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Prospectus

Introduction

Balenciaga occupies a paradoxical yet pivotal position within the fabric of fashion's identity. The brand's controversial nature intertwines seamlessly with its indispensable role in shaping the fashion landscape. Its vast research ethos, which encompasses two unique analyses and particular frameworks that highlight the significance of black culture, is deeply ingrained in its heart. This detailed investigation dives into the depths of the fashion business, exposing the complex ways that black culture profoundly influences the spirit and character of the sector, while being challenged by a non-black individual creating their own black experience. In this paper, I will address the research questions that guide my own approach and identify the scholarly conversations that frame this research object. My first research question is, How has the design of Balenciaga fallen into evolution of black aesthetics in fashion influenced contemporary design trends, and in what ways do designers incorporate elements of black culture into their creations? In order to start the comparative analysis of how this fashion company has created its own narrative of black culture, but just because they in a way have been caught does

not mean they are the only ones who are at fault. My second research question is, What role do prominent black designers play within the fashion industry play in shaping and redefining beauty standards, and how do their contributions impact the representation of blackness in the broader context of fashion, compared to a white european designer such as Balenciaga? In order to do this, I will engage with sources regarding who really owns black culture in fashion and how black designers treat the realm of expressing themselves through identity differently than a non black designer who is profiting off of a cultural experience and their own whiteness. My third research question is, How does the Balenciaga design highlight an intersectionality and contribute to a more inclusive and diverse fashion landscape or If it even does? This will involve a collective of all previous research in order to draw conclusions about ideology and fashion realities of Blackness and Whiteness in Balenciaga and surrounding companies that shape this identity, particularly those that are not as institutionally recognized or can only be expressed within the context of a black culture.

Literature Review: Methodology

Discursive Analysis

Analyses are vital to research because they act as a link between unprocessed data and significant discoveries. Discursive analysis serves as a potent lens through which to examine the complex language and communication techniques used in the fashion business. “One can approach discourse analysis from two types of problems, which turn out to be related. One problem is the question of correlating 'culture' and languages”, this point made by Harris showcases how I will focus on my discursive analysis (Harris 1). “Stone related the resulting tension (and the important implications for patients' behaviors) to the ways in which the roles that physicians and patients play are historically determined by different and conflicting models

of what disease and healing are”, This approach explores the discourse surrounding how a non black designer in fashion, which includes spoken and written words as well as visual components like ads and photographs are meeting their own agenda compared to a black designer (Hodges 571). Researchers can reveal the underlying meanings, cultural narratives, and power dynamics ingrained in the way fashion is consumed and communicated by using discursive analysis in the fashion industry. It will investigate the ways in which discourses around fashion influence the formation and renegotiating of identities, social norms, and aesthetic preferences. This method is especially useful for comprehending how social media, fashion media, and advertising influence and mirror societal values, philosophies, and cultural trends. Through analyzing the language and visual representations used in fashion discourse, scholars can acquire a more profound comprehension of the complex interactions between language, imagery, and societal dynamics in the dynamic realm of fashion.

Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis, like discursive analysis, draws a clear line between cultural appropriation and black culture and offers a nuanced viewpoint that walks the line between appropriation and black culture. “Comparative analysis involves at least three types of technical difficulties. For the two types of uses of comparison - the refining of case description, and the testing of hypotheses - there is a different type of solution to each three problems, to wit, the configurative and the nominalist difficulties are with source reliability, with typologies and classificatory and with sampling”, Haas elaborates on how a comparative analysis needs to be constructed (Haas 295). Comparative analysis is a useful tool in the field of fashion for analyzing the ever-changing terrain of trends, styles, and cultural influences. With this method, disparities and similarities between diverse fashion components—like styles, fabrics, and aesthetics—as

well as customer behavior across time periods, cultures, and brands—are methodically explored. By contrasting these components, scholars are able to spot trends, chart the development of style, and determine the fundamental causes of stylistic variances. A comprehensive understanding of the ways in which various elements, including historical contexts, cultural preferences, and technological breakthroughs, influence the fashion business can be gained through comparative research in the field of fashion, “According to Pickvance, comparative analysis is conducted mainly to explain and gain a better understanding of the causal processes involved in the creation of an event, feature or relationship usually by bringing together variations in the explanatory variable or variables” (Adiyia 1). This methodological approach is especially helpful in understanding the complex relationship between societal changes and fashion trends, providing insights into the dynamic nature of style and its wider cultural significance.

Literature Review: Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Race Theory

There are many scholars, such as those mentioned above that seek to understand the ways that critical race theory shapes our experiences and identity within areas of life, but also the negative impacts that allow for those to discredit it. Due to the shortcomings of conventional legal methods in resolving racial disparities, the theoretical framework known as Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT concentrates on the institutional and systemic aspects of racism rather than just looking at specific cases of prejudice, “critical racist theorists focus on racial consciousness to address the question of color”(Minda 167). It makes the claim that racism is not just an issue of personal prejudice but is pervasive in societal norms and institutions. Fundamentally, colorblindness is contested by CRT, which also highlights the significance of understanding race as a social construct with significant effects,” developments and the impact that CRT seems to be

having on national discourses” on power relations and societal systems (Delgado 113). It makes the claim that social and legal structures may, even unwittingly, support racial injustice and seeks to expose these subtle forces in order to advance social justice.

The idea of "intersectionality," which was first articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is fundamental to CRT. This concept acknowledges that people may encounter various levels of privilege and oppression due to intersecting variables such as sexual orientation, gender, race, and class. grasping the intricate and intertwined nature of different types of prejudice requires a grasp of intersectionality. Proponents of Critical Race Theory suggest that it can help identify and confront structural racism, while critics claim it can lead to essentialist and divisive viewpoints. Critical Race Theory has generated a great deal of controversy. In spite of criticism, CRT continues to have a significant impact on scholarly and public conversation, providing a useful framework for comprehending and tackling the enduring problems associated with racial inequality. In order to promote a more inclusive and fair society, it continues to influence conversations about laws, education, and social institutions, especially my focus on fashion.

Whiteness

As identities are established for individuals it is also based on who these individuals are on the spectrum of race. In critical race theory, "whiteness" refers to the social construct that creates a racial category for individuals who are descended from Europeans. It is a complicated system of privilege, power, and cultural supremacy that is profoundly ingrained in social systems rather than just a biological or genetic difference. Whiteness frequently functions covertly and unchallenged, serving as the standard by which other racial identities are judged. Whiteness has traditionally shaped cultural norms, beauty standards, and institutional systems in numerous societies, including the United States, “Most people would agree that everybody has value. But

many people in the US frequently collapse the distinction between the materiality of bodies and the troping of bodies. In other words, when most people use the term white as a racial category, they often assume that white signifies a biological fact of nature: Some people are white ... some people are not... period”(Kennedy 360).

White people have had a significant and wide-ranging influence on fashion. Throughout history, the fashion industry has frequently promoted Eurocentric ideas, which have led to a limited conception of style and beauty. The predominance of white models on runways, in fashion magazines, and in advertising campaigns has reinforced the role of whiteness in creating and defining fashion trends. The fashion industry's low diversity representation has aided in the marginalization of non-White voices and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes.

In order to combat whiteness in the fashion industry, structural obstacles must be taken down, inclusivity must be encouraged, and the variety of global aesthetics must be acknowledged. In addition to promoting more inclusive representation, brands and designers that value diversity also confront the deeply ingrained systems that have traditionally maintained whiteness as the norm in the fashion industry. The need for a more diversified and equitable representation of beauty and style that captures the diversity of world cultures and viewpoints is becoming increasingly apparent as the industry develops.

Post Colonialism/ Decolonialism

The analytical frameworks of post-colonialism and decolonization in fashion scrutinize and contest the persistent consequences of colonial histories on the fashion industry. In reaction to the “historical legacies of colonialism, post-colonial philosophy evolved, highlighting the necessity of dismantling Eurocentric narratives and power structures” (Legg 113). This entails challenging the ways in which the fashion industry has supported stereotypes, colonial aesthetics,

and cultural appropriations. A related idea called decolonialism goes beyond “postcolonialism in that it actively works to undermine the institutions and structures still in place that have their roots in colonial beliefs” (Legg 118). In the context of fashion, this entails tackling problems like cultural appropriation, uneven power relations, and resource exploitation in the Global South for the benefit of the Global North.

An important component of decolonial and post-colonial fashion viewpoints is the analysis of cultural representations. Western fashion is viewed as superior by the industry, which has frequently reinforced preconceptions and commercialized aspects of non-Western cultures. Decolonial fashion proponents stress cooperation, mutual respect, and reciprocity while calling for the recognition and celebration of many cultural influences. Diversity in design, production, and representation is a key component of decolonizing fashion efforts. This entails honoring and appreciating the contributions made by designers from many ethnic backgrounds, fusing traditional craftsmanship with modern designs, and promoting an inclusive and just fashion sector.

Culture Appropriation

These next three frameworks are intertwined in the sense of providing what appreciation is vs appropriation can be. The term "cultural appropriation" in the context of fashion refers to the taking of or imitating aspects of a culture—“typically one that has been historically marginalized or oppressed—without the appropriate knowledge, deference, or recognition” (Young 135). This is a common occurrence in the fashion business, as manufacturers and designers occasionally take inspiration from other cultural traditions without giving the cultural context or significance enough thought, as “Cultural appropriation can often seem morally problematic” (Matthes 343).

The use of traditional apparel, symbols, or patterns in ways that commercialize and weaken its cultural meanings is one way that this appropriation takes place. Fashion's use of cultural appropriation gives rise to worries about the erasure of underrepresented cultures' contributions, exploitation, and the maintenance of stereotypes. In order to make sure that other cultures are recognized and honored in a way that recognizes their historical and social relevance rather than being considered as passing fads, it emphasizes the significance of encouraging cultural sensitivity, collaboration, and ethical practices within the business.

Culture Appropriation of Black Culture

This framework begins the blending of cultural appropriation and black culture that allows to show how it impacts black individuals and communities. The fashion business has long been plagued by the widespread problem of cultural appropriation of Black culture, whereby deeply ingrained African and African-American traditions are frequently appropriated without due recognition or comprehension. Black cultural aspects, such as clothing patterns and styles and hairstyles like cornrows and braids, have been appropriated and sold by mainstream fashion, frequently shorn of its historical and cultural background, Johnson provides an example “Iggy Azalea’s appropriation of hip hop—from her “blackcent” to her ignorance of its history—led to demands for greater accountability to the culture and the broader community” , this ties into how a celebrity is on the same level of appropriation as fashion companies such as Balenciaga (Johnson 191).

This phenomenon not only reinforces negative stereotypes but also ignores the rich cultural value of these features, “This emergence is both a displacement and a hegemonic shift of black individuals and community” (Hall 104). The monetization of Black culture in the absence of significant Black voice inclusion or representation in decision-making processes serves to

perpetuate historical power disparities. In order to combat the cultural appropriation of Black culture in fashion, we must move toward diversity, collaboration, and cultural respect. By forming deep collaborations, acknowledging the sources of their inspiration, and proactively striving for greater inclusion of Black voices in the industry, brands and designers can be key players in advancing diversity and authenticity. The fashion industry must embrace moral standards that honor and celebrate the diversity of Black cultural history in addition to eschewing flimsy trends.

Black Culture

Following the closing of the three, this solely focuses on black cultural identity as a whole that scholars aim to showcase a clear understanding of this community. Black culture is a vibrant, diverse fabric that includes a broad range of customs, manifestations, and contributions from people of African descent. Black culture, which is rooted in a rich past molded by centuries of tenacity, inventiveness, and adaptation, is found throughout the world and takes many forms, such as art, music, dance, language, and fashion. Black culture has been a tough subject as “We have been a people who hated our African characteristics. We hated our black heads, we hated the shape of our noses ..., we hated the color of our skin”, Runcie provides why black culture is a difficult focus at times (Runcie 185).

“Resilience, a strong feeling of community, and a dedication to social justice are characteristics of black culture, more specifically, lectures, readings, and class discussions question the cultural and social construction of Blackness in an effort to uncover the ways that the definition of race and Blackness particularly influences and shapes Black Americans’ present social status and struggles for social justice”, This culture is deeply ingrained with the Civil Rights Movement and current racial equality action, which demonstrate a commitment to

confronting structural inequalities and working toward a more just society (Gallon 67). Black culture has enriched the fashion industry with its numerous influences and unique styles, leaving a lasting and substantial impact on the industry. Black culture, with its rich history spanning countries and centuries, has had a lasting influence on fashion thanks to its vivid colors, distinctive patterns, and avant-garde designs. Black culture has always defined and shaped trends, from the development of streetwear and urban fashion to traditional African textiles. An industry that has sometimes been criticized for its lack of inclusivity has seen increasing diversity and representation because of the efforts of Black influencers, models, and designers who have broken down barriers.

Conclusion

My initial conclusion is that the sweatpants by Balenciaga is just but a piece of colonial discourse to this day, constitutively created in opposition to dominant ideologies and creations set forth by the non black fashion community. While scholarship mentioned above offers a look into a dynamic and diversified spectrum of fashion expressions that have resulted from the union of cultural heritage with modern aesthetics, demonstrating the depth and diversity of Black culture in the worldwide fashion scene, it still plagues the ideal of who truly owns black culture in fashion. . In order to analyze the Balenciaga sweatpants, I intend to approach its “Racial Agenda” as a created discourse through a perspective of a non black designer creating a sense of their own black experience. While comparing it to a black designer that does not have to create an unauthentic experience. While stealing and profiting off one's culture is in itself a resistive practice, both a comparative and a discursive analysis will highlight ideologies specific to Fashion. Overall, the Balenciaga sweatpants are a unique research object that allows for a greater look at racial appropriation instead of just a piece of clothing.

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