

The Race to Cultural Diversity

A qualitative study on journalists' perception of cultural diversity in fashion

Student Name: Naomi Soryah Suryanti Martosoewondo

Student Number: 581225

Supervisor: Rian Koreman

Master Media Studies – Media and Creative Industries
Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

The fashion industry contributes a large part to the economic welfare of society by bringing fulfillment of the standards of clothing and opportunities for trade and jobs. As the fashion industry is considered to be one of the fastest-growing and most influential industries globally, the fashion industry still needs some progress regarding cultural diversity. Recently, the fashion industry has been scrutinized by fashion journalists for its racial inequality, structural racism, and lacking representation of people of color (POC). This lack of representation is of great influence as the fashion industry is considered to be a figurehead of what is seen as beautiful, attractive, or acceptable. Therefore, this racial issue deserves to be explored further. This study aims to explore the perception of fashion journalists on cultural diversity within the Dutch fashion industry to create a better understanding of why the fashion industry lacks cultural diversity. Therefore, it presents the following research question: "How do fashion journalists perceive cultural diversity within the fashion industry?" Various studies show that the lack of representation of POC is due to the structural racism that exists within fashion. Various studies have been conducted on racial inequality, cultural diversity, and representation of POC in the fashion industry of the US, but less attention is paid to how Dutch fashion journalists perceive this in The Netherlands. The Dutch fashion industry is also considered to have a lack of cultural diversity and therefore could be explored further. Based on in-depth interviews with twelve fashion journalists and the use of thematic analysis, the findings show the demand for representation of POC within fashion. Moreover, the results have shown that cultural diversity is not considered to be the end goal, but rather a constant development that needs to be attained. It explains how the lack of diversity is still present within the fashion industry as organizations either consider cultural diversity as not a priority, not beneficial, or simply do not know to be culturally diverse. This caused them to apply unethical efforts to become culturally diverse by only doing superficial work rather than looking internally. Fashion journalists believe that cultural diversity has no finish line and requires a continuous effort of development from all players within the industry.

KEYWORDS: cultural diversity, cultural representation, people of color, fashion industry, journalism, woke washing, tokenism, cultural appropriation

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1. Introduction

In the last two years, racial inequality and demand for equal rights have been the topic of discussion since the protests around police brutality and the COVID-19 hate crimes towards East Asians in the Western world (Ishmael, 2022). The fashion industry, with its flaws, has shown its contempt regarding these racial matters by promising to make its brand more culturally diverse by launching diverse marketing campaigns, making the recruitment process inclusive, and representing more people of color (Ishmael, 2022). However, their efforts are being scrutinized by fashion journalists (Omar, 2020).

The fashion industry has its reputation for racial inequality and this has remained a vital issue in the fashion industry that affects society (Stevenson, 2021). Racial inequality refers to an unequal balance between various racial and cultural groups (Matthew, 2017). Matthew (2017) explains that racial inequality is a result of structural racism that existed for over decades not only within society but additionally in the fashion industry. This dates back to the colonial time when these historic systems have always relied on slavery and exploitation of cultural minorities to provide the West with the resources of these colonized countries (Barnard, 2020). Even after decades and the colonial time, this is still present as the fashion industry has inherited structural racism from the past, favoring Caucasians in their rights as opposed to people of color (POC) (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004). This racial inequality has been observed to be present within an organization as well as what is presented to the public (McDowell, 2019).

The lacking representation of various cultural groups has been examined on the runway in which the models were predominantly white as well as the majority of editors-in-chief of fashion magazines (McDowell, 2019). This underrepresentation of cultural groups shows how the concept of race plays a role here as POC are not being equally represented (McDowell, 2019). According to Čiarnienė & Vienažindienė (2014), the fashion industry represents the cultural, political, and economical aspect of society, but lack the diversity of several cultural groups which does not reflect the multicultural society of today. Fashion journalists claim that the problem is not being reckoned with on a large scale and that the industry is held accountable to resolve this problem (Stevenson, 2021; Friedman et al., 2021; Hamar, n.d). After many protests of racial injustice in the USA, fashion brands started to show their solidarity as they vowed to change the inequality to be diverse and inclusive (Friedman et al., 2021).

The first attempt of a fashion brand was in 2019 when Chanel made a positive change toward a more culturally diverse organization by assigning its first Global Head of Diversity to educate its personnel on diversity and hire more POC (Omar, 2020). However, this has been scrutinized by the public as a survey conducted by McKinsey & Company (Manpowergroup, 2021) has shown that POC have greater inaccessibility to the fashion industry in comparison to Caucasians. In addition, 50% of POC claim that a career in the fashion industry is unequally accessible compared to all other qualified candidates, aiming at non-POC (Manpowergroup, 2021). However, even though the claims are being made by fashion brands to become culturally diverse, various fashion journalists have yet not seen any positive changes.

Alongside the presence of underrepresentation POC within an organization, the sincerity of diversity within these marketing campaigns has also been questioned by fashion journalists and the public (Omar, 2020). As a result of the ongoing discussion of cultural diversity and representation of people of color, fashion brands and organizations have incorporated various wrongful strategies to show diversity, which are cultural appropriation, tokenism, and woke washing (Pozzo, 2020; Lee, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Cultural appropriation is present when fashion brands take intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from other cultures and use them without their permission (Pozzo, 2020). This is an example of how brands and organizations are trying to be diverse and represent a culture, but are earning from it without giving recognition to the culture itself (Rogers, 2006). In addition, tokenism and woke washing involve organizations pretending to benefit cultural groups within society that are treated unfairly, only to appear non-discriminatory (McKinsey & Company, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Organizations will try to save their unethical reputation by creating a short-term solution to appear culturally diverse such as launching a marketing campaign that does not fit their core values (Mears, 2010; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

The lacking representation of POC has resulted in racist ideologies toward POC and how individuals from different ethnicities have an unfair image of what is seen as beautiful (Yan & Bissell, 2014). McDowell (2019) explains that this issue has a societal impact and is seen in the norms and values of today's culture. Moreover, lacking cultural representation within board rooms such as editors-in-chief or positions of power within fashion can discourage future POC to pursue the same career path (Roberts et al., 2020). The lack of cultural diversity and representation is thus a profound issue and deserves to be explored further.

Though various academic studies have been conducted on cultural diversity, representation, and inequality within the fashion industry (Unzueta & Bining, 2012; Van Horne, 2021), less attention has been paid to the perception of the fashion journalists on this issue. As fashion journalists can be considered an expert in their field and have the ability to look critically towards these developments, they can give valuable information on how they perceive the industry at large (Boyd, 2015). In comparison to other actors in the field, such as editors-in-chief or people in power positions, the insights of fashion journalists help shed light on the issue and educate those in the field of fashion with their experience and knowledge (2015).

Thus, how do fashion journalists perceive the development of POC in the fashion industry? Because cultural diversity within the fashion industry is important, this paper aims to answer the following research question: ‘‘How do fashion journalists perceive cultural diversity in the fashion industry?’’ The fashion industry plays an important role by gratifying the basic criteria of clothing as well as providing economic opportunities through trade and jobs within society (Čiarnienė & Vienažindienė, 2014). Previous research into similar topics of cultural diversity has mainly focused on the developments within the USA. Academic research has underpinned this issue by stating that the industry requires more knowledge on cultural diversity, representation, and inclusion within different assets of an organization (Mckinsey & Company, 2021; Unzueta and Bining, 2012). In addition, little to no research has been conducted on the cultural diversity within The Netherlands as the majority of these researches are content analyses or focused on the perception of the fashion consumer. Therefore, this study aims to fill in the academic gap by exploring the perception of fashion journalists on cultural diversity within The Netherlands.

The research question will be answered through a qualitative research approach where information will be gained through in-depth interviews with fashion journalists in The Netherlands. This method suffices as the goal of the study is to gain insight into the meaning-making process of fashion journalists regarding cultural diversity and representation of POC (Babbie, 2008). The interviews were conducted over the phone by using a topic list. The use of thematic analysis has been applied which presents themes from the data that aid in answering the research question.

Thus, this study contributes to the opportunity for fashion brands to educate themselves on this matter as it is important to consider how this has a significant impact as it affects society’s view of which psychical and cultural qualities are preferable, as well as gaining insights on how cultural diversity is conceptualized by these fashion journalists

(McDowell, 2019). Overall, people working within the fashion industry could benefit from this study as means of understanding the concept of cultural diversity and why it is important in every facet of the industry to solve the issue of racial inequality.

In the next chapter, background information will be provided on previous research on cultural diversity within the fashion industry and the origins of this phenomenon. Furthermore, it will discuss how racial inequality within the industry plays a role in how cultural diversity is represented and how the efforts made by organizations to become culturally diverse have presented some problematic issues such as tokenism, cultural appropriation, and woke washing. Moreover, the methods used will be discussed and explained. Finally, the results of the research are presented according to the theoretical framework of cultural diversity and representation of POC.

2. Theoretical Framework

To understand the nature of the study, this section will provide a theoretical framework by explaining the theory as the base of the study. First, the fashion industry and its influences will be discussed. Second, racial inequality within the fashion industry will be explained and how that has evolved over the years. Third, cultural appropriation and tokenism will be discussed, and how the media plays a role in this. Fourth, the representation of POC will be analyzed within the fashion industry. Fifth, the efforts of fashion brands will be explained by the theory of brand activism. Lastly, the role of the journalist within the debate on cultural diversity in the fashion industry will be clarified.

2.1 The Fashion Industry and Cultural Identity

The fashion industry is an umbrella term defining both the luxury fashion industry and the fast fashion industry and consists of many other industries such as the media, fashion retailers, and fashion designers (Bick et al, 2018). These industries combined can also be referred to as the ‘‘fashion system’’ which embodies the business and art side of fashion including the production aspect as well as the consumption aspect (Čiarnienė & Vienažindienė, 2014). To describe it more abstract, Čiarnienė & Vienažindienė (2014) explains that it consists of ‘‘ the design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, retailing, advertising, and promotion of all types of apparel’’ (p. 63-63) from fast fashion as well as luxury fashion. And although this is a more abstract way of describing the industry, fashion itself is open to interpretation – i.e., piece of clothing, cultural identity – to describe the industry (Evans & Minna, 1991). It is important to note that the sociological aspect of fashion will be used in this study to create meaning and understand how cultural diversity has now played a more prominent role within the industry.

In a more social context, fashion reflects the changes and developments in economic, cultural, political, and societal areas. For example, Čiarnienė & Vienažindienė (2014) continue that these developments of society are incorporated in the designing process of fashion designers such as making sneakers for leisure activities rather than for athletic purposes. Fashion is therefore also utilized to express one’s identity and the expression of one’s culture (Pozzo, 2020). Fashion can therefore be seen as a form of identity in different areas such as religion, culture, and social class (Pozzo, 2020). This link between clothing and identity is an extensively recognized theme within fashion studies and has been interpreted in different ways, according to Twigg (2009). The most prevalent perspective is one of social

class, in which sociologists Veblen and Simmel have scrutinized how clothing has shaped the class identity of an individual and how lower social groups have taken inspiration from the elites who have adopted the fashion style in the first place (Twigg, 2009). Rafferty (2011) underpins this issue by explaining that Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of the role of clothing within a working class shows how fashion is an element of cultural goods and is established by the elites. The elites shaping, maintaining, and reproducing this establishment in society show the reinforcement of dominance and subordination within a society (Rafferty, 2011). The reason why this is worth mentioning is that this class distinction of fashion still exists today – i.e., the luxury fashion industry versus fast fashion industry – and therefore is the most preferred theories when it comes to social relations in regards to fashion, this is “because of its consistency with how social relations occur in advanced capitalist societies today.” (Rafferty, 2011, p. 242). In regards to cultural diversity and the representation of POC in the fashion industry, this theory implies that the elites have a certain influence on what is considered fashion. Therefore, it can be assumed that the luxury fashion industry opposed to the fast fashion industry sets the tone on how cultural diversity is represented within this industry as they to a certain extent decide what is represented in fashion. This could also be applied to the individuals who work within the luxury fashion industry that are responsible for the marketing, and human resource management of a fashion brand as stated by Entwistle & Agnès (2006). For example, the research by Entwistle & Agnès (2006) explains this theory by using London Fashion Week. This is one of the key events within the fashion industry in which it shows how these individuals represent themselves within the field of fashion and being the “subject and object of the gaze of others” (Entwistle & Agnès, 2006, p. 749). Thus, implying that these key players within the field are the ones that are responsible for the representation within fashion.

However, even though the aforementioned patterns are still present, recently this dominance of the elite has been contested with the rise of street styles in which other elements of cultural identity have been highlighted (Twigg, 2009), such as the hip-hop culture from which street style has evolved – i.e. baggy jeans, casual sneaker wear, and hoodies (Moreno, 2020). Another perspective to look at fashion is the way fashion presents a linguistic code as means of conveying a message with their outfit. This perspective helps to understand the angle it will take to tackle the research question and provides a theory on how the fashion industry is constructed from various points of view. According to Davis (1992), meanings cannot be fixed and therefore argues that fashion should be regarded as an aesthetic rather

than a common ode. As in various other cultural goods, meanings are open to different interpretations and uncertainty (Twigg, 2009).

The last perspective on fashion is that fashion is theorized within a sub-group where fashion is seen as characterizing a particular culture group i.e., the streetwear culture, sneaker culture, or the Harajuku culture. This explains how fashion represents different cultures and sub-cultures and therefore it is vital to understand that the cultural aspect of fashion can be translated to more than just clothing customs but also to the way people from those cultures operate (Tajuddin, 2018). This relates to the research question of exploring the cultural diversity within fashion. Twigg (2009) explains that this gives a sense of belonging because of how the clothing identifies itself with the group, he continues that these perspectives mostly apply to ‘youth culture, street styles, and transgressive, countercultural modes;’ and ‘are rarely applied to conventional or dominant groups;’ (p. 4). To exemplify this theory, Kanye West– an African-American rapper and hip-hop artist – has influenced the way streetwear is perceived (Bug & Dao, 2019). As the hip-hop culture stands for authenticity and staying true to your roots, Kanye has managed to bring this to the fashion industry as a homage to the culture (Digital Editors, 2022). With his long-known friend Virgil Abloh, who has recently lost his battle with cancer, they have managed to introduce streetwear to the luxury fashion industry, making streetwear one of the most profitable elements of the industry (Vogue, 2021; Bug & Dao, 2019). This shows how streetwear – what once was considered to be clothing for the lower social group – has now turned into a luxury where one would spend a vast amount of money for a ‘hoodie’ (Moreno, 2020). Even though this is a triumph for the black community within the US, there still is a lack of cultural diversity and representation within the fashion industry considering the amount of racial inequality that is present (Omar, 2020). In the next paragraph, the notion of racial diversity will be discussed whereas the concept of cultural diversity will be explained.

2.2 Racial Inequality within The Fashion Industry

The fashion industry has long been accused of its racial inequality, underrepresentation of POC, and lack of cultural diversity (Omar, 2020). To uncover whether this lack of cultural diversity is occurring within the industry for the sake of this research, the concept of cultural diversity will be conceptualized. Cultural diversity can be defined as the presence of various cultural groups, in which the representation of various cultures is defined as cultural objects that reflect society and its culture (Salto, n.d.; Hall, 1997). To define a

cultural group is to look at the definition of culture. Culture refers to a way of living and customs such as one's beliefs, norms, and values (Hall, 1997). This presence of various cultural groups has been lacking in the fashion industry as the majority of the runway models were predominantly Caucasian, as well as no person of color has been editor-in-chief of fashion magazines in recent years (McDowell, 2019). This does not only show that cultural groups are unequally represented in the industry, it similarly shows that the racial aspect plays a role here as POC are underrepresented (McDowell, 2019). This racial aspect is constructed as an individual that is geographically separated from other individuals that develop distinctive physical characteristics, such as having a different skin color (Shepherd et al., 2018). This unequal representation of POC within a system such as the fashion industry can be referred to as racial inequality.

Racial inequality is defined by Matthew (2017) as a rather complex concept, containing the concepts of racism and racial discrimination. Matthew (2017) explains that racial inequality is the presence of an unequal proportion between different racial groups. This can be seen in several justice systems within society for example the social justice system and the criminal justice system (Matthew, 2017). As Matthew (2017) has argued earlier, racial inequality cannot exist without racism. This form of racism within a societal system can be defined as structural racism (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004). Structural racism is a system that normalizes and legitimizes the favored treatment of Caucasians at the expense of POC, mainly Black Latinos, Asians, Africans, Arabs, and other oppressed people (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004). This can be seen in inequalities of power, access, opportunities treatment, and policies.

However, the concept of racial inequality is not new to the fashion industry as it dates back to the time of colonialization (Barnard, 2020). At the beginning of the 16th century, the Western European countries wanted to expand their empire by invading the continents of Asia, Africa, and South America, searching for resources and cheap labor to make clothes (Barnard, 2020). These colonial systems from the past relied on slave labor and exploitation to provide the Western states with cotton and other sorts of fabrics to make clothes, building the system around the fashion industry that we know today (Barnard, 2020). Therefore, the fashion industry has inherited this colonial heritage whereas the fast fashion industry continues to evolve around this unfair system by exploiting those in non-Western countries that make the clothes (Bick et al, 2018). Lawrence & Keleher (2004) continues that structural racism is something that is inherited from the past, mainly from colonial times. It encompasses the history of the country, the culture, and the interconnected institutions and

policies that consists of rules and regulations that legitimize the racism that is present (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004). However, in recent years, various fashion brands such as Chanel, Gucci, and H&M have introduced corporate initiatives to make policies to increase cultural diversity (Omar, 2020). For example, by hiring various people from ethnic minority groups and Chanel being the first luxury brand that hired its first Global Head of Diversity and Inclusion (Omar, 2020). However, research by Mckinsey & Company (2021) showed that even though brands are incorporating the aforementioned initiatives which are being acknowledged by the overall employers, POC does not experience this change positively. For instance, the research shows that POC experience judgment by different standards, more minor accessibility to the fashion industry in comparison to their Caucasian employees, and that job opportunities are based on unfair and subjective criteria. These criteria entail recruiters perceiving candidates' socioeconomic status and race as insufficient due to being unconsciously biased (Mckinsey & Company, 2021). Mckinsey & Company (2021) furthermore discusses that these issues of diversity within an organization can be systematic and therefore it is necessary to cooperate between individuals, the company itself, and the industry to become diverse. Thus, structural racism is not a simple cause-effect relationship, but rather a complex and problematic issue that is present within a structural system that is influenced by any form of prejudice, internalized oppression, and privileges, which needs to be acknowledged and acted up upon to have a racially equal organization (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004). Various fashion journalists have claimed that the industry has a long way to go regarding the representation of POC as tokenism, cultural appropriation, and woke washing continue to be present, this will be furthermore discussed in the next sections.

We can therefore conclude that Caucasians do have an advantage within society because of the rules and regulations that exist to favor the whites. And as racial inequality is inherited within the fashion industry, it is seen in many forms within the industry that causes the lack of representation of POC.

2.3 Cultural Appropriation and The Role of New Media

To continue the discussion on racial inequality within the fashion industry, another problem that is prevalent within the industry is the notion of cultural appropriation. In this paragraph, the cultural appropriation will be discussed and exemplified, and how new media makes us rethink this concept.

As fashion is considered to be part of cultural identity as mentioned earlier, many fashion designers have created innovative designs with influences from different ethnic, racial, and cultural groups (Pozzo, 2020). This dates back to the 6th century when the ‘‘roundel-and-pearl’’ motif was created, which is inspired by Asian cultures (Pozzo, 2020). The constant desire of the West to innovate their clothes by incorporating other cultures’ traditional looks led to a discussion about whether this is appropriate or not (Pozzo, 2020). According to Pozzo (2020), this notion of incorporating marginalized and colonized cultures in your designs at the expense of their cultures is referred to as cultural appropriation (CA). The literal meaning of the verb appropriation according to Merriam-Webster (n.d) is ‘‘to take exclusive possession of’’ and ‘‘to take or make use of without authority or right’’. In this case, CA is present when intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from other cultures are used without their permission (Pozzo, 2020).

Rogers (2006) explains that there are four types of appropriation which are ‘‘exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation’’ (p. 475). The first category is ‘‘cultural exchange’’ which can be defined as the mutual and equal exchange between cultures of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies in terms of power. The second category explains the ‘‘cultural dominance’’, which refers to members of a subordinated culture using several aspects of the dominant culture, this in the context of the dominant culture being enforced onto the subordinated culture, including enactment of resistance. The third category is ‘‘cultural exploitation’’ which is the appropriation of aspects of a subordinated culture by the dominant culture without any permission or compensation. The fourth and last category is the ‘‘transculturation’’ which are the cultural aspects that have been created from multiple cultures and are identified as one culture, which can be problematic to track down the originating culture (Rogers, 2006). Thus, cultural appropriation can be considered a rather complex issue as it questions the belief that culture is bounded to a certain area and to what extent appropriation is applicable in this case. To exemplify this theory, Dior launched their Haute Couture collection in 2007 including clothing and make-up which had influences of the Japanese culture (Pozzo, 2020). Vogue Magazine claimed that the ‘‘kimono and geisha make-up’’ has been ‘‘Dior-ified’’ and referred to it as ‘‘brilliant’’ (Mairescu-Murphy, 2021). This can be seen as a form of cultural exploitation, but also as cultural dominance according to Rogers (2006), as it shows signs of imposing a certain culture onto the subordinated group and using their culture in forms of appropriation. However, even though the collection raised some questions about the oversimplification of the culture, Dior did not have to face the consequences of being publicly

boycotted due to it not reaching public awareness as it happened in closed circles (Maiorese-Murphy, 2021). A worthy example of cultural exchange is the aforementioned example of Virgil Abloh paying a homage to the hip-hop culture by introducing streetwear to the luxury industry. He is part of the culture himself and gives back to the subordinated group, referring to Afro-Americans, by creating the ‘‘Post-Modern’’ Scholarship Fund that supports the next generation of Afro-Americans in the fashion industry (Fashion Scholarship Fund, n.d.). The hip-hop culture – originated from the Afro-American community in the Bronx, New York – can be considered transculturation as it consists of cultural elements that have taken their shape in various regions while largely appropriating the hip-hop culture, such as the fetishized blackness in Japan (Cornyetz, 1994) and how it became performative in most European countries (Androutsopoulos & Scholz, 2003).

However, scholars argue that there is an opposite perspective on CA, which explains that it is not about the fact that appropriation is not being accepted and seen as a violation of their culture, but it solely depends on the agreement between the dominant culture and subordinate culture and how society as a group perceives this agreement (Nguyen & Strohl, 2019). This is referred to as ‘‘universal entitlement’’ (p. 982), in which people view CA as means to fortify creativity and diversity and believe it should be seen as a form of cultural expression, rather than being something that needs to be banned, also known as ‘‘universal restrictiveness’’ (p. 982). These arguments show that there is a lack of knowledge about the power imbalance by not taking into account that these cultural aspects are one-sided rather than a give-and-take, as Rogers claims (2006). This is because those in power such as the Wests have taken ownership of those cultures by using and degrading their culture for aesthetic purposes (Maiorese-Murphy, 2021)

New media and globalization have played a role in enforcing the issue of cultural appropriation and have stirred up the discussion more recently (De Felice, 2020). For example, Cordes (2019) addresses this issue by analyzing the outfits that are worn by mainly white American girls who visit the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival (CVMAF) also known as Coachella. Coachella is an annual music and art festival and is known for being a place where the attendees can experiment with different, mostly significant fashion styles (Cordes, 2019). According to Cordes (2019) this ‘‘Coachella’’ look is translated by white American girls by wearing hypersexualized outfits, feathers, headdresses, and beads that symbolize the Native-American culture. The fact that these people are sharing this on social media with pride such as how actress Vanessa Hudgens has proudly shared a picture of her wearing a traditional Indigenous headdress, shows the lack of empathy and knowledge about

the subordinated and marginalized culture (Johnson, 2018). In reaction to these actions, Indigenous and common allies have reacted to these racial and cultural appropriations on social media and have created the hashtag #donttrendonme as a statement to create awareness (Cordes, 2019). Online posting and sharing these forms of stereotypes of the Native-American culture contributes to retaining cultural appropriation if it is being shared by an influential individual on social media. This shows how social media can influence how cultures are perceived.

It can be assumed that the public has become aware and involved in the ethical aspects of fashion (Pozzo, 2020), therefore cultural appropriation is a concept that cannot stay unnoticed when we speak about racial inequality and diversity within the industry. In addition, the media does play a vital role in how culture is perceived in terms of cultural representation and to a certain extent affects the depicted culture negatively if it is being wrongly presented, according to De Felice (2020). In the next paragraph, the representation of POC will be discussed and how influences cultural diversity within the industry.

2.4 Representation of People of Color (POC)

For decades, the Western beauty ideal has been the norm for fashion brands to promote their products as seen on runways and in the media (Omar, 2020). Take for example fashion runways, a study by Cavusoglu & Atik (2019) examines the diversity in which women of color are presented on the runway shows of several brands during New York, London, Milan, and Paris Fashion Week in 2018. This report revealed that a staggering 27.9% of models were women of color. This shows that the industry is known for being predominantly white, whereas POC are rarely represented on the runway or in fashion campaigns and thus making them feel excluded (Omar, 202). Unzueta and Bining (2012) define cultural representation within organizations at a very simple level that refers to several employees of color that are usually in the minority. Stevenson (2021) explains that even though fashion brands made efforts to increase POC on the runway and in their marketing campaigns but lack cultural diversity within their board, with the majority being Caucasian and no equal balance of cultural backgrounds. This gives the perception of diversity without actually becoming diverse. A concept that illustrates this within the world of new media is tokenism. Tokenism is defined as “actions that are the result of pretending to give advantage to those groups in society who are often treated unfairly, to give the appearance of fairness” (Mckinsey&Company, 2021, p. 3). This concept, therefore, reveals a fake image of making an

effort to equally represent all cultures and thus asks to rethink whether or not an organization or institution is culturally diverse enough (Lee, 2020). In the context of the fashion industry, tokenism plays out in which cultural intermediaries – such as fashion designers, casting directors, and magazine producers – want to reach a certain culturally diverse quota, meaning that a certain number of models of color (MOC) will be cast to not look discriminatory (Mears, 2010). López (2020) discusses that fashion brands perceive these efforts as a branding strategy rather than focusing on and resolving the social and political issue of inequality, thus showing a form of “tokenism”. Considering these efforts, the industry still lacks certain knowledge on these cultural identities that need to be explored further (López, 2020).

The decision-making of bookers and clients within the industry also plays a vital role in the representation of POC and it can therefore be assumed that they contribute to keeping the Western beauty ideal alive (Mears, 2010). These standards that these people hold within the industry can be referred to as “the corporate gaze” meaning that it encourages the employees – which in this case the models – to define their bodies as an object which should be pleased by the organization or client (Mears, 2010). According to Mears (2010), the decision-making process of these “cultural intermediaries” (p. 41) is driven by market forces such as conforming to the Western beauty ideal, uncertainty, and authority on which they base their decision on selecting and casting Caucasian models for certain campaigns. This means that these cultural intermediaries purposely do not cast POC for certain campaigns, which results in not recognizing the underlying racism that is present by only selecting certain models because of their ability to create “the look” that conforms to the market (Mears, 2010). Furthermore, along the same lines of the corporate gaze lies another concept called “the white gaze” which is described as the constant need by a white individual to notice the “otherness”, which refers to several characteristics of an individual being alienated by the Western beauty ideal (Wissinger, 2011). It can be assumed that this has resulted in POC being underrepresented within the industry because of the cultural intermediaries underlying racism towards POC. Wissinger (2011) continues that, POC feel pressured to conform their standards to the European ideal or feel the urge to highlight their “otherness” to the white stereotypes of POC. For example, an East-Asian model feels the involuntary pressure to overemphasize her characteristics, such as their “monolid” eyes, dark straight hair, and fair skin tone that conforms to the Western stereotype of Asians (Wissinger, 2011).

It is relevant to understand how the industries’ attitudes towards cultural inequality and underrepresentation in fashion have developed over the years and by what means they

hold themselves accountable for this issue by looking at their actions. The lack of representation of POC to the outside world results in racist ideologies according to Omar (2020). This demonstrates how cultural diversity in fashion influences how society perceives beauty in terms of race. According to Yan & Bissell (2014), scholars have examined the effects of media images on individuals and found that these images of women's beauty standards influence individuals on what is seen as attractive in society. Furthermore, this shows a distorted image of what is seen as beautiful, this too applies to the fashion industry as a whole whereas the industry represents only a limited number of ethnicities and cultures (Yan & Bissell, 2014). As the fashion industry has a major influence on the societal norms and values of what is seen as beautiful, they should be held accountable for shaping and creating cultural diversity within the field.

2.5 Fashion Brands Activism

With the Black Lives Matter movement making a necessary comeback to spark the conversation around racism and racial inequality, the fashion industry felt the need to hold itself accountable to take action (Friedman et al, 2021). Fashion brands immediately took a stand and showed their solidarity by representing POC in their fashion campaigns as a form of brand activism (Friedman et al., 2021). Even though fashion brands are starting to acknowledge their responsibility to change the representation of POC in both their favor, fashion journalists have contested this acknowledgment (Friedman et al., 2021; Hamar, n.d).

According to Vredenburg et al. (2020), brand activism is a marketing strategy for brands to take a political and societal stance in favor of the public. Recently, there has been a demand by consumers for brands to take a sociopolitical stance concerning various issues, think as Black Lives Matter, the LGBTQ community, and the #MeToo movement Mirzaei et al. (2022). With brands taking a sociopolitical stance, consumers are more willing to engage with the brand as they feel it is a sense of authenticity (Vredenburg et al., 2020). For example, in 2018 Nike launched their campaign "Dream Crazy" featuring the NFL player Colin Kaepernick for which they got public backlash as some found the choice of the athlete too controversial (Eyada, 2020). Colin Kaepernick is known for his activism by kneeling before the NFL game during the USA national anthem as a symbol to stand against the police brutality toward African-Americans (Eyada, 2020). With this backlash, the hashtags #nikeboycott and #boycottnike has reached more than a billion views and ranked third and fourth place as the most popular hashtags around the Nike and Colin Kaepernick discussion

(Eyada, 2020). Despite the backlash, Nike's campaign has gone viral and has generated publicity. However, when taking a sociopolitical stance, the motives of the brands are being scrutinized by the consumers and are being examined on whether or not these fit with the norms and values of the brand (Vredenburg et al., 2020). In recent years, consumers have made a shift in expressing their consciousness of social and political discrimination (Mirzaei et al., 2022). Mirzaei et al. (2022) explain that particularly young consumers have shown interest in brands that address social issues and support social movements. The number of consumers is increasing who demand that brands are utilizing their power to put the effort into making a change in society in favor of minorities, such as by creating cultural diversity within the fashion industry (Mirzaei et al., 2022). According to Mirzaei et al. (2022), these consumers express their stance by either boycotting a brand who do not practice what they preach or supporting those who do. As consumers find the authenticity of the brand important, this opens up the discussion about 'woke washing'.

Woke washing is the enactment of inauthentic brand activism of a brand or organization that detaches its activist message from its norms and values with the purpose to mislead consumers which could damage its brand equity and its aspired social change (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Several critics have shared their opinions on the fashion industry's efforts to strive for societal change after the protests around Black Lives Matter (Ishmael, 2022; Alleyne, 2020). Alleyne (2020) explains that during these protests, many fashion brands showed their solidarity by turning to social media and participating in the #BlackoutTuesday initiative, in which black squares were posted to raise awareness about structural racism. Nevertheless, the public felt it was 'too simple' and expected to see sustainable change in the long term. Anna Wintour editor-in-chief at Vogue US who has a major influence in the fashion industry took responsibility for her actions and wrote to CNN: 'I know Vogue has not found enough ways to elevate and give space to Black editors, writers, photographers, designers, and other creators. We have made mistakes too, publishing images or stories that have been hurtful or intolerant,' (Alleyne, 2020, par. 9). Nevertheless, to become culturally diverse and to see change will not be easy as each individual has to put as much effort as far as the industry is willing to change (Ishmael, 2022). But how can this authenticity for change be realized? And what does this look like in regards to cultural diversity?

According to Vredenburg et al. (2020), authentic brand activism can be defined as a 'purpose- and values-driven strategy in which a brand adopts a nonneutral stance on institutionally contested sociopolitical issues, to create social change and marketing success'

(p. 446). The key factors are 1) the brand's drive for purpose and values, 2) addressing the sociopolitical issue(s), 3) the issues(s) addressed being progressive or conservative and 4) the brand's contribution to a positive sociopolitical change via messages and branding (Vredenburg et al., 2020). One example of authentic brand activism is Patagonia – an outdoor clothing brand – which values and supports sustainable business processes (Key et al., 2020). Key et al. (2020) explain that by having a solid brand activism strategy, Patagonia keeps on telling the narrative of creating awareness around the impact of consumerism on the planet. Although the type of ad might vary over time, the narrative stays the same while still being attached to its core values (Key et al., 2020). According to Stevenson (2021), this is what fashion brands lack in their strategy by not staying true to their core value of actually being and becoming diverse. Stevenson (2021) explained that the amount of POC in your marketing campaigns and your narrative has to be aligned with the amount of POC in your board room.

In the context of brand activism and the woke consumer, fashion journalists also play a vital role in the discussion of cultural diversity within the fashion industry.

2.6 The Role of Fashion Journalists

To understand the research, it is vital to understand the role of the journalists and how they play a role in the discussion of cultural diversity within fashion. This paragraph will first discuss what a journalist entails within the industry. Second, what the role of the journalist is within this discussion of cultural diversity, and third, the influence and power of journalists within the industry.

For decades, fashion magazines are known for being the first source to discover what is considered to be fashionable, but due to technological developments and the rise of the internet, digital sources of fashion have started to be the new source of information regarding fashion (Boyd, 2015). Because of this success, fashion bloggers and journalists are now turning to using digital advances to spread their knowledge and ideas regarding fashion which results in gaining more influencing power over their audience (Boyd, 2015). These digital advances entail online social platforms such as Instagram, blogs, and online community groups where they share their information with their readers (Sedeke, 2012). In the current digital age, the definition of a journalist has been the topic of discussion in social and media studies as it raises the question of how these digital journalists identify themselves (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). Perreault & Ferrucci (2020) conclude that the digital shift within the industry has opened up the field for new players which therefore asks long-established media

journalists to reassess their meaning of journalism as well as their practices. Perreault & Ferrucci (2020) explains that the definitions of journalists and bloggers are intertwined and that when referring to bloggers, we speak of those who share their ideas and opinions solely online, whereas journalists do so within print and digital media.

The role of a fashion journalist consists of various responsibilities within the field of fashion. According to Waller (1997), it involves doing research about the developments within fashion – online and offline – and writing about this in either magazines or (online) platforms for news sources. They gather this information through working with several other actors within the field such as fashion stylists, photographers, and designers, and attending fashion productions (Waller, 1997). In comparison to other actors in the field as mentioned earlier, fashion journalists have a clear overview of what is happening within the field and can build a bridge between theory and practice due to their expertise

In addition to sharing their information, these fashion bloggers and journalists also use their platform to spread their political statement that acts as a social resistance against social and political issues within the industry. For example, the various articles on online magazine platforms such as Vogue and ELLE in which fashion journalists speak up about the racial inequality and lack of cultural representation with an urgent request to the industry to make a change (Newbold, 2020). This exemplifies that these social and political statements of fashion journalists are considered crucial and play an important role as they have the power to raise awareness to rethink the industry. This means that digital technologies thus aid the journalists to inform and engage with the public more broadly, examine power relations, and narrate stories that are multi-sided (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). As this study by Perreault & Ferrucci (2020) focuses on redefining the role of a journalist in the digital age, they conclude that because digital technologies are so embedded in today's society, digitalization is no longer seen as a threat but rather something that is part of their job.

Due to digital technologies, it has become easier for new entrants to practice the job. Where once were only established fashion journalists within the fashion industry whose names were linked to well-known titles such as Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, and ELLE and even smaller titles, has now made space for the growing interest of individuals to start a blog without having an affiliation with fashion in the first place (Rocamora, 2011). This however could be considered a positive development for POC who want to enter the fashion journalism industry by making a name for themselves without having to be linked with well-known titles and having to suffice to the unfair criteria by recruiters within this field (Mckinsey & Company, 2021). Nonetheless, this new development has received some criticism from the

established players within the field because these new entrants lack the industry's knowledge, legitimacy, and professional disciplines (Rocamora, 2011). Therefore, those who considered themselves fashion journalists should reassess these three key factors mentioned by Rocamora (2011) to make an impact on the public and keep the authenticity within their texts.

Furthermore, research by Sudha and Sheena (2017) shows that consumers are influenced by fashion journalists and bloggers and are viewed as “the most powerful force in the fashion marketplace.” (p. 18). This can either be directly or indirectly as they channel their opinions via their platforms with a large following and can influence how brands are perceived and experienced by the public (Sudha and Sheena, 2017). In addition, these journalists can start a new trend or movement within the industry by discussing issues that companies prefer not to openly discuss such as sociopolitical issues (Sudha and Sheena, 2017). For example, the Dutch female journalist Janice Deul has created the online platform Diversity Rules (Verpoorten, n.d). As Janice Deul is a person of color herself, she found that this issue of underrepresentation needed to be solved, and has created this platform to called Diversity Rules to create awareness around the topic of diversity within fashion and magazines by giving lectures and presentations about how diversity can be incorporated (Verpoorten, n.d). This shows a journalist’s influence within the industry because it can drive change and awareness of recent issues within the fashion industry.

Therefore, the importance of fashion journalists within the fashion industry should not stay unnoticed as they hold the expertise of the industry and can formulate a thorough opinion on the racial themes that have been mentioned earlier. Thus, they are a valuable sample of the industry to gain insight into how cultural diversity is perceived within the fashion industry.

Overview

This theoretical framework has presented theories on how cultural diversity has developed over the years within the fashion industry and how it has been scrutinized by various scholars. The role of fashion journalists has an important role as they are perceived to be versatile within the field and can be seen as a connector between the industry and the public. In particular, the theory on racial inequality and representation of POC has brought insight into how POC are being disadvantaged within the fashion industry because of the inheritance of colonial policies that has favored Caucasians for over decades. Based on the theory that is reviewed it will aid in answering the main research question of how cultural diversity is perceived by fashion journalists and how it plays out within the fashion industry.

3. Method

To answer the research, question a qualitative research approach is applicable as it aims to explore the meaning of cultural diversity and representation from the perspective of fashion bloggers and journalists. As the goal of this study is to find meaning in cultural diversity from the perspective of a fashion journalist, in-depth interviews will help gather detailed information about their thoughts and ideas about this concept (Babbie, 2008). In comparison to focus groups and surveys, both would risk the validity of the study. A focus group could be challenging as discussions between participants are inevitable, this would present invalid data as participants tend to feel pressured or can feel unsafe to share their opinion (Babbie, 2008). In-depth interviews would give participants a safe space to express their thoughts and ideas (Babbie, 2008). A survey would not be sufficient in this case as the topic of discussion can be controversial which results in not responding truthfully as opposed to in-depth interviews (Babbie, 2008). In addition, researchers opt for a survey if the study is aimed at finding numerical correlations between two variables, which is not applicable to this study (Babbie, 2008).

Firstly, the sampling method will be explained and why the sample suffices within this study. Secondly, the process of gathering data from this sample will be discussed. Thirdly, the theories and concepts are explained and how this has formed the basis for the interviews. Fourthly, the data analysis process will be described. And lastly, ethical considerations and reliability and validity of the study will be discussed.

3.1 Sampling method

The participants are sampled according to the sampling criteria that are created by the researcher, choosing purposive sampling as the method of sampling. The researcher has decided which participants would be sufficient to aid in answering the research question (Babbie, 2008). This method is chosen as it allows to collect sufficient data from a small sample that advocates the representative group of fashion journalists (Babbie (2008) states.

Twelve journalists have participated in this study as it has reached its saturation according to Janssen & Verboord (2021). A journalist in this study is conceptualized as an individual who writes for any given online and/or offline platform to broadcast news to the public (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). The participants were chosen according to the sampling criteria in which they had to meet the characteristics of living in The Netherlands, identifying themselves as a journalist or writer, and being familiar with the fashion industry at large. This

entails participants being able to define the fashion industry as a “fashion system” consisting of various works of discipline (Čiarnienė & Vienažindienė, 2014) and have studied the industry sufficient enough to be able to give their opinion and perspective on cultural diversity and representation within the field of fashion. Creating the sampling criteria minimizes the presence of sampling bias. This occurs when individuals in the sample are underrepresented or not represented equally concerning the actual distribution (Panzeri et al., 2008). This has been prevented by creating a specific definition of the sample as well as the sampling criteria for this study (Panzeri et al., 2008). The sample represents the population of fashion journalists as the responsibilities of the sample and the overall population of fashion journalists is aligned. As the sample consists of predominate females it represents the overall population to some extent as the majority of journalists and/or writers working in fashion are female (Zippia, n.d).

The participants were recruited through fashion rubrics in online and offline magazines by exploring the authors of the written articles about fashion from a societal and political angle – i.e., racism, inequality, and diversity within fashion. As these journalists hold a type of power, gaining access to this specific group is challenging (Pridmore & Dumitricia, 2019). Therefore, the use of the researcher’s social network has been applied to recruit the participants, which makes the group of fashion journalists further accessible (Pridmore & Dumitricia, 2019). Accordingly, an online post was shared on LinkedIn and Instagram to gather potential participants. As the post was shared within a personal network of the researcher, the researcher made sure that there was no direct relationship with the participant to avoid respondent bias (Birt et al., 2016). Because close relatives or friends could threaten the validity of the results (Janssen & Verboord, 2021), exclusively those who did not have a close relationship with the researcher were recruited. In addition, potential participants were being e-mailed or were send a personal message via LinkedIn and/or Instagram.

Because journalists have an extensive network themselves, the use of snowball sampling has been applied to gain further access to these journalists. This means that each participant has been asked to suggest additional journalists for the study, this is a commonly used sampling strategy within qualitative research (Babbie, 2008). Furthermore, Chaim Noy argues that this strategy also aids in revealing additional information about the sample that could be of value for the study, such as how the participants perceive themselves and their willingness to suggest others to the researcher (Babbie, 2008).

As seen in Table 1, four of the twelve participants have stated that they found it important that their ethnicity should not stay unnoticed in their opinion as it has shaped their

perception of cultural diversity in general. Therefore, their ethnicity is presented in the sample, unlike the other participants. Table 1 provided an overview of the details of the participants regarding name, age, ethnicity, and gender.

Table 1 – Sample name, age, gender, and ethnicity

Participant	Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
1	Maddie	25	Female	N/A
2	Laura	35	Female	N/A
3	Amara	34	Female	N/A
4	Aïscha	27	Female	Dutch/Moluccan
5	Rokaya	21	Female	N/A
6	Youssra	21	Female	N/A
7	Genevieve	27	Female	N/A
8	Pim	26	Male	Dutch
9	Mehtap	38	Female	Turkish/Dutch
10	Susan	24	Female	Nigerian
11	Yaten	27	Female	N/A
12	Nahawi	25	Female	Surinamese

3.2 Data collection method

The data is collected through in-depth interviews that have been conducted over the phone. According to Kvale (2007), in-depth interviews are suitable in this case as the purpose is to explore the understanding of the studied population, which are fashion journalists. As opposed to a focus group, this would not be sufficient as the goal is to explore the journalists' perspective (Babbie, 2008). Furthermore, a focus group would limit the participant's freedom to speak out their true feelings and opinion which would endanger the outcome of the study (Kvale, 2007).

The interviews are semi-structured, meaning that the questions have been prepared beforehand to allow more freedom for the participants to express their feelings and emotions at their own pace (Kvale, 2007). In addition, it allows the researcher to rearrange the order of the questions for the sake of the interview and/or to ask any follow-up questions if necessary

(Kvale, 2007). Kvale (2007) states that this provides a natural flow during the interview that will set the participants at ease, which results in gaining valuable information. The topics for the topic guide are derived from the theoretical framework and are constructed according to the concepts of cultural diversity and representation of POC. The topic guide thus aids in providing a solid base for the interview.

Before the interview, the participants have been given their consent to participate in this interview and have been assured of their anonymity and confidentiality of the information that is provided by them. Discussing racial and cultural themes can be considered a sensitive topic of discussion and thus, the participants had the opportunity to do it anonymously or withdraw from the interview at any given time. It should be noted that participants 1 to 3 have indicated that they would like to remain anonymous and are given a pseudonym, whereas participants 4 to 12 have made clear that they would like to be cited by their name (see Table 1). In addition to assuring the overall safety of the participants, the magazines that participants referred to during the interview have been altered to a generic description without mentioning the factual magazine. This has been requested by a few of the participants who agreed on keeping their identity, taking into account that the magazines mentioned are coded. These magazines have been referred to as magazines A, X, Y, and Z (see Table 2).

The interviews lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes and have taken place over the phone as this was seen as the most efficient way, taking into account that these participants live across the country. This would save time and be more practical for both the interviewer and the interviewee. With the participants' consent, each interview has been voice recorded through a software that enables the researcher to record and transcribe the conversation via mobile phone. Protection of the data files is assured as access is only granted by the researcher using a password. After the interview, the data is saved and stored for approximately three months on the researcher's laptop, an external drive and Google Drive, in case any inconveniences in regards to losing the data will occur. After the three months have passed, the data will then be destroyed to preserve the participants' safety and privacy (Janssen & Verboord, 2021).

Table 2 – Description of magazines A, X, Y, and Z

Magazine/platform	Description
Magazine A	International (online) magazine that operates in the Netherlands with a target audience of Gen X which the majority identify themselves as a woman, middle/upper class
Magazine X	International (online) magazine that operates in the Netherlands with a target audience of Young Millennials and Gen Z which mostly identify themselves as a woman, working/middle class
Magazine Y	Dutch (online) magazine with a target audience between the ages of 20 and 49 years old and are predominantly white Dutch women, upper-class
Magazine Z	International (online) magazine that operates in the Netherlands with a target audience of Millennials and Gen X which the majority identify themselves as a woman, middle class

3.3 Operationalization

The main objective of this study is to uncover the perception of fashion journalists on cultural diversity within the fashion industry. The main concepts that will be used for this study are operationalized into a topic list. The main theoretical concepts that will be clarified are cultural diversity, representation of POC and fashion brands activism – this regards the unethical efforts of cultural diversity: woke washing, tokenism, and CA. Firstly, each concept will be briefly described; secondly, an explanation of how these concepts relate to the research question will be provided; and lastly, an example of how these concepts have been conceptualized into the topic list will be presented.

Cultural diversity is the main concept of this study and therefore essential to operationalize. Cultural diversity is a combination of various concepts including race, ethnicity, and nationality, and is commonly associated with a surface-level (i.e., skin tone) and deep-level (i.e., norms and values, race, ethnicity) according to Godfrey et al. (2020). Although race and ethnicity do overlap in their meanings, race involves an individual being associated with their descent and ethnicity to be connected with traditions and cultural

practices (Godfrey et al., 2020). When this variety of cultures is present and understood within the fashion industry, cultural representation becomes a vital element that should not stay unnoticed. Thus, the second concept that is operationalized is the representation of POC. Representation of POC or cultural representation is defined according to the theory by Stuart Hall (1997) in which cultural representation is seen in cultural objects that reflect society and its culture, whereas cultural objects refer to POC that are represented for example in fashion magazines, social media, and tv. While consumers' skepticism toward fashion brands that claim to be culturally diverse is increasing, it is important to understand how fashion brands are executing their activism. Therefore, the last concept that is conceptualized is fashion brand activism, which is a form of a branding strategy in which brands or organizations take a political and/or societal standpoint in favor of the public, in this case creating cultural diversity (Vredenburg et al, 2019). According to the theoretical framework, this unethical approach presents itself as woke washing, tokenism, and CA (López, 2020; Mirzai et al., 2022; Pozzo, 2020).

Each concept has been operationalized into a topic list (see Appendix A) that aids in conducting the interviews. The goal of the interviews is to get an understanding of how fashion journalists conceptualize and perceive cultural diversity within the fashion industry, regarding the representation of POC and fashion brand activism. These concepts are the basis of the interview that has formed a semi-structured topic list. Appendix A shows how these topics were formed into interview questions that cover the main concepts of cultural diversity, representation of POC, and fashion brand activism. As cultural diversity and representation of POC are closely related to each other and do influence one another, both these concepts have been merged into one overall concept of cultural diversity as seen in the topic list. It is important to mention that regarding the interconnectedness and relations of the topics of discussion, a clear categorization of the questions was not always achievable as it has caused an overlap between the topics. In addition, in the case of asking follow-up questions based on the answers of the participants, the interview occasionally shifted from one topic to another topic which made the categorization of the topics even more challenging.

As the interview questions were created to answer the main research question, the topic list has formed a conceptual structure that has emerged from the theoretical framework. The participants were introduced to the study through a social media post that called for participants who would like to discuss cultural diversity within the fashion industry as well as by approaching fashion journalists via an online message. To eliminate possible bias towards the topic among the participants, the topic of discussion was solely communicated as cultural

diversity within the fashion industry and not per se the lack thereof, as the academic theory claimed. As it was expected that the participants might not be familiar with the aforementioned main concepts, the definition of these concepts was furthermore explained during the interview. The goal of the interview is to understand the perception of fashion journalists on cultural diversity and therefore the definition of cultural diversity has not been provided. Merely real-life examples of this concept were given to be able to answer the questions.

The interview started with general questions and icebreakers to both introduce ourselves. The questions involved topics about their interest in fashion journalism, their studies, and the city they live in. Some of these questions have been recorded and are included in the transcripts. As the interviews were conducted over the phone, it can be challenging to paint a clear picture of both the interviewee and interviewer as no body language can be observed. However, after building rapport with the participants, the conversation started to naturally flow into the topics of discussion in which the participants were feeling comfortable enough to share their thoughts. Although the focus was put on the current developments of cultural diversity within the fashion industry, it was important to gain insight into how the participants wanted to see cultural diversity in the future. This was aimed to explore whether or not the perception of cultural diversity was positive or negative to which the participants could give their opinion on how this phenomenon should develop in the future. Therefore, the future of cultural diversity within fashion is discussed at the end of the interview to bring all the topics of discussion together and close the interview.

The topic list has proven to be of value during the data collection as it helped the participants to share their thoughts and ideas, without being off-topic. Although the topic list has been applied to each participant, each conversation was unique, which was mainly due to the participants' cultural backgrounds which made it even more interesting.

3.4 Data analysis method

Each interview has been manually transcribed and analyzed based on the recordings. To analyze the transcripts, a thematic analysis has been used. Thematic analysis usually opts as a primary choice when analyzing large data sets within qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis has helped identify certain themes and patterns from the data to provide a solid framework to report the findings and answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The emphasis here is put on the meaning-making process of the fashion

journalists, rather than on simply summarizing the data (Braun & Clarke, 2017). The advantage of thematic analysis is that it is flexible and accessible because of the two-stage reviewing process whereas the initial codes and themes that flow out of the data have been reread and adapted to a more fitting theme that could answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, this flexibility can cause inconsistency and lack of cohesion when creating themes, therefore the researcher made sure that each theme was made mutually exclusive in order to categorize the subcodes under the corresponding main category (Nowell et al., 2017). To do so, the claims that are made lay solely on the theoretical framework to increase validity and reliability.

The data has been analyzed according to the toolbox that is provided by Braun and Clarke (2017). First, general ideas and assumptions have been noted during the first analysis. This is done so the researcher could fully immerse in the data and get an overall idea of the data presented. Second, the data has then been coded into single codes. Third, the initial codes that are made are revised whereas the new codes and single codes have been combined, which results in broad categories that form the basis of the final themes. The fourth and final step is reviewing and adapting the initial themes into a more clarified definition. Within this stage, attention has been paid to highlighting the nuances, possible contradictions, and differences within themes are prevented (Pridmore & Dumitricia, 2019). In this stage, the themes have been made mutually exclusive to ensure the research's reliability in form of a coding tree (see Appendix B).

Although this type of data analysis is commonly used, it has the potential to overlook key elements of data because of its minimal presence within the dataset. The researcher has therefore made thorough decisions by looking back at the theory and deciding whether this element of data is important to consider mentioning.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Although the research topic on the surface might not appear as harmful or sensitive because of the recent open discussions on cultural diversity and representation, the ethics of this study has been considered to assure the participants' safety and privacy. As mentioned earlier, the researcher has made clear to the participants what the role of the researcher is and that the data is used for academic purposes only (Janssen & Verboord, 2021). To confirm the participants' safety and anonymity, both the researcher and the participant have agreed either

verbally or via online messaging – such as e-mail, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, or Instagram – on treating the provided data as confidential and will only be used for academic purposes.

3.6 Reliability and validity

To assess the strengths and weaknesses of this research, the validity and reliability will be discussed. Validity refers to whether the topic list is sufficient and accurate enough to measure what is intended to measure and reliability is the consistency of the measurements within the topic list.

The validity of this study is ensured as the data is collected from academic literature as well as a topic list that is built on existing theory in which each question is precisely worded (Babbie, 2008). To produce valid generalizable data, the population that is being researched has been clearly defined. In total, twelve fashion journalists have participated in this study and are considered to be sufficient to be a representative sample of the population according to Janssen & Verboord (2021). A threat that has to be taken into account when ensuring validity is the presence of researcher bias, which is the influence of the researcher's knowledge and judgments (Babbie, 2008). In addition, discussing a sensitive topic like cultural diversity can present respondent bias in which some respondents might feel they cannot provide truthful answers because they want to give responses that are perceived preferable to the researcher (Dumitricia & Pridmore, 2019). To combat this issue, member checking has been applied throughout the process in which the findings of the interviews are tested with the participants (Birt et al., 2016). This has been done by verifying interpretations and findings throughout the interview or by seeking contact after the themes have emerged from the analysis (Birt et al., 2016).

Moreover, reliability is achieved when there is a stability of responses to multiple measurements within the data set. Therefore, each participant has been asked the same set of questions based on the topic list whereas each interview has been audio-recorded and transcribed. To increase the trustworthiness of the research, the researcher has established rapport with the participants by creating a safe space for participants in the context of the interview that supports their willingness to share and elaborate on their thoughts and ideas (Dumitricia & Pridmore, 2019). This involved the researcher being an active listener, showing genuine interest, and respecting their privacy if they did not want to answer particular questions (Dumitricia & Pridmore, 2019).

4. Results

In the interviews with the journalists, several patterns and recurring themes emerged from the thematic analysis. It shows that they perceive cultural diversity concerning the representation of POC as an ongoing challenge they feel responsible to work for and that this perception can be interpreted in different ways. In addition, they explain how cultural diversity can be achieved and what the future of fashion should look like concerning diversity.

The themes that have been identified are 1) lack of cultural diversity as an institutionalized issue, 2) cultural diversity as a personal experience, 3) cultural diversity as performative, 4) cultural diversity as a priority, and 5) cultural diversity and its reciprocity. Each of the main themes is divided into subthemes that will be further discussed in each chapter.

Additionally, the journalists have mentioned in their interviews that they describe these issues regarding cultural diversity as rather challenging and do evoke mixed feelings as some of the wrongful ways of creating diversity can create various opportunities for POC. It is important to mention that some of these journalists were POC themselves and felt that their cultural background plays a role in how they perceive cultural diversity within the field of fashion. Therefore, this should be taken into account to get a comprehensive view of how diversity is perceived by these journalists.

4.1 Lack of cultural diversity as an institutionalized issue

The first theme discusses the findings regarding the perception that fashion journalists see a lack of cultural diversity within the fashion industry. They explain that this lack of cultural diversity is the result of racial inequality that is embedded within a structural system of everyday practices and customs that is accepted within society. Therefore, the developments regarding the lack of cultural diversity can be seen as an institutionalized issue. This theme is divided into several subthemes whereas each subtheme discusses a structural boundary that POC face in the discussion of cultural diversity.

4.1.1 Organizational structure

The participants were asked how they would describe the concept of cultural diversity. The majority of the participants have responded synonymously. In general, cultural diversity

has been defined as the presence of various individuals regardless of race, gender, and ethnicity in which people are being fairly treated. For example, Mehtap (38, woman) explains: “diversity to me is diversity from all sorts of people. As well as ethnicity to gender...so not only gender or race or ethnicity but also in sizes, in all shapes and sizes.” To link this with the theory, cultural diversity is defined by Godfrey et al. (2020) as a combination of various elements including race, ethnicity, and nationality which makes the concept of culture rather challenging within this discussion. As Godfrey et al. (2020) continue, there are several layers to this concept which are the cultural elements of norms and values (i.e., traditional customs) and what is seen on the surface (i.e., skin tone and other physical characteristics). Therefore, defining the concept of cultural diversity can vary per individual but does not inherently change its core meaning.

As cultural diversity has been defined, the participants were asked how they perceive cultural diversity within an organizational structure. Six of the twelve participants noticed an unequal variety of POC and non-POC on the work floor. Maddie (25, female) exemplifies this: “...when I started at the editorial office, there were predominantly white people, no POC”. Maddie (25, female) expressed her astonishment and explained why this was the case with most fashion magazines in the Netherlands, she continues: “...these magazines work with a permanent team, and I think it is hard to throw those out and instead hire diverse individuals instead.”

Furthermore, the participants agreed that the people in boardrooms are the most influential as they do have more power to create cultural diversity. As those people within the boardrooms are predominantly white, organizational decisions will be made from a non-POC perspective. Mehtap (38, female) argues: “It is not diverse on the top layer of many companies. So, the decisions are ultimately made by white people, so to say.” The participants consider this one of the main issues within the industry and have to do with giving unfair opportunities to POC to enter these power positions, which will be discussed in the next subtheme.

As cultural diversity is defined as the presence of various cultural groups (Salto, n.d.; Hall, 1997), this is something that the industry is lacking according to the results. The results have confirmed the observations by Omar (2020) in which POC are still underrepresented in the fashion industry and the lacking cultural diversity on an organizational level.

4.1.2 Unequal opportunities for POC

After the participants touched upon the lack of cultural representation and diversity within a team, they continued by explaining why this is the case in many fashion organizations. The majority of the participants believed that POC are treated unfairly when entering the fashion industry and therefore do not have equal opportunities as non-POC. Six out of twelve respondents agree that the organizations should give POC more opportunities to apply for certain jobs within fashion. To do so, participants argued that there are several causes why there is still an unequal balance in opportunities for POC as opposed to non-POC. As the participants do not have insights into the actual data around the recruiting process – concerning policies and regulations – they do believe that an underlying bias plays a role in the recruitment process.

Susan (25, female) states that people within an organization hire people that look like them, which results in an environment that the person in question envisions for that organization. Quoting Susan (25, female): “...there are studies that say people just hire one of the other because they look alike. Those people find it much more interesting if they resemble you.” For example, Pim (25, male) says: “ So yes, if there is already a white person in the boardroom, there is a good chance that they will hire a white person.” Assuming this issue, these candidates will be hired and eventually will consist of an organization that is predominantly white/non-POC. This is in line with the theory Unzueta and Bining (2012) present in which the recruitment process in fashion organizations is designed to favor non-POC.

In addition, this also applies to POC who have been given the opportunity to work in fashion. She exemplifies this with the following: “So can you imagine that it all starts with one person who looks different, different than white and blonde and skinny, you know?” (Susan, 25, female). Susan (25, female) suggests it all starts with giving opportunities to POC that can make a difference to create diversity. Mehtap (35, female) explains that these opportunities can only be given if those non-POC are aware of their underlying bias: “But then we have to become more aware that it already goes wrong at the beginning, at the very beginning”. Implying that it all starts from the core of the company to create awareness. Whether it comes from personal interest or the board.

These results contribute to a clearer understanding of how the underlying bias is one of the unfair criteria fashion organizations hold when recruiting POC, according to Mckinsey & Company (2021). Stated by Mckinsey & Company (2021), the majority of the recruiters perceive POC as insufficient as they believe that the socioeconomic status and ethnicity of

POC will influence their ability to work and therefore giving unequal access to the industry. In addition, it is part of structural racism which is conceptualized by Lawrence & Keleher (2007) as a system that justifies favored treatment of white/non-POC at the expense of POC (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004). This perception is part of recruiters' underlying bias that they are not aware of and as a result will be maintained as an institutionalized issue.

4.1.3 Commercial purposes

Maddie (25, female) previously mentioned that it can be a challenge to hire POC to create diversity as organizations usually work with a fixed team. This is because they rather work with individuals who are well-known within the fashion industry, have already made a name for themselves, and have sufficient work experience. This makes it extra efficient for the organization if well-known individuals work on these jobs as it delivers more profit as stated by Maddie (25, female): “Big organizations always use this for commercial marketing, of course, because it generates a lot of money.” The struggle with this fixed team is that it consists of mostly white/non-POC. Maddie (25, female) continues that fashion magazines claim that talented POC do not exist or that hiring POC who are not well-known will risk the profitability of the content that will be produced. While previous research has focused on the unfair criteria for hiring POC, these results demonstrate that there is a lacking effort and motivation in searching for qualified POC and that hiring POC is considered to be a risk.

Seven out of twelve participants believe that the reason why some organizations are not culturally diverse – on an organizational level as well as how they are represented in the media – is because organizations do not want to be at risk of losing their target group. The results have shown that the wants and needs of the target group are at the center of their business proposition and therefore believe that every action they take should be in favor of the target group. For example, Rokaya (21, female) explains that in the case of fashion magazines if your target audience is predominantly white, the fashion magazines believe that cultural diversity within their content and within their organization will not be considered important for this target audience. This is because they do not familiarize themselves with them and will therefore not buy this specific magazine.

These results therefore indicate that to be culturally diverse is to be considering all the economic and commercial effects on the organization. These results should be taken into account when considering the lack of diversity within the organization as mentioned by Lawrence & Keleher (2004).

4.2 Cultural diversity as a personal experience

The second theme discusses racial inequality within a personal sphere and to what extent this plays a role in creating cultural diversity within the fashion industry. The fashion journalists spoke about how cultural diversity has played a role in their own personal lives and how they consider that personal experiences do affect the way cultural diversity is considered to be important or not. This theme consists of three subthemes, namely cultural diversity being considered as a driving force, yet burden for POC; how a personal circle influences the perspective on cultural diversity; and the influences of upbringing and own cultural background.

4.2.1 *Driving force vs. burden*

The participants were asked to what extent they have experienced cultural diversity and whether or not they considered it important in their personal lives and their work field. The data shows two opposing themes. The participants felt like cultural diversity is important within their everyday lives and therefore considered it to be their driving force within their work field as a journalist. Yaten (28, female) explains that because she is a woman of color and finds cultural diversity important, she has taken on the role of an activist by sharing her knowledge with the world through social media. Cultural diversity is thus considered to be a driving force in her work field. However, they do also feel that they are pressured to do so because that is what is expected from them.

For example, one participant explained that she does find cultural diversity important, but that she sometimes feels pressured to write culturally diverse content because she is a person of color. Nahawi (25, female) is a person of color herself and has worked as a freelance writer for several Dutch fashion magazines and is currently doing a master's in Journalism. She feels the responsibility is exclusively given to POC to generate culturally diverse content, as it is being assumed that she – as a person of color – has more knowledge about cultural themes than white, non-POC: ‘I often find it disappointing that people of color are suddenly given the responsibility, especially if they are the only ones to deal with those things.’ She, therefore, gets the impression that she is only hired to be responsible for creating that cultural diversity while in fact, she believed that POC should not carry that burden and should also get the freedom to write about other things. ‘I would feel insulted because that is not on my to-do list at all? I have other things to do. Maybe, I just want to

write about the weather? Maybe I just want to write about a restaurant I visited yesterday that was great?” (Nahawi, 25, female)

This pressure is significantly more present with journalists of color than with non-POC/white journalists. For example, Pim (26, male) explained that even though he might not be a person of color, he is consistently trying to do his part in creating cultural diversity. He does not feel pressured in creating that cultural diversity but rather wants to because he finds it important. Pim (26, male) gives an example of how he can contribute to a culturally diverse organization: “... I make sure I interview people who normally wouldn't be able to get those kinds of interviews. Because they don't have those connections. And that's what I mean by making your team diverse.” He shows that he is in a position to do so and feels like he can, and not because it is demanded of him.

These results have presented a different insight into how fashion journalists go around their work regarding cultural diversity. Thus, the data confirm that journalists do have an impact on creating cultural diversity within the fashion industry, as it is being expected from journalists that they hold this responsibility (Newbold, 2020).

4.2.2 Personal circle

Three of the twelve participants have provided new insight regarding the unfair representation of POC within an organization (Mckinsey & Company, 2021). The data shows that your personal circle is from influence when considering cultural diversity important or necessary and thus shapes the way you perceive this concept.

As Aïscha (27, female) states: “...I think there really is a difference whether you live in the province or you live in the city, so to say”. Meaning that if an individual would live in a city with no people of color and/or have never had any POC in their environment, it can play a significant role in how cultural diversity is perceived and whether or not it is seen as an important matter. Rokaya (21, female) continues and explains that if a person has never experienced anything outside their bubble consisting of only one particular culture, they will not understand the concept of cultural diversity, because they have never experienced it within their circle. In this case, she refers to people living in Amsterdam who have a fairly white personal circle of friends. Rokaya (21, female) states: “So those stories outside Amsterdam, they are not heard. For example, the circles that they are in are not those circles, so they don't get involved with that”. She concludes that if those people or not aware of the stories and the disadvantages that POC face within the industry, they cannot be held accountable for it.

Additionally, it can be suggested that cultural diversity is something that is close to your norms and values and must come from your own experiences and personal motivation to be sincere. This cannot be created if it has to be forced upon you through established policies such as, for example, these POC quotas and diversity training as Nahawi (25, female) mentions: “I don’t know if people would come to these diversity training and to what extent they are there because they are open to it or just because they have to be there.” (Nahawi, 26, female).

The data shows that lack of knowledge and personal experience with cultural diversity plays a role in how cultural diversity can be or should be executed within organizations. In addition, it shows that cultural diversity is therefore not a significant element within personal circles. Previous research has focused on the perspective from a structural system in which structural racism is present (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004), but these results demonstrate a perspective from a more personal level in which an individual’s experiences should be taken into account when discussing the lack of cultural diversity.

4.2.3 Upbringing and cultural background

Three of the twelve respondents assume that the lack of cultural diversity in fashion is partly due to the upbringing of an individual and the personal circle they find themselves in. For example, Laura (35, female) argues that within several cultures, POC at a young age are being told that they should pursue a career path other than fashion as it is perceived as an uncertain industry. Thus, are obliged to work within an industry that is stable and generates a steady income to become successful in their eyes: “Suppose you are a very smart or a creative Turkish girl in the Netherlands. Then your parents really wouldn't tell you to become a tailor. Because that industry is not highly regarded there [in Turkey]. So then, why would you do that? So, it's part of social security. Which is missing in the fashion industry. Which also makes it quite privileged to start there.” (Laura, 35, female). The encouragement of pursuing a career in fashion within certain households – mainly from households of POC – is rarely present and thus POC do not even challenge themselves to apply for these types of studies. This results in POC not having the diploma that is required to work within the industry such as fashion brands and magazines. Therefore, it can be considered a privilege for non-POC to enter this industry as the system is made to favor white individuals and have less challenging access to the industry.

The results show that your personal experiences play a role in why some individuals with a cultural background other than Western/white, are not present within the industry

because of the limited or forbidden access to the education that is needed to enter this industry. This has to be taken into account when mentioning the unfair criteria that are presented by Mckinsey & Company (2021).

4.3 Cultural diversity as performative

The third theme describes the attempts of various fashion organizations to be culturally diverse and to equally represent POC. However, this does not go as righteous as organizations claim to do according to the fashion journalists. The participants consider the attempts of fashion organizations to be performative rather than sincerely wanting to be culturally diverse. The first subtheme discusses how this performativity plays out in the field of fashion and how it is defined, the second subtheme explains why this is considered to be not righteous and offensive, and the third subtheme clarifies what the fashion journalists would describe as a sincere attempt at creating cultural diversity within fashion organizations.

4.3.1 Performativity

The term ‘performative’ has appeared in two of the twelve participants’ interviews when asked why organizations are using tokenism and woke washing as a strategy to become culturally diverse. One participant expressed her doubts by saying that she questions the organization’s efforts regarding cultural diversity. Youssra (21, female) said: “Okay, suppose a Nella and an Arantxa [a queer bi-racial couple from the Netherlands] were kissing on a cover of Vogue and if it wasn't at all...the content wasn't diverse at all. Yes, then I would have seen that as tokenism”. In this example, she explains that if fashion magazines would put POC on the cover of a magazine and she would notice that the content within the magazine is not culturally diverse, she would have perceived it as tokenism.

One participant gave the example of a magazine she worked for and mentioned that she had the feeling she was hired because of her ethnicity and her cultural knowledge which could benefit the company in appearing diverse. Rokaya (21, female) explained this situation as she was hired for magazine Y which had a predominantly white team and appeared to be one of the only POC within this team. Thus, she questioned the company's integrity: “I have been there. I have often felt bad. And that it was just... because that contrast was so prevalent. I just don't believe it, that it's completely integer that, I just can't believe that.” She compares it to magazine X where she is now employed and explains the difference: “While, now that I'm at magazine X, I see that things can be done very differently and that there is more

freedom.” She feels that she should be hired because of her work qualities, not only because of her cultural appearance and background.

This data provides new insight into the relationship between fashion journalists and the performativity within the industry. The results indicate a correlation between the theory by Entwistle & Agnès (2006) on POC conforming to the corporate gaze in which the person is perceived as “a subject or object of the gaze of others” (p. 749) by non-POC. This can therefore evoke the feeling of tokenism and woke washing because the organization itself is predominantly white (Stevenson, 2021).

4.3.2 Public opinion

When the participants were asked why cultural diversity within the fashion industry is subsequently performative, they believed it to be some sort of damage control whereas organizations fear backlash from the public. This rather makes it a complex issue as mentioned earlier, that fashion magazines see cultural diversity as a risk. The data suggests that this performativity is seen as a quick fix, as organizations do not feel motivated to do the underlying work from the core. This will be touched upon in the next subtheme

Rokaya (21, female) explains: “Because it's not necessarily saying that people of color can't bring more money or the idea of wanting more people of color in their magazine, but it's more like ‘oh no, otherwise we will burn at the stake and that's not what we want.’” This goes in line with the theory by Mirzaei et al. (2022), stating that consumers are becoming more conscious of the disadvantages of POC and therefore demand that companies use their power to change this to a certain extent. Likewise, organizations exclusively use POC for their cultural appearances and characteristics to appear diverse. It implies that in some cases, organizations do not necessarily look at the skills and qualities of the person but rather look at them as a tool to save the image of the organization to look diverse as this seems important among the target audience.

Thus, the results indicate that when companies are using POC for their business strategy, it is more so out of fear of the public’s opinion that would influence the brand’s equity. These results confirm the theory of Stevenson (2021) in which fashion brands lack truthfulness in their strategy of not staying close to their core value. Implying that fashion brands put the focus on appearing culturally diverse without acknowledging the real issue. This is that these efforts of fashion brands are merely a short-term solution to an inherited structural racist system that disadvantages POC in terms of their qualities and skills (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004).

4.3.3 Sincere attempts

As the participants believe that everything that is being presented to the public starts from within the organization, the participants will provide their views on how it can be done differently within an organization. This theme argues what needs to be changed within an organization to create cultural diversity that is sincere.

The participants were asked when an organization is considered to be sincerely diverse and the results show that it is a compilation of various actions which can make an organization culturally diverse. In addition, the participants feel the state of mind of an individual towards working with POC, plays a role in the way cultural diversity is being executed within a company. All the participants agreed that there is no simple answer to whether an organization is fully sincerely diverse, but gave a few examples of role models they consider to be sincerely culturally diverse. For example, Maddie (26, female) explains that in her experience she has worked with a photographer who was a person of color. The photographer has shot a series of pictures for a fashion magazine by whom he was asked to be interviewed. He demanded that he only wanted to be interviewed if the person doing the interview is a person of color. This is an example of how Maddie (26, female) believes that organizations have to go around their work by being culturally diverse as it supports the representation of POC. This is because it is perceived as important for the individual – in this case, the photographer – and therefore Maddie (26, female) feels that this should be a common practice within the industry.

The participants expressed their feelings by saying that they want to see a fair presentation of POC within the organization, but also that the people are hired because of their qualities and not necessarily because of the way they look. In the case of project-based jobs, POC should be hired because it fits the actual project not because it is about hiring another POC to appear diverse. To conclude, an organization has to be whom they claim to be.

This goes in line with the theory of authentic brand activism according to Key et al. (2020) which explains that if the core values of the company match the business processes it would be considered authentic. The results that were presented show a correlation between the perception of the journalists and the theory by Key et al. (2020).

4.4 Cultural diversity as a priority

The fourth theme that emerged from the data is the discussion of whether cultural diversity is considered to be important within the industry. The majority of fashion journalists agree that cultural diversity is the norm as the fashion industry should be a reflection of society. They find it important that each individual has a sense of recognition in regards to fashion organizations – whether that be within an organization or what is seen in the media – in terms of cultural backgrounds.

However, the participants mention that they realize that cultural diversity does not always fit within every business strategy. They explain that even though cultural diversity is in general important to see in the industry, they do understand that those fashion organizations have a homogeneous target group, which generally consists of predominantly non-POC. The participants believe it is thus not necessary to integrate cultural diversity within such an organization as it will not appeal to the target group.

First, the reflection of society will be discussed and why cultural diversity should be a priority; second, the representation of POC and how it plays a role in how one perceives oneself; and third, the discussion of prioritizing cultural diversity will be explained.

4.4.1 Reflection of society

When the participants were asked why cultural diversity should be a priority within the fashion industry, they believed that it should be a reflection of society. As the data shows, the participants explained that the Dutch society consists of many cultures that are not being represented in the fashion industry which they feel is not fair and accurate. They also feel that there is a blind spot with some organizations that do not consider the multicultural composition of society. For example, Susan (23, female) presented an example in which a fashion magazine from France did not consider the multicultural society when posting an online post. She explained that the magazine had posted an article in which it states that headscarves were in fashion right after France had banned hijabs. The posts got several backlashes by readers who felt the magazine was tone-deaf and lacked prior research for their articles. Therefore, the majority of the participant agreed that the industry should consider these things and reflect the society with the needed knowledge about various cultures. They believed that when this knowledge is gained by people within those organizations, the occurrence of those actions mentioned above could be prevented.

The data shows that the participants perceive cultural diversity within fashion as something that should reflect the multi-cultural society. As the industry is predominantly white, it presents a distorted image that does not represent the different cultures within society (Stevenson, 2021). The data, therefore, support the theory that the industry indeed has an unequal balance of different cultures (Stevenson, 2021). Furthermore, the theory argues that the fashion industry has a profound influence on societal norms and values of what is seen as beautiful and acceptable (Yan & Bissell, 2014), thus holding the power to change that in favor of the POC being disadvantaged within the industry.

4.4.2 Representation of POC

The participants furthermore explained why it is important that the fashion industry should be a reflection of society. They agreed that the fashion industry has a global impact on how individuals perceive themselves regarding their cultural background. Therefore, representation of POC is seen as a priority within the industry.

One participant mentioned a noteworthy element of the effects of lacking representation of POC on an individual, in the case of a fashion magazine. Maddie (25, female) has worked for a fashion magazine in the Netherlands and explains that even the presence of the name of the authors has an effect on the feeling of inclusion and what is represented by an organization, such as a fashion magazine. When asked why this is the case, she responded: “Yes, it does support a bit more. I think oh, that's definitely someone of color it's a bit closer to yourself [as POC]”. She implies that POC could familiarize themselves more with the content from a specific fashion magazine that is well-known. However, this does not mean that white/non-POC authors who have gained the knowledge about the cultural content are not being considered sincere, but that POC rather want to see a person of color as the author of such articles. This is because it evokes the feeling of recognition and does, to some extent, show that POC can achieve similar positions in the fashion industry.

However, the generalizability of the results is limited by the amount of data that is available on this matter as and is not built on academic literature. To some extent, it does correlate with the academic data that the fashion industry influences what is perceived as the norm (Yan & Bissell, 2014), as mentioned earlier. Therefore, it is worthy to mention how this influences an individual as fashion journalists believe that the fashion industry does have a global impact on how individuals might look at themselves in terms of ability and self-acceptance.

4.4.3 Low vs. high priority

As the majority of participants accordingly agreed that cultural diversity and representation are important, one participant made an interesting remark that has sparked the discussion of whether or not cultural diversity should be a priority for fashion organizations. Laura (35, female) compares this to another trend and issue that is profound within the fashion industry which is sustainability. She says: “Sustainability, that is also very important. And they are might be busy with being sustainable, and maybe they want to do it [being culturally diverse] but maybe they are too busy to be able to do that.” It implies that cultural diversity is not being prioritized which is one of the reasons why the lack of cultural diversity is still present within the fashion industry. This has opened the discussion among the participants about whether or not it should be a priority for organizations as some organizations rather like to focus on other important matters. Correspondingly, the effect of this is that it enforces organizations to be culturally diverse which can result in tokenism and woke washing that has been mentioned earlier.

According to the data, additionally, organizations perceive cultural diversity as not fitting for their target group and feel this has more to do with the commercial purposes of the company. Amara (34, female) states: “Maybe there is a magazine that is very niche that is very specifically focused on, for example, a Mandy in the north of Sweden, well is it then necessary to have people write about cultural diversity?” This links back to the aforementioned main theme of how cultural diversity is perceived for commercial purposes. In this case, the participants believed that the lack of diversity has to do with the target audience being not diverse. Therefore, they conclude that organizations choose not to be culturally diverse if this is not reflected within the target audience.

However, the results show that the participants nevertheless agree on the fact that it should be a priority as it is seen as valuable as cultural diversity brings various perspectives, ideas, and values within an organization. Thus, the data has shown interesting insight into how cultural diversity is perceived. Due to the lack of academic data on this matter, the results cannot confirm whether or not this is true but provides an alternative insight on why there is a lack of POC within an organization.

4.5 Cultural diversity and its reciprocity

The fifth and final theme will analyze the previously mentioned themes and discuss the reciprocity of creating cultural diversity. The previous themes have shown how cultural

diversity is perceived within the industry with its doubts and challenges. This theme will focus on how cultural diversity will be further developed in the future and whether or not this can be realized for fashion organizations.

Fashion journalists believe that the challenges around creating cultural diversity are a vicious cycle. Earlier was mentioned that there are several reasons why there is a lack of cultural diversity within the fashion industry. However, they consider this discussion not as black and white but rather a grey area where the players within the field of fashion are constantly in a vicious cycle. Due to the observations of the fashion journalists, they see a minor change in a positive direction for POC but believe that the industry is not there yet. Therefore, they conclude that not one particular group of people should be held responsible for creating cultural diversity but that it is rather a collective problem that needs to be solved.

First, the vicious cycle will be explained; second, the presence of awareness among fashion organizations will be discussed; and third, the solution for creating cultural diversity will be presented.

4.5.1 Vicious cycle

The data shows that the overall conclusion of why the fashion industry is running behind on cultural diversity is because they perceive this issue to be a vicious cycle that needs to be broken down to resolve this issue. Laura (35, female) for instance explains that this vicious cycle is present within the recruitment process of hiring POC in fashion: “Okay, we have a vacancy. We're putting it out, who's applying for it? And then you are in that same cycle again.” She gives an example of how organizations go about recruiting POC. They want to hire POC for their abilities and their qualities but no POC are applying and therefore make the claim that there are no skilled and/or qualified POC that can fulfill that job. However, Laure (35, female) continues that this could be a possible scenario that those skilled and/or qualified POC are not existent –this might not be because organizations are not putting enough effort to find them or that POC are not presented enough as mentioned earlier – because they might not have a diploma to fulfill that job. And to have a diploma, one has to be willing to choose a study in fashion. The results show that this will also have to come from both ends. On one hand, a person of color does have to be interested in the fashion industry in general, but as soon s/he is limited to enter this study – i.e., being restricted by parents, universities, and organizations’ prejudices towards POC – s/he will lunge into an endless loop.

Because it is such a complex issue concerning the structural racism, inheritance of colonial past, and your norms and values towards cultural diversity, it is a challenge to combat the issue. The concept of structural racism is twofold and can be interpreted as either a cause or an effect. On the one hand, POC are being treated unfairly because of biased criteria – i.e., social status, academic degree – these organizations hold to fulfill a certain position in fashion, but on the other hand, POC often do not even reach that stage of obtaining a specific degree as they are already being disadvantaged from the start of their academic career (i.e., fashion industry being stigmatized, no cultural representation within fashion-related studies).

Therefore, this concept can be seen as a vicious cycle which makes it challenging to pinpoint the exact cause of how there is a lack of cultural diversity and representation of POC within fashion. All the participants agreed on the fact that opportunities for POC are being minimized in this case as POC have to deal with structural racism and underlying bias towards POC. The data, therefore, demonstrate a correlation between the theory by Matthew (2017) that structural racism influences the representation of POC in fashion. Moreover, it has brought new insight into the lack of cultural diversity that is present in the fashion industry. Thus, it contradicts the theory that the responsibility solely lies with one group of people as mentioned earlier (Friedman et al., 2021; Hamar, n.d).

4.5.2 Presence of awareness

However, we do see a gradual change toward cultural diversity. The results show that POC are put into positions of power considering fashion magazines. One participant mentions that she sees a POC being editor-in-chief of fashion magazines, which she considers a huge step for cultural diversity as she will be the one who will approve the decisions to create diversity and have the power to do so. Youssra (21, female) explained: “But what if she is at the top and she is considered the figurehead of magazine Z, she conveys that. But who is standing beneath her? Who is her right hand? Which people will she ensure that they receive a standard column in the magazine, for example? Which people does she ensure that they will be on the cover? Which stylist is she going to hire? She does that very well.” In addition, she implies here that the editor-in-chief does provide opportunities for POC by mentioning critical elements that she feels to be revised to become culturally diverse.

The majority of the participants consider a POC as an editor-in-chief a step in the right direction, but the feeling of distrust toward these companies remains. Pim (26, male) exemplifies this by using magazine A as an example: “...for example, look at [POC as editor-

in-chief] at magazine A. She is the only black woman within a merely white editorial staff, because magazine A is white, blonde, and are from ‘t Gooi...so that is still problematic.’’ The results might suggest that even though POC are put in a position of power, does not mean that cultural diversity has been reached if the initial staff, in general, is non-POC and could be considered problematic.

Nonetheless, the results overall show that journalists are somewhat satisfied that they see at least a change. Susan (23, female) is a freelance digital editor for a fashion magazine and a person of color, and she argues: ‘‘And I think it's okay. Because it does, well, yeah, whether it's sincere or not. I'm there you know. I'm an online editor who..., so I guess. It is also positive that they do this.’’ Although she has mixed feelings about the type of progress, she is grateful that she had the opportunity to fulfill the job within the field of fashion.

4.5.3 Collective problem solving

As cultural diversity is considered to be reciprocal, the data shows that every single actor within the field should be involved and that everyone within the industry shares the responsibility to change for a culturally diverse industry.

One of the participants gave an example regarding this responsibility by looking at the Dutch theater: ‘‘If you go to the theater in the Netherlands in the evening, there are only white Dutch people. Why? They're [POC] not going. That is apparently not existent in their system. And that... you can actively change that as a theatre. You can also actively change it if you are that cultural group in the Netherlands yourself. It's reciprocity.’’ (Laura, 35, female). Implying that the exchange of both POC, as well as the industry, does play a role in the discussion of cultural diversity. Especially, mutually exchanging one’s privilege to attend the theater. She assumes that this works the same way for the fashion industry, both POC and the industry have to both fulfill each other needs to make the industry more culturally diverse.

However, organizations do generally hold greater power in changing the system as they are shaping the industry (Yan & Bissell, 2014). The results show that it is challenging to pinpoint exactly who is responsible for the change as well as know where to start to convey cultural diversity within this reciprocity. Therefore, the data shows an interesting insight into creating cultural diversity being approached as a reciprocal process rather than a cause-and-effect relationship. Thus, cultural diversity is perceived as a collective problem within the industry that requires effort and involvement from every individual within fashion.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the perception of fashion journalists on cultural diversity and representation of POC in the fashion industry. A theoretical framework has been provided to establish the main concepts of the study. These concepts formed the basis of the study which served as a guidance instrument in fathering and analyzing the data. Based on a qualitative analysis of twelve semi-structured interviews, it can be concluded the perception of fashion journalists on cultural diversity in fashion is shaped by various factors in which they have presented their thoughts and ideas on this concept.

The majority of the participants have mutually agreed that there is a lack of diversity present within the fashion industry. The participants agreed that the industry consists of predominantly non-POC considering fashion magazine covers, organizational structure, and unfair recruitment processes. Building upon the existing academic literature, the participants have presented various elements that indirectly caused this lack of diversity. Starting from a personal experience, participants believed that if a person of color has not seen any representation within the fashion industry whom s/he cannot identify with, it is unlikely to think that s/he feels encouraged or capable enough to work in that industry. In addition, as the theory by Unzueta & Bining (2012) presents, POC experiences an unfair recruiting process when applying for a job in fashion. The data has confirmed this theory as fashion organizations do lack effort in finding or recruiting POC as they are not given the chance to work in fashion. This is due to their economic status, social status (i.e. being well-known), and cultural background. A new insight on this matter shows that another element that POC are being disadvantaged on is that mostly these jobs in fashion require a certain degree that some POC are unable to obtain. A reason why this is the case is that the fashion industry is considered to be a risky industry in terms of wealth, thus within some cultures, they are not privileged enough to afford a study that cannot guarantee a wealthy future as some cultures believe it to be irresponsible choosing this study. Therefore, the reason why POC are not represented within an organization is because they cannot apply to a certain job since they did not have the privilege to obtain that required degree. This has brought new insight on into the lack of cultural diversity within the fashion industry.

However, the findings show that POC do get hired but some fashion journalists have experienced that they are hired because of their cultural background and felt that this was only to be responsible for doing the work for the organization to be culturally diverse. This is an example of the “corporate gaze” as the person of color is considered an object that

contributed to the cultural diversity within an organization (Entwistle & Agnès, 2006, p. 749). Even though it could be considered a positive change that more POC are being hired, it is problematic to consider that they are hired because of their cultural background and not their skills or abilities. Disadvantaging POC by holding a corporate gaze and bias toward them is a form of prejudice and internalized oppression and thus is an institutionalized issue that is part of a greater system that maintains structural racism (Entwistle & Agnès, 2006; Lawrence & Keheler, 2007).

As the public has become more aware of the societal issues as Mirzai et al. (2022) state, the findings show that fashion journalists are also aware of the issues regarding racial inequality and the lack of representation in the fashion industry. They feel that some organizations do want to thrive for cultural diversity within their organization and the industry, but that they lack the knowledge and tools to fulfill that. Thus, this results in superficial and short-term solutions to save brand equity by presenting cultural diversity in a more performative way. As the public demand cultural diversity, fashion organizations have tried to do their part by putting POC on magazine covers without substantive narratives within magazines, launching diversity marketing campaigns, or working with POC. However, the findings show that this too is problematic as this is not in line with the core values of the organization. In line with the theory by Vredenburg et al. (...), when an organization takes a political or social stance it is considered to be authentic if it has incorporated the purpose-and values-driven strategy in which the organization does show its contribution to changing the industry. The findings show that this is not the case with most fashion organizations because there is still a lack of representation of POC within an organizational structure. The fashion journalists agree that a short-term solution such as launching a marketing campaign will not solve the racial inequality that is present within the industry.

The issue around the lack of cultural diversity remains a complex issue, considering the reciprocal process of creating cultural diversity. As mentioned earlier, racial inequality starts in the early stages of one's career by aspiring to work in fashion. However, to combat this issue in a later stage, it becomes more important who is responsible to make the change. The findings show that POC do feel pressured once they are working within fashion, and that they should be the only ones fighting for change. The majority of the participants agreed that the responsibility should not be with one particular group such as POC, CEOs, and editors-in-chief, but they do feel that people within those positions of power are the ones that can make it possible to implement that change. One example they give is that once there is an editor-in-chief that considers cultural diversity as important, you will see that change being

implemented in the fashion magazine. From the people working on the product shoot to the clothing brands they are wearing on the cover, if cultural diversity is considered to be important, more effort would be put into making sure that these people are all culturally diverse. Nonetheless, even from a position that does not give you the power to do so, it can spark the discussion around cultural diversity and open conversations around the topic that is needed in order to demand change. Therefore, the data suggests that prioritizing cultural diversity has to come from your norms and values and your sincere interest to represent POC within the industry.

As this research has aimed to illustrate the perception of fashion journalists regarding cultural diversity in the fashion industry, it also raises the question of how other elements of diversity play a role in this industry. Participants have often mentioned that they perceive cultural diversity as the inclusion of every person regarding race, age, gender, and sexual orientation. As this research is limited to the cultural and racial aspect of diversity, less to no attention is paid to the aforementioned elements. In addition, as the majority of the sample is predominantly female, the perception of cultural diversity is therefore biased from a female perspective as opposed to a male that could have a different perspective on cultural diversity. Another limitation of the study is that the majority of the participants all work in the same branch of fashion magazines. Finally, a potential constraint to take into consideration is that this research is limited to Dutch fashion journalists in the Randstad, because of the use of snowball-sampling. This could imply that if the same study would be conducted within another area in the Netherlands, the findings could vary which could negatively influence the generalizability of the representative population, which are the fashion journalists. However, as the study was not aimed at generalizing the results, it has presented an understanding of cultural diversity within the fashion industry as an extension of the existent academic literature.

To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could address the elements of age, gender, and sexual orientation when exploring diversity in the fashion industry. Therefore, a sample of an equal balance between females and males could be taken into consideration. In addition, the majority of the fashion journalists agreed on considering cultural diversity as vital within the fashion industry, it can be interesting to dedicate future studies to the perceptions of big fashion corporations and whether or not they feel they should contribute to a culturally diverse industry. This could bring a deeper understanding of why there is still a lack of diversity and whether or not the public can expect any major progression anytime soon. As cultural diversity is the topic of discussion from the perspective

of the public, further research could enrich this study by exploring the perception of those that hold the most power within the industry.

Overall, the results have indicated that cultural diversity is perceived as an ongoing process and not as an end goal that companies should work towards, but rather a philosophy that needs to be applied to in every day (work)life. Cultural diversity is therefore considered to be an important issue according to the fashion journalists and thus confirmed the theory that cultural diversity is vital. Thus, it should be taken into consideration within an organization's core business, regardless of whether this is beneficial for your organization as it should represent the multicultural society. Indeed, cultural diversity might not be an agenda point for every fashion organization as this core value is not considered important for their target audience. However, if the fashion industry wants to be and stay progressive as it claims to be, it, therefore, needs to break down the cycle by making changes that can feel uncomfortable and uneasy. This includes redefining your target audience, gaining knowledge by showing personal interest in different cultures, and being open to uncomfortable conversations that discuss racial inequality. The goal is not to become culturally diverse, but to be willing to continuously work on maintaining and developing the industry that makes space for every person of color.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Topic List

Topic	Questions
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you can give a short introduction about yourself, your name [if applicable], age and occupation. • What do you find the most interesting about the fashion industry as a journalist?
Cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you define cultural diversity? • Why do you think this is important in general? Why should this be important in the fashion industry? • Did you ever experience cultural inequality within your own work field? Can you give an example? • Did that ever play a significant role in your career as a journalist? And how? • How do you recognize and/or describe the cultural diversity within the fashion industry? In relation to representation of POC? • What does representation of POC means to you? • Why is representation considered to be important? • How would you like to see cultural diversity within the fashion industry? • Who are the role models within that? Which organizations does this best?
Fashion brand activism 1. Woke washing 2. Cultural appropriation 3. Tokenism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your opinion on organizations on who pretend to be diverse? How would you describe that? [woke washing, tokenism] • How would you view organizations making use of other cultures without giving credit where credit is due? [cultural appropriation] Can you think of an example within the fashion industry? • Would you see this as a problem or a solution to create diversity?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you think this phenomenon will develop over the years?• Why do you think organizations and brands are behind on being divers?
Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are you hoping for the future?

Appendix B – Coding Tree

Main Themes	Main codes	Sub-codes	Example
<p><i>Institutionalized issue'</i></p> <p><i>'Lack of cultural diversity considered to be constructed by an institutionalized system and structural racism''</i></p>	<p>People within boardrooms</p>	Lack of representation	<i>'Also, for example, that indeed it is not diverse at the top layer of many companies''</i>
		Great influence	<i>'And that doesn't mean that people who are lower have nothing to contribute. Only [those at the top layer] have the responsibility to actually push that diversity in the magazine or online, faster, you understand?''</i>
		Work experience	<i>'Or if I look at our own CEO at Hearst, you know, these are all people who, of course, also just have thirty years of work experience.'''</i>
	<p>Unequal opportunities POC</p>	Core business	<i>'But then we have to become more aware that it already goes wrong at the beginning, at the very beginning''</i>
		Underlying bias	<i>'...there are studies that say people just hire one of the other because they look alike. Those people find it much more interesting if they resemble you.'''</i>
	<p>Commercial purposes</p>	Target audience based	<i>'Big organizations always use this for commercial marketing, of course, because it generates a lot of money.'''</i>
		Risky	<i>'Just take your risk to go into a different direction and make money that way instead of the traditional way.'''</i>
<p><i>Personal experiences</i></p> <p><i>'Cultural diversity playing</i></p>	<p>Driving force vs. burden</p>	<p>Personal motivation</p>	<i>'From a young, I already experienced cultural diversity, and I perceive it as something normal and because there is such a lack of diversity within society,</i>

<i>a role within a personal atmosphere"</i>			<i>it became a goal of mine to thrive for cultural diversity."</i>
		Carreer path	<i>'Because it was divers, my actions within my company were also aimed at that and I think it is also the case for other people who also grew up in their bubble, who also implement that immediately in their work"</i>
		Pressure	<i>'I often find it disappointing that people of color are suddenly given the responsibility, especially if they are the only ones to deal with those things.'"</i>
	Personal circle	Type of close company	<i>"So those stories outside Amsterdam, they are not heard. For example, the circles that they are in are not those circles, so they don't get involved with that"</i>
		Life in a bubble	<i>'A lot of people have been growing up in a certain bubble their whole lives and then everything that is different feels weird and strange or awkward"</i>
		Residency	<i>'So I think there really is a difference whether you live in the province or you live in the city, so to say."</i>
	Upbringing and cultural background	Parents	<i>"Then you are often still under the influence of your parents. So you should be able to be allowed by your parents to go to that open day."</i>
		Personal interests	<i>'if you don't have the knowledge yourself, you should also dare to knock on the door and say: oh, you know more about this, so I'm going to hire you"</i>
	Performative	Performativity in fashion	Tokenism/woke washing

<p><i>"Cultural diversity is perceived as performative and not as norms and values.</i></p>			<p><i>the Netherlands] were kissing on a cover of Vogue and if it wasn't at all...the content wasn't diverse at all. Yes, then I would have seen that as tokenism''</i></p>
		Marketing strategy	<p><i>''Because it's not necessarily saying that people of color can't bring more money or the idea of wanting more people of color in their magazine, but it's more like 'oh no, otherwise we will burn at the stake and that's not what we want.'''</i></p>
	<p>Public's opinion</p>	Fear	<p><i>''Because it's not necessarily saying that people of color can't bring more money or the idea of more people of color in their magazine, but it's more like oh no, otherwise we will burn at the stake and that's not what we want.'''</i></p>
		Offensive	<p><i>'I would be offended because that is not on my to do list at all?'</i></p>
	<p>Sincere attempts</p>	Role models	<p><i>Examples of Vogue NL, Teen Vogue, British Vogue, H&M</i></p>
		Prior research	<p><i>'You know, you need background research and papers and reports and statistics to argument all that'</i></p>
Incorporate POC		<p><i>'If you guys want to do an interview with me, i don't want an interview with any of the team members, but i want someone of color.'</i></p>	
<p>Priority</p> <p><i>"Cultural diversity being on a spectrum of low vs.</i></p>	<p>Reflection of society</p>	Different perspectives	<p><i>'You get people with different perspectives, you get people with different ideas, with different values.'</i></p>
		Valuable	<p><i>'Because that just, yes, brings a lot more wealth, I think.'</i></p>

<i>high priority within the industry"</i>	Representation of POC	Feeling of recognition (POC)	<i>'And what I want to do is give everyone the opportunity to feel represented in the media.'</i>
	Low vs. high priority		<i>'You know the editor-in-chief who is there now, because she thinks it is important, she hires people who have knowledge about that'</i>
Reciprocity <i>"Cultural diversity being a reciprocal process in which there is no cause-and-effect relationship"</i>	Vicious cycle	School system	<i>'Why do relatively few people with a diverse cultural background work at fashion offices in the Netherlands? Because they don't have the degree.'</i>
		Work field	<i>'Okay, we have a vacancy. We're putting it out, who's applying for it? And then you are in that same cycle again.'</i>
	Presence of awareness	Progression	<i>'...for example, look at [POC as editor-in-chief] at magazine A. She is the only black woman within a merely white editorial staff, because magazine A is white, blonde, and are from 't Gooi...so that is still problematic.'</i>
		Mixed feelings	<i>'And I think it's okay. Because it does, well, yeah, whether it's sincere or not. I'm there you know. I'm an online editor who..., so I guess. It is also positive that they do this.'</i>
	Collective problem solving	Breaking through	<i>'It's a cycle you're in. So you have to break that.'</i>
		Responsibility	<i>'You can also actively change it if you are that cultural group in the Netherlands yourself. It's reciprocity'</i>