

# Leak NYC: fluid lingerie for expansive masculinity

CASE STUDY | Aug 16, 2022

Leak NYC is shaking up the lingerie industry, challenging long-standing views of masculinity through gender-fluid intimates that offer accessible luxury and style with a feminine touch. How are brands continuing to push boundaries, catering to shoppers across a broader spectrum of gender expressions?

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## EXPERTS

Jamie Ross

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 01** Leak NYC's bold intimate wear is pushing industry boundaries to make lingerie more inclusive, advancing the notion that it's not just for women
- 02** From mesh bodysuits to crystal harnesses, its lingerie line caters to expanded conceptions of masculinity and gender expressions
- 03** By making luxury affordable, Leak NYC also makes it easier for people to splurge as a means of self-care and boosting self-esteem

## DATA

- 85% of Gen Zers think individuality is more important than fitting in
- 51% of Americans say they like seeing brands that explore 'gender bending'
- 70% of US Gen Yers said they planned to treat themselves when shopping as the pandemic subsided

## SCOPE

Inspired by the fashion of Brooklyn's queer nightlife scene, [Leak NYC](#) is shaking up the lingerie market, taking styles traditionally tailored to women and making them available to men and gender-diverse people. Though gender-fluid clothing has been on the market for a while, unisex lines tend to offer relatively bland and uninspiring apparel that collapse rather than affirm expansive gender identities. Through brands like Leak NYC, the lingerie sector is only just beginning to provide genderless intimates in traditionally feminine styles. This is despite the fact that there are at least 20 million LGBTQ+ people in the US, meaning that nearly 8% of all Americans have diverse and unique gender expressions beyond the male/female binary. [1]

Parsons-trained designer Louis Dorantes launched Leak NYC in 2020 with a range of mesh bodysuits and dazzling harnesses that can be worn at home or at raves and clubs, where fetish wear is a common statement piece. In marketing its products beyond the bedroom, Leak NYC is expanding its potential consumer base at a time when people are excited to re-engage with nightlife in the wake of pandemic lockdowns, indulge in luxury purchases, and dress to self-express – in 2021, 70% of US Gen Yers said they planned to treat themselves when shopping as the pandemic subsided. [2]

Leak NYC also makes luxury lingerie affordable. Most bodysuits are under \$100, appealing to a wider range of consumers that prioritize affordability in their purchasing journeys. The brand also offers higher-end made-to-order crystal harnesses, thongs, and chokers retailing for up to \$360 for a sense of added luxe. As Gen Zers reclaim what constitutes luxury,

shifting the narrative from something costly to something high-quality and beautifully designed – 74% say they consider anything over \$40 to be expensive – Leak NYC is giving consumers the opulent looks they're after without having to break the bank. [3] How can other luxury brands push the envelope to offer a wider range of diverse, gender-affirming designs, catering to evolving forms of self-expression?



In the wake of the pandemic, people are looking experimental and playful ways to self-express

Leak (2022)

## CONTEXT

### LUXURY LINGERIE FOR SELF-EXPRESSION

Gender-expansive luxury lingerie sales were high during the pandemic – Fleur du Mal's [Fleur Pour Homme](#) collection sold out in two days, while sales of [Boy Smells'](#) genderless intimates were up 700% between January and August 2020. [4][5] During COVID-19, people had time to explore new gender identities, turning to brands like Leak NYC to realign their looks to their newfound individuality – 21% of Bumble users across the US, UK, Ireland, Australia, and Canada said they were planning to express their sexuality differently in 2020, and 14% shifted their sexual desires. [6] It's no wonder then that Lyst searches for fashion pieces with agender-related keywords increased by 33% in 2021, as consumers imbued their luxury lingerie purchases with new, personalized forms of self-expression. [7]

### EXPANDING CONCEPTS OF MASCULINITY

Consumer demand for clothing that challenges typical presentations of manhood is increasing. In the US, 16% of Gen Zers and 9% of Gen Yers identify as LGBT, and 51% of consumers say they like seeing brands that explore 'gender bending'. [8][9] As such, brands like Leak NYC, [Cosabella](#), [Kennie Mas](#), [Menagerié](#), and [Ciciful](#) are starting to fill the market gap. "[Zhe](#) is another brand meeting the needs of the transgender population with a wider gusset for tucking," says

Jamie Ross, fashion professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology. “These are spaces that haven’t really been touched on before by brands.” [10]

## NEW SELF-LOVE NARRATIVES

Modern self-care can come in many forms, and people are using lingerie purchases as a way to exemplify their desire for self-indulgence – in 2020, 43% of Americans made purchases to ease stress. [11] “People may have been stuck at home wearing comfy clothes, but underneath they were celebrating their bodies,” says Ross. “People always like to treat themselves like that.” [10] According to psychologists, purchasing lingerie can be seen as a form of self-care as it boosts self-esteem and confidence – ultimately benefiting people’s [mental health](#). [12] The hidden nature of lingerie means people can experiment without having to conform to cultural norms, which is why brands like Leak NYC are tapping into new self-love narratives. Other brands are getting on board, with Rihanna’s [Savage X Fenty](#) lingerie line – which won the brand disruptor award at the [2022 Emmy Awards](#) – “celebrates fearlessness, confidence, and inclusivity,” while [Wicked Mmm](#) produces “[s]exy lace lingerie made for people with packages,” and is a staunch advocate for “breaking down gender norms and stereotypes.”



Brands are beginning to offer intimate wear that truly reflects the diversity of the people wearing it

Leak (2022)

## INSIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### CATER TO CONSUMER EXCITEMENT

According to McKinsey’s 2022 State of Fashion report, “there will likely be increased appetite for experimentation and self-expression as consumers seek out more playful and energetic ways of dressing,” in the wake of the pandemic. [13] Brands have an opportunity to cater to and match consumer excitement to get dressed up again, presenting their newly-discovered identities in public, potentially for the first time. As people emerge from lockdowns ready to party

and date – 45% of Gen Zers say they're open to more creative ways of dating post-pandemic – the popularity of boundary-pushing luxury items is set to continue. [14] McKinsey goes on to suggest that brands should “consider bold ads and ambassadors suitable for the new mood,” like Leak NYC’s use of locally-famous queer performers in its social media marketing. [13]

## REFLECT A DIVERSE CUSTOMER BASE

Leak NYC is still up against a lingerie sector that largely caters to white, cisgender, slim women. There’s a major opportunity for brands to offer intimate wear that truly reflects the diversity of the people wearing it – from gender-affirming garments to a wider range of skin tones and inclusive sizing – appealing to the 48% of Gen Zers who value brands that don’t classify items by gender, as well as the 78% of Yers and Zers who think brands should take a pro-diversity stance. [15][16] Sizing is incredibly important in the gender-fluid fashion movement, and brands like [SKIMS](#) are paving the way toward an equal distribution from 2XS to 3XL, and on a wider scale, brands that reflect their diverse consumer bases will win favor with shoppers that are looking for added value from their purchases.

## BOOST PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE AND SELF-WORTH

As people's mental health worsened during the pandemic – 41% of US adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in January 2021, up from 11% in 2019 – brands can help consumers recharge their self-confidence through products that allow them to feel a sense of self-worth, self-confidence, and mental wellbeing. [17] As Leak NYC demonstrates, catering to unique self-expression is key, as 85% of Gen Zers think individuality is more important than fitting in. [18] “So many of my students are saying that they dress for themselves and don’t really worry about what other people are wearing,” says Ross. “That’s a very different and empowering turnaround from where we were even a couple of years ago.” [10]

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