THE ASYMMETRY OF GENDER-FLUID TRENDS

ABSTRACT

Marketers and consumers are rapidly embracing gender-fluid products that fundamentally challenge the conventional associations of masculinity and femininity. In theory, manifestations of gender fluidity in the marketplace respond to shifting gender norms toward more inclusivity. Accordingly, consumers believe that the representation of traditionally male and female styles in these trends should be even. In contrast with these balanced views, this research demonstrates that gender-fluid trends to date skew toward traditionally male styles and that the corresponding adoption of gender-fluid products is driven relatively more by female consumers. Using a multimethod approach that combines trend analyses on more than 100,000 baby names, deep learning on a data set of more than 250,000 products, and a series of lab experiments, this research defines gender fluidity in marketing and differentiates it from related constructs (gender-bending, unisex, androgyny), shows a skewness in gender-fluid trends to date, and reveals the underlying role of male advantage awareness. Finally, a field study on social media explores the marketing implications and demonstrates that raising men's awareness of their advantage increases their engagement with gender-fluid products in the marketplace.

Keywords: gender fluidity, androcentrism, male advantage, multimethod

For centuries, men and women were expected to display their gender and associated societal roles through their dressing styles and consumption practices. For example, in parts of Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century, practical shirts and wide pants symbolized men's societal role as patriarchs and providers. By contrast, women's ornamental and often uncomfortable outfits symbolized their exclusion from the workforce and economic dependence on men (Crane 2000). Back then, the dominant perspective allowed no ambiguity or possibility of deviance from prescribed dress codes.

In the twentieth century, however, women progressively entered the workforce and began adopting more masculine-looking uniforms. Simultaneously, men's dress code deviated from the standard masculine styles, becoming increasingly informal and influenced by leisure activities (Entwistle 2023). By the end of the twentieth century, previous notions of fixed identities and intolerance of gender ambiguity in dressing styles and consumption practices gradually diminished. Today, the dividing lines between genders have become blurrier than ever, with styles that do not fit conventional gender categories gaining popularity (Thomas 2021). Recently, *Vogue* argued that "The Future of Retail Is Genderless" (Yotka 2020) and labeled gender fluidity "Fashion's New Freedom" (Vogue 2022). Celebrities such as Harry Styles and Billie Eilish promote this shift by embracing gender-fluid appearances. Nowadays, almost 40% of consumers in the United States shop fashion outside their gender identity (Fleck 2023). Seconding these trends, retailers and brands such as Nordstrom, Marc Jacobs, and Gucci have launched gender-fluid collections (Cohn 2020; Socha 2020), and new gender-fluid designers like Harris Reed and gender-fluid brands like Telfar, The Phluid Project, and Wildfang have entered the marketplace (Herh 2021).

In theory, gender fluidity in the marketplace disregards the normative associations between conventional masculine markers (e.g., herringbone vests) and men and conventional feminine markers (e.g., nail polish) and women (Thomas 2021). Notwithstanding this hypothetical dissociation from conventional gender norms, in all gender-fluid trends, determining whether a specific gender-fluid taste or style has historically been associated more with women or men is possible. For example, recent gender-fluid collections feature off-the-shoulder and backless halter tops for everyone, both of which were historically female fashion items. Similarly, the name "Taylor" is now considered gender-fluid in the United States; historically, however, it was a male name, and for decades, it was only given to baby boys. If we trace back to the initial associations of tastes and styles marketed as gender-fluid today, how balanced are the representations of conventionally male and female styles?

We begin this investigation by surveying lay consumers about their *normative* beliefs about gender fluidity in a pilot study (reported subsequently). According to this sample, a truly gender-fluid clothing collection should have a 50:50 ratio of traditionally female to male items (i.e., 48% womenswear to 52% menswear, on average). In contrast with these balanced preferences, however, we propose that actual manifestations of gender fluidity to date depart from this even distribution. We argue that, given the prevailing perceptions of male advantage in societies around the world (Bailey, LaFrance, and Dovidio 2018; Bem 1993), gender-fluid trends so far are heavily skewed toward traditionally male markers, and the corresponding adoption of gender-fluid products is driven relatively more by female consumers.

This research uses trend analyses leveraging data on more than 100,000 baby names and a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) analyzing data on more than 250,000 clothing products to show that gender-fluid names and products disproportionally represent traditionally male

markers. We expand these findings in a series of lab experiments. We find that parents prefer gender-fluid names for their daughters over their sons and that this asymmetry does not reliably extend to other forms of gender nonconformity. Incentive-compatible lab studies find that female consumers are more likely than male consumers to choose gender-fluid products. This asymmetry can be explained, at least in part, by women's heightened awareness of the benefits men's traditional position has conferred upon them. A lab study featuring an incentive-compatible virtual game shows that women are more likely than men to adopt gender-fluid products when male players are advantaged in the game. Conversely, when female players are advantaged, men are more likely than women to adopt gender-fluid products. Finally, a field study investigating this work's marketing implications shows that by raising men's awareness of their advantage, marketers can increase men's engagement with gender-fluid products.

This research contributes to the literature on gender in marketing (Coleman, Fischer, and Zayer 2021; Dobscha 2019; Peñaloza et al. 2023) and privilege in psychology (Knowles et al. 2014; Phillips and Lowery 2018, 2020; Pratto and Stewart 2012) by explaining how male advantage shapes consumer behavior within gender-fluid trends. Specifically, we show that, due to the dominant position of men in most societies, the other groups (e.g., females) are not only less represented in gender-fluid tastes and styles but also more willing to emulate the more advantaged group (i.e., males) by adopting these tastes and styles. These findings suggest the persistence of male-centeredness even in a practice that ostensibly aims to reduce gender inequality and embrace inclusivity.

Moreover, this work provides the first formal definition of gender fluidity as it pertains to consumption and differentiates gender fluidity from similar but conceptually distinct gender-nonconforming constructs (Dobscha 2019; Peñaloza et al. 2023), such as gender-bending,

unisex, and androgyny. We also delineate the distinct adoption patterns of gender-fluid styles and tastes vis-à-vis these other forms of gender nonconformity (Avery 2012; Fugate and Phillips 2010; Neale, Robbie, and Martin 2016).

In the next sections, we begin by establishing a formal definition of gender fluidity and discussing other forms of gender-nonconforming expression. We then elaborate on the asymmetry of gender-fluid trends and the role of male advantage.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Gender Fluidity

The literature does not yet provide a formal definition of gender fluidity as it pertains to consumption. Given the recentness of gender fluidity as a market phenomenon, our starting point was an analysis of how designers, brands, and popular culture describe gender fluidity.

Method. We reviewed the first 50 links appearing from organic Google search results and leading to blogs, dictionaries, press articles, and reports for each of the keywords "gender-fluid fashion," "gender-fluid style," and "gender-fluid trend." We chose the keywords in line with our focus on gender fluidity as a form of gender expression, which is particularly relevant in the context of consumption, in which gender is primarily expressed through dressing styles (Booker 2016; Paul 2023). As a result, we identified 102 unique links, consisting of 29 blogs (e.g., WebMD, Medium, Heuritech), one dictionary (Merriam Webster), 64 press articles (e.g., *The New York Times*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*), and eight reports (e.g., MarketWatch, Trend Hunter, The Robin Report). We read every source carefully, focusing on how gender fluidity is defined.

Whenever available, we also noted how gender fluidity differs from other forms of gender nonconformity. We identified the codes emerging from the data and engaged in an inductive bottom-up coding procedure (Urquhart 2013) in a broad and exhaustive manner (Glaser 1978).

Through this process, we identified 29 unique open codes, such as "Suitable for all genders" and "Beyond gender binaries," and then clustered these codes into six higher-level, selective codes, such as "Inclusivity" and "Challenging traditional gender binaries." In the last theoretical coding step, we related the selective codes to each other. We carefully considered each property for its relevance and specificity to gender fluidity. This step resulted in three primary conceptual properties associated with gender fluidity: a focus on inclusivity, an emphasis on gender expression, and the fundamental challenging of traditional gender binaries.

To determine which properties were unique to gender fluidity, we compared them with properties associated with other gender-nonconforming categories (i.e., gender-bending, unisex, and androgyny) as identified in our data and prior literature on gender nonconformity (Avery 2012; Bem and Lewis 1975; Lieven and Hildebrand 2016; Van Tilburg et al. 2015). This comparison was critical in distinguishing gender fluidity from these other constructs. The data from this coding process and all the data in the paper are available on Open Science Framework.

Results. We organized the results of our coding into a cohesive definition of gender fluidity. Specifically, we define gender fluidity in the realm of consumption as "an inclusive gender expression that fundamentally challenges the conventional associations between traditional markers of masculinity and masculinity and between traditional markers of femininity and femininity." By situating our definition in the context of consumption, we develop a conceptual understanding of gender fluidity that is both indigenous and organic to marketing (Nunes, Ordanini, and Giambastiani 2021).

First, we use the term *inclusive* because gender-fluid styles, products, collections, and brands are designed for and marketed to "anyone, regardless of gender, size, or body type" (Detto 2023). Thus, gender fluidity embodies a "something for everyone mentality" (Kohan 2023) and is targeted at anyone, regardless of their gender identity: "Many people associate genderfluid fashion with a particular community [such as LGBTQIA+], but that's not the case. Genderfluid fashion is for everyone" (Claudio 2023). For example, gender-fluid brands such as One DNA continue to extend their sizing beyond what is considered the "normal" range, offering some styles up to 3XL to be inclusive on a larger scale (Claudio 2022).

Second, our definition focuses on gender fluidity as a form of *gender expression*, which needs to be distinguished from a gender-fluid identity. While gender identity asks, "Do you identify as a woman, man, or another gender: essentially, how would you describe your gender identity?" gender expression asks, "How do you show your gender to other people through how you look or act—in other words, your gender expression?" (Katz-Wise 2020). People who identify as gender-fluid do not fit into strict female or male categories and prefer to be flexible about their genders over time (WebMD 2021). While individuals who identify as gender-fluid may choose to express their gender fluidly, individuals who identify as male or female may also choose to incorporate gender-fluid styles in how they express themselves (Kohan 2023; Phuong 2020). Thus, a gender-fluid expression is not limited only to those who identify as gender-fluid; instead, it applies to everyone, regardless of gender identity. While a gender-fluid identity involves flexibility about one's gender identification over time, a gender-fluid expression involves flexibility about traditionally gendered styles over time.

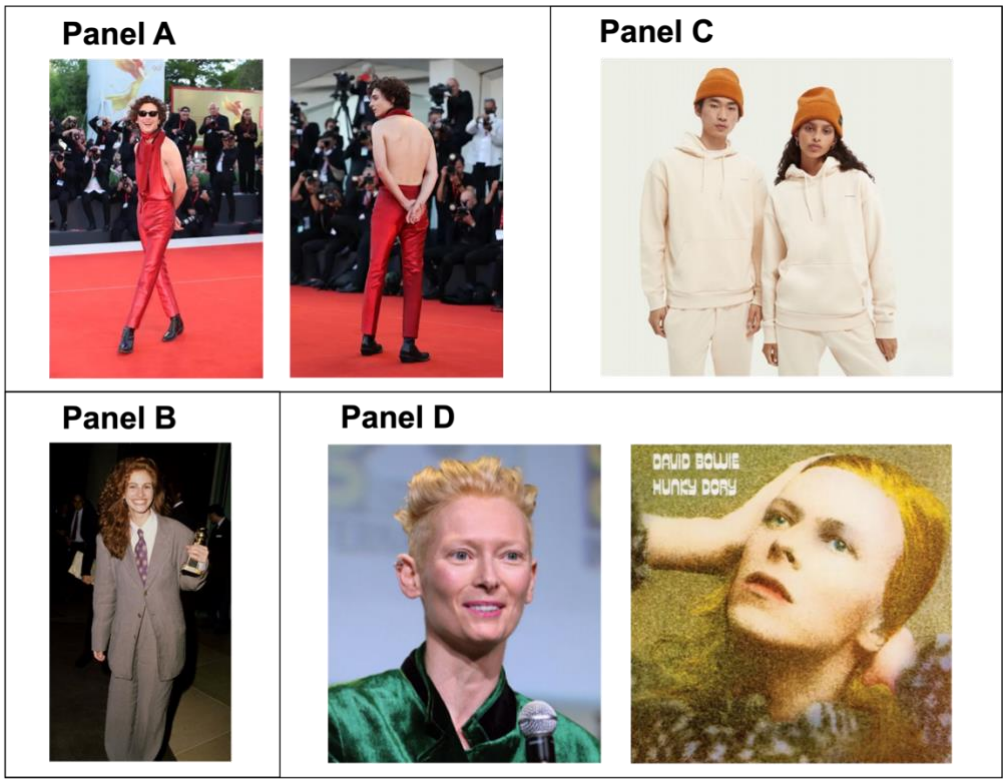
Third, gender fluidity, at its core, fundamentally challenges conventional binary gender associations. We use the expression *fundamentally challenges* because gender fluidity "break[s]

down traditional gender barriers and expectations" (Scull 2021). Gender fluidity does not conform to the traditional gender roles expected by society; instead, it offers an "alternative way of being" (Cohn 2020). Designers of gender-fluid brands and collections argue that products are not inherently gendered (Yu 2021); the goal of gender fluidity is to fundamentally challenge conventional gender associations attached to certain tastes, styles, designs, and products (Bellinger 2022). For example, gender fluidity disregards the association of pants and button-downs with men and of skirts and floral prints with women (Waters 2021). Instead, gender fluidity enables consumers to express themselves in a way that feels authentic to them (Dolan, Burnell, and Pursley 2022); "simply said: blue is no longer reserved for boys, and pink is not only for girls; anyone can wear any item and style it as they please with no distinctions based on binary norms" (Mollard 2022). To fundamentally challenge binary associations, items traditionally associated with a specific gender must be increasingly adopted by consumers who do not identify with that gender. For example, when male-identifying consumers increasingly embrace pearl necklaces and backless halter-neck tops, these items gain a more fluid connotation (Claudio 2022; Roberts 2020). Thus, gender fluidity reflects a change of traditionally gendered styles on the gender spectrum over time.

Examples of Gender Fluidity. The actor Timothée Chalamet, who identifies as male, is known for embracing gender-fluid looks that disregard conventional gender norms. On the red carpet of the Venice Film Festival in 2022, he wore a red backless halter-neck custom jumpsuit by Haider Ackermann (figure 1 panel A). This look is gender-fluid in that it features a traditionally female backless halter-neck top. It conveys that any gender can inclusively wear backless halter-necks. Indeed, *The Wall Street Journal* called backless-halter tops "the going-out

top for men," and several designers have featured backless tops for men in their latest collections (e.g., Saint Laurent, Jacquemus, and Fendi) (Gallagher 2023).

FIGURE 1
GENDER-NONCONFORMING EXPRESSIONS



In the context of names, according to data published by the Social Security Administration, the name Blake was originally only given to baby boys, making it a traditional marker of masculinity. However, since the 1960s, the name has been consistently given to both baby boys and baby girls, thus disregarding its original gender association. Today, the name Blake qualifies as gender-fluid and is inclusively given to babies of any gender.

Gender-Bending

Explanation of Gender-Bending. Gender fluidity is different from gender-bending and, in relation to clothing, cross-dressing. Gender-bending – a term that has been around since the 1960s – involves "dressing and behaving in a manner characteristic of the opposite sex" ("Gender-Bending" n.d.) and is sometimes used in an offensive way *(Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* n.d.). Notably, this term refers to sex as a binary construct, whereas gender fluidity considers the full spectrum of gender expressions (Papayanis 2022). Gender-bending and cross-dressing refer to a sometimes-exaggerated imitation of members from the opposite sex through the adoption of styles and products targeted to them without challenging the fundamental binary gender association of those items (Avery 2012). Whereas gender-bending is a sporadic imitation of members of the opposite sex, gender fluidity is an enduring adoption of conventionally gendered items by members of all genders. In short, while gender-bending maintains the dichotomization of gender and is about adopting products designed and marketed for the opposite gender, gender fluidity questions whether something can be inherently gendered and reinterprets conventionally gendered items (Mead 2021).

Examples of Gender-Bending. Julia Roberts, who identifies as female, wore an oversized Giorgio Armani men's suit at the Golden Globes Awards in 1990 (figure 1 panel B). The female celebrity's sporadic wearing of a suit specifically designed for men exemplifies gender-bending. In the context of names, according to data published by the Social Security Administration, the name Jonas was originally given only to baby boys, making it a traditional marker of masculinity. Throughout the years, the name was never really chosen by parents of female babies except for seven female babies in 1976, eight female babies in 1981–1982, and five female babies in 2004. These sporadic episodes of female babies being given the name Jonas exemplify

gender-bending in this context; these cases did not fundamentally challenge the historical association between Jonas and masculinity.

Unisex

Explanation of Unisex. Gender fluidity is different from unisex, also known as gender-neutral or genderless. Unisex refers to styles that are not specifically associated with a particular gender, thus veiling gender expression altogether. Unisex styles tend to use oversized, shapeless, and minimalist designs in neutral colors (Mead 2021; Weilke 2022). Thus, in contrast with a gender-fluid aesthetic, which conspicuously challenges binary gender associations by incorporating vibrant, colorful, flexible, expressive, and even flamboyant designs (Tauil Da Costa Branco 2022; Weilke 2022), unisex does not consider the "body and form, fluidity, movement, [or] color" (Mead 2021) and typically offers smaller assortments of loose styles in muted color palettes (Business of Fashion and McKinsey 2022). Consequently, gender fluidity is understood as a more inclusive form of gender expression, whose focus lies on reinterpreting conventionally male and female styles (*Toppan Digital Language* n.d.). This more affirmative approach to gender expression is particularly appealing to the younger generation of consumers who greatly value thinking beyond the binary, resulting in gender fluidity's increasing prominence since the 2010s, whereas unisex has been around since the 1960s (Benenson 2023). Some designers have criticized unisex for being "dull" and too "simplifying," failing to consider the nuances of gender as a spectrum (Mead 2021; Weilke 2022).

Examples of Unisex. Wearing color-neutral hoodies and sweatpants is an example of unisex because these outfits veil gender expression by using oversized, shapeless, and neutral colors (figure 1 panel C). In the context of names, according to data published by the Social

Security Administration, Storm can be considered a unisex or gender-neutral name. Since its first year of registration, the name has been given to both baby girls and baby boys, and the overall distribution of male and female babies with this name has been relatively even since then.

Androgyny

Explanation of Androgyny. Last, gender fluidity can be distinguished from androgyny. The term androgyny is derived from the Greek words *andro* (meaning man) and *gyne* (meaning woman) and, as its etymology suggests, it typically refers to individuals who simultaneously embody a combination of highly masculine and highly feminine traits (Bem and Lewis 1975; Cooke et al. 2022). The combination of both masculine and feminine characteristics can manifest in gender identity, gender expression, and/or biological sex. In the literature, androgyny has been explored primarily as a form of gender identity describing someone who simultaneously scores high on both masculine (e.g., independent, assertive, competitive) and feminine (e.g., affectionate, compassionate, warm) traits (Bem and Lewis 1975). In terms of gender expression, some celebrities openly embrace androgynous looks and aesthetics, mixing both highly masculine and highly feminine markers to create an androgynous appearance. Whereas androgyny involves a simultaneous blend of masculine and feminine characteristics within a single appearance (Cooke et al. 2022; Lieven and Hildebrand 2016; Van Tilburg et al. 2015), gender fluidity is characterized by a dynamic evolution in how traditional gender associations are understood and expressed over time.

Examples of Androgyny. Tilda Swinton and David Bowie are examples of celebrities who have openly embraced androgynous looks and aesthetics, mixing both highly masculine and highly feminine markers to create an androgynous appearance (figure 1 panel D). In the context

of names, according to data published by the Social Security Administration, the name Michaelann is androgynous because there is a part that is clearly male (Michael is a male name by itself) and a part that is clearly female (Ann is a female name by itself). Of note, the name is a traditionally female name and has not been given to male babies. Thus, it does not challenge the traditional association between Michaelann and femininity and, therefore, is not gender-fluid. However, it is an androgynous name because it has both a female and a male component.

THE ASYMMETRY OF GENDER-FLUID TRENDS AND MALE ADVANTAGE

Pilot Study

Defining gender fluidity raises the question of how even the representation of traditionally male and female styles now marketed as gender-fluid should be in theory and is in reality. We begin to address these points by surveying lay consumers (recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, N = 1,205, 49% female, M_{age} = 41.1) about their *normative beliefs* regarding gender fluidity in a pilot study. We told respondents, "Several designers and brands are embracing 'gender-fluid fashion,' that is, clothing that is not categorized in the traditional 'menswear' and 'womenswear' dichotomy. These gender-fluid collections often feature traditionally feminine items (e.g., skirts) and traditionally male items (e.g., ties) worn by everyone indistinctively." We then asked, "According to you, which percentage of items traditionally associated with the male/female categories should a truly gender-fluid collection feature?" We measured responses on a 0–100 slider scale (scale numbers were hidden to avoid framing one of the items as scoring higher than the other). The two end points of the scale were

"100% traditional menswear" and "100% traditional womenswear" (in randomized order), and the midpoint was "50%–50%." We coded the slider scale such that higher values indicated a higher percentage of traditional womenswear. Next, respondents provided optional thoughts about gender-fluid collections: "If you have any other thoughts on how gender-fluid collections should be, you can write them here (optional)." Finally, we measured respondents' familiarity with gender fluidity ("Have you heard the term 'gender-fluid' before?" Yes/No) and recorded some demographics.

On average, respondents indicated that a gender-fluid fashion collection should consist of 52% traditional menswear and 48% traditional womenswear. A chi-square test showed that this allocation was not significantly different from an even 50–50 distribution ($\chi^2(1) = 0.160$, $p = .689$). While 981 of our respondents were familiar with the term "gender-fluid" before taking the survey, 223 were not. Of note, the results did not differ between these two groups.

This pilot study demonstrates that lay consumers believe gender-fluid collections should feature an even representation of traditionally gendered styles. However, in contrast with these highly even preferences, we posit that current displays of gender fluidity deviate significantly from this balanced allocation. We contend that, given the prevailing perceptions of male advantages in society (Bailey et al. 2018; Bem 1993), gender-fluid trends to date overwhelmingly favor conventionally male markers.

Theoretical Development

Status – being respected and admired by others – is a fundamental human motive and carries a range of psychological and social benefits, incentivizing people to either protect or

advance their status, depending on context and current status level (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015; Magee and Galinsky 2008). While members of disadvantaged, low status groups are more likely to want to advance their status, members of advantaged, high status groups are more likely to want to protect their status (Hoff, Rucker, and Galinsky 2024). In an attempt to advance their status, members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to mimic and want to associate with the advantaged group than vice versa (Han, Nunes, and Drèze 2010; Robinson 1961; Simmel 1957). These general social hierarchy dynamics apply to gender hierarchies.

Throughout history, the majority of societies have been androcentric (Amaral et al. 2019). Androcentrism positions men at the center of society, establishing men's bodies, thoughts, and experiences as the normative standard (Bailey et al. 2018; Bem 1993). This male-centeredness has reinforced patriarchies, which place men at the top of the gender hierarchy (Bailey et al. 2018). For example, recent research shows that androcentric and patriarchic societies use male terms and representations to depict all people (Bailey, LaFrance, and Dovidio 2020). Similarly, in a consumption context, masculine brands are more likely to be perceived as cultural symbols than feminine brands in the United States (Amaral et al. 2019).

Given this prevalent male-centeredness in most societies, we argue that masculinity continues to socially dominate femininity even in a cultural and marketplace practice that supposedly aims to *reduce* gender inequality. That is, we propose that as the historically disadvantaged group, women are more likely to consistently adopt tastes and styles associated with masculinity that, over time, gain a gender-fluid connotation than men consistently adopting tastes and styles associated with femininity that, over time, gain a gender-fluid connotation. As a result, gender-fluid trends to date skew toward traditional masculinity. In other words, when examining current gender-fluid trends (e.g., baby names, fashion products), we expect to see

traditionally male tastes and styles becoming gender-fluid more often than traditionally female ones. In the context of names, for example, male names are associated more with success and ambition in life than female names (Mehrabian 2001), thus giving an incentive to parents to adopt these names for their daughters. Therefore, we expect parents to more commonly give their daughters traditionally male names that over time develop a gender-fluid connotation than to give their sons traditionally female names that over time develop a gender-fluid connotation. Consequently, gender-fluid names end up skewing toward masculinity.

We further contend that these asymmetric patterns reinforce adoptions of tastes and styles that have eventually gained a gender-fluid connotation. That is, given the traditional dominance of the male gender, not only are historically disadvantaged groups (e.g., females) less represented in gender-fluid tastes and styles, but these groups are also more willing to emulate the historically advantaged group (i.e., males) by adopting these tastes and styles, ultimately reinforcing male-centeredness. Indeed, women may be incentivized to adopt gender-fluid tastes and styles as a way to challenge traditional gender binaries and assimilate with the dominating gender group (Peñaloza 1994).

By contrast, men who consume gender-fluid tastes and styles deviate from their dominant group. Advantaged groups are incentivized to stabilize their group's dominant position in the hierarchy (Knowles et al. 2014; Phillips and Lowery 2018, 2020). To affirm their leadership, men must continually prove their manhood and maintain a certain level of dominance (Bosson and Vandello 2011; DiMuccio and Knowles 2020; Vandello and Bosson 2013). An effective way of doing so is to avoid anything considered feminine and affirm masculinity through consumption (Bosson and Michniewicz 2013). In line with these assertions, male-identifying consumers prefer gender-congruent products more than female-identifying consumers (Fugate

and Phillips 2010; Neale et al. 2016). They also tend to exhibit an adverse reaction to the introduction of feminine products by masculine brands (Avery 2012). Thus, we hypothesize that female consumers are more likely to adopt gender-fluid tastes and styles than male consumers.

Why precisely are women more open to gender fluidity? We argue that this discrepancy results from these individuals' heightened awareness of male advantage (Pratto and Stewart 2012; Reitz and Higgins 2019). As members of the historically disadvantaged group, women are more aware of the benefits men's position in the gender hierarchy has conferred upon them and may use gender-fluid tastes and styles to assimilate with the dominating group. Men's lower awareness of their advantages is due to, at least in part, the normalization of their experiences as the societal standard in androcentric societies, and it serves to preserve the status quo of the current hierarchy and protect their advantaged status (Phillips and Lowery 2020; Pratto and Stewart 2012). As men may perceive their experiences as "normal" more than advantaged, deviance from this normality is perceived as risky (Vandello and Bosson 2013), and there is less impetus to question or deviate from their traditional gender expressions and embrace gender fluidity. In short, we propose that the increased likelihood of female consumers to adopt gender-fluid tastes and styles will be mediated by their greater awareness of male advantage.

What can marketers do to create more evenness in gender-fluid trends and their adoption? Research on privilege has demonstrated that advantaged group members feel encouraged to take action when their advantaged status is explicitly revealed (Knowles et al. 2014; Phillips and Lowery 2020). Framing inequity in terms of advantage increases these group members' sense of personal relevance, thereby heightening engagement responses (Lowery and Wout 2010; Tropp and Barlow 2018). Building on these findings, we propose that when men are made more cognizant of their advantage, they become more open to embracing gender fluidity as an

inclusive gender expression that fundamentally challenges traditional binary gender associations. Consequently, we propose that raising men's awareness of their advantage and incorporating messages on male privilege into advertising materials can motivate men to explore and embrace gender-fluid products more openly in the marketplace.

STUDY 1: ASYMMETRIC FLUIDITY IN BABY NAMES

Study 1 tests our hypothesis about the uneven fluidity of gender-fluid trends on a data set of names spanning more than a century. The choice of names given to newborns is an important conspicuous decision that parents make, and it has been used in prior work to examine cultural evolution and fashion cycles (Berger et al. 2012; Lieberson 2000; Yoganarasimhan 2017). We downloaded all registered infant names in the United States, beginning in 1880, from the Social Security Administration. These data allow us to determine whether gender fluidity is growing and whether traditionally male or female names are driving this trend.

Method

For each year since 1880, the Social Security Administration has published a list of the top 1,000 registered names in that year and the number of male and female infants (as indicated in the applications for Social Security cards) given that name. We compiled all names from 1880 until 2022 and focused on names whose gender was unambiguous in their year of inception (i.e., only infants of one biological sex were given that specific name when the name appeared for the first time: N = 101,874). We then analyzed potential departures over time from the initial (or

traditional) gender. Consistent with prior work suggesting that it takes two decades for a name to change its connotation (Lieberson 2000), we classified a name as gender-fluid if it was adopted by at least five infants[1] of the opposite sex for at least 20 consecutive years of registration.

We then counted the number of gender-fluid names each year. For example, the name Blake appeared for the first time in 1883 when it was given to five male infants and no female infants. In 1951 and 1953, the name was only sporadically given to five and six female infants, respectively (indicating a case of sporadic gender-bending rather than gender fluidity, as per our definitions). Then, in 1962, the name started being consistently given to female infants, and 20 years later, in 1981, the name changed its traditionally male connotation to a gender-fluid connotation. As an illustration, in 2022, the name was given to 1,441 female and 1,573 male infants. We categorized the name Blake as unambiguously male in 1883 and gender-fluid from 1981 onward. Similarly, the name Jamie appeared for the first time in 1884 when it was given to five female infants and no male infants. Then, from 1909 onwards, the name Jamie started being consistently given to male infants, and 20 years later, in 1928, the name changed its traditionally female connotation to a gender-fluid connotation. In 2022, the name Jamie was given to 394 female and 447 male babies. Using this procedure, we identified 2,507 unique gender-fluid names in total.

Results

[1] We use a minimum cutoff of five because this is the minimum count reported by the Social Security Administration per sex per year. We report sensitivity analyses with cutoffs of ten and 20 in web appendix A and show the results robustness. The higher the cutoff, the stronger the results. Also note that the vast majority of names is only given to a small number of babies, making these cutoffs meaningful. For example, in 2022, 45% of names were given to a maximum of ten babies, and 65% were given to a maximum of 20 babies.

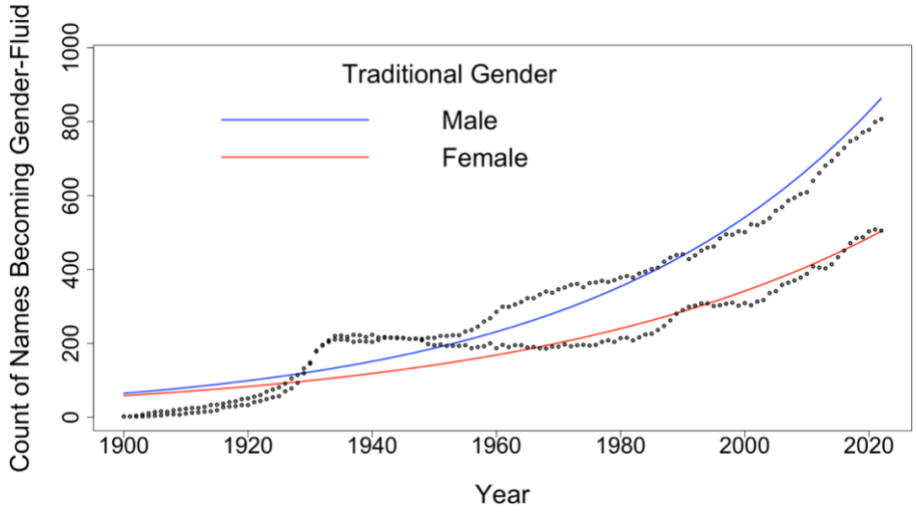
Because the dependent variable is count data involving some overdispersion, we used Quasi-Poisson regressions to analyze the data (glm function in R with the family equal to 'quasipoisson' setting). Importantly, all the following results hold when employing Poisson, linear, and negative binomial regressions. According to our classification, the first time any name could be considered gender-fluid was in 1900, so we began our analyses that year. As expected, in any given year between 1900 and 2022, the average count of traditionally male names becoming gender-fluid (M = 309.36, SD = 215.75) was significantly higher than the average count of traditionally female names becoming gender-fluid (M = 207.24, SD = 130.11; b = 0.40, SE = 0.09, $t(244) = 4.59$, $p < .001$). We ran a Quasi-Poisson regression on the count of gender-fluid names as the dependent variable with an interaction between traditional gender (coded as 0 for male and 1 for female) and year, with the main effects entered in step 1 and the interaction term added in step 2. In step 1, we found a significant main effect of traditional gender (b = –0.40, SE = 0.04, $t(243) = –11.05$, $p < .001$) and a significant main effect of year (b = 0.02, SE = 0.00, $t(243) = 34.46$, $p < .001$). In step 2, we found a significant interaction (b = –0.004, SE = 0.00, $t(242) = –3.21$, $p = .002$). As figure 2 shows, gender fluidity has been growing, but the slope is steeper for traditionally male names (b = 0.021, SE = 0.00, $t(121) = 33.47$, $p < .001$) than for traditionally female names (b = 0.018, SE = 0.00, $t(121) = 18.63$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Study 1 examines gender fluidity in names that had a traditional binary association in their year of inception. We find that names are becoming increasingly gender-fluid overall. However, this trend shows a clear asymmetry with more traditionally male names becoming

gender-fluid than traditionally female names. In conclusion, these results support the predicted skewness of gender-fluid trends toward traditionally masculine tastes.

FIGURE 2
COUNT OF NAMES BECOMING GENDER-FLUID PER YEAR BY GENDER



NOTE.—Dots represent observed data, and lines represent predicted values from the Quasi-Poisson regression.

STUDY 2: ASYMMETRIC FLUIDITY IN CLOTHING

Study 2 generalizes study 1 to the domain of clothing and examines the extent to which gendered collections are gender-fluid. In this study, we operationalize gender fluidity in fashion products by examining the error rates in algorithmic categorization between menswear and womenswear. This approach assumes that certain design elements confuse algorithms trained on traditional binary gender classifications, thereby serving as indicators of gender fluidity. If womenswear items are misclassified as menswear, the gender fluidity stems from a skewness toward traditional masculinity, and if menswear items are misclassified as womenswear, the gender fluidity stems from a skewness toward traditional femininity. Specifically, we analyze a large data set (250,000+ product images) of men's and women's clothing collections from Farfetch, a global online retailer. We train a CNN with residual connections and test whether it is

more likely to misclassify womenswear as menswear than vice versa. If our hypothesis is correct that female clothing tends to be more gender-fluid and incorporates more traditionally masculine markers than male clothing does with traditionally feminine markers, we should find that a higher proportion of female products are mistakenly categorized as male than vice versa.

Data

We scraped all images (N = 255,199) from Farfetch's men's (N = 103,355) and women's (N = 151,844) clothing collections (e.g., pants, dresses, jumpsuits, shirts, shorts, skirts, knits, suits, jackets, coats) in December 2022. Farfetch is a global online fashion retail platform that sells products from more than 1,400 boutiques and brands around the world (e.g., AllSaints, Burberry, Ralph Lauren) and thus represents a wide range of designs and brands. Moreover, unlike most online retailers, Farfetch displays its images front side, with a single product centered on a homogeneous and clean white background. During training, this aspect ensured that the CNN learned to predict gender only from fashion-related features rather than external factors (e.g., facial features, pose, and hairstyle if a model were present). To further ensure that the CNN only learned attributes that are specific to clothing items, we manually reviewed the entire data set and removed occasional images that included a model. Moreover, we removed images that were accessories and not clothing items (e.g., towels, bags, hats) and images that were cropped out and did not show the entire clothing item. This process resulted in 254,572 images used in our analysis (N_{menswear} = 103,069, $N_{\text{womenswear}}$ = 151,503).

Model Selection

Following Ferreira et al.'s (2018) work, which categorizes Farfetch's clothing items into categories (e.g., dresses), subcategories (e.g., cocktail and party dresses), and attributes (e.g., flared silhouette, sleeveless, V-neck, mid-length), we used ResNet-50 as a base model. ResNet-50 is a deep CNN consisting of 50 layers leveraging residual connections in its architecture (He et al. 2016). These residual connections allow the model to directly feed information from earlier layers to later layers, which can significantly improve model accuracy (He et al. 2016).

Implementation Details. We implemented our proposed model using Keras with TensorFlow. We used an off-the-shelf CNN ResNet-50, pretrained on the ImageNet data set.

Image Preprocessing. We resized the images to the ResNet-50 input dimension of 224 × 224 pixels. During the training phase, we applied random transformations (including flipping, cropping, and rotating) to the input images to perform data augmentation (see figure 3 for a visual depiction and web appendix B for more details). Augmenting the data set is particularly effective in regularizing deep neural networks (i.e., preventing them from overfitting, or memorizing the training data instead of learning attributes of the images that are generalizable to new, unseen data) (Krizhevsky, Sutskever, and Hinton 2017).

FIGURE 3
IMAGE AUGMENTATION

NOTE.—Product images underwent random transformations.

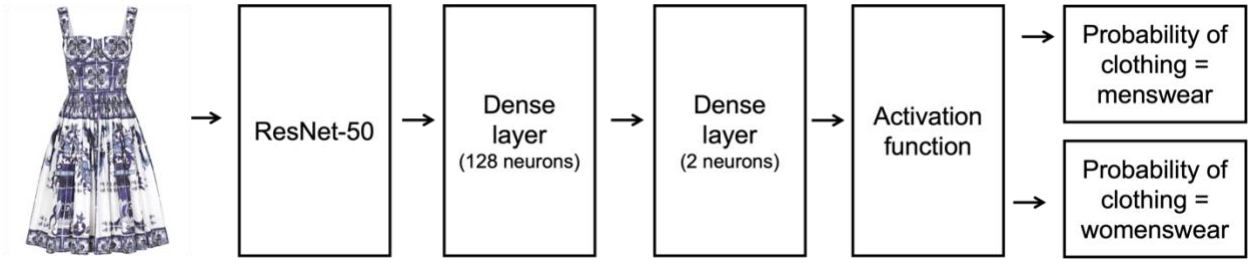
CNN Architecture

Using random data splitting, we leveraged 60% of the two clothing data sets for training purposes ($N_{womenswear}$ = 90,901, $N_{menswear}$ = 61,840), 20% for validation purposes ($N_{womenswear}$ = 30,300, $N_{menswear}$ = 20,613), and 20% for testing purposes ($N_{womenswear}$ = 30,301, $N_{menswear}$ = 20,615). During training, the model was fed images and learned parameters to optimally predict their corresponding labels: "menswear" or "womenswear." We then used the validation set to monitor the model's performance and prevent overfitting. Finally, we used the testing set to evaluate the model's performance on new data it had not seen before. We analyzed the *entire data set* to maximize the external validity of the study. Note that Farfetch has more images of womenswear than menswear, which offers a conservative test of our hypothesis (i.e., if anything, the model should be more likely to accurately learn features of womenswear and thus have a relatively lower error rate for these items).

For the training process, we used transfer learning, allowing only the final 11 layers of the ResNet-50 to have their weights retrained (Ferreira et al. 2018). Moreover, we added two layers and a final activation function to predict whether a clothing item is categorized as menswear or womenswear. We used a softmax activation function to transform the raw outputs of the neural network into a vector of probabilities, thereby making each value interpretable as the probability of membership for each class (Chollet 2021). We used Adam (Kingma and Ba 2015) for stochastic optimization of a binary cross-entropy loss function, which computes the difference between true labels and predicted labels in binary classification models (i.e., the cross-entropy loss). We trained the model for 20 epochs – the number of complete passes through the training data set. The model achieved peak validation accuracy after eight epochs (validation

accuracy of .937), which we saved for our analysis. Figure 4 summarizes the model's higher-level architecture.

FIGURE 4
HIGHER-LEVEL ARCHITECTURE OF THE CNN MODEL



Results

For each product image, the CNN generates a vector containing the probabilities of that product being menswear and womenswear. The model's final prediction for that product (i.e., whether it is predicted to be menswear or womenswear) is determined by selecting the class with the higher probability. Figure 5 shows examples of the prediction results on several products from the data set.

We plot the confusion matrices for both the test and validation data sets in figure 6. As the figure shows, both matrices support the predicted pattern; the proportion of womenswear misclassified as menswear (blue cells; test data: 7.06%; validation data: 7.08%) is higher than the proportion of menswear misclassified as womenswear (yellow cells; test data: 5.38% with $\chi^2(1) = 57.74$, $p < .001$; validation data: 5.15% with $\chi^2(1) = 76.95$, $p < .001$).

FIGURE 5
EXAMPLES OF PREDICTION RESULTS

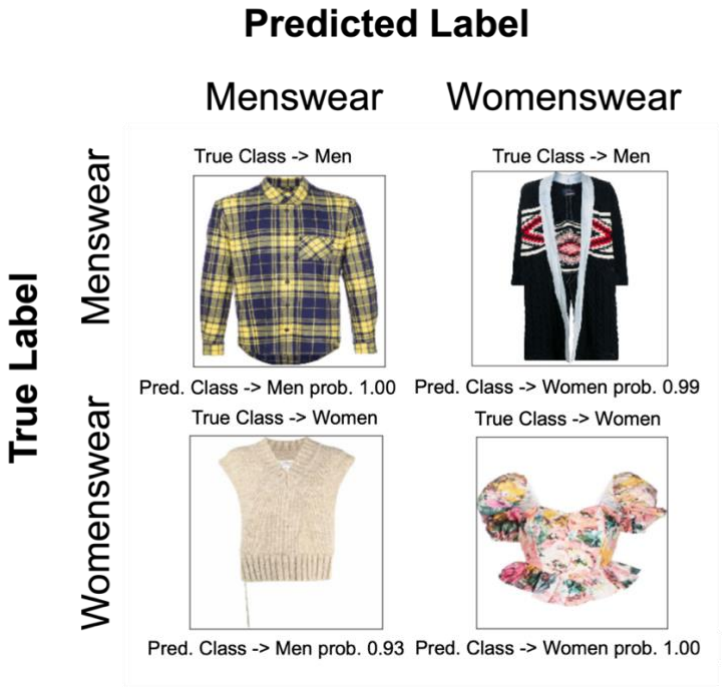
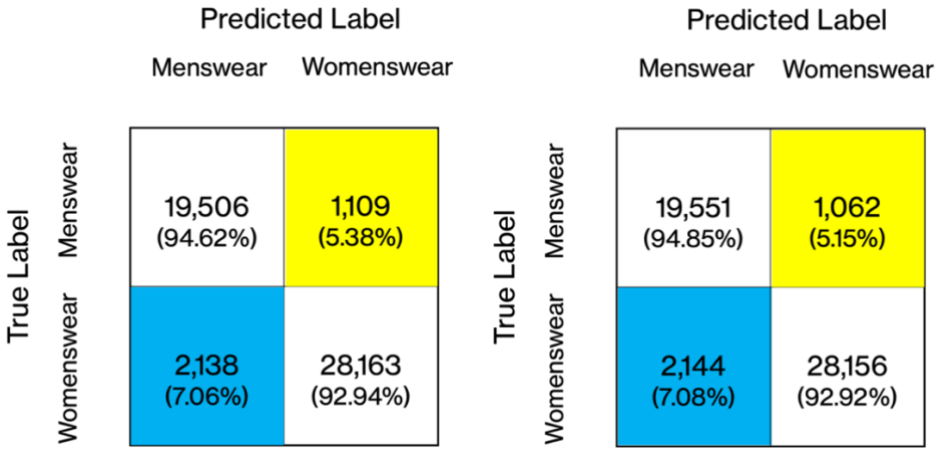


FIGURE 6
CONFUSION MATRICES FOR TEST (LEFT) AND VALIDATION (RIGHT) DATA



NOTE.—The numbers in parentheses represent the percentage of instances within their respective row. For example, 94.62% in the top left cell of the test data matrix indicates that 94.62% of products sold in menswear were correctly classified as menswear, while 5.38% (top right) were incorrectly classified as womenswear.

Discussion

In Study 2, we trained a CNN to analyze the menswear and womenswear collections of the global digital marketplace Farfetch. As predicted, we find that more women's clothing items are misclassified as menswear than vice versa. This finding indicates that the proportion of womenswear that incorporates gender-fluid styles skewing toward traditionally male styles is higher than the proportion of menswear that incorporates gender-fluid styles skewing toward traditionally female styles. This finding further supports the general skewness toward male styles detected in study 1 in the context of clothing products.

We confirm the CNN's classifications through a human validation study reported in web appendix B. This study demonstrates on a subset of 400 images that human ratings generally align with the CNN's classifications of gendered clothing items, even when the CNN made mistakes. This alignment suggests that the CNN is indeed classifying images based on gender-specific cues rather than other extraneous noise and variety alone. Nonetheless, an inherent limitation of using real-world data and mathematical operationalizations of gender fluidity is that they may not fully reflect consumers' perceptions of gender fluidity. Therefore, in the following experimental studies, we carefully pretest all gender-fluid items against gender-conforming, gender-bending, unisex, and androgynous items.

STUDY 3: DIFFERENTIATING GENDER FLUIDITY FROM GENDER-BENDING, UNISEX, AND ANDROGYNY

Study 1 found that more traditionally male names are given to female infants than traditionally female names are given to male infants, ultimately skewing gender-fluid names

toward masculinity. In study 3, we directly build on these findings and examine this asymmetry more directly in the adoption patterns of gender-fluid names depending on the biological sex of the baby. Consistent with our theorizing, we predict that parents prefer gender-fluid names for their daughters more than for their sons.

Importantly, we also examine whether this skewed preference extends beyond gender-fluid names to other nonconforming categories, including gender-bending, unisex, and androgynous names. We expect that the predicted asymmetry does not systematically extend to these other forms of gender nonconformity. Unisex names, by definition, are designed to be gender-neutral and veil gender expression, and thus their adoption should not vary with the biological sex of the baby. For gender-bending and androgynous names, we expect that these names are too nonconforming, even for daughters, to gain widespread adoption and create meaningful differences in adoption rates. That is, while gender-bending and androgynous names theoretically help daughters assimilate with the dominating male gender, parents may refrain from giving their daughters these names because (1) gender-bending names are a more extreme assimilation of masculinity than gender-fluid names and could be deemed less appropriate for daughters than gender-fluid names and (2) androgynous names combine male and female names in one word, resulting in rare phonological combinations, which may also be deemed less appropriate for daughters than gender-fluid names that are relatively more familiar sounding. Supporting these assertions, research on coolness, uniqueness, and deviation from the norm shows that extreme and too-radical departures can be damaging (Bellezza 2023; Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001; Warren and Campbell 2014).

Method

We recruited 844 participants on Prolific Academic to guarantee enough power to detect small-to-medium effect sizes at 80% (d = 0.40) and 90% power (d = 0.46). To ensure that the names in this study would be relevant to respondents, we kept only participants whose nationality was the United States and whose native language was English (N = 830; 48.6% female, 1.2% nonbinary, 0.4% prefer not to say; M_{age} = 41.4).

We randomly assigned participants to one of eight conditions in a 2 (baby sex: male vs. female) × 4 (form of gender nonconformity: gender-fluid vs. gender-bending vs. unisex vs. androgynous) between-subjects design. Participants imagined expecting a baby boy or girl and contemplating names. All participants considered six pretested names (web appendix C) presented in random order. Three names were gender-conforming (i.e., unambiguously male names for the baby boy and unambiguously female names for the baby girl), and three were gender-nonconforming. The gender-nonconforming names were either gender-fluid, gender-bending (female names for the baby boy and male names for the baby girl), unisex, or androgynous, depending on the condition. Figure 7 summarizes the experimental design with the three gender-conforming options listed first and the three gender-nonconforming options listed second (arrows indicate random order of names in the study).

Pretesting the names ensured that the selected names were *unambiguously* gender-conforming, gender-bending, gender-fluid, unisex, and androgynous, as per our definitions. Moreover, the selected male and female names did not differ in liking, which is important because they served as the comparison condition. We also selected names from the gender-nonconforming categories with similar liking (for full details, see web appendix C). Of note,

consistent with our findings in study 1, we chose gender-fluid names that skew toward masculinity (i.e., Leighton, Reagan, and Darcy) because they were traditionally male names that

FIGURE 7
EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

Name Options in the Four Baby Boy Conditions

Gender-fluid	Gender-bending	Unisex	Androgynous
Otto	Otto	Otto	Otto
Reuben	Reuben	Reuben	Reuben
Julius	Julius	Julius	Julius
Leighton	Gretchen	Nakai	Adriann
Reagan	Odelia	Lux	Nathanielle
Darcy	Felicity	Kao	Annajames

Name Options in the Four Baby Girl Conditions

Gender-fluid	Gender-bending	Unisex	Androgynous
Gretchen	Gretchen	Gretchen	Gretchen
Odelia	Odelia	Odelia	Odelia
Felicity	Felicity	Felicity	Felicity
Leighton	Otto	Nakai	Adriann
Reagan	Reuben	Lux	Nathanielle
Darcy	Julius	Kao	Annajames

today are recognized as gender-fluid. This selection provides a conservative test for our hypothesis because we expected that parents would be more inclined to give their sons gender-fluid names that were historically male instead of female, thus lowering our chances of detecting a difference between the baby boy and baby girl conditions.

Participants ranked the names by how likely they were to give the name to their baby: "Please rank the following options based on how likely you are to give the name to your little

one (i.e., your first choice should be on rank 1, followed by your second choice on rank 2, etc.)." Last, we collected participants' gender, age, nationality, and native language.

Results

The dependent variable of interest was participants' preference for gender-nonconforming names. In the first step, we reverse-coded the rank numbers; that is, a name ranking first choice received a score of 6, a name ranking second choice received a score of 5, a name ranking third choice received a score of 4, and so on. In a second step, we summed these scores for the gender-nonconforming names to arrive at a preference score. The possible maximum score was 15 if the gender-nonconforming names were ranked first (score of 6), second (score of 5), and third choice (score of 4), and the possible minimum score was 6 if the gender-nonconforming names were ranked fourth (score of 3), fifth (score of 2), and sixth choice (score of 1). For example, consider a participant ranking gender-conforming names (Reuben, Julius, and Otto) and gender-fluid names (Leighton, Reagan, and Darcy) for their baby boy according to how likely they are to give any of these names to their son. If they ranked Leighton as first choice (score of 6), Reagan as fifth choice (score of 2), and Darcy as sixth choice (score of 1), they would receive a preference score of 9. A higher preference score indicates a stronger preference for gender-nonconforming names.

Because our goal was to examine whether the asymmetry can be attributed to gender-fluid names rather than any of the other types of gender-nonconforming names, we first ran a linear regression of baby sex (male = 0, female = 1) and gender fluidity (gender-fluid names = 1, gender-bending, unisex, and androgynous names = 0) on the preference score. In the first step, we entered the main effects and found both a significant effect of baby sex (b = 0.43, SE = 0.19,

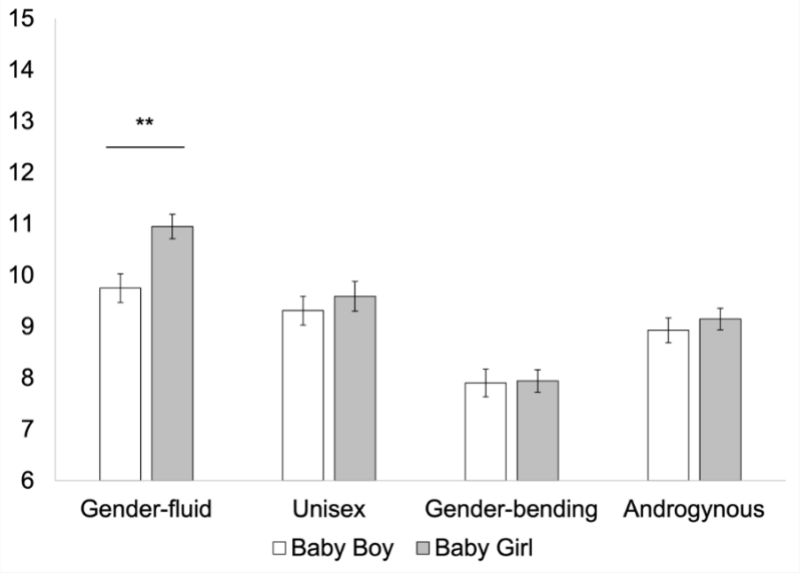
$t(827) = 2.33$, $p = .020$) and a significant effect of gender fluidity ($b = 1.54$, SE = 0.22, $t(827) = 7.15$, $p < .001$). In the second step, we entered the interaction term and, consistent with our expectations, found a significant interaction ($b = 1.02$, SE = 0.43, $t(826) = 2.38$, $p = .017$). As expected, this pattern indicates that gender-fluid names are unevenly adopted while other categories of gender-nonconforming names are not.

Next, we compared the preference scores for each gender-nonconforming category (figure 8). For gender-fluid names, we found the expected asymmetric adoption pattern: Parents were more likely to give a gender-fluid name to their baby girl ($M = 10.95$, SD = 2.38) than to their baby boy ($M = 9.75$, SD = 2.82; $t(201) = 3.29$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.46$). For the unisex names, future parents were as likely to give a unisex name to their female baby ($M = 9.59$, SD = 2.98) as they were to give a unisex name to their male baby ($M = 9.31$, SD = 2.87; $t(204) = 0.69$, $p = .490$, $d = 0.10$), supporting the notion that unisex names veil gender expression. For the gender-bending names, we found no difference by baby sex; future parents were as likely to give their daughter a male name ($M = 7.94$, SD = 2.29) as they were to give their son a female name ($M = 7.90$, SD = 2.75; $t(207) = 0.11$, $p = .915$, $d = 0.01$). Along the same lines, future parents were as likely to give their daughters androgynous names ($M = 9.15$, SD = 2.19) as they were to give their sons androgynous names ($M = 8.93$, SD = 2.48; $t(210) = 0.67$, $p = .500$, $d = 0.09$). The overall lower preference scores for gender-bending and androgynous names are consistent with the notion that these types of names may be too nonconforming to create meaningful differences by baby sex.

Discussion

Study 3 found that parents prefer gender-fluid names for their daughters over their sons. Consistent with our theorizing, we find that the historically disadvantaged group (e.g., females) is not only less represented in gender-fluid names (study 1) but also more likely to be given these names. Importantly, study 3 distinguished gender-fluid names from gender-bending, unisex, and androgynous names. While participants were more likely to give their daughters gender-fluid names than their sons, this pattern did not reliably extend to gender-bending, unisex, and androgynous names in our data.

FIGURE 8
PREFERENCE SCORE BY GENDER-NONCONFORMING CATEGORY



STUDY 4: THE PROCESS UNDERLYING THE ASYMMETRIC ADOPTION OF GENDER-FLUID PRODUCTS

Thus far, we have examined how parents name their children and found that they prefer gender-fluid names for their daughters over their sons. In study 4, we examine whether this

asymmetry holds when individuals make choices for themselves in the context of accessories. As hypothesized, we expect female consumers to be more likely to adopt gender-fluid styles than male consumers, which is driven by their heightened awareness of male advantage.

Study 4 uses an incentive-compatible design to examine the process underlying the asymmetric adoption of gender-fluid styles. We focus on gender-fluid pearl necklaces. While study 3 focused on gender-fluid names that were once considered traditionally male, this study examines a gender-fluid product that was once traditionally female. Men embracing pearl necklaces – a jewelry piece traditionally associated with femininity – has been a gender-fluid trend since 2016[2] when Pharrell Williams boldly wore layered pearl necklaces on the Chanel runway. In 2020, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the latest must-have accessory for men was a pearl necklace – with other celebrities like Harry Styles and A$AP Rocky publicly endorsing the trend (Gallagher 2020). Various news outlets have reported that this trend of men wearing pearls is here to stay (Danziger 2023; Jana 2021) and many brands and retailers now offer pearl necklaces for men (e.g., Supreme x Tiffany's, Mikimoto, Polite Worldwide).

In a pretest, we identify unambiguously gender-fluid, male, and female necklaces[3] (web appendix D). In the main study, participants first specify their gender identity and then choose between a gender-conforming and gender-fluid necklace. Finally, we measure participants' male advantage awareness and address two potential alternative explanations for the uneven adoption of gender-fluid styles: the need for uniqueness and variety seeking. That is, one might argue that women have a greater need for uniqueness and seek more variety in the styles they use for self-

[2] We argued that it takes 20-plus years for a traditionally gendered name to attain a gender-fluid connotation given the long human lifespan (study 1). However, fashion items have a much shorter life cycle (Richardson and Kroeber 1940), so their connotation changes more quickly.

[3] We ensured that the necklaces were not perceived as gender-bending, unisex, or androgynous. Moreover, the "baseline" female and male necklaces did not differ in perceived luxuriousness and liking.

expression, which leads them to adopt gender-fluid products. This study was preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/3V6_9P5).

Method

In total, 505 participants from Prolific Academic completed our study (48.5% female, 3.0% nonbinary, 0.2% prefer not to say; M_{age} = 40.8). The study consisted of three tasks (i.e., a lottery, an unrelated filler task, and scale completion) appearing in randomized order. Of note, the two main tasks (lottery and scale completion) were always separated by the unrelated filler task to reduce demand effects. We began the study by measuring participants' demographics (gender, age, nationality, and native language).

In the choice task, we gauged participants' preference for necklaces. Participants who self-identified as female viewed the pretested female and gender-fluid necklaces, and those who self-identified as male viewed the pretested male and gender-fluid necklaces. Those who self-identified as nonbinary/third gender or preferred not to specify their gender (N = 16) viewed either the female or male necklace (randomly assigned) and the gender-fluid necklace.[4] Participants read the following instructions, including our definition of gender fluidity: "Below is a necklace sold under the women's [men's] label and a necklace sold under the gender-fluid label. Gender fluidity is an inclusive gender expression that fundamentally challenges the conventional associations between traditional markers of masculinity and masculinity and

[4] Because nonbinary individuals are a historically disadvantaged group (Coffman, Coffman, and Ericson 2024; Eames 2024), we grouped these 16 individuals with female participants in this study. We then compared non-male identifying individuals (N = 261) to male-identifying individuals (N = 244). Despite the small sample size for nonbinary individuals, seven out of 16 opted for the gender-fluid necklace, showing similar tendencies to women. Excluding these individuals and comparing only female to male participants does not change the results.

between traditional markers of femininity and femininity." Participants viewed the female (male) and gender-fluid necklaces on the same page, presented vertically. On the next page, we asked participants to choose between the two necklaces presented horizontally in randomized order (figure 9): "Below, we ask you to choose between the two necklaces. You will be entered into a lottery for your chosen necklace. That is, there is a chance you will win the necklace you choose to wear. Which necklace do you prefer to wear?"

FIGURE 9
NECKLACES

In the unrelated filler task, participants read product descriptions of two unrelated vintage products and rated them on some dimensions. In the scale completion task, we measured participants' awareness of male advantage in society (e.g., "Women are advantaged, and men are currently at a disadvantage" [reverse scored]; 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; 7 items presented in random order, α = .92; Case, 2007), need for uniqueness (e.g., "I am more likely to buy a product if it is scarce," 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, 5 items, α = .85; Lynn and Harris 1997), and variety-seeking tendency (e.g., "I am constantly seeking new ideas and

experiences," 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree, 5 items, α = .87; Olsen et al. 2016). Finally, participants could add an optional comment.

Results

Choice of Gender-Fluid Necklace. A chi-square test found that female and nonbinary participants were almost four times more likely to choose the gender-fluid necklace in the lottery (39.8%) than male participants (10.7%) ($\chi^2(1) = 54.70$, $p < .001$, $\varphi = 0.33$).[5]

Male Advantage Awareness. As expected, female and nonbinary participants reported greater awareness of male advantage ($M = 5.28$, SD = 1.37) than male participants ($M = 4.17$, SD = 1.47; $t(503) = 8.83$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.79$).

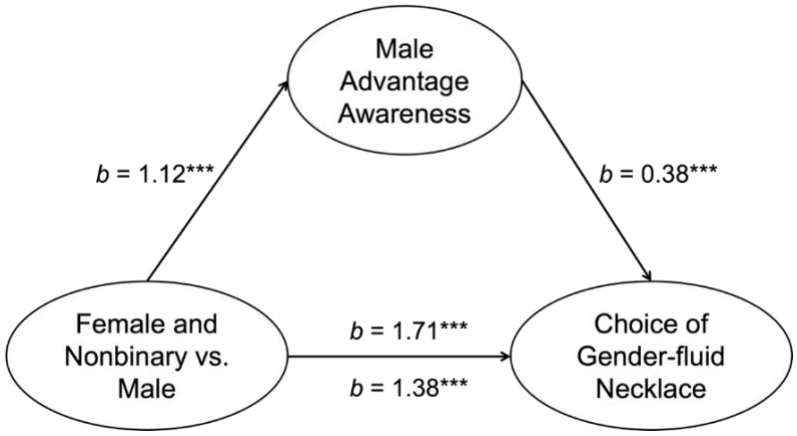
Mediation. A binary logistic regression revealed that male advantage awareness increased participants' likelihood of choosing gender-fluid products ($b = 0.53$, SE = 0.08, $z = 6.22$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.70$, 95% CI = [1.444, 2.016]) and a mediation analysis revealed the predicted significant indirect effect ($b = 0.42$, 95% CI = [0.231, 0.662], $p < .001$) (figure 10). In other words, female and nonbinary participants were more likely to choose the gender-fluid necklace because they were more aware of male advantage than male participants.

Need for Uniqueness and Variety Seeking. Female and nonbinary participants did not indicate a greater need for uniqueness ($M = 2.67$, SD = 0.95) than male participants ($M = 2.81$, SD = 0.99; $t(503) = 1.56$, $p = .119$, $d = 0.14$). Along the same lines, female and nonbinary participants also did not indicate greater variety seeking ($M = 3.91$, SD = 1.35) than male participants ($M = 4.05$, SD = 1.28; $t(503) = 1.24$, $p = .216$, $d = 0.11$). Finally, neither need for

[5] These results hold when comparing only female to male participants.

uniqueness (b = –0.17, SE = 0.11, z = –1.56, p = .118) nor variety seeking (b = –0.05, SE = 0.08, z = –0.69, p = .493) predicted the choice of the gender-fluid necklace.

FIGURE 10
MEDIATION THROUGH MALE ADVANTAGE AWARENESS



***p < .001. NOTE.—b = 1.71 is the direct effect of participant gender on choice of gender-fluid necklace, and b = 1.38 is the effect of participant gender on choice of gender-fluid necklace when we control for male advantage awareness.

Discussion

Using an incentive-compatible design, study 4 shows that female (and nonbinary) consumers are more likely to adopt gender-fluid products than male consumers because they are particularly aware of the benefits men's position in the social hierarchy confers upon them. In study 4b (web appendix E), we directly replicate this study's findings and explore the role of two additional plausible mechanisms: fear of negative evaluation and social dominance orientation.

In a parallel mediation, male advantage awareness and fear of negative evaluation were the only significant mediators. Although fear of negative evaluation helped explain reluctance among female and nonbinary participants to choose the gender-fluid product, it did not explain the behavior of male participants. In contrast, the male advantage awareness process positively predicted the choice of the gender-fluid product across all gender identities (though men had

lower levels overall). We leverage these findings for marketing implications and manipulate gender group advantage (study 5) and awareness of male advantage (study 6).

Moreover, study 4c (web appendix E) replicates study 4's main result even when every participant chooses among the men's, women's, and gender-fluid products. Even when a gender-bending option is available, women (and nonbinary individuals) are more likely to choose the gender-fluid product than men.

STUDY 5: MANIPULATING GENDER ADVANTAGE

Study 5 further examines the effects of gender hierarchy on the asymmetric adoption of gender-fluid products. We expect that in societies with female advantage, men should be the primary adopters of gender-fluid products. To this end, we use an incentive-compatible virtual game and manipulate whether female or male players are advantaged in the game. This study was preregistered https://aspredicted.org/Q2X_CR2.

Method

The study was a 2 (gender identity: male vs. female) × 2 (advantage: male advantage vs. female advantage) design. A total of 438[6] participants from Prolific Academic completed our survey, and 436 participants passed our preregistered attention check (48.2% female, M_{age} =

[6] We recruited a 50:50 ratio of male and female participants on Prolific Academic. Seven non-binary individuals completed the study, who we omitted from the analyses because our preregistration centered around male and female participants. Clustering the non-binary individuals with female participants in the male advantage condition and with male participants in the female advantage condition does not change the results.

35.1). Participants specified some demographic information (i.e., gender identity, age, nationality, and native language) and then read about a virtual reality game:

> "We are exploring decision-making and strategy in a virtual environment. You will participate in a virtual reality game called "Victory Island." In this game, you aim to earn as many points as possible by completing tasks and forming strategic alliances with other successful players. Forming the right alliances and doing well on the tasks can significantly increase your chances of earning bonus rewards at the end of the study (up to $0.10). You are about to enter Victory Island. Please choose an avatar to represent yourself" (figure 11).

FIGURE 11: AVATARS

Next, participants entered the first round of the game manipulating whether female or male players were advantaged in the game:

> "On Victory Island, female [male] players have certain advantages. For example,
> - Female [Male] players receive extra resources at the start of the game.
> - Alliances with female [male] players increase individual players' likelihood of success in the game by up to 50%.
> - Female [Male] players hold a protective shield that reduces penalties during adverse events in the game.
>
> To help form strategic alliances, you can choose one of the following accessories for your avatar as a signal to other players. Other players will recognize these signals when deciding who to form alliances with."

Participants then chose an accessory for their avatar. We used the same necklaces as in study 4a and labeled the products as women's, men's, and gender-fluid (i.e., omitting the word necklace from study 4, figure 9). Female [Male] participants could choose between a product

sold under the women's [men's] label and a product sold under the gender-fluid label (displayed in random order). We added the following explanation for the gender-fluid product:

> "Gender fluidity is an inclusive gender expression that fundamentally challenges the conventional associations between traditional markers of masculinity and masculinity and between traditional markers of femininity and femininity. The gender-fluid product is designed for all genders and fundamentally challenges traditional binary associations. To help form strategic alliances, choose one of the following accessories for your avatar to signal your strategic potential to other players."

To increase experimental realism, we added a filler task at the end that allowed participants to win another $0.05 bonus:

> "Congrats! Your alliance consists of four players, and you will receive a bonus of $0.05 for your alliance membership. Now, you can win another $0.05 bonus by completing the following task. You have 20 seconds to arrange the letters in the correct order: RUSIVORV.[7]"

On a separate page, we measured the effectiveness of our manipulation using two items, displayed in random order: "On Victory Island, men have privileges that women do not have." and "On Victory Island, women are advantaged, and men are at a disadvantage (reverse coded)." (1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree; $r = 0.83$). On the following pages, we included an attention check ("The virtual reality game took place on: Victory Island / Mountain Castle"), assessed participants' ownership of chains or necklaces ("Do you own ANY chain or necklace? Yes / No")[8], and allowed participants to enter optional comments.

Results

[7] In total, 285 participants correctly ordered the letters into the word "SURVIVOR" and won the additional bonus.
[8] In total, 335 participants (91.5% of female participants and 63.1% of male participants) indicated that they own a chain or necklace, and 101 indicated that they do not. Controlling for necklace ownership does not affect our results.

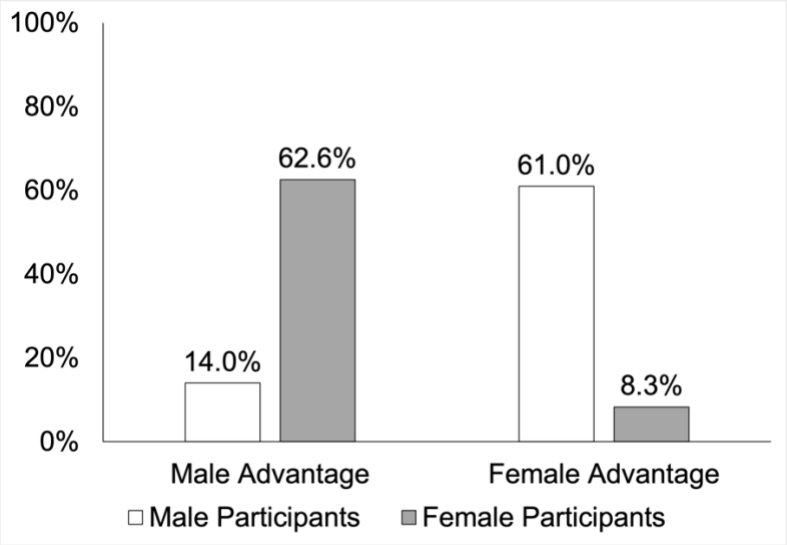
The manipulation check confirmed the effectiveness of our manipulation; participants rated Victory Island higher on advantaging male players in the male (M = 6.51, SD = 1.02) than in the female advantage condition (M = 2.00, SD = 1.12; $t(434) = 43.89$, $p < .001$).

As preregistered, we first ran a binary logistic regression of participants' gender identity (male = 0, female = 1) and advantage condition (male advantage = 0, female advantage = 1) on the choice of the gender-fluid accessory. In the first step, we entered the main effects and found neither a significant effect of gender identity (b = –0.04, SE = 0.20, z = –0.19, p = .850) nor advantage condition (b = –0.08, SE = 0.20, z = –0.40, p = .689). In the second step, we entered the interaction term and found the expected significant interaction (b = –5.18, SE = 0.54, z = –9.67, $p < .001$; figure 12).

In the female advantage condition, male participants were significantly more likely to choose the gender-fluid option (61.0%) than female participants (8.3%; $\chi^2(1) = 60.54$, V = 0.53). Conversely, in the male advantage condition, female participants chose the gender-fluid option (62.6%) more often than male participants (14.0%; $\chi^2(1) = 52.89$, V = 0.49).

Overall, male participants were more than four times as likely to choose the gender-fluid option when female players were advantaged (61.0%) than when male players were advantaged (14.0%; $\chi^2(1) = 50.30$, V = 0.49). Similarly, female players were more than seven times as likely to choose the gender-fluid option when male players were advantaged (62.6%) than when female players were advantaged (8.3%; $\chi^2(1) = 63.19$, V = 0.55).

FIGURE 12: CHOICE OF GENDER-FLUID ACCESSORY BY ADVANTAGE CONDITION



Discussion

Study 5 allowed us to manipulate which gender group has advantages in a virtual game. As predicted, when female players were advantaged, male players were the primary adopters of gender-fluid products, and when male players were advantaged, female players were the primary adopters of gender-fluid products. Marketers can leverage these findings by highlighting male advantages when incentivizing women to adopt gender-fluid products and by highlighting female advantages when incentivizing men to adopt gender-fluid products.

STUDY 6: RAISING MALE ADVANTAGE AWARENESS AMONG MEN

Study 6 examines how marketers can promote gender-fluid products to male-identifying consumers who appear more reluctant to adopt these products by raising awareness of their advantage. We create two advertisements for the gender-fluid necklace from studies 4 and 5 and

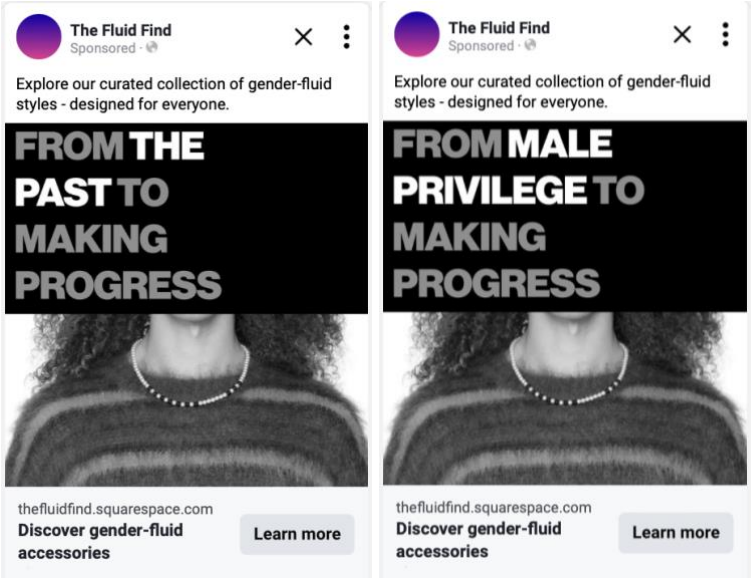
post them on Facebook and Instagram. The goal is to examine which advertisement performs best in a targeted environment (Braun and Schwartz 2024). We use Meta's Ads Manager Split (A/B) Test to compare the effectiveness of different versions of the advertisement on click-through rates (CTRs). Consistent with our theorizing, we expect that raising male advantage awareness in gender-fluid advertising increases male-identifying consumers' engagement.

Method

We pretested two ads manipulating male advantage awareness on Prolific Academic (N = 185, 97.8% male, M_{age} = 35.7; full details in web appendix F). Both ads (figure 13) scored moderately on realism ($M_{collapsed}$ = 4.11, SD = 1.65) and were rated similarly to the midpoint of the scale ($t(184) = .91$, $p = .366$) (Paharia 2020). Importantly, the male privilege ad was rated significantly higher on raising male advantage awareness (M = 3.80, SD = 1.73) than the control ad (M = 2.44, 1.41; $t(183) = 5.83$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.86$): "To what extent does the advertisement raise awareness of male privilege in society?" (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much).

On Meta, both ads were launched by the page "The Fluid Find" and featured the same primary text ("Explore our curated collection of gender-fluid styles – designed for everyone"), headline ("Discover gender-fluid accessories"), and call to action ("Learn more"). We randomly assigned users to see only one of the two ads. To reach users potentially curious about the product, we targeted male U.S. users aged 18–40 years with the following interests: "Clothing (clothing)," "Fashion accessories (accessories)," and "Jewelry (apparel)" (for full targeting and ad specification information, see web appendix F).

FIGURE 13: FACEBOOK POST ADVERTISEMENTS



We decided in advance to run the ad campaign for four days, with the intent to reach as many people as possible during this time frame. Each copy had a lifetime budget of up to $150 (and we spent a total of $202.73). Users who clicked on the ad were directed to a website with a link where consumers could purchase the advertised product and an Institutional Review Board–approved study debrief (www.thefluidfind.squarespace.com). Our dependent variables were the ratio of unique link clicks to impression and the ratio of unique link clicks to reach. While impressions count how often an ad is displayed – regardless of whether it is shown several times to an identical user – reach measures the total number of unique users who see the ad.

Results

Impressions. Our advertisement made 30,581 impressions in total and the overall CTR was 2.34%. As hypothesized, the male advantage awareness ad was significantly more effective

(CTR = 4.30%; cost per result = $0.21) than the control ad (CTR = 1.21%; cost per result = $0.43; $\chi^2(1) = 296.09$, $p < .001$).

Reach. We reached 18,233 users in total and the overall CTR was 3.92%. When using reach instead of impressions, the male advantage awareness ad remained significantly more effective (CTR = 6.12%) than the control ad (CTR = 2.27%; $\chi^2(1) = 176.17$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

Study 6 used a real-world setting to test the effectiveness of advertising gender-fluid products to men. As hypothesized, raising awareness of male advantage boosted the engagement of male consumers.[9] We acknowledge that the complexities of Meta's A/B testing and optimization processes could have affected our results. For example, if one ad performs better in an A/B test, it is uncertain whether the result is due to overall performance or better optimization (Gordon, Moakler, and Zettelmeyer 2023). In addition, ads posted on Facebook and Instagram are "live" and could be liked, commented, and shared, which could introduce endogeneity issues. The results of A/B split tests must be interpreted as the combined effect of ad content and targeting (Braun and Schwartz 2024). Despite these limitations, this A/B test on social media offers high external validity and allows partially addressing potential social desirability issues when measuring male advantage awareness.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

[9] Prior research on white privilege has identified three potential response strategies when advantaged group members are confronted with their privilege: denial of their group's privilege, distancing themselves from their group and its privileges, or dismantling and challenging their group's privilege (Knowles et al. 2014). In this study, the framing of the advertisement as a call "to making progress" may have evoked dismantling responses.

Although gender-fluid products have gained momentum in the marketplace in response to the need for greater gender inclusivity (Thomas 2021), we leverage data on over 100,000 names and 250,000 clothing products to reveal imbalances toward conventionally male markers in gender-fluid names and gendered clothing products. A series of lab experiments demonstrates that women are not only less represented in gender-fluid tastes and styles but also more willing to emulate men by adopting these tastes and styles. This asymmetric adoption behavior does not systematically extend to other forms of gender-nonconforming expressions and is driven by women's heightened awareness of male advantages in society. Building on these findings, a field study on social media shows that raising men's advantage awareness in advertising increases their engagement with gender-fluid products.

Theoretical Contributions

This work responds to recent calls to study the fuller spectra of gender phenomena (Dobscha 2019; Peñaloza et al. 2023) by establishing a clear definition of gender fluidity as it pertains to marketing and consumption and by differentiating gender fluidity from similar but conceptually distinct gender-nonconforming constructs, including gender-bending, unisex, and androgyny (Avery 2012; Bem and Lewis 1975; Lieven and Hildebrand 2016; Van Tilburg et al. 2015). We clarify the unique adoption patterns underlying gender-fluid trends compared with other forms of gender nonconformity.

Importantly, this research integrates the literature on gender in marketing and sociology (Coleman et al. 2021; Dobscha 2019; Peñaloza et al. 2023) and privilege in psychology

(Knowles et al. 2014; Phillips and Lowery 2018; Pratto and Stewart 2012) by exploring how a novel mechanism – male advantage and its corresponding awareness – shapes consumer behavior within gender-fluid trends. We show that, due to the traditional privileging of the male gender in most societies, the historically disadvantaged groups (e.g., females) are not only less represented in gender-fluid tastes and styles but also more willing to emulate the more historically advantaged group (i.e., males) by adopting these tastes and styles. As an ironic consequence, by moving toward the male gender through their adoption of gender-fluid tastes and styles, women inadvertently reinforce the male-centeredness prevalent in societies around the world. By the same token, men's relative reluctance to adopt gender-fluid styles also reinforces male-centeredness. These findings suggest the persistence of male-centeredness even in a marketplace practice that supposedly aims to *reduce* gender inequality.

We demonstrate that simply raising men's awareness about their advantage makes them more willing to engage with gender fluidity in the marketplace. This intervention provides marketers with a useful tool to help address the uneven adoption of gender-fluid products and contributes to recent work on nudges through A/B testing (Hardisty and Weber 2020). Last, this work expands the traditional toolkit of consumer behavior research by employing deep learning and applying a residual CNN on a data set of more than 250,000 products.

Future Research

Several important possibilities for future research arise from our findings. First, examining how gender fluidity will further evolve would be a fruitful direction. With the public

endorsement of gender fluidity by popular celebrities and iconic brands just beginning, gender fluidity will likely become even more widespread in the future.

Second, future research could explore whether our findings extend to more geographic, ideological, and identity contexts. For example, how do consumers in more matrilineal and gynocentric societies, such as the Khasi in India, engage with gender-fluid products? How do consumers of different political ideologies engage with gender fluidity? Work in progress on how political ideology shapes consumer response to historically underrepresented identities in marketing communications suggests that conservatives may react less favorably to gender-fluid products than liberals (Haltman et al. 2024). Similarly, one of our preliminary tests revealed a positive correlation between liberalism and male advantage awareness. We encourage researchers to examine how political ideology interacts with our findings. Along the same lines, researchers could explore how our results intersect with other domains of identity (e.g., ethnicity, age, social class). For example, building on research suggesting that higher individual-level status is associated with more autonomy, future studies could examine whether high-status men are more prone to adopt gender fluidity than low-status men (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014). Similarly, researchers could draw from work on the interactions between racial and gender stereotypes and examine whether our findings are amplified among Blacks who tend to be more associated with masculinity than Whites and Asians (Galinsky, Hall, and Cuddy 2013).

Third, while our work focuses primarily on names and fashion, as these are core domains of gender expression (Entwistle 2023), future research could explore the adoption and representation of gender fluidity in other domains, such as food and beverages, automotive, beauty, technology, entertainment, and health care. Understanding how diverse industries

incorporate gender fluidity into product design, marketing communication, and brand positioning would provide an even more comprehensive understanding of its impact on consumer behavior.

Last, future research could explore how consumers who express themselves gender-fluidly are perceived. For example, initial findings from our exploratory study suggest that, in line with our key findings, male consumers who use gender-fluid products are perceived as less cool than female and nonbinary consumers engaging in the same type of consumption. Future work could explore boundary conditions and process evidence for these preliminary results. On a broader note, our work opens a new research stream in marketing for considering the full spectrum of gender expressions beyond the traditional gender binary.

Practical Implications

Our work has an important takeaway for marketers. Given that the current asymmetry of gender fluidity in the marketplace counters consumers' normative beliefs (i.e., the extent to which traditionally male and female styles *should* be represented), marketers might face potential backlash and criticism in the future if this asymmetry comes to light. To turn this into a market opportunity, marketers could be more mindful and work to ensure a more even inclusion of different styles in their gender-fluid products, collections, and brands. We demonstrate an effective alternative to skewing gender-fluid products and collections toward traditionally male styles in the field: Marketers can raise awareness of male advantage when promoting gender fluidity to male consumers, which increases this segment's engagement with gender-fluid products.

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