**Fashion retailers and LGBTQ+**

Retailers are progressively making improvements to engage, represent and support diverse communities.

River Island, a high street fashion brand, celebrated it's 30th year anniversary with a new campaign which featured the international anti-bullying charity; 'Ditch the Labels'.

The diverse range of models included; Stav Strashko, who was born male (ASSIGNED MALE AT BIRTH), declaring that she is ''100 per cent women' and couple Charlie and Bella (WHO ARE THEY? PUT A QUICK SENTENCE EXPLAINING WHO THEY ARE FOR THE READER).

The campaign sought out to raise awareness of irrelevant labels given to individuals regarding race, sexual orientation and religion and to celebrate individuality. The campaign encourages people to be who they want to be and encourage others to be accepting without identifying with labels.

To reiterate the purpose and message behind the campaign, the brand produced gender-free merchandise that would be sold in all stores for consumers to purchase where £3 of each garment purchased would go to the charity. Merchandise sold included the hashtag '#labelsareforclothes' and slogans such as 'cool vibes only, genuine aesthetic' and 'best kept glam, handles own business' each featuring care labels. (GOOD DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE COLLECTION)

Derby store manager, Jordon Chalmers, states; 'I think it's amazing that River Island are standing by equality and encouraging it's customers to express themselves and be who they want to be. River Island is a huge retailer so it's really important that they're following and supporting social movement. All the merchandise we had in store has sold out and it's so positive to see that the Derby customer is supporting the charity'.

SIMILARLY, In 2017 ASOS, an online fashion store (TAKE THIS OUT, EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT ASOS IS), announced its collaboration with GLAAD. GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) is a company (ORGANISATION) which shapes the media narrative by tackling issues to provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change and accelerates acceptance for the LGBTQ+ community. The collection included eight gender neutral pieces embellished with the ampersand (&) character = the symbol of unity and acceptance.

Furthermore, two years ago, Zara, a trend-lead fashion retailer, released an 'un-gendered' range made up of gender-free basics including t-shirts, sweatshirts, denim and tracksuit bottoms. The inspiration behind the range is to break down the idea that there's solely two genders and to embrace equality and individuality.

Despite the positive message behind the range, critics have stated that in fact, the word 'un-gendered' is an additional word for 'uni-sex' and therefore the range has little to do with gender identity. Brands like American Apparel have been selling unisex clothing for years which had little impact on the social movement of gender identity. (GOOD THAT WE’VE GOT AN EXAMPLE OF HOW IT CAN GO WRONG)

Although the reasoning’s behind gender-neutral collections are taking a step in right direction for the representation of equality, the designed collections still remain misogynistic.   
THE Majority of the collections available feature baggy t-shirts, loose fitted hoodies and jeans all in neutral colours. What brands are missing out on is the celebration of femininity. Females currently, and have done for a while, adopt masculine styles. However, males boundaries aren't being pushed and are repeatedly kept safe with hoodies and t-shirts which have the association of men.

Despite retailers (SHOWING THAT THEY WANT TO BE) being progressive, brands need to further understand that gender-neutral clothing is not solely t-shirt and hoodies and in fact includes both male and female associated garmets for it to be seen as gender-neutral rather than just unisex.

(MAYBE ADD A FEW SENTENCES SUGGESTING HOW THIS COULD BE ACHIEVED)





