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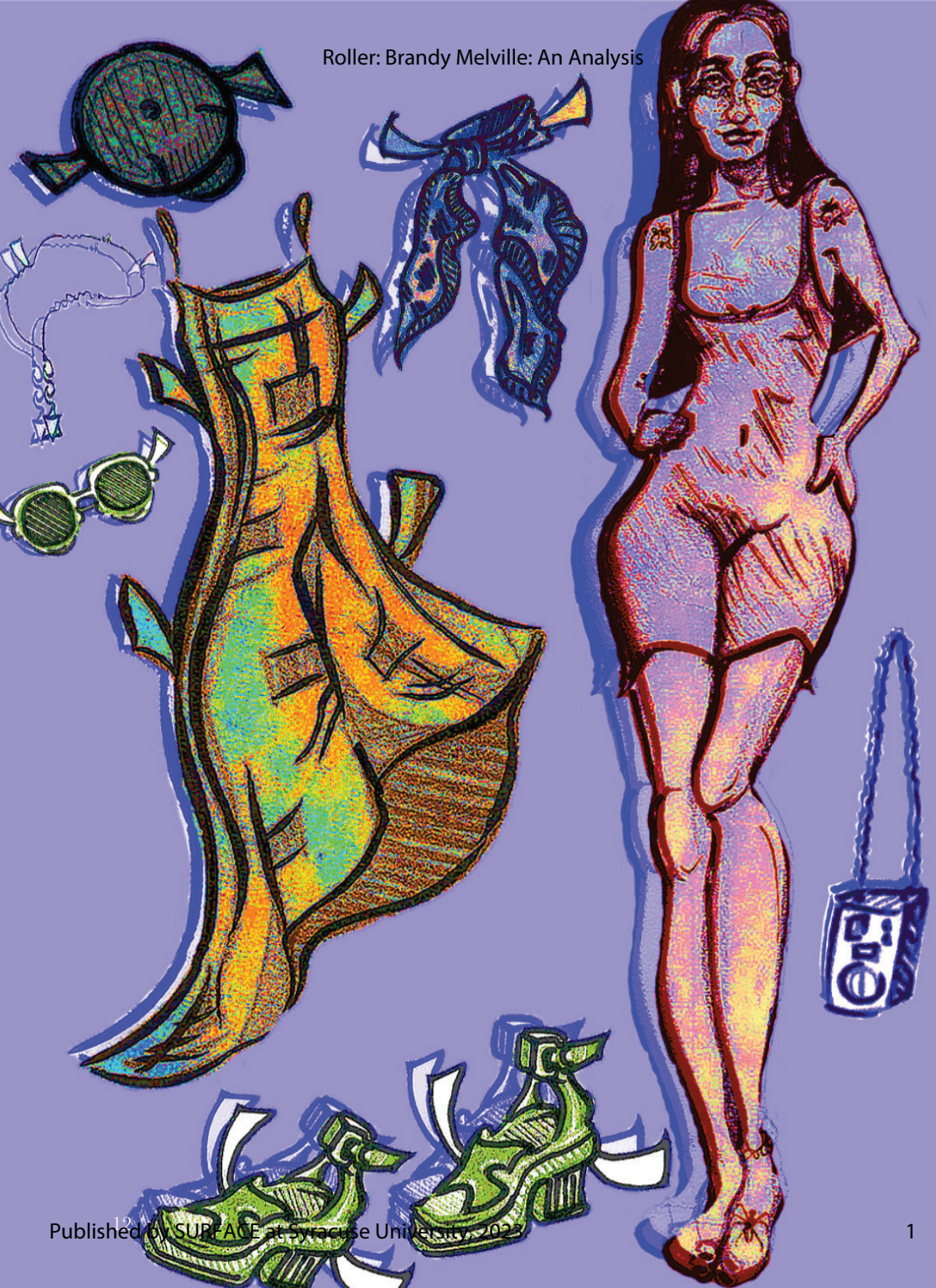

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I will never forget the year I decided to buy my little sister Brandy Melville cargo pants for Christmas. I had carefully sorted through multiple stores for the perfect pair of pants when I landed on these dark green cargo pants. I immediately purchased them without thinking too much about it; I just knew that she would like them. When Christmas arrived, I remember forcing my sister to open my gift first. I sat there eagerly awaiting as she tore back the pieces of the wrapping paper. Immediately, her face lit up—she loved them!

Later that night after all our gifts had been opened, the two of us ran upstairs together and went to her room to try on her new pants. Unfortunately, her waist was too big to fit into the pants. Coming into my room with a look of deep disappointment, she told me that the pants didn't fit. I could tell that she was crushed, but I reassured her that we would go to Brandy as soon as possible to switch out the pants and get her a new pair. She looked at me and responded, "We can't get another pair of these pants; they are one size fits all, and I am too big to fit into them." At that moment I felt awful, but I was determined to go to Brandy Melville with her

and find something she could buy, even if it wasn't a pair of cargo pants. Brandy was super popular at the time, and I wanted her to have something from the store.

A few days later, I drove with my sister to Brandy Melville to make a gift exchange. Of course, the store was packed with people returning their holiday gifts and shopping the store's post-holiday sale. It didn't take long for my sister to find a bunch of things that she loved. With about ten pieces in her arms, she walked swiftly towards the fitting room. As I waited for her, I continued to shop. I was aimlessly wandering when she finally returned from the dressing room, practically in tears. She told me that none of the clothing fit her.

At the time, I was a senior in high school, dealing with my own body insecurities. I had always felt ashamed of my body, but it was an eye-opening experience to see someone I loved feel so much pain and disgust towards their own body. At this moment my sadness turned to outrage. We immediately left, and I haven't gone back since.

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In 1970, Silvio Marsan founded Brandy Melville in Italy. In 2009, Brandy Melville

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opened its first shop in Los Angeles (Belgum). The store is known for manufacturing casual, cute, and inexpensive clothing for teenage girls. It currently has over 3 million followers on Instagram. It has 95 locations worldwide and an annual growth rate of 25% (Macedo). Brandy Melville has a limited sizing chart; most of the clothing that it sells is labeled "one size fits most" or "oversized." There are few pieces of clothing that are labeled small and medium. These pieces typically fit women who wear sizes zero to two.

Brandy's company has a unique infrastructure that I believe has contributed to the company's overall success. Unlike other fashion companies, Brandy has created a

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Many people are highly critical of Brandy Melville because of the limited sizes and the unrealistic beauty standards that the company covertly promotes. To understand how Brandy Melville has become a leading fashion company amongst teens despite criticism, I explore what makes the "Brandy Girl" so enticing. I contend that it is the sizing, social media accounts, and the company's staff that have made Brandy feel relatable to young teens while covertly excluding them.

To understand the employment process and the sizing, I spoke with one of my peers who worked at Brandy for over three years. To protect her identity, I will keep her anon-

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product development team of teenage girls. This team of young women helps to decide what products to sell and how to sell them (Fitzgerald). As a result, the company has branded itself extremely well. Their clothing is associated with a certain type of aesthetic that customers refer to as the "Brandy Girl."

The "Brandy Girl" is a white, tanned, long-limbed thin girl with long blond hair. The "Brandy Girl" wears super short shorts, crop tops, and oversized sweatshirts. She is meant to appear like the "girl next door" in that she appears to be naturally beautiful with minimal effort. The "Brandy Girl" is depicted across Brandy's social media accounts and the company's employees working in stores (Wolfe).

ymous. I wanted to interview a former employee because I knew it would provide me with more information of the behind-the-scenes work that Brandy does to maintain its well-crafted image. I don't believe that the company would be nearly as successful without having created a brand that relies on the naivety of teens. Below I focus on issues of sizing, marketing, and employment.

Sizing

Brandy Melville's limited selection of sizes dictates who wears the clothing. The way in which the sizing is marketed suggests that the brand is inclusive when, in reality, it is not. The harsh reality is that teenage girls who don't wear between a size zero and

two can't wear Brandy. When I was exploring the company's sizing, three key questions emerged:

1. Why did Brandy Melville decide to limit its audience to a specific size?

2. Did they ever consider changing their sizing?

3. Why is it so popular amongst teenage girls when it excludes a large portion of them?

I turned to my interviewee, a former Brandy employee, to answer the first two questions regarding the company structure. I didn't intend for her to touch on the third question, but she beautifully answered all three.

"Brandy is like the smartest fucking company in the entire world, I will give them that. In terms of the fact that their overhead is so low because to make sizes costs so much more than to not make sizes…. They didn't care about the backlash because it was inspirational and aspirational—that was my main takeaway. It was inspirational to the skinny girls who could fit into [the clothes]. And it was aspirational because bigger girls would shop there and hope they could fit into it. So, it was the most amazing business model. They don't care about the criticism. They don't care about the sizing because, guess what? Bigger girls would go in hoping that, like, maybe the shorts would fit them and they could be the size of a Brandy model. And they were making a fuck ton of money because they aren't making sizes."

It makes complete sense when you think about it. Not making sizes makes it cheaper, quicker, and easier to manufacture clothes. It also entices teenage girls in a similar way to how designer clothes entice people with their exclusivity and status. Wearing Brandy elevates a teenage girl's status amongst her peers and creates a sense of belonging. This is due to society's obsession with weight. Women are taught from an extremely young age that their bodies are connected to their overall worth. Being skinny is a symbol of success and attractiveness. This is especially true for teenage girls who are becoming more aware of their bodies and how their bodies are perceived. Many teenage girls are insecure about their appearance, making them highly susceptible to this sort of manipulation.

The girls who can fit into Brandy feel a sense of power, and the girls who can't feel a sense of shame. If they can't wear Brandy, they blame themselves, not the company. On my interviewee's first day at work, she shared an awful experience when one customer's dad yelled that she "was responsible for his daughter's eating disorder." Obviously, he didn't mean my interviewee but the company. Teens who can't fit into Brandy's clothes may fault themselves.

Marketing

As described in Jia Tolentino's "The I in the Internet," social media functions as a space in which individuals curate their idealized selves. Companies and civilians use their social media to project a specific image. This presence is described by Tolentino as being one's "on stage" presence. It is different from an offstage presence or how one behaves outside of social media when no one is watching.

By reviewing Brandy's social media and marketing strategy, I learned how the company is communicating with its buyers. Brandy Melville has a unique marketing strategy that makes them largely recognizable amongst

teens. The company has created a certain type of person to wear and advertise its clothing. The company uses its employees, customers, and models to represent its brand across all social media platforms.

Brandy's social media doesn't look or feel like a typical store page. This is a strategic decision based on an understanding that younger generations are becoming more critical of traditional advertising tactics. Teenage girls have been exposed to information about Photoshop and how it is used across the fashion industry—we know that many fashion companies edit and refine their social media posts. Because we have been taught about how unrealistic these models are, teens have become highly critical of big fashion corporations and their unrealistic representation of women.

Brandy Melville's marketing strategically avoids this criticism by creating advertisements with minimalistic glitz and glamour. The models aren't wearing a lot of makeup, and they aren't posing on sets. Instead, Brandy shares pictures that are casual and natural. All their advertisements are shot in stores, on the beach, or on the street. This makes the content feel user-generated to their customers. It makes customers believe that they could be featured on Brandy's page and that the company represents the average teen.

While making their social media feel relatable to teenage girls, the company still covertly promotes the same traditional beauty standards that other brands do. Brandy picks girls with the same sort of bodies as do the traditional models that are used, which covertly reinforces unrealistic body and beauty standards. The difference is that

they do this in a way that makes girls think that one day they can look like a "Brandy Girl." This further encourages girls to fit themselves into the clothing and, by extension, to support the company.

Employment

Brandy uses its employees to further promote the image of a "Brandy Girl." Countless articles online explain how Brandy's hiring process is solely image-based. In order to assess this claim, I asked my interviewee to describe when and how she was hired. She told me that she was approached while she was shopping at a Brandy pop-up shop with her friend.

"I was fourteen, my hair was really long. I've always looked really young for my age. Like I have always looked…two years younger than my age. People always think I'm younger. And I walked in, and this blonde girl who was really, really, really skinny came up to me. And was like 'Can we take a picture of you?' And I was like, okay. And then they were like, 'Do you have a job? How old are you?' And I was like, "'Oh, I'm fourteen, I don't have a job.' They were like 'We would love for you to work here,' and I was like, 'okay.'"

After this conversation, the employee asked for her Instagram username, phone number, and email address. She was told that Brandy would reach out soon regarding potential employment. The fact that my interviewee was offered a job, but others were not, without inquiring about a position demonstrates how Brandy picks employees based on their looks in order to further support the "Brandy Girl" image. If the company wasn't using their employees to further curate this image of what type of girls wear Brandy, the employee

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would have approached other girls, too.

"A day or two later, this girl named Bethany, who was significantly older than me and was like, the manager of all the New York stores dm'ed me on Instagram and was like, 'Hey [name], it was so nice to meet you the other day. Brandy Melville wants to offer you a job.' And then they emailed me stuff." From that moment forward, without being interviewed, she was hired.

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Even with so much criticism towards the company, Brandy Melville remains extremely popular amongst teens because of its branding. The company presents itself as being an inclusive place for all teens by making its sizing "one size fits most" and by posting unedited photographs of teenage girls on all its social media accounts. This makes teenagers feel as though the brand represents them. When a teen steps into the store, they are surrounded by staff who are around their age, which again makes the brand seem as though it is designed specifically for them. By appearing relatable, Brandy encourages teenage girls to shop there.

Once these teens step foot in the store, Brandy continues to entice them by playing off their insecurities. The company creates small-sized clothing that only fits a certain body type to cut costs and to keep teens wanting to shop there. This method of sizing exploits body dissatisfaction, covertly suggesting to girls that they should aspire to fit into their clothing. Those who can fit into the clothing feel a sense of elevated status amongst their peers, which keeps them coming back for more; whereas the girls who don't fit into the clothing feel ashamed of themselves and often develop a strange desire to be like the

"Brandy Girl."

By communicating with its audience in this deceptive manner, Brandy Melville reinforces society's widely held beauty and body standards. This example displays the agony that teenage girls go through to be seen as successful and beautiful. It reveals the level of importance that teens place on their bodies. It also reveals the company's true intentions are to make the most money possible, even if it requires them to leave teens feeling ashamed of their bodies.

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