

# “PARIS MEASUREMENTS”

— THE INERTIA OF THE THIN IDEAL ON THE  
RUNWAYS OF PARIS FASHION WEEK

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**Title: “Paris Measurements”** – The Inertia of the Thin Ideal on the Runways of Paris Fashion Week

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### **Abstract**

*Background* - Welcome to the 2010's and its visual information culture informing about the century-old ideal of thinness, by sending (almost) exclusively thin bodies down the runway of Paris Fashion Week (PFW). This, while at the same time the academia and mass media are repeatedly articulating the necessity of a more ethical aesthetic within the fashion industry, while the argument that “thinness sells” lack empirical support, while measures are taken around Europe to discourage media bias and encourage healthy bodies walking the, and while the body positivity movement – applauding the diversity of body types – is on the rise in the Western society.

*Problem* - How can it be explained that PFW, as an event organized to communicate the latest trends, and as an institution of a concept that thrives on change, is being stuck in an inertia of thin models? The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the explanations for the idealization of thin bodies in regard to female runway models, to be found in visual representations of PFW. Examining the paradox of the idealization of thin bodies has the potential to reveal the measures necessary to establish practices of ethical representation in the realm of PFW.

*Method* - The search for explanations to the inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW is based upon a qualitative research design and a method of semi-structured interviews. The sample consisted of fourteen people involved in the event of PFW. It is framed within three theoretical perspectives: the trickle-down, trickle-across and trickle-up theories – associated with authors such as Simmel (1957), King (1963) and Blumer (1969a; 1969b); a theoretical view of the relation between fashion, clothes and the body provided by Barnard (2014) and, lastly, the Organizational Ecology Theory presented by Hannan and Freeman (1977; 1989).

*Findings* - The findings suggest that the inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW is explained by the thin body not only being part of a long history and tradition of creating and showing fashion, but also being dressed in aesthetic value. At the same time, the explanations to the idealization, or inertia, of thin bodies on PFW are found to be multiple as well as paradoxical, a conclusion serving as an explanation in itself.

*Conclusion* – It is difficult to point out *the* explanation to the inertia of the thin ideal – both in terms of factors and actors – not at least due to the explanations stemming from both social and cultural as well as economic aspects of fashion. As a consequence, every actor part the fashion industry need to understand the effects as well as the extent of idealization of thin bodies, and start to realize that public health is more important than profits.

**Keywords:** Thin Ideal, Visual Representation, Idealization, Organizational Ecology, Inertia, Aesthetics, Fashion Week, Paris Fashion Week

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## **Glossary**

### **Aesthetics, aesthetic (noun)**

The word “aesthetics” is used in two ways, either as referring to a certain conception of beauty, a particular taste for what is pleasing to the sight, or as referring to a pleasing appearance or effect (Merriam-Webster n.d.a).

### **Aesthetic (adjective)**

Aesthetic is used as a synonym to “pleasing in appearance”, or “beautiful” (Merriam-Webster n.d.a).

### **Fashion**

In consonance with Kawamura (2004), fashion is considered as a concept that separates itself from other words which are often used as synonyms of fashion. While words such as clothing, garments and apparel refer to tangible objects, fashion is considered as an intangible object (Kawamura 2004). Fashion is understood as the invisible elements included in for example clothing, which in turn are a result of the acceptance of certain cultural values (ibid.). Fashion is characterized by change, ambivalence and novelty (ibid.).

### **Fashion company**

While all of the fashion companies showing their collections on Paris Fashion Week design and sells exclusive clothing and accessories, not all of them are founded as businesses of haute couture over 200 years ago. Younger fashion companies without a distinct and long history of haute couture are therefore referred to as “fashion companies”, in distinction from “fashion house”:

### **Fashion house**

The concept of fashion house is used throughout the text referring to a fashion company with a long history and a present influenced by haute couture. The connection between the expression “fashion house” and haute couture is unraveled by the fact that the business of the first haute couturier, Charles Frederick Worth, was called “Maison Worth”, or, in English, “House of Worth” and that it is often used when referring to fashion companies that design and sells exclusive clothing and accessories, or haute couture (Cambridge Dictionary 2019; Macmillan Dictionary 2019; Schaeffer 2001).

## **Haute Couture**

“Haute couture” is French for “High fashion” or “High dressmaking” and often understood as expensive and one-of-a-kind clothing, or the business of making expensive clothing of original design (Cambridge Dictionary 2019; Macmillan Dictionary 2019; Morton 2019). As the founder of “Maison Worth” – which during the 19th century started to create one off pieces of fashion for specific clients – the Englishman Charles Frederick Worth is considered to be the father of haute couture (Morton 2019). However, as recognized in the study at issue, the definition of haute couture is today far more specific, requiring specific rules for qualification (ibid.). The fashion companies qualifying as fashion companies of haute couture are selected by the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture, and must for example design made-to-order clothes for private clientele, with more than one fitting, using an atelier that employs at least fifteen full-time staff (ibid.). Examples of members of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture are Chanel, Givenchy, Christian Dior, Elie Saab and Valentino (Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode 2019).

## **High-end**

High-end refers to “of superior quality or sophistication” (Merriam-Webster n.d.b).

## **Inertia**

In line with Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.), inertia is defined as “a tendency to do nothing or to remain unchanged”.

## **The thin ideal**

The thin ideal refers to the conception of the thin body as aesthetic and ideal.

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# 1 Introduction

*In the following paragraphs, the thin ideal is put in perspective within the frames of the visual information culture of today. The idealization of the thin body is then discussed in relation to the event of Paris Fashion Week (PFW) as an influential institution of the fashion industry. Lastly, the inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW is established as a paradox to which the explanations remains insufficient.*

## 1.1 Idealization of the Thin Body

In no other time in history has there been such an explosion of visual images around us (Schroeder 2002). These visual images function within a cultural system of meaning, influenced by advertising, consumption, marketing and mass media – and their interpretative meanings are subject to change (ibid.). The image is a key characteristic of the twenty-first century economy, within which marketing is fundamentally about image management (ibid.). Marketing communications, or images, then, can be situated within a system of visual representation that creates meaning within the circuit of culture, largely via representational conventions (Hall 1997; Schroeder & Zwick 2004; Schroeder & Borgerson 2005; Stern & Schroeder 1994; Thompson 1995). Visual representation is part of the constitution of things and categories, since it shapes understandings of the world and the identities of its people and places (Schroeder & Borgerson 2005). As a consequence, marketing images contribute to the “reality” into which contemporary consumers are socialized, influencing how the consumers perceive and respond to the world (ibid.). However, this “reality” may be quite distant from reality, as brought to light by the concept of epistemic closure, which refers to the danger of typified representations of identity that increase the probability of human subjects interpreting what they have represented to them as typical (Gordon 1997; Schroeder & Borgerson 2005). As has been elaborated upon by Schroeder and Borgerson (2005), typified representations may undermine a group’s dignity and historical integrity and cast a demeaning light upon their physical and intellectual habits as well as their ontological status as human beings (Miller 1994).

One representational convention within marketing communication giving rise to such typified interpretations, and ontological dilemmas, is *idealization* (Schroeder & Borgerson 2005). Idealization refers to marketing communication routinely depicting ideal types – for example

thin runway models – and the negative effects of this depiction (ibid.). There is profound evidence suggesting that the kind of mass media messages pertaining to body images paved by the strong cultural, aesthetic value placed on thinness in the Western<sup>1</sup> society have negative consequences for girls and women (Clayton, Ridgway & Hendrickse 2017; Diedrichs & Lee 2011; Martin & Gentry 1997; Richins 1991). These problematic consequences of images of thin runway models – body image dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem and eating disorders, to mention a few – have been brought to light both in mass media and academic research within fields such as psychology, sociology and communication (Clements 2013; Grabe, Ward & Hyde 2008; Hankin & Abramson 1999; Stice & Shaw 1994; Treasure, Wack & Roberts 2008). As a consequence, idealized bodies are part of the construction of female identity, attractiveness and normality in a way that can damage it (Schroeder & Borgerson 2005). The desire for thinness among girls and women in the Western world is so prevalent among girls and women that it has been identified as a “normative discontent” (Cash 2004; Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore 1984; Smolak 2006; Swami & Szmigielska 2012). In addition, as the world grows smaller due to globalization and the dissemination of information through the Internet, the Western ideal of thinness are dispersed across the globe, not at least evident in the presence of Western aesthetics in Asian advertisements (Skokanova & Balfanz 2012).

As a consequence of the research identifying the negative consequences of the thin ideal, the economic effectiveness of thin models has become a recurring topic of within the field of business research during the last two decades. While the answer to the question whether thinness sells or not is far from clear-cut, there is little empirical evidence that it does. Halliwell and Dittmar (2004) have shown that marketing communication were equally effective regardless of the model’s size, while Bian and Foxall (2013) have shown that small-sized female models are only preferred over normal-sized female models when marketing established brands that have strong associations with small-sized female models. Loken and Peck (2005) and Martin, Pervan and Veer (2007), however, have shown positive evaluations and effects of larger-sized female models.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of “Western” society and culture is, throughout the thesis, referring to a society and culture based upon values, systems and traditions of European origin.

## **1.2 The Thin Ideal on the Runways of Paris Fashion Week**

In a visual information culture, these idealized bodies are nearly everywhere – and during fashion week, it is an impossible mission avoiding them. Today, the live streams and images, or, the promotion of brand recognition as well as the thin ideal, are only one click away. The visual representations of the shows of fashion weeks may be considered as marketing communication, or advertisement – aimed at calling public attention to the brand (Duggan 2001; Entwistle & Rocamora 2006; Evans 2001; Findlay 2017; Steele 2004; Zborowska 2014).

In fact, Fashion Week, or the fashion show as part of Fashion Week, has played a key role in the development of the modern fashion industry (Evans 2001). The rise of the fashion show, but also the fashion model, are directly linked to the rise of mass production and industrialization (ibid.). The fashion show evolved from an exclusive in-house presentation of haute couture held for private clientele, to a biannual spectacle of both haute couture and ready-to-wear, enchanting not only consumers, but also mass media and the fashion industry at large (Evans 2001; Steele 2004). As explained by Steele (2004, p. 67):

A number of cultural and social forces are responsible for this evolution, including the increased consumer awareness of Parisian couture, the rise of the ready-to-wear industry after World War II, the growth of the modeling profession, and the increasing attention paid to the runway by the popular press.

Already in the first decade of the 20th century, the fashion shows were used as a promotional vehicle, and the fashion newsreel – originating from the same time period – served to bring the shows to a wider public (Steele 2004). However, the spectacular fashion shows of today originates from the 1960's, when the haute couture shows, threatened by the proliferation of ready-to-wear, became marketing tools rather than sales tools (Evans 2001). The purpose of the haute couture shows altered into generation of publicity and prestige as well as establishment of an image of exclusivity, in order to profit from licensing deals, that is, sunglasses, perfumes and cosmetics (ibid.). The public visibility of these marketing spectacles increased dramatically during the 1970's, and by the mid 1980's, shows were broadcasted through satellite and television stations world-wide (Evans 2001; Steele 2004). As a

consequence, today, these fashion shows are important image-making mechanisms. The designs displayed on the runways are objects created to be watched, to sell the image of the brand (Mears 2010; Zborowska 2014). Rarely profitable, what these shows produce is aesthetic value (Findlay 2017). This aesthetic value give rise to a framing and contextualization of the collection, creating a brand image that affixes to the licensed products through which profits are created (Findlay 2017; Godart & Mears 2009; Mears 2010). In addition, as suggested by Kawamura (2004), one of the unintended consequences of fashion shows is that the site of mobilization – Paris, in this case – confirms that that is where fashion emerges from, which in turn adds value to clothing and transforms it into fashion, but also sustains the site as an influential fashion capital.

Crucial to the marketing spectacle of the fashion show is the media. Indeed, the fashion shows and the media that transmit their image(s), are to a large extent complementary. The fashion show is a media event serving to create publicity, which implicates that the media is part of the construction of the fashion show. The media coverage extends the life of the live fashion show, creating a mediated participation which unveil the new and impress potential customers (Findlay 2017). As a consequence, the image(s) of the fashion shows of Fashion Week published in media can be seen as marketing communication – communicating brand image through spectacle, with the purpose to generate attention and, in turn, profit (Duggan 2001; Entwistle & Rocamora 2006; Evans 2001; Godart & Mears 2009; Mears 2010; Steele 2004; Zborowska 2014).

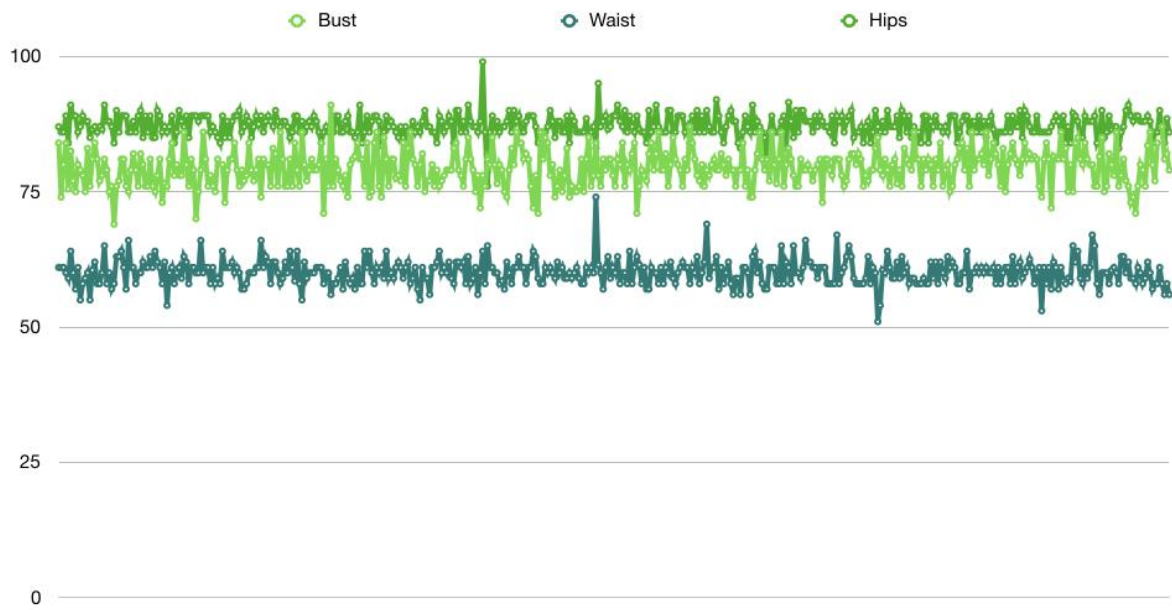
However, the dissemination of these visual representations, or images, in various media, goes hand in hand with thin-ideal internalization (Calogero & Tylka 2010). As has been emphasized by Calogero and Tylka (2010), Internet exposure indirectly predicted weight dissatisfaction via internalization and comparison. PFW is one of the most prominent of fashion weeks and receives, as a consequence, considerable press coverage – making it an influential promoter of aesthetics and of the thin ideal (Bradford 2014). At the time of birth of the fashion industry, and the rise of the fashion show, Paris was the global capital of art and fashion, and it has since had a privileged role as center of cultural and economic activity (Villette & Hardill 2010). Even to this day, Parisian fashion and Parisian haute couture continues to influence the global fashion industry, with many of the French fashion houses showing on PFW – Chanel, Hermès, Louis Vuitton, Poiret and Balenciaga, to name a few –

having a long history and tradition of haute couture (ibid.). PFW has during the last couple of years also been part of many headlines worldwide due to a law approved in France in 2015, requiring all models to have an independent doctor's certificate assuring his or her health (Lichfield 2015). The intention of the law is to protect models from potentially dangerous demands from agencies and fashion houses, but also to protect girls and women from a media bias towards excessive thinness (ibid.) In addition, in 2017, the two French conglomerates LVMH and Kering established a charter for the well-being of models, banning size zero models – or, “Paris thin” models, as they are also known – from appearing in runway shows and campaigns (Clements 2013; LVMH 2017). However, as has been argued by Vine (2019), the promised end to thin models turned out to be “a sickening portrayal”.

Establishment European fashion has not acknowledged that women who wear above size four even exists.

(George-Parkin 2018)

In order to explicitly demonstrate the idealization of thin bodies on the runways of PFW, an introductory study, further elaborated upon in chapter “5. Method”, was carried through. The introductory study, founded upon a compilation of the body measurements of the models walking the runways of 23 of the fashion companies showing on PFW Ready-to-Wear Spring/Summer 2019, showed a very low diversity in body measurements, as made visible by *Figure 1*. The average height and bust-waist-hips measurements were 178 cm and 79 cm-60 cm-87 cm, respectively, as exemplified by the French model Margot Baget, shown in *Picture 1*.



**Figure 1:** The diversity among the models walking the runways of PFW SS19/20.



**Picture 1:** Margot Baget (Photogenics Media n.d.), illustrating the average measurements (178 cm, 79-60-87 cm) for the models walking the runways of PFW.

### **1.3 The Paradox of the Thin Ideal**

The results from the introductory study was as unambiguous as research results can possibly be. There was one model walking the runways of PFW Spring Summer 2019 shows that could be considered as plus size. One.

The majority of the other models looked emaciated and gaunt. Collar-bones after collar-bones and hollow cheeks after hollow cheeks kept walking down the runways of PFW – and we, the

authors of the thesis in your hands, could not find any reasonable explanation to the relentless nature of the sickening (in multiple aspects) idealization of thin bodies on these runways.

The first interview was with a respectable and internationally well-known trend forecaster with over 30 years of experience.

The thing is that the whole thing the about small models is just already over. That it is history. It's like five, or ten years ago, everybody was about the issue that the models were too thin and, you know, it was not good, and it was promoting anorexia, etc. etc.

So, I think that you have to investigate the real trend better.

Because you're focusing on something that's history. Actually.

We found ourselves in a visual information culture informing about the ideal of thinness by, with an evidently blinkered view, sending (almost) exclusively thin bodies down the runway of PFW. This, while at the same time the academia and mass media are repeatedly articulating the necessity of a more ethical aesthetic within the fashion industry, while the argument that “thinness sells” lack empirical support, while measures are taken around Europe to discourage media bias and encourage healthy bodies walking the runways, and while the body positivity movement – applauding the diversity of body types – is on the rise in the Western society (Alptraum 2017; Vine 2019):

Diversity is the new black. With one notable exception: High fashion. When it comes to clothes – and especially couture – the catwalks are still hopelessly hung up on an impossible notion of what constitutes beauty. And it is – literally – the narrowest definition.

(Vine 2019)

The proliferation of the thin ideal within the realm of PFW is part of the problem of idealization of thin bodies, a problem recognized as a cause to an important public health concern (Swami & Szmigielska 2013). The inalterable nature of the thin ideal on PFW is

consequently an unsolved, problematic paradox – why on earth would fashion companies ignore the voices raised against the thin ideal and choose to be part of the cause to a public health concern?

While the body of research on the thin ideal and its consequences has, as elaborated upon above, become vast during the last 30 years, there is a very narrow stream of research examining the reasons behind the unalterable nature of the evidently problematic thin ideal in Western society. Volonté (2017) have put forward the idea that the ideal of thinness is not only just a standard of perfection in people's minds – created and sustained by the promotion of the thin ideal within the fashion industry – but also a phenomenon incorporated into the elements of the practice of fashion, its habits, routines, objects and bodies. Drawing on practice theory, Volonté (2017) has argued that the imagery of thinness is the consequence of the practice that has prevailed in fashion, in connection with the introduction of the clothes sizing system. Beyond size 12, the technique of proportionally increasing measurements from size to size is constrained, as body measurements vary in a no longer proportional manner. Consequently, the thin ideal spread together with a fashion industry technologically discouraged from producing larger sizes (ibid.). The production of smaller sizes created a demand for thin bodies to use for fitting and marketing communication, and as the model profession became institutionalized, these bodies became the bodies of fashion (ibid.). In addition, Mears (2010) has pointed to the notion that the highly competitive fashion industry and its inherent uncertainty concerning “the next big thing” causes the lookout for the next thin(ner) model to, under institutional constraints, be locked-in as a survival strategy (Mears 2010). The high level of uncertainty and ambiguity faced by bookers and clients within the fashion modelling industry has led to a reliance on conventions – decisions are guided more by imitation, stereotypes, routines and rules of thumb rather than rational calculation (Godart & Mears 2009; Mears 2010).

The thesis at issue may therefore be situated within a stream of research that has shown that the thin ideal is detrimental for both girls and women, in all ages and across the world, causing for example body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (Grabe, Ward & Hyde 2008; Groesz, Levine & Murnen 2002; Parker, Haytko & Hermans 2008; Yang, Gray & Pope 2005). The research within this stream has also shown that the economic effectiveness of the inclusion of the thin ideal in marketing communication is uncertain, while at the same time the ethical aspects of that marketing communication is being questioned (Schroeder &

Borgerson 2005; Watson, Lecki & Lebcir 2015). Furthermore, it has been shown that images in mass media portraying the thin ideal, for example marketing communication images, and especially images in fashion magazines, have a significant role in the proliferation and dispersion of the thin ideal (Anschutz, Engels, Van Leeuwe, & van Strien, 2009; Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling 2009; Harper & Tiggemann 2008). The thin ideal has been shown to be detrimental not just to the girls and women exposed to these images, but also the women portrayed in them – the thin ideal is part of an objectification of fashion models causing for example disempowerment and insecurity among women in the profession (Soley-Beltran 2012; Treasure, Wack & Roberts 2008). There is evidence suggesting that the thin ideal is partly rooted in the clothing sizing system developed during the industrialization of the textile industry over 100 years ago, and the – in terms of body size – undiversified runways have shown to be institutionally reproduced, with cultural producers imitating each other without a rational judgment (Godard & Mears 2009; Mears 2010; Volonté 2017).

Despite the negative consequences of the proliferation across girls and women all over the world, and despite the absence of a rational explanation to keep sending the thin ideal down the runways – to the inertia of the thin ideal – there was only one plus size model on the PFW Spring/Summer 2019 (Hargrove 2018). Consequently, the paradox of idealized, thin bodies walking the runways of PFW give rise to a gap in the field's knowledge. It is by no means clear why the visual representational convention of idealization in terms of thin bodies is still so prominent in the visual representations of PFW. How can it be explained that PFW, as an event organized to communicate the latest trends, and as an institution of a concept that thrives on change, is being stuck in an inertia – of thin models?

## **2 Research Problem**

*The chapter at issue establishes the inertia of the thin ideal as represented on PFW as a research problem. It presents the research purpose and the research question. Subsequently, the theoretical foundation as well as the frames of the research are briefly presented.*

### **2.1 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the explanations for the idealization of thin bodies in regard to female runway models, to be found in visual representations of PFW. Seeking the explanations for the idealization has the potential to reveal the measures necessary to establish practices of ethical representation in the realm of PFW. As explained by Schroeder and Borgerson (2005), discussions of marketing ethics rarely include visual issues – but in the image economy of today these visual issues are of great importance, as they clearly influence the well-being of women, and in turn society. In addition, understanding idealization as an ethical issue surrounding representations of identity and its underlying reasons may prove fruitful for strategic reasons – Alexander McQueen did certainly receive standing ovations for sending plus sized Betsy Teske and Eline Lykke down the runway of the spring 2018 show (Cusumano 2018; Okwodu 2017; Schroeder & Borgerson 2005).

### **2.2 Research Question**

How can the idealization of thin bodies in regard to female runway models on Paris Fashion Week be explained?

### **2.3 The Theoretical Foundation of the Research**

The theoretical framework forming the base of the exploration of the reasons behind the inertia of the thin ideal in the visual representations of PFW consists of three theoretical perspectives. Two of the theoretical perspectives – the trickle-down-up-across theories and Barnard's (2014) theory of the fashioned body – bring to light sociological and cultural aspects of fashion, while the third perspective, Hannan and Freeman's (1989) theory of organizational ecology, explains inertia and change in organizations. The trickle-down theory, and the more recent trickle-up and trickle-across theories, explains the hierarchical flow of fashion from one element of a society to another. Barnard's (2014) theory of the fashioned body explains how even the nakedest of bodies is always dressed by culture, and consequently

suggests that the body does not exist until it has been dressed with the values and meaning of culture. Hannan and Freeman's (1977; 1989) theory of organizational ecology uses insights from biology, economics and sociology to explain how organizations emerge, grow and die – how inertia and change relates to organizational mortality.

The theoretical framework brings to light both sociological, cultural and economic aspects of fashion in the search for explanations of the inertia of the thin ideal within the realm of PFW – acknowledging fashion as an important part of human culture, as a social phenomenon and as the darling of capitalism. In order to be able to capture all these aspects and reach explanations as detailed as possible, a qualitative research strategy has been employed. Through the research method of semi-structured interviewing, the views, stories and reflections of a range of individuals involved in the event of PFW were examined in an attempt to explain the identified paradox of the inertia of the thin ideal.

## **2.4 The Frames of the Research**

The study at issue focuses upon female models and how the thin ideal and its consequences affect girls and women. There are several reasons for the delimitation to women. Firstly, female models receive the bulk of the attention of the fashion press, leading to a higher number of visual representations of the female ideal body, as compared to the male body ideal, in the mass media reporting on fashion (Godart & Mears 2009). Secondly, women have shown to be immensely influenced by such visual representations, in terms of both identity and relations, which stands in contrast to men who have shown to be relatively unaffected by the messages sent out (Shields & Heineken 2001; Schroeder & Borgerson 2005). Women in the Western culture have shown to be more tyrannized by the thin ideal than men are (Bordo 2004). It is far more important to men than to women that their partner is slim, women are much more prone than men to perceive themselves as fat, women are more likely than men to engage in crash dieting and compulsive exercising, and women are far more vulnerable to eating disorders than men (Bordo 2004; Siever, Beutler & Rothblum 1994). Thirdly, the body positive movement, as a contemporary reaction to the thin ideal in the Western society, is led and sustained by a distinct majority of women, as evident on social media under hashtags such as #bodypositivity and #effyourbeautystandards.

However, while the focus is set on female models and the thin ideal as it affects girls and women, the subjects of the empirical research have not been solely women – the fashion industry, and more specifically the event of PFW, involves people of different gender, why an exclusion of men might would have hindered a well-grounded explanation to the paradox identified. In addition, as a further attempt to reach that well-grounded explanation, the research method of semi-structured interviews was employed. As previous research has shown that the thin ideal persists in habits, routines and rules of thumb based on convention (Volonté 2017; Mears 2010; Godart & Mears 2009), interviews were considered more appropriate as compared to participant observation as they provided an opportunity to examine how issues related to the thin ideal – supposedly not reflected upon – were actually reflected upon when brought to light. Furthermore, the method of qualitative interviewing as compared to participant observation was considered to be less intrusive in people’s lives, to avoid reactive effects, to provide a greater breadth of coverage in terms of individuals involved in the event of PFW and to be a more effective way of getting access to these individuals.

Despite considerable research on the relation between body ideals and gender identity as well as gender relations, the study at issue seeks the explanations for the inertia of the thin ideal in the light of social class as discriminant. While the issue of the thin ideal is certainly related to gender issues in Western society, as was elaborated upon above, the history of haute couture and the fashion industry – with Paris as the main stage – as well as ideas of the diffusion of fashion and Barnard’s (2014) idea of “the classics” within fashion, suggest that the inertia of the thin ideal of an event such as PFW may be more appropriately explained by social class as discriminant. As argued by Kaiser (2012), especially luxury design fashion, i.e. fashion shown on PFW, appears to be appropriately described by the trickle-down theory of fashion, as the social group on top of the hierarchy theoretically have little motivation to participate in fashion as a social process. No change can bring them additional power and every change can give them something to fear (Simmel 1957).

### **3 Literature Review**

*Our research on the thin bodies walking the runways of PFW may be framed within a body of research divided into two broad streams – one examining the origin, presence and consequences of the thin body ideal and the other examining the causes, presence and consequences of organizational inertia. Firstly, the research on the thin ideal within the field of psychology is presented, followed by research within the field of sociology. Subsequently, research on the economic effectiveness of the thin ideal, research on the thin ideal in relation to mass media, and research on the thin ideal as part of the fashion industry is presented. Lastly, research on the notion of inertia is reviewed, and the chapter is then concluded by discussing the research gap identified.*

#### **3.1 Research on the Thin Ideal**

The research on the thin ideal cuts across the various fields of psychology (Diedrichs & Lee 2011; Dohnt & Tiggemann 2006; Grabe, Ward & Hyde 2008; Groesz, Levine & Murnen 2002), sociology (Godart & Mears 2009; Tylka & Calogero 2011), business (Martin & Gentry 1997; Parker, Haytko & Hermans 2008; Richins 1991; Schroeder & Borgerson 2005), communication (Clayton, Ridgway & Hendrickse 2017; Harrison & Cantor 1997; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson & Kelly 1986; Stice & Shaw 1994) and fashion studies (Arnold 1999a; 1999b; Evans 2011; Soley-Beltran 2012; Tsëlon 2011). The majority of the research on the thin ideal stems from the last two decades, with some studies published during the 1980's and 1990's. The research has grown in accordance with the proliferation and dissemination of the thin ideal in various media across the world (Gordon 2004; Parker, Haytko & Hermans 2008; Xie et al. 2006; Yang, Gray & Pope 2005).

##### **3.1.1 The Psychological Consequences of the Thin Ideal**

Within the field of psychology, there is considerable empirical evidence – with a majority of studies stemming from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st – substantiating a negative impact of the thin ideal on girls and women. In a meta-analysis covering 25 studies from the 1980's and 1990's, Groesz, Levine and Murnen (2002) have shown that body image is significantly more negative after viewing thin media images than after viewing images of either average size models, plus size models or inanimate objects. The results have been further substantiated in another meta-analysis by Grabe, Ward and Hyde (2008) covering 77 studies from the 1990's and the 2010's. In the meta-analysis, it was concluded that exposure to media images depicting the thin ideal body is related to body

image concerns such as body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors among women – regardless of assessment technique, individual differences variables, media type, age or other idiosyncratic study characteristics. Highly prevalent among girls and women worldwide, and even referred to as “normative” by multiple authors, body image concerns are widely recognized as an important public health concern (Cash 2004; Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore 1984; Smolak 2006; Swami & Szmigielska 2012). As elaborated upon by Watson, Lecki and Lebcir (2015), negative body image has been linked to low self-esteem (Tiggeman & Lynch 2001), depressive symptoms (Holsen, Kraft & Royssamb 2001), body-focused anxiety (Halliwell & Dittmar 2004; Koyuncu, Tok, Canpolat & Catikkas 2010), dietary restraint (Forrest & Stuhldreher 2007; Markey & Markey 2005) and eating disorders (Midlarsky & Nitzburg 2008; Neumark-Sztainer, Paxton, Hannan, Haines & Story 2006; Polivy & Herman 2002; Stice & Shaw 2002).

Informed by Social comparison theory (Festinger 1954) – one of the most commonly used theories within psychology to explain the impact of thin ideal on girls’ and women’s body image – multiple studies have shown that upward social comparison with idealized images presented in mass media may be harmful to girls and women (Diedrichs & Lee 2011; Martin & Gentry 1997; Parker, Haytko & Hermans 2008). Exposure to images in media depicting idealized, unrealistically thin bodies, leads to social comparison which negatively affects the psychological well-being of girls and women, causing for example body dissatisfaction and development of eating disorders (Clayton, Ridgway & Hendrickse 2017; Richins 1999).

### **3.1.2 The Thin Ideal within the Western Society**

The significance of the social comparison theory in explaining the psychological impact of the thin ideal indicates the importance of the sociological aspects to understand the thin ideal in a wider perspective. Within the field of sociology, research on the thin ideal is connected to aspects such as gender, demography as well as culture. As with the studies on the thin ideal within psychology, most of the studies stem from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st.

Multiple studies within the field of sociology have examined the thin ideal and its consequences from a feminist perspective many of them stemming from the last decade (Bozsik, Whisenhunt, Hudson, Bennett & Lundgren 2018; Tylka & Calogero 2011). As with

many of the studies addressing the thin ideal within the field of psychology, these studies, for example Forbes, Doroszewicz, Card and Adam-Curtis (2004) and Lew, Mann, Myers, Taylor and Bower (2007), substantiate the adverse effects of the thin ideal on body (dis)satisfaction. Harper & Tiggemann (2008) have shown that marketing communication featuring thin-idealized women leads to greater self-objectification, weight-related appearance anxiety and body dissatisfaction. Feminist researchers examining the thin ideal has argued that women are taught to police their bodies through the repeated and normalized exposure to it (Grogan 2008). The links between feminism, Western culture and body ideals have also been elaborated upon within cultural studies, for example by Bordo (2004), emphasizing the body as inscribed with an ideological construction of femininity of the specific time. Bordo (2004) has argued that until the late nineteenth century, the central discriminations marked were those of class, race and gender – the body indicated social identity, and the thin body announced aristocratic status by being seemingly above the commerce in appetite. Related to this, the thin ideal has also been examined in connection to gender issues (Henrichs-Beck, Szymanski & Gonsiorek 2017; Meltzer & McNulty 2015; Morrison & Sheahan 2009; Piran & Cormier 2005). These studies have in common the idea that, as argued by Piran and Cormier (2005, p. 549):

[...]the social inquiry into etiological models of disrupted body and self-experience, such as eating disorders, has to be contextualized in the experience of gender. Gender, a socially constructed concept, is governed by multiple sets of socially shared beliefs, meanings, and dominant norms, also called social discourses, that originate from powerful cultural and political institutions.

Laus, Costa, and Almeida (2015) as well as Epel, Spanakos, Kasl-Godley and Brownell (1996) have showed that there are gender differences in body ideals and Morrison and Sheahan (2009) have suggested that gender-related discourses mediate the association between thin body ideal internalization and behaviors characteristic of disordered eating.

Research within the field of sociology have also examined the thin ideal in connection to race and ethnicity, showing a moderating effect of ethnicity on the influence of the thin ideal on body dissatisfaction, as well as differences in body ideals between races (Burk 2013; Debraganza & Hausenblas 2010; Overstreet, Quinn & Agocha 2010). A related stream of

research has examined how the Western culture and its thin ideal has disseminated across the world, and the subsequent effects of this dissemination (Gordon 2004; Parker, Haytko & Hermans 2008; Talukdar 2012). The globalization and technological advancements enabling dissemination of information has made the thin ideal a reference model not only for women in western societies, but for women all over the world (Gordon 2004; Parker, Haytko & Hermans 2008). For example, Yang, Gray and Pope (2005) have argued that exposure to Western images have caused women in eastern cultures to become more dissatisfied with their In line with this, Skokanova and Balfanz (2012) have shown that there is an apparent tendency of Chinese consumers to change body parameters due to the presence of Western body image parameters in marketing communication.

As concerns the demographic aspect of age, multiple studies – often intersecting the fields of psychology and sociology – have shown that girls as young as six to seven years of age desire a thinner ideal body (Ambrosi-Randic 2000; Dohnt & Tiggemann 2004; 2005; Hendy, Gustitus, Leitzel-Schwalm 2001; Williamson & Delin 2001). Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006) have found that girls, already at the age of five to eight years, are governed by an appearance culture in which media influence body image and dieting awareness – leading to a “normative discontent” also among young girls (Phares, Steinberg & Thompson 2004; Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore 1984). Other studies have shown how the thin ideal is affecting girls and women across the lifespan, showing that body dissatisfaction, as a consequence of the thin ideal, remains relatively stable from childhood and during adulthood (Bessenoff & Priore 2007; Brown & Slaughter 2011).

### **3.1.3 The Business of the Thin Ideal**

As a consequence of the research within psychology and sociology identifying the negative consequences of the thin ideal, a million-dollar question has come under scrutiny within marketing research during the last two decades – does thinness really sell?

The thin ideal has been vastly examined in terms of its economic effectiveness. Within this research stream, the notion that the thin ideal arguably predominates cultures all around the world is recurrent – a size-zero body is considered desirable and ideal in the modern world (Bian & Wang 2015; Gordon 2004; Parker, Haytko & Hermans 2008; Volonté 2017; Xie et al. 2006; Yang, Gray & Pope 2005). Stereotypically, and historically, thinness has been, and

still is, associated with youthfulness, attractiveness, success, happiness and social acceptance. Obesity, on the other hand, has been, and still is, associated with unhappiness and unlikableness (Borland & Akram 2007; Crandall 1994; Greenleaf, Chambliss, Rhea, Martin & Morrow 2006; Peat, Peyerl & Muehlenkamp 2006). The hegemony of the thin ideal has loomed since the 20th century, and the link between the thin ideal and the fashion industry is apparent – the fashion industry promulgates an excessively thin ideal which is then diffused in various visual media (Volonté 2017). At the same time, fashion – as one of the most expressive product categories there is – enables girls and women to express their idealized selves. Consequently, multiple studies argue, drawing on self-image congruence theory, that these girls and women prefer brands congruent with their ideal self-image, i.e. brands with marketing communication depicting idealized, thin, female bodies (Escalas & Bettman 2005; Watson, Lecki & Lebcir 2015). For example, Kees, Becker-Olsen and Mitric (2008) have shown that marketing communication featuring thin models make women feel better about the brand featured, and Aagerup (2011) has found that thinner models lead to the most positive brand perception, and that a thin model is best for communicating competence. Examining “the skinny trend”, Apeagyei (2008) has shown that consumers (75% of the respondents) perceives the slim body size as the most ideal, and that an overwhelming count of consumers (90 % of the respondents) perceives the big body size at the least ideal. Nonetheless, there is little empirical evidence within the research stream to support the argument that thinness sells (Watson, Lecki & Lebcir 2015).

However, there are studies suggesting that the effectiveness of the thin ideal in marketing communication depends on its circumstances (Bian & Foxall 2013; Halliwell & Dittmar 2004; Peck & Loken 2004). As exemplified by Halliwell and Dittmar (2004) – who have shown that marketing communication were equally effective regardless of the model’s size, but that thin models led to greater body-focused anxiety among women – these studies often intersect the fields of psychology and business. Peck and Loken (2004) have, in a groundbreaking article concerning the positive effects of larger-sized female models in marketing communication, stated that the context in which images of female bodies are shown have significant impact on how these bodies are perceived. Larger sized female models are rated as more attractive when an instructional frame activates non-traditional beliefs, that is, when shown in a new women’s magazine that features larger-sized women – as compared to when traditional beliefs are activated, that is, when shown in a traditional women’s magazine. Similarly, Bian and Foxall (2013) have later shown that small-sized female models

are only preferred over normal-sized female models when marketing established brands that have a strong association with small-sized female models in a traditional frame that activates small-sized models from memory. Normal-sized models are more effective when marketing new brands in a non-traditional frame, and may result in consequences equally positive to the use of small-sized models when marketing new brands, even in a traditional frame. Further, the authors have found that the use of normal-sized models in marketing communication will result in more positive outcomes if the target population has a higher level of awareness of health problems concerning small-sized models. Watson, Lecki and Lebcir (2015) have found that model body size has no significant impact on brand image perception for older consumers, while there is some limited evidence that a thinner model generates a positive brand image for consumers between 18-25 years of age. However, there is no evidence that underweight models have a more positive impact on brand image. Consequently, it is unlikely that brand image would be damaged if brands ceased to use underweight models in their marketing communication.

Contrastingly, other studies within the field – among others one by the previously mentioned authors Loken and Peck (2005) – have shown positive evaluations and effects of larger-sized female models (Bisell & Rask 2010; Martin, Pervan & Veer 2007; Mazurkewich 2007). Furthermore, Bian and Wang (2015) have shown that average-sized models are being evaluated as being more attractive than size-zero models for new brands, whereas for well-established brands, traditionally associated with size zero models, average-sized models and size-zero models are evaluated as being equally attractive.

In addition to the research on its economic effectiveness, the thin ideal has also been examined in terms of ethics of representation in marketing communication. Schroeder and Borgerson (2005) have, placing marketing communication within a broader cultural context and seeing as part of a representational system, presented an ethics of representation for international marketing communication. The representational system highlights the power of marketing communication to exert influence and reinforce ethically irresponsible visual representations of identity – one of which is idealization. Idealization refers to marketing communication routinely depicting ideal times, such as thin models, unrealistic scenarios or unattainable goals, and the negative effects of these depictions (Martin & Gentry 1997; Richins 1991; Shields & Heineken 2002; Shroeder & Borgerson 2005). Idealization of thin bodies in marketing communication construct notions about identity, attractiveness and

normality in ways that can damage identity (Schroeder & Borgerson 2005). The troublesome consequences of idealization are also brought to light by Gordon (1997) through the concept of epistemic closure, which calls attention to the danger of typified representations that increase the probability of human subjects interpreting what they have represented to them as stereotypical (Schroeder & Borgerson 2005). In line with multiple authors (Apeageyi 2008; Soley-Beltran 2012), Schroeder & Borgerson (2005) argue for ethical analysis on marketing communication in order to avoid problematic representational conventions such as idealization.

### **3.1.4 The Thin Ideal in Mass Media**

Many of the studies on the thin ideal within the fields of psychology and sociology point to the significance of mass media in the proliferation of the thin ideal (Anschutz, Engels, Van Leeuwe, & van Strien, 2009; Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling 2009; Hawkins, Richards, Granley & Stein 2004; Stice & Shaw 1994). As explained by Bell and Dittmar (2011, p. 478):

According to sociocultural theory, negative body image emerges as a result of perceived environmental pressure to conform to a culturally defined body and beauty ideal. The mass media may be seen as the single biggest purveyor of this ideal, promoting and unrealistic and artificial image of female beauty that is impossible for the majority of females to achieve.

The role of mass media in promoting the thin ideal has been researched for over 40 years. Already in the 1980's, Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson and Kelly (1986) showed that the standard of attractiveness for women portrayed in media is thinner than that for men, that it is thinner than ever before and that the thin ideal is promoted in many of the major media. Multiple studies have shown how exposure to images portraying the thin ideal in magazines increase for example body dissatisfaction (Harper & Tiggemann 2008; Harrison & Cantor 1997; Hawkins, Richards, Granley & Stein 2004; Stice & Shaw 1994), while Bell & Dittmar (2011) have showed that exposure to the thin ideal leads to significantly higher body and appearance satisfaction regardless of media type. Tiggemann and Miller (2010) have showed that for adolescent girls, Internet appearance exposure and magazine reading – but not television exposure – is correlated with greater internalization of thin ideals and weight dissatisfaction.

### 3.1.5 The Thin Ideal within the Fashion Industry

As was elaborated upon above, the link between the thin ideal and the fashion industry is apparent – the fashion industry promulgates an excessively thin ideal which is then diffused in various visual media (Volonté 2017). There are a number of studies – stemming primarily from the last two decades – intersecting the fields of psychology, sociology and fashion studies that have examined the thin ideal in fashion and beauty discourses (Ahern, Bennett & Hetherinton 2008; Harper & Tiggemann 2008; Tiggeman, Polivy & Hargreaves 2009). These studies suggest that the thin ideal holds a problematic representation of femininity. Barnard (2014, p. 178) explains the relation between the ideal body and fashion in the concept of *image*:

[...] an image, a representation of femininity, is generated in and by the fashion industry and it is deemed so powerful that some women will die in their attempt to attain it.

The idea of the image in and by fashion as a representation of femininity, and identity, has been elaborated upon by multiple authors (Almond 2013; Bordo 2004; Stewart & Janovicek 2001). Tortora and Eubank (2010) have shown how social changes throughout history have been reflected in shifts in fashion and body ideals. For example, as a consequence of the civil rights movement and the second wave of feminist movement during the 1960's, the feminine housewife styles were replaced with the more androgynous look – and the feminine curves by skinny bodies resembling those of adolescent boys (Gamman & Makinen 1995). Bouldwood and Jerrard (2000) have examined the relationship between fashion and the body in regard to ambivalence, a concept considered by multiple authors (Baudrillard 1981; Davis 1985; Kaiser, Nagawasa & Hutton 1995) as a crucial aspect of fashion. Ambivalence, both within the individual and in the individual's interaction with society, was found to be central to the body-clothing-fashion experience.

The thin ideal has also been researched in connection to fashion modelling. Barnard (2014) has stated that the fashion industry's preference for and dependence on thin models is well known and well documented. However, he has also noted that larger bodies are coming into fashion, challenging the thin ideal. These larger bodies are sometimes called “real” bodies, as

they are said to belong to “real” women, as exemplified by Craik (2015) and Cernek (2009). Soley-Beltran (2012) has examined the subjects of the discourse of idealized model looks, concluding that perfection comes at a heavy price of disempowerment, insecurity and inadequacy. In line with these findings, Swami and Szmigielska (2013) as well as Treasure, Wack and Roberts (2008) have found that fashion models are negatively affected by the thin ideal and as a consequence considered to be at high-risk for the development of body image concerns. This because of the fashion industry, which, through its dissemination of an extremely thin body ideal, creates a harmful environment for them. In connection to Barnards (2014) idea of “real” women, Soley-Beltran (2012) has noted the objectification and commodification of the “unreal” fashion model. The fashion model and her thin frame is used as a clotheshorse, while her individuality and personality erased in order for the clothes to wear her. Mears (2010) have shown that beneath the aesthetic codes, i.e. the notion that clothes hang better on thin models, there are also codes of class and sexuality determining the type of body sent down the runways. In the realm of the fashion show, producers are looking to shock in a high-stakes game of chance. This is achieved through “edgy”-looking models which, in contrast to the commercial look, is younger, whiter, and appears as radically thin (ibid.). The look of edginess does not embody sexiness – on the contrary, any traces of curves and their accompanying suggestions of female sexual desire and availability are polluting images for high-end brands and high-end femininities (ibid.). Instead, there is a construction of unattainable fantasy femininities, envisioned by multiple gazes – gay, straight, female – and found in that extraordinary body that radically stretches norms of slenderness (ibid.).

A few, also recent, studies intersecting the business research field and the fashion research field have examined the thin ideal as being part of the business of fashion (Entwistle 2009; Godard & Mears 2009; Mears 2010; Volonté 2017). Volonté (2017) has argued that the ideal of thinness is incorporated in the routines and habits of the business of fashion, with the clothes sizing system as an essential object. The clothing system introduced in the 20th century enabled standardization and, as a result, considerable economic advantage. However, the algorithmic derivation of other sizes from a single original pattern set an upper limit on the applicability of the sizing system to larger bodies – beyond size 12, it is almost impossible to standardize the measurement between sizes (ibid.). As a consequence, the thin ideal disseminated together with the growth of a fashion industry technologically discouraged from producing larger sizes. The production of smaller sizes created a demand for thin bodies to use for fitting and marketing communication, and as the model profession became

institutionalized, these bodies became the bodies of fashion (ibid.) Mears (2010) has showed that the highly competitive fashion industry and its inherent uncertainty concerning “the next big thing” causes the lookout for the next thin(ner) model to, under institutional constraints, be locked-in as a survival strategy (Mears 2010). The high level of uncertainty and ambiguity faced by bookers and clients within the fashion modelling industry leads to a reliance on conventions. Furthermore, Godart and Mears (2009) have shown that the decisions of fashion producers are shaped by information sharing mechanisms in social networks, principally the mechanism of “optioning”, which enables the producers to know each others’ preferences concerning fashion models, and to align themselves with similar actors in the industry. As a consequence, fashion houses with similar status, resources and organizational knowledge tend to hire similar fashion models (ibid.). Lastly, Entwistle (2009) have, acknowledging the hybridity of fashion as business and culture, examined the emergence of particular trends within the frames of what she calls the “aesthetic market”. The aesthetic market is a market in which an aesthetic quality, for example a look, is commodified and sold, implying that aesthetics are not something “added on” a product – aesthetics are the product. The aesthetic quality is constantly moving in and out of fashion as the aesthetic value is in constant flux.

[...] fashion is not just about changing clothes, it is also about changing ideals as to the design and look of clothes. In other words, fashion is about aesthetics, not simply new clothes, but clothes that are promoted and popularized as ‘attractive’, ‘beautiful’, ‘stylish’, or ‘chic’. Hence, when we talk about fashionable dress we need to bear in mind not only the production of actual garments, but the production of aesthetic value around such garments. Clothes are selected for their ability to ‘look good’ within the terms of taste of the day.

(Entwistle 2009, p. 7-8)

### **3.2 Research on Inertia within Organizations**

In the light of the body of research framing the thin ideal, the fact that it is still so prominent on PFW – an influential marketing event aiming to present the latest trends of fashion, which as a concept is all about change – constitute a paradox. PFW is stuck in an inertia, in a tendency of remaining unchanged (Oxford Dictionaries n.d.). The research on organizational inertia, part of the business and management research field, stems primarily from the last

three decades of the 20th century (Hannan & Freeman 1977; Hedberg & Nyström 1976; Miller & Friesen 1980; Sing & Lumsden 1990).

The idea of inertia in organizations or populations of organizations has received attention within the fields of business and management since the 1970's, initially referring to the stagnation through inadequate adaption to a changing environment (Hedberg 1981; Hedberg & Nyström 1976) and later to the resistance to fundamental reorientations as part of the organizational evolution (Miller & Chen 1994; Miller & Friesen 1980). While organizational inertia traditionally has been viewed as detrimental – as exemplified by the Icarus paradox (Miller 1992) elucidating how success seduces organizations into failure through complacency, dogma and rituals – more recent research has brought to light potential benefits, such as greater reliability and efficiency (Amburgey & Miner 1992; Hannan & Freeman 1984; Miller & Chen 1994; Nelson & Winter 1982). However, most recent research on organizational inertia view it as damaging, for example by highlighting the contradiction between sustained competitive advantage and organizational adaptation (Hung 2015) or the need to counterbalance with initiatives for organizational flexibility (Oyadomari et. al. 2018).

Organizational inertia is also a key concern within the subfield of organizational studies called organizational ecology (Singh & Lumsden 1990). While there are examples of ecological approaches within organizational studies already in the 1960's, the theory of organizational ecology – concerned with the growth and decline of organization within an environment – was formulated by Michael T. Hannan and John H. Freeman in 1977 (Evan 1966; Hannan & Freeman 1977; Singh & Lumsden 1990).

Although differences exist among individual researchers, one significant premise underlies thinking in organizational ecology. Under specific conditions, processes of change in organizational populations parallel processes of change in biotic populations.

(Singh & Lumsden 1990, p. 162)

The key concerns of organizational ecology are to investigate how social conditions influence the rates of creation of new organizational forms and new organizations, the rates of demise of organizational forms and organizations, and the rates of change in organizational forms (Carroll 1988; Hannan & Freeman 1989; Singh 1990; Singh & Lumsden 1990).

Wenting and Frenken (2008) have applied the organizational ecology perspective to analyze the ready-to-wear fashion industry, finding that legitimation effects are local and competition effects are global. In addition, they have found that the decline of Paris in the post-war period is attributed to an “institutional lock-in” – the emergence of a ready-to-wear cluster threatened the interest of haute couture designers, and where consequently prevented.

### **3.3 Research Gap**

The body of research on the thin ideal in terms of its presence and consequences has, primarily during the last 30 years, become vast. The research has – unequivocally – shown that the thin ideal is detrimental for both girls and women, in all ages and across the world, causing for example body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. It has also been shown that the economic effectiveness of the thin ideal in marketing communication is uncertain, while at the same time the ethical aspects of that marketing communication is being questioned. Furthermore, research has shown that images in mass media portraying the thin ideal, for example marketing communication images, and especially images in fashion magazines, have a significant role in the proliferation and dispersion of the thin ideal. It has further been shown that the thin ideal is part of an objectification of fashion models causing for example disempowerment and insecurity among women in the profession. The thin ideal has shown to be partly rooted in the clothing sizing system developed during the industrialization of the textile industry over 100 years ago, and the – in terms of body size – undiversified runways have shown to be institutionally reproduced, with cultural producers imitating each other without a rational judgment.

The body of research on organizational inertia provides an explanation to the presence and consequences of inertia in organizations and therefore has a plausible link to the inertia of the thin bodies walking the runways of PFW as an organization. The ideas of organizational inertia, and more specifically organizational ecology, have to a very small extent been applied in the context of the fashion industry. Nonetheless, the findings of Wenting and Frenken (2008) draws attention to how organizational ecology may provide answers to the puzzling inertial aspects of the fashion industry.

Despite the negative consequences of the proliferation across girls and women all over the world, and despite the absence of a rational explanation to keep sending the thin ideal down the runways – to the inertia of the thin ideal – there was only one plus size model on the PFW Spring/Summer 2019 (Hargrove 2018). This paradox is yet to be examined and explained. By acknowledging not only the cultural and social aspects of fashion, but also the economic, or organizational ones, the thesis at issue seeks to minor the gap of research on the presence of inertia in an industry thriving on change. The inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW are therefore examined in the light of three theoretical perspectives. The trickle-down theory and the more recent trickle-across and trickle-up theories, which explains the flow of fashion from one element of society to another, Barnard's (2014) synthesis of theoretical perspectives on the fashioned body, which explains how the body is always dressed by culture, and, lastly, Hannan and Freeman's (1977; 1989) theory of organizational ecology, which explains inertia and change in organizations as part of organizational mortality.

## **4 Theoretical Framework**

*The three theoretical perspectives framing the study at issue are theories of the diffusion of fashion – the trickle-down, trickle-across and trickle-up theories – associated with authors such as Simmel (1957), King (1963) and Blumer (1969a; 1969b); a theoretical view of the relation between fashion, clothes and the body provided by Barnard (2014) and, lastly; the Organizational Ecology Theory presented by Hannan and Freeman (1977; 1989).*

### **4.1 The Diffusion of Fashion**

Theories of the diffusion of fashion relates to the inertia of the thin ideal in that they explain the mechanics of change within fashion – an understanding of the absence of change requires an understanding of the causes of change. Furthermore, the trickle-down theory explains the role of power relations and prestige within the fashion industry, especially during the time when many of the fashion houses showing on PFW today were founded. From the nineteenth century, French Haute Couture dictated women's fashion – trickling down from the aristocracy in Paris – an aspect haunting the halls (and the change) of the Parisian fashion houses even to this day.

The trickle-down theory, a theory associated with scholars such as Georg Simmel (1957), Thorstein Veblen (1957) and Herbert Spencer (1966), emphasize that fashion is driven by the upper class or elite (Barnard 2002; Kawamura 2004; Simmel 1959). Fashion is understood as form of imitation – as linking together social groups – but at the same time, paradoxically, differentiate social strata from one another (Simmel 1959). Veblen claimed that the upper classes had to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, and Simmel pointed out that fashion is for the upper classes and likewise only affect those (Barnard 2002). A particular fashion style is adopted by the upper class, and is then gradually spread through all levels of the society and trickled down to the lower classes (Barnard 2002; Simmel 1957). According to the trickle-down theory, there is only one place for fashion to derive from, which is the upper class and social elite. The elite initiates fashion and when the fashion trickles down to the mass, the elite abandons the style and initiate something new (Simmel 1957). This process quickens with increased wealth. The time it takes for a fashion style to trickle its way down the social pyramid correspond to the lifespan of the fashion cycle (Barnard 2002). The upper class is the most intensely affected and transformed by new influences therefore, they are the most responsive. It can be seen as the upper branches of a tree, which responds to the

movements of a breeze. Simmel (1957) further claims that the upper class are the most conservative ones, and often even old-fashioned.

Just as soon as the lower classes begin to copy their style, thereby crossing the line of demarcation the upper classes have drawn and destroying the uniformity of their coherence, the upper classes turn away from this style and adopt a new one, which in turn differentiates them from the masses; and thus the game goes merrily on.

(Simmel 1957, p 545)

A recent study by Galak, Gray, Elbert and Strohminger (2016) examined whether trickle-down is still applicable in society of today. The study was based on how women purchased new shoes, when either moving to a high-status location, or a lower status location. The research showed that people *are* much more prone to adapting to trends from high-status locations, than when trends come from low status locations (ibid.).

The trickle-down theory has, however, been questioned and criticized by multiple authors (Blumer 1969a; Blumer 1969b; King 1969, Polhemus 1994), arguing that the trickle-down theory is unable to explain the diffusion of fashion in contemporary society. For example, the rise of fashion magazines and more advanced journalism lead to a situation where fashion could be seen in different social classes simultaneously, leading to fashion moving horizontally between social groups. The phenomenon was described by Charles King (1963) using the term “trickle-across”, illuminating the idea that fashion moves between different social levels of society (Barnard 2002).

Another author who has been arguing that a class differentiation model is not able to explain fashion in contemporary society is Herbert Blumer (1969a; 1969b). According to Blumer (1969a), the trickle-down theory is suited only to fashion in dress in seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Europe within a particular class structure.

The efforts of an elite class to set itself apart in appearance take place inside of the movement of fashion instead of being its cause [...] The fashion mechanism appears not in response to a need of class differentiation and class emulation, but in response to a wish to be in fashion, to be abreast of

what has good standing, to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world.

Blumer (1969a, p. 281)

In an attempt to better explain the operation of fashion in contemporary society, Blumer (1969b) has suggested what has come to be known as the trickle up theory, implying that fashion is directed by consumer taste and that it is the fashion designer's task to predict and read the modern taste of the collective mass. As consumers become increasingly fashionable and fashion conscious in modern and postmodern societies, they become the producers – as exemplified by street fashion being anti-fashion, but later acknowledged as fashion (Kawamura 2004).

In addition to Blumer, the trickle up theory is also associated with George Field (1970) and Ted Polhemus (1994). Field (1970) has explained the upward diffusion of fashions in terms of the Status Float phenomenon, exemplified by, males in the conservative world copying trademarks of contemporary youth and blue-collar fashions and tastes being imitated by white-collar groups. Polhemus (1994, p. 8) has explained the phenomenon with his so-called bubble-up theory, emphasizing the shift from high culture to popular- and subculture as the main influence on fashion:

Styles which start life of the street corner have a way of ending up on the backs of top models on the world's most prestigious fashion catwalks. This shouldn't surprise us because the authenticity which street style is deemed to represent is a precious commodity. Everyone wants a piece of it.

## **4.2 Fashion, Clothes and the Body**

The ideas of fashion, clothes and the body presented below put forward the notion that the changes within fashion – as explained above in regard to theories of the diffusion of fashion – are not only reflected in adornment of the body but also the body itself. Understanding the inertia of the thin ideal requires understanding how the ideal body takes shape, or how the thin ideal is constructed as a certainly persistent trend in Western society.

As elaborated upon by Malcolm Barnard (2014) in his book “Fashion Theory”, bodies are not only there to hang fashion and clothing from, they are fashion themselves, as different sizes and styles of body goes in and out of vogue as the seasons change. Discussing the works of Michel Foucault, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Joanne Entwistle, Barnard (2014) argues that the body is always a fashioned body – a cultured body – as even the nakedest of bodies appears with the trappings of culture. Fashion is consequently understood as everything that is worn on the body and that is done to or with the body; the dress, the clothing, the adornment, the modification and so on that happens on and to the body in the West is fashion.

Barnard (2014) suggests that there is not some natural, innocent or “edenic body”. The body is always already fashionable, as it never appears without appearing according to the cultural rules of a time and a place. As a consequence, bodies are cultural constructions – bodies don’t exist until they have been dressed in the values and meanings of culture. All experiences and perceptions of the dressed body can only take the form of representations, implying that all experiences and perceptions will be cultural constructions. The body image concerns and the eating disorders recurring in the discussion of the relation between fashion, clothes and the body evidently show the irresistible power of these cultural constructions of gender and body ideals, as well as the role of dress, or cultural values and meanings, in these constructions (Barnard 2014).

An image, a representation of femininity, is generated in and by the fashion industry and it is deemed so powerful that some women will die in their attempt to attain it.

Barnard (2014, p. 178)

An important aspect to bring to light when dissertating the relation between fashion, clothes and the body is the aspect of time. Different times generate different values in terms of which fashions, in terms of which bodies, are meaningful. Our social categories are our values and beliefs, which in turn are the products of our historical situation. What separates fashionable from unfashionable is simply time – as time pass, the current and the fashionable turns into the past and the unfashionable.

How come, then, if fashion is very much “of the time”, that there are “classic” fashion? What makes the Chanel 2.55 handbag “a classic”, with connotations of high quality, authenticity

and excellence – and not just something outdated? According to Barnard (2014), the explanation lies in that “the classic” represents a dominant social group’s taste at one time and place, presented by that group and accepted by the majority as good taste at every time and place. The idea of “the classic” depends on it being taken out of history and made timeless, and therefore natural (ibid.). While history has been made by people, nature has not – “the classic” is consequently presented and understood as though it is a product of nature rather than a product of a particular social group’s tastes and styles (ibid.). Accordingly, “the classic” has a role in the identification and establishment of a dominant class and in the maintenance and reproduction of its position in a social hierarchy:

The culturally loaded and historically specific Chanel handbag appears to be a classic as naturally and innocently as grass is green or as buds appear in the spring.

Barnard (2014, p. 72)

### **4.3 Organizational Ecology**

The fashion industry constitutes a considerable part of the world economy, and turning a blind eye to the economic aspects of the inertia of the thin ideal would most certainly lead to an incomplete perspective on the issue. How can the trend of the thin ideal be so persistent in such a fast-moving and uncertain environment as the fashion industry? The Organizational Ecology Theory provides an idea of how the environment is affecting organizations abilities to emerge, grow and die, and explains how inertia arises as a by-product of an organization’s reliability and accountability in that environment.

The economic aspects of the inertia of the thin ideal may also be understood by the theory Organizational Ecology by Michael T. Hannan and John Freeman (1977; 1989), which brings the structural and organizational aspects of the inertia of the thin ideal to light. The theory was formed in the middle of the 1970s, by Hannan and Freeman (1977; 1989). An ecology of organizations developed, which meant a “perspective which consider organizations as complicated systems with strong limitations on flexibility and speed of response” (Hannan & Freeman 1989, p xii). The ecological models were used as frameworks to study sociological processes, with insights from economy, biology and sociology. The formulation of the theory was introduced in their article “The Population Ecology of Organizations”, but was later

developed further and presented in their book “Organizational Ecology” in 1989. The theory defines how organizations compete and how the natural selection occurs. The theory, and primarily its direction, was influenced by Amos Hawley and his neoclassical theory of human ecology. The theory by Hawley (1950, 1968) sought to explain patterns of adaptation of human communities to ecological settings. Hannan and Freeman was also strongly influenced by Stinchcombe’s (1965) analysis of change in the world of organizations, when developing their theory.

Organizational Ecology includes a number of focus areas, or sub units (Hannan & Freeman 1977). One of them is “Structural Inertia and Organizational Change”, which focus on inertia and change within organizations. The theory emphasize that an organization needs reliability and accountability in order to survive (Hannan & Freeman 1989). However, inertia is seen as a negative by-product of these needs. Inertia may lower the chances for successfully reorganizing to a new structure. Hannan and Freeman (1989) argues that existing organizations needs to be able to change their strategies and structures faster than entrepreneurs can start something new, or else the competitors will gain advantage. Nonetheless, given the limits on firm-level adaption, it is suggested that most of the broader changes in a population of organizations come from entry and selective replacement of organizations. Hannan and Freeman (1989) further argues that structural inertia increases with age, while the mortality rate decreases. Inertia derive from both internal structural arrangements and external environmental constraints (Hannan & Freeman 1977). The internal constraints cover (1) sunk costs, which may limit the options for adaptation, (2) flow of information which may constrain the organizational decision makers, (3) internal political constraints and (4) constraints generated by the organization’s own history. The external constraints are (1) a number of legal and financial barriers to entry and exit, (2) the accessibility of information, (3) legitimacy constraints and (4) collective rationality (ibid.).

Another focus area within “Organizational Mortality”, in addition to inertia and change, is the “Age Dependence” of the organization, referring to the relation between an organization’s age and risk of mortality (Hannan & Freeman 1977; 1989). One pattern identified is described as liabilities of aging, suggesting that the risk of failure increases with organizational age. The risk of failure increases either through internal inefficiencies arising from the aging of the organization, so-called liability of senescence, or through a growing external mismatch with

the environment, so called liability of obsolescence (Clegg 2013; Hannan & Freeman 1977; Hannan & Freeman 1989).

## 5 Method

*The study at issue are of qualitative nature and the methodological details – sampling, primary data and data analysis – are presented below. These details are followed by a critique and evaluation of the qualitative approach. Subsequently, the introductory study upon which the study is based is presented, as well as a review of the ethical aspects that has shaped the study. The chapter is then concluded by a discussion on the limitations of the study.*

### 5.1 Sampling

In line with the qualitative research strategy, a purposive sampling approach has been employed. In order to access a wide range of perspectives, individuals with different connections to the fashion industry in general and PFW in particular were sampled in a strategic way. Furthermore, two kinds of purposive sampling approaches were used in combination; generic purposive sampling and snowball sampling. As concerns the generic purposive sampling, the criteria for selecting individuals were formed a priori in the form of a list of roles involved in the event of PFW throughout the whole process of the event – a list of roles necessary to investigate in order to explain the paradox. While the focus of the study is set on female models and the thin ideal as it affects girls and women, the sampled subjects of the empirical research have not been solely women, since the fashion industry, and more specifically the event of PFW, involves people of different gender. Consequently, an exclusion of men might have hindered a well-grounded explanation to the paradox identified. The generic purposive sampling was followed by snowball sampling in order to establish contacts with individuals with the same or a different role in the process of PFW through the network of contacts of the individuals already sampled. Informed by Coleman (1958), the snowball sampling approach was considered appropriate as it was *the network* of individuals involved in the event that was the focus of attention. The resulting sample consisted of four men and ten women with a total of nine roles, including designer, fashionista, fashion editor, trend forecaster, stylist, casting agent, photographer, model with a body considered “plus size” by the industry, and model with a body considered “thin”, or “ideal” by the industry. All participants were asked if they knew anyone with knowledge related to fashion week, or connection to the industry. For instance, one of the designers referred us to the Casting Agent. Consequently, the purposive sampling approach in

combination with the snowball sampling approach provided an appropriate sample in terms of the research question at issue. The participants are further presented below.

### **5.1.1 Participants**

#### **The Trend Analyst**

The Trend Analyst is 53 years old and has been in the industry for almost 30 years. She is educated within textiles and fashion and are now working as a trend forecaster, creative director and speaker.

#### **The Fashionista**

The Fashionista is 18 years old, with no experience of the fashion industry, in terms of education or work. However, he is an interested consumer, and eager to criticize the way fashion is constructed. By raising his voice on Instagram, he is able to share his opinion.

#### **The Plus Size Model**

The Plus Size Model is a 30-year-old female model. She was one of the very few curvy models walking on PFW FW 19/20. She started her modeling career when she was nineteen, and are today signed by two different agencies. Besides modeling, she is also a theatre director and performer. She is considered as a plus size model by the industry, and works hard for diversity in the industry.

#### **The Photographer**

The Photographer is an Italian photographer, based in Paris. He is 31 and has been in the fashion industry during the last decade. He is educated within fashion and art. He is a freelance photographer, and many of his clients has been well known, luxury brands.

#### **The Stylist**

The Stylist is a 29 years old fashion stylist, working primarily in New York and Los Angeles. He has – during the last four seasons – been styling for the American fashion company Chromat during New York Fashion Week, a brand prized for its diversity of body types on the runway and its non-binary way of designing fashion. He has a degree from the University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Sweden and has been working in the fashion industry for around four years.

### The Thin Model

The Thin Model is 20 years old and comes from Sweden. She has been modeling for about three years, and now model full time. She lives in Stockholm and works mostly in Stockholm, London and Paris. Her measurements are 79-61-88 cm (almost the same as the average in the introductory study, which showed 79-60-87 cm).

### The Fashion Designer 1

Fashion Designer 1 is a 27-year-old fashion designer, educated at the Swedish School of Textiles. She was a part of the EXIT 2018 graduation class, who showed at Stockholm Fashion Week and London Fashion Week the same year. The show became highlighted, especially considering the choice of models.

### The Fashion Designer 2

Fashion Designer 2 is a 27-year-old fashion designer, also educated at the Swedish School of Textiles. Just like participant 5, he was a part of the EXIT 2018 graduation class and Stockholm Fashion Week and London Fashion Week the same year. He is now working as fashion designer, and has been in the industry for a couple of years.

### The Fashion Designer 3

Fashion Designer 3 is also a Swedish fashion designer in her mid-twenties. She recently graduated from The Swedish School of Textiles with a degree in Fashion Design. Currently she is working in a fashion company in Paris.

### The Fashion Designer 4

Fashion Designer 4 is a designer in her mid-20's. She recently graduated from The Swedish School of Textiles with a masters degree in Fashion Design. Currently she is working with a couple of different designer projects on Iceland.

### The Fashion Designer 5

Fashion Designer 5 is a Swedish fashion designer in her late twenties. Her experience within fashion started in high school, where her main subject was textiles. After that she studied *patternmaking* in Malmö. She graduated from The Swedish School of Textiles last year with a degree in Fashion Design.

### The Casting Agent

The Casting Agent is the founder of a casting agency in Stockholm, and has a number of years in the industry. She is also a graphic designer, and combines the work of the casting agency and the work as a graphic designer.

### The Fashion Editor 1

The Fashion Editor 1 is a fashion editor at one of Sweden's largest fashion Magazines. She has been in the industry since 2000, and was before that educated within fashion, communication and journalism. Her history as a fashion editor goes back to the beginning of her career, and she has been working at several fashion magazines.

### The Fashion Editor 2

The Fashion Editor 2 is a 28-year-old fashion journalist and critic who has been freelancing for fashion magazines such as Dazed, L'Officiel USA and Vogue. She is educated at London College of Fashion and has many years of experience of reporting from runways.

## **5.2 Primary data**

The research method employed was semi-structured interviewing, which was the primary source of data. The semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility and rich, detailed answers within the frames of the fairly focused research question posed. The flexibility of the semi-structured approach provided insight into what the interviewee found relevant and important in the context and the opportunity to adjust the emphases in the research based on these issues. In addition, as the research was carried out by more than one person, the semi-structured approach – as compared to the unstructured approach – ensured a greater comparability of interviewing style. The method of semi-structured interviews was also considered more appropriate as compared to participant observation since the topic of the thin ideal had been shown in previous research to persist in habits, routines and rules of thumb based on convention (Volonté 2017; Mears 2010; Godart & Mears 2009). As a consequence, the interviews provided an opportunity to examine how the interviewees reflect upon issues connected to the thin ideal supposedly not reflected upon on a regular basis, and to find explanations to the inertia of the thin ideal in these reflections. Furthermore, the method of qualitative interviewing as compared to participant observation was considered to be less

intrusive in people's lives, to avoid reactive effects, to provide a greater breadth of coverage in terms of individuals involved in the event of PFW and to be a more effective way of getting access to these individuals within the quite closed sphere of the process of PFW *behind* the runways.

Starting out with a clearly defined puzzle or paradox, an interview guide was prepared with a focus on solving the identified puzzle – the inertia of the thin ideal of PFW. To get as much out of the interviews as possible, we decided to create four different interview guides (*Appendix 1*), to be able to cover the different areas within which the participants are present, and base the interviews on their knowledge and experience within the industry. Interview guide 1 were made to capture the view of the participants of fashion week. Interview guide 2 focused on those working within media, such as the Photographer and the Fashion Editor 1 and 2. The third interview guide was made with suitable questions for the Fashionista. The fourth interview guide was made in Swedish, and used for the interviews held in Swedish.

Another main focus when preparing the interview guide was to not present the thin ideal in a leading way – as problematic – but rather examine the interviewees views upon it and seeking explanations within that specific view. Different interview guides were prepared for the different roles examined, although the majority of the questions were the same, some had smaller adjustments. The questions were structured in a logical order depending on the theme of the question and introducing questions was always followed by follow-up questions, specifying questions or interpreting questions to ensure rich answers.

All of the interviews, except the ones with the fashion editors, took place over Skype, or, when the internet connection tergiversated, over the telephone. The fashion editors answered the questions of the interview guide in an e-mail. PFW as an international happening, and an important institution within an increasingly global fashion industry, required international participants, why interviewing mediated by internet technology was necessary. The individuals interviewed were located at such diverse places around the globe – from New York to Amsterdam and Stockholm – that interviewing in person would not have been economically, practically or environmentally defensible. In addition, as the collection of empirical material took place during the same month as PFW Fall/Winter 2019 was held, many potential participants had limited amount of time for interviews, and Skype provided a flexible way to get access to the participants' inputs under time constraints. While there were

some disadvantages of Skype – the main ones being the quality of connection and the related issues of a lesser flow in the interview and trickier transcription – the advantages prevailed due to the time and cost savings and since the possibility to secure rapport was not noticeably affected.

The collection of empirical material took place between mid-February and late March 2019. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed shortly after the interviews took place in order to capture not only what was said but also how it was said. Most of the interviews were held in English, although, five of them were held in Swedish. The interviews held on Swedish were a result of both the snowball sampling, as well as to the fact that we, the authors of the thesis, are Swedish. It was therefore natural to have some of the interviews in Swedish, when we crossed paths with Swedish people involved in the industry. These interviews were, as the other interviews, transcribed – and then translated into English. This in order to increase the quality of the research, and to depict the reality better.

### **5.3 Data analysis**

The research on the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW has been approached as an abductive process. Abduction implies starting with a puzzle (or paradox) and then seeking to explain it, through a process involving back-and-forth engagement with the social world and the literature (Bryman & Bell 2015). The three theoretical perspectives constituting the theoretical frameworks consequently provides three different lenses through which the inertia of the thin ideal may be examined and explained.

The qualitative data stemming from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis, which followed the guidelines provided by Bryman and Bell (2015). The recurring motifs found in the transcripts of the interviews were ordered and synthesized into central themes and subthemes organized in an index. The themes and subthemes then served as a basis for a theoretical understanding of the data, relating them to the different aspects of each of the lenses provided by the theoretical framework. The phenomenon of the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW is, just as fashion as a concept, complex and multifaceted. The theoretical framework at issue seeks to make sense of the inertia of the thin ideal by acknowledging cultural, sociological as well as economical facets of fashion. The theories presented within the theoretical framework are therefore used to interpret the findings, to

make sense of the complex reality presented as findings in themes and subthemes. The thematic analysis was chosen over other ways of analyzing the data, as the thematic analysis is very common and applicable to most approaches of qualitative data (Bryman and Bell 2015).

#### **5.4 Critique of Method**

There are a lot of criticism towards qualitative research, with one of the main criticisms from quantitative researchers being that qualitative research is too much influenced by personal opinions. Quantitative researchers further mean that qualitative researchers rely too much on the often unsystematic views of what is significant and important, as well as close personal relationships that may occur between the researcher and the people studied. Other criticisms directed at qualitative studies are the difficulties to replicate, problems of generalization and lack of transparency (Bryman & Bell 2015). It can be difficult to replicate due to the fact that the researchers focus often is a result of own preferences. They discuss that there might be problems of generalization, and argue that the findings are to generalize to theory rather than to populations. It might be difficult to establish what the researcher actually did, and how, which is a result of lack of transparency.

It may be argued that not all research questions can be answered through quantitative methods, as they are too complex. We have done our very best to avoid the side effects that arise from this, by being as objective as possible all the way through. This by, for instance, going through all of the interviews several times – both listening to the recordings, watching body language and reading the transcription – to make sure both of us perceived it the same way. Further considerations in regard to the quality of the study are discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### **5.5 Evaluation of Method**

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), there are different measures to evaluate the quality of the research – either reliability and validity adapted to qualitative research, or the measures of trustworthiness. As the terms of reliability and validity tend to be similar, this research was evaluated based on trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is built on the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. *Credibility* is based on how the researcher describes the social reality – if it is credible or not (Bryman & Bell 2015). In order to ensure

credibility, the perception of the researcher has been authenticated in each case in which it has been unclear what the respondents actually said or meant. As mentioned above, the interviews were transcribed as soon as possible, to get as correct information as possible out of them. To make sure the result was in line with what the respondents said, multiple rounds of coding were carried through. The empirical material has been discussed several times and constantly been kept in mind, in order to ensure that what the participants said was conveyed clearly and correctly in the thesis. The second criteria, *transferability*, concerns the issue of whether the results are transferable to another context or not (ibid.). As a qualitative study, the study at issue focus on depth rather than width, which implies that the results are relatively difficult to transfer to another context. However, a detailed list of the participants – yet guaranteeing their anonymity – as well as the theoretical frameworks, increases the transferability by creating an understanding of how the data was gathered and analysed. *Dependability* is about having a transparent research process to clarify credibility of the result (ibid.). To prove dependability, all parts of the process has been carefully described. Two colleagues, with the same knowledge level, have been reading the thesis to critically review and to make sure there were no missing details. The last criteria, *confirmability*, emphasize that the research should be as objective as possible, and free from the researchers' opinions and values (ibid.). While it is impossible do any business research completely objective, the risk of personal influences contaminating the research were minimized through the researchers constantly keeping the research question in mind. In addition, there were no political intentions with writing the thesis. To make sure the research was as objective as possible, and free from personal beliefs and statements, two persons without specific knowledge in the field proofread the thesis.

## **5.6 Introductory Study**

An introductory study was made to get a broader view and to assess the prominence of the idealization of thin bodies within the realm of PFW. The introductory study aimed to show if there is diversity or lack of diversity in terms of body sizes of the models walking the shows. The study was based on fashion shows from PFW Ready-to-Wear Spring/Summer 2019. All shows with the models' names stated, as reported by Vogue.com, were included in the study. The shows represented in the study are: A.P.C, Ann Demeulemeester, Balenciaga, Celine, Chanel, Chloé, Christian Dior, Dries van Noten, Ellie Saab, Esteban Cortazar, Givenchy, Hermès, John Galliano, Louis Vuitton, Miu Miu, Off-White, Paul & Joe, Poiret, Sacai, Saint Laurent, Sonia Rykiel, Stella McCartney and Valentino. The names of the models were

placed in a spreadsheet together with bust-waist-hips measurements. The measurements were found on the websites of the modeling agencies they are/were represented by. Some of the models walked multiple shows, and when finalizing the spreadsheet, all duplicates were taken away – that is to say, no model showed more than once. Through the spreadsheet it was possible to identify the average and median bust-waist-hips measurements, which both were 79-60-87 cm, respectively. The range values for the bust, waist and hips measurements were 69-91 cm, 51-74 cm and 76-99 cm, respectively. The result of the introductory study shows very low diversity in terms of body measurements on the bodies shown on PFW, as illustrated in Figure 1 on page 6. The study also shows that despite the actions taken, in terms of the new French law banning size zero models, as well as the charts established by the two conglomerates LVMH and Kering, the models are still very thin. Worth mentioning is that also the shows not included in the study – due to lack of information concerning the models – visually reveal an abundance of thin models. In conclusion, the introductory study showed an evident and clear trend of thin models walking the runways of PFW.

## **5.7 Ethics and Considerations**

Several ethical issues were taken into consideration to ensure that the research was conducted appropriately. Diener and Crandall (1978) suggest four main areas to consider as concerns ethics of business research: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. *Harm to participants* mean both physical harm, harm to their own development or self-esteem, stress, harm to career or future employment. Taking this into consideration, all participants have been informed about the research and been asked if recording the interview is allowed. All participants were ensured anonymity, and measures have been taken to keep all of them anonymous.

*Lack of informed consent* was also an important factor to consider. The participants were ensured about both the subject and the purpose of the research. All participants were first contacted via an email which clarified the details of the research. In addition, these details and the focus of the research were repeated in the beginning of each interview.

*Invasion of privacy* is related to the degree of invading the private sphere of the participants (Diener & Crandall 1978). Invasion of privacy goes hand in hand with informed consent, and as mentioned above, all participants were informed about the process and purpose of the

research. All interviews have been treated carefully and individually. None of the participants have been forced to tell anything, and all participants had the option not to answer questions considered to be too personal. Careful consideration has also been taken to GDPR, as the research process involved the handling of personal data. The only personal data collected was name and profession, as the interviews focused on the experiences and thoughts of the participants, and not on their identity. No information has been gathered without a purpose, and nothing has been and will not be shared to anyone else.

The last main area considered in regard to the ethics of the research is *deception*, which refers to the researcher presenting the study as something other than it is (Diener & Crandall 1978). This research has been transparent the entire process, with no intention to deceive any of the participants, as substantiated by this chapter. The participants who wanted got the questions in advance. In addition, as mentioned above, all of the participants were well aware of the subject of the research and the use of the interviews.

Except the considerations mentioned by Denier and Crandall (1978), Vetenskapsrådet (2019) suggest a few additional criteria. For instance, Vetenskapsrådet (2019) recommend taking scientific misconduct into consideration, as it is an essential point to avoid when making the research ethically correct. Scientific misconduct often covers fabrication, falsification or plagiarism, but also other factors such as withholding research results or abuse of superior position. Good research practice is necessary in order to avoid misleading results, or harm to humans, animals and the environment. To assure good research practice, the four criteria by Denier and Crandall (1978) was kept in mind during the entire process. In order to prevent fabrication, falsification or plagiarism, all sources have been carefully used, and critically reviewed. Additionally, correct and consistent use of a referencing style is necessary to ensure that the right person gets credit for what they have researched. The authors of this thesis have therefore followed the University of Borås' Guide on the Harvard referencing style rigorously.

## **5.8 Limitations**

The thesis of issue has, in line with the theoretical frames provided by first and foremost the trickle-down theory, examined the aspect of social status as an explanation of the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW. Since social status or class is just one of multiple social stratification,

and since it has been argued that the various forms of social stratification are interlinked, the perspective would be more complete if other forms would have been included – for example gender, race or age. The connections between the different forms of social stratification as related to the thin ideal were also brought up by some the participants – but could, due to time constraints and word limits, not be included in the analysis.

Furthermore, while the sample profile is very varied, an important note to be made is that it does not include people that have worked directly in connection with these old fashion houses showing on PFW for a longer time. The sample profile includes people with insight into the haute couture business, but due to the trickiness of getting a hold on Anna Wintour or Heidi Slimane, some ideas suggested might not be as reliable as they would have been with unrestricted access to the decision makers of these old fashion houses. However, there are also benefits with interviewing people not as used to the public eye as for instance Anna Wintour is. These people, like the participants in this study, are not as restricted in their opinions and do not need to make sure that each idea put forward is politically correct.

Another limitation of the study concerns the timing, as the study was carried through during the late winter and early spring – a time when the preparations for the PFW Fall/Winter shows are intense. Consequently, the timing made it hard to get a hold on people involved in the event. However, it may also have caused the interviews to be less rich and detailed, as many of the participants had a limited time frame for the interview. Of course, face to face interviews without time limitations would have been ideal, but due to both environmental and financial as well as time constraints, this was not possible. Rather, a more varied sample profile with participants as relevant as possible, and from all over the world, was strived for.

## 6 Results and Analysis

*In consonance with the abductive stance of the research, the findings – the explanations to the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW – are presented and subsequently interpreted through the lenses provided by the theoretical framework. The findings are presented in themes and subthemes, each of which, in an effort to foster a theoretical understanding of the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW, is analyzed in the light of the theoretical propositions presented in the theoretical framework and in the literature review. Firstly, the explanations based upon the theme of the thin body as an aesthetic body are presented, followed by the explanations based upon the theme that the thin ideal is part of a long history and tradition. The explanations emanating from the theme of financial risk and power are then presented, and, lastly, the explanations emanating from the theme of multiple actors being responsible for the inertia of the thin ideal are put forward.*

### 6.1 Thin = Aesthetic

A common view among the participants is that the explanation to the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW lies in the conception of the thin body as an aesthetic body. The roots of this conception may be found both in the Western society as well as the fashion industry.

#### 6.1.1 Aesthetics within the Western Society

Almost all participants emphasize the thin body ideal as part of Western society and the visual representations of the thin body ideal within the fashion industry as a trend. Some view it as an outdated trend, others as an insistent, undeviating trend. As the Photographer argues, the ideal body goes with the aesthetics of the time, and each decade seem to have its own zeitgeist.

It [the ideal body] is always just going be a trend. Some things are going be more trendy than something else. Like now, for instance, it's super trendy to have people who look kind of androgynous or playing around with, like gender roles [...].

(The Fashion Designer 4)

It springs from that the general body ideal within society is very thin, too.

(The Fashion Designer 3)

Many participants discuss how the body ideal in society has changed during the last century. The participants note how the bodies of fashion models – often represented by a famous fashion model of a specific period – have changed, just as other trends in society, bringing to light examples such as the grunge era of the 1990's and the minimalistic take of the 2000's. The Plus Size Model notes the uncertainty and ambiguity involved in the concept of a trend, comparing the thin body ideal to the skinny jeans trend and concluding that it differs across time.

The discussions of the participants consequently bring to light that body ideals in society are *reflected* in the bodies of fashion models – and that these body aesthetics change. The notion that the thin body ideal is a trend in the Western society is a notion closely related to the ideas on the links between fashion, clothes and the body presented by Barnard (2014). It is certainly clear in the discussions of the participants that bodies are not a-fashionable carriers of clothing, only there to hand fashion and clothing upon – but rather fashionable items themselves that are re-dressed in accordance to the latest trend, the aesthetics of the certain time and place. The notion that different sizes and styles of body go in and out of vogue, just like clothes, are elaborated upon by the participants through mentioning how the bodies of famous fashion models have changed throughout the latest century. Their discussions consequently indicate the importance of our historical location in the generation of our ideas and values. Each historical location has its own values and beliefs that creates the social categories and the aesthetics of that specific time. At this time and place, in the Western society during the 2010's, the thin body is considered aesthetic, as reflected in the bodies of fashion models.

[...] if you're curvy, people won't really tell you "you should be a model". If you're skinny and pretty, it's much more likely that your surrounding will say "oh, you could be a model". Whereas if you are curvy, they won't tell you, because they think you're, you know, society thinks you're too fat to be a model.

(The Plus Size Model)

A notable view among the participants is the view that the thin ideal has had a strong hold on Western society for a long time, and still has. Many participants discuss the thin ideal as something very problematic within the Western society of today, telling stories about models

being asked to lose weight and about friends – both within and outside the fashion industry – with body image concerns and eating disorders.

I would say it [the thin ideal] is problematic. Cause it is an image you show to girls, specifically young girls, that “this is beautiful, and your body is not”, if you look different. And that is the point of representation, if you don’t see yourself in the magazines, if you don’t see yourself on the catwalk, or in other media, you’re going think “I’m ugly. I’m not worth it.”

(The Plus Size Model)

There is a view in society that thin bodies are beautiful bodies, and as a consequence, thin bodies are the bodies that are seen in mass media – creating an alienation of other body types and establishing the idea that other body types are outside the norm. However, according to the participants, it is not the mass media in itself that is responsible for the thin ideal, rather, it is the whole Western culture and its aesthetics.

It’s the society, it’s not one person. [...] It’s not one person changing it [the ideal body], it’s not the industry, it’s not the consumer, it’s everything together. It’s a movement of a lot of people together.

(The Trend Analyst)

Other participants have a more economical and rational view of the thin ideal in Western society, arguing that in order for fashion to sell, it must reflect general patterns in society – and that these general patterns of today include the idea that thin bodies are aesthetic bodies. As a consequence, the thin bodies of the fashion models walking the runways of PFW are not so much about the ideas of designers and fashion houses as it is about their reactions to the general aesthetics in the Western society of today, implying that thin is beautiful.

I think it is more the general philosophy in the society about it [the ideal body], that makes what is happening.

(The Trend Analyst)

There is a long history of the idea that fat people are ugly... to provide an easy answer. I believe it has been like that for a long time now, it just... prevails.

(The Thin Model)

One idea is that one wants things to sell. And I believe that one follows general patterns in society. For example, and then I don't mean on an individual level, but what the general conception of beauty is.

(The Fashion Designer 2)

Today, according to many of the participants, the values and beliefs within the Western culture applaud thin bodies and disparage bigger bodies. The bodies of today are dressed in the values and beliefs implying that the thin body is the ideal body, the desirable body. This desirable body is the only body sent down the runways of PFW because this body is the body of fashion – the body of the latest trend, the aesthetic body. This body exist because it has been dressed with values of a culture praising thinness – and our experiences and perceptions of that body consequently take the form of representations, as they are cultural constructions. This implies a reasoning, present in many discussions of the participants, that it may be the persistent thin ideal in the society that sends these thin bodies down the runway of PFW. The inertia of the thin ideal on PFW may consequently be seen as a reflection of the Western cultural construction of the ideal body.

As elaborated upon by Volonté (2017), thinness has been a dominant cultural ideal since the 20th century and the thin ideal constitutes a notable example of a hegemonic discourse. As has been argued by multiple authors, thinness has for a long time been – and continues to be – associated with youthfulness, attractiveness, success, happiness and social acceptance (Aagerup 2011; Borland & Akram 2007; Crandall 1994; Greenleaf, Chambliss, Rhea, Martin & Morrow 2006; Peat, Peyerl & Muehlenkamp 2006). The notion of the thin ideal having a strong and persistent hold on Western society is further validated by the rich, wide and field crossing stream of research on the thin ideal, stemming from the second half of the 20th century and later. The idea of the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW as a reflection of tedious aesthetics within the Western society may be substantiated by the findings of previous research within business on the thin ideal in Western society, most notably the results shown

by Apeageyi (2008) that the slim body size is considered the most ideal among consumers. The idea is also in line with the findings of Kees, Becker-Olsen and Mitric (2008) and Aagerup (2011) which have shown that marketing communication featuring thin models make women feel better about the brand and lead to a more positive brand perception of the brand featured.

### **6.1.2 Aesthetics within the Fashion Industry**

In contradiction to the view that the inertia of the thin ideal of PFW is a reflection of the aesthetics of the Western culture in which we find the event of PFW, there is a view among many of the participants that the explanation to inertia of the thin ideal lies in the idea of fashion having its “own” *constructed* aesthetics. This idea implies that the thin ideal within fashion, as represented on PFW, is not so much about the general conception of beauty within the Western society, as it is about fashion having its “own”, fashionable, body. As argued by the Fashion Designer 5, the thin ideal within fashion and the establishment of “the body of fashion” goes hand in hand, with Twiggy as the star of the launch.

And then it was Twiggy, I guess [...] who made success, because then she had a different body type as compared to what it had looked like before. [...] And then she got really famous, and she had a more straight, slim, thin body. And I think that it is since then that it [the thin ideal] has just resided.

(The Fashion Designer 5)

The Fashion Designer 5 further suggests that the attempt by the fashion industry to establish its own female body – the fashionable female body – was an attempt to establish a body that could not be associated with the porn industry. The fashionable female body consequently became a straight, slim and thin body, without any signs of curves, or connotations of sexuality. In line with the the Fashion Designer 5’s idea of the fashionable body as a straight and thin body, multiple participants discuss the notion of the ideal body within the realm of fashion as a clothes hanger.

There are a few quotes from some designer that has compared the female body with a clothes hanger – that it [clothes] should just hang there.

(The Stylist)

I mean, they say that it's because the designers wanna have, sort of clothes racks, on which they can drape their clothes the way they prefer it. So that there's no, the clothes can do what the designer, you know, thought of when he designed it on a doll. So that there's no bumps that change shape of the fabric in any way.

(The Plus Size Model)

And then there are many designers... which I have learned reading about it... that says that they think clothes look better on a tall and thin body.

(The Casting Agent)

These discussions consequently suggest that the thin body ideal is explained by the aesthetics of fashion, that there is a conception within the fashion industry, especially among designers, that clothes in general are more aesthetically pleasing on a thin body. As is argued by the Trend Analyst, the thin body as represented on PFW is not about the average conception beauty or what is considered to be the ideal body within the society, rather, it is about the ideal body of a fashion model being "extreme".

What I am talking about, is, extremer things, so it's not like the average beauty, like we see it, like perfect, but it's like, extremes. So it's like, too big nose, strange teeth... ears that are, like, flipping out.

(The Trend Analyst)

The notion that the aesthetics within fashion implies an exceptional and extremely thin body is also evident in the participants' descriptions of fashion models, where the words "unusual" and "unrealistic" are recurring.

It is a rather unusual body type. Because I guess it is quite few, especially girls, that are really tall and thin.

(The Fashion Designer 2)

It becomes completely absurd if one should be really tall but also weigh really little... It is actually unrealistic... from a health perspective it is really weird.

(The Thin Model)

As a consequence, the inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW may be explained by the realm of fashion, perhaps most notably fashion designers, dressing the body with its “own”, fashionable, aesthetics. In sharp contrast to the notion of the body as a fashionable item re-dressed in accordance with the latest trend, as presented in the previous section, the aesthetics within the realm of fashion implies a body that is simply an a-fashionable carrier of clothing. This body is only there to hang fashion and clothing upon, and does not change in accordance with trends within society.

It is easy to look at popular culture and celebrityism for inspiration, however, they rarely impact runway models and their purpose.

(The Fashion Editor 2)

The ideal body of fashion as the exceptional, almost artificial and thin body has been elaborated upon from multiple perspectives in previous research. The idea of the fashion model as a clothes hanger is clearly in line with the conclusions of Soley-Beltran (2012), implying that fashion models and their thin frames are often objectified and commodified as they are reduced to being clotheshorses without any signs of personality. The extremeness inhabiting the aesthetics within the realm of fashion is discussed by Arnold (1999a; 1999b), who highlights the need within fashion photography to push further, and to reject the limits of the natural body. In addition, the ideal body of fashion as discussed by the participants are also clearly related to the so-called “look of edginess”, which has been explained by Mears (2010) as the sought-after look of models among cultural producers. The look of edginess is a look embodying youth, whiteness, and thinness – but without any traces of sexiness, or curves. This look is, in turn, related to the idea of the fashion models as “unreal” and artificial, since the look of edginess is associated with an unattainable fantasy femininity – a notion returned to in section “6.2.3 The Thin Body as a Source of Prestige” (ibid.). Entwistle (2009) has also elaborated upon this specific look, which she has explained is often referred to as an “editorial” look and described as “edgy”, in turn referring to the unusual and odd nature of the

look. She has further emphasized that the aesthetic content of the high fashion model look is quite different from “beauty” as defined outside the world of fashion modelling.

To conclude the section concerning a thin body as an aesthetic body, the findings suggests that there are two paradoxical ways of explaining the aesthetic aspect of the inertia of the thin ideal of PFW. While the ubiquity of the thin ideal in the Western society is considered to be one of the possible explanations behind the inertia by many of the participants, the view of fashion having its own aesthetics brings to light the explanation that it is the fashion industry that has established and preserved the thin ideal. In other words, while the thin bodies walking the runways of PFW may be considered as a reflection of the cultural construction of the ideal body, they may also be considered as part of – as a cause behind – that cultural construction. In consonance with the latter view, suggesting that the inertia of the thin ideal is considered to be part of the construction of the ideal body, the next section presents the idea that the inertia of the thin ideal is explained by the history and tradition of the fashion industry.

## **6.2 The Thin Ideal is Part of the Tradition**

The discussions of the participants suggest that while fashion as a concept, but also PFW as an event, is about presenting novelty, it is also – in line with its paradoxical nature – about history and tradition. Many participants put forward the idea that the inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW is explained by tradition, or that these fashion houses continues to send thin bodies down the runways because that is how they have done it for a very long time.

There are considerable and deeply rooted structures that is affecting this, but it is a lot of thin models in Paris, and it has been like that for a very, very long time, and it, I perceive it almost like there are structures that are hard to budge. Of you compare it to other fashion weeks, I believe there is a wider diversity of bodies, for example, when I think of New York Fashion Week but also in London, that are a bit younger, newer fashion weeks. There, it is more movement, or should I say elbow room, as concerns it, but it feels like... Paris is still really... the body ideal is really thin.

(The Fashion Designer 3)

It [the thin ideal] goes so very far back that it's not possible to change these fashion houses.

(The Stylist)

The Photographer discusses whether the thin ideal is ideal or not, and his opinion is that it is ideal, in terms of showing the clothes. He states that it is “the classical way”, in which the designers want to show their creations, and many of the other participants similarly claim that the thin ideal is deeply rooted in the traditions and norms. The long tradition and history of showing clothes in thin bodies constitute a solid foundation to rely upon within an environment characterized by uncertainty and changes.

History dictates the tendencies of fashion, models have over the course of time had different body requirements – yet, they are always on the slim side, or at least that is what we turn back to in times of confusion.

(The Fashion Editor 2)

I think that, that it is so far or so deeply rooted in norms, and the way it has been looking like in former times, how one chose to present it on a body in former times.

(The Fashion Designer 5)

### **6.2.1 Standards of Procedure Marked by History**

*How*, then, can history and tradition dictate the way fashion is created and presented on PFW? According to the participants, there are two ways of creating and presenting fashion. Either, clothes are made on the models available, or the models are chosen afterwards, implying that the clothes control the models in terms of body measurements. In both cases, history and tradition seem to influence standards of procedure.

Many of the participants argue that, regardless of the way fashion is created and presented, it is time efficient to make all clothes in one size. This “one size”, then, has traditionally has, and therefore continues to be, a size for a thin body. The Plus Size Model describes the process with making her dress before the show she walked on PFW SS19, and unlike the traditional models, who only needed one fitting, she had to come in three days before to fit the

dress several times. It was necessary to reshape it, make it again and fit it once more. Further, she stresses that it is easier for the designer if the models are all the same size. The Thin Model agrees with the Plus Size Model's statements, and adds that it is a way to make it comfortable for the fashion companies.

Whether or not we [the consumers] will fit it is not important, because there's a massive difference between sample size, and consumer size.

(The Fashion Editor 2)

Not only do fashion companies tend to create garments in the same size, but also shoes are all in the same size, often 38, as the Thin Model affirms. The thin bodies may therefore be considered to be stuck on the runways of PFW due to the efficiency of creating and presenting fashion in one, traditionally used, size.

Based on the discussions of the participants, it seems that it is more common that clothes are made in advance and that the models are chosen afterwards. Some participants suggest that it consequently is easier – both more practical and efficient – for the designer to make clothes in one size. As is discussed by the Fashion Designer 2 and the Fashion Designer 3, the garments that are shown on PFW are often made before the models are chosen, and with a limited time. As a consequence, all garments are made after a specific body type but with no specific model in mind, a notion further substantiating the notion discussed above that the fashion industry has its “own” aesthetic “body of fashion”, a body serving as a clothes hanger.

Then I'm sure that it is also a, like, an issue of convenience from, like, the point of view of fashion brands and companies... That all clothes can be in the same size, so that one doesn't have to customize everything.

(The Thin Model)

It could be, starting from a practical point of view, it could be the case that when you make samples and make, so to speak, small collections, it is most often the case that one has chosen a size, whatever it may be. And then you often just do it in one size. And then all the models will have to conform to

that. Because you can't have a small dress on a really big person, and a big dress on a... well, you get it.

(The Fashion Designer 2)

Since many of the collections for fashion week are only sewn in one specimen of each look, it is very governed, in terms of size... some clothes are maybe sewn in just 34 or 36, and then it is, like, only a person with that size that can wear that look.

(The Casting Agent)

Consequently, it may be the case that there are established standards of procedures based upon the tradition that fashion is made for, and shown on, thin models – why there are only thin models sent down the runways. This explanation, found in the history and tradition of the fashion industry, has also been elaborated upon by Volonté (2017). Volonté (2017) stresses that the use of thin models is a phenomenon incorporated into the practice of fashion – its habits, routines, objects and bodies – ever since the fashion industry was first formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is why it is so resilient despite the fast-changing world around it. An example of this incorporation is the application of the sizing system, as the technique of proportionally increasing the measurements when creating fashion has, since the introduction of the sizing system, been constrained beyond size 12. Beyond size 12, body measurements often no longer vary in a proportional manner, why changing the patterns would demand more time and effort from the designer, and subsequently be costlier. Consequently, the fashion industry has become technologically discouraged from producing larger sizes (ibid.). The production of smaller sizes created and continues to create a demand for thin bodies – to use for fittings and in marketing communication, for example on the runways – and the inertia prevails.

However, the explanation to the inertia of the thin bodies on the runways may also be found in the other way of creating clothes, that is, that clothes are made on the models available. The young and newly graduated designers interviewed stresses that the garments they make, at least in the context of the school, are often made on anyone available who can act as a model. This someone might be thin, obese, short or tall – he or she might not necessarily have the size of a traditional model. As explained by the Fashion Designer 4 and the Casting Agent,

the variety of body types acting as the canvases on which the designers design, is handled by using materials with greater flexibility or by having a specific model in mind when designing.

Since we are not producing for a large mass, we make fittings on models that are close to oneself, or on oneself. And if you are in that size, it doesn't mean that that is the ideal that you want to accentuate, but rather, that it is the easiest way.

(The Fashion Designer 1)

These discussions bring to light the idea that it might be the case that for the fashion houses, the models available are only the traditionally thin bodies. Consequently, the garments shown on PFW are made these thin bodies as canvases. As Fashion Designer 1 emphasizes, the creations shown on the runway are, just as the creations created by the aspiring designers, not produced for masses, but primarily created only to be shown on one specific model. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the model controls the creation, and not the other way around. In addition, many of the participants emphasize the overabundance of classical, thin, models on the modelling agencies. As the Thin Model puts it, describing her colleagues at her modelling agency, "there aren't a single model that is not thin".

And also, as modelling agencies... they should probably widen their supply [...] to show a wider range of models.

(The Casting Agent)

Instead of the creative decisions makers postulating that the clothes will be made for and shown on thin models, it might be the case that these decision makers, as the young designers in design school, don't really have a decision to make. Rather, they make clothes on the bodies available. However, whether or not the inertia of thin bodies on the runways lies in the standards of procedure and routines of the creative decisions makers or the modelling agencies – or, for the matter of fact, of them both – the main point is that the way of doing it seems to be hard to change. These thin bodies are part of the tradition, of the practice, of how to create and present fashion and therefore continues to be overrepresented on the runways.

The significance of history and tradition among the fashion houses and the subsequent explanation to the inertia of the thin ideal, as discussed by the participants, may be correlated to the internal constraint to change termed “history”, put forward by Hannan and Freeman (1977;1989) within the frames of Organizational Ecology. The internal constraint of history implies that standard procedures and allocation of tasks and authority has become the subject of normative agreement, leading to increasing cost of change. This suggests that the old fashion houses, dealing with the uncertain environment of which they are part, will continue to do what they have done for years, as it obviously works for them. However, it also leaves them stuck in inertia. The constraint of history therefore serves as an explanation to the inertia of the thin ideal, since changes in the standards of procedures of creating and presenting fashion would mean increased costs, why it is safe for the fashion houses to carry on with the present ones.

The reliance on history and tradition among the old fashion houses showing on PFW are also discussed by the participants as a contrast to how younger fashion companies deal with the uncertain and competitive environment of the fashion industry. Some of the participants claim that the young designers have to form their own foundation, as they have no history to rely on. They are consequently in a good position to take their own path and extinguish themselves from the traditional fashion houses, who seems to be stuck in the traditional way of presenting fashion and the standards of procedures behind it.

Cause they're [young designers] kind of working in like, usually working kind of like unknown territory, which like the bigger companies then usually pick up.

(The Fashion Designer 4)

Among other things, I think that, as a new designer or if you are newly graduated from a school or so ... that is when you really have the chance to show a new kind of fashion.

(The Casting Agent)

This highlights that new fashion companies, in comparison with the old fashion houses, are more adaptive to changes in their environment, a notion relating to the concept of age dependence which is part of the theory of Organizational Ecology. The concept of age

dependency implies that an organization's risk of mortality is related to the age of the organization, and that the risk of failure increases with age, either due to a liability of senescence or a liability of obsolescence. Whether related to failure or not, the risk of inertia also increases with age, since new fashion companies are less likely, as compared to the old fashion houses, to follow the same patterns on routine and consequently bear a lower risk to become stuck in inertia.

The liabilities of aging – the liability of senescence and the liability of obsolescence – are certainly in line with the explanation put forward by the participants that the old fashion houses are unable to change due to deeply rooted structures and norms in their decisions concerning the bodies that walk their runways. The liability of obsolescence refers to a growing mismatch with the environment, and is a result of environmental change (Clegg 2013). This is the mismatch that makes the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW a paradox, because despite the extensive research indicating negative consequences of the thin ideal as represented in visual communication, the old fashion houses continue to do as they have always done. This, while at the same time new fashion companies are adjusting these environmental changes, an adjustment implying taking into consideration the rise of the body positivity movement and the calls from academia, mass media and industry actors for a more ethical visual representation of bodies within the fashion industry – by including a wider diversity of body types in their marketing (Alptraum 2017; Clements 2013; Lichfield 2015; Schroeder & Borgerson 2005). The liability of senescence, then, is a direct effect of aging, and a matter of internal friction and inefficiencies (ibid.). The presence of the liability of senescence is not the least accentuated by the Stylist, implying that the tradition within these fashion houses is so strong that the inefficiencies are not even considered. Processes continues to be based on tradition and routines formed throughout the history of the organization, and inertia arises since the processes and routines of creating or presenting fashion are not questioned or evaluated. Left are the outdated processes deeply rooted in traditions – perhaps in need of a reality check.

To conclude this section, the inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW may be explained by the history of the fashion houses constituting a constraint to change, and the liabilities of aging making them less adaptive and eventually stuck in inertia. Consequently, the thin ideal is still present on the runways of PFW because changes in the external environment of the old fashion houses, both cultural and technical, are not reflected in

changes in the internal conditions within them. Rather, these fashion houses continue to rely on the traditional way of creating and presenting fashion – because “it goes so very far back that it’s not possible to change”.

### **6.2.2 The Thin Body as Something Natural**

The notion that the thin ideal “goes so far back that it is not possible to change” not only come to expression in the more practical aspects and processes of their organizations, but also in the culture of which they are part. In many interviews, the thin ideal is discussed as something natural, as a given fact part of the fashion industry. The participants bring up “standard” measurements for “classic” models and the shock value residing in plus size models. In addition, very few of the participants acknowledge that the thin ideal is something critically discussed, or often reflected upon, in their work. The idea that the thin ideal is part of the culture within the fashion industry clearly correlates to, and substantiates, the idea of the fashion industry (or culture) having its own aesthetics. As argued by the Fashion Editor 2, “the standard is set and that is how the industry works”.

The discussions of the participants disclose that there is very little confusion in how the ideal body of a runway model look like. Many of them even mention exact ideal body measurements, and the Thin Model, as was mentioned above, calls these measurements the “Paris measurements”.

The ideal runway model is between 5,9" to 5,11" tall. She weighs approximately 115-130 lbs and has a well-proportioned body in terms of symmetry. In common terms, she should be tall and skinny, usually around a size extra small.

(The Fashion Editor 2)

There seems to be a universal standard for becoming a model, a standard that is seen as a natural part – probably because of its long history – of the modelling profession and that everyone seems to know of. As elaborated upon by the Fashion Editor 2 above, history dictates the tendencies of fashion and fashion models have always been on the slim side, as that is what is turned to in times of confusion. According to the discussions of several participants, these standard measurements seem to be set in stone and, as argued by the

Fashion Editor 2 above, not affected by either popular culture or celebrityism. These measurements are part of the profession and purpose of the fashion model.

If a model is too slim, that will show on the garment and it will look bad. If a model is too big, that will again, show in the garment and it will look bad. The standard is set and that is how the industry works.

(The Fashion Editor 2)

I would say the runway model still is the, what we call straight size model. Meaning she's tall and slim. Following the measurements that are required for runway models.

(The Plus Size Model)

The Thin Model interviewed bear witness to the fact that the models on her agency, and other agencies she's been connected to in her profession, are exclusively thin, and when she has been working with plus size colleagues, these women have not been part of any modelling agency. The Casting Agent discuss the abundance of "traditional" modelling agencies where all the models are thin 16-year-olds with white skin and blonde hair, and further explain that if an agency would have a so called open casting, the requirement to participate would be to have a "classical" model body in order to be able to wear anything. The Fashion Designer 1 also comments on the standard measurements set within the industry, emphasizing the problems arising when she, as a designer, want to show clothes on other body types. She describes how she got into trouble when working with a traditional modelling agency in London, which only days before the show provided models that were a lot smaller than what had been agreed upon – there were no models of a bigger size.

Some of the participants also reflect upon *why* the thin ideal is considered natural and not something critically discussed. One designer as well as the models put forward the idea that it's not reflected upon because the thin, white and tall models – the majority of the bodies of the fashion industry – are not affected by the underrepresentation themselves. Rather, it is bigger and shorter girls and women with different skin colors outside the fashion industry that are affected, and as a consequence are more critical about it. However, as is discussed by the Thin Model, these critical voices are not heard, because "if you're not seen, you're not heard".

[...] the skinny, white girl won't probably not talk about that [the thin ideal], cause it's not something that's on her mind, cause it's not affecting her personally.

(The Plus Size Model)

As has been elaborated upon above, the thin ideal seems to be part of the birth and history of the fashion industry to quite an extent. In the earlier section on the aesthetics within Western society, it was also mentioned that the dimension of time is an important aspect of fashion – that as time goes by, body types go in and out of vogue. As has been argued by Barnard (2014), what makes something out of fashion is simply time. However, Barnard (2014) has also noted the ultimately paradoxical reference to value involving fashion that is held to be timeless, exemplified by “the classic”, which is held to be high quality, authentic, excellent and good for all times and all time. According to Barnard (2014), the phenomenon of “the classic” is explained by hierarchical aesthetics. “The classic” represents a dominant group’s taste, at one time and place, which is accepted by the majority as good or fashionable taste at every time and place.

With Paris as the birthplace of the modern fashion industry and as the fashion capital of the world (Villette & Hardill 2010), the significance of which is elaborated upon in the next section, PFW can be considered as presenting a dominant group’s taste or aesthetics. That is, aesthetics that influences the taste of other groups, within the fashion industry and within the society. Not only are many of the fashion houses showing on PFW characterized by tradition – they are the fashion houses of the world – they also have the groups on top of the social hierarchy as a target audience. These groups are in turn part of the dominant taste, in the creation of “the classics”. Among these “classics” are not only the Chanel 2.55 hand bag, the ballet flats from Lanvin and the Love bracelet from Cartier, but also the thin body. In line with the reasoning presented by Barnard (2014), that fashion is not only about adornment of the body but also about the body itself, the bodies walking the runways of PFW can be considered to be “classics”.

However, the argument that the inertia of thin bodies on PFW are due to these bodies being considered as “classics” relies on the notion that the trickle-down theory still is a relevant theory to describe the way fashion diffuses today. Being on the top of the hierarchy, or being

associated with high-end aesthetics, would not be of significance otherwise. As implied by the trickle-down theory, fashion is created by an elite and controlled by the higher classes, trickling its way down the social hierarchy, bringing the fashion of circle to life (Simmel 1957). As the Stylist claims, the old fashion houses never will benefit from changing, which is why they will continue to use thin models on the runway. This can certainly be linked to the reasoning of Simmel (1957) and his idea of the social hierarchy – no change can bring the ones at the top any additional power, rather, smallest change can instead make them fear. As evident in the discussions concerning the thin models above, this seems to be the case also for the models. No change can bring these thin models additional power, but every change can give them lesser chances of walking the runways of the most renowned fashion houses in the world. They are not themselves negatively affected by the underrepresentation of bigger models, rather the opposite, so why would they question the nature of it all?

Further verification of the notion that the thin ideal is considered natural within the fashion industry is to be found in discussions of diversified body types on the runways, which by multiple of the participants is considered to be giving rise to shock value. The Plus Size Model interviewed discusses the fact that she was chosen to walk a fashion show on PFW only because she was plus size:

He [the creative director of the fashion company] was specifically looking for different, which is how he saw me.

(The Plus Size Model)

It is clear in the discussions of the participants that diversified body types on the runways is not compatible with higher fashion – that is, the fashion on the runways of PFW. Rather, diversified body types are a way for other designers to distinguish themselves from the typically traditional, as seen on the runways of the traditional fashion houses showing on PFW.

A lot of brands, that do include curves, kind of make it like, they had to make it shock. You know like “oh my gosh, she’s so curvy”. Or they make it a bit like “oh, we’re one big happy diverse family”. And, I’m longing for a show that’s truly mixed, because at [the fashion show at issue], I was the only one. I mean, it was cool, but I was still the exception. A show that

would be truly mixed without [doing it for the shock value], and, still be really high-end fashion. So, not do it for the shock or for the kind of “we have an inclusive message”. Like, it shouldn’t even be a message, it should be normal.

(The Plus Size Model)

The shock value of diverse bodies on the runways lies in the fact that the audience does not expect to see these bigger bodies on the runways – as elaborated upon above, the idea of thin bodies as aesthetic bodies is part of the culture in Western society, and/or the culture of the fashion industry. Many of the participants, both models and designers, admit that the thin ideal is something rarely critically discussed in their work, and some of them ascribe it to the standards and how things are done in the industry.

I don’t believe we have talked about it on any of my jobs, it has rather been brought up in academic environment and such. It’s usually because, when it comes to the crunch, people are quite in agreement on what one wants and wants to show.

(The Fashion Designer 2)

If you don't like the industry you're in, and its morals – I suggest you find another career. In the end, it's about giving the designer enough creative space to create the collections we, as consumers, will buy. Whether or not we will fit it is not important, because there's a massive difference between sample size, and consumer size.

(The Fashion Editor 2)

Because these bodies represent a dominant group’s taste, they are taken out of time, and as a consequence seen as natural and unquestionable (Barnard 2014). Turning the fashionable, thin body into the timeless, thin body is about turning history into nature. A recurring idea in the discussions of the participants is that it is an ideological function that establishes the idea that the fashion of the thin body is good for all time and at all times. As the thin body is considered as being part of nature, it’s not questioned; either you embrace it, or you leave it to those who do. It goes without saying how it should be – the models of traditional modelling agencies are all thin and the creations shown of PFW are created for a thin body – because it

is a natural part of the fashion industry. Diverse body types are not, and are therefore a source of shock value.

To conclude, the notion of the thin ideal being considered a “classic”, part of a dominant group’s aesthetics, consequently put forward a further explanation to the inertia of it based of the relation between fashion and history. As compared to the idea that the thin ideal is part of a long history of the fashion houses and therefore continues to be part of the process due to the cost of changes, as well as the idea of the liability of aging – the notion of the “classic” presumes that the thin body is taken out of that history and made natural. The aesthetic, thin body is superior to history and time, it is good for all times and all time. The view of the thin ideal as something natural is, however, dependent upon the acceptance and adoption of the thin ideal as part of a dominant group’s aesthetics, that is, the acceptance and adoption of the taste of these old, Paris-based fashion houses as a dominant group within the fashion industry. As elaborated upon in section “6.3 The Financial Power and Risk behind the Inertia of the Thin Ideal”, there are indications of such a dominance.

### **6.2.3 The Thin Body as a Source of Prestige**

While the previous two sections have shown how history and tradition is part of the process of creating and presenting fashion on PFW today in a way that it “goes without saying”, there is also a view among the participants that it might be a more deliberate decision behind the thin bodies on the runways. The strong emphasis put on the history and tradition by these fashion houses may not necessarily lead them to failure, which was suggested by the concept of age dependency. Rather, the history of the thin body as an aesthetic body and a body associated with haute couture is used as a means to establish and sustain prestige and an image of exclusivity – reflected in the fact that the fashion houses continues to send thin bodies down the runways of PFW.

There is no doubt that the looks that are sent down the runways of PFW are put together to breathe extraordinariness and exclusivity. The Casting Agent suggests that the designers match their clothing with models who look extraordinary in terms of looks that very few people can achieve. Very few people are as thin, tall and white as the models on the runway of PFW. The notion that the thin body is associated with exclusivity is also put forward by other participants.

I think that it is a lot about... or that fashion is about mystique, that it should be something that is very desirable, and like you might not even be able to get it. It is about... wanting but not being able to get it. And I think that this is what is matched with models that look in a way that very few people can achieve.

(The Casting Agent)

But it's also, I mean, maybe it takes more effort to be very, very thin. I don't know. There's something about it that is unnatural. Maybe that makes us crave for that? Or that makes it something special?

(The Plus Size Model)

Most people just want to showcase the hardest body to have and that's being super skinny because it goes against our human nature not to eat.

(The Fashion Editor 1)

The idea that the extraordinary, thin bodies walking down the runways of PFW is a way for the fashion companies to sustain their prestige and image of exclusivity clearly relates to what Hannan and Freeman (1977; 1989) term the external constraint of legitimacy. In the frames of Organizational Ecology, any legitimacy acquired by an organization constitute an asset in manipulating the environment, and as the thin bodies seem to legitimize the fashion house's exclusive image, they may therefore be considered as legitimizing assets. An adaptation to trends in the environment, such as the body positivity movement, would obviously violate these legitimacy claims based on a thin ideal. Consequently, such an adoption would, as argued by Hannan and Freeman (1977), incur considerable costs, which creates a disincentive to change the thin body type of the models to more diversified body types. As will be further elaborated upon in section "6.2.3 The Thin Body as a Source of Prestige" the thin body can be seen as a vital aspect for these fashion houses as economic actors dependent on prestige, or conspicuous consumption.

The associations of the thin body with exclusivity and extraordinariness, apparent in the discussions of the participants, have also been elaborated upon by authors such as Bordo (2004) and Mears (2010). Bordo (2004) has suggested that the thin body traditionally has been associated with elitist notions and aristocracy. During the late nineteenth century – a

time when the foundations of the fashion industry were set out – the thin body announced aristocratic status, representing social power in that it was connected to the ability to control (ibid.). Fat, on the other hand, was associated with lower-class status, and was perceived as an indication of, for example, laziness and lack of discipline (ibid.). While the importance of the traditional class associations with thinness has eroded since the 1970's, thinness continues to be associated with high social status, especially among women (ibid.). As argued by Mears (2010, p. 36):

Editorial producers actively look for the extraordinary body, one that so radically stretches norms of slenderness until it borders on what they imagine “your mom” may register as the uncanny or the ugly. Drawing on cultural imagery of white bourgeois femininity, producers conflate high-class with slenderness and sexual unavailability. Any trace of curves and their accompanying suggestions of female sexual desire and availability are polluting images for high-end brands and high-end femininities. In other words, curves are seen as cheap.

Consequently, the thin body was, and still is to some extent, associated with high social status and in turn haute couture, or high-end aesthetics. These conclusions further substantiate the notion that the thin bodies continue to walk the runways of PFW because they, through their associations with exclusivity, legitimize the fashion houses as prestigious.

According to the participants, the thin body is not only associated with exclusivity directly, but also indirectly, by being associated with Paris and its tradition of haute couture. The Thin Model interviewed claims that the industry ideal in general is very thin, but that there are “Paris-measurements” – in other words, specific measurements for runway models in Paris, that are precise and relatively thinner.

There is such a standard that you should be... that, like, the Paris measurements are 88 centimeters around the hip [...]

(The Thin Model)

There are very thin models in Paris, and it has been like that for a very, very long time, and I experience it like certain structures that are hard to derange.

(Fashion Designer 3)

The Casting Agent means that Paris is more like an institution, being very classic and conservative, and similarly to other participants, she compares the traditional way of showing fashion on PFW with the way fashion is shown on other big fashion weeks. She explains that New York Fashion Week, in sharp contrast to PFW, is multicultural, liberal and continuously moving forward, with plenty of designers from all over the world. This idea is also put forward by Fashion Designer 3.

I think there is a wider diversity of bodies on, for example, New York Fashion Week, but also in London, that are younger, newer fashion weeks. [...] Paris is still really... the body ideal is really thin.

(Fashion Designer 3)

In Paris, it is shown a lot of, like, couture stuff, and that whole branch of the industry is so very conservative. It is only made in a certain size and it is hand made on very small dolls and so on. But I believe it is... it feels like it should look like it has always looked like.

(The Casting Agent)

In other words, there is a view among some of the participants that there are less room for diversity and variation in Paris as compared to the other big fashion cities, primarily because of the emphasis put on tradition – of haute couture and of showing fashion on thin bodies. This, in turn, leads to the thin body being associated with Paris and haute couture, why the thin bodies of walking the runways of PFW may be seen as a means to uphold the prestige stemming from the concept and tradition of haute couture. That is to say, as a means to legitimize the prestigious fashion houses.

The notion that thin bodies are associated with Paris and haute couture, and in turn exclusivity and aristocracy has also been brought to light in previous research. This notion is clearly related to the conclusion of Wenting and Frenken (2008), that an institutional lock-in, preventing the establishment of a ready-to-wear cluster, has caused a focus on haute couture

in the realm of the Parisian fashion scene. In addition, both Villette and Hardill (2010) and Record and Austin (2016) have elaborated upon the link between thin fashion models and Paris. Villette and Hardill (2010) have suggested, in line with the views of the participants, that there is no other city so focused on haute couture. Consequently, Paris, as the fashion capital of the world and with a long tradition of haute couture, may be seen as a source of prestige (Kawamura 2004; Villette & Hardill 2010). With Paris as the site of the fashion show, it is confirmed that this is where fashion emerges from, which adds aesthetic value to the clothing shown and transforms it into fashion (Kawamura 2004).

In conclusion, thin bodies bring legitimacy to the old fashion houses, both directly, by associated with exclusivity and aristocracy, as well as indirectly, by being associated with Paris and in turn haute couture. In either case, these thin bodies are associated with high-end aesthetics. As was elaborated upon in the section “1.2 The Thin Ideal on the Runways of Paris Fashion Week”, the old fashion houses, especially by means of PFW, sell materialized exclusivity and prestige – and the thin bodies is a way to legitimize that.

### **6.2.3.1 Selling Dreams**

The importance of prestige and an image of exclusivity, and in turn the importance of legitimizing such an image by sending thin bodies down the runways is illuminated by considering what these fashion houses are actually selling. Some of the participants points to the fact that there are significant differences in the target customers of the actors within the fashion industry. Many of the fashion houses showing on PFW don't aim to sell to the masses, but to a specific customer. As is discussed by multiple of the participants, and elaborated upon in the subsequent section, these fashion houses don't sell to the masses. Consequently, they don't need to take into consideration the reality of the masses – that is, the diversity of body types among the masses. Rather, they sell the opposite of reality; dreams:

The really old fashion houses, they don't need to relate to any reality,  
because they are dreams... They are fashion brands of dreams.

(The Stylist)

The market buys into what is hard to achieve and have – such as fancy cars, luxury lifestyles and super slim, slender bodies. Most brands need to sell the dream life in order to keep their brand from just being a dream.

(The Fashion Editor 1)

A recurring notion among the participants is the notion that the thin ideal as represented on PFW is part of a marketing strategy of selling the cure to an incurable desire, or dreams. The thin body represented on the runways of PFW are very hard for the average woman to imitate, and as is noted by the Fashion Editor 1, the harder it is to get, the more you want it. The thin body becomes an efficient marketing tool as the thin body can be seen as part of a luxurious and high-end dream life – a life, or identity, desired by that specific customer that the fashion houses want to sell to. In other words, and in line with Entwistle's (2009) idea of the aesthetic marketplace, what is sold is the aesthetic quality of the thin body.

As repeatedly elaborated upon in previous research, visual representation has a considerable, even fatal, influence on identity, especially among women (Martin & Gentry 1997; Richins 1991; Shields & Heineken 2002; Schroeder & Borgerson 2005). The image of, and the image produced by, these fashion houses, give rise to a highly desirable representation of identity sharing many characteristics with the ideal self-image of many girls and women. In accordance with self-image congruence theory and research drawing upon it, the thin bodies of the old fashion houses sell – because these thin bodies are congruent with an ideal self-image, a desired identity (Escalas & Bettman 2005; Watson, Lecki & Lebcir 2015). The strategy of the old fashion houses is consequently to sell the dream of the customer's idealized self.

Maybe the thinness of fashion models is creating a, sort of, fantasy, since we don't often see these kinds of body types in real life.

(The Fashionista)

As is made clear by the participants, most notably the Fashion Editor 1, the dream or the dream life that these fashion houses are selling are an extraordinary life characterized by excess and luxury – a life on the top layers of the social hierarchy. Consequently, it can be argued that the thin body as high-end aesthetics, associated with aristocracy and power, is so persistent on the runways of PFW since it is simply part of the marketing strategy of these old

fashion houses. The marketing strategy is based upon the desire for exclusiveness, or a desire for elitist, almost artificially thin aesthetics. It is based upon a desire for reaching the top of the hierarchy, the elite.

The elongated, slim silhouette is what the industry strives for, and even in fitness for women, you see this example of desire. An elongated, slimming figure is heavily advocated for.

(The Fashion Editor 2)

The idea of a marketing strategy of creating a desire for the elitist and the hard-to-get is clearly in line with the notion discussed above of the fashion industry having its own, exclusive, aesthetics. This particular, aesthetic, thin body exist because is it a strategic way for the high-end fashion industry to sell the conspicuous product that fashion can be considered to be.

Just as the notion of the thin body as an unquestioned part of the fashion industry, or as a “classic”, the notion of the thin body legitimizing the fashion houses as prestigious is also correlated to the trickle-down theory. The legitimacy, the exclusivity and prestige would not be of importance for the fashion houses if they did not have an interest in maintaining their position on top of a hierarchy. As argued above, these fashion houses constitute a dominant group which aesthetics seem to influence large parts of the fashion industry and society in general. These ideas clearly related to the fundamental idea of the trickle-down theory, implying that the elite initiates a fashion and the mass imitates it in an effort to obliterate the external distinctions of class, or to be associated with the elite. The elite is here understood as the old fashion houses showing on PFW, considered among the participants to be influential actors within the fashion industry, which is further elaborated upon in the subsequent section. This is not at least because they sell more than clothes as material things – they sell the idea, or dream, of being elitist. Selling the dream of being on top of a hierarchy, however, requires these fashion houses to be part of the elite themselves – a conception which is sustained through emphasizing their history and tradition of which the prestigious and exclusive thin bodies are a natural part. While, as has been argued by for example Blumer (1969a; 1969b) and Field (1970), class distinctions are not as pronounced and significant in today’s society as they were when the trickle-down theory first was formed, it is obvious in the discussions of the participants that the fashion industry is considered to be based upon a hierarchy that may

be reflected among the consumers of fashion. The next section further substantiate the notion of the old, traditional fashion houses as being on top of such a hierarchy, and how this notion may explain the inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW.

### **6.3 The Financial Power and Risk behind the Inertia of the Thin Ideal**

How come, then, that the thin bodies are overrepresented also on the shows of younger fashion companies? Far from all of the fashion companies showing on PFW are old, traditional fashion houses with a long tradition characterized by haute couture and aristocracy.

The notion that the old, traditional fashion houses showing on PFW are on the top of a hierarchy and as a consequence powerful actors within the fashion industry is recurrently discussed among the participants in relation to financial power. There seems to be a general idea among the participants that the old fashion houses of Paris have substantial financial resources, and as a consequence, the power to influence the fashion industry.

They [the old fashion houses] have so much money in their establishments that they don't need to deal with the issue of selling. And when they sell, it is to a very specific customer.

(The Stylist)

I believe there are a lot of questions, but that the large picture is all about money and power. It is about oppression of people and it is about a power position.

(The Stylist)

I personally believe that the big actors, like H&M or the big, really well-known fashion brands showing in New York or in Paris, is really the ones who have the opportunity [to change the thin ideal] because they have the greatest power of them all.

(The Casting Agent)

The notion of power is also brought up by the Fashion Designer 1 having trouble with the modelling agency in London that only could present thinner models than what was agreed upon. She explains that as a minor actor or designer showing on Fashion Week, with little influence and power, one's request may not be taken as seriously. Consequently, saying no to these thin models presented might have resulted in a show with no models at all.

As is discussed by both the Plus Size Model and the Casting Agent, to diverge from the tradition is a big step, since there is a financial risk in diverging from what is known to work.

[the fashion house] is not willing to take a bigger step, cause it's a risk, from what they know works.

(The Plus Size Model)

Sending out models of diverse body types is about breaking the norms of the fashion industry of Europe and especially of Paris, and breaking norms or traditions is risky. At the end of the day, as is emphasized by almost all participants, it is all about selling and making profit – which may or may not be preceded by risk taking.

As elaborated upon above, the financial risk of abandoning the thin ideal lies to a large extent in the concepts of the internal constraint of history and the external constraint of legitimacy, as part of the theory of Organizational Ecology. There is a long history of these old fashion houses using thin models, and these thin bodies, as noted by the Fashion Designer 2 above, seems to be a subject of normative agreement. As a subject of normative agreement, these thin bodies not only provide a justification and an organizing principle for the continued use of solely thin models, but they also preclude the serious consideration of alternative responses, that is, sending other body types down the runways. It is in the history of these fashion houses to show their creations on thin bodies, and that is what is known to work. The internal constraint of history leaves these fashion houses with the idea that nothing is broken and as a consequence, nothing needs to be fixed – there is no point for them to modify the tradition. At the same time, the external constraint of legitimacy provides these old fashion houses with further incentives *not* to modify the tradition. The tradition of the use of thin fashion models legitimizes, as already discussed above, their position on top of the hierarchy of fashion.

The old, traditional fashion houses are consequently financially discouraged from *not* sending thin bodies down the runways of PFW, while at the same time being considered to be top of the hierarchy and to have a considerable influence of the industry. This influence, as put forward by the participants, certainly suggests that fashion – in line with the trickle-down theory – trickles down from these fashion houses and social classes at the top of the hierarchy. The trickling down of the thin bodies, then, leads to that not only these old fashion houses themselves, but also other fashion companies, recognize the abandonment of the thin ideal as a financial risk. Being on top of the hierarchy, these old fashion houses set the standards and norms of the fashion industry in general, making it both risky and tricky to step outside the frames of how fashion is, and should be, presented. The big, old fashion houses are powerful actors and as they request thin models, thin models are what the traditional – i.e. the majority of – modelling agencies will provide. This explains why also younger fashion companies without a tradition linked to haute couture and aristocracy – for example Off-White, Miu Miu and Stella McCartney, as noted in the introductory study – send thin bodies down the runways.

### **6.3.1 (Ir)rational Risk Taking**

Some of the participants argues that *taking the risk* of sending more diverse body types down the runways of PFW would be profitable – from both a financial and ethical point of view – due to the broader audience targeted, and the subsequent higher number of potential customers.

But it's also from a financial point of view, it's business. I mean, most women are bigger than a size 42, both in Europe and the US. So, why would you not access that market?

(The Plus Size Model)

I think, like, designers try to kind of distinguish themselves, away from the typical traditional. [...] Because I think people are just tired of seeing the same thing all the time, kind of. And also, probably to appeal to, like, a bigger audience.

(Fashion Designer 4)

However, as both the Stylist as well as the Fashion Designer 2 argues, and discussed above in terms of what these fashion houses are actually selling, the fashion houses showing on PFW don't aim to sell to a broader audience, as it is part of their business idea not to. The Fashion Designer 2 further opposes haute couture with the Finnish retail store Lindex, arguing that it is part of their business plan to include a wider diversity of bodies in their marketing communication and make money out of that inclusive message.

These ideas of different business ideas clearly relate to the collective rationality problem, presented as an external constraint within Organizational Ecology. A certain course of action that is adaptive for some organizations facing a changing environment may or may not be adaptive for many other competing organizations adopting the similar strategy. In other words, riding the wave of the body positivity movement may be a way for some actors within the fashion industry to adopt and reach higher profits – but not for other actors. As has been argued by Hannan and Freeman (1977, p 932):

It is difficult to establish that a strategy that is rational for a single decision maker will be rational if adopted by a large number of decision makers.

The fact that there are many different fashion companies part of the fashion system can consequently be seen as an explanation to why the old fashion houses do not change. Is it rational for every fashion company to include all the body types? Is it rational for the old fashion houses to change?

The findings suggest that it is not. The actors most likely to profit from adapting to such a movement as the body positivity movement are, according to the participants, actors within the mass-produced fashion sector, which aim to sell to a broader audience, with a wider diversity of body types. As noted above, such an adaptation may be quite risky, and irrational, for the old fashion houses as the thin bodies are both part of a long history and a source of legitimacy. It is part of their business plan to exclude other body types than the really thin ones in their marketing communication, and to make money out of that exclusive message.

The collective rationality issue surely brings to light that each and every decision taken concerning the thin bodies on the runways are influenced by the decisions of other actors within the industry. This circumstance indicates that explanations to the inertia of the thin

ideal may be found in the fact that there are multiple actors that form the fashion industry – and sustains the thin ideal. The subsequent section presents this explanation in further detail.

#### **6.4 The Multiple Actors behind the Inertia of the Thin Ideal**

The fashion industry is a huge business, and, therefore, a network of multiple actors. The general opinion among the participants is that there is not only one actor responsible for the thin ideal shown on the runways, but multiple. On the one hand, as discussed in the previous section, it may or may not be rational for each and every one of the many different fashion companies to include a wider diversity of bodies on their runways. On the other hand, the many different fashion companies and the network of actors surrounding them leaves the responsibility of the thin ideal wide-spread – and the incentives to change it minimal. The following paragraphs describes, based on the discussions of the participants, how each of these actors of the fashion industry network are connected to the dissemination of the thin ideal. Subsequently, the implications of this network of actors, as explanations to the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW, are elaborated upon.

The Plus Size Model explains that there are a number of actors and processes linked to each other, where all of them needs to take their own responsibility to change the industry. First, the agent needs to find a various set of girls and expand the diversity in terms of models. The models do have a responsibility too, and have to be strong enough to say no – to know their worth and resist the unnecessary pressure from other actors in the industry. The Plus Size Model means that the casting director has to change the way they are casting, and ultimately, the designer needs to change the way they are making clothes. The Stylist also points to the responsibility of multiple actors as regards what body types are sent down the runways:

And it is a decision between the stylist, the designer, the casting director, who has presented the models, and there may be some more people who are influential.

(The Stylist)

Apart from the actors mentioned above, there are other actors who might be just as responsible and plays an important role in the thin ideal shown on the runways of PFW. Many participants mention the marketing industry and how advertising is produced. Advertising, PR

and social media finds its own ways to portray fashion and the thin ideal as well, and how they work plays an important role in how it is perceived.

The way media and marketing works, they play a huge role in what is seen in the public eye.

(The Fashion Editor 1)

According to the participants, the responsibility lies with those who expose fashion – such as photography, film, magazines, PR and social media. That is to say, both the marketing industry and the entire fashion industry holds a great responsibility. The view that the marketing industry and mass media have are part of the diffusion and consequences of the thin ideal is, as elaborated upon in the literature review, consistent with a vast amount of previous research examining how mass media promotes the thin ideal (Anschutz, Engels, Van Leeuwe, & van Strien, 2009; Hawkins, Richards, Granley & Stein 2004; Harper & Tiggemann 2008; Stice & Shaw 1994; Dittmar, Halliwell & Stirling 2009).

I think it's all the people who use models in their shows. And, I mean, it's always gonna affect the audience. Because in the end it's models who are presenting your work. So, you have to be kind of responsible for how you show your work, like on the models.

(The Fashion Designer 4)

A few of the participants adds that models and consumers are in some way responsible. The Plus Size Model argues that the models have to know that the thin ideal is a matter of representation. She means that if curvy girls are seen on the catwalk, more curvy girls will likely try to be models.

And also, it's maybe just me, but I think that, fashion models may have, their share of responsibility there. Even though I'm 100% for them.

(The Fashionista)

There is also a view among some of the participants, as presented above in section “6.1.1 Aesthetics within the Western Society”, that the fashion company only reacts to the societal trends and tries to give the consumers what they want. As mentioned above, the Fashion

Designer 2 put forward that the ones who buy are the ones who are able to control the industry, and that thin bodies are something that people generally think is beautiful. As long as the general conception of beauty among the consumers is that thin is aesthetic, the fashion companies will show thin bodies in order to appeal to the consumers. Nonetheless, the responsibility of models and consumers are not as recurring in the discussions of the participants as is the responsibility of other actors, such as for example modelling agencies and both younger designers as well as designers working for older, traditional fashion houses. This suggests that the models and consumers carry a relatively small amount of responsibility in comparison to these other actors with greater influence. A general notion noted among the participants is that it is the major players are the ones who needs to take the greatest responsibility, and these major players seem to be big, traditional modelling agencies and the designers of influential fashion companies.

I can't influence the modelling industry as an editor, because I don't work for a fashion house, nor do I work with a casting agency or modelling agency.

(The Fashion Editor 2)

Many of the participants find the modeling agencies and thereby the agents as responsible for the thin ideal to a notable extent. The Thin Model, who is signed by a model agency herself, knows a lot about the requirements and pressure coming from agents. She explains that she does not feel any pressure to have certain body measurements from her agency, however, many of her modeling colleagues signed by other agencies do feel an enormous pressure. Almost all of the models have a height over 178 centimeters, and she means that the among the agencies preferred weight is absurd and not near healthy at all.

Many agencies tell their models to work out and eat healthy and... like that, to stay at a body weight that might not be their natural one.

(The Thin Model)

The Casting Agent, who is the founder of a casting agency with a wider diversity of body types as compared to the traditional modelling agencies argues, as elaborated upon above in section "6.2.1 Standards of Procedure Marked by History", that the agencies must widen their range of models. The Fashion Designer 1 emphasize that the modeling agencies are

responsible to make sure their models are healthy. The Thin Model interviewed add that it all comes down to what agency the models are signed with – which dictates the requirements. As was elaborated upon above, the traditional modelling agencies, which make up the main part of the modelling agency domain, often represent solely thin models. What is also discussed by some participants, is that the modeling industry in general can be seen as very one-dimensional and stereotypical. As argued above in section “6.1.2 Aesthetics within the Fashion Industry”, there is a stereotypical view of how a model is supposed to look like; she is thin and tall.

However, the Casting Agent claims that the requirements stem from the fashion industry and that it subsequently becomes a vicious circle. If the clothes are made in a certain size, only a certain type of model, or body type are able to present these clothes. Most participants argue that the actor who carries the greatest responsibility is the designer.

I know that many people are targeting agencies, like Elite or Wilhelmina, I don't know. But, in my opinion, it's the fashion designers fault. Because they are restricting again and again. [...] And the clothes are always smaller and smaller. So, I think it might be their fault.

(The Fashionista)

Here I believe that you as a designer (like the one who ultimately stands behind the brand) should make active choices and statements. It is undoubtedly the one thing that gets the greatest impact.

(The Fashion Editor 1)

In the design process, you can make decisions that determine how everything will look.

(The Stylist)

The designer is the one who is responsible for creating the items and also the one who has the final say in who are allowed to carry the items on the runway. The Stylist argue that the designer is responsible for creating the patterns and also the one who creates the garments from a vision. Subsequently, the design process is where the decisions are made in terms of how the final result will look. The Photographer claims that the vision of the clothes comes

from the idea that the designer had in his or her head while drawing the garment, and that they can design the clothes for a different body type. The Stylist agrees with the statements made by the Photographer, and ask how thin it actually needs to be.

[...] I guess it's kind of the designer who choose, you know. Which kind of clothes and which kind of people going out wearing this clothes.

(The Photographer)

As elaborated upon above in regard to the aspect of age dependency, many participants mean that young designers are in a particularly good position to change the thin ideal. Consequently, as evident in the findings, younger designers carry both responsibility and belief on their shoulders.

I think a lot of the younger designers today are already doing that. Cause they're kind of working in like, usually working kind of like unknown territory, which the bigger companies then usually pick up, cause that's usually, kind of, considered cooler, you know. [...] And then it kind of works its way up the hierarchy in the fashion industry, I would say.

(The Fashion Designer 4)

I believe that as a new designer, or if newly examined from a school or something, you really have the chance to show a new kind of fashion.

(The Casting Agent)

But it is also about bringing something new, so to speak. To follow this trend [of body diversity] and just go for it. Because these [the young designers] are the ones that are the new, and that will become renowned later on.

(The Casting Agent)

One of the designers interviewed discusses that the young designers grow up well aware of the present ideal, which seems to reflect on the choices they make.

I know where it [the thin ideal] comes from and how it affects me. Absolutely, I am influenced by it. Definitely. And that is also the reason I believe it is so important to deal with.

(The Fashion Designer 5)

As the Casting Agent argues, the younger designers are the ones who will replace the present decision makers of the old fashion houses in the future. These young designers are able to form their foundation as of now, taking other decisions and other paths than the traditional, older fashion houses have taken in the past and continues to take. The younger generation of designers has grown up in a visual culture constantly overwhelmed with body ideals and their consequences. Almost all participants point out that they have been affected by the thin ideal themselves, whereas both the Fashion Designer 3 and the Casting Agent have also suffered from eating disorders. This younger generation of designers may be more aware of the consequences of the thin ideal as compared to the older one, and therefore also keener to make a change. In addition, as brought to light by the Fashion Designer 4 above, including a wider diversity of body types is a way for designers to distinguish themselves, away from the typical traditional.

The ideas of the potential of younger designers to change the fashion industry and the thin ideal further substantiate the argument relating to the external constraint of collective rationality, as presented in the previous section (Hannan & Freeman 1977; Hannan & Freeman 1989). As argued above, it is more rational for fashion companies in the ready-to-wear fashion sector of the industry to include a wider diversity of body types, as compared to fashion companies with a strong emphasis on their history of haute couture. However, in addition to the ready-to-wear fashion sector, the argument also applies for younger fashion companies, or younger fashion designers. Many participants argue that young designers have the potential to change the body ideal as represented within the fashion industry. Based on the discussions of the participants, it seems to be more rational for young designers to include diversity in terms of body sizes, than it is for the older fashion houses because of a number of identified aspects. First, they have no history to take into consideration, unlike the older fashion houses. They may therefore street cast and use non-traditional casting agencies to a greater extent, and they can build a foundation on their own values. These values are, as argued above, often marked by the visual culture that they have grown up within. While the older fashion houses continue to send thin bodies down the runways, including a wider

diversity of body types also becomes a way for younger designers to distinguish themselves. As was elaborated upon above, other body types than the thin one are seen as *different*, and giving rise to *shock value*. At the same time, in line with the concepts of collective rationality as well as the trickle-down theory, since these younger fashion companies do not imitate the use of models completely, the thin models keep connoting exclusivity on the runways of the old fashion houses. The inertia of the thin ideal on these runways continues, as part of the marketing of an image of exclusivity.

The argument based upon the external constraint of collective rationality consequently presumes that fashion simultaneously diffuses both in line with the trickle-up theory and the trickle-down theory. It presumes that the old, traditional fashion houses in Paris continue to stay on the top of the hierarchy, while at the same time younger designers have the influence to change the fashion industry and its traditions. The young designers begin to diffuse the fashion of diversified bodies in a way more appropriately described by the trickle-up theory or the trickle-across theory. Trickle-up is, as mentioned in section “4.1 The Diffusion of Fashion”, a theory based on the notion that fashion trickles its way up the hierarchy. As specified by several participants, fashion often starts bottom up. That is to say, fashion trickles up the hierarchy, where consumers create the trends and fashion houses adapt to the taste of the consumers, or “street close” designers (Blumer 1969a; Blumer 1969b). In this case, it can be seen as the young designers set the new standards, as they are more prone to do fashion inspired by “the street”, which at the time is influenced by the body positive movement. The younger designers work in an unknown territory, which might be considered as an opportunity for them to make their own, new decisions. A prominent example, brought up by the Stylist, is the American fashion company Chromat, a young and trend sensitive fashion company using many different body types, awarded for using various body types as well as different gender identities and being non-binary. As is noted by some of the participants, and exemplified above by the quote from the Fashion Designer 4, it is not uncommon that the bigger and older fashion houses tend to pick up the trends made by younger designers, as it is often considered cooler. Besides, even if it is not picked up by these fashion houses, the younger designers still normalize diversity of bodies of fashion by including them on their runways.

#### **6.4.1 The Thin Ideal as the Responsibility of No One and Everyone**

Who is responsible for the thin ideal, then? Is it the fashion editor, for diffusing the images of these thin bodies? Is it the stylist, for not speaking out in the process of choosing models? Is it the modelling agency, for not representing a wider diversity of body types? Is it the designer, for not designing on another body type than the thin one? Is it your neighbor, for appraising the thin body as aesthetic?

The findings, highlighting many different responsible actors, suggest that the answer to this question lies in the notion that no one and everyone is responsible for the thin ideal. This notion also serves as an explanation to the inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW, since there is always someone else to put the responsibility on. The participants all agree about the fact that there are multiple actors responsible, and that it may be hard to hold one sole actor accountable.

I mean, there are so many levels on which there are problems, to which one can point at.

(The Stylist)

I guess we all are [responsible for the thin ideal]. It's... we're all in this industry together.

(The Plus Size Model)

All the big actors need to take the biggest responsibility and, like, lead the way to change.

(The Fashion Designer 1)

As mentioned earlier, it is not only the actors in the fashion industry who are responsible, but also the marketing and communication industry. With this in mind, a large number of the participants made it clear that there are actions to take, and many actors who can take steps towards responsibility. However, when it all comes down to it, these are steps that no one is willing to actually take. The responsibility can easily be put on someone else. According to the participants, the fashion industry – but also related industries – is a network of multiple actors who all need to work together for change to happen.

The aspect of the responsibility of multiple actors, as commonly discussed by the participants, is evidently related to the notion that the diffusion of fashion can be explained by both the trickle-down theory and trickle-up theory as well as the trickle-across theory. The way fashion diffuses or trickles its way through the society today, through both trickle-up and trickle-down as well as trickle-across, makes it hard to point out one single actor as the source of the thin ideal. Fashion diffuses in multiple ways and directions, and what is diffused between and across different parts of society is consequently influenced by fashion companies, designers, consumers, modelling agencies, models, mass media and so on. Each and every one of these actors take the decision of what to pass on, either intentionally or unintentionally. There is no trend of thin bodies without consumers adopting it, without modelling agencies providing thin models, without mass media spreading the word (or image) of *the* body, *the* aesthetics. No single actor can be seen as *the* responsible actor – leading to the actors not taking on any responsibility to change the body ideal represented, and in turn inertia.

## 7 Discussion

*The chapter at issue review the major findings of the study and discusses the meaning and implications of these findings. Alternative explanations are then presented, and the chapter is closed by suggestions for further research.*

### 7.1 Major Findings

With the purpose to explore the explanations for the idealization of thin bodies in regard to female runway models found in visual representations of PFW, the qualitative study at issue suggests that these explanations are multiple and multidimensional. As expected, the inertia of the thin bodies on PFW are to a notable extent explained by the long history and tradition of creating and presenting clothes on thin bodies – it is part of the standards of procedure as well as the culture of the fashion industry, and consequently considered as given by the actors involved. A change of the body ideal is also financially discouraged, since there is considered to be a financial risk in abandoning the thin ideal. The thin ideal not only constitute a well-known territory, but also legitimizes the high status or prestige of the high-end, conspicuous product sold. Another explanation lies in the idea that there are many actors responsible for the thin ideal as represented on PFW, which makes it hard to point out and hold a single actor accountable. This leaves all actors with little incentive to change it. However, the incentives of these actors are also influenced by the issue of collective rationality, since it may not be rational for every fashion company to include a wider diversity of body types on the runways. Taking into consideration the notions that the thin bodies sent down the runways of PFW is part of the history of these fashion houses, or even taken out of history and considered natural, as well as the notions that these bodies legitimizes the business idea and is part of a marketing strategy – it seems quite irrational for the fashion houses to include another body type than the thin one. A further notion making it irrational is the quite unexpected finding that the thin ideal is still, according to the participants, having a strong hold on the Western society. The thin body is still, to a large extent, considered *the* aesthetic body, and this is reflected on the runways of PFW. Lastly, relating to aesthetics as well as the idea of the thin body as a source of prestige, the inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW may also be explained by the fashion industry sustaining a body of its own aesthetics, that is, a fashionable body that is associated with fashion, and fashion only.

## 7.2 The Paradoxical Nature of Fashion

As explained by the theories of the diffusion of fashion, fashion is driven by change. It therefore seems paradoxical that PFW, as a significant fashion institution, is stuck in an inertia of thin models. However, one of the corner stones of the trickle-down theory is the paradoxical nature of fashion – elaborated upon by Simmel (1957) in regard to differentiation and identification. This paradoxical nature, or ambivalence, has been further substantiated by multiple other authors, viewing it as a crucial aspect of fashion (Baudrillard 1981; Davis 1985; Kaiser, Nagawasa & Hutton 1995; Warwick & Cavallaro 1998). As has been concluded by Bouldwood and Jerrard (2000), ambivalence is central to the body-clothing-fashion experience.

Just as there are different degrees of differentiation and identification among groups within the society, there are different degrees of change and inertia among organizations within the environment of the fashion industry. The inertia of the thin ideal on the runways of PFW is consequently, in line with Barnard's (2014) idea of the fashioned body, not about a complete inertia. Fashion – whether it be a piece of clothing or a body – implies change, even though this change is relative. Some actors within the fashion industry thrive on short-lived trends and fast changes, while other thrive on almost immutable trends and such a relatively slow rate of change that the change is commingled with inertia. The slow rate of change, stemming to a large extent from the emphasis on a long history and tradition, is what distinguishes many of the fashion houses from other actors within the fashion industry.

As is evident in chapter “6. Results and Analysis”, the explanations to the paradox of the inertia of the thin ideal are also of paradoxical nature. The findings are presented in the light of the paradoxical idea put forward by Barnard (2014), that the naked body is always dressed – by the culture of which it is part. This idea gave rise to the explanation that the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW is caused by the aesthetics within the Western society, but also the contradictory explanation that it is caused by distinctive aesthetics within the fashion industry. The notion that there is a thin ideal is due to aesthetics within society suggests that what is sent down the runways of PFW is just a reflection of the cultural construction of the thin body as the aesthetic body. However, both the internal constraint of history and the external constraints of legitimacy and collective rationality, as well as the idea of distinctive aesthetics within the realm of fashion, suggests that the fashion industry may also be part of the establishment and maintenance of that cultural construction. As previous research has

suggested, visual representation has considerable impact on body image and body ideals (Clayton, Ridgway & Hendrickse 2017; Diedrichs & Lee 2011; Martin & Gentry 1997; Parker, Haytko & Hermans 2008; Richins 1999). There is certainly a chance that the thin ideal is a cultural construction maintained by the fashion industry and related industries and that there would not be a thin ideal in society if it was not for the visual representations peppering the visual cultural of today. That is, that the thin ideal is not a reflection of a cultural construction but a cultural construction in itself. While established in cultural norms at some point, it is now maintained exclusively by visual representation, or idealization of thin bodies. Most likely – coalescing around the ambivalence of fashion – the thin bodies are both reflection and maintenance of a cultural construction.

The explanations based upon the historical aspects of the thin ideal on PFW are also of paradoxical nature. On the one hand, in line with the internal constraint of history as part of the theory of organizational ecology, the inertia of the thin ideal is caused by the thin body being part of the standards of procedure and the culture of creating and presenting fashion. On the other hand, in line with Barnard's (2014) idea of "the classic", the inertia of the thin ideal is caused by the thin body being taken out of history and considered natural, why it is unquestioned. In addition, the concept of age dependency, presented within the frames of organizational ecology, suggests that inertia may be detrimental to organizations. This while the concept of collective rationality, part of the same theory, synthesized with the notion of aesthetics within the Western society and the trickle-down theory, suggest that the inertia of the thin ideal is a strategic way to increase the bottom line. In the realm of organizational ecology, inertia is in general seen as a negative by-product of the need for reliability and accountability – those who do not change will be outrun by the competitors who do. It is likely that many of the old, traditional fashion houses showing on PFW are affected by the liabilities of aging, perhaps the liability of obsolescence in particular, suggesting a growing external mismatch with the environment. The environment, in this case, is an environment of increasingly bigger customers, and in which body image concerns are considered a public health issue. As shown in previous research, the negative consequences of the thin ideal in visual representations are considerable, which too cast a negative light on the inertia of thin bodies, however on a different level. On the other hand, there is a thin ideal in Western society suggesting that thinness is desirable and therefore sells, a finding in line with the conclusions of for example Watson, Lecki and Lebcir 2015, Kees, Becker-Olsen and Mitric (2008), Aagerup (2011) and Apeageyi (2008). This view is further substantiated by the notion

that thinness is part of aesthetics that has been, and still is, to some extent, associated with aristocracy and high status. These associations, in turn, legitimizes the prestigious aesthetics that the fashion houses are selling. In a time where body diversity is gaining ground on the runways of other fashion weeks, thinness can be seen as a way for the fashion houses showing on PFW to distinguish and hang on to a legitimizing history characterized by the cultural rules of Paris, or Europe, during the twentieth century. From this point of view, taking the long tradition into consideration, the inertia of the thin bodies on PFW can be seen as both rational and natural.

The paradoxical nature of fashion, and of the explanations to the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW, is not at least emphasized by the conclusion that the diffusion of fashion cannot be explained by a trickle-one-way theory. Rather, it is the aggregation of the trickle-down, trickle-up and trickle-across theories that provides the most complete perspective on how fashion diffuses in society of today. The influence of old, traditional fashion houses on the processes of the fashion industry suggest that the trickle-down theory, despite less accentuated class differences, is still able to describe how fashion diffuses today. Nonetheless, it does not constitute the one and only description. As suggested above, as well as in the analysis, there is a lot of prestige involved in the business of the traditional fashion houses showing on PFW. It is not just the idea of thin models being on top of a hierarchy, but also the fashion house itself, PFW as an event, and the product and/or service they are selling. Without the conspicuousness and prestige – without the conception of the hierarchy – little would be left of these fashion houses. The relevance of the trickle-down theory has also been elaborated upon by Galak et. al. (2016), who have shown that people in today's society still do tend to adopt to fashion trends of higher status locations in a greater extent than to trends of lower status locations. While class distinctions are not as clear as they were when the trickle-down theory was formed, fashion, both in terms of body and its adornment, is still a way to communicate one's identity, including social standing. It is the symbolic, or aesthetic, value of clothing that turns clothing into fashion (Kawamura 2004). In addition, as noted above, Bordo (2004) argues that there still is a relation between class distinctions and the fashionable body in today's society, although not as significant as it once were.

The contradictory – while at the same time complementing – theories of trickle-up and trickle-across, then, describes how change, or the absence of it, may also stem from other actors in the hierarchical fashion industry, for example younger or newly established fashion

companies. This is, as discussed by the participants, not at least evident on both London Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week. These other actors certainly have the influence to change the thin ideal, as they can normalize the diversity of bodies. Such a normalization may lead to the thin body of the old fashion houses of PFW becoming just one body type among many other. The significance of the trickle-up theory in explaining changes within the fashion industry is further substantiated when taking into consideration the limits of firm-level adaption as discussed in the realm of organizational ecology. Most of the broader changes in populations of organizations, or of fashion companies, come from entry and selective replacement of organizations.

Consequently, in the light of a theoretical framework acknowledging the multidimensionality of fashion, not only as culturally circumscribed, but also as a social phenomenon and as an economic engine within the Western society of today, multiple and paradoxical explanations to the inertia of the thin ideal is to be found. These multiple and paradoxical explanations to the inertia of the thin ideal on PFW makes it difficult to point at the cause to it, both in terms of factors and actors, why it proves difficult to know where to break ground. The multiple explanations found therefore serves as an explanation in itself.

Returning to the introduction of the thesis and the words of the Trend Analyst, the thin ideal *is not* history. However, it is *part of* fashion and its history, why it seems to be stuck in an inertia.

### **7.3 Implications**

As brought to light in the sections about aesthetics and the section about the thin body as a source of prestige in chapter “6. Results and Analysis”, within high-end fashion, aesthetics is the product. As has been argued by Entwistle (2009), fashion is all about promoting and popularize clothes – or bodies – as “beautiful”, or as being surrounded by aesthetic value. Regardless of this aesthetic value stemming from the Western society or fashion industry, aesthetics is, as emphasized in the section about the multiple actors interlinked to the inertia of the thin ideal, formed by many different taste-making actors. While some of these actors are more influential than others, for example traditional modelling agencies and old fashion houses, each and every one of these actors take decisions that forms the aesthetics.

While it is not definite whether or not the inertia of the thin ideal causes an elevated rate of mortality or an increased bottom line for the fashion houses at issue, there is by no means any ambiguity as concerns the detrimental consequences of idealization of thin bodies in visual representation (Growsz, Levine & Murnen 2002; Grabe, Ward & Hyde 2008; Tiggemann & Lynch 2001). The big, old Parisian fashion houses are still considered influential in regard to how the fashion industry is shaped and the fact that they are sending exclusively thin models down their runways is consequently problematic. Selling the thin body as a Chanel 2.55 hand bag may increase the bottom line – but it does so at the extent of public health, because selling fashion is selling culture (obsessed by thinness) dressing a body.

#### **7.4 Alternative Explanations**

In regard to the finding that the thin ideal is having a strong hold on Western society and that thinness consequently sells, it needs to be noted that the thesis at issue has not examined whether or not thin bodies sells better than bigger ones. It may be the case that thinness does not actually sell. It may be the case that thinness is just part of the standards of procedure of the fashion industry and that the customers are not buying into the association of thinness with aristocracy and status, but rather other aspects of high-end aesthetics and life that are communicated by these fashion houses.

A further aspect that, according to previous research, may explain the inertia of the thin ideal of PFW is the aspect of information availability within the fast-changing and competitive environment of the fashion industry. Godart and Mears (2009) and Mears (2010) have explained the sameness among modelling agencies and fashion companies through the notion of imitation due to lack of information. In the absence of information to base rational decisions upon, decisions are taken by rules of thumbs and imitation, which creates inertia. As discussed by Mears (2010), the use of size zero models is not necessarily a choice, rather, a surviving strategy, implying that the highly competitive industry causes the constant lookout for new, thin(ner) models. Godart and Mears (2009) also emphasize the status of fashion models, expressed through a process of optioning. This process implies decision makers basing their decisions on preferences of others within their social networks, leading to fashion companies with equally high status sharing “hot” models, and fashion companies with lower status choosing from a larger set of models. The notion of hierarchical information sharing within the fashion industry is certainly related to the findings of the study, and also to the

external constraint of information availability as part of the theory of Organizational Ecology. However, this aspect of information sharing was not specifically put forward by any of the participants – perhaps a result of the sample profile at issue.

## **7.5 Further Research**

As mentioned above in regard to the limitations of the study, the inertia of the thin ideal is probably related to multiple, interlinked forms of social stratification, why examining the issue of the thin ideal through an intersectional approach would reveal further explanation. Since the focus of both the study at issue and the majority of previous related research has been focusing on girls and women, a gender or male focused approach may also prove fruitful. Lastly, as brought up multiple times throughout the pages of the thesis, it is still not definite whether or not thinness sells, why further investigation into this highly relevant topic is needed. As concerns the fashion industry, it may – as elaborated upon above – equally well be some other aspects of high-end aesthetics or life that weights heavier in terms of appeal to the customers. Only further research, conceivably an approach involving qualitative interviewing and an even more diverse sample profile, will be able to reveal that.

## **8 Conclusion**

The qualitative study at issue have examined the explanations to the idealization of thin bodies in regard to female runway models found in visual representations of PFW. Despite the negative consequences of the proliferation across girls and women all over the world, and despite the absence of a rational explanation to keep sending the thin ideal down the runways – to the inertia of the thin ideal – there was only one plus size model on the PFW Spring/Summer 2019 (Hargrove 2018). The findings suggest that this paradox is explained by the thin body not only being part of a long history and tradition of creating and showing fashion, but also being dressed in aesthetic value. At the same time, the explanations to the idealization, or inertia, of thin bodies on PFW are found to be multiple – both in terms of factors and actors – as well as paradoxical, a conclusion serving as an explanation in itself. The paradoxical nature of the inertia of the thin ideal as well as its explanations is however congruent with the notion of fashion, as a concept, being characterized by ambivalence (Baudrillard 1981; Davis 1985; Kaiser, Nagawasa & Hutton 1995; Warwick & Cavallaro 1998). The findings implicate that every actor part the fashion industry need to understand the effects as well as the extent of idealization of thin bodies, and start to realize that public health is more important than profits.

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## Appendix

### Interview Guide 1: Participants of the Fashion Week Process

Can you shortly introduce yourself?

- Experience, age, current position...

According to you, how does the ideal runway model body look like?

- If different from the thin, industry ideal – how does your ideal runway model body differ from it?
- Why does/doesn't your ideal runway model body differ from the thin, industry ideal?
- Has your idea of the ideal runway model body changed over time? In what way?
- How does your relationship to the fashion industry look like?

Why, according to you, does the body ideal in the fashion industry look the way it does?

- Have you heard of any theories?

Where do you think the thin ideal is coming from? Where did it start?

Why do you think it differs, in terms of body diversity, between Paris Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week?

Is the thin ideal something often talked about in your job?

- If yes, how?

What do you know about the process of recruiting runway models to fashion shows? What are the requirements and preferences?

- From where do these requirements and preferences come?
- Who, if anyone, is able to change these requirements and preferences?

Who, according to you, is responsible for the thin ideal bodies of runway models?

How, do you believe, women are affected by the thin ideal?

Do you have any experience of how women are affected?

Would you say that the thin ideal is problematic?

- If so, in what way?
- Who, according to you, is/are able to change the problematic situation of thin models on the runway?

If you were to arrange your own show on PFW, what kind of models would you send down the runway?

## **Interview Guide 2: Media**

Can you shortly introduce yourself?

- Experience, age, current position...

According to you, how does the ideal runway model body look like?

- If different from the thin, industry ideal – how does your ideal runway model body differ from it?
- Why does/doesn't your ideal runway model body differ from the thin, industry ideal?
- Has your idea of the ideal runway model body changed over time? In what way?
- Why, do you believe, is the industry ideal body thin?

Do you reflect over the bodies of the runway models when reporting about Fashion Weeks?

- If so, in what way?
- If so, do your reflections influence how you cover the events of Fashion Weeks? - If not, why – do you believe – is this the case?

To what extent can you as an [participants role] influence what bodies are shown on the runways of Fashion Weeks?

Who, according to you, is responsible for the thin ideal bodies of runway models?

Would you say that the thin ideal is problematic?

- Will it continue to prevail?

### **Interview Guide 3: Instagram comment (Fashionista)**

Can you shortly introduce yourself?

- Experience, age, current position...

What made you comment this picture?

- Do you comment pictures regularly or was this just a 'one-time-thing'?

How does your relationship to the fashion industry look like?

In what way does it matter to you what body types are sent down the runways of fashion week?

What do you reflect over when seeing a fashion model?

- Why do you reflect over these issues, you believe?

According to you, how does the ideal runway model body look like?

- If different from the thin, industry ideal – how does your ideal runway model body differ from it?
- Why does/doesn't your ideal runway model body differ from the thin, industry ideal?

Has your idea of the ideal runway model body changed over time? In what way?

Why, do you believe, is the industry ideal body thin?

Who, according to you, is responsible for the thin ideal bodies of runway models?

Would you say that the thin ideal is problematic?

- If so, in what way?
- Who, according to you, is/are able to change the problematic situation of thin models on the runway?

## Interview Guide 4: In Swedish

Kan du kort introducera dig själv?

- ålder, yrke, erfarenhet...

Hur ser kroppsidealet ut för en catwalk-modell på modeveckan, enligt dig?

- Om annorlunda från det tunna idealet skapat av modeindustrin – hur skiljer sig din syn på kroppsidealet för en catwalk-modell från det?
- Varför skiljer sig/sig inte din syn på kroppsidealet för en catwalk-modell från det tunna idealet skapat av modeindustrin?

Har din syn på kroppsidealet för en catwalk-modell förändrats över tid? På vilket sätt?

Varför ser kroppsidealet i modeindustrin ut som det gör, enligt dig?

- Har du hört om några teorier?
- Var tror du det tunna idealet kommer ifrån? Var började det?

Varför tror du det skiljer sig, gällande diversitet, mellan PFW och NY FW?

Är det tunna idealet något som ofta pratas om i ditt yrke?

- Om ja, hur?

Vad vet du om processen att rekrytera catwalk-modeller till modevisningar? Vad finns det för krav och preferenser?

- Vem ställer dessa krav och preferenser?
- Vem, om någon, har möjlighet att ändra på dessa krav och preferenser?

Vem, enligt dig, är ansvarig för det tunna kroppsidealet hos catwalk-modeller?

Hur tänker du att kvinnor påverkas av det tunna idealet?

- Har du någon erfarenhet av hur kvinnor påverkas av det tunna idealet? 110

Skulle du säga att det tunna idealet är problematiskt?

Vem eller vilka skulle kunna öka variationen i kroppstyper på catwalken, enligt dig?

- Krävs det nya aktörer eller tror du att äldre modehus kan ändra på sig?

Om du fick möjlighet att anordna din egen show på PWF, vilken typ av modeller hade du valt att visa på catwalken?



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