

KUSMITH JAI

We too have a Style!

Questioning and subverting the masculine stereotype
in fashion through the designs of Neil Grotzinger.

ABSTRACT: Social stigma of masculine and feminine, the constant struggle between manly strength and womanly sensitivity, God's other human creations, labeled as 'the queer' are highly neglected even in modern times. Queers' struggle for acceptance even in the creative fields is sorer to accept than in the commercial fields. Hence, this research focuses on the role and scope of gender agnostic designers and designs in the fashion industry. By questioning and subverting the masculine stereotype and its effects on the creative non-normative brains through the special study of life and designs of Neil Grotzinger; whose mission was to tease society's notion of masculinity and lavish them with intricate embroidery and embellishments that had been previously reserved for women and brought that into menswear. This research conclusively evaluates the effects of Neil Grotzinger's designs on the male, female, and queer genders and the fashion industry and thus evaluates the scope of queer fashion in the mainstream fashion industry.

KEYWORDS: fashion studies; queer fashion; gender stereotypes; Neil Grotzinger; social acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

"Strength, courage, mastery, and honor are the *alpha* virtues of men all over the world" (JACK & N.F. MILLER 2012). In today's society, the most gender prejudiced phrase in the English language is 'be a man'. To be a man today says film-maker Jennifer Siebel Newsom "is to fight for success and sex, to reject empathy, to never cry and to act masculine because that's the thought people have associated with a man" (NEWSOM 2016). The studies of masculinity were believed to be inspired by a feminist interdisciplinary field that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century as a topic of study. This is a very vibrant, interdisciplinary field of study, which is concerned with the social construction of what it means to 'be a man' and what is 'masculinity'.

The term 'masculinity' refers to the behaviors, social rules, and relations of a man with a given society as well as meaning attributed to them. "The stereotypical masculine or feminine qualifications are not personality characteristics of individual men and women but these are socially

ACCEPTED DRAFT – TO BE COPYEDITED

constructed representations of gender, based on what society expects of each sex” (CONDOR 1987, LLOYD & DUVEEN 1993). And such gender stereotypes are fixed ideas people have about men’s and women’s traits and behavior and that of attire. For example, if a man is wearing a floral pink printed shirt, he’s assumed to be feminine, weird or he’s not suitable to his gender. So, through the context of clothing, these masculine and gender stereotypes can be subverted in people’s minds because clothes are the visible expression of gender and personal identity.

While Clothing plays a huge role in fashioning one’s identity, and setting a trend; a non-normative sexual identity that are contrary to the socially determined genders, who are other than straight or cisgender and widely referred as ‘queer’ become an interesting element to study. ‘Queer Fashion’ is a very well-discussed yet largely ostracized trend in society as well as in the queer community. Queer fashion is all about gender non-conformity and doesn’t limit one to a specific style. In fact, queer fashion does not show any rule. It is a lenient and less oppressive way of expressing oneself. It is nothing but people expressing them in their way and having fun with what they wear. But unfortunately, queer fashion and people face severe acceptance issues even in today’s progressive society. As Lewis G. (2018) puts it,

It is still very limited like in terms of people how they look at us or how they look at our clothing. Like the queer can and could still have much more fluidity and so much more possibilities rather can categorize our behavior, fashion or anything in one small tiny box. Queer is all-encompassing we can form our identities or likes and dislikes.

While Lewis established the important to understand the other side of the normative fashion, Nakhane expressed the agony of acceptance and fear the community is facing by saying that “there are just spaces in the world where walking down the street looking like we all do can get scary and our style could get endangered” (NAKHANE 2018).

Despite all the rejection, dejection and distress, there came queer fashion designers like Alan Crocotti, Gogo Gradon, and Neil Grotzinger who left an enormous mark on the fashion industry with their style and designs that neither the queer community nor the world had ever seen before. Such trend transformers however, just because they are not straight have found

lost their right of fame in the curve of social stigma. Therefore, this research aims at understanding the role and scope of gender agnostic designers and designs in the fashion industry. Further, elements like social reproach, questioning and subverting the masculine stereotype and its effects on the creative non-normative brains have been critically analyzed through the special study of life and designs of Neil Grotzinger; whose mission was to tease society's notion of masculinity and lavish them with intricate embroidery and embellishments that had been previously reserved for women and brought that into menswear. This research conclusively evaluates the effects of Neil Grotzinger's designs on the queer community and the fashion industry.

BACKGROUND STUDY

The basic concept of 'to queer' according to 'queer theory' is 'to disrupt' or 'make something strange,' twisting something or pushing the invisible to the spotlight (JOHNSON 2014). These techniques are seen to have the potential to transform the normative (taken for granted) assumptions and are widely used to challenge assumptions about sexuality and gender. If one looks back in the history, during the 1700s homosexuality was illegal in Europe, this opened the doors towards small and secret homosexual subcultures. In public, it started when the members known as the mollies, would cross-dress in private to self-identify and to attract partners. There were also secret dress codes that allowed gay men and lesbians to identify each other. Later Such queer fashion extended its influence on the runway, especially when it came to subjects perceived as social taboos during the 1990s.

However, the fashion of queer aesthetics is still an emerging concept in today's world, there often happens a comparison of it with that what the binary gender group wears. It is only from the year 2000 onwards' millennium looks which is beyond gender binaries and the idea of gender-less clothing was prospered. For instance, one of the well-known Indian designers, Rohit Bal entered into the idea of androgyny fashion through his collection 'The Alpha Men'. In 2003 Lakmé Fashion Week, he gave creative tribute to the new breed of secure alpha men. He used elaborate drapes and floral prints. These kinds of silhouettes and prints usage was not seen in the regular men's fashion. (see fig.1). He presented male models wearing long skirts, *sindoor* (vermillion), and a nose ring! – elements primitively associated with the feminine gender. Through this collection, he wanted to show

men being in touch with their feminine side. Another designer from France Jean Paul Gaultier, also went on to make skirts for men, (LADHA 2019).



FIGURE 1. Rohit Bal's 'The Alpha Men' collection from Lakmé Fashion Week, 2003

However, straight men's opinion about carrying this kind of fashion were found separated from that of Rohit's and as a result, his trickled down skirt fashion got submerged in the loud applause for the beautifully embellished jackets accompanying the skirts. This can be considered to be the evidence that queer fashion has still not found complete acceptance as a trickle-up fashion.

The queer youth fashion has also always been a mode of self-expression because it gives people visibility of what they love. But it does have its pros and cons. For example, there are men today who don't care and dress up the way they want in a creative field workplace. But workplaces with a particular uniform to follow, queer men cannot dress the way they want, to avoid 'masculinity dilemma' at work. Even if they don't want it, they have to achieve or pretend having masculinity. Facing identity crisis is also very commonly faced by this community in the society; as Chinese model Weimin Li says, "I wish society was more accepting. You don't have to be brave to express yourself, but it's still dangerous (for the queer). We need exposure [to nongendered clothing] to make it more normal. It helps people to express themselves" (WILSON 2019). So, a bunch of designers working on non-binary fashion was like a ray of hope for this community.

Designers like Sohaya Misra's 'Bye Felicia' collection in Lakmé Fashion Week Winter/ Festive 2018, again broke the rules of gender norms by making Prateik Babbar walk the runway in a pair of grey, wrap-around pants

with mock buttons attached along the front and an oversized black jacket with detailing on the sleeves. He was also accompanied by multi-talented make-up artist, Jason Arland sporting a sheer, heavily layered, and frilled off-white gown with a charming and attractive veil (see Fig.2) that brought the gender-neutral theme to the forefront and could subvert the basic men's wear (Roy, 6-9- 2018). Designer Anvita Sharma, who showcased her gender-neutral collection at Lakmé Fashion Week too says, "there was a time when the queer fashion was not represented on the ramp and was simply ignored. But that's changing this fashion is become a strong tool to express your freedom. I'm glad that designers are doing this now" (Sharma A, 2018).



FIGURE 2. Prateik Babar and Jason Arland of Sohaya Misra's 'Bye Felicia' collection in Lakme Fashion Week Winter/ Festive 2018 and S/S 2019

Throughout history, the basic stereotype of regular men's wear is mostly been checks, stripes, suits, shirts, etc. but queer fashion is all about breaking these assumptions and accepting something new. For example, Neil Grotzinger's intricate embroidery, lavish designs, and zippers on the trousers that are halfway open on menswear are the details not usually seen on the regular men's fashion. This community is always looking for something new that they can embody. Neil, through his designs aims to- 'give an erotic sensation' to his garments 'so that the queer community especially can embody them and express themselves (Subservient Authorities

collection)' (CFDA, n.d.). By his extraordinary approach to the menswear he not only challenges the traditional understanding of the masculinity, but making a mark through subverting the authorities and hence, this research focuses on the detailed study of the designs of Neil Grotzinger and his perception of masculinity and queer fashion. His 'whatever' attitude makes him appropriate choice for this study.

FOCUSED STUDY: NEIL GROTZINGER AND HIS WORK

Famous for his gender agnostic designs and the main focus of this study, Neil Grotzinger caught people's eye by showing what's fashion through his eyes. He strongly considers that 'queer fashion' is more than just a trend. It is an expression of oneself in their unique way and having fun with what they wear. Neil Grotzinger believes in making his garments more internally erotic and gives self-fulfilling desire by aiming at 'pulling people from the underground. And provide and stage within his community to as many as people possible who are underappreciated by not making mainstream or stereotypical designs' (GROTZINGER 2019).

Neil Patrick Grotzinger was raised and brought up in a very conservative town just outside Colorado Springs only a few miles away from the air force academy. This town is a built system of ascendancy and obedience. It was the home for a lot of mega-churches in America. So, he grew up around people who always craved for authority. From a very young age, he discovered that he was sort of misplaced in this part of the world. Which got him in observing things very consciously. He started taking note of all the roles and that was being played by especially men in his age group and the assumptions they had. Families around him completely overshadowed their personalities. E.g. If the father is a soldier the son in the family saw himself as a future soldier or if there were people in the archery or hunting were meant to have their wardrobe filled with camouflage fabrics. It seemed very restricted and downright.

Neil's starting point in design as he remembers "being fascinated by clothing in movies which were what lead me to move to New York City and pursue a career in fashion. The obsession with embroidery came from a similar place. It makes things seem unreal" (GROTZINGER 2019). Interestingly, Neil Grotzinger draws inspiration from the disposition thoughts based on the concept of masculinity in the Midwestern that saturated his upbringing. This kind of stereotypical thinking fascinated Neil and inspired

him to introduce his SS19 collection titled ‘Subservient Authorities’. His aim was to take a stereotypical idea, that too a well-known one within the masculine culture and then subvert those characters through hand embellishments and beadwork that often consider to be a statement for women’s wear, in different techniques to break the idea of gender.

His ‘Subservient Authorities’ collection was inspired by using the American symbols as the main tool for subverting and questioning the masculine stereotype. Symbols that people expected to look masculine like troops, armies, camouflage, officers etc. which people expect as a representation of strong, bold, and masculine (see Fig. 3) were used to show firmness, fearlessness and authority of the otherwise.



FIGURE 3. Hector J Diaz and Jancarlos Daiz in Nihl.nyc for new issue of Gayletter magazine (photo @ nihl.nyc, 2018).

Neil Grotzinger’s amazing take on this broke the perception of people on how to act, seem, or be a male. He changed the whole vision of manliness. His work since then has evolved into challenging the framework of menswear today.

Most of his designs included embroidery, hand emblems, or use of jockstraps and sexy peeling off pants caught the people’s eye (see Fig.4). Well, a lot of queer-identifying people immediately latched his work just based on having that same suspicion of like ‘I feel like no one is making this right now but I’ve always wanted to see it. (GROTZINGER 2019). And a certain sized straight man who would be interested could wear it but the queer community is who is in his head when designing.



FIGURE 4: Designs from Neil's NIHL A/W '20 and S/S'18 collections

According to the study, it is very visible how this community believes in embracing their style and fashion in terms of what they love and not what their gender is. And show a new way of embodying something. A lot of queer-identifying people immediately latched his work just based on having that same suspicion of like 'I feel like no one is making this right now but I've always wanted to see it. (GROTZINGER 2019). As Neil mentions this community immediately latched on to what he is doing simply because they had never seen someone do this ever before but needed this badly. So, few designers mentioned above including Neil Grotzinger opened doors for this community. His innovative ideas whether it be embroidery, hand emblems, or use of jockstraps and sexy peeling off pants (see Figure 4) that are put into each collection are something fresh and simultaneously break the masculine stereotypes around us.

Neil's goal is to displace and dispel masculine stereotypes in people's minds, his garment construction denies their predictable and customary purpose by transforming what was once functional and separating it into couture objects. He innovates by putting traditional garments and elements of hand craftsmanship in a way that consistently challenges stereotypes and holds in on an erotic sensation. His 'Masculine Effeminacy' collection is a very specific spot where he was trying to highlight within the gendered grey area. He was particularly fascinated by the term 'effeminate' when he developed his first collection. He also wanted to dissect this term because it has, at least up until this point, typically only been used as a sort of 'call-out' or insult. At first glance, he says, "it might seem this collection was meant

to contradict, but it was really about finding the misnomers within the male culture that were almost borderline, then push them so over the edge that there was no questioning on how queer they'd become" (Grotzinger 2019)

Neil's designs (see fig. 1 & 2) clearly show his curiosity behind why these symbols have to look strong or manly was what lead to this collection. He subverted the masculine stereotypes by giving an erotic and sensual look to his garments. As Neil says "I'm also curious as to why these archetypes are the way they are. As men adopt gender roles throughout life, each old role submits to a new one. From this notion, a parodic, eroticized tone emerges in the collection". (PATEL 2018).

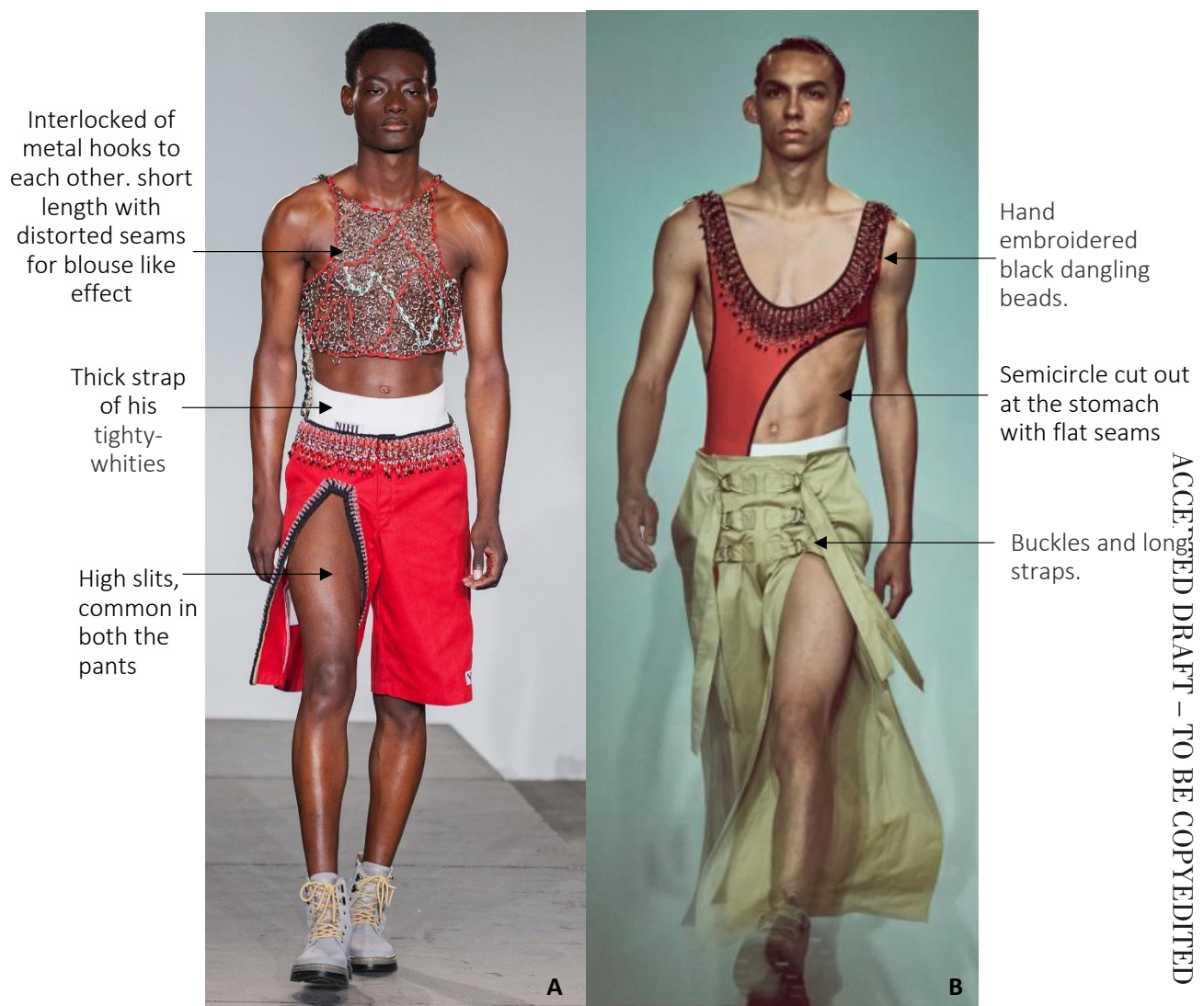


FIGURE 5: Models at Neil's Grotzinger SS19 collection titled 'Subservient Authorities' (Shkoda L. 2018).

His designs (see fig. 5A & B) are a contrast of traditionally feminine techniques like hand-beaded embroidery with stereotypically masculine

shapes which includes contemporary ideas about masculinity power, strong and dominant. The jacket silhouette resembles the basic military jacket which is a chain mail jacket with a dirndl neckline which is laced in red elaborated braided trim and deep to show the bare chest which took over a week and 100 hours of handwork to make it (YOTKA 2018). The jacket (see fig.5 A) is made with the interlocking of metal hooks to each other with fitted inlets and distorted seams where the jacket is cut short to give it a crop top/blouse like effect yet look raw. The model walks with showing off his thick strap of his tights-whities and lowers which are slight open revealing till the thigh which is made up of metallic trap.

Whereas the circular hole (see fig. 5 B) at the stomach with flat seams revealing the waist gives it a sexy yet burnt hole effect to remind that the struggle of chasing of beauty and something you love can be painstaking. There is a very deep cut neckline with black dangling beads hand embroidered on the neckline to enhance the so-called feminine techniques with and hook and eye attachments. The pants material is soft silk which is flowy and is again slit high open showing bare skin till the thighs with dirndl neckline with red laced braided trims of long hanging straps, belts, and buckles (see fig. 5 B)

Few garments in Neil's collection also produced pants using screen printing technique and silk dyed shirts that tapped into the tie-dyed world today as a fun element with hand-embroidered deep necklines and pockets and trim like laces and tie-ups inculcated in the garment to keep it feminine and give a new vision to maleness.

In all, this collection was an endorsement of a new kind of sensual, it simultaneously subverted the stereotypes and elevated a new platform for the community. The purpose behind this collection was to see clothing beyond just beautiful or something tactile but wanted to give out a new vision and reach and get closer to the queer community.

Grotzinger loves challenging himself and changing the normality of people's perception mainly on the topic of how men should look or behave to appear masculine and also be able to pay homage for his community. So, in his NIHL A/W '20 collection Neil aimed at sending up all things to break the notions of masculinity. The theme of this collection was: Villainy. Inspired by the horror film *The Silence of the Lambs*. Drawing inspiration from this film, Grotzinger depicted stitching together and build a connection between the queer culture and the fondness he has for crampy cinema



FIGURE 6: Neil Grotzinger's SS19 collection, 'Subservient Authorities' (Shkoda L. 2018)

villains. Each model on the ramp for this collection depicted different characters from the movie and ramp walked with their expressional take on a spooky feel. He aimed to show the rebellious nature of the queer community and how the world sees them as villains but still they move forward and fight for their identity by breaking these social taboos.

The dungaree style jumpsuit (see fig. 7A) silhouette where the fabric is soft and a very subtle color pallet and has a patchwork at the crotch area with long straps are attached to the waist using the buckles and thin strings. Inside is a contrasting red mesh material sleeveless tee. The pants have zippers attached that kind of peeled off till down to give that sexy look and had cut-outs on the thigh. He also tops the look with a leather belt to gives that strangled character look. Whereas in the other garment (see fig.7 B) Grotzinger has used slinky jockstraps with pieces of leather fabric with thin suspender-like straps that are rounded and knotted at the model's shoulders. And inside is a thin black mesh piece covered only on one leg and one cloth which covered till the elbow to kind of balance the overall look. And paired the whole look with ankle-high boots. This erotic look yet a very spooky and furious expression attracted people's eye.

However, these garments were less about function and more towards



FIGURE 7: Neil Grotzinger's NIHL A/W'20 collection, 'Villainy' (Shkoda L. 2018).

sexual, scandalous, and a dysfunction concept. The garments were about showing as much skin as possible, along with the portrayal of dissident and furiousness through their expressions. His designs for the Villainy collection also reflect the influence of the army in the excessive usage of fasteners like straps, belts, and buckles. However, in the sharp contrast to these masculine elements, lace and mesh fabrics were used to show the bare chest. The sexy peeling of pants till the pelvis bone and also few cuts around the calf and knee which were getting the sensual feel out.

The other set of garments also included that raw and spooky look yet showed the delicate side of the people from this community with the help of the roses attached to the garment.

As shown in figure 8 A, two half tore bands covering the face to show that the fight is real. The top length is cropped till the chest with normal tie-ups and flat seams using very subtle nude colors. The short sleeves also had dysfunctional zippers attached on the sides to enhance the theme. The stripped one-leg palazzo pants with the contrasting red zipper till the end of the pant brought in an elegance feel to the look. To give a raw, delicate yet fun look he also inculcated floral prints on his garments (see fig-8 B). Where the cropped jacket with raw edges and beaded embroidery on one



FIGURE 8: Neil Grotzinger's NIHL A/W'20 collection, 'Villainy' (Shkoda L. 2018).

side of the jacket to get the feminine side out. And only the sleeves and a long patch on the lower garment were made of light and little see-through floral printed fabric that was very flowy. And he topped the look with few roses attached to give a soft and elegant look from the petals but also a spooky feel from the thorns.

So, there were models in high heels to play on the feminine side but with the sinister theme. With a green see-through mesh full sleeves top with a black and grey contrasting patch on the sleeves. It also had red, green, and silver dangling beads embroidered on the lower part of the chest to get the texture and tactile feel to the garment. And finally, a short above the knee skirt of glossy PVC material and a separate piece added on one side of the leg made this a completed the erotic and the sexy look (see fig.10 A). The show ended off with a grand golden princess looking full-sleeved dress which revealed the hips of the model. The fabric was rich in color with printed flowers to give the royal character look. And finally topped the look with a beautiful golden tiara (see fig.10 B) The overall collection was dysfunctional and made it look chaotic in their way giving it the spooking and yet a delicate look to completely stay in the theme and the aim to subvert the notion of masculinity.

ACCEPTED DRAFT – TO BE COPYEDITED



FIGURE 9 – Neil Grotzinger's NIHL A/W'20 collection, 'Villainy' (Shkoda L. 2018).

After analyzing Neil's gender agnostic designs and understanding his perception of queer fashion, appreciating his creative attempt to find approval in the mainstream fashion, researcher found it important to understand main genders' review on such designs so as to predict the further scope of queer fashion. With the same motive, researcher circulated online questionnaire to 100 young fashionistas between the age of 18 to 33. Sample was selected through thorough profile check and considering their interest in the fashion and its current trends. A request mail was sent to all the possible participants to participate in an online survey on the captioned topic and 60 of them agreed to participate in the survey.

This survey received responses from 50% male, 40% female, and the rest were non-binary and gender-fluid respondents. This survey gave a perspective to the surveyor of the thoughts that come to people's minds. This survey observed influence of the age to be one of the guiding force in being conservative to the set norms of the society. Age group of and above 29 years was found more exposed and aware to the gender stereotypes contrary to that of the age around 18 years old. This indicates people of older age are more prone to the basic gender stereotypes of 'man has to act masculine and a girl has to act feminine around them'.

To understanding the respondents' thoughts and their take on breaking the masculine stereotypes, designs of the gender agnostic designer Neil Grotzinger were presented to them through photographs. On the scale of 1 to 5, 45% (see figure 11) of the total respondents liked the concept of breaking masculine stereotypes through embellishments and embroidery, however, upon asking possible acceptability ratio of these designs (See fig. 1 to 10) in the society, a 28-year-old female positively responded that she thinks 'this is highly acceptable', whereas 26-28-year-old men were 'not quite sure if this would be highly acceptable in the society'.

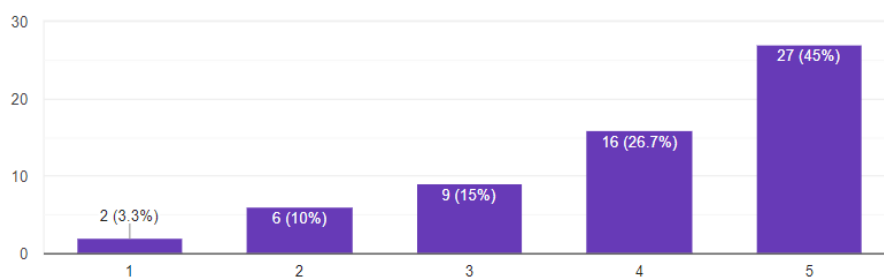


FIGURE 10 – Reponse on acceptability of Neil's designs in the society.

Overall, female participants were more positive to the acceptability of these designs by people around them than the male participants.

As acceptance of society is generalized and not in a hand of one individual, however, acceptance of one has potential to inspire the crowd, personal opinion of the respondents also mattered at length for this survey. Hence, the surveyor questioned that if the respondents were given a chance would they ever purchase or would like wearing any of Neil Grotzinger's garments. 27-year-old female respondent positively responded that, 'sure, it looks very quirky and I loved it' she specifically appreciated 'beautiful feminine touch, the embellishments, and also the silhouettes' and found it 'something new and [she] would go for it.' Another female respondent feels that 'this is something empowering and bold, which she aspires to be, and want to see this as something normal soon.' She also insisted upon wearing 'whatever they like or feel comfortable in and not classify clothes based on gender.' 24-year-old female respondent marked that what Neil is doing is 'needed today and that is okay for men to cry and a female to look more biff than a man.' On the other hand, only 1% male respondents were found positive for his designs. Majority (97%) of them clearly said that 'they

won't be comfortable wearing such garments' because either it is 'not their style' or they are 'not supportive of woman behavior in men'. However, 2% of the male respondents liked the designs and agreed to wear them if in future gender-neutral trends come into fashion. Men here proved to be more rigid and orthodox for their style. When women could easily adapt wearing pants and shirts, men seem to be more withdrawn towards the idea of accepting the stereotyped silhouettes and embroidery traditionally set for the women. So, such contrast of responses was highly observed throughout the survey majority of the female respondents were open to this idea and dint mind the exploration, and men were more proven to be a little rigid, and inclined to the perception of gender stereotypes. The non-binary respondents definitely liked the designs and think that these designs 'are for all the genders' and can 'break the stereotypes' and help them 'gaining acceptance in the society'.

After considering view points of main genders, the respondents' opinion on Neil's way of subverting masculine stereotypes and possibilities of giving the place and acceptance to the thried gender through his attempt in the society were asked. A 22 year's male respondent has a positive response as he thinks this 'can be worn by queer, male and female, and flaunted very confidently but depends on person to person and their personal choice'. Where as a 26-year-old female respondent thinks that Neil is 'helping them to come out confidently with their style'. Another repondent is of the opinion that 'these clothes break the laws of male stereotyping' and 'appeal to the audience that [soceity] doesn't identify as male'. Also, majority of the respondents (89%) strongly believe that 'the designer is doing a great job' and they 'like the way Neil blurred the line between typical male and female fashion'. Such positive responses prove that men and women are completely on board with Neil Grotzinger's idea and how he is opening doors for the queer community. He has brough the hope for the queers.

The survey concluded by asking if the respondents believe that this is could be the future of fashion which would help in subverting the masculine stereotypes where 30-year-old female respondent has positively marked that 'Yes, it can be' as she thinks that 'the society around us is changing drastically and at some point, the queer fashion will have its place and acceptance and she hopes to see that day very soon'. Another female respondent thinks that 'some people out there who wish to wear emotions and stay very close to what they feel and that audience could take

this fashion up in the future. A 30-year-old male respondent has connected the designs with the earlier fashion trend and a positively mentioned,

Yes, this should be the future of fashion because it's what we deserve! And fashion is a constant change there's always something new on the plate. For example, ripped jeans were introduced in the fashion industry and both men and women followed the trend, so maybe, if ripped jeans could become fashion then why not this. We sought inclusivity and that's why he thinks that this could be the future of fashion as it is more inclusive and promotes freedom of choice.

However, a 33-year-old man respondent thinks that 'this is very personal to people, it could be an addition, yes, but as a whole no because labeling fashion that's meant to be for a certain kind of gender identity does sort of deviate from the purpose of inclusivity'.

Such contrast of response is been highly observed through this survey where the majority of the respondents, male and female were found open to the fact that the queer audience do need a platform and not just queer any man who wants to wear something like this should be completely seen as normal and its time that these masculine stereotypes are broken. On the other hand, few male respondents support this idea but also feel that it is very personal and seem a little rigid, orthodox simply because of the set of perceptions on masculinity they've always been tagged with by the people around them.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned before queer style is more than just a trend. These people raise a toast on genderless fashion. They want recognition for their style uniquely and not seen or used as an insult. In today's time, the queer fashion is still not seen as a formality. Their style still deserves to reach out on a larger and deeper level because at the end of the day every person follows an individualistic style and expects freedom to follow that and this includes every gender. The difference of gender did affect the queer community a lot as they believed and wanted to wear something that they prefer and carry themselves with the same confidence as the other genders, hence Neil was like a ray of hope for this community. Neil Grotzinger is still taking his journey forward in breaking the notion of how to be, seem, or act as a male because they deserve the platform and the freedom to feel on amongst us. Neil Grotzinger's innovative designs and his very creative

way of subverting masculine stereotype by getting hand embroidery and hand embellishments into menswear was an eye-opener to the people who believed in gender norms and for the queer audience who believed that this kind of style was probably not done by anyone but craved for it.

With the positive responses from the youth like, ‘everyone should be freely able to wear what they like and it doesn’t matter what the society expects from the queers’ (male respondent of 24) and people should ‘have the freedom to wear what they feel most confident in, and shouldn’t be restricted by the billions of identity labels that exist’ (female respondent of 19), youth is showing more liberal attitude and acceptance. However, it is still not easy to break the stigma and accept queer as the gender-neutral fashion. The queer community has still a long path ahead to be accepted by all. However, creative brains like Neil is a motivation for them to believe in themselves, reject the social reproach and freely wear what their hormones crave for.

Kusmith Jai

kusmithjai@gmail.com
PhD candidate, University of...

REFERENCES

- ANVITA S., 2018, “Lakme Fashion Week 2018: Is India ready to accept queer fashion?”, *hindustan times*, August 23rd, <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/fashion-and-trends/is-india-ready-to-accept-queer-fashion/story-oHZZ61bUS-GfOvGiNaCoomK.html>> (last accessed 10-10-2020).
- CONDOR & DUVEEN L., 1987, 1993, *Construction of Gender through Fashion and Dressing*, s.l.: Zoi Arvanitidou. Condor, L. & D., 1987,1993.
- GROTZINGER N., 2018, “The New York-based designer subverting masculine stereotypes”, *Dazed*, July 11th, <<https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/40655/1/neil-grotzinger-nihl-new-york-menswear-lvmh-masculinity>>.
- JACK J. D. & Nathan F. Miller N., 2012. *The Way of Men*. 2012 ed. s.l.:Jack Donovan.
- JOHNSON. K, 2014. *Queer Theory*. In: Teo T. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, Springer, New York NY.
- LADHA, 2019.
- LEWIS. G, 2018. *Queer Discussion Panel: Progress, visibility and authenticity in fashion for the Queer Community* [Interview] (5-10-2018).
- NAKHANE, 2018. *Queer Discussion Panel: Progress, visibility and authenticity in fashion for the Queer Community* [Interview] (5-10-2018).

NEWSOM J.S., 2016. Depression, violence, anxiety: the problem with the phrase ‘be a man’. *The Observers Mens Health*, Sunday 8.

PATEL S., 10-7-2018. Neil Grotzinger Subverts and Eroticizes the Male Form.

YOTKA S., ed., 2018. Nihl’s Debut Collection Is an Endorsement of a New Kind of Sensual, Strong Masculinity. 18 July.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1. Rohit Bal’s ‘The Alpha Men’ collection from Lakmé Fashion Week, 2003 [Online] [Accessed on 15-08-2020] From <https://www.rediff.com/news/2003/jul/19rohit6.htm>

FIGURE 2. Prateik Babar and Jason Arland of Sohaya Misra’s ‘Bye Felicia’ collection in Lakme Fashion Week Winter/ Festive 2018 and S/S 2019 [Online] [Accessed on 17-08-2020] <https://www.rediff.com/getahead/report/glamour-lfw-winter-why-is-prateik-babbar-dressed-like-a-drag-queen/20180823.htm>

FIGURE 3. Grotzinger N. 2018. Hector J Diaz and Jancarlos Daiz in Nihl.nyc for new issue of Gayletter magazine.[Online] [Accessed on 17-08-2020] <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/40655/1/neil-grotzinger-nihl-new-york-menswear-lvmh-masculinity>

FIGURE 4. Yotka S. 2020. Designs from Neil’s NIHL A/W ‘20 and S/S’18 collections [Online][Accessed on 20-08-2020] <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2020-menswear/nihl> and <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/737534876450023256/>

FIGURE 5. Shkoda L. 2018. Models at Neil’s Grotzinger SS19 collection titled ‘Subservient Authorities’. [Online] [Accessed on 24-09-2020] (Shkoda L. 2018) <https://www.vogue.com/article/nihl-spring-2019-menswear>

FIGURE 6, Shkoda L. 2018. Neil Grotzinger’s SS19 collection ‘Subservient Authorities’ .[Online] [Accessed on 24-09-2020] (Shkoda L. 2018) <https://www.vogue.com/article/nihl-spring-2019-menswear>

FIGURE 7, Shkoda L. 2018. Neil Grotzinger’s NIHL A/W’20 collection, ‘Villainy’. [Online] [Accessed on 01-10-2020] (Shkoda L. 2018) <https://www.vogue.com/article/nihl-spring-2019-menswear>

FIGURE 8, Shkoda L. 2018. Neil Grotzinger’s NIHL A/W’20 collection, ‘Villainy’. [Online] [Accessed on 01-10-2020] (Shkoda L. 2018) <https://www.vogue.com/article/nihl-spring-2019-menswear>

FIGURE 9, Shkoda L. 2018. Neil Grotzinger’s NIHL A/W’20 collection, ‘Villainy’. [Online] [Accessed on 01-10-2020] (Shkoda L. 2018) <https://www.vogue.com/article/nihl-spring-2019-menswear>

FIGURE 10, Shkoda L. 2018. Neil Grotzinger’s NIHL A/W’20 collection, ‘Villainy’. [Online] [Accessed on 01-10-2020] (Shkoda L. 2018) <https://www.vogue.com/article/nihl-spring-2019-menswear>

FIGURE 11. Kusmith Jai 2020. Reponse on acceptibility of Neil’s designs in the so-
ciety [Bar Chart] Primary data analysis.

ACCEPTED DRAFT – TO BE COPYEDITED