

How societal norms and underrepresentation of a certain culture affect the mainstream  
male fashion industry to become more inclusive: Kilts

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## *Abstract*

This paper explores how societal norms influenced by historical developments categorize mainstream items of clothing as masculine, feminine as well as male or female, respectively. It touches open the unequal opportunities rooted in the male mainstream fashion items, and analyses why the female fashion industry seems to be more inclusive and less restrictive. The paper primary focuses on kilts, as a kind of apparel that could not break into mainstream male fashion culture on an international level and discusses the possible reasons through an analysis of various articles. Moreover, the marketing perspective of kilts is address as well to better understand the issue with normalizing it within streetwear culture among men. Lastly, the idea of selective representation of certain cultures in the media as well as identity issues are discussed to find out how the underrepresentation of Scottish culture hinders certain cultural elements, such as kilts, from becoming contemporary and accessible to the general public.

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## ***Introduction***

The fashion industry currently sees no tangible restrictions due to the growing delimitations in feminine and masculine fashion cultures. Creative production processes such as fashion shows proffer ideas that have been unusual to the public eye, thus loosening boundaries rooted in conventional fashion inclinations. Especially conventional male fashion trends seem to be leaving the premises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's fashion reality. While men would traditionally be expected to wear a suit to a special event, and a pair of jeans with a simple t-shirt out on the street, this scenario is experiencing a complete turnabout which prominent figures contribute to greatly. Many male celebrities have been spotted wearing female-coded attire in the last couple of years. For example, Zac Efron was seen walking with a fringe crop top (fig. 1), Billy Porter presented himself on the 2019 Oscars red carpet wearing a long black voluminous velvet gown by Christian Siriano (fig. 2), and Harry Styles appeared on the Vogue Cover of 2020 December issue wearing a pale blue ball gown by Gucci (fig. 3). All these examples signal how revolutionary as well as controversial the male fashion trends can be despite the traditionally accepted apparel that the public is used to seeing on a male figure.

Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



However, even these examples do not fully represent the idea of male individuals going full-on with female attire. Zac Efron's crop top is an individual piece that merely adds a sense of edginess to his overall look. It does not portray a man experimenting with female-coded clothes entirely, as he is still wearing a pair of yellow-white sport pants with classic leather brown moccasin shoes. Despite his apparent attempt of playing with unconventional items, aspects of masculine outlook are clearly visible.

Billy Porter is also experimenting with what could be considered feminine. However, male-coded fashion elements and facial characteristics are even present in the case of Hollywood's most unconventional male actor. The black velvet gown consists of a tuxedo in the upper part, and Porter decided not to turn up wearing makeup or a wig, but his usual beard. These features do illustrate an unconventional fashion look; however, they overwhelmingly go along the lines of the drag culture more than female fashion culture.

The same attitude has been adopted for Harry Styles' Vogue cover. The look is certainly unusual and would even be outlandish for many, however, the singer is covering the gown with a black blazer, which does not represent a complete feminine look of a clothing item by a male figure. This is another example of constraints that are put into the male fashion industry.

When gender-bending fashion trends are discussed and implemented in the fashion industry, men are more inclined to be in the center of criticism and controversy by the public, whereas women's fashion choices get adaptation and acceptance at a much quicker pace. A great example of this phenomenon can be Yves Saint Laurent's Autumn/Winter "Pop Art" Collection in 1966. The little black dress that was a staple during the 60's was outshined by the so-called "Le Smoking" Tuxedos, which was a controversial statement of femininity around that period (<https://www.anothermag.com/>). Yet years later after this collection, fashion designers started to

present suits for women in a variety of ways, and women started wearing them on different occasions. Suits, tuxedos, and simple blazers that were staple in men's mainstream fashion quickly immigrated into women's wardrobes and became a complete part of female apparel collections from late 1960's onwards.

Famous actress Bianca Jagger was one of the fashion trailblazers who would always stun the public with her revolutionary fashion choices. She would always appear on the streets of New York with pantsuits, instead of a skirt or a dress (fig. 4). Even at her Wedding, Jagger substituted the traditional white wedding gown to a white YSL suit (Timms, 2020). Although being criticized for her unconventional style, the latter undoubtedly inspired the fashion industry to develop ideas that are innovative and different.



fig. 4

In 1980, Giorgio Armani came out with a collection of suits for women with her own unique touch and new design elements. In 1975, after launching his own label, Giorgio Armani's sister pushed him to create suits for women ([www.designer-vintage.com](http://www.designer-vintage.com)). All these occurrences paved a way for traditionally accepted male fashion items to integrate into mainstream female fashion culture. However, men have not had the luxury of integrating attire that are considered to be feminine into their wardrobes and make it mainstream, despite various

attempts by creative geniuses. This can be due to various societal reasons, the most crucial being the issue of masculinity and femininity. When we see women integrating and embracing an item of clothing so freely and proudly, while not having the same situation among men a certain conclusion can be drawn: masculinity is seen as superior to femininity.

Many designers have tried to revolutionize the male wardrobe by introducing items that would stereotypically fall under the “for her” category, such as the skirt. Notable examples of this can be Vivienne Westwood’s 97/98 Autumn/Winter collection, where male models walked the runway with guipure lace skirts, or Jean Paul Gaultier who put forth a model with a long black dress in his Autumn/Winter 2001/2002 collection, or Alexander McQueen’s Spring Summer Collection which overwhelmingly showcased men in skirts and pleated kilts(<http://www.vam.ac.uk/>). Nevertheless, skirts have not become a common item for men to wear on a daily basis, while blazers, pants and pantsuits for instance, which have historically and traditionally been worn by men, have been mainstream fashion choices for women for over six decades now.

Items that are created for women can be both extravagant as well as extraordinary and still be perceived as something unique and approachable; meanwhile, men do not receive the blessing of experimenting with certain items of clothing on their part. Hence, a number of questions arise, the major one being, whether or not societal norms and historical events have played any role in shaping the male fashion culture.

Evidently, the current conventional mainstream culture that has developed around male wardrobe does not coincide with the reality of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, men's fashion was as extravagant and significant as women's fashion at the time (Aspers, Godart, 2013). However, in

the 19<sup>th</sup> century European bourgeois families, men's focus became work, which contributed to the emergence of sober and simpler dresses for men (p.185).

When we think of male items, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century fashion discourse, pants, shirts, and suits are the first things that cross our minds at least from the stereotypical perspective. These are the conventional items of clothing that is imagined on a male figure. Articles of clothing that have a traditional feminine silhouette fall out of the mainstream male fashion culture such as the Kilt. A kilt is a type of knee-length garment with pleats at the back, originating in the traditional dress of Gaelic men and boys in the Scottish Highlands (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/kilt>). The shape and form of the item reminds of a modern skirt; however, with a particular tartanry garment. This clothing article is not worn by men across the world daily. It is only worn on special occasions such as wedding celebrations, for instance. Nevertheless, to understand why kilts or items which have a similar silhouette get left out from the mainstream male fashion culture, the historical contexts should be touched upon first.

The kilt as we know it today, springs from the tartan wrap. Around the 16<sup>th</sup> century, fashion was for brimful styles, as it would suggest one's social class (Newsome, 2019). Much fabric was equivalent to affluency so people would start folding large wraps of fabric and belt them around the waist area. This is what later came to be known as the belted plaid, which gradually evolved into a kilt. The garment that people would use to create an outdoorsy ensemble was 5 to 6 yards long and on average 50" to 60" wide. Once belted at the waist, the remainder of the fabric would hang downwards above the knee and the upper part would be styled in different ways around the shoulders (Newsome, 2019).

The extensive wrapping of the fabric gradually took a bit of a minimalistic form in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and led to the creation of the phillabeg. As opposed to the belted plaid, the

phillabeg was a cloth that was 4 yards long and only 25” wide. It was only making the lower part of the belted plaid, hence resembling a modern kilt silhouette. Many people think of phillabeg as the modern version of the kilt; however, it must be noted that the original version of the phillabeg was untailored. At the beginning of the 18th, the phillabeg became widespread and was worn until 1820’s. However, in the wake of the tailored kilt, the phillabeg started to lose its popularity around 1790’s (Newsome, 2019)

The tailored kilt contrasts from the phillabeg in that rather than essentially being assembled and belted on, the pleats were sewn down about 5 inches and the length was selvedge to selvedge with about 25” (Newsome, 2019). They first appeared in the military in the 1790’s in box pleated forms to the line. Around 3.5 and 4 yards of fabric was used to produce tailored kilts at the time. However, the tailored kilts patently underwent an evolution which led to adding waistbands, straps, linings, and buckles (Newsome, 2019). All these changes were adopted due to the developments in society that were evidently reflective in the course of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion.

Regardless of the fact that kilt is considered to be a reflection of true Scotsman’s cultural and traditional heritage, it can become a mainstream item of clothing due to its simple form, modern silhouette, and potential to manifest into staple streetwear item. However, I am inclined to believe that the society has made the fashion industry binary. Its incomprehensibility to embrace an item of clothing, that has a skirt-like silhouette into mainstream male fashion industry, hinders kilts from becoming a ready-to-wear item as pants, for instance.

## *Literature Review*

Kilts, from a historical perspective, have been considered as inferior articles of clothing. To better understand this statement, the historical context of this item should be discussed. Around the beginning of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Scottish society was rather divided. Highlanders and Lowlanders were forming the two primary strata. George IV, the Prince of Wales, planned a visit to Edinburgh in 1822, which became a reason for Scotland to recreate their cultural past that had rich traditional heritage (Zuelow, 2006). To do so, Walter Scott, a famous Scottish poet, and historian, was assigned to create such spectacle that would depict Scottish Society as a unified “realm.” As Scott oversaw the retrieval of the Scottish national memory that did not hold divisions among the members of society, he immediately turned to finding a way to dismantle the strata of Highlanders and Lowlanders. Since, Highlanders and Lowlanders were identified by their distinct physical outlook, Scott introduced the traditional tartanry clothing to equate both groups (p. 38). The plans went very successful, and by the gaze of George IV and other visitors, Scotland was portrayed as a unified society with rich traditional spirit.

In the past, items of clothing were not specifically viewed based on their shapes and forms. As a matter of fact, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the debate over “Kilts vs Breeches” came round, as Highlanders, being the upper division of Scottish society, supposedly wanted to stick to their superior identity. Even at the time, breeches were more appreciated by the majority, and were a traditional wear for Lowlanders. As Blackwood's editorial highlighted, pants “were ultimately superior clothing,” (p. 45). However, the reason why pants were superior articles of clothing, and what made them be so admirable was a question with no solid answer. As an argument against the advantages of wearing kilts, The Blackwood’s editorial mentioned that any “Lowlander who attempted to wear a kilt in cold weather would inevitably be “killed by the kilt” because they

would be unable to withstand the Scottish wind” (p. 45,46). Whether this was the only reason why kilts were not deemed as equal of an item as breeches or pants was not clear at the time.

Many people may still not have proper information and knowledge about kilts. They might immediately draw correlations based on their first impression of how it physically looks on a body. The first opinion that may come out towards kilts as an item would most probably be that it is, or it looks like a skirt. Although kilts and skirts display rather similar silhouettes, there is a clear distinction between these two articles of clothing. First, Kilts are consistently pleated in the back, whereas skirts come both pleated and un-pleated. Kilts are fastened with a belt, while skirts come in different styles. Moreover, skirts can have different lengths, but kilts are always of knee length. And lastly, kilts have been originally worn by men and they have a Gaelic origin, skirts have evolved overwhelmingly around female individuals, although they have also been worn by men in prehistoric times (Cvekic, 2016) and they do not have a particular place of origin.

Despite the distinctions that fashion history has put forward, many designers, as already mentioned, have tried to play with merging male and female fashion sides by introducing unisex aesthetics. Elizabeth Hawes, a New-York based fashion designer, was a pioneer in fighting for unisex apparel. In 1967, an exhibition at the Fashion Institute of Technology was organized to celebrate Hawes. (Woodard, 2017) She was a notorious figure in the fashion industry for her controversial approach to fashion. During the exhibition, Hawes introduced a series of skirts for men, as she believed that men are too constrained and restrictive when it comes to fashion. At that time, she made a prediction that by 1976, men in America will be at liberty the same as women (p.1). Although Hawes seemed to have a mission throughout her career to make the

fashion industry fluid and liberal, the current situation regarding the mainstream male fashion proves that her aspiration has not yet been achieved entirely.

Men being privileged societal actors are believed to be free of criticism. Nonetheless, when it comes to fashion choices, male privilege leaves the “scene.” History has shaped the role of a man as a superior individual in society, therefore they are thought to be free of scrutiny by and large. However, according to a study conducted by Ben Ben and Martin Dylan at the Ryerson University in Canada, men do face challenges when making certain fashion choices. In a study conducted among men within 19-29 ages and of different backgrounds, and sexualities, participants reported that they faced criticism and scrutiny about their clothing choices. Men edited their ensembles to offset conventionally feminine sartorial elements with styles that connoted masculinity. Both gay and straight men felt limited by gender and sexuality norms, as well as conventional menswear styles (Ben & Dylan, 2015). This leads to thinking that masculinity norms, and even conservative views that are present in society play a significant role in limiting the mainstream male fashion, regardless of the sexuality and preferences of male individuals.

Unconventional attire does tend to signal stereotypical thoughts with regards to one’s sexual inclination, or even gender identification in society. However, whether they always coincide with the reality is debatable. Hoe Ryung Lee, Jongsun Kim and Jisoo Ha, in their article “Neo-Cross-sexual fashion in contemporary men's suits,” discuss the concept of Cross-sexualism, and make an interesting argument with how gender roles are perceived based on clothing in our society. The term cross-sexual defines “any man who deems himself as a cis-gender male but empathizes with and takes pleasure in feminine sartorial design elements and fashionable accessories” (Lee, Kim, Ha, 2020, p. 2). This also includes heterosexual men. A

great example of this is brought up in the article, which explains the term more in practice. French bus drivers and male students from England arrive in school in a hot summer period, wearing skirts. They claimed that they wanted “to stay cooler in the hot weather” (p.2). This incident perfectly illustrates how people, and even heterosexual males can put on a female-deemed item of clothing, and still hold on to their “masculine” position in society. Only because what they are wearing is viewed as feminine, does not define them or question their gender role, as a matter of fact, they wore it to stay “cooler” in hot summer weather.

To make free choices and not be criticized for it, it is necessary to have a society or surrounding that leans on liberal values, at least from the theoretical perspective. However, this is not always the case. As Deepak Sarna writes in his article/essay “Men who wear dresses,” society has placed constraints on people that suggest that “wearing a dress is purely a feminine thing to do” (Sarna, 1993). Because of this, people are unable to break the categorization that exists in the fashion industry and this trend is transferred to the mainstream society. Even at Reed College, which holds onto strong liberal values, Sarna experienced some sort of non-verbal criticism when he wore a dress (p.1). Hence, the issue of categorization of articles of clothing is rooted in every society and environment, regardless of the social convention it is formed around.

Clothing items in general have some sort of benefits. Certain items can protect against cold or hot conditions, or give a clean obstruction, keeping irresistible and harmful materials absent from the body. Clothes also give assurance from bright radiation. Taking all these into consideration, many may ask what the benefit of kilts would be, if introduced into the mainstream male fashion culture. There are recounted reports that men who wear Scottish kilts have way better sperm quality and better fertility (Kompanje, 2013). Adding up to sperm check and sperm concentration, it reflects semen quality and male reproductive potential. It has been

demonstrated that changes within the scrotal temperature influence spermatogenesis (p.1). As a matter of fact, clothing increments the scrotal temperature to an unusual level that will have a negative impact on spermatogenesis. Hence, it appears conceivable that men ought to wear “skirt-like” garments (kilts) and dodge pants, at least amid the period during which they arrange to conceive children (p.3). Even if this were communicated to male individuals of society across the world, it would still be hard for kilts to break into the list of mainstream male fashion items. Stereotypically enough it might be thought that wearing an item that resembles the silhouette of a skirt, may challenge the male masculinity, and negatively affect the gender roles in society. However, Kilts symbolize masculinity from the historical perspective (p.3). Moreover, according to many research studies, men who wear kilts attract women as well as those wearing pants (p. 4). Hence, it can be argued that the way people form opinions towards certain articles of clothing, are because of the societal norms that have influenced a general subjective mindset towards kilts as a non-masculine attire from the perspective of people from eastern geolocations, for instance.

It is irrefutable that societal norms have put constraints on the fashion industry, which yielded to categorization of certain items of clothing for men and women, respectively. As it was discussed in the beginning, history does leave its effect behind, which creates values and norms later in society. The way people are communicated what is normal to wear and what is less appreciated to wear is based on what the societal majority’s opinion is. As far as “Kilt” as a menswear article is concerned, the symbolism, what women think of it, or what history it has are all ignored for one simple reason. It resembles a skirt, which is a mainstream female clothing item. Hence, what is not mainstream is not normal: it is unconventional.

## ***Research Questions and Methodology***

The main research questions this paper is trying to address are as followed: 1. Why are kilts or items with similar silhouette (e.g., skirts) not included in mainstream male fashion culture and how society influences this phenomenon. 2. Do kilts communicate a different message when worn by male individuals as a streetwear apparel and what is the reason behind it? 3. How has female mainstream fashion culture taken on a far liberal approach, whereas men are likely to be taken aback with experimenting what is deemed to be globally unconventional, e.g, kilts, skirts, etc.

The central methodological approach that was employed to help answer the research questions is qualitative. An online survey and interviews with a female and two male participants have been conducted to illustrate the results and come to a certain conclusion for the research questions.

The online survey was conducted through different social media platforms, the main one being Facebook. The survey was shared as a post in groups that included people of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. The survey consisted of 9 questions which included both multiple, “yes” and “no” as well as short answer types of questions. All the questions were selected in order to provide a solid analysis to the research questions.

As this paper is speculating around such fields as fashion and sociology the questions were chosen correspondingly to address the matter of further analysis of the survey. The first three questions are about Nationality, Age, and Gender. The first two questions are essential to understand how one’s homeland, which might have had certain impact on their societal view, and age group affect their response. The third question is about Gender, which has three options:

male, female, and other – which is a blank space to fill for people identifying neither male or female, for instance. This in its turn would help comparing the survey responses of people of different gender identities. The fourth question already focuses on the main topic, kilts, which would ask whether the participants know what kilts are by choosing yes or no. With an image of a red tartan kilt, the fifth question would ask the survey participants to choose yes or no to the question whether they would wear the item of clothing in public. As the survey is including people of different genders, the fifth question would help understand how male or female responders feel about wearing the presented item of clothing out in public. In case the responder chose the answer “no,” the next questions would ask for elaboration in order to understand the root of such an answer.

Kilts are not widely represented in the media as a traditional attire for Scotsmen, therefore the seventh question would ask whether the participant is informed about that fact. The question has three options: “yes,” “no,” and “other” – for those who might have an opposite opinion or other information about kilts and they would like to share. The eighth question presents a young male individual casually standing and wearing a kilt with a white t-shirt. The image was intentionally chosen to represent that kilts might as well be worn as a streetwear apparel by men on a daily basis. It asks the survey participants how they would feel if their partner or friend appeared in public with a similar look as presented in the image. Since, the question can be answered rather elaborately, multiple answers have been provided to choose from, which are as followed: 1. I would be totally ok with his choice 2. I would be a bit constrained with him in public 3. I would be quite uncomfortable with his choice 4. I would not go out in public with him wearing a similar outfit. The answers have been chosen to understand the acceptance spectrum of

the respondents and evaluate their inclusivity as well as open-mindedness regarding unconventional streetwear attire.

Items of clothing are usually associated with certain gender and sexual identities. Many might draw parallels between what one decides to wear and their gender identity or sexual preference for instance. Hence, the last question asks whether the participant draws any correlations between one's sexuality/gender identity and fashion choices. This question provides three responses: "yes," "no," "somewhat yes." The third option has been selected to evaluate if there is even a subtle stigma attached to the idea that a person's physical outlook in public may inspire subjective opinions of their sexuality or gender.

As already mentioned, interviews have been conducted as well. The interview part was fundamental to understand the viewpoint of kilts as a traditional clothing item from the perspective of people with Scottish origin. Despite the fact that kilt is a traditional highlander dress that has been worn initially by men, the interview was conducted not only with male participants, but also a female participant. This was done to be able to understand a female perspective on the topic and give a more sophisticated acknowledgement on the central research questions. Additionally, the participants were also chosen based on their age. One of the male participants is a teenager, the female participant is a young adult, and the other male participant is an adult. The generation difference would help analyze the differences in their responses.

As the interview was conducted with Scottish individuals, the couple of questions would be more general and focus on what kilt is for the interviewees, what words they would choose to describe the item of clothing and whether it has any symbolism. Although, it was initially known that kilts are usually worn on special occasions, such as Weddings, or certain celebrations, the questions were designed to find out whether Kilts are worn casually on a day-to-day basis in

Scotland. Moreover, kilts are known to be non-mainstream and less represented in male fashion culture. Therefore, it would be essential to know what potential reasons there might be for such development regarding kilts and with another question to understand if the interviews see any potential of kilts becoming a mainstream streetwear item or any steps that can be taken to make this a reality. Furthermore, they were asked about their potential reaction towards a male individual casually wearing a kilt in public.

As an item of clothing that has a skirt-like silhouette, the interviewees were also asked if there is any stigma among the Scottish male youth towards wearing a kilt even on special occasions. The participants were also asked if there would be any negative correlation between masculinity and wearing a kilt as a streetwear even in Scotland.

Kilts, as a traditional Gaelic male dress, seem to not have evolved as a traditional dress for women as well. Hence, the participants were asked whether women and girls wear kilts in general and how it is perceived in Scotland. As a further matter, it was necessary to learn more about female perception of kilts worn by male: what they think when their partner or friend wears a kilt, and if there is any reluctance or discomfort towards a traditional fashion choice by their partners even for a special occasion.

As the questions might have required elaborate answers, certain follow-up questions have been asked as well, which will be presented in the analysis section below.

## *Research Findings and Analysis*

### *Survey Analysis*

123 participants have taken part in the online survey (fig. 5), with the majority of respondents being from countries in Europe(43.1%) and Asia(39.8%), respectively. Around 7%, 6% and 3% of the respondents correspondingly chose South America, Africa, and North America as their nationality by continent. No respondents were identified from Australia.

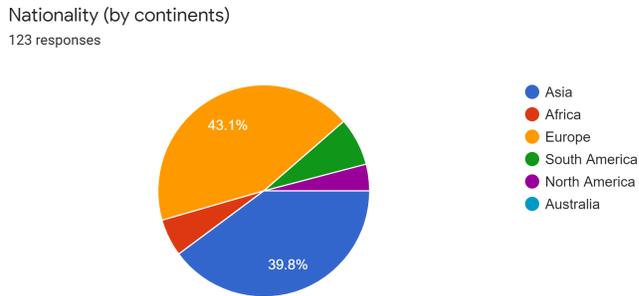


fig. 5

Out of all respondents, 61% were recorded to be up to 21 years of age, while 35.8% aged between 22-38. A very small percentage of the respondents were between 38-54 and above 54 age range, respectively. (fig. 6)

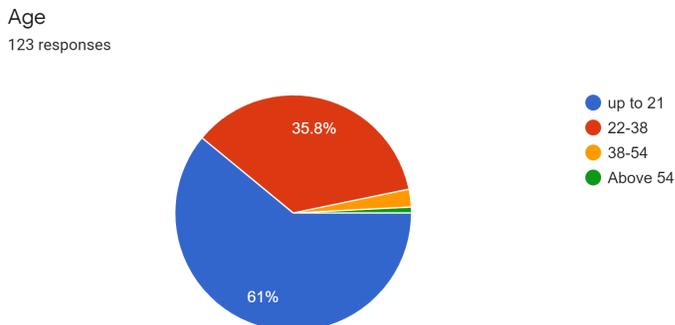


fig. 6

With regards to Gender, the majority (61%) identified as female and the 37.4% as male. 2% of the participants identified as Non-binary (fig. 7)

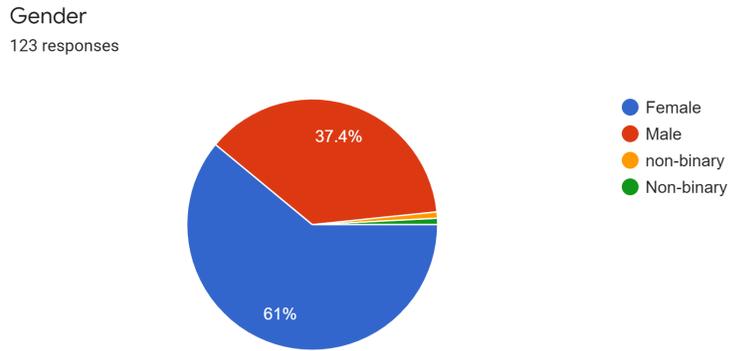


fig. 7

To the question, whether they know what kilts are, around 66.7% of the participants answered “yes,” while 33.3% being completely unaware of the name of the clothing item (fig. 8).

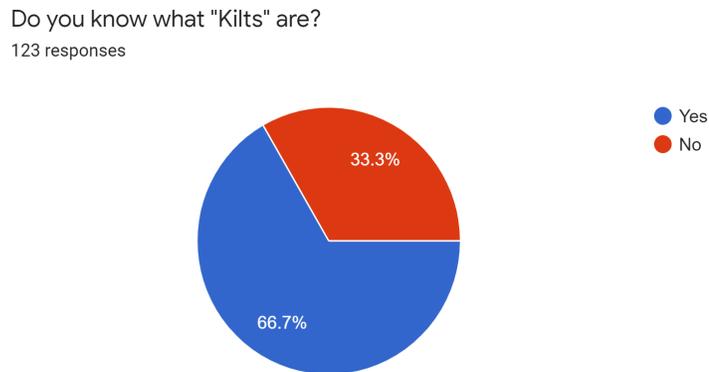


fig. 8

When asked if they would wear the presented clothing item (a red tartan kilt) in public, the majority of participants answered “no” (fig. 9). In fact, 63 participants, which includes both male and female respondents would not consider a kilt as a streetwear apparel. Many of the participants had different responses as to why they would not wear a kilt out in public. The majority of male participants had a similar answer, which was “it’s not for men.” Such an answer may come from from two different perspectives for men. The first one is that they might not be well aware of the fact that the presented picture in the former question was a kilt, which has been worn traditionally by men. The second reason is that the picture is very likely to remind them of a skirt, which is something they might be used to seeing on a female individual in their culture. This is another evidence that certain items of clothing are not communicated in different societies based on their historical, cultural and current contexts, which results in low level of awareness towards kilts, in this case. Presumably, skirts are have a female representation, whereas pants have a male representation.

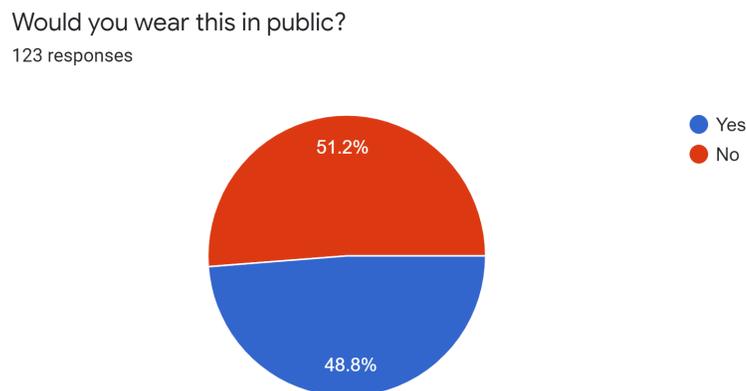


fig. 9

Another interesting group of responses was regarding the style of the item. Many answered that it is “not beautiful,” or that the item does not go along the lines of their mainstream fashion choices. Many of the responders, even among women referred to a kilt as a skirt. Even in this case, it can be analysed why they would not wear it out in public. Most of the skirts in today’s fashion era, tend to be of short length, with more minimalistic patterns, and of more common garments, such as leather or denim. This, in fact, could have also affected their responses, given that skirts that do not conform the aforementioned criteria might as well fall out of use.

Several participants, with a very small percentage, even touched upon the issue of cultural appropriation. Their answers varied from “it is not part of my cultur” to “it would be offensive to the Scottish people.” This illustrates that even cultural context of a clothing article might be considered before deciding to wear it or not. However, the reason why so few participants justified their answer “no” to wearing the presented item of clothing in public, is again because of the big unawareness of the cultural context of kilts, in this case.

Interestingly enough the majority of survey participants (78%) were aware that kilts have traditionally been worn by men. Only around 20% of the participants did not know about this fact, whereas two percent correspondingly answered they definitely knew about it or that they had heard but were not certain enough to give an exact response to the question (fig. 10).

Did you know that this item of clothing has traditionally been worn by men?

123 responses

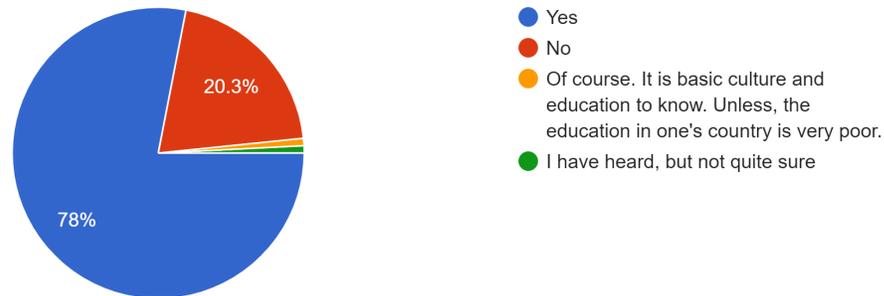


fig. 10

When the category of streetwear apparel is discussed, the public opinion play a pivotal role in determining whether or not a certain item of clothing would be worn in public. In the case of a kilt, being an unconventional item from the perspective of mainstream male fashion culture, public opinion would be taken into consideration as well. As a matter of fact, only 28.5% answered that they would be ok if their friend or partner decided to wear a kilt in public. The majority of participants chose options that illustrate their reluctance towards kilt, were their friend or partner chose to wear outside. 27.6% answered that they would not go out in public had they known their friend was going to wear a kilt. Another 44% of respondents said that they would feel constrained or uncomfortable with such a fashion choice by their friend or partner. These answers clearly show that many people stigmatise an item of clothing, potentially because it reminds them of a skirt. Neither the historical and cultural elements nor the fact that kilts have been exclusively worn by male members of Scottish society is taken into account. Thus, such a result has yielded from this particular question (fig. 11).

How would you feel if your partner/friend had such look in public?

123 responses

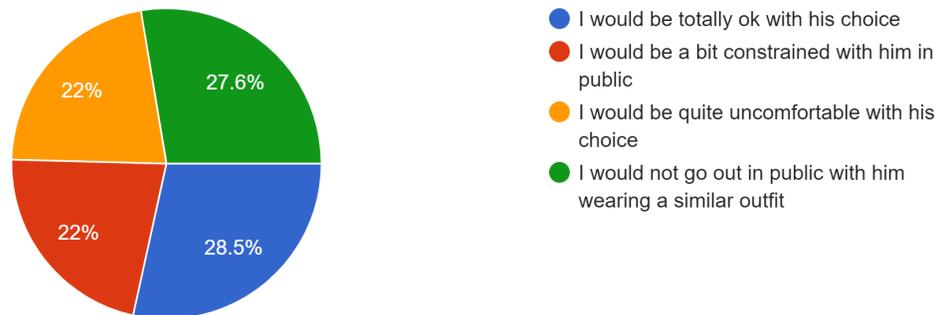


fig. 11

Lastly, a correlation between one's fashion choices and sexuality could be drawn by many people. To find that out, the participants were also asked whether they make assumptions about one's sexuality based on how they present themselves physically in public. The overwhelming majority, as a matter of fact, does, which becomes clear by looking at the percentages. 40.7% of people answered "somewhat yes" and 37.4% said "yes." Only 22% of respondents answered "no" to the question (fig. 12). Hence, fashion choices can impact on how people perceive one another's sexual orientation, thus playing a big role in accepting or denying to wear a certain article of clothing.

Even though, the 21st century seems to be introducing unconventional ideas in many spheres including fashion, there is a huge stigmatism around certain articles of clothing that have not found their way into mainstream fashion. Apparently clothing and sexuality are also interconnected according to some people, which negatively affects items of clothing that are considered to be unconventional. Kilts, being one of those items, might not be considered by male individuals, as based on the survey, many people might make assumptions about one's

sexual orientation. Kilts will just not be regarded as something to wear outside by men, not only to avoid stereotypic assumptions but also to keep the public out of discussions on topics, such as sexuality, which can be highly personal for many people.

Do you draw any correlations between one's sexuality/gender identity and fashion choices?

123 responses

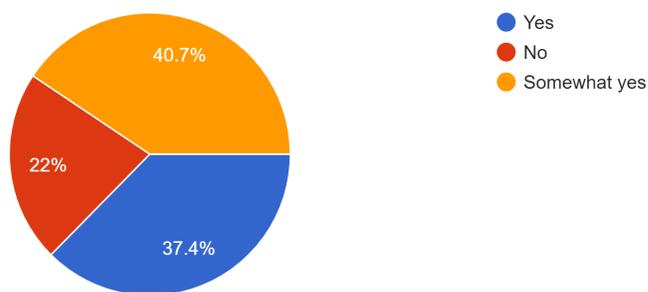


fig. 12

### ***Interview N1. Analysis***

Giving a definition or describing clothing items is simple and rather directional; however, when it comes to items that hold a historical context, the case may be different. The description can differ especially from geographic to geographic. For Millie Brown, a 21-year-old student, who is originally from Edinburg, Scotland and was one of the participants in the conducted interviews, Kilts are “extremely traditional.” However, she mentions that “Kilts may be viewed

stereotypically oversexualized by many people.” As a matter of fact, kilts are supposed to be worn without any underwear, which may stimulate sexual thoughts among people towards Scotsmen wearing kilts. Also, many people are likely to be unaware about the proper way kilts should be worn, and they might jump into conclusions that not wearing an underwear is done intentionally to draw attention or inspire sexual feelings in a given circumstance.

In Addition, kilts do tend to be viewed as quite masculine and sexy. In fact, as Millie highlights, many women think that “there is nothing sexier than a man in a kilt.” While it may be viewed as another attempt of sexualizing kilts, its strong attachment to its historic context as well as the sexiness and masculinity component might as well give practical features to kilts as a male apparel.

Kilts are deemed as traditional dress for Scotsmen; however, a question arises whether women in Scotland have a national dress. As Millie mentioned, kilts are mostly worn by male individuals, although she has worn a kilt when she had to represent her country during cultural events in international settings. However, the most interesting aspect around this question was that at her school the female students had to wear kilts, whereas male students had to wear trousers. This is another example that proves female fashion culture is more free, adaptable, unrestrictive, and inclusive. If male students are not wearing kilts, because it is a female school uniform, from early ages they are exposed to the fact that kilts and items with similar silhouette belong to the female fashion. Even if they are asked to wear it only on special occasions, they are very likely to refuse, as they have seen their female classmates wearing them. This in its turn leads to categorizing what belongs in boys’ wardrobes and girls’ wardrobes, respectively.

Considering a kilt as a streetwear apparel for men can have a high potential. As Millie elaborates, “black kilts are quite fashionable nowadays, although they require competence to

wear it properly as a streetwear.” However, she also mentions that when kilts begin to become a mainstream streetwear item for men it may not clearly communicate that it is a kilt, since it is more “akin to the style of wearing a skirt” as a streetwear. Hence, there might be some confusion among people who may not even be familiar with kilts by and large.

Furthermore, kilts are associated with “strong formal connotations,” as Mille contemplates. Even if they were to become a mainstream streetwear apparel it would not be easily integrated at least in Scottish society. In fact, Millie pointed out that Scottish are fully aware that kilts are worn exclusively on special occasions, hence seeing someone, even for example a tourist in a kilt, is viewed as “weird.” Thus, there is a clear traditional identity attached to kilts as a formal wear and is generally rare or even completely neglected as a streetwear fashion choice even for Scotsmen.

The distinction between a kilt and a skirt turns out to be not easily perceived not exclusively by people outside Scotland or the UK, but even native-born English. As Millie recalls, even some people from England could not see the distinction between a kilt and a skirt. Some of them even said to her, “Oh You wear skirts.” This illustrates how underrepresented Scottish traditions are and how uneducated people may be when a traditional item of clothing, in this case kilts, are concerned even in the British mainland.

Generation gap appears to have its impact among male individuals who decide to wear a kilt. As Mille mentions, “My younger brother, who is fifteen, refuses to wear a kilt to special celebrations, he instead wears a suit.” Even though their mother constantly accentuates that he should be proud of his Scottish background, Millie’s brother thinks that it is “weird” for him to show up in a kilt. However, Millie’s Dad dons his kilt proudly every time he goes on certain celebrations, as he is able to show his cultural heritage through her physical look, in which kilt

plays a major role. The fact that people of different generations look at the same item of clothing from different lenses comes from the changes in the fashion industry and eastern/western societal practices that influence these changes. As suits or pants for instance, overwhelmingly occupy the fashion industry, it affects people's mindset and puts them in a spectrum to what is ok to wear for a man and a woman, correspondingly. Moreover, being physically as well as digitally exposed to different societies, in which the majority of men wear pants as a streetwear item and suits as formal wear, the idea of wearing something across the lines of this created "normalcy" puts people and especially the younger generation in a binary environment.

### ***Interview N2. and N3.***

The male perspective differs from that of a female perspective when it comes to giving kilts a description of any kind. As already highlighted two male participants of different generations were included in the interviews. The first interviewee was Adam Brown, and the second interviewee was his son Edward Brown. When asked to describe a kilt, apart from being "traditional and unique," both participants mentioned that it is also "versatile and flattering." These features can be considered as inherent components to kilts. In fact, Adam mentioned that especially for curvy people who are relatively shorter in height, when worn properly, kilts can look flattering and bring a correct proportion to their physique. This is in actuality an advantageous example that kilts have compared to pants, for instance. Even in the current times, body image is of great importance for many people. At least subconsciously, people pay a great deal of attention to how they look in their clothes. Pants, being quite problematic sometimes, do affect many, especially when they do not fit size-wise. This in its turn impacts people emotionally, signaling that their body proportions do not fit with the standard sizes offered in the market. Kilts, however, can not only come across more flattering to any kind of body, but also,

due to their waistbands, straps, linings, and buckles, they can fully be donned by people of various body proportions without making extra changes to the item.

As already mentioned a kilt is usually worn when one attends a special event such as wedding parties, for instance. During a wedding party, Edward reminisces about how he opted for a suit instead of a kilt, whereas his Dad, Adam, turned up to the event wearing a kilt. When asked what triggered such a decision, Adam said, “I don’t know, I just did not feel comfortable wearing a kilt to that party, I believe I would have stood out from the crowd.” When we get deeper into this answer it becomes clear that there is stigma attached to certain types of clothing items even among youth. Even within the Scottish youth, their national dress may come across as extraordinary but not on the most positive note when it comes to wearing it in public. The articles of clothing or ensembles that are less provocative tend to be prioritized, since a sense of social comfort is easily achievable in a public bubble. Additionally, the possible reasons for such an approach to kilts by the youngsters is highly impacted by the mainstream trends that are introduced in the fashion industry by and large.

Kilt as a clothing article holds a rich historical heritage. However, the representation of this item of clothing does not seem to catch the attention of many male fashion enthusiasts. In fact, one will hardly ever see a male individual walking down the street wearing a kilt on a daily basis even in Scotland, where Kilts originated. Even on special events, kilts have lost their popularity, as Adam mentioned. Especially many young individuals do not even consider wearing a kilt for a special occasion. He believes that because people do not pay enough attention to the cultural context of kilts, it starts to gradually fall out of use. Hence, not being well aware of the history behind a national dress might make many young people view their

national dress as a trivial item that does not hold significance and certain values, and therefore a level of neglect can potentially arise.

It has been already mentioned that kilts, although being a national dress for Scotsmen, have the potential to become mainstream, given that they have a silhouette that is similar to skirts. However, evidently enough kilts are far from being a mainstream clothing item. When asked about what possible reasons there might be for such a phenomenon, Adam was quick to respond that “a good kilt is expensive and the garment is quite heavy,” while Adam mentioned that the the reason why kilts are not worn extensively is because there is an issue of toxic masculinity that impacts the international daily use of kilts. In fact, two different perspectives on this question were touched upon. However, certain hypothetical analysis can be done to find out why Adam and Edwards, both being from Scotland, gave two different responses. First of all, the age gap could have impacted their answers. Coming from two different generations, these two participants look at this topic differently. Adam could have been unfamiliar with toxic masculinity as a term, especially given that it is a quite new term, or at least a term that has gained popularity in the last couple of years. Moreover, Adam comes from a generation, where people take pride in their national Gaelic dress and nothing other than traditional values is attached to kilts as an article of clothing. Meanwhile, Adam, who has been growing up in a media oriented era, where people of different backgrounds freely hold views on certain topics, could have formed his opinion based on his experiences. In fact, many cultures do not have a unique national dress as kilts, for instance. Therefore, kilts being similar to skirts silhouette-wise can be viewed in a strange manner, since many might have seen overwhelmingly female individuals wearing such an item of clothing in their society.

The majority of national dresses hold specific symbolic meanings within them. For example, kimonos represent longevity and good fortune (<https://www.vam.ac.uk/>). However, symbolic concepts seem to be not strongly associated with kilts. Although it is part of a national scottish dress, “kilt on its own, does not hold any symbolism,” highlighted Adam. The Gaelic national dress at present times does not end with kilts, it includes other parts as well. The belt, sporran (the purse), kilt knife and pin, hose, which are the woollen socks, as well as the shoes, known as Ghillie Brogues, are what make up the whole national Gaelic dress for the modern Scotsmen. When regarded as a whole, it symbolizes the true nature of a Gaelic man, and a sense of masculinity, as Adam mentioned. Provided that a kilt on its own does not represent symbolic values, and give a full historical and even cultural context, might as well give kilt the idea to be regarded as a potential mainstream item in the future.

Many items of clothing may bring about the issue of cultural appropriation, especially national dresses. Many artists, especially in the music industry, have been in the center of criticism for wearing a national dress that culturally they are not a part of. For example, a couple of years ago, Selena Gomez, a famous American singer and actress, performed in MTV movie awards wearing a bindi and indian garments. Many people did not find her fashion choice tactful and even regarded the whole look as an example of cultural appropriation. The singer chose such a look to complement her performance; however, many thought that she had taken no notice of the true cultural elements behind such a look and therefore found herself in a center of online backlash.

The issue of cultural appropriation is widely discussed especially in the fashion industry. However, when it comes to kilts, Scotsmen seem to have no issue with people willing to wear them on a daily basis. In fact, Adam said that he would be completely fine if people regardless of

their gender and nationality started wearing kilts whenever and wherever they desire to. This illustrates the point that although having a rich historical heritage and cultural uniqueness, kilts do stand a chance of becoming unapologetically mainstream one day, especially within male individuals. No issue of cultural appropriation will apply to kilts, which is one of the important aspects nowadays when showcasing pieces with a new touch and in different innovative ways.

### ***Traditional Scottish Identity vs. Contemporary Scottish Identity***

Scotland has a rich cultural heritage, and all the components are equally unique and inherent to the Scottish identity, one of those unique components being the traditional Gaelic dress. Despite the fact that kilts, being a part of the whole Scottish national ensemble, do not hold any specific symbolism on their own, the tartan is hugely symbolical of the traditional heritage in Scotland (Marcella-Hood, 2020). However, the fact that Scotland is primarily popular for its textile industry and people associate Scotland with tartan garments, it leaves a huge gap for the Scotland to advance in the contemporary fashion scene with its items. As McCrone et al (1995) mentioned, the Scottish heritage that celebrates its symbols with tartanry in general comes across as outdated and represents overwhelmingly the traditional Scottish identity. Due to this, the modern Scottish identity with regards to fashion is demoted and less represented.

Traditional Scottish identity and the symbolism that has evolved around it throughout the fashion discourse should be celebrated by all means. However, the strong attachment to the traditional identity does not let certain items of clothing access the mainstream fashion culture. Hence it becomes rather challenging for designers to put forth articles of clothing that have a strong cultural and traditional context behind them.

Furthermore, as Marcella-Hood (2020) argues, the main concentration that goes into representing the Scottish identity through literature is on textiles. She does not oppose the idea of not learning about the specificities or certain facts about the textile industry in Scotland, she rather finds it “interesting and useful.” There is also a big number of books and different literature on the history of tartanry. However, these seem to be less relevant nowadays, which gives an impression of treating Scottish identity regarding fashion more as a hub for producing textile, omitting the creative geniuses that created such a unique garment that tartan is.

### ***Representation of different cultures in Media***

Media serves as a popular panel to learn about different cultures through different means. Many times, various TV programs and films incorporate elements in their scenes based on the cultural context the plot develops around. A great current example of this is the netflix series “Emily in Paris,” where the main character moves to Paris, France from Chicago and starts working at a French marketing firm. The series clearly shows certain cultural aspects that are inherent to France, and quite challenging to adapt to especially for someone from the United States. Although, the central plot of the movie is the difference between work life balance in the United States and France, and how Emily finds herself in a societal crisis as an American, many different cultural realms are touched upon as well. From french cuisine to behavioral patterns and fashion trends, viewers get a firsthand knowledge of how french life, particularly in Paris, functions. They also get acquainted with what constitutes “frenchness” and “parisian lifestyle” through the elements as mentioned above. Hence, the representation of french culture grows and becomes one that is easily identifiable.

Another great example is the film “Eat, Pray, Love,” by Ryan Murphy based on the original book by Elizabeth Gilbert, “Eat, Pray, Love.” In this movie Julia Roberts, who plays the

main character, finds herself in an unhappy marriage, which results in a divorce and her leaving her hometown New York, and travel to Italy, India, and Malaysia. In this movie, there are a myriad of cultural elements that are highlighted in different manners. The Italian cuisine, language and fashion are the focal points that the plot of the movie revolves around, whereas religion, spirituality, and emotional stability are highlighted in the other two countries, the main character travels to. After watching the movie, viewers are able to identify certain aspects of cultural life in these three countries. They learn and explore things that are inherent to Italian, Indian, and Malaysian cultures, respectively. Although Italian culture is rather popular on an international scale, the Indian and Malaysian cultures might be not well-represented especially in the western world. However, with this movie, viewers learn new things about these cultures, which subsequently leads to the elevation of eastern cultural representations.

When it comes to the representation of the Scottish culture, the scenario takes on a different approach. Not many TV programs and shows showcase what Scottish culture is and how different it is in the United Kingdom. Such an approach might be because of the geolocation as well as Scotland's status as a state. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland consists of four countries, one of them being Scotland. Therefore, what constitutes Scottish may be incorporated into the domain of the United Kingdom and come to be known as "British" rather than "Scottish." It should be noted that Scottish culture has certain particularities that can be seen mostly in the cities of Scotland. However, because it does not hold a status of an independent state, the cultural elements start to blend with British ideology and identity, which influences the separate representation of Scottish culture in the media.

Nonetheless, there is currently a growing interest in Scottish culture in the media. A semi-scripted docuseries called "Men in Kilts: A Roadtrip with Sam and Graham" takes the

viewers through the rich traditional heritage as well as cultural habits Scots have been intimately attached to for centuries (Klain, 2021). From cuisine to music and fashion, Sam and Graham experience the complex, and diverse culture of their homeland, while having adventurous moments in different circumstances throughout the episodes. This docuseries is one of the fewest TV programs that specially points the viewer's attention to the Scottish identity, and informs about cultural elements in a more amusing manner. One of their episodes is dedicated to tartans and clans, where they dive into the fashion culture of their homeland, and learn about how each tartan represents a specific clan. All this information is well communicated to the audience, which positively influences the representation of Scottish culture. Discussing various aspects of traditions in Scotland, Sam and Graham illuminate facts and information exclusively related to the Scottish national identity, which clearly accentuates what Scotland is all about from the historical and cultural point of view.

### ***How are kilts marketed in online platforms***

The digital advances in the 21st century have impacted almost every aspect of life. From our social life, personal habits to shopping behaviors, everything seems to be influenced by what digital platforms "dictate." The technological developments have forced industries establishing digital presence as well. Currently many brands, apart from having their products sold in actual stores, also market their products online. Stores specialized in making kilts and selling them are no exception.

When exploring the way kilt stores market their products online, certain things became apparent. First, kilts are not presented to potential consumers in a way that would intrigue or spark interest in them. There is no question that kilts intimately hold onto traditional and cultural elements within the Highlanders in Scotland and that this should be celebrated and represented.

However, because kilt, as a traditional item is presented in online platforms in a traditional way, the access to contemporary fashion world becomes challenging. To illustrate, when looking at how kilts are positioned in online stores, one thing becomes clear: the stores' objective is merely the product, making kilts product-oriented items (fig. 13). While many stores are trying to communicate an image, style, and unique sense of fashion, kilt-stores intentionally or unintentionally counteract such an approach.

This marketing strategy can also be justified. Scotsmen take great pride in their national dress and value the uniqueness of it. Because it communicates a rich historical heritage and has a special cultural context to it, stores that sell kilts might as well wish to uphold the exclusivity of their products by defying the contemporary marketing strategies that help many brands become inclusive and accessible to everyone. Nevertheless, this may not be the objective of the stores that sell kilts, since they might not sell style, trend, and fashion, with kilts, but a part of scottish history that is special and out of the premissis of the contemporary reality. Yet, the fact that such an approach puts obstacles and does not contribute to the inclusivity of the mainstream male fashion culture is also undeniable.



(fig. 13)

## ***Conclusion***

The mainstream male fashion industry and female fashion industry are not on the same level when it comes to integrating certain items of clothing into male and female wardrobes, respectively. While male-coded clothing items have broken into female wardrobes easily and quickly received acceptance by the general public, items that resemble female items struggle to get mainstream inclusion within male wardrobes. The extensive research on kilts, as a national dress for Scotsmen and an item that has a silhouette similar to skirts, showed how underrepresented kilts are internationally, which impacts as to how society perceives and categorises items of clothing for male and female, correspondingly. All the information from the literature research as well as conducted interviews and surveys showed a somewhat conclusive statement as to why kilts or items with a similar silhouette are not part of mainstream male fashion culture. The mainstream fashion culture has introduced the silhouette of a skirt as feminine. Kilts could not find their way into the international mainstream male fashion culture and have been disregarded, because they remind people of a skirt, and skirt has been overwhelmingly considered as a female item of clothing. Hence, the mainstream fashion culture throughout history conveyed a general concept with regards to certain silhouettes, due to which kilts have struggled to become contemporary and did not find their place in male wardrobes internationally, as skirts did within girls and women.

## *Avenues for Future Research*

The topics listed below can be considered for future research to dive deeper into topics and themes speculating around the interconnection between sociology and fashion.

1. How have pants come to become the priority fashion item for both males and females.
2. Do women feel insecure about their fashion choices and how society boosts those potential insecurities within females
3. How have clothes become a great means of demonstrating political statements
4. What contributes to revisiting old fashion trends and bringing them back into contemporary fashion
5. How has the concept of “style” changed over time and what has impacted that.
6. How does fashion industry work to adjust items of clothing for non-binary individuals as well
7. LGBTQ representation in marketing strategies of certain labels.
8. How has fashion industry helped controversial topics come into mainstream world: toxic masculinity, cultural appropriation, genderless fashion, etc.

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