

## GENDER FLUIDITY IN CONTEMPORARY MENSWEAR: A DELEUZIAN ANALYSIS AND GEN Z NARRATIVES

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### ABSTRACT

*The market identity for menswear is undergoing a significant transformation toward a more diverse and inclusive range of options, primarily due to the rise of gender-fluid fashion. Research indicates that menswear evolves to offer a greater variety of gender-fluid and diverse clothing choices for the average male consumer, reflecting a shift in fashion consumption and expressions of masculinity. Notable trends reshaping the fashion landscape include the embrace of gender-flexible fashion and the rejection of toxic masculinity among Generation Z (Gen Z) men. The research aims to explore the trend of gender fluidity in contemporary menswear through a Deleuzian lens. It focuses on applying the theory of the senses and the concept of “becoming” based on the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The analysis centers around a fashion design project titled Soul Equilibrium, which serves as the case study. Deleuzian theory is employed to examine the relationship between trend fluidity and changes in gender performativity as expressed through fashion. Qualitative data are gathered through observations, interviews, and literature reviews, with respondents selected through purposive sampling. These respondents include experts and individuals actively engaged in fashion. Key findings reveal that the intersection of gender-fluid fashion and performativity fosters a dynamic relationship among fashion, identity, and societal norms. Gender-fluid fashion emerges as a significant indicator of changing gender performativity in society. The concept of gender performativity highlights how individuals actively construct their gender identity through behavior and self-expression. The results of the research advocate for greater social acceptance and inclusivity within society.*

**Keywords:** gender-fluid fashion, menswear, Deleuzian theory, gender performativity

### INTRODUCTION

Gender-fluid fashion emerges as a significant trend in menswear over the past five years, characterized by a growing variety of product options that blur traditional gender boundaries (Martin, 2021). This trend signifies a broader evolution in men's fashion, allowing individuals to experiment with and express their identities in innovative ways (Athill & Bowstead, 2021). The fashion industry increasingly features designs that challenge conventional gender norms, marking a shift away from the historical segregation of clothing lines for women and men (Martin, 2021). This movement sparks sociological research aimed at

understanding how fashion professionals make gender fluidity more visible within an industry that has long categorized clothing strictly by gender (Misslin, 2020). Ultimately, this trend further dissolves the binary distinctions between male and female clothing categories.

The concept of gender-fluid fashion challenges traditional binary gender stereotypes in clothing for both men and women (Kushchuk, 2021). It involves incorporating characteristics typically associated with the opposite gender into one's appearance and dressing style. An example of gender fluidity appears in the inclusion of feminine elements in modern menswear, resulting in a redefinition of the rules and boundaries

that define contemporary men's fashion. This shift demonstrates how gender expression in clothing evolves beyond rigid categorizations, reflecting a broader acceptance of diversity in identity and aesthetics.

The introduction of gender-fluid fashion trends in menswear over the past five years represents a significant shift toward more inclusive and diverse clothing options for men. This movement challenges traditional notions of masculinity and gender norms, allowing individuals greater freedom of expression through their fashion choices. The trend aligns with broader societal changes that promote gender equality and inclusivity (Fernández et al., 2021). Furthermore, the acceptance of gender-fluid concepts in the menswear fashion industry reflects a changing perception of masculinity and a reevaluation of conventional gender norms. This trend not only impacts the fashion landscape but also has broader implications for social norms and the expression of individual identity.

The process of incorporating traditionally feminine elements into menswear, and vice versa, challenges conventional gender boundaries in clothing. Furthermore, the current trend of gender fluidity is closely linked to androgynous styles and existing unisex clothing designs. This trend demonstrates that androgynous fashion, gender-fluid clothing, and unisex designs are interconnected, reflecting the evolving landscape of fashion and gender expression (Buentello et al., 2023). This interconnection signifies an ongoing transformation within the fashion industry, where inclusivity and individuality become central aspects of design and self-representation.

This phenomenon is attributed to the blending of masculine and feminine elements within a single appearance through androgynous styles, which have maintained a significant presence in fashion for decades (Lautama et al., 2022). Such styles facilitate the acceptance of gender fluidity by challenging traditional norms and promoting a more inclusive approach to clothing choices (W. Githapradana et al., 2024). Additionally, they play a crucial role in dismantling the rigid boundaries of binary gender oppositions, thereby fostering a sense of fluidity in fashion (D. M. W. Githapradana, 2022). This blending of styles contributes to a more dynamic understanding of fashion as an evolving form of cultural expression that reflects social progress and identity transformation.

The gender-fluid fashion trend challenges the conventional gender binary, resulting in a growing number of brands that offer unisex fashion designs. Unisex fashion is characterized by its inclusive design concept, which is acceptable to all gender identities. This approach, often referred to as gender-neutral fashion, features designs that are neither distinctly feminine nor masculine. It connects with the gender-fluid fashion trend by providing clothing options that go beyond traditional norms, allowing individuals to express their identities authentically.

The rise of gender-fluid trends in menswear

is driven by changes in market demands and tastes (Martin, 2021). Notably, the menswear fashion market is undergoing a significant transformation, aiming to offer more diverse and inclusive options. Previous research indicates that menswear is evolving to incorporate a broader range of gender-fluid designs, reflecting shifts in fashion consumption and expressions of masculinity. This transformation emphasizes style and the exploration of new definitions of masculinity, enabling men to express their identities in innovative ways (Bowstead, 2018). Furthermore, the menswear market is increasingly moving beyond traditional biological sex distinctions, as contemporary understandings of gender are less aligned with old-fashioned market segmentation strategies (Pohlmann & Chen, 2020).

The acceptance of gender fluidity in the mainstream male market group is debatable. This is because of the hesitation from a marketing standpoint to explore gender fluidity in fashion, given concerns about mainstream consumer acceptance (Boyd et al., 2020). However, there is a growing recognition of the importance of inclusive identities and the need to reimagine retail brands to accommodate diverse expressions of human sexuality (Boyd et al., 2020). The observation is supported by previous research indicating that gender factors significantly influence the fashion market, leading to the implementation of different marketing strategies and changes in consumer perception (Talaat, 2022).

The development of gender-fluid fashion for men is closely linked to changes in the mindset, perceptions, and behaviors of modern men. Several factors influence the acceptance of gender-fluid fashion trends, including issues of gender inclusivity, individual identity expression, and evolving societal norms. As fashion evolves towards gender fluidity, it fosters a more inclusive environment where the traditional distinctions between masculine and feminine clothing are blurred. This shift enables men to explore a wider variety of styles and express their identities more freely (Athill & Bowstead, 2021). The acceptance of feminine elements in men's clothing also represents an effort to challenge and redefine traditional gender norms and stereotypes.

Generation Z (Gen Z) plays a crucial role in shaping the gender-fluid fashion trend in menswear. This influence stems from their emphasis on sustainability, digital engagement, and their unique characteristics (Bagdi et al., 2023). Given their substantial market impact, Gen Z is a promising and influential consumer group for the future of the fashion industry. Therefore, brands and industry stakeholders need to understand and address the preferences and values of this group to remain relevant and successful in the evolving fashion market. This generational influence highlights how shifts in cultural attitudes and technological engagement redefine how masculinity and self-expression are communicated through fashion.

Gen Z is poised to become a significant market

due to several key factors identified in previous research. Their growing influence on demand, particularly concerning sustainability and circular economy practices, is noteworthy (Gazzola et al., 2020). This generation prioritizes ethical behavior, humanist values, and environmental impact, leading to a preference for sustainable consumption (Kara & Min, 2024). Their emphasis on sustainability aligns with the increasing trend toward eco-friendly and socially responsible fashion practices.

Additionally, distinct characteristics of Gen Z—such as high levels of social interaction and a unique perspective on health and aesthetics—affect their fashion consumption preferences (Istijanto & Handoko, 2022). These values and behaviors are reshaping the fashion landscape by compelling brands to adapt to their evolving tastes and demands. This adaptation process encourages greater innovation in design, marketing, and production strategies within the fashion industry to remain relevant to this socially conscious demographic.

Gen Z's sensitivity to sustainability, ethical considerations, and humanistic values facilitates the acceptance of fluid clothing styles, free from traditional gender stereotypes (Hwang & Zhao, 2022). This trend towards gender-fluid fashion and the rejection of toxic masculinity is reshaping the fashion industry. There is an increasing openness among Gen Z men towards gender-fluid fashion, challenging conventional norms and promoting diverse and inclusive expressions of individual identity (Huang et al., 2023).

This shift represents a broader movement towards hybrid masculinity profiles, where Gen Z men favor brands that offer inclusive and diverse narratives (Huang et al., 2023). Moreover, the unique characteristics of this market group, including digital savviness and openness to new ideas, enhance the potential for adopting gender-fluid fashion (Bagdi et al., 2023). These factors make Gen Z a transformative force in redefining the boundaries of menswear and establishing a foundation for the long-term normalization of gender-fluid fashion.

Toxic masculinity, characterized by aggressive competition and dominance, is actively resisted by Gen Z men who aim to redefine masculinity more positively and inclusively. This resistance is rooted in the belief that rejecting toxic masculinity is essential for promoting mental health and well-being among men, particularly within Generation Z. As a result, the acceptance of gender-fluid fashion and the rejection of toxic masculinity represent significant contributions from Gen Z men to a more inclusive and diverse fashion landscape that encourages self-expression and originality.

The openness to gender-fluid fashion trends signals a shift in traditional values of masculinity toward a contemporary understanding (Pan, 2023). Furthermore, the emergence of gender fluidity in menswear indicates changes in societal perceptions of gender performativity. These changes suggest that masculinity is no longer defined by rigid standards

but instead by personal authenticity and freedom of expression, marking a critical evolution in how men relate to fashion and identity.

Previous studies on gender fluidity in fashion have mainly concentrated on aesthetic design elements and consumer perceptions. However, they have not sufficiently explored the intersection between the representation of gender-fluid menswear and the narratives of Generation Z. This generation is navigating identity and gender performativity beyond binary frameworks. While existing research often emphasizes androgynous styles, visual ambiguity, or social acceptance, it frequently overlooks the cultural and generational factors that shape the reception of gender-fluid fashion. Additionally, scholarly investigations into how designers' creative practices serve as a medium for challenging traditional gender norms within the contemporary market context remain limited. There is thus a significant gap in linking gender-fluid fashion with the evolving narratives of identity among younger generations, particularly Generation Z.

The current research analyzes fashion as a medium for representing changes in gender performativity. It examines the dressing styles of modern men, specifically Gen Z, beyond the boundaries of traditional masculinity and gender binaries through visual elements in clothing. This trend positions fashion as a nonverbal medium that reflects changes and shifts in societal values regarding gender performativity. To facilitate this analysis, the concept of sensory perception, rooted in Deleuzian theory, is employed to explore gender-fluid trends in menswear, focusing on the evolution of the conventional gender binary. This theoretical framework enables a deeper understanding of how sensory experiences and material expressions influence gender identity construction in fashion.

The primary objective is to determine the relationship between contemporary gender-fluid fashion trends in menswear and changes in gender performativity. Additionally, the study aims to assess how visual appearance and dressing styles can express a more inclusive and dynamic identity, particularly for Gen Z men. The research focuses on the contemporary menswear collection titled "Soul Equilibrium" from the Xander G brand, selected for its embodiment of gender fluidity in its design style. Consequently, the research examines the trends of gender fluidity in the "Soul Equilibrium" collection using Deleuzian perception, sensory theory, and the concept of "becoming."

## METHODS

The research discusses fashion as a means of communicating individual identities, particularly in relation to gender. Fashion is seen as a social product that conveys meaning and influences interactions, highlighting its role as a form of expression. The symbols and signs associated with clothing are best

understood through the body's interaction with them. This perspective is informed by the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, particularly their ideas on sensory experiences and the concept of becoming, which help to clarify the relationship between clothing and the body.

The Deleuzian approach is rooted in post-structuralist philosophy and reevaluates contemporary fashion in relation to the body and sensory responses (Wang & Kim, 2020). Deleuze and Guattari propose concepts that encourage new experiments with clothing while also exploring the connections between clothing, the human body, and the identity of the wearer. This approach emphasizes that fashion is not a static phenomenon but a continuous process of transformation, where sensory experiences and bodily engagement play an essential role in shaping identity and perception.

Fashion functions as a social phenomenon, often reshaping societal images. This stems from the ability of clothing to represent a mood, serve as an outward mask, or reflect the authentic personality of the wearer (Chira, 2022). Individuals use clothing to assert their identity during social interactions through visual symbols. Preferences in clothing choices reflect the best way to project one's personality to the world, whether it is embracing self-acceptance, concealing a vulnerable aspect of oneself, or adopting a predefined social role, depending on the context.

Deleuzian theory, developed by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, is highly relevant to the discussion of gender fluidity in fashion trends, particularly in contemporary menswear. This theory offers a framework for exploring the relationship between gender fluidity and its expression through appearance. Key indicators of this relevance include the non-binary perception of gender, the concept of the rhizomatic body, embodied sensation and affect, processes of becoming and transformation, and affectivity and subjectivity.

Deleuze exemplifies a philosophical approach that rejects conventional and rigid binaries, as well as fixed identities. He argues that gender-related identity does not have to be constrained by binary concepts; instead, it can be fluid, layered, and constantly evolving (Perger, 2024). This framework is pertinent to gender fluidity in contemporary fashion trends, particularly in menswear, which extends beyond traditional masculine and feminine categories to create a more inclusive space for expression (Fernández et al., 2021).

The rhizome concept in Deleuzian theory represents a non-hierarchical and multidimensional structure, where each part is connected in a non-linear fashion (Pham & Bright, 2022). The rhizomatic body is characterized by its lack of a center and its detachment from fixed structures. Gender identity, like other identities, can be understood as a network of expressions, experiences, and relationships that evolve with society. Thus, gender identity aligns with the rhizomatic body by rejecting the rigid boundaries

typically associated with the feminine and masculine dualism. This trend opens up opportunities for individuals to express their identity by incorporating elements from various gender identities, without being confined to restrictive social norms.

In Deleuzian terms, the body serves as an "experimental field" for sensing the world. It is described as an entity that "feels" the world through sensation and bodily experience, encompassing not just rational perception but also intensity and emotion. Gender-fluid fashion is viewed as a tool for transforming the body into a platform for expression and experimentation. Thus, the concepts of embodied sensation and affect within Deleuzian thought provide a solid philosophical foundation for understanding how gender-fluid fashion functions as a visual expression and a medium for conveying emotions, as well as affective and sensory experiences that transcend traditional gender identity boundaries.

Deleuzian theory rejects rigid binary concepts, illustrated by the idea of becoming. This view is based on the argument that identity, especially in the context of gender, is fluid, unstable, and constantly evolving. This process is often referred to as "becoming" rather than "being" (Cheded & Liu, 2022). The concept of "becoming" and transformation in Deleuzian theory offers a dynamic and non-binary perspective for understanding identity and expression, particularly within the realm of gender-fluid fashion. It underscores that fashion is not merely about appearance but also about an ongoing process of transformation that reflects evolving cultural and individual perceptions.

Deleuzian theory also expresses the processes of affection and the formation of subjectivity. Affection highlights how emotional and sensory experiences shape subjectivity (Atkinson, 2024). In relation to gender fluidity, this suggests that menswear can be designed to express affect and feelings without being confined to masculine stereotypes. The theory illustrates affection as the energy or intensity that the body experiences before formulating a specific emotion. It also emphasizes the body's capacity to act and be affected in relational contexts. This trend indicates that affection extends beyond mere emotion to encompass the body's potential for experience and change. Furthermore, Deleuze regards subjectivity as a constantly evolving concept, not a fixed one, produced through interactions with the world.

The research utilizes qualitative methods to explore the concept, meaning, and context of gender fluidity within the menswear fashion collection known as *Soul Equilibrium*. The research focuses on the experiences, perceptions, and interactions between design and users to gain deeper insights. Data are collected using triangulation methods, including observation, literature reviews, and interviews, to ensure validity and reliability while providing a comprehensive representation of the research subject.

The observation aims to identify the phenomenon of gender-fluid trends in menswear design, concentrating on their production, use, and



acceptance by users. This method facilitates an empirical understanding of how design functions in a real context through visual observations of elements representing gender fluidity. The observation process also provides insight into how audiences perceive and interpret gender-fluid characteristics within contemporary menswear presentations.

The literature review analyzes academic references, design theories, trends, and previous research on gender-fluid fashion, particularly in menswear. This approach establishes a strong theoretical framework for the research, supporting a more in-depth analysis. Data on the relationship between the development of the gender-fluid trend and the perceptions of Gen Z user groups are collected and analyzed using Deleuzian theory.

In-depth interviews are conducted with experts, designers, users, and relevant individuals who possess deep insights into the field. This method allows for the exploration of perceptions, experiences, and ideas that cannot be captured through observation or literature review. Respondents are selected through purposive sampling, focusing on expert designers with over five years of experience in the Indonesian fashion industry and a solid understanding of menswear trend development. Additionally, hyper-users are chosen based on specific criteria, including being Gen Z, male, aged between 20 and 25 years, pursuing careers in the creative industry, and having a dynamic and expressive approach to fashion. A total of ten students from the Faculty of Creative Industry at Ciputra University Surabaya, classified as the Gen Z age group, are ultimately selected as respondents. The selection is based on their direct involvement in the creative world and their openness to progressive fashion developments.

To apply Deleuzian theory, the research employs the concepts of "rhizomatic mapping" and "assemblage" as analytical frameworks. During data collection, in-depth interviews with Gen Z participants are designed to elicit fluid and non-linear narratives regarding their sartorial choices and gender expressions. These narratives are analyzed through a rhizomatic approach, tracing connections between fragments of experiences, fashion practices, and cultural references without imposing hierarchical categories. The concept of "assemblage" is further utilized to interpret the interplay between the *Soul Equilibrium* collection, Gen Z narratives, and broader socio-cultural discourses. This approach enables a more dynamic and non-binary understanding of gender performativity in contemporary menswear.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The case study focuses on the menswear collection titled *Soul Equilibrium*, which launches in December 2023 during the Spotlight Indonesia event by the Xander G brand. This collection features twelve designs and represents an Indonesian fashion

label that promotes the concept of gender fluidity. *The Soul Equilibrium* collection aims to explore the balance between masculinity and femininity within contemporary styles while emphasizing inclusivity and the redefinition of gender norms in menswear.

The collection challenges traditional gender boundaries in fashion by showcasing soft silhouettes combined with strong structures. *Soul Equilibrium* embodies a harmonious blend of strength and softness in modern aesthetics, offering a distinctive look for men who wish to express their personality beyond conventional norms. It highlights the creative integration of textures, forms, and materials to convey gender balance as a central visual and conceptual theme.



Figure 1 *Soul Equilibrium* Fashion Collection

Figure 1 presents the documentation of the *Soul Equilibrium* collection, showcased at the Spotlight Indonesia event. This collection is analyzed in relation to gender fluidity through storytelling and detailed observation of visual elements such as color, material, texture, cut, shape, silhouette, motif, and styling. Gender fluidity is expressed through a deliberate blend of these visual elements, which blur the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, resulting in a harmonious balance of style. Every design aspect—from color and material to texture, cut, shape, and styling—contributes to the narrative of freedom of expression beyond traditional gender norms, highlighting the collection's conceptual depth and artistic intent.

The *Soul Equilibrium* collection features an achromatic color palette dominated by black, white, and hints of gray. The interplay between these colors symbolizes feminine and masculine characteristics. White represents softness, purity, and transparency, traits frequently associated with femininity. In contrast, black reflects strength, assertiveness, and mystery, attributes traditionally linked to masculinity..

According to color psychologist Faber Birren, "White is often associated with light, purity, and new beginnings, while black reflects firmness, authority, and emotional depth" (Birren, 1961). The deliberate choice of these two colors in the *Soul Equilibrium* collection is both aesthetically appealing and symbolically significant, representing the balance between masculine and feminine energy and closely aligning with the theme of gender fluidity. This thoughtful color selection demonstrates how visual elements can communicate identity and emotion in fashion, reinforcing the conceptual narrative of gender-fluid expression throughout the collection.

The transparency of the white cotton fabric used in the collection conveys fragility and freedom that transcends conventional rules, while black accents in the layering and structure emphasize boldness in identity expression. This combination produces a visual harmony between softness and strength, further redefining gender meaning in contemporary fashion. Together, these design choices highlight the collection's commitment to balancing aesthetic appeal with conceptual storytelling, illustrating how materials and structure can embody the fluidity of gender identity.

Grey functions as a neutral color representing a blend of feminine and masculine traits. The *Soul Equilibrium* collection embodies androgyny—neither entirely feminine nor completely masculine, but a nuanced mix of both. Grey symbolizes balance, calmness, and flexibility, reflecting the collection's core theme of gender fluidity. As noted in *The Little Book of Colour*, Karen Haller identifies grey as a color of compromise that lacks the strong emotional connotations of black or white, representing impartiality and balance (Haller, 2019). This quality makes grey an ideal choice for representing identities that transcend traditional gender dichotomies. In *Soul Equilibrium*, grey conveys a smooth transition between masculine and feminine elements, presenting a soft yet structured aesthetic that embodies freedom of expression beyond conventional gender boundaries.

The textural elements in the *Soul Equilibrium* collection also illustrate gender fluidity. The use of transparent textures in menswear conveys a feminine impression, adding a touch of softness, sensuality, and subtle allure. This creates a light and flowy visual effect, highlighting a delicate and fragile side that contrasts with the conventional view of masculinity, which is often seen as more assertive and rigid. These textural choices reinforce the collection's aim to blend masculine and feminine elements seamlessly, providing a tactile representation of gender fluidity in

fashion..

An interview with expert fashion designer Aldrie Indrayana reveals that transparency carries multiple layers of meaning. First, it showcases the sensuality of the body, reflecting an aesthetic appreciation of form and movement. Second, it expresses inherent sensitivity, capturing emotional and individual expression. This perspective emphasizes that transparent materials are not merely used to expose the physical body but to communicate the wearer's inner emotional world. Fabrics such as sheer cotton and organza represent gender fluidity, symbolizing a balance between strength and tenderness in modern menswear, free from rigid gender restrictions, while inviting nuanced interpretations of identity through clothing.

Nylon and leather materials symbolize masculine characteristics due to their thick, robust, and non-transparent structures. In contrast, transparent fabrics embody feminine softness and sensuality. While nylon and leather convey firmness, protection, and durability—traits traditionally associated with masculinity—transparent materials evoke a gentler aesthetic.

Bonnie English, in her book *A Cultural History of Fashion* in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, notes that "fabrics with structural integrity, such as leather and technical textiles, have long been associated with strength and protection, reinforcing a sense of authority and power" (English, 2013). In the context of the *Soul Equilibrium* collection, these materials are used to achieve a balance between soft and hard elements, creating a compelling exploration of gender fluidity. The designs highlight contrasts in texture and form, allowing garments to convey both strength and vulnerability simultaneously. This approach emphasizes how fashion can challenge traditional notions of gender while remaining visually striking and conceptually rich.

The blend of nylon and leather with transparent materials in the collection illustrates how fashion can challenge traditional perceptions of gender. The sturdy texture of the masculine materials contrasts with the softness of the transparent fabrics, resulting in a harmonious integration of two typically opposing characteristics. This process leads to a perfect combination of both concepts in *Soul Equilibrium*, demonstrating that contrasting materials can coexist to create a cohesive and innovative design. It highlights the designer's intentional play with texture and perception, encouraging viewers to reconsider rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity in fashion.

The pieces in the collection adapt elements of contemporary tailoring while incorporating a freer, more flexible structure. The silhouettes are not restricted to strict masculine lines; instead, they allow for fluidity through variations in volume, asymmetry, and drapery, which creates a dynamic effect. Bold structural cuts, oversized silhouettes, and bulky volumes contribute to a strong masculine impression. However, they are balanced by gathering details and

soft, flowing draperies—elements traditionally linked to feminine aesthetics.

The concept of gender fluidity in the *Soul Equilibrium* collection is further emphasized through styling, a crucial component that combines both masculine and feminine attributes. The collection embodies an androgynous style, which occupies a space that is neither entirely masculine nor feminine but exists somewhere in between. This combination reflects a broader acceptance of gender in fashion and illustrates how clothing can serve as a means of expression, free from traditional boundaries. By carefully balancing elements from both ends of the gender spectrum, the collection creates a visual narrative that challenges conventional expectations and celebrates individuality.

Androgynous fashion challenges the traditional binary view of gender by providing a platform for fluid and self-expressive identities. Fashion designer Raegita Oktora highlights this perspective, noting that the styling in the *Soul Equilibrium* collection features a playful use of layering with both transparent and solid materials, oversized tailoring combined with drapery and ruffle elements, and minimalist accessories that are not associated with a specific gender. This approach celebrates freedom of expression in fashion, allowing individuals to choose appearances that reflect their identities without being constrained by conventional gender norms. It encourages experimentation and supports a culture where personal style is a reflection of self rather than societal expectation.

The research validates this data through direct observation and in-depth interviews. The observations provide empirical evidence of the application of gender fluidity in the *Soul Equilibrium* collection. At the same time, the interviews offer insight into how Gen Z understands, accepts, and interprets this trend. The findings confirm that gender fluidity is a growing trend and examine the social, cultural, and psychological factors influencing its acceptance. Key aspects include perceptions of masculinity and femininity in fashion, the comfort of wearing gender-fluid clothing, and the role of social media in shaping opinions and dress preferences. These factors collectively highlight the evolving attitudes toward gender expression among younger generations.

Deleuzian sensory perception emphasizes the body's experience and its interaction with clothing as part of the process of experimentation and identity formation. Consequently, the in-depth interviews focus on respondent's subjective perceptions of materials, silhouettes, textures, and how gender-fluid clothing shapes their experiences of body and identity. By examining these sensory interactions, the research uncovers the nuanced ways in which fashion contributes to personal and social identity construction. It also explores how tactile and visual experiences influence individuals' sense of self.

In Deleuzian theory, the concept of becoming highlights that identity is not static but is in a constant state of transformation. The research explores how

respondents understand and experience gender-fluid fashion within the *Soul Equilibrium* collection as a transitional space. The trend illustrates that the boundaries between masculinity and femininity are not fixed but continuously evolve based on social and sensory experiences. This fluidity encourages ongoing reinterpretation of identity and fashion norms, reflecting broader cultural shifts.

Respondents serve both as sources of information and active participants in shaping and defining the meaning of gender-fluid fashion. Analyzing their experiences provides more profound insights into how this trend develops into a dynamic cultural phenomenon, further enriching the validation of the *Soul Equilibrium* collection. Their perspectives reveal the reciprocal relationship between creators, wearers, and audiences, showing how fashion functions as both a personal and collective expression.



Figure 2 Five Appearances Used by Hyper User

The five appearances presented are utilized as research instruments during interviews with respondents. The data collected are analyzed in greater depth using Deleuzian perception. The results indicate that non-binary gender perceptions are reflected through the design elements and styling of the *Soul Equilibrium* menswear collection, as previously described. This observation is further validated by asking respondents, "Can you see the concept of gender fluidity in the *Soul Equilibrium* collection?" This inquiry follows an evaluation of respondents' understanding of gender-fluid fashion.

The interview results reveal that the term "gender-fluid fashion" is relatively new to most respondents, who are more familiar with terms like unisex or genderless fashion, which are already recognized in the industry. However, the essential concept of gender fluidity is understood through visual experiences and references from popular culture. Respondents primarily gain this understanding through exposure to gender-fluid public figures and celebrities, such as musicians and actors who challenge traditional gender norms in their clothing choices. Social media also plays a significant role in shaping respondents' understanding of the concept. Trends are identified from various fashion content consumed on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and digital fashion editorials, which lead to greater recognition of how gender-fluid fashion is applied in everyday dressing.

Respondents express the belief that gender-fluid



fashion encompasses more than just gender-neutral clothing. The concept is associated with freedom of expression and the courage to experiment with fashion elements that transcend conventional gender norms. This indicates that while the term may be unfamiliar to respondents, the practices and ideas of gender-fluid fashion have become a recognized part of their understanding and appreciation of contemporary fashion.

All respondents concur that the concept of gender-fluid fashion is clearly visible in the visual styling of the *Soul Equilibrium* collection. They note that the collection effectively blurs traditional gender boundaries by incorporating fashion elements associated with both femininity and masculinity. A prominent feature is the strategy of including feminine elements in menswear. For example, the mix-and-match use of skirts in menswear styling produces progressive visuals that challenge established dress norms. Additionally, the collection employs transparent materials with sensual textures and ruffled accents typically linked to feminine aesthetics, reinforcing the non-binary essence of the designs. The exploration of textures and silhouettes, along with masculine-feminine mix-and-match elements, demonstrates that the collection successfully embodies non-binary perceptions in fashion, both aesthetically and conceptually, in accordance with Deleuzian theory.

The responses to the interview questions reveal that the majority of Generation Z is open to the concept of gender fluidity in fashion. Respondents actively reject toxic masculinity, which limits gender expression through rigid standards and discredits feminine elements in menswear. Instead, there is a general acceptance of the idea that fashion can be a space where individuals freely express their identities without traditional gender restrictions.

Gender fluidity is viewed as more than just a trend; it represents a form of social change that reflects values of inclusivity and freedom of expression. Respondents believe that clothing should not be strictly categorized as masculine or feminine but should provide an opportunity for each individual to explore their identity more flexibly. This perspective shows a cultural shift toward greater acceptance of personal authenticity, where fashion becomes a medium for empowerment and individuality.

The concept of the "rhizomatic body," as described by Deleuze and Guattari, refers to a body that is free from a fixed center or hierarchy. This trend illustrates that the body is not limited by rigid categories such as the gender binary; rather, it is fluid, flexible, and constantly transforming. This idea offers an alternative to the rigid and hegemonic notions of toxic masculinity, which emphasize patriarchal norms that restrict male expression to strength, dominance, and the denial of emotional or feminine aspects. The rhizomatic body demonstrates that gender identity is not confined to the masculine-feminine dichotomy but is open to a variety of possibilities for self-expression.

The response from Bryan, a 20-year-old

student of Visual Communication Design at Ciputra University Surabaya, reinforces the trend. He shares his experience with gender-fluid styling, introducing feminine attributes to his appearance during special events like birthday parties. He believes this concept represents freedom of expression, allowing individuals to show their authentic identities without being restricted by others' opinions. Meanwhile, Kenneth, a 20-year-old Architecture student at Ciputra University Surabaya, agrees that toxic masculinity should not limit male self-expression. He mentions that while he considers others' opinions when expressing gender fluidity through fashion, he feels more comfortable with a straightforward and conventional appearance.

The Deleuzian concept of embodied sensation and affect focuses on bodily experience as the core of perception, meaning, and emotion. In the context of fashion and gender fluidity, this concept helps us understand that identity, expression, and taste are not confined to fixed categories; they are shaped by lived, sensory, and emotional experiences of the body. Hyper-user respondents are encouraged to observe and try gender-fluid fashion products to deepen their understanding, rather than simply judging them aesthetically or ideologically.

Gender-fluid fashion products in Figure 2 are presented as samples for respondents to experience. They can feel the texture of the fabrics, the volume of the silhouettes, the shape of the cuts, and how the clothes move with their bodies. This is a manifestation of embodied sensation, an experience that is both "seen" and "lived." The concept of affect is defined as an experience transcending language. It fixes notions at a pre-cognitive level, grounded in the intensity perceived by the body before it can be articulated. For example, an individual might feel comfortable, liberated, or even strange while wearing clothing that defies gender norms. This can elicit a strong emotional response and create a unique personal connection with the product.

Affect is not a rationally explainable emotion but a bodily impulse that influences an individual's perception and understanding of the world. This subjectivity is continuously evolving and shaped by physical experiences and interactions with the material world. The sensory experience of a fabric's touch, an unconventional cut, the transparency of the material, and the draping flexibility of gender-fluid fashion products from the *Soul Equilibrium* collection stimulate emotional responses that trigger subjectivity. These products represent an effective assemblage, blending with the physical body and activating the psychological and emotional layers unique to each individual.

Subjectivity is understood as a process of becoming within the Deleuzian framework, rather than a stable, singular entity. As a result, various interpretations and judgments depend heavily on the personality, character, and affective background of each respondent when wearing a product from the collection. Some individuals experience feelings of



freedom and expressiveness, while others display ambiguous or provocative tendencies, or even explore the softer aspects of their masculine identity.

The results of the interviews and experiments reveal that five out of ten respondents prefer Figure 2D's appearance in Figure 2. This preference is based on the perception that the fluidity of the feminine character is not overtly noticeable, making the product relatively easy to wear. These five respondents are part of a more conventional group that accepts and is open to the concept of gender-fluid fashion but is not bold enough to wear significantly eccentric clothing. Two respondents choose Figure 2E's appearance, which features more apparent feminine attributes. Their selection is associated with their open, confident character and the belief that self-expression and identity are essential for authenticity. Additionally, three respondents prefer Figure 2A's appearance, feeling it conveys a new sensation of confidence, uniqueness, and sexiness.

Deleuzian theory illustrates that respondents believe the design method used in the *Soul Equilibrium* collection supports the concept of becoming, where gender identity is seen as fluid and continuously transformed through sensory experiences. It is observed that the collection not only features gender-neutral clothing but also creates a space for individuals to explore and express their identity through fashion. This approach argues that becoming transcends the existing labels of "male" or "masculine," creating a transitional space where identity boundaries dissolve, allowing for the possibility of a new existence.

The experiences of male respondents with the *Soul Equilibrium* products trigger the becoming process described in Deleuzian theory. The clothing—characterized by drapery details, transparent materials, and silhouettes reflecting feminine traits—initiates an affective shift. As male bodies engage with the clothing, they experience sensations and expressions that diverge from traditional norms of masculinity. The tactile nature of the materials and how the clothing interacts with their bodies indicate that this experience is more than just "wearing clothes"; it is a process of becoming something other than themselves, unveiling aspects of their identity that have previously been repressed or untouchable.

This process of becoming creates opportunities for reconstructing gender identity, freeing individuals from rigid masculine-feminine dichotomies. Respondents begin to perceive gender identity as an open field, personally and emotionally negotiable. The comfort that male bodies find in softer, more expressive clothing and the vulnerability in their performances lead to a redefinition of the toxic masculinity often associated with limited emotional expression, tenderness, and uniqueness.

Interview results demonstrate that gender fluidity within *Soul Equilibrium* serves as a visual and material reflection of the increasingly fluid expressions of gender identity in contemporary fashion. The collection rejects conventional gender

binaries and embraces ambiguity. This fluidity transcends mere aesthetic style, signaling a shift in gender performativity in today's society. This trend highlights that gender performativity is growing more flexible, dynamic, and individualized, contrasting with Judith Butler's (1988) idea that expression is inherently tied to biological bodies and performed according to societal norms.

The *Soul Equilibrium* collection exemplifies how fashion serves as a potent medium for individuals to express their identities beyond binary classifications. It indicates that clothing evolves from being a rigid gender marker to an open space for exploration, play, and the reshaping of self-identity. The fluidity observed reflects how the current generation interprets gender as a broad spectrum, where masculinity and femininity can coexist, interchange, or even dissolve.

To reinforce this discussion, comparisons are drawn to other fashion collections that also address gender fluidity, such as those by Alessandro Michele, Thom Browne, and Harris Reed. These designers emphasize the aesthetic interplay between masculinity and femininity. Analyzing these collections alongside *Soul Equilibrium* reinforces the idea that gender fluidity is not merely an aesthetic experiment but a trend emerging from evolving market behaviors. Generation Z, as a significant consumer group aware of fluid identities, catalyzes a transformation in gender perceptions within contemporary social systems, moving away from binary frameworks toward a more inclusive spectrum.

In this context, *Soul Equilibrium* aligns with global movements where gender-fluid menswear represents not only a style choice but also broader societal transformations initiated by younger generations through consumption, narrative construction, and gender performativity. Additionally, critical literature on gender performativity and generational identity fluidity (Butler, 1998) is integrated to enhance the theoretical dialogue. Thus, this discussion not only affirms the uniqueness of Generation Z's narrative on the representation of gender-fluid men's fashion but also expands the implications of findings by connecting them to global fashion discourse and critical gender theory.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, gender fluidity emerges as a significant trend within contemporary menswear collections, notably exemplified by the designs of *Soul Equilibrium*. This trend indicates a notable shift in gender performativity in society, as contemporary menswear redefines the meaning of gender by introducing styles that blur traditional boundaries between masculinity and femininity. Fashion serves as a performative medium that not only represents but also shapes social identity. It is observed that personal dress styles reflect individual identity and offer a platform for dynamic and contextual expression of

that identity.

Generation Z, having grown up in the digital age and an inclusive culture, shows a strong inclination toward more flexible and non-binary expressions of identity. This demographic uses fashion as a means to negotiate their gender identity, free from heteronormative constraints. Their fashion choices reflect a rejection of rigid categorization and demonstrate support for diversity and freedom of expression.

Applying Deleuzian theory to this subject provides a relevant conceptual framework for understanding gender fluidity in menswear as part of the evolving landscape of gender performativity in contemporary society. The emphasis on rejecting fixed categories and embracing identity as a process of continuous becoming allows Deleuzian theory to offer a fresh perspective on gender expression that is not confined to rigid binary structures.

Gender-fluid fashion can thus be viewed as a visual representation of the deterritorialization of established gender norms. Here, individuals, particularly from Gen Z, explore their identities through non-linear, nomadic, and ever-changing visual representations. Gen Z utilizes fashion as a space for identity experimentation, aligning with the principles of rhizomatic thought in Deleuzian theory. This perspective highlights that identity is not anchored in a single center or direction but is instead open, plural, and fluid across multiple meanings.

The research effectively examines the meanings and trends surrounding gender-fluid fashion among Gen Z through a qualitative approach. However, some limitations are noted. The data gathered from interviews do not fully capture the diverse perceptions of Gen Z in Indonesia due to a limited number of respondents, which affects the extent to which the results can be generalized. Time constraints also hinder a deeper exploration of the data, leaving some relevant issues and dynamics unaddressed. Consequently, the findings should be viewed as an initial exploratory effort, offering a partial yet valid interpretation within the qualitative research context. While this study contributes to the discourse on gender fluidity in men's fashion and the narratives of Gen Z, it is vital to recognize its limitations, such as the narrow focus on a single collection (*Soul Equilibrium*) and the potential bias introduced by the author's perspective in the theoretical analysis. These limitations present opportunities for further research to broaden the scope of the study.

Future research should aim to increase the number and diversity of respondents while allowing for more adequate time to gather data. These improvements are essential to obtain a more comprehensive, representative, and contextual understanding of how Gen Z in Indonesia constructs gender identity through fashion. Expanding the scope of future studies can also reveal deeper insights into cultural, social, and technological factors that influence gender expression through fashion. Such exploration will strengthen the

theoretical and practical contributions of research on gender-fluid fashion within Indonesia's evolving cultural landscape.

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