



BETWEEN ASPIRATIONAL MODELS AND TRANSNORMATIVITY: Trans Women Representation in Luxury Fashion Films

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how luxury fashion brands represent trans women in their fashion films (2017–2023), a format chosen for its narrative capacity to convey values and emotions. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, it analyzes iconographic, psychological, and social dimensions, including intersectionality and stereotypes. The results show that the campaigns highlight the empowerment and identity of trans women, but do so by reinforcing a transnormative and idealized image. While the brands claim to be inclusive, these representations may serve marketing purposes, reflecting a whitewashing of genuine commitment and raising questions about the authenticity of their commitment to trans representation.

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1. Introduction. Fashion Films as Vehicles of Narrative Transportation

Audience weariness with traditional advertising formats with traditional advertising formats has boosted the development of branded content, whose objective is to generate entertainment produced by a brand which, according to Hidalgo Marí and Segarra Saavedra (2013), “becomes the active subject of the plot insofar as the content and narrative revolve around its philosophy” (p. 1). Unlike traditional TV spots, the use of long-form videos enables more developed storytelling and generates a more lasting impact, since “video storytelling advertisements cause narrative transportation” (Teraiya et al., 2023, p. 14), which influences consumers more effectively (Hepola et al., 2017).

Within this advertising production framework, the fashion film, conceived as a type of format within branded content, presents certain specificities by integrating cinema into the brand's universe (Gómez Briceño y Durán Manso, 2021). The production of fashion films is based on an attractive brand aesthetic, inherited from fashion photography (Del Pino-Romero and Castelló-Martínez, 2015, p. 118), which leverages the names of film directors, photographers, actors, and actresses (Caerols and De la Horra Veldman, 2015, p. 354). In this sense, these authors state that fashion films “are designed to persuade the audience to consume them voluntarily, as if they were just another promotional product” (Caerols and De la Horra Veldman 2015, p. 354). In the words of Jódar (201, p. 136), they are “a promotional product resulting from the process of fashion brands adapting to the new digital communication ecosystem.” For their part, Díaz Soloaga and García Guerrero (2016) also link the concept of fashion films to the world of luxury fashion, considering them creative promotional products that complement traditional ones with narrative threads. In this regard, Michaud (2015) points out that luxury fashion products evoke appeal through seduction, transmitting symbols that refer to the brand's core values, such as excellence, quality, beauty, and power, since they do not communicate pragmatic aspects. Along these lines, Wang and Juhlin (2020) argue that, through impeccable narrative construction, fashion films aim to influence the audience's ultimate experience and encourage them to consume the brand in question. For all these reasons, Díaz Soloaga and García Guerrero (2016) assert that fashion films are a branding tool that allows a luxury fashion brand to showcase its universe while ensuring that its values are perceived in an audiovisual product.

Even so, there is controversy among authors regarding the presence of advertising in fashion films. While some authors, such as Ramos and Pineda (2009), assert that advertising is present, albeit “disguised as entertainment content” (Ramos and Pineda, 2009, p. 730), others, such as Atarama-Rojas et al. (2022), believe that fashion films are a technique that focuses not on products, but on conveying brand values through stories designed to capture viewers' attention. According to these authors, “in the fashion industry, it would be impossible to avoid the presence of products in fashion films, given that the actors should, naturally, wear the brand's clothing and not that of the competition” (Atarama-Rojas et al., 2022, p. 64), knowing that they will appear in the background rather than as protagonists.

With all this in mind, brands conceive of fashion films as a form of expression through which to convey their values and brand philosophy to their target audience in a more suggestive way than through traditional advertising, while simultaneously allowing the viewer to experience the essence of the brand through the look and feel inherent in the fashion film. And indeed, unlike television commercials and print advertising, fashion films can “persuade viewers with a sincere and compelling brand story, creating favorable associations with the brand” (Teraiya et al., p. 1). Therefore, as Garrido and Fernández (2014) and Sáez (2015) emphasize, storytelling (or storyselling, in the critical view of Byung-Chul Han, 2023) becomes a crucial element that allows for creative storytelling and introduces the audience to the brand's universe. Therefore, it is interesting to know what stories brands tell through this format, how they do it, and what elements they use. From an audiovisual narrative perspective, the narrative content, the spaces, and the characters that populate the stories are all important (Mocanu, 2020). Regarding the characters, their construction and meaning are interesting both for the brand and for the audience who can recognize role models in them, especially when they are celebrities who express the brand's values. As they state Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018) the choice of famous personalities, and even brand ambassadors, gives these brands social relevance, since they influence consumer perception, as consumers construct their own image based on these celebrities with whom they identify. In this sense, the argument of Díaz Soloaga and García Guerrero (2016) is also interesting, as they state that the values that represent the brand sometimes act as characters in the plot.

Therefore, the power of audiovisual narratives created by brands is undeniable in an evident intention to communicate their own identity, commitments, and social purposes to their target audience. Considering the importance of format as a narrative vehicle, the following objectives are proposed:

1. To analyze the narrative of various fashion films in relation to the philosophy of luxury brands.
2. To examine the values embodied by the characters within fashion films.
3. To determine whether there is an alignment between the values promoted by the brand and the roles assumed by the characters within the fashion film narrative.

2. Towards the democratization of the body in media? Trans representation in the public sphere and fashion brands

While we currently live in a sociocultural moment where the democratization of the body, inclusion, and diversity are on the rise, contemporary discourse on diversity and inclusion reveals a fundamentally paradoxical landscape, marked simultaneously by remarkable progress and persistent structural challenges. The concept of diversity is the subject of numerous studies. Zeynep et al. (2022) have referred to diversity as the physical and sociocultural differences attributed to people. Hertz (2020) has addressed diversity from the perspective of the media, considering that they play a fundamental role in its representation. For his part, Tsichla (2020) criticizes the fact that it is precisely the media that creates content aimed at homogeneous groups, thus hindering the promotion of diversity.

Understanding this complexity requires examining both the narratives of cultural transformation that prioritize diversity and the forms of subliminal discrimination that continue to marginalize transgender communities. This tension reflects how contemporary societies navigate between proclaimed inclusion and the persistence of deeply rooted discriminatory practices that have evolved into more subtle and less obvious manifestations. Although there is an increasing presence of transgender people in mass media, the construction of a transgender imaginary—often based on negative stereotypes—continues to position the community on the periphery of society (Otero, 2025; Stryker y Currah, 2014). Beyond mere stereotyping, Johnson (2016) defines transnormativity as a dominant ideological accountability structure that establishes a medicalized, binary-based standard for transgender identity, effectively regulating and validating specific experiences as "authentic" while marginalizing those that do not conform.. In the view of Villegas Simón et al. (2003, p. 25), "transnormativity functions as a regulatory ideology that structures the identifications, characteristics, and behaviors of trans people into something legitimate and prescriptive, as opposed to others who are marginalized, subordinate, stigmatized and invisible". Therefore, the transgender experience is encoded through an external perspective and remains confined within the boundaries of normativity; consequently, portrayed experiences are generally stereotypical and lack diversity.

This paradox is particularly relevant in commercial and media environments, where the increased visibility of transgender people coexists with symbolic representation and what scholars have conceptualized as subliminal discrimination: while Pounders (2018) argues that "we are witnessing a significant cultural shift, where women expect diversity, realism, and inclusion in marketing campaigns not only in terms of size and body shape, but also ethnicity, ability, and gender (transgender and queer/nonbinary)" (p. 135), Pérez Curiel (2017) y Sales Gelabert (2017) maintain that discrimination based on gender, race, and class remains widespread. As Pérez Curiel observes, "exclusion based on class, color, and gender, among other factors, has evolved into a more subliminal form of group separation; it is less visible than before, but it persists" (2017, p. 5).

Given this reality, Fernández Ramírez and Correa Blázquez (2015) argue that "queer theory has laid the groundwork for a new identity-based political practice through which a wide variety of stigmatized groups can reconsider their public representation in order to demand dignified treatment from society" (2015, p. 119). These authors suggest that "the way in which symbolic systems maintain stigma can be subverted through public actions that contribute to invalidating established gender categories and promoting critical reflection on the perverse way in which these categories are imposed as inescapable norms" (Fernández Ramírez and Correa Blázquez 2015, p. 120).

In this sense, regarding the fashion industry, García Estévez (2019) has reflected on its purpose, while also questioning whether fashion can be considered another art form that attempts to evoke feelings and emotions and generate a shift in societal attitudes toward diversity. Just as the specialist

literature addressing whether fashion brands construct an image committed to including transexual people in their narratives is thin on the ground, so too is their visibility and representation in advertising campaigns, despite this collective's incipient actions and purchasing power.

The beauty industry, specifically cosmetics, has taken important first steps in representing gender identities through inclusive advertising campaigns. Dove's campaign, launched in 2004, pioneered the use of women's natural imagery in advertising. "Since then, the number of plus-size and transgender models, as well as models from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and others with undisguised body marks, has steadily increased, appearing on magazine covers, in fashion shows, and in commercial brand advertising" (Fernández Ramírez and Correa Blázquez, 2015, p. 119). Following this example, brands like MAC and Sleek Makeup began to demonstrate their commitment to representing transgender people. In 2018, Sephora launched a series of video tutorials on skincare and makeup application called "Confidence Classes". Among them is the video "Bold Beauty for the Transgender Community", developed by transgender and non-binary employees, which focused on skincare for this niche market. As a result, this initiative generated greater trust in the brand. According to *Adhertising* magazine (2020), new marketing tactics, among other factors, are driving the industry to be naturally more inclusive, although this involves reflections that go beyond mere representation and the influence of advertising.

Focusing on the fashion sector, research such as that by Tiggemann and Lacey (2009) reveals that consumer products, such as clothing, can address people's concerns about their self-concept, such as body image and gender identity. Based on this, Strübe and Goswami (2022) argue that,

although openly gender-neutral fashion has become more popular in recent years, the fashion and apparel market still reflects a dichotomous evaluation of gender (i.e., masculinity and femininity), which does not necessarily cater to the transgender population. (p.13).

Despite this need, there is an underrepresentation of transgender people, products, and services in the fashion and apparel industry. According to Jones (2021), although only about 0.6% of the population self-identifies as transgender, the importance of the symbolic and functional values of clothing and fashion for this population cannot be ignored. For Semerene (2023), clothing becomes a hegemonic element, as its fundamental function is not only to represent the trans woman or man, but also to act as a stimulating signifier in their interactions with others. This is especially relevant given that research shows the LGBTQ+ community represents a largely overlooked trillion-dollar market (Schneider and Auten, 2018). Despite this, Strübe and Goswami (2022) state that while some companies are catching up, most mainstream clothing retailers demonstrate a significant lack of understanding and inclusion of transgender consumers. Inaccessibility to the products and services necessary for body image management can lead to severe body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. According to Kraemer et al. (2007), this is particularly noticeable for transgender individuals during the transition process.

For their part, authors like Cáceres Zapatero and Díaz Soloaga (2008), Del Olmo Arriaga et al. (2018), Guichard (2019) and Lai and Perminiene (2020), among others, state that the topic of diversity is being prioritised by the fashion industry, which meets the demands of those collectives calling for more diverse and inclusive fashion that excludes stereotypes. The Met Gala is a clear example of this. At this charity event, designers and artists exhibit authentic works of art based on a different theme each year (García Estévez, 2019, p. 9). In the 2021 edition, for example, the theme was how clothing emphasizes certain qualities linked to equity, diversity, and inclusion. In this regard, Pérez Curiel (2017) claims that "fashion is a strong force to fight against stereotypes. Freedom is what the individuals are looking for and dress assists in the job of making them feel part of the society and not feel excluded" (2017, p. 8). The most outstanding designers in this regard include Alexander McQueen and Valentino, both of whom use fashion as a weapon for achieving social equality by eliminating stereotypes. For Malson and Burns (2009), being different implies the establishment of a new social paradigm regarding the various ways of being. Despite these encouraging actions, Tórtola Moret et al. (2023) assert that in fashion magazines, 'there is no real commitment to diversity or inclusion in advertising' (2013, p. 16), and when diversity is represented, this practice is not without suspicion, as it is overshadowed by commercialism.

The growing visibility of LGBTQ+ identities in brand narratives has sparked critical debates about the authenticity of these inclusive practices. The phenomenon known as "rainbow-washing" refers to the strategic appropriation of LGBTQ+ imagery and discourse by brands primarily for commercial gain,

without genuine commitment to the community's rights or well-being (Schopper et al., 2024). This term, derived from “greenwashing” in environmental marketing, describes superficial gestures of support—often limited to Pride Month campaigns or token representation—that mask the absence of substantive actions such as equitable hiring practices, donations to LGBTQ+ causes, or advocacy for policy changes. As noted by Diwanji et al. (2025) rainbow-washing transforms activism into aesthetic, commodifying identity politics while perpetuating systemic inequalities. In this line of thought, Navarro Gaviño, (2022, p. 53) argues that nonconformity, authenticity, gender, and other issues of identity sensitivity have been easily popularized as marketing and communication tools to encourage the conventional consumption of conformist products, so that transgression itself becomes a strategy of the establishment.

Are these inclusive practices real—that is, do they form part of a genuine commitment by brands to the representation and visibility of gender diversity—or are they rather rainbow-washing strategies? This question becomes central to evaluating whether brands function as agents of social change or merely capitalize on progressive aesthetics to expand market share within the “pink economy”, that is, the set of economic activities, products, and services aimed specifically at the LGBTQ+ community, as well as the purchasing power of this group. Given the need to seem credible and transparent, brands must transmit honesty and avoid falling into the trap of ‘tokenism’, that is, the practice of making a few minor concessions to a discriminated collective, which have little or no impact on the status quo (Adhertising, 2020). Therefore, brands should not only convey messages on key days—in this case, for the trans collective— (Campillo-Alhama and Quiles Soler, 2023) but instead should demonstrate a visible and long-term commitment.

To overcome the mercantilist vision, if brands seek to engage thus far marginalised audiences, they must go beyond marketing campaigns. This has resulted in the emergence of brands whose ultimate purpose is to raise social awareness. Through the design of new communication strategies, these brands attempt to convert themselves into useful ones which, in addition to offering a better product or service, contribute to improve society, the environment and the human rights agenda (Castelló-Martínez and Barrilero-Carpio 2021, Milagro 2021).

3. Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative-descriptive methodology employing content analysis. As indicated by Krippendorff (2018), the content analysis is a technique designed to generate valid and reproducible inferences that are applicable to a specific context based on available data. The sample consists of seven fashion films meeting the following requirements:

1. The advertising formats analysed here are recognised as fashion films by the brands themselves.
2. The brands analysed here share aspects that make them representative of the fashion industry: (a) international recognition; (b) heritage and prestige; (c) the creation of exclusive luxury products ranging from clothing, through accessories, to perfumes; and (d) the importance given to marketing and brand positioning.
3. The fashion films analysed here were produced from the beginning of the 2010s to 2023.
4. The trans actresses appearing in the fashion films figure on two lists drawn up by the media outlets CBS (Capatides, 2021) and *ELLE* (Rosco Martín & Del Río, 2024) because of their importance as trans celebrities. Both media outlets share the following characteristics: (a) they have an international scope; (b) they focus on mass communication; (c) they produce cultural content; (d) they discover trends; and (e) they focus on covering celebrity lifestyles above.

A preliminary análisis of the ad corpus detected 13 fashion films, of which six were eliminated because they did not meet variables 2 and 4: those discarded correspond to 17 transgender models/Barneys, 2014; Daniela Vega/Vogue, GQ and Gucci, 2019; Silvia Calderoni and Paul B. Preciado/GUCCI, 2020; Harlow Monroe/Diesel, 2020; Lachlan Watson/Zalando, 2021; and Valentina Sampaio/Giorgio Armani, 2022. In relation to variable 4, the presence of Laverne Cox and MJ Rodríguez was also detected on both lists, but although they have appeared in ads launched during the study timeframe (variable 3), these are not considered to be fashion films (variable 1).

In sum, the corpus includes the sample show in Table 1.

Table 1. Contextualization data

Brand/Country	Fashion Film	Main Actress	Contextualization data
Gucci Bloom/ Italy	Bloom-GrowingPainswith Hari Nef https://goo.su/iut0Jau	Hari Nef (USA)	-Year: 2017. -Product: fragrance. -Duration: 0:01:00 -Group representation.
Gucci Bloom/ Italy	https://goo.su/YtXfQp	Hari Nef (USA)	-Year: 2019. -Product: fragrance. -Duration: 0:01:37 -Individual representation.
Yves Saint Laurent/ France	French Water https://goo.su/xuym	Indya Moore (USA)	-Year: 2021. -Product: Summer'21 Collection. -Duration: 0:09:00 -Group representation.
Tommy Hilfiger/ USA	The Rebirth of a Style Movement Episode 1 https://goo.su/UBz100	Indya Moore (USA)	-Year: 2022. -Product: fashion. -Duration: 0:01:44 -Individual representation.
Valentino Garavani/ Italy	The Film (1 episode) https://goo.su/2Y4Bw	Dominique Jackson (Trinidad and Tobago)	-Year: 2019. -Product: handbag. -Duration: 0:00:52 -Individual representation
Prada/ Italy	The Galleria https://goo.su/ERTiR	Hunter Schafer (USA)	-Year: 2021. -Product: handbag. -Duration: 0:00:59 -Individual representation.
Mugler/ France	Mugler - Angel Elixir - The Film Starring Hunter Schafer https://goo.su/lGk5	Hunter Schafer (USA)	-Year: 2023. -Product: fragrance -Duration: 0:01:00 -Individual representation

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

After identifying the actresses appearing in the different fashion films, it was essential to verify whether the brands behind these broadcast products were really committed to inclusion and diversity, including them as part of their corporate values in pursuit of social responsibility as brands and companies. To this end, the corporate social responsibility section of the brand's websites was consulted.

With respect to the methodological tool, a worksheet was created for the purpose of obtaining data on the representation of the women appearing in the fashion films. It included an analysis of the representation of the actresses, using the character identity analytical template created by the AdMira research group (University of Seville). This template was originally designed employing classical narrative theories (Casetti and Di Chio 1991, 1999; Chatman, 2014) for analysing film and TV fiction characters from a multiple approach reflecting the following: (a) iconographic dimension; (b) psychological dimension; (c) sociological dimension; (d) actions performed; and (e) role and stereotype. For Sánchez Noriega, 'these analytical indicators verify the way of being and doing of whoever represents them, which involves a series of traits that individualise the character in question' (Sánchez Noriega, 2000, p. 126). Even though this template has been pioneeringly used to analyse films and series, recent studies have shown how its application in the field of advertising is equally effective (Milagro 2021, Mérida Donoso 2022, Tardivo et al. 2022, Sánchez-Labela Martín et al., 2024) among others, have resorted to this template or have used some of its items in their studies to analyse the characters appearing in ads, as well as the values they transmit).

However, the basic template is insufficient for analysing how gender identity traits traditionally associated with the representation of trans people are approached. To fill this gap, as has been done in other recent studies (Cobo-Durán and Otero-Escudero 2021, Higuera-Ruiz 2022), it was decided to supplement the narrative items of analysis with studies of trans representation (Billard, 2016; GLAAD, 2013; Namaste, 2005; Serano, 2016; Shelley, 2008). The congruence matrix (Crenshaw 1989; Davis

2005; Hills y Collins 2000) was also implemented for considering the values of gender oppression/privilege, age, race, normative beauty and social class with an eye to analysing the diversity of the women represented.

Table 2. Study congruence matrix. Research questions, dimensions, variables and references

Research Questions (RQ)
RQ1. From an external perspective, how is the character constructed and represented?
-Dimension: Iconographic
-Variable: Physical appearance +How it is presented + Hypersexualization + Intersectionality
-References: Casetti and Di Chio, 1991, 1999; Chatman, (2014) + Indicator 9: Genital focus/sexualization indicates whether an author or speaker focuses the discussion of a transgender individual on the person's genitalia or depicts the person as a sexual object (delegitimizing) (Billard, 2016: 4199). Mérida Donoso (2022: 337): physique, beauty standards according to imposed canon. Tardivo et al. (2022: 142): context. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2005; Hills Collins, 2000).
RQ2. From an internal perspective, how is the character constructed and what does she transmit?
-Dimension: Psychological
-Variable: Actress and character identification? + 1) Inclusion of a trans character? The character's motivations + 2) Is she defined solely and predominantly by her gender identity? Internal conflicts present in the plot + 3) Is her presence complementary or does her absence impact the plot?
-References: + We applied the test that Vito Russo, film historian and co-founder of GLAAD, proposed as criteria for creating multidimensional characters and LGBTQIA+ visibility in the media: 1) 2) 3) (GLAAD, 2013: 8).
RQ3. From an internal perspective, how does the character integrate into and relate to her context? What relationship is there between the trans character and the brand?
-Dimension: Sociological
-Variable: The character's external conflicts, culture and economic status + Message conveyed to the target audience. Values or countervalues represented in the character/ brand relationship.
-References: Mérida Donoso (2022: 337): What is being conveyed and to what audience. Milagro (2021): Values that brand convey.
RQ4. What actions does the trans person represent?
-Dimension: Action performed.
-Variable: 5 keywords (infinitive verbs).
-References: Mérida Donoso (2022: 337): actions performed according to the attitude represented (active or passive).
RQ5. Do trans characters reproduce roles and stereotypes in the fashion films?
-Dimension: Role.
-Variable: Role in the story + Stereotypes associated with the representation of trans women: 1) liar, 2) pathetic, 3) sexualization, 4) sensationalism
-References: + 1) a sexual predator who keeps her condition hidden until the end of the plot, when femininity becomes a deception. 2) low dignity, worthy of pity (Serrano, 2016). 3) defined by her spectacular physique; and 4) grotesque role (Namaste, 2005; Shelley, 2008). Tardivo et al. (2022: 142): roles and stereotypes.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

4. Results

The identity of women appearing in the fashion films included in the sample is described below, in accordance with the elements indicated in the methodology.

4.1. Iconographic dimension

The actresses were aged between 20 and 30 when the fashion films in which they appear were made, except for Dominique Jackson, who was 40 in the Valentino film. All transmit a timeless image, faithful to the brands they represent. The first has blond hair and blue eyes, the second brown hair and eyes, and the last two dark hair and eyes.

As to clothing, all four have a well-groomed appearance in keeping with luxury fashion brands. Those with a more elegant and classic style include Moore in Yves Saint Laurent, Schafer in Prada, with deconstructed coats in one colour matching the Galleria bag, which appears 21 times, and Jackson, whose white Valentino dress stands out for neatness and perfection. Their clothing shows straight lines and neutral tones that transmit harmony, linked to elegance and classicism. Yet there are particularities: in Tommy Hilfiger, Moore appears in preppy style, and Hari Nef in Gucci films in boho style with floral motifs. Schafer also wears boho outfits for Prada Galleria, drawing an aesthetic parallel between both Italian houses.

As to their way of speaking, voices are rarely heard, except Moore in Tommy Hilfiger, talking in voice-over as if thinking; Hari Nef in Prada, also in voice-over; and Jackson in Valentino, whose dramatic voice interprets an actress at a handbag casting. Her gestures and tone grow more aggressive as the plot advances, equating the character's strong personality with the bag.

Regarding other traits, Hunter Schafer and Hari Nef are white, Indya Moore and Dominique Jackson are black. The representation is balanced, considering that the luxury fashion industry has traditionally favoured white actresses and models. All four are American, though Jackson is originally from Trinidad and Tobago.

As for indicator 9, hyper-sexualisation appears only in Mugler with Hunter Schafer. Many shots focus on her legs and cleavage, emphasised by her clothes. First, she wears a tight black body top with long sleeves and halter collar. Then she transforms into a metallic bodysuit covered with crystals. These garments parallel the advertised product: Angel Elixir perfume. Lastly, in Tommy Hilfiger, Moore appears in underwear, whereas Nef and Jackson present a feminine aspect for Gucci and Valentino, respectively, though not sexualised.

As contextual elements, butterflies appear in two advertisements—real in Gucci Bloom and decorative in the Tommy Hilfiger fashion film—potentially evoking the metaphor of transformation.

Regarding the spaces where the films are set, the following is observed. In the Gucci Bloom and Tommy Hilfiger films, only the actresses are present and there is no one else on set. A combination of exterior and interior, urban and bucolic, is evident, where the domestic sphere is relevant and contains the universe of the fashion brand. In the case of Valentino Garavani film, the absolute protagonist is the actress, who appears against a neutral white wall that highlights her figure and the products of the brand. The same idea is repeated in the Prada Galleria and Mugler films. In Prada, the domestic space is the protagonist: a cluttered room where the actress moves around and which is later revealed to be a film set. In the Mugler film, the idea of solitude is accentuated. The actress appears completely alone in a vast and shadowy space that initially diminishes her and then empowers her. The only social space appears in the YSL film. It takes place at a smart night party with other people, but the group is isolated from the rest of society.

4.2. Psychological dimension

With respect to the psychological dimension, the relationship established between the characters, objects and brands is interesting. In three of the seven films, the actresses express themselves indirectly (Indya Moore/Tommy Hilfiger, Hari Nef/Gucci Dazed Beauty) or directly (Dominique Jackson/Valentino), describing their intense relationship with fashion as a form of personal self-determination. In the case of Indya Moore and Hari Nef in the Tommy Hilfiger and Gucci films, respectively, voice-overs in the first-person singular are used, because they are also representing themselves, that is, there is an identification between the character and the real person. Dominique Jackson, who plays the role of Devoray, establishes a dialogue in which she explains how the bag and herself are made for each other ('I lunge at him. He lunges at me. I lunge back at him. Back and forth in this sort of French farce'). In the other four ads, the characters say practically nothing and appear enjoying their own company (Hunter Schafer/Prada), with others (Hari Nef/Gucci Bloom: The

Campaign Film), looking for other people (Indya Moore/Yves Saint Laurent) or searching for a path to the stars (Hunter Schafer/Mugler).

Moving on to motivations, the intention is to underscore precisely a sense of quest (Indya Moore in the Yves Saint Laurent films the most literal example of this) and determination (Dominique Jackson fights for her Valentino bag: 'I'll do anything for the bag'), even when the path she takes means taking the plunge into the unknown (Hunter Schafer decidedly walking into shot, before jumping towards the sky in the case of Mugler). Two of the examples that literally express how fashion serves the actresses to know, construct and play out their own identity are as follows: Indya Moore reflects on this in the Tommy Hilfiger fashion film ('Fashion opens new worlds for me', 'This opened my mind and my heart', 'I dress with a purpose'), whereas in Dazed Beauty Hari Nef explains that her objective in life is to encounter the way of feeling integrated and comfortable with her body and in her professional career, but without losing her identity ('Can an actress/a model be an activist?', 'I have always wanted to be pretty').

In these last two instances, although they do not directly use the word 'trans', gender identity is crucial for the storyline of the fashion films. Of the seven films analysed, in five of them it can be held that the basic idea is the quest for identity as a personal achievement, often involving struggle, effort and courage (Dominique Jackson/Valentino, Hunter Schafer/Mugler). In contrast, two of them feature characters without a deep psychological dimension, specifically Hunter Schafer in Prada and Hari Nef in Gucci Bloom, who are depicted as being fairy-like and as happy human beings with clear objectives who are merely having fun in colourful and agreeable surroundings. Lastly, with respect to the importance of the actresses to the storyline, in five of the fashion films their presence is essential for they are the only characters, whereas in those cases in which they are accompanied by other people, this obviously is not the case (Hari Nef/Gucci Bloom group fashion film, Indya Moore/Yves Saint Laurent).

4.3. Sociological dimension

The target audience of the fashion films analysed here are upper-class young women. To engage them, the brands opt for representing characters who do not seem to have any external conflicts. On the one hand, they represent self-confident women, which can be clearly seen in the Valentino, Mugler and Yves Saint Laurent fashion films through their determined gestures, movements and attitudes. On the other, they represent active women. In the following table, it is possible to observe that the most frequent action of the trans characters is laughing (in four fashion films), followed by resting (3), floating (3), flirting (3), strolling (2), talking on the phone (2), walking (2) and climbing stairs (2), among others.

Tabla 3. Actions

Brands	Actresses	Actions
Gucci Bloom	Hari Nef	Rest, laugh, dance, float, flirt (looking in the mirror)
Gucci Bloom	Hari Nef	Rest, Float, Laugh, Walk, Drink (tea)
Yves Saint Laurent	Charlotte Gainsbourg, Indya Moore, Julianne Moore y Chloë Sevigny, Leo Reilly (Yves Saint Laurent)	Drink (water), walk, dress (dress herself), climb (stairs), talk (to waiter)
Tommy Hilfiger	Indya Moore	Rest, flirt (looking in the mirror), talk (on the phone), stroll, climb stairs
Valentino Garavani	Dominique Jackson	Act, laugh, scream, fight*, win* (*These are actions that do not appear explicitly, but are interpreted from the protagonist's speech)
Prada	Hunter Schafer	Flirting (putting on make up, putting one earrings), laughing, talking (on the phone), walking, jumping, picking up (clothes), reading, playing, kissing (blowing a kiss)
Mugler	Hunter Schafer	Float, parade, run, climb, fly

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

With the trans actresses, the brands represent women who exalt the value of uniqueness through a defined personality, the value of the authentic and natural, attempting to be faithful to their way of being. In the first fashion film analysed, for instance, Gucci represents a female character who is trying to discover how to meet traditional standards without betraying herself. In the voice-over, she reflects

on her relationship with beauty: «I definitely wasn't conventionally pretty by anybody's standards [...] I felt I really had to chisel out of a hard rock».

In this connection, the values transmitted by the fashion films analysed here are listed below:

1. In the Valentino Garavani fashion film, Dominique Jackson stresses the value of authenticity, intelligence, personality, strength and elegance.
2. In the Gucci fashion film, Hari Nef suggests valuing unconventional beauty, authenticity and fashion as an artistic expression.
3. For the Gucci brand, Hari Nef, Dakota Johnson and Petra Collins highlight the value of naturalness, a quiet lifestyle, the value of company and enjoying things at a sedate pace.
4. For the Mugler brand, Hunter Schafer transmits self-assurance, empowerment, the quest for an objective, satisfaction with her achievements and self-contentedness.
5. For Prada, Hunter Schafer exalts elegance, sophistication and youth.
6. For Tommy Hilfiger, Indya Moore underscores the value of evolution, renovation, fashion as an artistic and identity-related expression, reinvention and openness.
7. In the Yves Saint Laurent fashion film, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Indya Moore, Julianne Moore, Chloë Sevigny and Leo Reilly put the accent on the value of elegance, sophistication and intellectuality.

As for the roles and stereotypes represented, although there is an absence of the former, the women analysed do indeed reflect certain stereotypes. This is especially the case in the Valentino and Mugler fashion films. The former features a trans woman with effeminate movements and gestures, whereas in the latter, the protagonist is sexualised. In the case of Gucci, Hari Nef, Dakota Johnson and Petra Collins portray the stereotype of the fairy-like woman. In the Tommy Hilfiger and Yves Saint Laurent fashion films, the women are represented with the preppy stereotype. For her part, Hunter Schafer is stereotyped in the Prada fashion film, since she appears sexualized and defined by her physical appearance.

5. Discussion of the results

Considering the results obtained, we concur with Ramos and Pineda (2009) in considering that fashion films are conceived as broadcast products inherent to advertainment, as they focus on the construction of a narrative structure and the creation of characters capable of conveying brand identity and values. In all the films analysed, brands are present, although, as these authors note, camouflaged as entertainment. Clothes and accessories are shown as complementary elements, never the focus, aiming instead to transmit brand values through engaging narratives. Regarding the characteristics of the fashion films, we also agree with Del Pino Romero and Castelló Martínez (2015) in their observation of the merging of film and fashion photography aesthetics. We likewise share Michaud's (2015) and Wang and Juhlin's (2023) view that excellence and quality are fundamental traits of fashion films and defining values brands seek to promote. As Díaz Soloaga and García Guerrero (2016) have noted, fashion films serve as branding tools that introduce viewers to the advertiser's universe, allowing a connection through entertainment in a broadcast format. From a luxury fashion standpoint, they are creative products that complement traditional shows. Although all the films analyzed support this claim, the Yves Saint Laurent film notably recreates the runway experience, with women walking through the rooms and adopting poses reminiscent of mannequins displayed in boutique windows.

Following Díaz Soloaga and García Guerrero (2016), we consider that fashion films, beyond their format, transmit brand personality through characters who embody the brand's values, both iconographically and psychologically. This contrasts with fashion shows, where branding is limited to visual representation. In the films analysed, character construction is crucial in conveying the intended brand message. Our analysis revealed that the idea of 'remaining faithful to oneself' is central—both for the brands (expressing their values) and the portrayal of the trans actresses. The brands studied (Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Tommy Hilfiger, Valentino, Prada and Mugler) promote inclusion, diversity, and bodily democratization—although Mugler alone resorts to sexualisation—allowing these women to express identity. Thus, both the aesthetic of the films and the casting choices are aligned with brand identity.

In five of the seven fashion films analysed, the quest for identity emerges as a central theme. In Gucci's film, Hari Nef's character seeks acceptance and integration without self-betrayal, ultimately

achieved through the brand. Her narrative, like Indya Moore's, reflects an alignment between actress and character. The consumption of these branded products becomes a form of self-determination, as the brand universe constructed by each brand supports individuals in the process of identity formation. Thus, fashion—and specifically the creativity offered by these brands—helps to shape both the identity of the characters and, by extension, that of the brand's potential audience (e.g. Indya Moore/Tommy Hilfiger, Hari Nef/Gucci, Dominique Jackson/Valentino). In this regard, the discourses articulated by the characters in the analysed fashion films reinforce Pérez Curiel's (2017) and García Estévez (2019) assertion that fashion serves as a means of representing alternative realities.

The objective of the fashion films analysed is ostensibly to capitalize on the construction of identity, in part through the consumption of branded products, by promoting a successful and aspirational way of being that encourages the target audience to attain the fulfilment of their own constructed or developing identity. Accordingly, the fashion films analysed convey the idea that consuming products from these brands may function as an act of identity self-affirmation. While, from a business perspective, this strategy appears effective—given the undeniable international success of the brands—from an ideological standpoint, such an interpretation remains open to question. Although these brands promote narratives of inclusion and diversity, analysis from physical, psychological, and sociological perspectives reveals a limited contribution to the authentic representation of transgender people, due to their idealized and stereotypical portrayal in these fashion films. Despite featuring well-known actresses, the characters they portray conform to idealized bodies that serve the advertising discourse, while overlooking the real diversity of transgender identities. These identity representations are not neutral; rather, they are articulated within transnormative frameworks, which constrain their inclusive potential, as criticized Johnson (2016) and Villegas Simón et al. (2003). In this regard, we concur with Pounders (2018), who argues that advertising aspires to represent authenticity and diversity, although this objective has yet to be fully realized.

The trans actresses project a unified identity: young women with normative beauty—Hunter Schafer's being more exuberant—and associated with high-end brands. Interestingly, Dominique Jackson, the oldest, appears youthful. Racial diversity, however, remains limited. As Sales Gelabert (2017) explains, Black women often face dual discrimination. Despite this, all featured actresses are portrayed as confident and active, without showing traits of weakness.

In two group-based films (Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent), the presence of Hari Nef and Indya Moore is not essential, but in the others, these actresses are the sole characters and thus indispensable. To counter this potentially mercantilist use, Castelló Martínez and Barrilero Carpio (2021) and Milagro (2021) advocate for brands with purpose. In the interest of purpose-driven brands, while these brands appear committed to identity diversity, this commitment is debatable, since after examining the values that each brand includes in its corporate social responsibility programs we know that Gucci, Tommy Hilfiger, Valentino, and Mugler support inclusion and gender diversity; in contrast, Yves Saint Laurent and Prada focus exclusively on sustainability.

Table 4. Diversity and inclusion as corporate values of the brand and social responsibility

Brands	Corporate values of social responsibility
Gucci Bloom: https://goo.su/IMFx0	Diversity, inclusion, equality, gender parity
Yves Saint Laurent: https://goo.su/6DK8BbH	Sustainability
Tommy Hilfiger: https://goo.su/UkP6CW	Sustainability, inclusion, equality, gender diversity and size diversity
Valentino Garavani: https://goo.su/m2iAl	Gender equality, inclusion, diversity, respect
Prada: https://goo.su/ZAKGcP	Sustainability
Mugler: https://goo.su/XyCTT	Tolerance

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

This raises the question: are these brands engaging in rainbow-washing? This possibility echoes Tórtola Moret, Paricio Esteban and Puchatt López's (2023) conclusion that advertising often lacks genuine commitment to inclusion.

6. Conclusions

In view of the results of our study, we can conclude that, on the one hand, the characters are constructed with a relative intersectionality that takes into consideration the appearance of white and black women,

one of whom aged 49 is also older than the rest. However, they all seem to be privileged, namely, they are all upper-class women, being presented more as inspirational than realistic role models, unattainable for middle-class consumers. They are very elegant and beautiful, the majority in the normative feminine sense of the word, although in the case of the Tommy Hilfiger fashion film, the trans actress plays with masculine and feminine gender expressions, disrupting binary gender expressions (RQ1).

On the other hand, from an internal perspective, it is essential to stress the importance of the actresses as key characters in the storylines and how their construction is inextricably linked to achieving their own identity as trans women, which is expressed in different ways (in the dialogue or monologue itself, taking a leap of faith, etc.). With respect to the objectives set, the analysis reveals that the narratives of fashion films are oriented toward conveying a clear insight: the pursuit of personal identity. The value consistently promoted is that of being true to oneself, which the characters articulate within the narrative itself, either through visual representation or through their own discourse. Nevertheless, although gender diversity and inclusion are the cornerstones of these fashion films and fashion is vindicated as a basic way of finding one's own identity, it is telling that the word 'trans' is never employed. There is more talk about the concepts of courage, struggle, play and building one's own identity in the abstract sense of the word which can refer to a wider audience. That is, the negative aspects of the path undertaken toward the conquest of one's own identity are omitted, and the positive aspects of the transformation, the successful outcome, and the empowerment achieved are emphasized (RQ2).

Additionally, it is important to emphasise that they are self-confident women whose main conflict is internal. In this regard, the idea of the inner journey shared by most of the protagonists of the fashion films has nothing to do with social pressure or external factors influencing them, but rather they are shown on the path of self-elevation that empowers them and always leads them to a happy ending. The social conflict existing in society with respect to the acceptance of trans women is avoided, as if this were already a fully accepted reality (RQ3).

At this point, it is essential to consider the new policies of Donald Trump affecting the defence of inclusion and gender diversity. On the one hand, the US president's opinion that there are only two genders (male and female) has affected the actress Hunter Schafer (who stars in the Prada and Mugler fashion films), who has reported that she has been issued a new passport in which she figures as a male (Hernández, 2025). On the other, and in relation to the corporate world, according to articles posted by Gómez Bobillo and Steward in the US digital news outlet *Business Insider*, the current trend followed by some companies has been to eliminate references to diversity, equity and inclusion from public reports and statements because of the fear of legal and political backlash. This reality places the spotlight on Tommy Hilfiger because it is a brand that implements the most complete gender equality programme in contrast to the others analysed here (see the link in Table 3). As a future line of research, considering the current political context of the country, it would be interesting to follow the evolution of these brands in the US market to observe whether they modify their discourses or continue to be committed to responsible advertising as regards gender diversity, equity and inclusion.

With respect to the representation of actions, these can be divided into two types: superficial actions, which portray gentle, reflexive and inoffensive characters, and actions aimed at reaching an objective, which can be linked to the path taken by each one of the actresses in the quest for their own identity (RQ4). Lastly, as to the representation of stereotypes, there are no markedly negative ones, although we have indeed identified one case of sexualisation, two of femininity associated with fairy-like characters and two cases of the preppy aesthetic, known to be linked to a wealthy society that combines tradition and modernity, without losing classicism (RQ5).

All things considered, we can conclude that, although Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Valentino, Prada, Mugler, and Tommy Hilfiger profess to be brands with a purpose because they address the representation of trans people in their fashion films, their social commitment to gender identity raises some doubts, for our results reveal that these brands seem to be more concerned with the actresses representing the idea of elegance and glamour than committed to the trans collective. Consequently, this reinforces a transnormative representation that constructs trans identity as an inevitable, aestheticized, and individual journey. Within this narrative, luxury brands act as key agents in building an elite trans

imaginary, effectively tying personal transformation to socioeconomic privilege and high-status consumption.

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