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EDWARD SALAZAR
Universidad Santo Tomás

Beauty has no age anymore: Fashion and youth in Colombia (1970–99)

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the cultural construction of youth and beauty as socially dominant values through an interrogation of Colombian fashion magazines produced between 1970 and 1999. To this end, the article analyses the role of fashion and the textile industry – including brands, textile companies and designers – within this key period to understand the transformation of male and female values in the process of establishing youth as an imperative standard for appearance and behaviour. The methodology used is discourse analysis applied to visual and textual advertising published by fashion magazines during the aforementioned period, as a means to understand the ideals and values of fashion and its material culture. This article reveals the tensions between the historical construction of youth in Colombia and the textile and fashion industries, the de-differentiation of youth as a value in men and women, and the paradoxical ambiguity between the ephemeral logic of fashion and the eternal aspiration of youth. These issues have not been adequately explored with regard to Colombia yet.

KEYWORDS

fashion
youth
slimness
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advertising
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Queen Grimhilde, Snow White's stepmother in the fairy tale, lived in the midst of unimaginable anguish produced by the envy and contempt she suffered for her putative daughter. These negative emotions had two clearly identifiable reasons: Snow White's beauty and youth. The healthy and vivacious girl

who lived happily among the flowers surrounded by the protective love of her father – portrayed in the Disney version with small, deep red lips, a tiny red ribbon on top of her head, and a fluffy blue and yellow dress – contrasted with the image of her stepmother: a severe-looking, serious adult dressed in black and purple. Queen Grimhilde was willing to go the extra mile to steal Snow White's care-free attitude and youth.

Although the ages of the stepmother and the stepdaughter are sufficiently different to reveal the disparities between adolescence and adulthood, youth and beauty are achievements that both obtain. While Snow White obtains her beauty from the freshness of her age, Queen Grimhilde preserves it by other means. However, the narrative of youth and beauty not only speaks of the means people use to obtain them, but also requires an additional element: eternity. It is not enough that we are beautiful and young, we need to be beautiful and young *forever*. This metaphor allows us to examine an element that cuts across consumption and fashion in the twentieth century: youth. The historical construction of youth is addressed within this research as a desire that surpasses age, through fashion. Advertising and editorial contents of the Colombian weekly magazine *Cromos*, between 1970 and 1990, were analysed to this end.

Founded in 1916, *Cromos* has been widely analysed in Colombia for the study of social representations, subjectivity and the country's project of modernity (Pedraza 2012; Castro-Gómez 2009) due to the fact that it has circulated uninterruptedly, and its contents have undergone transformations. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the magazine published mixed intellectual, cultural, leisure and urban lifestyle articles. It later became a women's magazine dedicated to the cultivation of beauty, lifestyles and the body. *Cromos* was not always a magazine exclusively dedicated to fashion, but over time this would become its main focus. When examining *Cromos*, scholars have typically not focused on fashion. Rather, the magazine has been analysed in relation to urban modernity, defined by Castro-Gómez (2009) as the desire to belong to a civilized, orderly and progressive urban life, in a country that has experienced precarious material development.

To this end, approximately 1400 issues of *Cromos* were reviewed, along with issues from other magazines dedicated to fashion published in the same period, in order to increase the historical breadth. Specifically, ten issues from *Revista Semana* published in the 1990s, a special collection of eight issues of *Semana Moda* and three issues of *Revista Moda* were analysed. These magazines emerged in the 1990s and were included in the analysis due to *Cromos* losing its prominence as the main fashion magazine in this period.

The magazines were approached through discourse analysis. Discourse is understood as the narrative and possibly the practice of certain ideas and values on a given and recognizable topic, which form a historical discourse (Gee 2005) where the discourse about practice is never the same as what is practiced.

According to Rocamora 'the fashion press is central to the field of fashion, to the definition and consecration of its many agents and institutions' (2009: XIV). Following Rocamora's lead in her work related to the discourse of fashion in Paris, I analysed several advertising images and texts, because in the decades included in this analysis the images were closely linked to texts to produce meanings about fashion and the textile industry.

It was between the 1970s and 1990s that the ideas of fashion and youth were becoming intertwined, and the achievement of one could be considered as the achievement of the other. Initially, this research was focused on the textile industry and not on youth. However, according to grounded theory, youth is an emerging category, meaning that my proposed analysis of media discourse is based on an emerging category. The content of these magazines allows us to examine the ways in which the style of rendering appearance and behaviour juvenile has established itself, a process that took advantage of fashion and other beauty industries as fundamental devices. By means of superficial artifices, a new type of consumer, young regardless of his or her age, was shaped not only in Colombia, but in the whole modernized West (Featherstone 1991).

From 1970 to 1999, these values were crystallized in a carefree attitude towards life and a disposition to dress in new and audacious attires. Consequently, youth gradually became the intrinsic and fundamental value of fashion. During this period, the process of urbanization in Colombia was accelerated and the middle class was gradually spreading in principal urban centres. In the 1970s, *sustitución de importaciones* (import substitution), a protectionist model for the textile industry launched at the beginning of the twentieth century and consolidated in the 1960s, was dismantled. The national industry now had to compete with imported foreign goods. Although several textile firms were threatened, some national fashion brands that still lead the domestic textile and clothing supply chain began to position themselves in the market.

The nefarious phenomenon of drug trafficking, increasing in the 1980s and 1990s, resulted in unprecedented illicit enrichment of citizens and the undermining of political institutions. The drug trade became one of the most relevant social, cultural and economic issues in Colombia. Despite several cruel episodes of violence produced by the internal armed conflict between state and non-state actors, fashion and variety magazines distanced themselves from these discussions and focused on promoting a hedonistic lifestyle, as a celebration of consumption, beauty and, of course, youth.

In this discourse, youth evolved into a timeless ideal: regardless of one's biological age, youth could be obtained with some interventions on the body and mind. Being young is a task pertaining to the body as a material unit subject to aesthetic interventions (clothing, makeup, hairstyle, exercise and diet) and a task related to personal attitude and disposition. It is a way of facing life in accordance with change and freedom of movement:

'Youth' is not a natural condition but a historical construction that is articulated through material and symbolic resources. The social distribution of these resources is asymmetric. One is differently young depending upon the social differentiation of parameters such as money, work, education, neighbourhood and free time. The condition of 'youth' is not given in the same way to all the members of the statistical category 'young people'.

(Margulis and Urresti 1995: 109)

In the magazines, this process, achieved through fashion and beauty, results from the progressive homogenization of the concept of youth in different types of subjects and ages. Several authors have studied the role of fashion as the generator of a new transience-oriented subject, that is, a subject that must

1. Pérez (2017) made a historiographic balance of consumption in Latin America.
2. For example, the United Nations (UN) declared 1985 as the 'World Year of Youth' and defined youth as being between 15 and 24. Law 375 of 4 July 1997, in Colombia, establishes the range of youth for those over 14 and under 26 years of age. Law 1622 of 29 April 2013, also in Colombia, defines young people as those between 14 and 28.

renew itself and find a recognizable identity in discontinuity (see e.g. Barreiro 1998; Entwistle 2015; Lipovetsky 1987). This consumer of standardized fashion gradually developed in western society during the first part of the twentieth century and was consolidated in the second half. Yet, fashion and consumption in Colombia during the same period have not been extensively documented.¹ However, the magazines of that time display a quest and acceptance of the principles of fashion: its ambiguity of being at once liberating and oppressive, its changing nature which relates to modernity. Despite these unceasing changes, the desire for fashion and youth remains the underlying value.

The material and symbolic qualities of fabrics capable to channel youth were highlighted in advertisement photographs and texts. The importance of fashion for the professional success of men and women and for their ability to remain both current and modern was emphasized. The country's economic role was also highlighted, along with a development of the idea that Colombia was a country of fashion due to its textile production. Values changed, but not only at a discursive level. The shapes of fashion objects were also altered: silhouettes, sizes, fabrics and types of clothing were modified during this period in favour of a younger-looking appearance.

FASHION, YOUTH AND AGE

Age, as a number, can be read in several ways and contains many different implications for populations according to their historical and geographical context. Coming of age, school age, average age, age of consent, age of adulthood or old age are some examples of categories – which change through each period of history – based on a person's age. These categories have been used by governments to establish policies for their citizens, by parents in a cultural sense to understand the stages of their children's upbringing, and by marketing experts to segment their target audiences. By all definitions, social, political and cultural implications of age change according to the period being studied.² Such categorization by age is related to certain roles and behaviours in terms of education levels, family situations, expectations regarding love and friendships, tastes and incorporation into the workforce, among other areas.

International academic studies have examined the relationship between consumption and youth, focusing mainly on patterns of consumption adopted by young people or concentrating on the discursive relationship between fashion, body and youth (Dunas 2001; Hodkinson and Deicke 2007; McCracken 2014). These studies recognize youth as a pivotal element in the emergence of new urban subjectivities and experiences, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. In some cases, contemporary fashion and clothing were studied as typical aesthetic expressions of young people or as a general process of juvenilizing appearances, ranging from global to local references (Miller 2004). Bolin (2004) points out that the cultural dimension of youth has been described as a desirable value obtained through consumption. Featherstone (1991, 2010) also considers the emergence of the young body as the dominant value of contemporary consumption, within a social framework in which the aesthetic experience of life is privileged.

Youth has also been widely studied in Latin America, but more along the lines of historiography, which lies outside the parameters of this research. Mario Margulis' (Margulis and Urresti 1995) work on the social and cultural dimensions of youth and the relationship between youth and fashion is important in this field. In Colombia, fashion and its association with youth

have not been extensively studied. Pedraza (2012), Castro-Gómez (2009) and Zambrano (2002) have tangentially approached fashion to explain the features of modernity and the modern subject in this country. During the first half of the twentieth century, the discourse of advertising promoted a young, white, slim body and its desire and consumption as narratives of progress, health, sensuality, beauty and success, amidst conservative social structures that prescribed proper urban behaviour. In the second half of the century, an almost seamless relationship between youth and beauty was progressively established by fashion. *Cromos* called that relationship *la moda de los jóvenes* ('young people's fashion'), defining it according to a certain age, tastes, social class and the quest to problematize what it means to be an adult. Clothing was one of the catalysts for young people's fashion, helping to define the age at which a body was considered young.

From a stage of social transition – one in which teenagers are allowed to display a series of transitive, rebellious and anti-establishment behaviours before they achieve their adult life – fashion turned youth into an outward look achievable at almost any age. Youth was no longer the embodiment of political and cultural changes and ruptures with previous generations. Rather, it became an aspirational source of beauty and a desirable, exploitable and extendable personal image. Analysis of the magazines reveals ways in which youth in Colombia, little by little, stopped signifying behaviours related to a certain age and became a quality in itself: a certain attitude, a way of living and of experiencing life. Youth was materialized by fashion through clothes, styles and open stances, while normalized by hegemonic ideas of beautiful bodies.

The use of the term 'generation' helps understanding the change by which members of a community aim to differentiate themselves from older members – the parents – to innovate their ideas, strength and drive (Margulis 2001). The important differentiation of these young subcultures is based on ascribing identity to smaller communities or groups through aesthetics and style (Feixa 1999). Fashion helped define the distinguishing aesthetics of youth through its logic of constant renewal. It also paved the way to generalizing behaviours related to youth, allowing people to embrace an attitude related to the aesthetics of youth at any age: '[i]n today's society, the condition of age no longer allows the containing of the complexity of meanings linked to youth. Classifying by age does not translate into consistent and predictable competencies and attributions' (Margulis 2001: 41). In this sense, the cultural project of youth has become a series of ideas – and ideals – that individuals continually display in their adult lives (Bennet 2007).

The practices of the fashion industry, portrayed in a magazine aimed at the aspirational upper-middle and White-mestizo class, emphasized the importance of physical appearance, health and beauty to achieve youth. In Colombia, the material and immaterial references to youth were produced by fashion itself, within its close and problematic relationship with the textile industry.

YOUTH: BETWEEN TEXTILES AND FASHION

In the mid-1970s, *Cromos* contained a section named *Modas* ('fashions'). This was in the plural, given that more than one fashion were considered to exist. Although a series of trends emerged from different countries and fashion houses, a hegemonic fashion prevailed: legitimized designs, designers and well-known brands. The national clothing – or textile – industry was seen

merely as a producer of materials to emulate imported designs, and magazines served to educate female consumers on world fashion.

The idea of renewing styles was not a central concern in the early days of the Colombian textile industry. Rather, the textile business and its outlets mostly sold fabrics, so that clothing was conceived as an instrument to promote textile sales. Advertising of the 'national fashion' during the 1970s and part of the 1980s was related to the quality of textiles and the value of the garments derived from it. In 1973, this industry defended the significant role of fabrics within the value chain of fashion, promoting relaxation of the body through something they called *informalismo del vestido* ('informality of garments'), understood to be related to textile attributes and quality rather than styles or designs: '[t]he specific value of informal fashion relies on the materials and not on the époque [...] Corduroy-Seda supports informality' (Cromos 1973: n.pag.).

Fabrics channelled the values of informality, promoting a modern spirit full of charm and youthful grace (Cubillos 2014: 222). Light and futuristic materials were key in the quest to stay up-to-date. At the beginning of the 1970s, the company Pantex (Textiles Panamericanos) named its textile novelties 'futurized fabrics'. Similarly, in 1971, Coltejer promoted outfits produced with its Coltepunto line of fabrics with the name 'cybernetic fashion'. The magazines included information related to super-knit fabrics made with 100 per cent textured Fortrel, a new material popular among young people. Colteroy was also used (a 100 per cent cotton material) and a special variation of Fortrel made by Celanese is mentioned. The innovation of the Tycron press by Coltejer, which was based on Primel (an older but renewed fabric), is also described in several advertisements from the early 1970s and a mixture of Terlenka and cotton that produced a type of fabric called Dobby was launched as the novelty of youth. The language of textiles reveals the amount of knowledge and information that was advertised to support the national industry and portray its modernity. In this model, textile properties conferred youth, not design. In other words, the industry needed highly informed consumers, who knew about materials but not necessarily about fashion. An advertisement read:

Some of our competitors add expensive and fantastic labels on their shirts, full of tufted family coats of arms and exotic phrases to highlight the benefits of their product.

Our labels are simple, since they have nothing to do, at any time, with the excellent quality of our shirts. With the VIP label you get the guarantee of ultramodern designs, perfect cuts and tailoring and the extraordinary quality of Fabricato fabrics, Dobby fabrics, bright prints or fabrics with pre-dyed yarns...! [...] Only for important men! Based on Terlenka with Approved Quality.

(Cromos 1972a: n.pag.)

Within the complex relationship between material and design, denim is a well-known fabric recognized as the 'material of youth'. It has been perceived as an egalitarian and modern garment in terms of gender and class (Solomon 1986; Davis 1989; Steele 1997). Denim marked a route to democratizing appearances and gender – based on youth and comfort – that started in the 1950s, when it became popular as a sign of rebellion. Its use spread throughout the middle-class in the 1960s (Miller and Woodward 2012).

In Colombia, the use of denim, despite having been recorded since the 1960s, only began to expand in the 1970s. Denim, or jeans, embodied the values of a 'new youth', which was dynamic regardless of seasonal fashion. The student revolt of the end of the 1960s, the hippy movement of the 1970s, electropop of the 1980s and the first technological wave of the 1990s were all movements dressed in jeans, as the magazines reported. During the last three decades of the twentieth century, denim was positioned as the quintessential garment of youth. All previous doubts related to its lack of femininity for women, or its lack of credibility, seriousness and elegance for men were abandoned. Denim proved to be a forceful device to homogenize experiences of gender, class and age, since the discourse that advertised it both as material and as spirit of renewal penetrated the imagination and clothing practices of Colombian people.

In 1970, Caribú jeans were promoted in *Cromos* as youthful and trendy. In 1974 the brand turned the spelling of the word 'jean' into *yin* or *jin* and described it as a 'vibrant style', a vocabulary and an adjective that highlighted the possibility of going beyond seriousness through the appropriation of the garment. Several of its advertising pieces played with the spelling of the word 'jean' to emphasize that it broke rules and was informal. Between 1984 and 1985, the Fabricato advertising campaigns invited women to wear denim – as a garment and as a material – using the slogan: 'Now it's time to wear jeans!'. Young, thin women modelled them, suggesting that existing outside of this trend was not possible and that a last call was being made for women to wear them. The silhouette of jeans at the time was widely uniform for men and women (high-rise, tapered legs). This feature allowed for greater homogeneity in terms of gender since, again, its main value was that of youth and nonchalance, in accordance with the new times.

Textiles began losing their importance in the mid-1980s, when the trends of the 1990s were gradually emerging. The link of fashion with design advanced slowly: design became part of the creation of value as an idea associated with modernity (Peña 2009). Although in the 1960s the first higher education programmes focused on fashion design were created,³ and programmes in graphic and industrial design were established in the 1970s, it was not until the 1990s that design became a central element in industrial production chains. That is why there was an evident disconnection between academic design and industrial requirements (Fernández 2008). Confirmation of this detachment can be found in the late creation of the Institute for Exports and Fashion (Inexmoda) in 1987. Only at this time were some changes introduced in the production of clothes and textiles, as design was added to value chains and the marketing process was aestheticized. Such changes were not fully mobilized by the new institution, but were gradually organized by it.

There were some attempts to introduce design into textiles – or create an organized fashion industry – before Inexmoda. A key figure was Toby Setton (1936–2000), the first fashion designer in Colombia, who created and positioned his own brand called Jackson Fashion during the 1970s. Subsequently, other local designers or creators focused on selling fashion instead of fabrics, implying that image was preferred over materials. Jackson Fashion and other brands created during the 1970s, such as El Paraguas Rojo, proposed ways to market fashion beyond textiles with modern and colourful advertising, developing conceptual campaigns that restricted the amount of text and popularized slogans. They emulated the American and European experiences that

3. Academia Arturo Tejada Cano was the first technical school dedicated to teaching pattern making, dress making and fashion. In Colombia, it is one of the pioneer schools in this field.

4. Some brands remained, such as Leonisa, Studio Faride (Studio F from 1994) or Arturo Calle, as they switched to campaigns based on fashion and image. Some designers also gradually positioned themselves, such as Amelia Toro or Hernando Trujillo, but, as brands, it was only in the 1990s that they widely recognized the discourse of fashion over fabrics.

promoted brand and fashion over fabric. Although fashion and the idea of youthful change became central in their discourse, the effort to organize the industry was too little, too late and these brands disappeared.⁴ A group of recognized Colombian designers was not consolidated and a catwalk calendar was not defined to face the discursive rivalry against the textile companies, mainly from the region of Antioquia. Toby Setton went into crisis in the 1980s, his pioneering voice did not resonate with others and tensions within the fashion system remained unresolved by the time his company closed in the 1990s. However, his experience reflects the supreme value of turning fashion and design into vehicles of an aestheticized youth. To this end, design also became the vehicle for a youthful experience.

GOOD AGE

As with the case of jeans, the advertising discourse for other garments worn by Colombians gradually adapted their language in reference to youth. 'Good age' is praised by Arrow, a brand of shirts, as a transmutation between a person's age and the appearance of their garment, since good clothing must represent good age. For this and other brands, 'good' becomes a synonym of young: 'shirts of the good age: youth. Stay 20 or 25 years old, 'the age I know without saying'. Arrow will help you. Arrow shirts are worn as an age: youthful, expressive, attractive. Arrow is cutting-edge' (*Cromos* 1972b: n.pag.)

'Good age' favours men of any age – the male figure in the ad appears to be over 40 – as long as they are willing to dress to reduce physical ageing. Age should be hidden by fashion, therefore journalists praise those who manage to appear younger. Colours, cuts, silhouettes and materials that conform to the idea of youth – understood as versatility, ease and simplicity – are proposed by fashion to counteract age. Heavy dresses, overly structured suits and shirts made with fabrics that do not favour movement were gradually abandoned, as had been the case for cloth and wool, which fell by the wayside between the 1980s and 1990s. Through its advertising, in an attempt to strengthen its position as a textile brand, Paños Vicuña stressed that innovation had to come from the design, not the fabrics. With the same attitude, designer Gloria Trejos 'ditches folklore' as she considers it old, and sees design as targeting youth: 'I dress 45-year-old young men' (*Cromos* 1984b: 91). She emphasizes slim and athletic bodies because, despite their age, her clothes allow men to exude youth.

Over the years, the threshold of youth is lowered: first it was possible to be a young 45-year-old woman who dressed to reduce her age. Then, being 35 years old seemed too old:

The vain consumerist world does nothing but talk about wrinkle creams, memory pills, gymnastics for slimming the waist, books to cure depression, etc. Because of all these, but especially thanks to an enriched personal life, turning 35 is no longer an agony for women. Loving intensely, being productive, and exploiting feminine charms is no longer something unique to fifteen-year-old girls. Women in today's world can seize their femininity without fearing the passage of time.

(*Cromos* 1994b: 112)

Paradoxically, although anyone can reduce their perceived age whenever they wish, the age and limit of youthfulness have also been significantly lowered. The bodies and faces appearing in advertising are increasingly of younger

models. Over the decades, brands have constantly reduced the age of the figures they have promoted, going from men over 40 and women over 30 to models between 18 and 30. Beauty companies – as part of the fashion system – have also produced treatments to help people remain young. Youth is, therefore, both a state of mind and bodily evidence that is obtained from fashion, and translates into a repertoire of seduction. Desirable bodies look young and that fact, subsequently, translates into a profession: entertainment in television, and later, modelling in fashion.

Celebrity models of the 1990s looked radically younger than the non-professional models of previous decades, particularly men. A report in *Cromos* from 1994 included interviews with several men – all over 30 – from national show business, who were asked about their use of jeans and their relationship to success within the creative industries (music, television, radio, etc.). The questions were:

Why do you wear jeans? Why do you feel comfortable with them? How long have you been wearing them? Have you suffered an unpleasant experience due to your insistence on wearing them? What image do you want to project by wearing them, or what is the image you think you project? In your case, *is wearing them a matter of rebellion, comfort, or a desire to feel young?* How many jeans do you own?

(*Cromos* 1994a: 114, emphasis added)

Through the questions we observe a longing for youth at any age, but above all, these questions reveal an understanding of youth equating professional success. This represented a drastic change from what a successful man was considered to be: no longer someone traditional wearing a tie, but a young and fashionable man.

Cromos is discursively aimed to establish a similar ‘passion for youth’ as a desirable value for the general public. The paradox revealed here is based on the fact that youth is achievable at any age but investments in it must be made as rapidly as possible. In simpler terms: youth may be eternal, but it ends quickly. Additionally, although most of the academic literature about body and beauty claims that women aspired to look young, there is evidence that men were also subjected to the discourse of youth. While news of social events in the 1970s featured men wearing ties and women dressed in formal attires getting married before the age of 25, at a later time fashion turned into ‘feeling good’, as advertised by the brand Giorgio Capriani throughout the 1980s. By the 1990s, the role in those celebrations was played by youth extended well beyond that age:

Many of them do not know what maturity is, they have not crossed its threshold. They strut with those thirty-something years on their backs, almost always wearing jeans that fit like their own skin.

(*Cromos* 1994b: 112).

The idea of fitting like one’s own skin reflects the comfort of being 30 without having achieved the maturity that was previously expected from that age, thanks to the new uniformity of age and gender produced by the democratization of the fashion experience.⁵ ‘Young people’, as advertised by the brand North Star, are the main consumers of fashion and the ones who assess its value. Whoever wanted to be young had to distance themselves from the stability of adult values – work, family and savings – to focus on the quest

5. Santiago Castro-Gomez (2009) analyses the Bogotá of the 1920s in *Cromos* and points out that most of the body procedures to preserve thinness and youth were aimed at women. Advertising related to the desirable body begins a process of gender homogenization in the face of the ideal of youth. However, it contained different consumer experiences for men and women.

for immediate pleasures (Bauman 2007). In that sense, it became necessary to define features of the attitude young people had to adopt: movement, change and a lack of the responsibilities that force adults into quietness. The apparent autonomy of youth sustains one's identity and, thus, turns fashion from being a complement into a whole project personified in the bodies of young people:

As an entity, this body is legitimized by dominant aesthetics as the desirable paradigm for all ages. Its main characteristics are slenderness, whiteness, athletic skills and beauty in terms of the predominant white and European values. Yet, this idealized aesthetic of youth involves other aspects: decision, audacity, romance, eroticism, and innovation.

(Margulis 2001: 51)

In the media, young thin bodies abounded in the 1990s and, although white thinness was not the only body ideal available, it was positioned as the main homogenizing value that responded to the global cultural canons of the twentieth century, in the representation of thinness as a figure of rebellion and asceticism (Wallerstein and Mansour 1999). Wallerstein and Mansour studied thinness in fashion advertising in the 1990s, when Kate Moss became a fashion icon at the age of 15. She and other models appeared in the advertisements of brands such as Calvin Klein, Hugo Boss or Miu Miu, posing as women-girls or men-boys, acting distantly, impassively and uninterestedly. As such, they emulated certain rebellious attitudes that were seen as cultural values of youth. In Colombia, Margarita Rosa de Francisco – who had been working in fashion for some years – was 19 years old when she was chosen by *Cromos* as 'model of the year' in 1984. She embodied the beauty and elegance of a woman-girl, with a slim body laden with the makeup of an adult woman, combined with a cheerful and rebellious attitude. She had built one of the most respected modelling and acting careers in the country (*Cromos* 1984a: 62). That same year she participated in the *Reinado Nacional de la Belleza* (National Beauty Contest), a highly hegemonic institution in terms of its understanding of women's beauty. For the contest Margarita wore her hair very short (above her shoulders), displaying an attitude of youthful rebellion against the norm. In this regard, she embodied the paradox pointed out by Wallerstein and Mansour (1999) related to thinness and youth equally symbolic of subordination and a defiant body, in a close relationship to the spectacle of fashion.

In the mid-1980s, the Colombian brand Pinel played with this visual idea of youth. The brand featured models who appeared alone, leaning against walls or in the countryside, exhibiting an attitude of seclusion and meditation. They were performing the loneliness and lack of understanding of youth, only as a matter of style without the defiant expression. In Colombia, thinness was not seen as transgression or rebellion, but was mainly regarded as a thoughtless appropriation of the desire to be thin. This explains why advertising images in Colombian magazines – composed of warm or bright colours like yellow, red, orange, or green – portrayed less slim models than fashion magazines in Europe or the United States. The images in black and white, or aimed at exhibiting black garments, presented smiling models with strong, toned bodies in situations of success at work or in erotic sensuality. Voluptuous youth in Colombia was a characteristic of modernity, translating into values such as joy, vibrancy, euphoria and uproar. Advertising was more colourful with neon colours included in campaigns aimed at young people.

The Colombian brand Pronto, which literally translates as 'soon', originated in the 1990s. As it was one of the first brands exclusively aimed at promoting youth, Pronto embodied the ideals of a young consumer who lacks clarity as to whether s/he is actually performing an act of rebellion or merely following global cultural trends. The name of the brand invites consumers to an immediate and ephemeral experience, suggesting clothes made to be discarded quickly after they have been bought. No wonder its slogan since the 1990s has been 'Whatever you want, do it soon'.

Pronto turned to models around 18 years old, who looked significantly younger and more childish than those in ads of previous decades. Even in advertisements that included family photographs, the clothing worn by 'parents' resembled that of their youthful and informal children. In this case, youth was not represented by bodies performing rebellious attitudes, but had become the hegemonic, general value of fashion. Consequently, after the body was aestheticized to personify youth during the 1980s and 1990s, men abandoned their beards, moustaches and body hair, turning to the appearance of adolescent bodies of uncertain adulthood.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

Designers and modelling agencies used to complain that the height of Colombian models was an obstacle for them to enter international catwalks. It was no different for the general population, who were not fit to respond to these international ideals either. That is true for Leonisa, a brand of underwear designed to fit the special standards of Latin women, who had larger breasts than their European counterparts and demanded bra cups to make them more voluptuous. 'Leonisa is a Latin woman' was the slogan developed by the company to conjure up those differences in corporality. The specificity of the Colombian body – sturdier men, more voluptuous women and a shorter population compared to European standards – based the corporal dimension of beauty on the premise of 'work with what you have'.

The object positioned to achieve features of youth – accomplished through spreading creams and potions – was the silhouette. The ad from a product made to that end reads: 'White, brunette, olive-skinned, pale or black. Don't lose your glamor by ditching your silhouette. Remember that a stylized body is the appeal of every modern woman. Use "Linecrem". It is not a drug. It is a cream that imparts glamor' (*Cromos* 1970: n.pag.). The role of race is minimized in order to give prominence to the desirability of stylized, modern and glamorous White-mestizo women. In that way, minor body technologies were also at the service of fashion, which is not only a discourse of clothing, but of beauty in general.

Even the smallest details from the garments contributed to features of bodily beauty, accentuating or hiding one of its parts without affecting comfort. The idea of having a relaxed yet flattering silhouette became so popular, and became so entangled with fashion, that they seemed to serve a single purpose. Women were trying to achieve a 'chic, feminine and sensual silhouette', wearing garments that portrayed their bodies as elongated (tall) and slim. Fashion made it possible for people to discursively achieve an idea of modernity through simple garments – made with straight cuts and uniform types and patterns of fabrics – in which sophistication was based on hidden details such as seams, drapes or fabrics (*Cromos* 1986: 74). The kind of consumer involved in this had to be increasingly proficient in the language of fashion.

6. In women, the size of the waist had been positioned decades before. The history of the corset accounts for this process.

The allure of youthful clothing was aimed at offering customers the privilege of wearing garments that did not restrict their movement. This was one of the features that a Colombian designer accomplished:

Magician or designer? Nelly Villegas Gómez becomes both [...] a creator of clothing that serves all types of women: tall, short, chubby or skinny. Nelly has attained what seems like a feat making loose clothes with light fabrics (cotton, denim, and wool), wide and long skirts, blouses and jackets, that hide the lack of waist or emphasise its presence as the case may be.

(*Cromos* 1987: 60)

The magazine emphasizes the importance in today's fashion – in which everything is possible – of a correct understanding of proportion, shape, length and proper selection of the 'best style' for each body.

Fashion and underwear advertising for men revealed a new, less defined feature of the body: sensuality. Tight boxer shorts now worn by men displayed the attributes of their sexed masculinity, emphasizing their slimmer silhouettes. In this case sensuality is not meant to question virility. The height of trousers at the waist was lowered and men began wearing them at the hips, uncovering the navel. Erotic exploration was now approved for people making male clothing, allowing them to play with figures and proportions.

Reducing their waist size – in trousers, skirts and underwear – became one of the priorities for men and women.⁶ Men shunned the hitherto tolerated belly and waists became fundamental elements of the youthful appearance and beacons of youth and sensuality. This new clothing trend brought an unprecedented and progressive de-differentiation of men and women, as clothing relaxed and new modern values of comfort were promoted. Men started to fulfil the requirement of being slim and young, and their bodies were released: shirts no longer had to be buttoned up to the neck and their skin was bared (Barthes 1985).

During the 1970s and 1980s, it was possible to be an adult man and also a fashionable one by wearing dissimilar garments: a suit fitted to the body or with wide legs and shoulders; high- or low-rise trousers with large variations in waist size; tight-fitting or very loose shirts and t-shirts. None of those styles clashed with the other because a clear standard for the male figure had not been defined or accepted, as it clearly had been for women. Younger men enjoyed greater freedom: t-shirts were fitted to the arms in the 1980s, or in the 1990s the width of the trouser boot was reduced.

Exercising and playing sports persistently appeared in the magazines as masculine themes, with good health and physical beautification being expected from their practice. Controlling one's weight and having visible, strong 'abs' were major concerns. In the 1990s, the silhouette of male clothes was much tighter to the skin and the effect of sensuality, previously reserved for women, was emphasized. The treatment Ultratone, which was advertised in the magazines as a surgical procedure for women, but for men ambiguously as a surgical or dietary treatment (*Semana* 1996: n.pag.), emphasized that men needed to continue with their lives at work while caring for their body image. In this sense, the campaigns used ambiguous discourses on body care and vanity in order not to make fashion at odds with traditional masculinity, and to promote a more active participation of men in fashion.

Denim trousers for men made by the brand El Roble were sold with a singular element on the back: five meandering grommets in a row that served to store pens and acted as a sort of pencil case. The ads directed the eye straight to that differentiating and novel component on the buttocks. In 1977, El Roble tried to differentiate itself from competitors through this detail, which raises many questions about the material used: does one feel those grommets when sitting down? How comfortable is it to carry pens on the back? Is it possible to walk or sit down naturally and forget they are there? Do those trousers represent fashionable workwear? These questions may seem trivial but inquiring after the trousers' materiality⁷ may allow us to understand the way in which fashion in Colombia was shaped as innovative in design, as opposed to the more standardized understanding of international fashion design. In any case, the value promoted was novelty rather than functionality, with novelty seen as a way of being young.

Those details were also present in ties, shoes, bags, wallets, scarves, in the seams of trousers and shirts, buttons, prints, even in the type of buckle on a strap. In *Semana Moda* it was announced that: 'To achieve exclusivity, the design and manufacture of suits must go hand in hand with details. Of buttons, ties, belts, shirts. Of everything that a suit is made of, which in turn will result in a stunning image' (*Semana Moda* 1996: 131). That is to say, the consumer must be devoted to details and must be able to recognize them. Educating consumers in fashion, then, was no longer the role of advertising but the responsibility of fashion. Style specialists and consumers themselves had to take on this task: 'the role of advertising changed from delivering product news bulletins to building an image around a particular brand-name version of a product' (Klein 1999: 6). The process of turning a brand into a 'personality', which implied being able to position and validate them in a hierarchical system, became essential for the capitalist fashion economy. That is why the ads of Levi's in Colombia used slogans such as '*Si usted ama las imitaciones no venga a nuestros almacenes*' ('If you love knockoffs, don't come into our shops').

Ads in the magazines demonstrate that Colombian brands – Manhattan, Jackson Fashion, Puppy Fashion or El Paraguas Rojo – had been solidly developed in the 1970s and 1980s, but very few of them survived. In Colombia, the production of brand meanings was weak and generally overshadowed by international brands, whose graphic production was better built on the hegemony of youth and thinness.

FOREVER 21: CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE IDEAL SUBJECT

After those three decades, the process of juvenilizing appearance was finally consolidated, peaking during the 1990s. Fashion was one of the devices that best promoted the idea of youth, beyond biological age, even becoming a synonym for youth. Being young became the aesthetic rule: 'the elderly, to obey the prevailing mandates, must look young. Youth is at the same time subject and predicate, category of consumption and fashionable object' (Margulis and Urresti 1995: 116).

This notion is highly publicized in the magazines' editorials and graphic content. The latter shifted its focus from the hegemony of the text to the hegemony of the image, a particularly youthful transformation. *Cromos* stated 'No to tradition. Tradition is boring', whereas fashion is 'easy-going, free, happy, and versatile' (*Cromos* 1990: 60–61). A drastic and fundamental change was therefore established for the textile industry in Colombia. The initial

7. Appadurai (1986) points out that in the study of material culture is important to avoid the so called 'methodological fetishism', which is the tendency to disregard that objects consist mainly in their materiality and not only in their meanings.

discourse of the textile industry – focused on fabrics as a conduit for fashion and as a ‘desire for fashion’ – structured during the first half of the twentieth century and revealed by the textile boom (Cruz 2019) eventually disappeared in favour of fashion as an aesthetic system of brands. This transformation can be summarized from the evidence in magazines and their ads in the following way: the process began in the avant-garde of the textile industry in the 1970s, before textiles were sidelined and the textile companies and clothing manufacturers were barely mentioned in the 1980s. Finally, in the 1990s, the textile reference to privilege fashion and brands was eliminated. The transition was characterized by considerable tensions between the role of design and the textile material, and between the role of the textile brand and fashion brand. In the end, the discourse of fashion prevailed and confirmed its traditional definition as a system based on appearances. The breach with tradition and a new understanding of the concept of youth are exemplified in a different way here not only in the body, but beyond it. Brands and fashion are projects of youth themselves.

Key is the spread of long-term cultural values: versatility, youth and renewal, in constant pursuit of beauty. Fashion, as materiality, allows the return or renewal of styles and textiles: cloths, terlenka, corduroy, denim, silk and velvet come and go; coats, prints and jackets are back. This fluctuation gradually adjusted to a unique body shape: slim and beautiful. Youth and beauty are achieved according to the knowledge of one’s own body and the resources available to adapt it, by means of relatively simple interventions such as applying creams, playing with body proportions, wearing youthful materials or ‘vibrant’ colours, etc. Youth is, then, a symbolic feature revealed through ‘[c]omfort, freshness, and nonchalance’ (Cromos 1994b: 112), achieved materially by means of fashion and its auxiliary industries, such as the beauty industry, which in turn is an industry of youth. At this point a paradox is revealed: the quest for eternal youth is made through ephemeral fashion. Eternity meets decay.

Beauty and youth are articulated with the demands of masculinity and femininity through clothing, since fashion pre-codes the ways in which one is a man or a woman by standardizing the experience of young people. To this extent, there is room for political criticism of fashion for its role in the development of a hegemonic international ideal of beauty that is far from matching Colombian culture and corporeality and which established a moral judgment of those people who did not reach modernity by means of fashion and its overwhelmingly white advertising. In Colombia, this process of reaching modernity took a little longer than in the United States and Europe, and involved different imaginaries, as well as national and global branding systems. The cultural history of fashion is constructed through reading transnational relationships in the production of economic systems and shared hegemonic aesthetic values.

Analysing fashion in Colombia, including its textile history and cultural history of beauty, enables us to make more complex observations of this field of power and material and symbolic production of meaning. At the same time, we can offer cultural explanations for the problems experienced by the textile industry at a time when it was unable to adapt to the novel discourse of appearances, and consequently did not understand the requirements and needs of new consumers who demanded styles rather than textiles. Fashion is a breeding ground in which political, economic, social and cultural variables intersect, depending on the historical and geographical context from

which it is viewed, but which in any case produces and reproduces a type of subject which is transnational, white, beautiful, mouldable, informed, young and timeless. Success in terms of fashion depends on the body's ability to understand fashion's new values.

It is worth concluding this article with an allegorical anecdote. The final part of the 1990s was marked by the emergence of the most famous soap opera in Colombia, *Yo soy Betty, la fea* ('I'm Ugly Betty'), first broadcast on 25 October 1999. The show featured a woman who had obtained academic merit and aspired to land the position as a secretary in a fashion company. She arrived at her interview in Ecomoda – the quintessential company of glamor – to compete with a group of slim, beautiful, young women. Betty did not dress well, she did not understand fashion, but she did understand finances. She did not add a photo to her résumé because she knew that a single glance at her appearance would cause her evaluators to dismiss her. The industry, of course, preferred tall, slim, young women to succeed in the world of fashion. In the end, Betty would be given the opportunity to enter the industry to find herself transformed into a young and desirable body. This would be the final secret to her happiness.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Edward Salazar is a sociologist (Universidad Nacional de Colombia) and has a master's degree in cultural studies (Universidad de los Andes, Colombia). He is a professor and researcher at Santo Tomás University, specialized in fashion studies, visual culture, social class and research methodologies. He is the creator and host of 'Nación Moda', one of the most recognized podcasts about fashion and culture in Colombia, author of the book *Nostalgias y Aspiraciones* (Universidad Santo Tomás, Universidad Javeriana and Universidad del Rosario, 2021) about aesthetic and middle class in Colombia, and editor and writer in the first Colombian critical fashion studies reader (in edition). Salazar is also a writer and consultant in national and international cultural media in arts, fashion and visual culture. He has been awarded with several national recognitions for his work, such as best sociological bachelor degree (Universidad Nacional de Colombia), scholarship in photography research (Ministry of Culture) and second place at National Novel Prize – Bogotá City.

Contact: Universidad Santo Tomás, Carrera 9 #51-11, Bogotá 110231426,
Colombia.
E-mail: edwardsalazar@usantotomas.edu.co

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5456-9962>

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