumer behavior. Recent studies in the marketing field have determined that gendered marketing has only increased in the last decade, with more gendered products today than ever before (Millan & Wright, 2018). The changing definitions and concepts of gender have prompted professionals and academics to delve deeper into its role in consumers' perception and purchase intention toward brands and products. The study of gender and its role within the context of brands, products, and consumers is a growing area of research that has gained increasing popularity within the last twenty years.

Per Figure 1, researched on August 20th, 2022, the current research on both brand gender and product gender has more than tripled in the previous decade. Furthermore, it has explicitly become prevalent within the fashion industry as consumers often share their gender expression and identity through the fashion products they buy and wear (Crane, 2012).

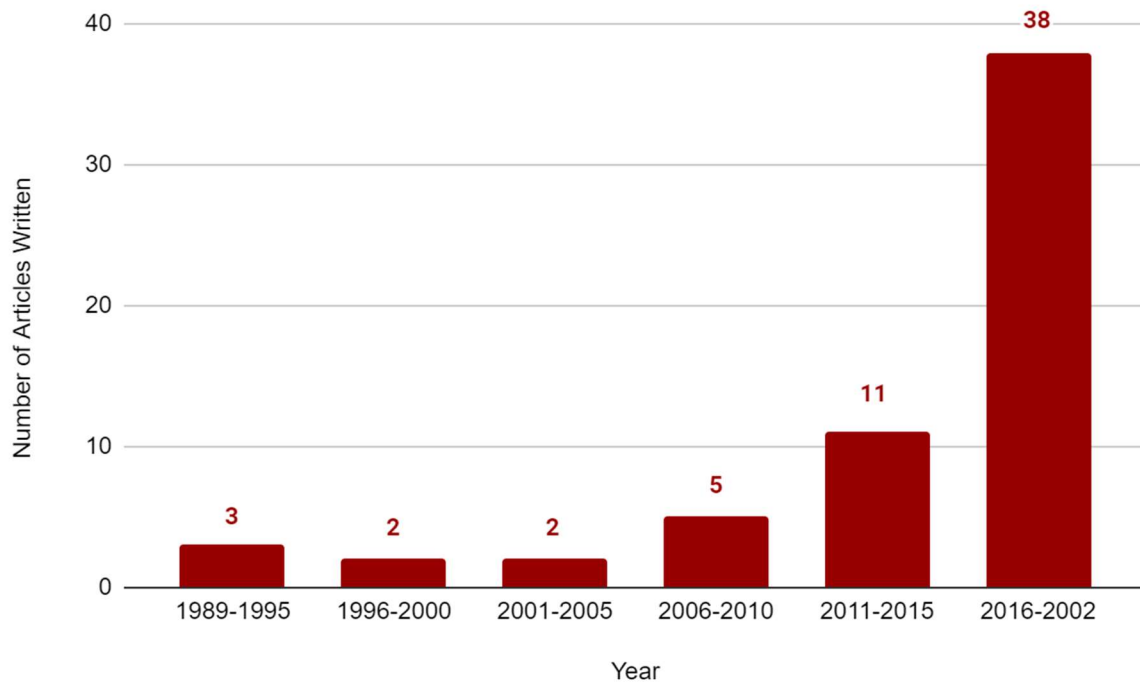


Figure 1. Based on 60 records for a search on Web of Science on 04 August 2022. Search query TOPIC: (brand gender) and TOPIC: (product gender)

Academic Relevance

From an academic perspective, this theoretical research revolves around four main theories: the theory of planned behavior (TPB), gender schema theory, identity theory, and self-congruence theory. Gender has always been an essential aspect of research, as consumers often use their purchasing power and buying behavior to signal their gender identity through everyday consumption decisions (Avery, 2012). Furthermore, consumers tend to transfer their specific personality traits to the brands they buy from, inherently adding value to the concept of gendered brands and products and how they relate to consumers' identity expression (McCracken, 1986). The majority of past literature suggests that solid gendering of a brand or product has a significant influence on the responses that they elicit from consumers. In addition, past literature

indicates that creating a stronger gender identity for products can also create stronger long-term consumer reactions (Caesar et al., 2018).

Though gender has always played an essential role in brand equity and consumer purchase intention, until the last two decades, current literature has overlooked the importance of androgyny and gender-fluid product purchases. Changing perceptions of gender psychology and gender roles have significantly impacted consumer behavior and marketing strategy (Cooke et al., 2022). In a groundbreaking study by Lieven & Hildebrand (2016), they found inequity in the way previous researchers were studying the role of gender in marketing altogether. By focusing primarily on Western cultures with individualistic tendencies and looking into brands and products that were highly feminine and masculine, these researchers noticed there was a gap within the literature surrounding new gender schemas and their interaction with widespread consumers. Their research revealed a gap in marketing gender research since gender researchers were not properly studying how this shift in gender preference might change the entire landscape of gender marketing. This researcher plans to address this literature gap through the context of gender-fluid fashion products.

Managerial Relevance

From a managerial perspective, the prospective chance to gain a more holistic and accurate perception of the power of gendering within the marketing space is essential to helping businesses create and maintain good standing with current and prospective consumers. The fashion industry is transforming due to changing gender roles, and outward identity viewpoints as these concepts have evolved in the last decade. Historically, fashion was not gendered but was rather a social class representation. It was only until the 19th century that society started to use fashion as a structured way to express their gender identities (Behal, 2020). With the emergence

and popularization of the androgynous and non-binary concepts both in literature and society, it has become more vital than ever for researchers to identify consumers' changing views on their connection with psychological gender in order to examine how this will affect their perceptions and understanding of current branding and product gender.

As gender attitudes and perspectives have continued to reflect modern culture, fashion marketers have had to adapt their marketing strategies and tactics to fit a changing market. There is a need to understand how changing gender concepts will continue to affect the overall marketplace and how consumers' various identities drive this (Cooke et al., 2022). Managers will need to understand the effects of gendered branding and positioning as it has been shown to increase consumer-based brand equity and can mean the difference between long-term customer loyalty (Lieven et al., 2014). How marketers position and promote their products regarding brand personality, product gender, and consumer value perception will be a critical managerial decision to maintain good standing in the changing gender landscape.

There is a theoretical and managerial need for researchers to delve deeper into a more holistic view of gendering. For example, professionals have already begun to consider the idea of more androgynous gender perspectives and gender-fluid purchasing behavior to maximize consumer congruence and incongruence in a world that is starting to define a less binary view of gender theory and understanding (Lieven & Hildebrand, 2016).

Research Goals: General Objectives and Specific Objectives

The primary purpose of research is to examine consumer behavior toward purchasing gender-fluid fashion products. This research is based on an extended model integrating the theory of planned behavior constructs, gender identity, self and social identity, fashion-self congruence types, and perceived risk. In addition, this research aims to study how consumers'

different identities influence their intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products. As previously stated, we contribute to the existing literature by exploring the relationship between identity and gender-fluid fashion products. While product and brand androgyny has been studied within the fashion realm, there is a research gap around gender-fluid fashion products and how they relate to consumer gender identity expression. The theoretical basis of this study follows the theory of planned behavior (TPB), gender schema theory, identity theory, and self-congruence theory.

This research aims to provide empirical insights into how consumers' gender and social identities, their concept of self, and the theory of planned behavior constructs combine to influence consumers' overall intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products. The specific objectives are:

1. To explain gender-fluid fashion product purchase intention in relation to the following variables: attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, social identity, self-identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, ideal social fashion self-congruity, and perceived social risk.
2. To analyze how gender expression (feminine, masculine) impacts consumer attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, social identity, self-identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, ideal social fashion self-congruity, and perceived social risk towards gender-fluid fashion products.
3. To analyze if gender (masculine, feminine) affects whether consumers choose to express their chosen gender through gender-fluid fashion products.

4. To determine if where consumers shop (solely online, solely in-store, or a mix of both) affects consumers' purchase intention and their perception of perceived social risk, subjective norms, and attitude towards gender-fluid fashion products.

Overall, this study contributes to the body of literature on consumer behavior, gender, identity, and self-congruence. This research provides theoretical and empirical insights based on consumers' planned behaviors and feelings towards the relationship between gender-fluid fashion and identity, set in the broader context of affecting variables like social norms and perceived external risks.

Methodology and Overview of Thesis

This thesis will be divided into two main sections to study and analyze the above-outlined research goals properly. The first section will synthesize and summarize the pertinent literature surrounding these topics, and the second section will outline the empirical research undertaken (see Figure 2).

These sections will be split into chapters. Following the introduction of this thesis (Chapter 1), the background of our thesis and the origins of our hypotheses will be outlined and explained using supportive theories and literature (Chapter 2). This review will include a brief overview of the importance of consumer gender and identity in the fashion industry context. It will begin with the theory of planned behavior and its effects on consumer purchase intention within the fashion industry (2.1). It will then delve into the related constructs of gender identity (2.2), personal identity (2.3), fashion self-congruence (2.4), and perceived social risk (2.5) to offer a more holistic review of the factors that combined to affect overall consumer purchase intention.

Our literature review frames our hypotheses and main objectives to help create our theoretical model outlined in Figure 5. For the empirical section of our research, an online survey was conducted and collected 398 valid responses concerning how personal identity affects the purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products (Chapter 3). Data about how the questionnaire was formatted and the scales, data collection methods, reliability testing, and analytical techniques are outlined and explained in Chapter 4. The results and findings around the proposed hypotheses and objectives will be detailed in Chapter 5. Finally, chapter 6 includes our limitations, suggestions for future research, and our research's overall managerial and academic implications.

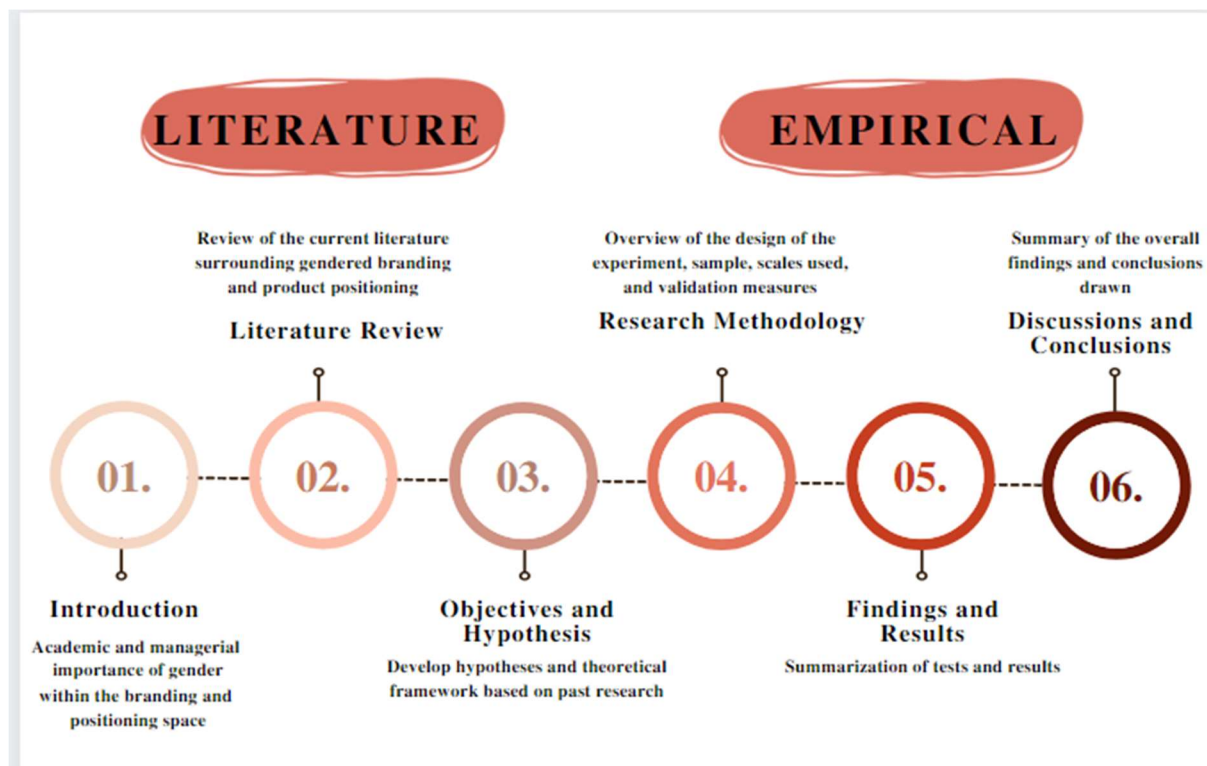


Figure 2. Overview of the Thesis Structure

LITERATURE REVIEW

Past literature demonstrates that many consumers use fashion products to represent their personal identities. However, what aspects of identity impact their intentions to purchase gender-fluid fashion products? We will present an overview of the related literature around gender-fluid fashion in the context of the theory of planned behavior (TPB), gender schema theory, identity theory, and self-congruence theory. We will expound on the literature related to the above theories and their relationship to the constructs of gender identity, social identity, self-identity, self-congruence, and perceived social risk. The first section will elaborate on TPB and how its constructs relate to the purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products. The second section will expound on how gender psychology and gender theory relate to self-expression through gendered fashion choices. The third section will detail how fashion connects to identity expression, specifically social and self-identity, within the context of gender-fluid fashion. The fourth section will delve into fashion self-congruence and the three constructs created within this area. Finally, the fifth section will define how fashion and gender expression are affected by the external variable of perceived social risk.

The combination of these four theoretical frameworks covers many of the different factors that are prevalent when consumers are deciding how to express oneself through fashion products. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a popular theory surrounding people's motivations and the main factors consumers include in their purchase decision-making process. It is utilized in many contexts, including fashion, and this research is the first to utilize it in the context of gender-fluid fashion. Gender-fluid fashion is also directly related to consumer gender schema and changing gender expression. Many consumers use clothing and fashion products to express their chosen gender, a gender choice that can often be explained through gender schema

theory. Gender schema theory outlines the process of gender identification in early life through adulthood (Condor, 1987). It accounts for how societal and social norms contribute to gender identification and expression formation. Identity theory is closely related to gender schema theory as it revolves around the idea that many humans create various identities and that these identities help dictate their actions during their daily lives (Burke & Stets, 2009). So, consumers who are interested in expressing particular gender identities for certain occasions might utilize gender-fluid fashion products to assist with this. Consumers consciously choose certain products to represent and communicate their gender, self, and social identities (Worth, Smith, & Mackie, 1992). Fashion self-congruence theory relates to this as it is based on the idea that consumers use fashion as a tool to build the identity they believe they have, the identity they are striving to have, and the identity they want others to believe already exists (Anand & Kaur, 2017).

These four theories intertwine to help explain how consumers relate and interact with gender-fluid fashion products. Researchers of this study have determined that a combination of the variables within each of these theories will help analyze the purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products. In addition, perceived social risk is added as a final external variable, as social risk often plays a prominent role in decreasing purchase intention in certain social situations (Hur, 2020).

The Theory of Planned Behavior In Relation to Gender-Fluid Fashion Products

Consumer purchase intent and decision-making often encompass a variety of motivations and complications that affect overall behavior (Park & Lin, 2020). Many models frame consumer behavior to help explain the motivation behind different types of decision-making. Since gender-fluid fashion and consumer identity and purchasing intention have not been widely studied together, researchers of this study chose to use Ajzen's (1991) well-established theory of planned

behavior to explore such a new topic properly.

TPB is an extension of the theory of reasoned action and is based on the idea that consumers practice consumption through an intention to perform a specific behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This theory outlines the relationship between consumer attitude and behavior and is intended to help predict future human behavior (Negm, 2019). TPB has previously been used in many contexts, including the study of fashion (Gam, 2011; Hodges & Karpova, 2009). TPB suggests that an increase in consumer purchase intention means an increase in a consumer's chance of executing that specific behavior (Chetioui, Benlafqih, & Lebdaoui, 2019). It was one of the first theories to establish that researchers can use people's individual beliefs and values to predict their intended behavior (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). This makes TPB a critical theory to research and utilize when explaining how individual and social values play a role in shaping consumers' behavioral intent (Suha & Sharif, 2018).

TPB uses three variables to predict behavioral intention: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Pinna, 2020). These three elements all combine to impact consumer intentions. Intentions explain how much effort a consumer plans to exert to engage in their planned behavior. On this basis, the stronger a consumer's intention, the more likely they will perform in the predicted way (Ajzen, 1991).

Attitude

Attitude is the first predictor of a consumer's intention and measures how favorable or unfavorable a consumer perceives the intended behavior. It combines consumers' experiences of social pressures, past experiences, and current life concerns (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Attitude towards fashion is critical because it is evaluative in nature and is a sign of consumers' predisposition to have positive feelings towards buying (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The more

favorable the attitude, the more likely a consumer, is to act, and vice versa (Becker-Leifhold, 2018). This leads us to propose hypothesis 1:

H1: *An increase in consumers' attitudes towards gender-fluid fashion products has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.*

Subjective Norms

The second element of TPB is subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective norms are perceived outside societal pressures from significant others to practice or not practice a specific behavior. They are based on normative expectations and capture how social pressure can determine whether consumers adopt certain behaviors, like deciding to purchase gender-fluid fashion products. Subjective norms help explain how a consumer's external environmental and social expectations influence overall motivation toward certain behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). They often relate to consumers' feelings of responsibility or moral obligation towards an intended behavior (Negm, 2019). Recent research demonstrates that social norms around non-binary gender identity and gender-fluid fashion expression are changing. A wider variety of gender expressions has become more socially accepted in recent decades (Gross, 2003). This leads us to propose hypothesis 2:

H2: *An increase in positive subjective norms towards gender fluid-fashion products has a direct positive impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.*

Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived Behavioral Control is the third element of TBP. It outlines how easily a consumer can perform an intended behavior and their perception of any difficulties that may occur from said behavior (Conner & Armitrage, 1998; Negm, 2019). This perceived control is based on the perceived strength of outside factors to prevent or facilitate a consumer's specific

planned behavior (Chetioui, Benlafqih, & Lebdaoui, 2019). Ajzen (1991) states that perceived behavioral control is often impacted by consumers' past experiences and any anticipated obstacles they will encounter when performing the intended behavior. It is also impacted by whether a consumer has all of the elements and mechanisms they need to be able to finalize the behavior they are contemplating performing (Pinna, 2020). Based on this research, we pose hypothesis 3:

H3: *Increased perceived behavioral control around the ability to express oneself through gender-fluid fashion products has a direct positive impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.*

Related Constructs

However, even though TPB is a popular theory that many researchers utilize when examining consumer behavior, some critique that it focuses on rational variables, missing the more affective and cognitive factors often related to decision-making. Affective and cognitive factors are important to study because they play an essential role in decision-making. This is especially true when examining decisions that affect consumer identity and social capital (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). Due to this, some researchers argue that it is often essential to include other variables when utilizing TPB to create a more accurate depiction of the variety of factors involved in consumer purchase intention (Chetioui, Benlafqih, & Lebdaoui, 2019).

In a study by Pinna (2020) determining the effects of gender on the purchase of ethical products, researchers added the internal constructs of moral obligation, self-identity, impediments, and gender (femininity and masculinity) to further their study. The theoretical model from this Pinna's (2020) study is demonstrated in Figure 3 below. Pinna (2020) added these different constructs because theory and research determined that these variables play a

prominent role in consumers' choice to purchase ethically. Adding variables gave the research a more well-rounded approach and aided in identifying the complete picture of purchase intention within the ethical product landscape.

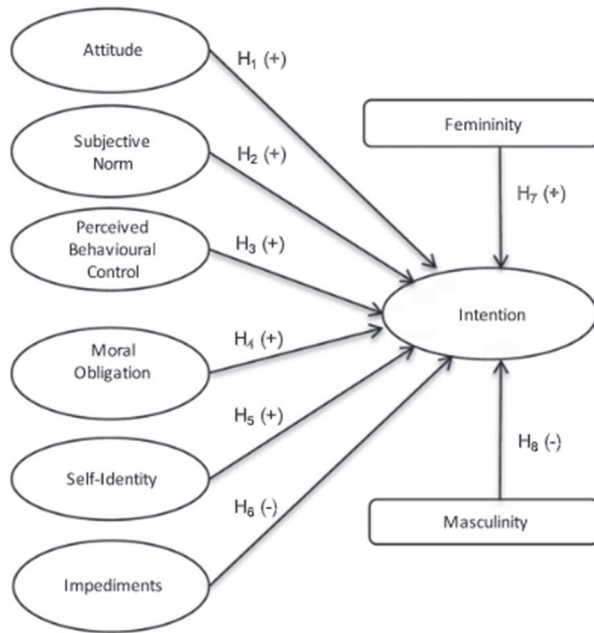


Figure 3. Intention to Purchase Ethical Products (Pinna, 2020)

Based on the adaption of Pinna's (2020) research, we thought it was essential to identify various factors involved in driving the purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products.

Previous studies included variables around self and social identity, fashion self-congruence, and perceived social risk as integral sources of inspiration behind consumers' purchase intention (San Martin, Camarero, & San Jose, 2011; Seo & Lang, 2019; Suha & Sharif, 2018; Anand & Kaur, 2018; Das, 2015). Therefore, these variables were added to our theoretical framework, showcased in Figure 5.

Examining the Relationship Between Fashion and Gender Identity

Fashion is one of the largest dominators of the modern psyche. Many consumers use fashion products as an extension of their identity to express aspects like gender, status, social

class, and age (Kaiser, 1990; McCracken, 1990). Psychological factors and cultural norms relating to gender stereotypes affect consumers' intent to purchase gender-fluid fashion products (Morris & Cundif, 1971). For example, the different identities people express about themselves and those around them often affect consumer purchase intention for all types of gendered products.

Definitions

When discussing consumer identity, a few definitions around gender identity and gender expression are essential to understand before we delve deeper into this phenomenon.

Gender Identity is defined as a "person's internal and individual experience of gender" ("Gender identity and gender expression," 2022). This is different from biological sex and encapsulates the variety of genders on the gender spectrum. Gender identity may be the same as the sex a person was assigned at birth, or it may vary depending on their chosen gender expression.

Gender Expression is how each person decides to publicly express this gender identity through things like behavior, appearance, fashion, body language, voice, and pronouns. Many individuals choose to be non-gender conforming, following their definitions of gender rather than conforming to the stereotypical gender roles of society.

"Lived" Gender Identity is the gender that they feel internally and choose to express externally in daily life activities like going to work, shopping, and interacting with the broader community ("Gender identity and gender expression," 2022).

Gender Fluid Fashion Products

Gender-fluid fashion products are any fashion products that may be perceived as outside of a consumer's assigned gender. These products are not limited by gender binaries and

traditional gender constructs (Herh, 2021). Any fashion product can be gender-fluid if worn to reflect consumers' identities without defying defined gender labels. According to fashion experts, there is no one size fits all definition of gender-fluid fashion because the idea of gender-fluid fashion is undefinable. Connecting gender to fashion is simply a societal construct because fashion reflects the gender identities that consumers portray about themselves. These genders can lie anywhere on the gender spectrum. Herh (2021) states that many customers shop outside their assigned gender label, prompting researchers to wonder what aspects of personal identity contribute to the breakdown of gendering in fashion. Our research poses the question: how does gender psychology affect consumers' ideas about gender expression through fashion products?

Gender Psychology and Sex Typing

Gender is a construct that begins to form at birth. There is a phenomenon in developmental psychology called sex typing that outlines the process of early gender development. Sex typing explains why children develop masculine and feminine traits early on in life due to cultural and societal norms that define what is appropriate for each generation (Bem, 1983). Gender schema theory was born from sex typing theory and outlines the process of memory storage and understanding during child maturation. As children grow and mature, they process and store information from their surroundings, turning them into memories called gender schema (Bem, 1983). Gender schema is caused by children's readiness to encode and organize their life's information and learnings based on their culture's definition of maleness and femaleness. This continued collection of gender schema helps children define femininity and masculinity early. Together these two theories help researchers identify the impact of societal norms on people's lives.

This continuous cycle of cultural influence on child development explains why many

adults create a culturally appropriate template of gender identification that continues to impact them into adulthood, including their purchasing decisions. Gender schema theory outlines that individuals often prefer products and brands that are congruent with the gender schema they have grown up connecting and relating to (Worth, Smith, & Mackie, 1992). Congruently, social identity theory states that individuals will consume in line with their gender identity to protect their gender group status (Ferguson, Brace-Govan, & Martin, 2020). In addition, Avery (2012) states that consumers often choose to signal their gender identity through their purchasing decisions, further supporting the idea that gender expression impacts purchase intention for many potential buyers.

Society has always had many unspoken rules around gender dress codes across cultures. The early stereotypical masculine and feminine archetypes were socially crafted from societal expectations of traditional gender roles (Condor, 1987; Lloyd & Duveen, 1993). However, in the postmodern era, the fashion industry has shifted gender strategies to blur the strict line between masculine and feminine branded products. Researchers see movements like the rise of feminism as a marked shift prompting consumers' natural tendencies and brand affinities to change and morph with changing gender roles (Cooke et al., 2022). Men and women have recorded different reactions to this phenomenon, with women more amenable to the shift and men more hesitant to stray from historical gender practices (Sandhu, 2017). The feminist movement altered many female consumers' preferences as they began to adapt their brand gender preferences to include the acceptance of masculine brands and products. This brings us to hypotheses 4 and 5:

***H4:** Feminine gender expression has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.*

***H5:** Masculine gender expression has a direct negative impact on the intention to purchase*

gender-fluid fashion products.

In the last century, the androgyny concept has emerged, reflecting that individuals can assume masculine and feminine traits and coexist and adapt rather than being exclusively one gender. One of the first cross-cultural studies by Lieven and Hildebrand (2015) found that androgynous brands have begun to generate higher brand equity than predominantly male-gendered brands globally. This was a distinct change from previous works where masculine brands dominated. In addition, society's recent cultural shift has brought about increased value in feminine traits and attitudes towards femininity, paving the way towards a change in acceptance and preference of feminine brands and products.

If this shift in thinking holds, it may signal a new inclination towards androgynous branding and products as gender roles continue to converge and society gives individuals a new opportunity to embrace their femininity and masculinity simultaneously (Gross, 2003; Ulrich & Tissier-Desbordes, 2011). Golden and Clee's (1979) study shared that those who are non-binary in their gender expression may tend to gender-fluid products since their gender expression is symbolically related to both feminine and masculine traits (Golden & Clee, 1979; Grohmann, 2009). This leads us to propose hypothesis 6:

H6: *Non-binary gender expression has a direct positive impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.*

Personal Identity and Gender-Fluid Fashion: The Effects of Social Identity and Self-Identity

Suha and Sharif (2018) identified the different aspects of personal identity as extensions of TPB, as demonstrated in their proposed theoretical framework in Figure 4. Identity theory is based on the idea that individuals create various identities for themselves and that these identities help dictate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. (Burke & Stets, 2009). Identity is often self-

constructed, and people have the opportunity to change and shift their identities by tweaking their outward appearances. Consumers' purchasing habits often reveal how they see and express their self-image (Suha & Sharif, 2018; Sandhu, 2022). Many consumers purchase specific products and brands to build and change their self-identity and social identity.

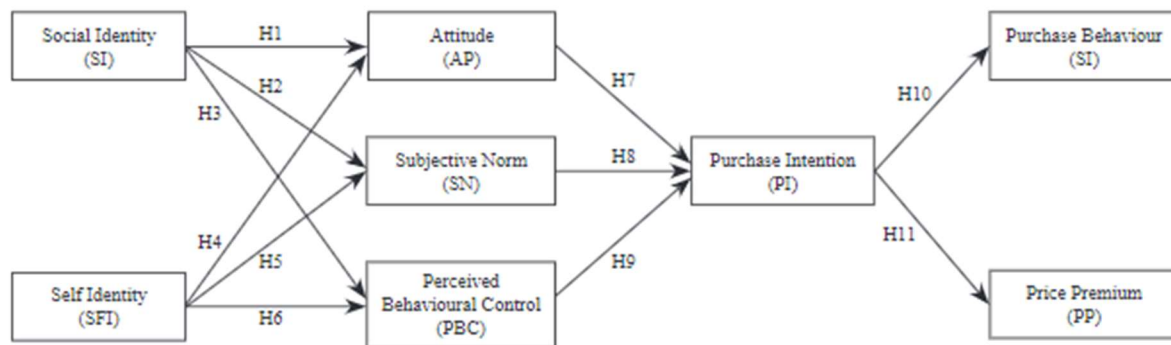


Figure 4. Self-Identity and Social Identity as Drivers of Consumer Purchase Intention (Suha & Sharif, 2018)

Social Identity

Social identity is essential for researchers to study when trying to build a deeper understanding of consumers' motivations behind the purchase intention of fashion products. Social identity can be split and defined by consumers' different demographic groups through categorizations that define them, like race and gender (Stets & Burke, 2003). The theory of social identity argues that consumers' egos and self-esteem are directly related to their social groups (Suha & Sharif, 2018). People can directly affect others' evaluations of themselves in these mental and social contexts through their choice of how they display their outward appearance (Kaiser, 1990). Fashion holds many symbolic meanings and values and often helps consumers identify as part of different social groups. Fashion products are often used to aid consumers in their quest to define their social identities (Kaiser, 1990). These products, specifically clothing, are critical self-modification tools directly tied to identity as they facilitate easy and affordable alterations of social and self-image (Barry, 2015).

Yuen et al. (2021) studied the relationship between gender identity and fashion choice. They found that individuals were likelier to buy products that were in line with their biological sex to protect their social status. In a study of men's fashion, McNeill and McKay (2016) determined that men's social identity has become more prevalently constructed through fashion in the last two decades. They postulated that as traditional gender roles have begun to shift and evolve, it has become more socially acceptable for men to be more fashion focused. Their findings determined that in the last twenty years, there has been an indication of men's increased use of fashion as a social tool to frame their identities and self-image. They also found that masculinity has become more appearance focused than ever before.

In a study by McNeill (2018), researchers found that women also used self-presentation to control the impression of those around them. McNeill (2018) determined that the three driving factors of innovation in women's fashion were individuals' security in their concept of self, self-esteem, and social insecurity. Fashion independence and straying from fashion norms were seen as either a sign of a high sense of self or a sign that women were trying to use fashion to gain social acceptance and social capital. Finally, fashion products were seen as a way to project and communicate the social style and roles consumers were trying to identify. For example, if consumers chose to express a specific gender to fit in with a particular gender group, they were shown to use products that symbolized that specific group. Based on this line of research, we postulate the following hypothesis:

H7: Social Identity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.

Self-Identity

The mixture of identity theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000) and self-congruity theory (Sirgy,

1986) helps researchers understand the overall concept of self-identity. Self-identity is defined by the variety of roles that individuals create for themselves and how this further defines their social positioning within society (McNeill, 2017). Self-identity researchers theorize that many people's selves directly relate to their intention to perform certain behaviors (Shaw & Shuib, 2002b). Previous research has ascertained that many consumers create self-identity through purchasing material possessions because these products help people relate to their external environments (Belk, 1988). Ownership of these products allows consumers to maintain their version of self and display it to their communities (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995). In this way, fashion products become tools for self-identity as they reflect one's heritage, culture, and chosen gender expression. Many consumers use fashion to express their self-identity and gender identity through gender-fluid clothing choices (Behal, 2020). This line of research leads us to consider self-identity as an essential variable when studying purchase intention for gender-fluid fashion products. From this, we propose hypothesis five below:

H8: Self Identity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.

Fashion and the Self-Concept: the Three Types of Fashion Self-Congruence

Identity, self-concept, and fashion are intertwined, as many consumers use fashion to express their self-concept and build their ideal identities (Au *et al.*, 2007). Self-concept is directly related to self-congruence. The self-congruity theory postulates that consumers tend to use products that coincide with their personality image (Sirgy, 1986). Over time, people's purchasing habits and behaviors are directly affected by the congruence between themselves and the products they buy. They use these products to build and represent their self-identity and self-image.

The theories of fashion self-congruence and gender congruence align. Grohmann (2009) defined *brand gender congruence* as the idea that consumers are more likely to accept products that are consistent with their chosen gender identity. Grohmann found that female consumers were more likely to evaluate feminine brands positively, and the same could be said for male consumers' evaluations of masculine brands. The self-congruence theory states that potential consumers are more likely to positively respond to brands that align with their self-concept of gender expressions which essentially predicts purchase intention (Azar, Aime, & Ulrich, 2018). This helps explain why consumers may respond more positively to gender-congruent brands and products, in line with self-congruence theory.

This idea of self-congruence and self-concept influences how many consumers view the marketing landscape, changing their perceptions of advertising, products, and brands depending on how they interact with the stimuli in front of them. Self-concept is an important area in the context of fashion because many people use clothes and fashion products for self-formation and self-exhibition (Davis, 1985). Belk (1988) notes that consumers have historically consumed items congruent with their perceptions of their current, future, and social selves.

Self-concept is how consumers create self-perception and attitudes towards themselves as objects. It is related to self-image and is a primary variable many marketers study. Researchers theorize that consumers often select the products and brands they think fit within their self-image to further the image they want others to have of them, further defining their self-concepts (Goldsmith, Moore, & Beaudoin, 1999). In the past, researchers have split the idea of self-concept in different ways. For example, some researchers classify the idea of self into two sections, one's ideal self-concept, or how one wants to be perceived, and their real self-concept, or how one truly is (Goldsmith, Moore, & Beaudoin, 1999). Other authors split self-concept into

four categories: actual self, ideal self, social self, and idea social self (Sirgy, 1979; He & Mukherjee, 2007). Table 1 demonstrates how different authors chose to split consumers' ideas of self-concept and self-image.

Table 1

Studies About Self-Concept and Self-Image Congruence

Authors	Study	Aspects of Self
Casidy <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Linking fashion consciousness with Gen Y attitude toward prestige brands	Actual self
Dolich (1969)	Congruence relationships between self-images and product brand	Actual self, ideal self
Rhee and Johnson (2012)	Investigating relationships between adolescents' liking for an apparel brand and brand self congruency	Actual self, ideal self, ideal social self
Sirgy (1979)	Self-concept in consumer behavior	actual self, ideal self, social self, ideal social self
He and Mukherjee (2007)	I am, ergo I shop: does store image congruity explain shopping behaviour of Chinese consumers?	actual self, ideal self, social self, ideal social self
Anand and Kaur (2018)	Fashion self-congruity: scale development and validation	actual self, ideal self, social self, ideal social self

Adapted from: (Anand & Kaur, 2018)

Fashion products are easy tools to express various aspects of self in social situations. How people choose which aspects of self to display, be it their actual, ideal, or ideal social self, is influenced by the outside environmental factors they may encounter (Schenk & Holman, 1980). According to the scale developed by Anand and Kaur (2018), the three dimensions of self

most related to fashion are the actual self, the ideal self, and the ideal social self.

The intersection of self-concept and fashion is defined as fashion self-congruity (Casidy *et al.*, 2015). The idea of congruence stems from conceptual congruence. This theory states that consumers have a more positive response when they have an easier time processing and understanding stimulus (Reber *et al.*, 2004; Winkielmen *et al.*, 2003). Mendler (1982) theorized that the level of congruence between a person's schema and certain stimuli affects how that stimulus is evaluated. Many consumers choose to align their desired aspect of self with fashion products that express it (Sirgy *et al.*, 2000; Casidy *et al.*, 2015)

For this research and based on our review of the pertinent literature above, we align with Anand and Kaur's scale (2017). They split fashion self-congruity into three types of congruence that align with consumers' chosen self-concept: actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, and ideal social fashion self-congruity. Actual fashion self-congruity is when consumers wear fashion products and create a style that aligns with the qualities *they believe they actually possess*. Based on this, we postulate hypothesis 9:

H9: Actual fashion self-congruity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.

Ideal fashion self-congruity is when consumers wear fashion products and create a style that aligns with the qualities *they are striving to possess*. Based on this concept we postulate hypothesis 10:

H10: Ideal fashion self-congruity has a direct positive impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.

Ideal social fashion self-congruity is when consumers wear fashion products and create a style that embodies the social image *they want those around them to believe they already*

possess. (Anand & Kaur, 2017). Based on this concept we postulate hypothesis 11:

H11: Ideal social fashion self-congruity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.

Aversion of Gender-Fluid Fashion: Social Risk as a Contributing External Factor

As stated above, historically, clothing was used to create one's self-image. Throughout time many people have used fashion to align their image with those of perceived social norms. Many professionals in the fashion industry have been using demographic variables like biological sex (male and female consumers) and psychographic traits (femininity and masculinity) as explanatory variables for decades (Gould & Stern, 1989). Using this type of psychological typography has helped those in the fashion industry create products geared toward certain personality types (Dichter, 1985). However, these marketing strategies have also led to the perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes.

Perceived social risk is any potential disapproval from family and friends that convinces consumers not to purchase certain products (Shang, Pei, & Jin, 2017). It is a solid external factor that impedes consumers' willingness to break social norms (Campbell & Goodstein, 2001). Those that have a stronger-self-concept may make riskier fashion choices due to their overall sense of confidence in themselves and their fashion choices. In contrast, those with a weaker self-concept may be more easily affected by perceived social risk (McNeil, 2018).

As members of a similar culture, consumers often decide the appropriateness of different gendered products based on societal standards. Many consumer purchase intentions are affected by social norms, and the perceived risk of the disapproving opinions of others can be a catalyst for declining purchase intention towards products outside the usual social norms, like gender-fluid fashion products.

These risk factors stem from consumers' need to regulate the conflict between their internal desire to buy a product and the negative feelings from breaking social norms. This is defined as the social risk sentence. This tug-of-war between preference and social status often leads to a decline in purchase intention in many consumers (Shang, Pei, & Jin, 2017). But on the other hand, when the perceived risk is very high, it can prompt consumers to purchase in accordance with more established social norms, like choosing fashion products aligned with current gender stigmas.

In a study by Yokayama et al. (2014), researchers measured consumers' intention to purchase products and the influence of social risk on this intention. Using fMRI, they identified a strong positive correlation that consumers' perception of social risks triggered the brain's anterior insula, which measures social-emotional networks. This trigger prompts consumers not to buy items that are perceived as unacceptable or risky. This study further emphasizes how perceived social risk can work as a catalyst for decreased purchase intention.

In another study by Campbell and Goodstein (2001), researchers found that perceived risk was a limit to intention due to consumers' preference for the norm when high-risk conditions were present. High perceived risk was shown to create wariness and a sense of risk aversion in consumers. They tended to choose familiar and well-known products when increased feelings of risk were present due to the comfort that comes from familiarity and the increased degree of match between their schema and the chosen product (Campbell & Goldstein, 2001).

Hur (2020) outlines perceived risk in relation to fashion choice. Hur states that the consumer decision-making process is impacted by the cognitive links between attributes identified for a product, the product's perceived consequences, and the consumers' values. Consequences arise from risks that may come from direct product use. These consequences are

split into three sections: functional consequences, personal/psychological consequences, and social consequences. Social consequences are derived from how consumers perceive they will look to others compared to societal and social norms. Examples are constructs like self-perceived social status and negative social image. The combination of the research above leads us to propose hypothesis twelve:

H12: *Perceived social risk has a direct negative impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.*

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

In the following section, we will outline the research objectives and hypotheses and propose our connected research framework.

Research Objectives

The proposed conceptual framework, illustrated in Figure 5, is based on the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) with other relevant theories and variables sourced from related literature. Our review of the pertinent literature found that there are studies around purchase intentions within the fashion industry. However, there is a gap in the literature studying the relationship between identity and gender-fluid fashion. Therefore, there are a few primary objectives within this study.

Our first aim was to examine how various pertinent variables within this field affect the purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products. We included the variables from TPB as they have been used in many studies to test consumer intention toward products. Based on this theory, we included the primary constructs of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. We also wanted to examine whether gender identity, self-identity, social identity, and elements of fashion self-congruence affect consumers' intent to purchase gender-fluid products. This was based on previous literature's connection of identity criteria and societal influence on fashion choices (Pinna, 2020; San Martin, Camarero, & San Jose, 2011; Seo & Lang, 2019; Suha & Sharif, 2018; Anand & Kaur, 2018; Das, 2015). Additionally, researchers wanted to examine if perceived social risk around gender-fluid fashion products had an adverse effect on purchase intention, so we included this as our final variable.

Our second and third aims were to examine how consumer gender expression impacted any of the independent variables involved in our study and if it also impacted consumers' willingness to express their chosen gender through gender-fluid fashion products. Our fourth and

final aim was to determine if shopping online or in-store affected consumer purchase intention, perceived social risk, subjective norms, and attitude toward gender-fluid fashion products

Research Hypotheses

Table 2 summarizes this study's thirteen hypotheses that were justified in the above literature review.

Table 2

Overview of Proposed Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Authors
H1: An increase in consumers' attitudes towards gender-fluid fashion products has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.	(Pinna, 2020; Morris & Cundiff, 1971)
H2: An increase in positive subjective norms towards gender fluid-fashion products has a direct positive impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.	(Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Sethi & Jain, 2020; Pinna, 2020)
H3: Increased perceived behavioral control around the ability to express oneself through gender-fluid fashion products has a direct positive impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.	(Pinna, 2020)
H4: Feminine gender expression has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.	(Sandhu, 2017; Cooke <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
Programming	
H5: Masculine gender expression has a direct negative impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.	(Sandhu, 2017; Cooke <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
H6: Non-binary gender expression has a direct positive impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.	(Golden & Clee, 1979; Grohmann, 2009)
H7: Social Identity has a direct positive impact on the intention to	(Suha & Sharif, 2018)

purchase gender-fluid fashion products.

H8: Self-Identity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products. (Pinna, 2020; Grewal, Mehta & Kardes, 2004)

H9: Actual fashion self-congruity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products. (Anand & Kaur, 2018)

H10: Ideal fashion self-congruity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products. (Anand & Kaur, 2018)

H11: Ideal social fashion self-congruity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products. (Anand & Kaur, 2018)

H12: Perceived social risk has a direct negative impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products. (Shang, Pei, & Jin, 2017; San Jose, 2011)

Own Elaboration

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model below was developed based on the hypotheses listed above.

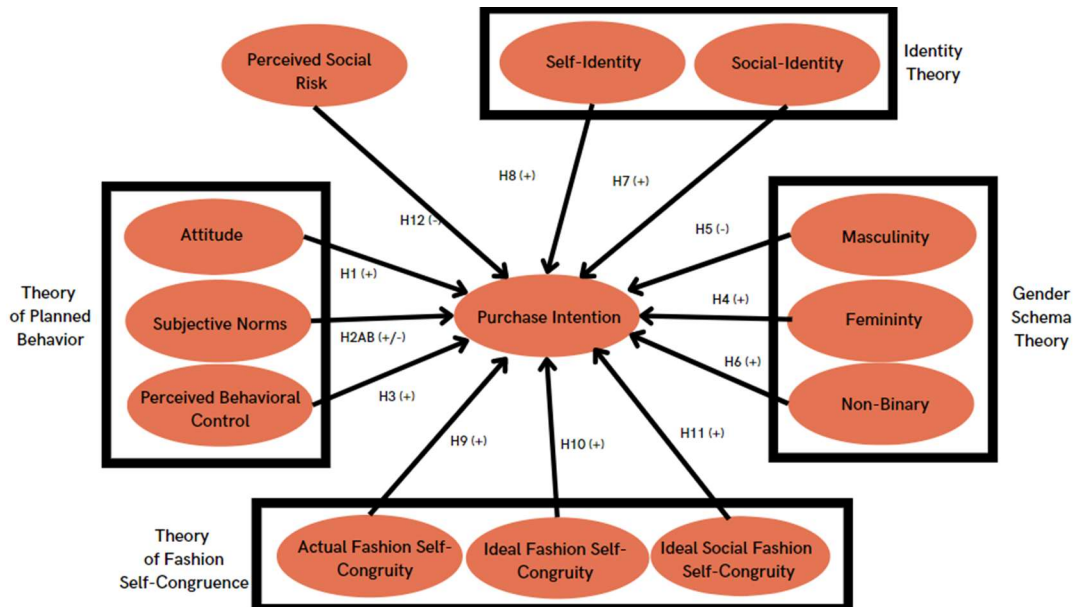


Figure 5. Conceptual Framework (own illustration)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will contain our research's design and data collection strategies. We will outline how we collected our sample, the scales we used and developed, and how we analyzed our data.

Population and Data Collection

Data was collected from individuals from all around the United States as well as some international respondents. All questionnaires were delivered in English. In order to collect responses, convenience sampling was used. The researchers posted their survey link on their social media platforms and a professor at UNCW sent the link out to a class containing over 200 UNCW students. In this way, only non-probabilistic sampling techniques were used. The data collection lasted a week and a total of 398 valid responses were collected. The main sample features are summed up in Table 3 below.

First, we will offer the main descriptive statistics of our sample. Table 3 outlines the demographics statistics and the relevant frequencies from the acquired sample. Respondents ranged from 18-50+ with 91.5% of respondents between 18-33 years old. A majority of participants identified as masculine and feminine, with just 3% choosing to identify as non-binary or prefer not to say. The level of education reported by respondents was high, with over 94% holding an undergraduate degree or higher. 92.9% percent of participants shared that they expressed their gender through fashion products. 57% percent reported that they had purchased gender-fluid fashion products at least once before taking this survey. More than half of our sample was located in the South-Eastern region of the United States, with over 16% reporting they lived internationally, and the rest of the sample spread throughout the United States.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of Population

		Frequency (N=Sample Size)	Percent
Age	18-25	331	83.2%
	26-33	33	8.3%
	34-41	11	2.8%
	42-50	6	1.5%
	51+	17	4.3%
	Total	398	100%
Gender	Masculine	175	44%
	Feminine	211	53%
	Non-Binary/third gender	8	2%
	Prefer not to answer	4	1%
	Total	389	100%
Education	High School	23	5.8%
	Undergraduate	312	78.4%
	Graduate or more	62	15.6%
	Other	1	0.3%
	Total	398	100%
Location	Western U.S.	27	6.8%
	Southwestern U.S.	10	2.5%
	Midwestern U.S.	17	4.3%
	Southeastern U.S.	222	55.8%
	Northeastern U.S.	58	14.6%
	International	64	16.1%

Sexuality	Heterosexual	321	80.7%
	Homosexual	14	3.5%
	Bisexual	45	11.3%
	Asexual	6	1.5%
	Prefer not to say	7	1.8%
	Total	398	100%
Do you express your gender through the fashion products you buy?	Yes	227	57%
	No	37	9.3%
	Sometimes	103	25.9%
	Not sure	31	7.8%
	Total	398	100%
Have you ever purchased gender-fluid fashion products?	Yes	228	57.3%
	No	170	42.7%
	Total	398	100%

Source: Own Elaboration

Pre-Test

The questionnaire was pretested with a convenience sample of around 10 people to ensure the participants understood the definitions and terminology and that the questions were clear and concise. This pre-test also helped us to determine that the questionnaire length was around 10 minutes. After this pre-test, some of the questions were altered to be more understandable and some extra behavioral questions were added.

Measures and Procedures

Our hypotheses were tested using an online survey created on Qualtrics. The survey consisted of fourteen sections with a total of forty-six questions. Respondents were first shown an introductory message with an introduction to the survey. They were then shown a page that informed them of the definitions of “lived” gender identity and gender-fluid fashion products in order to help ensure understanding of survey matter. After this they were asked initial questions on whether they normally express their gender through fashion and if they had ever bought gender-fluid fashion products in the past.

In the main portion of the survey, based on previous literature, respondents were presented with a set of statements based on each of the main constructs under study. Respondents were asked to answer to what extent they agreed on around three to six statements that aligned with each of the different constructs under study. The statements were based on previous literature for each topic area, and all used 5-point Likert scales, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The statements for each variable are showcased in Table 4 below. All scales used were developed based on previous literature. The end of the survey included behavioral questions around personal shopping habits as well as standard demographics questions whose results are shown in Table 3 above. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Table 4

Construct Measurement

Construct of Variable	Items Used	Authors
Self-Identity	3a. I think of myself as someone who is concerned about gender stereotypes and the issues this brings to fashion consumption.	(Pinna, 2020; Grewal, Mehta & Kardes, 2004)

	<p>3b. I think of myself as someone who will buy gender-fluid fashion products.</p> <p>3c. To buy gender-fluid fashion products is important to who I am.</p> <p>3d. I am not the type of person to buy gender-fluid fashion products.</p>	
Social Identity	<p>4a. Having gender-fluid fashion products makes me feel accepted.</p> <p>4b. Having gender-fluid fashion products improves the way I am perceived.</p> <p>4c. Having gender-fluid fashion products makes a good impression on others.</p>	(Suha & Sharif, 2018)
Attitude	<p>5a. In general, my attitude towards buying gender-fluid fashion products is favorable.</p> <p>5b. In general, my attitude towards buying gender-fluid fashion products is positive.</p> <p>5c. I believe gender-fluid fashion products are valuable.</p> <p>5d. I believe gender-fluid fashion products are useful.</p>	(Pinna, 2020; Morris & Cundiff, 1971)
Subjective Norms	<p>6a. Most people who are important to me buy gender-fluid products.</p> <p>6b. Most people who are important to me think that I should buy gender-fluid fashion products.</p> <p>6c. The people in my life whose opinions I value would not approve of gender-fluid fashion product purchases.</p> <p>6d. The people in my life whose opinions I value support my gender-fluid fashion product purchases.</p>	(Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Sethi & Jain, 2020; Pinna, 2020)

Perceived Behavioral Control	7a. For me, to buy gender-fluid fashion products in the future would be difficult.	(Pinna, 2020)
	7b. If I wanted to, I could buy gender-fluid fashion products in the near future.	
	7c. It is mostly up to me whether or not I buy gender-fluid fashion products.	
Perceived Social Risk	8a. I believe that buying gender-fluid fashion products will not meet the approval of my family.	(Shang, Pei, & Jin, 2017; San Martin, Camarero, & San Jose, 2011)
	8b. I believe that buying gender-fluid fashion products will not meet the approval of my friends.	
	8c. I feel that if I buy gender-fluid fashion products I will not be in fashion.	
	8d. Buying and using gender-fluid fashion products might make others have an unfavorable impression of me.	
	8e. Buying gender-fluid fashion products may cause me to lose my reputation.	
	8f. I will be thought of as strange if I buy gender-fluid fashion products.	
Actual Fashion Self-Congruity	9a. Basing my fashion style around gender-fluid fashion products is consistent with how I see myself.	(Anand & Kaur, 2018)
	9b. Gender-fluid fashion products are important tools to express my self image.	
	9c. My gender-fluid fashion products reflect how I feel about myself.	
Ideal Fashion Self-Congruity	10a. Gender-fluid fashion products help me to become the person I want to be.	(Anand & Kaur, 2018)

	10b. Gender-fluid fashion products help me achieve the identity I want to have.	
	10c. Gender-fluid fashion products help me narrow the gap between who I am and who I want to try and be.	
Ideal Social Fashion Self-Congruity	11a. Buying gender-fluid fashion products helps create an impression that I want people to have of me.	(Anand & Kaur, 2018)
	11b. Creating a gender-fluid dressing style is consistent with the image I want to create in people's minds.	
	11c. My fashion style is consistent with what is considered ideal.	
Purchase Intention	12a. I expect to buy gender-diverse fashion products in the near future.	(Pinna, 2020)
	12b. I want to buy gender-diverse fashion products in the near future	
	12c. I intend to buy gender-diverse fashion products in the near future.	
	H10: Ideal fashion self-congruity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.	(Anand & Kaur, 2018)
	H11: Ideal social fashion self-congruity has a direct positive impact on the intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.	(Anand & Kaur, 2018)
	H12: Perceived social risk has a direct negative impact on intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.	(Shang, Pei, & Jin, 2017; San Martin, Camarero, & San Jose, 2011)

Source: Own Elaboration

Since basic demographic information and personal characteristics can affect the outcomes of respondents, we included demographic and psychographic questions at the end of the questionnaire. The questions are included in the survey in Appendix A. We plan to study these features through post hoc measurements to determine if we can find any correlations between these features and overall purchase intention.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In order to properly evaluate our answers to the research questions of this study and the objectives we set out to complete, we plan to analyze the various questions that relate to each of our hypotheses. We will analyze the data collected from our questionnaire through IBM SPSS, a marketing statistics program. We originally had 494 responses but cleaned our data through the deletion of practice responses and incomplete responses. We ended up with 398 total usable responses. The tests we plan to run, and the results will be written up in Chapter 5.

Calculating Reliability for Each Construct

Before proceeding with our testing, we made sure to calculate reliability for each construct. To do this we ran Cronbach Alpha reliability analysis through SPSS. The results are shown in Table five below.

Table 5

Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Self-Identity	.740	3
Social Identity	.859	3
Attitude	.928	4
Subjective Norms	.731	3
Perceived Behavioral Control	.596	2
Perceived Social Risk	.891	6
Actual Fashion Self-Congruence	.898	3
Ideal Fashion Self-Congruence	.954	3
Ideal Social Fashion Self-Congruence	.668	3
Purchase Intention	.965	3

Source: Own Elaboration

We analyzed each construct and were looking to find a Cronbach alpha score above at least .5. According to Pallant (2013), if constructs have less than 10 statements within them a score of .5 is significant enough to recommend reliability. As demonstrated in Table 5, all 398 cases were valid for all constructs, and we had no missing responses. For our self-identity, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control constructs we initially scored below our .5 threshold and had to delete a statement from each to increase the scores above .5. At the end of our analysis all constructs were found reliable enough for further testing.

Descriptive Statistics

In order to provide some basic information about our overall data set and check to see any potential relationships between all of the variables within our study, we first ran descriptive statistics. For our analysis, our independent variables were combined to create averages for self-identity, social identity, attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavior control, perceived social risk, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, ideal social fashion self-congruity, and purchase intention. These are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

Means and SDs of Investigated Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Self-Identity Average (SelfIdAVG)	2.74	.94
Social Identity Average (SoIdAVG)	2.66	.91
Attitude Average (AttAVG)	3.55	1.02
Subjective Norms Average (SubNormAVG)	2.56	.82
Perceived Behavioral Control Average (PBC AVG)	4.1	.84
Perceived Social Risk Average (PSRAVG)	2.57	.98
Actual Fashion Self-Congruity Average (AFSCAVG)	2.49	1.10

Ideal Fashion Self-Congruity Average (IFACAVG)	2.40	1.17
Ideal Social Fashion Self-Congruity Average (ISFSAVG)	2.74	0.89
Purchase Intention (PIAVG)	2.69	1.19

Source: Own Elaboration

When analyzing the descriptive statistics, most of the variables have similar means at about the middle point of the scale, around 2.5. The two main exceptions are attitude and perceived behavioral control. Respondents found they had higher levels of positive attitude ($m = 3.55$) and perceived behavioral control ($m = 4.1$) towards gender-fluid fashion products.

Main Results

In order to prove or disprove the hypotheses posed within this study we utilized statistical analysis as we tested each of our hypotheses. This chapter has been split into sub-chapters that will outline each test we ran and our analysis of the results.

Objective 1: Effects of Constructs on Purchase Intention

The purpose of this study was to explore what factors led to increased intent to purchase gender-fluid fashion products. A final sample of 398 usable responses were collected using a convenience sample approach via an online survey. Eleven variables were included as independent variables: attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, self-identity, social identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, ideal social fashion self-congruity, and perceived social risk. These variables were tested alongside the final dependent variable of purchase intention. Based on this information we hypothesized: There is a significant positive relationship between consumer attitude (H1), subjective norms (H2), perceived behavioral control (H3), social identity (H7), self-identity (H8), actual fashion self-congruity (H9), ideal fashion self-congruity (H10), and ideal social fashion self-congruity (H11) to purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products. There is a significant negative

relationship between perceived social risk (H12) and purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products.

To test hypotheses 1-8, 11-12, we start by creating a variable for each construct under analysis, from the mean of the items involved in it. When analyzed the effects of these constructs on purchase intention and we applied an MLR. We used the calculated means of each of our independent variables of attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, self-identity, social identity, gender identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, ideal social fashion self-congruity, perceived social risk, and our dependent variable of purchase intention.

Before analyzing the results of the MRL, we made sure to check the conditions of applicability of this technique. First, we checked that all variables are metrical and linear. Then we looked at the normality of the data per charts 1 and 2. According to chart 1, the data can be perceived as normal as it follows a bell shape. This is corroborated in chart 2 as most of the dots fall on the diagonal line.

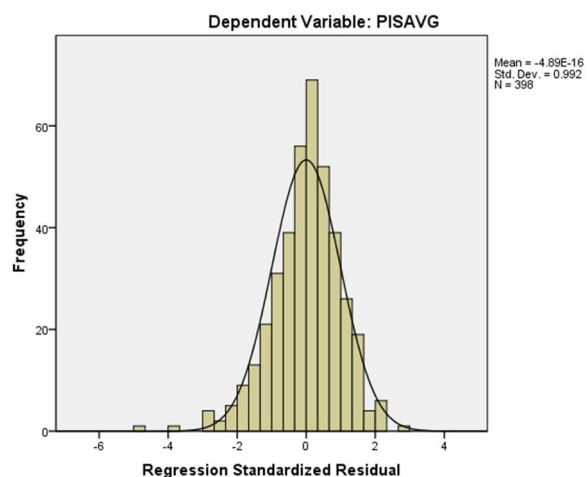


Chart 1. Normality of Data (own elaboration)

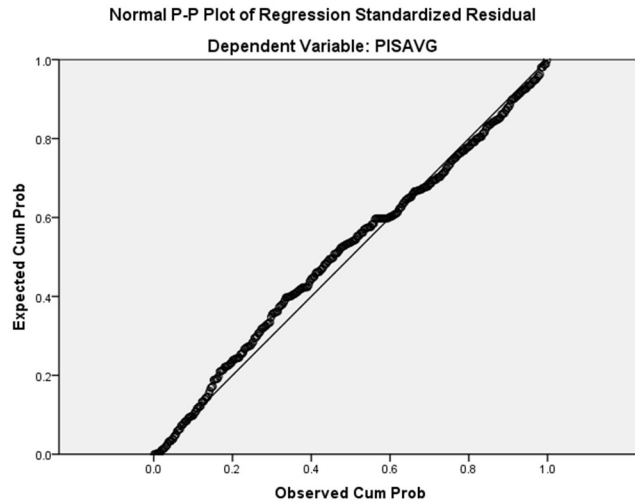


Chart 2. Normal P-Plot of Regression Standardized Residual (own elaboration)

Next, we examined chart 3 to determine homogeneity of variances. Per chart 3, homogeneity of variances is assumed as the dot distribution is symmetrical and there are no significant outliers.

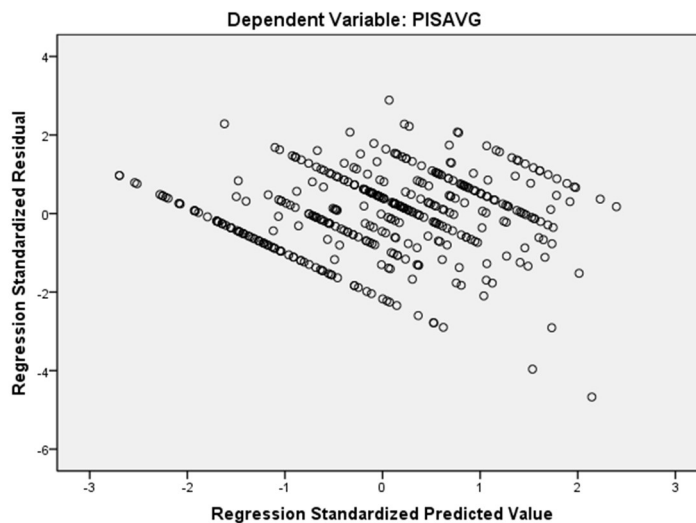


Chart 3. Scatter Plot (own elaboration)

Once we checked the conditions of applicability, we interpreted the MLR results. According to table 7, R^2 indicates how much of the total variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables. In this case, our model of best fit is number 6 with an R^2 of .58. This means that variation of purchase intention is predicted by the respondent's

attitude, ideal fashion self-congruity, perceived social risk, subjective norms, social identity, and actual fashion self-congruity 58% of the time. A percentage of R^2 above 50% indicates that this is an appropriate result

Table 7

Model Summary

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin Watson
1	.623	.338	.386	.93326	
2	.719	.517	.514	.83000	
3	.740	.547	.544	.80473	
4	.754	.568	.564	.78666	
5	.758	.575	.569	.78154	
6	.761	.580	.573	.77813	1.884

Source: Own elaboration

Second, we look at the ANOVA table to be sure the model is significant (see table 8). Our regression model predicts the dependent variables when the statistical significance is less than 0.05. According to table 8, the significance associated with our chosen model 6 is .000. When $p < 0.05$, the probability of being wrong if we reject the null hypothesis is relatively small. Thus, our regression model can reasonably predict the variation of our dependent variable. Our final model (6) contains six causal variables of attitude, subjective norms, social identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, and perceived social risk that reasonably predict variation in purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products.

Table 8

ANOVA for Model 6

Model 6	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	326.468	6	54.411	89.865	.000
Residual	236.742	391	.605		
Total	563.210	397			

Source: Own elaboration

Next, we look at the coefficients table (see table 9). First, we check collinearity statistics. Since all our VIF scores are <10 and our tolerances are close to 1, we are good to go on with our analysis. Based on the results demonstrated in table 9, hypotheses 1, 2, 7, 9, 10, and 12 are supported. To truly understand the significant variables' impact on purchase intention, each individual variable must be considered.

Table 9

Coefficients for Model 6

Model 6	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.323	.250		1.292	.197		
AttAVG	.292	.053	.250	5.512	.000	.524	1.1909
SubNormAVG	.252	.078	.134	3.214	.001	.620	1.612
SocIDAVG	.142	.064	.108	2.220	.027	.455	2.197
AFSCAVG	.139	.066	.128	2.110	.036	.292	3.426
IFSCAVG	.229	.061	.226	3.773	.000	.300	3.332
PSRAVG	-.226	.045	-.186	-5.049	.000	.795	1.258

Source: Own elaboration

Attitude For every one-point increase in consumers' attitudes (Attitude-AttAVG) towards gender-fluid fashion products, their purchase intentions increase by .292 points ($p < .05$). This

finding supports H1 and demonstrates that consumers' intention to purchase is increased when they have a more positive attitude towards gender-fluid fashion products.

Subjective Norms For every one-point increase in subjective norms (Subjective Norms-SubNormAVG) towards gender-fluid fashion products, consumers' purchase intentions increase by .252 points ($p < .05$). This finding supports H2 and demonstrates that consumers' intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products is increased when perceived outside social pressures around gender-fluid fashion is positive.

Social Identity For every one-point increase in consumers' use of gender-fluid fashion products to represent their social identity (Social Identity-SocIdAVG), their purchase intentions increase by .142 points ($p < .05$). This finding supports H7 and communicates that consumers' intent to purchase gender-fluid fashion products increases when these products have a stronger connection to their social identity expression.

Actual Fashion Self-Congruity For every one-point increase in consumers' actual fashion self-congruity (Actual Fashion Self-Congruity-AFSCAVG) towards gender-fluid fashion products, consumers' purchase intentions increase by .139 points ($p < .05$). This finding supports H9 and demonstrates that consumers have a higher intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products when these products help them create a style that aligns with qualities that they believe they already possess.

Ideal Fashion Self-Congruity For everyone one-point increase in consumers' ideal fashion self-congruity (Ideal Fashion Self-Congruity-IFSCAVG) towards gender-fluid fashion products, their purchase intentions increase by .229 points ($p < .05$). This finding supports H10 and demonstrates that consumers have higher intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products

when these products help them to create a style that aligns with qualities they are striving to possess.

Perceived Social Risk For every one-point increase in consumers' perceived social risk (Perceived Social Risk-PSRAVG) towards gender-fluid fashion products, their purchase intentions decrease by .226 points ($p < .05$). This finding supports H12 and communicates that consumers' purchase intentions towards gender-fluid fashion products decrease when there is perceived social risk around purchasing said items.

Unsupported Constructs The relationships between perceived behavioral control (H3), self-identity (H8), ideal social fashion self-congruity (H11) to purchase intention were not supported by this analysis as they did not fit within the chosen model. Based on these findings' hypotheses 3, 8, and 11 are rejected.

Objective 2: Effects of Gender Expression

The purpose of this test was to ascertain if there are significant differences in consumer responses depending on the expressed gender of our participants. Within our survey, 398 respondents were asked to classify their gender expression as masculine, feminine, non-binary, or prefer not to answer. Due to the low response rate of non-binary participants (2%) and participants that preferred not to answer (1%), we took these two groups out of our analysis and focused on those who were masculine and feminine. Through this analysis, we are testing whether expressed femininity (H4) or masculinity (H5) has a direct positive impact on consumer's intention to purchase gender-fluid fashion products.

Apart from our initial hypotheses around gender differences in relation to purchase intention, we chose to run additional analysis on gender differences in relation to all of our other constructs under study. We wanted to explore if expressed gender would have an effect on any of

our other constructs. To measure these results, we ran an independent t-test to calculate the probability that the mean of each of our variables would differ for our masculine and feminine participants. We used gender as our independent variable, and attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, self-identity, social identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, ideal social fashion self-congruity, and perceived social risk, and purchase intention as our dependent variables. Below in Table 10 are the recorded results and the final analysis, including the F statistic to test homogeneity of variances.

Table 10

T-Test Results of the Effects of Gender on Constructs Under Study

Construct	Gender (M/F)	N	Mean	Std. D	T-Test	F	Sig	T	Sig (2tailed)
Self-Identity	M	175	2.28	.89	Unequal variances	5.168	.024	-9.242	.000
	F	211	3.09	.82					
Social Identity	M	175	2.36	.90	Unequal variances	8.587	.004	-5.640	.000
	F	211	2.86	.84					
Attitude	M	175	3.07	.97	Equal variances	.01	.977	-8.542	.000
	F	211	3.89	.90					
Subjective Norms	M	175	2.30	.88	Unequal variances	12.211	.001	-5.251	.000
	F	211	2.74	.72					
Perceived Behavioral Control	M	175	3.89	.92	Unequal variances	12.679	.000	-4.885	.000
	F	211							

	F	211	4.3	.72					
Perceived	M	175	2.97	.94	Equal	.314	.576	7.976	.000
Social Risk					variances				
	F	211	2.26	.89					
Actual	M	175	2.12	1.04	Equal	2.253	.112	-5.620	.000
Fashion Self-					variances				
Congruence									
	F	211	2.71	1.01					
Ideal Fashion	M	175	2.06	1.14	Equal	1.796	.181	-4.542	.000
Self-					variances				
Congruence									
	F	211	2.59	1.11					
Ideal Social	M	175	2.49	.88	Equal	2.396	.122	-4.845	.000
Fashion Self-					variances				
Congruence									
	F	211	2.91	.84					
Purchase	M	175	2.18	1.11	Unequal	4.949	.027	-7.643	.000
Intention					variances				
	F	211	3.03	1.07					.000

Source: Own elaboration

As we can see in table 10, above are the significant variables under analysis. We are analyzing if participant gender has an effect on self-identity, social identity, attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control perceived, social risk, actual fashion self-congruence, ideal fashion self-congruence, ideal social fashion self-congruence, and purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products. As the Significance (2-tailed) for all variables is under 0.05, we reject our null hypotheses and confirm a significant difference between participants identifying as masculine and feminine across all constructs.

Purchase Intention Based on this analysis H4 and H5 were supported. The data suggests that the 211 feminine participants ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.11$) compared to the 175 reported masculine participants ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.07$) demonstrated significantly higher purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products, $t(366) = -7.64$, $p = .000$.

Identity Constructs The data suggests that the 211 feminine participants ($M = 3.09$, $SD = .82$) compared to the 175 masculine participants ($M = 2.28$, $SD = .89$), reported higher rates of using gender-fluid fashion products to express their self-identity, $t(358) = -9.2$, $p = .00$. It also suggests that feminine participants ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .84$) compared to masculine participants ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .90$) reported using gender-fluid fashion products more often to express their social identities, $t(362) = -5.6$, $p = .00$.

Theory of Planned Behavior Constructs In regard to attitude, our 211 feminine participants ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .72$) in comparison to our 175 masculine participants ($M = 3.07$, $SD = .97$) reported more positive attitudes towards gender-fluid fashion products, $t(384) = -8.5$, $p = .00$. Feminine participants ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .72$) in comparison to masculine participants ($M = 2.30$, $SD = .88$) felt that there were more positive subjective norms around gender-fluid fashion products, $t(337) = -5.3$, $p = .00$. Feminine participants ($M = 4.3$, $SD = .72$) in comparison to masculine participants ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .92$) found they had higher levels of perceived behavioral control around the purchase of gender-fluid fashion products, $t(327) = -4.9$, $p = .00$.

Fashion Self-Congruence Constructs The 211 feminine participants ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.01$) in comparison to 175 masculine participants ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.04$) reported higher levels of actual fashion self-congruity, $t(384) = -5.6$, $p = .00$. This means they were more likely to use gender-fluid fashion products to create a style that aligns with qualities they currently possess. Feminine participants ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.11$) in comparison to masculine participants ($M = 2.06$,

$SD = 1.14$) also reported higher levels of ideal fashion self-congruity $t(384) = -4.5, p = .00$. This demonstrates that feminine participants were more likely to use gender-fluid fashion products to create a style that aligns with the qualities they are striving to possess. Finally, feminine participants ($M = 2.91, SD = .84$) in comparison to masculine participants ($M = 2.49, SD = .88$) reported higher levels of ideal social fashion self-congruity, $t(384) = -4.8, p = .00$. This means feminine participants were more likely to use gender-fluid fashion products to create a style that embodies the social image they want those around them to believe they already possess.

Perceived Social Risk Masculine participants ($M = 2.97, SD = .94$) in comparison to feminine participants ($M = 2.26, SD = .94$) reported higher levels of perceived social risk around the purchase of gender-fluid fashion products, $t(366) = -7.6, p = .00$. This is the only construct that masculine participants scored higher than feminine participants in.

Objective 3: Association Between Gender and the Use of Gender-Fluid Fashion to Express One's Gender

We were curious about further effects of gender, so we decided to run additional analysis around gender and choices related to gender-fluid fashion. A Chi-square Crosstabs test was conducted to determine if respondents' gender and the choice to use gender-fluid fashion products to express gender are associated. Results are located in Table 11 and Table 12 and are further analyzed below.

Table 11

*Gender * Choice to Express Gender Through Gender-Fluid Fashion Products*

Answer		Masculine	Feminine	Non-Binary	Prefer Not to Answer	Total
Yes	n	96	128	3	0	227
	%	54.9%	60.7%	37.5%	0%	57%
No	n	26	10	0	1	37
	%	14.9%	4.7%	0%	25%	9.3%
Sometimes	n	29	66	5	3	103
	%	16.6%	31.3%	62.5%	75%	25.9%
Not sure	n	24	7	0	0	31
	%	13.7%	3.3%	0%	0%	7.8%
Total	n	175	211	8	4	398
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Own elaboration

Table 12

Chi-Square Test

Test	Value	df	Asym. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	46.14	9	.000

Source: Own elaboration

According to table 12, our $p < .05$, so we can confirm that there is a relationship between gender and the choice to express one's gender through gender-fluid fashion products, $\text{Chi}(df) = 46.14(9)$, $p = .000$. We then read across the rows of dependent variables to see if there were

differences in the column percentages in order to calculate the probability that the mean of each of our variables would be different for our masculine and feminine participants.

In regard to our masculine and feminine participants, more than half of our respondents confirmed that they express their gender through gender-fluid fashion products (57%), with 25.9% stating they sometimes do, and 9.3% saying they never do. 7.8% of respondents were unsure whether they used this type of fashion to express their gender or not. Of the 57% that answered yes, we found that feminine respondents (60.7%) were more likely to use these products than masculine respondents (54.9%). 14.9% of masculine respondents reported they had never used gender-fluid fashion to express their gender, while only 4% of feminine respondents agreed with them. We chose not to analyse those who answered as non-binary or prefer not to answer in this test because these respondents made up a statistically insignificant part of our population.

Objective 4: Shopping Location and Its Relationship with Consumer Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Social Risk, and Purchase Intention

We were also curious about shopping locations, so we decided to run an additional analysis on behavioral conditions during shopping. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of where consumers shop (online, in-store, or a mix of both) on their attitude, subjective norms, perceived social risk, and purchase intention towards gender-fluid fashion products. Our findings are displayed in Table 13 and our interpretation of our ANOVA analysis is located below.

Table 13

Descriptives of our ANOVA Comparing Location of Shopping

Construct	Shopping Locations	N	Mean	Std.d.
Attitude	Online	57	3.82	1.005
	In Store	118	3.41	0.953
	Both	223	3.55	1.042
Subjective Norms	Online	57	2.49	0.595
	In Store	118	2.54	0.665
	Both	23	2.55	0.625
Perceived Social Risk	Online	57	2.36	0.92
	In Store	118	2.84	0.93
	Both	223	2.48	0.99
Purchase Intention	Online	57	3.04	0.16
	In Store	118	2.51	0.11
	Both	223	2.70	0.08

Source: Own elaboration

Table 14

ANOVA Results

Construct	Sources	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Attitude	Between Groups	6.44	2	3.22	3.15	.044
	Within Groups	404.16	395	1.02		
	Total	410.61	397			
Subjective Norms	Between Groups	0.18	2	0.09	.230	.795
	Within Groups	158.29	395	0.40		
	Total	158.48	397			
Perceived Social Risk	Between Groups	13.47	2	9.74	7.28	.001
	Within Groups	365.58	395	0.93		
	Total	379.05	397			
Purchase Intention	Between Groups	10.696	2	5.35	3.82	.023
	Within Groups	552.51	395	1.40		
	Total	563.21	397			

Source: Own elaboration

Table 15

Tukey HSD Constructs Comparison Across Groups

Construct	Comparison		Mean	Sig.
	Across		Difference	
	Groups			
Attitude	Online	In Person	0.41*	.03
		Both	0.27	.18
	In Person	Online	-0.41*	.03
		Both	-0.14	.43
	Both	Online	-0.27	.18
		In Person	0.14	.43
Perceived Social Risk	Online	In Person	-0.49*	.01
		Both	-0.12	.69
	In Person	Online	0.49*	.01
		Both	0.37	.00
	Both	Online	0.12	.69
		In Person	-0.37*	.01
Purchase Intention	Online	In Person	0.53*	.02
		Both	0.34	.14
	In Person	Online	-0.53*	.02
		Both	-0.19	.33
	Both	Online	-0.34	.14
		In Person	0.19	.33

Source: Own elaboration

Attitude According to Table 13, the mean attitudes for those who prefer to shop solely online was 3.82 (high), 3.55 for those who prefer to shop both online and in store (medium), and 3.41 (low) for those who prefer to solely shop in store. A statistically significant difference was

found in the attitude of consumers who preferred to shop online, in store, or a mix of both, $F(2, 395) = 3.15, p = .044$. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests indicated that the group that prefers to shop online and the group that prefers to shop in store differ significantly in their attitude towards gender-fluid fashion products ($p < .05$). Therefore, where consumers shop has a significant effect on their overall positive attitude towards gender-fluid fashion products. We concluded that consumers who prefer to shop online are more likely to have a more positive attitude towards gender-fluid fashion products than those who prefer to shop in store.

Subjective Norms The mean for consumers' subjective norms around gender-fluid fashion products for those who prefer to shop solely online was 2.49 (low), 2.55 (high) for those who prefer to shop both online and in store, and 2.54 (medium) for those who prefer to solely shop in store. The difference was not found to be statistically significant as $p > .05$.

Perceived Social Risk The mean of perceived social risk for those who prefer to shop solely online was 2.36 (low), 2.55 (medium) for those who prefer to shop both online and in store, and 2.84 (high) and for those who prefer to shop solely in-store. A statistically significant difference was found in the perceived social risk of consumers who preferred to shop online, in-store, or a mix of both, $F(2, 395) = 7.28, p = .001$. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests indicated that the group that prefers to shop online vs the group that prefers to shop in-store differ significantly in the perceived social risk surrounding gender-fluid fashion products, ($p < .05$). Post hoc Tukey HSD tests also indicated that the group that prefers to shop solely in-store vs the group that prefers to shop both online and in-store also significantly differ in their perception of perceived social risk around gender-fluid fashion products ($p < .05$). Therefore, where consumers choose to shop has an effect on their overall perceived social risk towards gender-fluid fashion products. We concluded that consumers who prefer to shop online demonstrate lower rates of perceived

social risk than those who prefer to shop in-store. We also noted that those who prefer to shop both online and in-person demonstrated lower rates of perceived social risk than those who prefer to shop solely in-store. Therefore, based on these results, we can infer that shopping in stores for gender-fluid fashion products could cause consumers to feel higher levels of perceived social risk.

Perceived Social Risk The mean of perceived social risk for those who prefer to shop solely online was 2.36 (low), 2.55 (medium) for those who prefer to shop both online and in store, and 2.84 (high) and for those who prefer to shop solely in-store. A statistically significant difference was found in the perceived social risk of consumers who preferred to shop online, in-store, or a mix of both, $F(2, 395) = 7.28, p = .001$. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests indicated that the group that prefers to shop online vs the group that prefers to shop in-store differ significantly in the perceived social risk surrounding gender-fluid fashion products, ($p < .05$). Post hoc Tukey HSD tests also indicated that the group that prefers to shop solely in-store vs the group that prefers to shop both online and in-store also significantly differ in their perception of perceived social risk around gender-fluid fashion products ($p < .05$). Therefore, where consumers choose to shop has an effect on their overall perceived social risk towards gender-fluid fashion products. We concluded that consumers who prefer to shop online demonstrate lower rates of perceived social risk than those who prefer to shop in-store. We also noted that those who prefer to shop both online and in-person demonstrated lower rates of perceived social risk than those who prefer to shop solely in-store. Therefore, based on these results, we can infer that shopping in stores for gender-fluid fashion products could cause consumers to feel higher levels of perceived social risk.

Purchase Intention The mean purchase intention for those who prefer to shop solely online was 3.04 (high), 2.70 (medium) for those who prefer to shop both online and in-store, and 2.51 (low) for those who prefer to shop solely in-store. A statistically significant difference was found in the purchase intention of consumers who prefer to shop solely online vs those who prefer to shop solely in-store, $F(2, 395) = 3.82, p = .023$. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests indicated that the group who prefers to shop solely online vs solely in store differ significantly in their purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products ($p < .05$). Therefore, where consumers choose to shop has an effect on their purchase intentions towards gender-fluid fashion products. We concluded that consumers who prefer to shop online demonstrate significantly higher levels of purchase intention than those who choose to shop solely in-store.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As traditional gender roles have begun to adapt and change in the last decade and the concept of androgyny and gender-fluid fashion has become more prevalent within society, there is a need for researchers and marketers to understand better how this change is affecting consumers. From an academic point of view, gender research has shown a steady increase in popularity, and there has been a change in the foundation of the successful gendering of brands and products that coincides with the changes happening in society. From a managerial perspective, marketers must continue to research how changing gender roles contribute to consumers' purchase intentions towards various products, as it will impact the most effective ways for marketers to tweak their branding strategies.

This study examined how that change has extended to the fashion industry in the context of gender-fluid fashion products. We wanted to pinpoint what variables influence the continued popularization of gender-fluid fashion products and how these variables impact consumer purchase intention. For our research, we decided to apply variables from the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), gender schema theory (Bem, 1983), identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009), and self-congruence theory (Azar, Aime, & Ulrich, 2018). This combination of theories has not been widely researched together within gender research or fashion research.

In order to accomplish these goals, a literature review was conducted. The goal was to understand the background and related theories and ascertain the relationships between our chosen variables. In addition, we wanted to identify critical definitions and external findings and search for important research gaps that needed to be addressed. The second half of our research was empirical and conducted through an online survey with 398 participants.

This study contributes to the existing research as, based on our literature review, it is one of the first to expound on how consumer identity (gender, social, and self) impacts purchase intention towards gender-fluid fashion products. Gender-fluid fashion products are growing in popularity, and marketers must understand what variables impact consumers' willingness to purchase these products. By identifying what key variables have the biggest significant impact on consumers' intent to purchase these fashion items, we are shedding light on how future marketers can better invite prospective buyers to purchase their products

Theoretical Implications

As mentioned in section 1.2, our research was framed around three main research objectives. This section will analyze and discuss the theoretical implications of each research objective.

The first research objective was to help explain the variation in purchase intention of gender-fluid fashion products in relation to attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, social identity, self-identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, ideal social fashion self-congruity, and perceived social risk. Of these variables under study, attitude, subjective norms, social identity, actual fashion self-congruity, ideal fashion self-congruity, and perceived social risk were the only variables that reasonably predicted any variation in consumer purchase intention.

This research is partially in accordance with Pinna (2020) and other authors studying the effects of TPB as it supports consumer attitude and subjective norms as factors. However, it strays from other research because it does not support the idea of perceived behavioral control as a decisive factor during consumer purchase decisions. When examining identity theory based on Burke & Stets' (2009) research, our findings only partially support theirs. Our research

supported the significance of social identity but did not support self-identity as a variable that significantly affected consumer purchase intention. Following literature around fashion self-congruence (Anand & Kaur, 2021), our two variables of actual fashion self-congruity and ideal social fashion self-congruity significantly impacted consumer purchase intention, while ideal fashion self-congruence was not supported as a significant variable. Unlike Anand and Kaur (2017), our research implies that consumers care more about how their gender-fluid fashion products help them create a style that they believe they possess and a style they want those around them to believe they already possess, but they do not use these items to create a style they are striving to possess. Finally, the perceived social risk was deemed the most statistically significant variable to impact purchase intention. Our research, following other findings, supported the idea that perceived social risk will often lead to a decline in purchase intention due to consumers' unwillingness to break established social norms (Shang, Pei, & Jin, 2017).

Our second research objective was to determine if gender expression impacted consumers' perceptions of our variables under study as they related to gender-fluid fashion products. Based on gender schema theory and research around the gendering of brands and products, there was theoretical evidence to assume that those with masculine gender expression would score lower on all variables besides perceived social risk (Avery, 2012; Ferguson, Brace-Govan, & Martin, 2020; Sandhu, 2017). Our research supports the existing literature as our feminine participants scored higher in all categories besides perceived social risk, whereas our masculine participants scored highest.

Concerning our third objective, we tested whether shopping location impacted our participants. Shopping online vs. in-person led to increased positive attitudes toward gender-fluid

fashion products and increased purchase intention. It was also shown to decrease consumers' perceptions of social risk.

This study furthers researchers understanding of consumers' relationship with gender-fluid fashion products and contributes to understanding how gender affects consumers' intended purchasing behaviors. It contributes to gender research as it demonstrates the importance of gender in purchasing decisions. It also elaborates on why gender-fluid products are becoming increasingly popular as gender roles alter and change within our society. This academic knowledge may lead future researchers to increase their understanding of gendering products and how consumers' identity impacts their purchasing behavior.

Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, these results are significant for marketers and business leaders looking to work on their branding strategies. Our findings indicate that consumers have positive attitudes towards gender-fluid products and connect these products to the formation of consumers' social identities. Our findings also reveal that increased perceived social risk causes a decrease in overall purchase intention and that shopping online can sometimes decrease this feeling of perceived risk. This may help marketers change their approach to where they place ads around these products and the marketing touchpoints to increase purchase intention.

Our research indicates that masculine and feminine consumers may view gender-fluid fashion products differently. According to our results, feminine consumers were more likely to purchase gender-fluid fashion products, tie them to their identity expression, and feel a personal relationship with them. In addition, feminine consumers were less likely to feel perceived social risk when purchasing the products than masculine consumers. Finally, gender-fluid fashion

products were seen as integral in consumers' ability to create a style reflective of attributes consumers thought they possessed and wanted to possess in the future.

Companies may use these findings to create a marketing strategy more likely to resonate with potential consumers. Our research implies that companies should demonstrate how their gender-fluid fashion products can help increase social identity and help consumers achieve the style they want. Our research also indicates that marketers might be more successful if they create advertisements targeted towards feminine consumers as they have an overall increased purchase intention towards these products. Strategically, it also implies that marketing these products to masculine consumers may be essential to demonstrate how to decrease social risk and how there is a growing increase in positive subjective norms towards these products. Understanding what variables are most significant in impacting purchasing behavior and which populations are most likely to purchase can help marketers increase the effectiveness of their campaigns and narrow down their segmentation to deliver suitable ads to the right audiences on the right platforms.

Limitations and Further Research Avenues

Limitations

This study encountered a variety of limitations. Firstly, our sample size had only 398 valid responses. Due to a convenience sampling recruitment method, most of our respondents were located in the Southeastern United States, and there was not a diverse gender representation. We only had seven participants that identified as non-binary participants. A larger, more diverse representation of respondents would have enriched our findings and may have added more external validity concerning this global topic.

The length and difficulty of our questionnaire were also determining factors. As we included many different scales giving it a longer length, participants may have been tempted to answer randomly or not have answered our questions as thoroughly as we would have liked. Due to this, it may have been beneficial to exclude some of the behavioral questions we did not end up using and delete some of the statements from our constructs. Our topic was also very academic and centered around more advanced terminology, so it may have been difficult for some respondents who are unfamiliar with the concept of gender fluidity and changing gender definitions and norms to understand some of the questions included within our research. Based on this, future researchers might try using more layperson's terms or include more background information at the beginning of the survey for further clarification.

Future Research

Due to the considerable research gap around androgyny and gender-fluid products in the gender research field, many more avenues of gender research are available for prospective researchers. The combination of the theory of planned behavior, gender schema theory, identity through, and self-congruence theory and their related variables should be utilized in contexts besides just fashion. Gender-fluid products are designed and sold in a variety of industries all over the world, and there is a lack of research on what makes these products successful in various markets. It would be interesting to repeat this research with products in different industries than fashion, like electronics, athletics, or home goods, to see if the variables would interact the same when framed in different contexts. The perception of gender-fluid fashion products may vary across countries, depending on their perceptions of gender roles. It would be interesting to repeat this study across several countries.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Appendix A

Hello!

My name is Paris and I am conducting research on **what factors affect consumer purchase intention in the fashion industry**. This survey is part of my Master's Thesis at the University of Valencia, Spain. I will be asking you to answer a few sets of questions about your shopping motivations with demographic questions coming last.

Involvement: This questionnaire will not take more than 10 minutes to complete.

Risk and Benefits: There are no known risks associated with completing this survey.

Confidentiality: All responses will be anonymous. Your answers will be confidential and the data from this survey will be coded and analyzed in aggregated form only. Any information that is obtained from this survey is only for the purpose of my research and will not be shared. Access to this data is restricted to the primary researcher and will not be shared with any others. No answer that you share will be incorrect.

Participant's Rights: Your participation is voluntary and you have a right to leave this survey at any time.

Thank you!

"Lived" Gender Identity: how a person internally feels about their gender and how they express it in their daily actions through activities like dressing, shopping, and interacting with their community.

Gender-Fluid Fashion Products: When people purchase gender-fluid fashion products they are purchasing products that are representative of the spectrum of gendered products in fashion. These purchases vary from the cultural gender stereotypes and acknowledge the spectrum of gender identities across the fashion landscape.

This study is looking at what factors affect consumers' purchase intention when deciding to communicate their gender expression and create their "lived" gender identity through the purchase of gender-fluid fashion products.

Do you express your gender through the fashion products you buy?

Yes

No

Sometimes

Not sure

Have you ever bought gender-fluid fashion products?

Yes

No

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I think of myself as someone who is concerned about gender stereotypes and the issues this brings to fashion consumption.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think of myself as someone who will buy gender-fluid fashion products.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To buy gender-fluid fashion products is important to who I am.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am not the type of person to buy gender-fluid fashion products.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Having gender-fluid fashion products makes me feel accepted.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having gender-fluid fashion products improves the way I am perceived.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having gender-fluid fashion products makes a good impression on others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
In general, my attitude towards buying gender-fluid fashion products is favorable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In general, my attitude towards buying gender-fluid fashion products is positive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe gender-fluid fashion products are valuable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe gender-fluid fashion products are useful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Most people who are important to me buy gender-fluid products.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most people who are important to me think that I should buy gender-fluid fashion products.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The people in my life whose opinions I value would not approve of gender-fluid fashion product purchases.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The people in my life whose opinions I value support my gender-fluid fashion product purchases.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
For me, to buy gender-fluid fashion products in the future would be difficult.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If wanted to, I could buy gender-fluid fashion products in the near future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is mostly up to me whether or not I buy gender-fluid fashion products.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I believe that buying gender-fluid fashion products will not meet the approval of my family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that buying gender-fluid fashion products will not meet the approval of my friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that if I buy gender-fluid fashion products I will not be in fashion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buying and using gender-fluid fashion products might make others have an unfavorable impression of me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buying gender-fluid fashion products may cause me to lose my reputation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will be thought of as strange if I buy gender-fluid fashion products.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Basing my fashion style around gender-fluid fashion products is consistent with how I see myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender-fluid fashion products are important tools to express my self image.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My gender-fluid fashion products reflect how I feel about myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Gender-fluid fashion products help me to become the person I want to be.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender-fluid fashion products help me achieve the identity I want to have.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender-fluid fashion products help me narrow the gap between who I am and who I want to try and be.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Buying gender-fluid fashion products helps create an impression that I want people to have of me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creating a gender-fluid dressing style is consistent with the image I want to create in people's minds.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My fashion style is consistent with what is considered ideal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you agree...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly Agree
I expect to buy gender-fluid fashion products in the near future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to buy gender-fluid fashion products in the near future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I intend to buy gender-fluid fashion products in the near future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How many times per month do you go shopping for fashion products?

0 times

1-2 times

3-4 times

5-6 times

7+ times

When shopping for fashion products, do you prefer to shop in person or online?

I prefer to shop online.

I prefer to shop in person.

I like to shop both online and in person.

When you go shopping for fashion products do you normally shop alone or with others?

I mostly shop alone.

I mostly shop with friends.

I mostly shop with family.

I prefer a mix of shopping alone and with friends and family

Other

What is your age?

18-25

26-33

34-41

42-50

51+

What is your education level?

High school

Undergraduate

Graduate or more

Other

Where are you from?

Western United States

Southwestern United States

Midwestern United States

Southeastern United States

Northeastern United States

International

What gender do you identify as?

Masculine

Feminine

Non-binary/third gender

Prefer not to answer

What is your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual

Homosexual

Bisexual

Asexual

Other

Prefer not to say

Thank you for taking the time to finish my survey! Your response has been recorded. If you have any further questions or concerns please contact me at: pjb9762@uncw.edu.