THE HIDDEN FIGURES IN FASHION: BRIDGING THE DIVERSITY GAP BETWEEN CONSUMERS AND PRODUCERS

LENA CAVUSOGLU

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THE HIDDEN FIGURES IN FASHION: BRIDGING THE DIVERSITY GAP BETWEEN CONSUMERS AND PRODUCERS

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LENA CAVUSOGLU

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Approval of the Graduate School of Business

Prof. Dr. Hasan Fehmi Baklacı
Director of Graduate School of Business

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Assoc. Prof. Burcu Güneri Çangarlı
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Prof. Dr. Deniz Atik
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Prof. Dr. Deniz Atik

Prof. Dr. Ayla Özhan Dedeoğlu

Asst. Prof. Zeynep Özdamar-Ertekin

Prof. Dr. Firat A. Fuat

Prof Dr. Canan Madran

ABSTRACT

THE HIDDEN FIGURES IN FASHION: BRIDGING THE DIVERSITY GAP BETWEEN CONSUMERS AND PRODUCERS

Cavusoglu, Lena

Ph.D. in Business Administration, Graduate School of Business

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Deniz Atik

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Prior research has emphasized how the fashion industry creates the burden on women to measure their self-worth with the ideal standards of beauty defined by the industry. In a fashion scene dominated by Caucasian looks, this burden becomes even more substantial for women from different ethnic, racial, religious, or cultural backgrounds and women in different age groups and socioeconomic classes and with differing physical abilities, to name a few. As such, investigating the fashion consumption experiences of a diverse group of women, the social and psychological consequences of underrepresentation, and the perspectives of fashion producers on diversity becomes crucial. With a qualitative inquiry, this study employs the triangulation of data collection techniques, including 56 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with both fashion consumers and producers, observation, and secondary research, as well as interpretive analysis and content analysis through Netnography (via Instagram posts under the hashtag #fashiondiversity). The first theoretical contribution of this research is the revelation of a perception gap between fashion producers and consumers regarding what diversity means, as well as the extension of the types of diversity that were previously ignored in the literature. Second, through using the social capital framework to understand the consumption experiences of diverse consumers, the study highlights the impact of virtual communities and the role of different fashion constituents regarding a possible institutional-level change towards increased diversity or cultural homogeneity. Ultimately, through this study, I hope to contribute to a change towards increased inclusivity, a redefining the beauty standards, and the preventions of the industry from engaging in practices that lead to the exclusion of specific female groups.

Keywords: fashion diversity, consumption, underrepresented women, ideal beauty, social capital

ÖZET

MODA’NIN GİZLİ YÜZLERİ: ÇEŞİTLİLİK KONUSUNDA TÜKETİCİLER VE ÜRETİCİLER ARASINDAKİ ALGI FARKLILIKLARININ BİRLEŞTİRİLMESİ

Çavuşoğlu, Lena

İşletme Doktora Programı, İşletme Enstitüsü

Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Deniz Atik

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Önceden yapılan araştırmalar, moda endüstrisinin tanımladığı ideal güzellik standartlarının kadınların kendi öz değerlerini ölçmesinde bir yük oluşturduğunu vurgulamıştır. Bu yük, Kafkas görünümünün egemen olduğu moda endüstrisinde, değişik etnik, ırksal, dini veya kültürel kökenden gelen, farklı yaş gruplarında ve sosyoekonomik sınıflarda olan kadınlar için daha da artmaktadır. Bu nedenle, farklı karakteristiklere sahip kadınların moda tüketimi deneyimlerini, yeterli derecede temsil edilmeyişin sosyal ve psikolojik sonuçlarını ve moda üreticilerinin çeşitlilik konusundaki bakış açılarını araştırmak önem kazanmaktadır. Nitel bir sorgulama ile bu çalışmada moda tüketicileri ve üreticileri ile 56 adet yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakatın yanında gözlem ve ikincil araştırma teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca, Netnografi aracılığıyla Instagram üzerinden #fashiondiversity etiketi altındaki paylaşımlar toplanarak yorumlayıcı içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Bu araştırmanın ilk teorik katkısı, moda üreticileri ve tüketicileri arasında çeşitlilik konusundaki algı farklılıklarının gösterilmesi ve daha önce literatürde göz ardı edilen çeşitlilik türlerinin eklenmesidir. İkinci katkı ise, farklı kadın tüketicilerin tüketim deneyimlerini anlamak için “sosyal sermaye” perspektifini kullanarak sanal toplulukların ve farklı moda aktörlerinin çeşitlilik veya kültürel homojenlik yönünde kurumsal düzeyde olası bir değişim için üstlendikleri rolleri sergilemesidir. Sonuç olarak bu tez, moda sektörünü daha kapsayıcı olmaya, güzellik standartlarını yeniden tanımlamaya ve çeşitli kadın gruplarının dışlanmasına yol açan uygulamalardan uzaklaştırmaya katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: moda çeşitliliği, tüketim, yetersiz temsil edilen kadınlar, ideal güzellik, sosyal sermaye

To my beloved family and husband…

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1. Background and motivation

> "Traditionally, what exactly constitutes beauty has always been a locally indigenous evaluation. This fact is changing across the world" (Isa and Kramer 2003, p. 41).

Whether it includes dedicated followers or simply those dressing for protection, fashion has always existed, and women have been its focus (Barnard 2002). As such, this dissertation specifically focuses on the fashion consumption experiences of women from different ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds, in different age groups and socioeconomic classes, and with varying physical abilities.

The shift of clothing from purely functional to fashionable with expressive capacities throughout history has morphed clothing into a tool used to establish and convey multiple aspects of identity and culture (Smith 2012). Although many differences exist between countries in terms of culture, tradition, fashion, and aesthetics, due to the influence of globalization, these differences are assimilated by the fashion and beauty industries. In particular, the Westernization of fashion and beauty has eroded both national beauty standards for women other than Caucasians (Isa and Kramer 2003) and the traditional manner of dress in non-Western countries. As a result, women who fall outside the dominant beauty standards, particularly those who have historically been socially stigmatized (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), are neglected in the fashion industry.

It has always surprised me that the underlying meaning of diversity in the fashion industry has been incredibly limited compared to other fields in the business world. Over the years, the dominant discourse of diversity in fashion has related primarily to skin color. For instance, The Fashion Spot's (2017) diversity

report, after examining New York's, London's, Milan's, and Paris's runway shows, announced that spring 2018 was the season of diversity for the fashion industry. The report revealed that only 27.9% of models were women of color, while 72.1% were White. Also, the appearances of plus-sized models, models over age 50, and transgender or non-binary models were 2.2%, 3.0%, and 1.3%, respectively. Even though a new trend towards including women of color and women with plus-sized bodies has been promoted in fashion world in the past few years in an attempt to break the strong homogeneity in the fashion industry, these attempts could not surpass the limited representation of a very narrow segment of women in these groups.

Ideal beauty standards are set by globally published fashion and beauty media and featured as including a narrow face with high eyebrows, large, round, light-colored eyes, high cheekbones, thin noses and lips, and straight hair (Cunningham et al. 1995; Kim 2010) and are associated with Whiteness, such as having lighter skin (Taylor 1999). Also, thinness is closely related with female beauty (Mussell, Binford, and Fulkerson 2000). The constructed, so-called Western standards of beauty and femininity (Bartky 1997) have "*racialized* beauty, [in] that it has defined beauty per se in terms of White beauty, in terms of the physical features that the people we consider white [people] are more likely to have" (Taylor 1999, p. 17). The overwhelming lack of representation of women who do not possess the qualities that are reflected in the standard definitions and rules of the fashion and beauty industry causes a significant disparity and brings forth huge struggles for minorities and other ordinary women.

Women internalize what the fashion industry communicates as what society accepts and values and equate this with their self-worth (Polivy and Herman 2004), which causes dramatic impacts on the perception of *self* for people who are discarded by the aforementioned definitions of standard. Therefore, investigating the experiences and representation of women in the fashion industry becomes crucial to shed light on the importance of diversity in fashion.

2. Purpose of the study

This research aims to demonstrate the global conversation on diversity in the fashion industry and the perception gap between producers and consumers on what diversity entails by analyzing the experiences of underrepresented women with differing buying power from various racial or ethnic origins, social classes, and religions, who have varied sexual orientations, body shapes, physical appearances, and abilities. In doing so, this research will lead fashion producers and researchers into a new era towards diversity by bringing underrepresented women into the conversation. As a consequence, this dissertation enables new ideas that can help to reshape fashion design and communication by reducing practices that lead to the exclusion of certain groups through discrimination, isolation, and segregation.

3. Significance of the study and literature gap

In academia, researchers from various academic fields have investigated the concept of diversity in fashion. In sociology and psychology, the focus has been on the racial diversity of models in the mainstream media (e.g., Schopf 2016, Mears 2010, Mcdermott and Pettijohn 2011). Researchers of fashion studies have primarily investigated body shape and size diversity in clothing (e.g., Christel 2014; Shin 2013) and examined diverse gender preferences in apparel shopping (e.g., queer women's experiences) (e.g., Stokes 2015; Reddy-Best 2013), whereas consumer researchers, such as Scaraboto and Fischer (2013), have revealed the necessity of greater variety for plus-sized consumers in mainstream markets. The same authors also emphasized the importance of future studies that explore consumers' quest for change in fashion. Since a holistic study has never been conducted on fashion diversity that examines the perception differences of fashion producers and consumers regarding "what is diverse," investigating the fashion consumption experiences of a divergent group of woman and the understanding of diversity from the perspective of industry agents has become crucial for both consumer research literature and professionals. Table 1 summarizes the highlights from the literature based on their focus and shows the gaps in diversity research.

Table 1. Summary of relevant literature focusing on diversity in fashion

Field	Focus	Authors	Research Context
Focus on racial diversity in mainstream fashion media			
Sociology	Emphasis on employment of white versus black models in fashion modelling	e.g. Schopf 2016	Content analysis
	Emphasis on colorblind racism and femininity in fashion modelling industry	e.g. Mears 2010, 2015	Empirical study with producers of fashion industry
Psychology	Emphasis on race of the models in consumer perception	e.g. Mcdermott and Pettijohn II 2011	Empirical study with both male and female college students
Liberal studies	Emphasis on excluding models of color and discrimination for black models	e.g. Newman, 2017	Case studies
Communication	Emphasis on the perception of black and white models on body image	e.g. David, Morrison, Johnson and Ross 2002	Empirical study with both Black and White college-age women.
Focus on the body size and shape diversity			
Fashion studies	Emphasis on plus size consumers apparel shopping experiences, the lack of choice choices and limited freedom in dress	e.g. Christel 2014, 2016	Empirical study with undergraduate students enrolled in Apparel Design or Merchandising courses, Empirical study with obese women
	Emphasis on apparel fit and fit perceptions	e.g. Shin, 2013	Empirical study with college students
	Emphasis on ethnic female consumers body shape in the context of jean sizing	e.g. Shin and Istook 2007	Empirical study with adult women from different ethnicities in a certain size range
Consumer research	Emphasis on greater choice in mainstream markets for plus-sized consumers	e.g. Scaraboto and Fischer 2013	Content analysis of fashion blogs and media coverage using Netnography
Psychology	Emphasis on average-size and muscular fashion models on body image	e.g. Diedrichs and Lee 2010	Empirical study with male and female consumers
Focus on gender diversity			
Fashion studies	Emphasis on queer women's experiences with fashion shopping	e.g. Reddy-Best, 2013	Empirical study with queer women
Sociology	Emphasis on privileges based on gender and sexuality for fashion designers	e.g. Stokes, 2015	Content analysis
Focus on lifestyle diversity			
Consumer research	Focus on stigmatized practices such as veiling and its its gradual routinization and destigmatization among secular women	e.g. Sandikci and Ger, 2010	Empirical study with Turkish covered women
Suggestions on fashion diversity research			
Consumer research	Understanding of consumers' quest for change	e.g. Scaraboto and Fischer 2012	Content analysis of fashion blogs and media coverage using Netnography
Fashion studies	Examining the mannequins effect on consumers' perception of self for women from different ethnicities	e.g. Cohen 2014	Empirical study with women aged 18 and older.
	Defining different body shapes for ethnic groups	e.g. Shin and Istook 2007	Empirical study with adult women from different ethnicities in a certain size range

4. Organization of the dissertation

This first chapter of the dissertation introduces the background and motivation of the study, explaining the overall problem and its significance and presenting a brief synthesis of the literature by identifying the gap. In Chapter II, after a thorough literature review of the fashion concept and its historical evolution, the inquiry explains why fashion places women in the center and delves into the "democratization" of fashion and the globalization of Western beauty and fashion ideals. Next, a combination of both classic and contemporary literature on the much-debated discriminatory practices in fashion is presented. This section attempts to explain the causes and implications of the homogenization of fashion and beauty for race, body, social class, lifestyle, physical ability, and gender hierarchies. Following how the digital-self-presentation through fashion has encouraged fashion activists to present their cultural identity, the subsequent section introduces the pivotal role of social media in the democratization process and explains social capital theory in the context of virtual communities. The final part of Chapter II briefly presents the scope of fashion as a research discipline and explains the focus of this study, which places women's bodies, selves, and identities at the center. Furthermore, based on the literature regarding the lack of diversity in the fashion industry, the relevant research questions are presented, and the literature gap is demonstrated in a conceptual model. Later, Chapter III presents the methodology best suited for this study, detailing the research design by explaining how the data collection and analyses were conducted. In Chapter IV, the results of the data analysis are presented, while in Chapter V, the findings are discussed in detail in light of the theoretical implications. Lastly, Chapter VI concludes the dissertation by presenting an improved version of the conceptual model that highlights the theoretical contributions and presents managerial implications and future research suggestions.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

An overview of the scholarly literature related to fashion and diversity is presented in this chapter. Part one dives into the explanation of the concept of the term "fashion" and its connotations in this study. Part two subsequently explores the brief history of clothing and fashion, including the historical events behind the occurrence of Western cities as global fashion capitals with women at the focus and the democratization of fashion. To emphasize the purpose of this study, part three focuses on the importance of fashion as a subject matter in consumer research. Part four examines the influence of fashion on individual and cultural identity, as well as the evolution of fashion with the help of technological advancements. This section explains how the social capital theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) applies to the increases in virtual communities. Chapter II concludes with a thorough review of the literature on fashion diversity, including topics such as social class, body image, race and ethnicity, sexuality and gender, religion, age, and being labelled as disabled, which all are directly linked to the research questions.

1. Fashion as a concept

In contemporary Western society, the word "fashion" is used as an umbrella term for other terms, such as "adornment," "style," "dress," "clothes," and "clothing," or it stands within a network of relations to these terms (Polhemus and Procter 1978). The philosopher Wittgenstein (1958) defined this similarity between those words as "family resemblances," while acknowledging that no single meaning is common to all of them and that each term shares something common with at least one of the others. Similarly, Barnard (2002) identified the "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" between all

of these terms and highlighted the impossibility of providing a rigid definition for any of these words. The author mentions that all of these terms derive meaning from their relations to each other and their places in a network or structure.

In the eighteenth century, the term "fashion" was used to describe everything related to taste and thus included music, poetry, furniture, and architecture (Smith 2006). In the twentieth century, the term consisted of all consumer goods, individual bodies, and things worn on the bodies (Baudrillard 1993). Throughout history, there have been several attempts by scholars in various disciplines to provide rigid descriptions for the aforementioned terms. The fashion theorists Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) attempted to provide a final definition for the word "dress," by distinguishing it from its relations to other words such as "fashion," "appearance," "ornament," "clothing," "apparel," and "costume." The authors defined "dress" as an assemblage of direct modifications of the body, which includes activities such as hair styling, skin coloring, tattooing, scarification and cicatrisation, ear piercing, breath scenting and hygienic activities, and supplements to the body by adding items such as garments, jewelry, and accessories. This definition makes "dress" a multi-sensory phenomenon that engages the four senses of hearing, touch, smell, and vision.

The sociologist Entwistle took a step further to define "fashion" and "dress." She described dress as "an activity of clothing to the body with an aesthetic element" and defined fashion as "a specific system of dress" (2000, p. 48). The fashion historian Hollander (1994, p. 11) described fashion as what people wear in their everyday lives, at work, leisure, and rest. Lastly, Wilson (1985, p. 10) identified fashion as a "cultural phenomena, especially of a symbolic and mythic kind, which are curiously resistant to being imprisoned in one meaning." These definitions are all provided in this section of the dissertation to note the lack of a stand-alone definition for the term "fashion." Those fashion concepts cannot be distinguished from each other and cannot be studied separately, apart from their relations to one another (Barnard 2002). For these reasons, the concept of "fashion" encompasses all of these terms: fashion, clothing, dress, adornment, and style, which includes activities such as plastic surgery, hair styling, makeup, tattooing, piercing, and dressing, and supplement items such as

accessories, clothes, shoes, makeup, hair and skin products, jewelry, and so on. As such, throughout this dissertation, “fashion” as a term refers to the activities, garments, and all other aforementioned items that women around the world wear every day, and female consumers are the focus of this research because historically, primarily women have been the focus of the fashion industry (Barnard 2002), as is detailed further in the following section.

2. The history of fashion

To more clearly understand the current fashion scene and how and why fashion is mostly aimed at women, clarifying the historical, social, and cultural contexts of fashion and Western fashion capitals is critical. Such an understanding enables the contemplation of the present fashion experiences of women and why beauty and fashion standards still exist in the modern world.

2.1. A brief look at the history of fashion and Western fashion capitals

This part of the dissertation summarizes the history of clothing and textiles and presents a brief timeline of the term “fashion,” which has its roots in Western societies. Evidence suggests that clothing has been a part of human life beginning as far back as 100,000–500,000 years ago (Barber 1995). Although no specific date for when humans began wearing clothes can be pinpointed, anthropologists believe that animal skin and fur, leaves, and grass were depicted in wall coverings as protection of bodies against heat, cold, and rain (Wilcox 1951). For instance, the functionalist anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowsky argued that protection from natural elements was the primary reason for clothing for humans (Rouse 1989). The evolution of dress has been drastically influenced by climate, geography, and the national and social characteristics of people (Ellsworth 2017). After humans discovered sewing needles and learned how to spin cotton, weave other fibers, and dye cloth, a shift in clothing from functional to fashionable, with expressive and communicative capacities, developed (Smith 2012).

The clothes that we know today originated in the late Middle Ages in European societies and were profoundly influenced by the court fashion of kings and upper classes (McCracken 1988). Fashion in clothing emerged in the European courts during the fourteenth century, particularly in France in the court of Louis XIV, and developed with the rise of mercantile capitalism (Laver, 1980). During the sixteenth century, Spain, as Europe's dominant political and military power, spread its formal court dress style to other European countries (Hopkins 2012). In some countries, sumptuary laws defined the types of materials and ornaments allowed to be used by members of different social classes (Hurlock 1965). By the seventeenth century, France usurped Spain's political power, heralding the Baroque era, and thus promoted and exported French dress styles, which were designed based on the rigid artistic rules and views of the French society (Hopkins 2012).

In the mid-nineteenth century, clothing abandoned its mission as the marker of the order of social stratification, which was the symbol of the pre-modern societies, and began to express social mobility in the market, with the rise of the bourgeoisie (Rosa 2013). At this time, the modern idea of a specific market for luxury goods that symbolized the commercial notion of meritocracy and success in business was born (Perrot 1998). The clothing style of Western societies was the dominant form, which was perceived as "civilized," while the non-Western clothing forms and body adornment were perceived as "primitive" (Skov and Melchior 2010).

In general, all languages have a word for fashion; however, historically, no word has been more popular and influential than the French *la mode*, which has been used in almost all non-English speaking Western countries to define fashion. *La mode* emerged as a feminine noun and was associated with modernity and urban life (Laver 1980). It is not surprising that the term *la mode* and the haute couture in France emerged in the same century. The introduction of haute couture by Frederick Worth (1825–1895) in Paris reversed social dynamics by giving the empowerment to the couturier (who was previously client/servant) rather than the lord (who was previously master) (Rosa 2013). After the First World War, haute couture represented the institutionalization of fashion, and the French Maisons

(fashion houses) began to display their original collections twice a year (Simmel 1904). Thereby, beginning in this period, France, and more specifically Paris, positioned itself as an unassailable fashion capital.

Until the Industrial Revolution, since the cost of clothing was so high, clothes were very precious and considered a person's most valuable possessions. Fashion was created for the upper classes, and so it was unavailable for the lower, working classes (Crane 2012). Therefore, in preindustrial societies, clothing behavior was an essential symbol of a person's identity and social status, as well as an indicator of occupation, religion, and regional origin (Ewen 1985). As Western societies industrialized and machine-made clothing increased, clothes become cheaper and more accessible to lower classes. In the early nineteenth century, the advanced tailoring techniques of English riding costumes for men and women greatly influenced the development of fashion, and England, and specifically London, established itself as a fashion center for high-quality clothing (Hopkins 2012). The world renowned fashion magazine Vogue was also conceived in the late nineteenth century, in 1892 in New York, as a special gazette for the Euro-centric American elite (Eisner 1991). The idiom of the era "when good Americans die, they go to Paris" clearly states how Paris symbolized "the epicenter of elegance and consumerism" for the American elite (Skafidas 2009, p. 156).

In the twentieth century, although clothing lost its economic value due to the expansion of ready-made clothing, its symbolic value was still significant (Crane 2012). The consumption of fashionable clothing became a mass phenomenon for all social classes (Laver 1980). After World War II, the mass market for clothes was growing, and consumers were seeking functional, durable, high-quality garments (Jedras 2011). During the post-war years, the US began to produce its own fashion designers and export American design and apparel technology to Europe. With the help of Hollywood's promotions, as a global influencer, and the success of *Vogue* magazine, New York became a global fashion capital (Hopkins 2012). Similarly, Italy, and specifically Milan, emerged as a globally known fashion hub during the post-war years, based on its skilled labor, quality craftsmanship, and respectable heritage of clothing production (Goldstein and Caprarella 2002).

Umberto Eco once bantered that "it is impossible to build a perfect society if people are ill-dressed" (Finkelstein 1998, p. 70). Eco's sarcasm shows the importance of fashion as a maker of one's social image in the twentieth century. Based on this logic, the modernized West became the home for the aesthetics of modern fashion, which has emerged to convey Western civilization's wish for refinement. As Hollander (1994, p. 11) stated, nobody with eyes could have managed to escape from fashion, and Western fashion attracted the imagination of middle classes and affected both males and females equally, as well as most civilizations. Based on the cultural, historical, political, and linguistic developments in Europe and the West, fashion transferred through the royalty and nobility, the middle class, and the working lower classes (McCracken 1988). Since the concept of fashion takes its analytical power from linguistic, cultural, social, technological, and institutional developments in Europe, its application is very problematic outside of the West (Skov and Melchior 2010). Fashion magazines have continuously propagated a specific idea of the Western lifestyle, which is the idea of homogenization that serves the needs of global markets, while transforming the desires of local markets. This process of "fashionization" established fashion as a machine of consumerism that normalizes fantasies, regulates and controls appearances, and propels aesthetic choices on both the global and local levels (Skafidas 2009).

Although new fashion capitals, such as Tokyo, Shanghai, and Lagos, are on the rise, for many people, fashion is still identified with "Paris, London, Milan and New York." Therefore, mainstream fashion media covers only these four cities, and the industry caters primarily to Western consumers. Since this study criticizes this Western dominance in the fashion industry, it has been essential that the first section of this chapter clarify the historical framework that established these four Western cities as global fashion capitals. The next part reviews the historical context to clarify why women are at the focus of fashion.

2.2. Why is fashion aimed at women?

Until the Industrial Revolution, men and women were equally concerned with fashion. Industrialization changed the direction of fashion, and the industry began to target primarily women. This shift occurred after married, working-class wives and unmarried, working-class women became involved in social life by working outside the home. Thus, women's expenditure on fashion items had increased by the late nineteenth century (Crane 2012).

The ways through which married, working-class wives and unmarried, young, working-class women constructed a fashionable look to join in social activities differed. In the nineteenth century, due to conservatism and romanticism, working-class wives belonged to the home and were thus isolated from social life, and they were spending 20% less money on their clothing than their husbands (Brown 1994). The working-class wife was self-effacing, because her husband represented the family in the community, so resources for apparel were saved for husbands and children. Working-class daughters had greater funds for clothing than their mothers, because they were more likely to work outside of the home and seek a middle- or upper-class husband (Crane 2012). Therefore, the clothing of working-class wives, who were confined in their homes, was less noticeable than that of young employed women.

On the other hand, working-class women who were in contact with middle-class women were more inclined to dress fashionably. These women were generally young, unmarried, or widowed and were working outside of their family economy (Scott and Louise 1975). They were employed in jobs labeled as "women's jobs," such as sewing, making textiles, and being salesclerks in department stores and servants in upper-class families. Servant maids wore uniforms during their working hours, which they perceived as the badge of their low-status job. Also, isolation from their peers, family, and the social life of their employers strengthened their interest and desire to dress well, as an attempt to claim social equality (Dudden 1983). A servant maid, who tended to be visible in the public sphere, dressed so similarly to her mistress in her leisure time that it was difficult to distinguish her social status (Banner 1984). The desire for a fashionable appearance in the social arena was derived from the desire to obtain a higher social

status through marriage. Therefore, since fashionable clothing was the primary consumer good and the form of popular culture that was accessible for working-class women (Wright 1969), women spent a significant amount of their disposable income on clothing worn outside of work, to improve their social lives and upward mobility (Simmel 1904; Smith 1994). Servant maids and young working-class women are considered the pioneers of consumer culture, where clothes, as the tool of self-expression, are at the center (Crane 2012).

In the late nineteenth century, wives were spending 66% more for their clothes than their husbands (Brown 1994). The proportion allocated to the wife's clothing from the family budget changed when working-class wives became involved in social activities that required different types of clothes (Crane 2012). Women were considered to possess two leading roles in life: to raise children and to represent. Only lower-class women could join to workforce. For the good name of the household and for being differentiated from the poor, women acted as the pious leader of the family. The most conspicuous way a woman could show her family's social status and prove their level of wealth was through dress. Since wives were the economic dependents of men, they became the chattel of industrialist husbands who brought in money for dressing and leisurely lifestyles and, thus, through the appearance of the wife and daughters, demonstrated his wealth and social status (Veblen 1899). Therefore, the conspicuous leisure life and consumption of the woman was credited to her master, her husband. The more expensive were the dresses worn by the unproductive women of the household, the more reputability the husband received. The costly dresses of housewives that were embellished with embroidery, lace, and decorative inventiveness were considered evidence of the ability to pay for the leisure life. The overall voluntarily discomfort of women's attire through constricting corsets, high heels, impractical bonnets, and heavy skirts was accepted as the proof of incapacity for all productive employment. The primary objective of women's apparel was to demonstrate women's disinterest in useful work and thus earn respect for the household and the husband (Veblen 2008). Since the political and social environment of many leading countries did not change until the early twentieth century, attitudes towards women and, thus, the aim of clothing for women, did not change either.

Consequently, the fashion industry accepted women as their primary target consumer, who was responsible for conveying messages to society about herself and her family through how she dressed.

In the nineteenth century, clothing consumption meant personal production for women. Therefore, sewing machines and fashion magazines filled with sewing advice and patterns were primarily aimed at women who designed their clothing at home. Women who were experienced at using sewing machines joined the workforce outside the home. Women's financial ability to access clothing created a profound impact on the women's ready-to-wear apparel industry (White 2009). In addition, the adoption of sewing machines by factories created a rapid shift from custom-made to ready-made clothes (Baron and Klepp 1984). As the fashion industry developed significantly, department stores such as Butterick and Demorest began to open branches in many American and European cities, place price tags on their clothes instead of using the previous transaction method of bargaining, and offer catalog orders using the postal service and railroads to increase their sales (Walsh 1979). Women began to wear simpler styles purchased from retail stores rather than custom designed or home-made clothing (Leach 1984). Within this era, another element of fashion was changing. The growth of the middle class, the introduction of the sewing machine for commercial use, the expansion of the fashion market, which made fashionable forms of the dress readily available to women from all classes, and the postal service introduced a new thesis to the fashion scene: the democratization of fashion.

2.3. Democratization of fashion and expansion of the market

The evolution of fashion is described as the process of "democratization" by Gilles Lipovetsky, who viewed this progress in fashion as one a manifestation of the development of the individuality concept (Rosa 2013). Fashion, primarily clothing, took the first step towards democratization after the first consumer revolution in Europe, together with the increasing purchasing power of the new middle class and the development of urban life (Entwistle 2000). The second step occurred when Paris as a fashion authority began to struggle against fashion

designers in London, New York, and Milan. However, haute couture, with Paris still at its center for production and distribution, is significant for the fashion industry, which, with its creations of trendy made-to-measure clothing and industrial production, attempted to imitate it. Lastly, the third and most recent step of fashion democratization was the emergence of street styles and minority juvenile styles, which, then, became the primary inspiration for contemporary fashion production (Bovone 2012). However, it is important to note here that the notion of "democratization" has been primarily associated with the inclusion of diverse social classes to fashion consumption, not necessary the inclusion of other ethnic groups, races, gender, body types, and so on. Therefore, democratization is a term to be challenged and explored. Since, historically, fashion tended to privilege the elite (Patton 2006), to understand the explosions in the process of fashion democratization, it is necessary to understand the historical events behind it. The following paragraphs of this section demonstrate the historical flow of the democratization process of fashion.

In the late nineteenth century, clothing was one of the first consumer goods that was widely accessible, which blurred the indications of one's social status and identity (Crane 2012). At that time, fashion was somewhat democratized, as all social classes wore similar types of clothing, but with quality differences (Steele 1989). For instance, the scarcity and poor quality of clothing available to the working class varied by region, ethnicity, race, and gender (Shergold 1982). The transition from hand-made clothing to machine-made clothing and the development of patterns and an accurate system of body measurements improved the quality and style of dress in lower economic classes (Crane 2012). However, subtle combinations of styles and accessories, such as hats, gloves, ties, vests, and chained watches, were used by upper and middle classes to revive social values, define class distinctions, and reproduce the social structure (Hall 1992). Therefore, the disparity in the numbers of clothing and accessories, such as hats, gloves, and shawls, owned by the middle and working classes was remarkable (Brew 1945). As such, some authors (e.g., Jensen 1984) argue that the democratization of fashion, which means the availability of fashionable clothing, was present for the middle class rather than the working class. In other words, fashionable clothing

that was primarily worn and, thus, used to expand a person's social capital was predominantly available for the middle and upper classes during the late nineteenth century. Here, it is important to note that, as can be seen from the aforementioned evidence, although the concept of "democratization" is used to explain the developments in the fashion industry, this led to the dissemination and expansion of fashion rather than its democratization.

Nevertheless, the expansion of fashion to other social classes is considered the transition from traditional to modern society (Slater 1997). Smith (1994) states that fashion was democratized and, thus, clothes became less important as a sign of individuality and status during the twentieth century, rather than the nineteenth century, because democratization can only occur if dresses are simpler and easier to produce.

Although the democratization of fashion brought the standardization of clothing, according to diffusion theory, social class differences were still salient because of the new fashionable styles created for and adopted by elites. Fashionable clothing worn by wealthy women was designed by skilled dressmakers, and it was extravagant, decorative, and complicated, which required too much fabric and trimmings (Brew 1945). Middle-class women wore reproductions of these styles, as they appeared in women's magazines, and paid the dressmakers in their towns to eliminate the amateurish effect of copying (Laver 1980). On the other hand, working-class women presented a stylish appearance, by making their own clothing at home, often using their old dresses with the addition of a new type of sleeve or a new bodice to an existing skirt (Severa 1995). The desire to dress well was more dominant among working-class women who were living in isolated locations, such as rural districts and small towns, because clothing was the only link to urban life (Crane 2012).

Once fashionable clothing was available to everyone regardless of their social class and ethnicity, the production of hegemonic cultures by industrial societies exterminated traditional clothing styles (Schudson 1994). Global integration between cultures occurred as a result of international trade and developments in communication technology (Giddens 1990). Rising levels of literacy, the growth of fashionable, machine-made clothing as a form of popular

culture available to all social classes, and the expansion of the press contributed to this cultural unification in the fashion scene (Crane 2012). Before addressing the destructive effects of universal fashion and beauty ideals as a societal issue, it is critical understand the role of the West in the unification of fashion and feminine beauty perceptions worldwide.

3. Globalization of Western beauty and fashion

Before the Industrial Revolution, both men and women were part of the productive unit, and the value of a woman was based on her work skills, fertility, physical strength, and economic intelligence. Thus, beauty did not have a significant value in marriage (Wolf 2002). Standardized beauty gained ground after industrialization, when new urbanization and factorization separated men from women in the workforce, and men became the breadwinners of the household. Middle classes expanded, disposable incomes increased, literacy rose, the size of families shrank, and a new class of literate women with changing values developed. Until then, women did not have a unified beauty perception (Jones 2011). To better understand how the Western female look became the global ideal of beauty, it is necessary to review the confluence of events occurring in the history of the beauty industry.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the modern beauty industry emerged in Europe and North America, due to changing lifestyles. Rising incomes allowed for discretionary spending, urbanization heightened awareness about hygiene to prevent diseases, and changing diets brought on new health issues, such as tooth cavities (Jones 2008). Until the mid-nineteenth century, Western societies were famous for foul-smelling people, because washing with water was not common until the outbreak of the bubonic plague (Vigarello 1988). Some historians argue that the plague epidemic was the turning point in the Western economy, because the disease killed so many people from the working population and caused a massive demand for labor, and thus working-class wages rose (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015). After the outbreak, regular washing gained importance. Since hygienic standards were established to define social hierarchy

and female domesticity, most of the cleaning and beauty products were initially marketed to women. Personal cleanliness began to be viewed as a symbol of social, racial, and moral superiority, as hygiene was associated with Western "Whiteness" (Bushman and Bushman 1988). So, the shift in values was also a significant parameter in the quick growth of the beauty industry. Once hygiene became a routine in middle-class households, soap-making manufacturers such as Colgate, Procter and Gamble, B. J. Johnson, and Yardley established in the United States and Britain began to produce "toilet soap" for personal use (Dyer, Danzel, and Olegario 2004). France was the global center of perfumery, and thus it entrenched itself as the center of haute couture (custom-fitted high-end fashion), both in beauty and fashion. American entrepreneurs developed cosmetics, such as mascara, lipsticks, shampoos, and home-purchase hair dyes (Scott 2006). Fashion magazines, such as Vogue, the Queen, and Harper's Bazaar, were the primary outlets where beauty companies could advertise their products. The arrival of radio broadcasting turned cosmetic industry towards media-based marketing (Jones 2008). After the development of mass marketing, women began to be exposed to images outside of the Church, which dictated how women should look (Newhall 1986). Advertisers began to promote the feminine mystique by using nude photographs of extremely thin sex workers in advertisements as representations of beautiful women. Middle-class women were confined with postcards, copies of classical artwork, and porcelain figurines of society beauties and royal mistresses. Also, women's fashion magazines published Western clothing patterns in specific sizes, and only dress makers possessed the skills to adopt those standard patterns to the sizes of female consumers. As such, working-class wives who were making their own fashionable clothes at home had to adopt their bodies to the standard patterns by dieting (Crane 2012). The discourse of thinness and youth put pressure on women as a sign of success in womanhood, and thus the skin care and diet industries within the beauty industry appeared as the new cultural censors of women's intellectual space. Middle-class Western women began to be controlled by ideals, stereotypes, and material constraints. Beauty, which was identified by politics, began to be equalized with universal quality and became a concept not about women but about male dominance, institutions, and power (Wolf 2002).

Therefore, due to advancements in product innovations, the mass production and mass marketing of the beauty industry was growing with a heavy skew towards women.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, toilet soap and perfume led the globalization process in the beauty industry (Jones 2004). Although French perfumery dominated the interwar American market, entrepreneurs from the United States checked foreign markets for new business opportunities and opened factories in Canada, Latin America, Europe, and Australia.

In interwar and post-war America, the dominant image of ideal female beauty was Caucasian, so, for example, non-Whites were not even allowed to join in Miss America beauty contests until 1921. African American women participated in the national beauty contest for the first time in 1960, but the first win came in 1984 (Jones 2008). The invention of television reinforced the diffusion of a Western, particularly American, lifestyle, beauty, and fashion ideals to other countries by turning beauty pageants into international media events (Jones 2011). Beauty pageants and female grooming set the perception of the universality of aspiration, thus defining beauty (Gundle 2008). The "Miss Universe" standard of beauty was described as paler skin and wider eyes (Van Esterik 1996).

After the Second World War, the American market turned beauty products into a necessity, rather than a luxury, and became the leader in the world beauty industry (Jones 2008). However, the American market was interested in the homogenization of global beauty ideals, so that the ethnic cosmetic market, which sold specific products for African Americans and other ethnicities, consisted of only 2.3% of the total US market (Frost and Sullivan 1988). The beauty industry did not cater beauty products specialized to these markets because due to the White women ideal, it was uncommon to consider non-White women beautiful (Jones 2011). Beauty firms used racial stereotypes to advertise soap and toiletries. These products were presented as the Western contribution to civilizing colonized people (Burke 1996). American and British soap marketers claimed that their soap would whiten the skin of people of color, thus civilizing them (McClintock 1995), and Greek soap firms declared that their products were capable of "turning even a negro white" (Sifneos 2002, p. 71). So, in Western societies, White skin was

considered superior, and both marketing and branding strategies strengthened and diffused these values.

Barbie toy dolls came to the market in 1950, and they were predominantly blonde and blue-eyed until 1980 (Jones 2008). The ever-developing beauty industry used Hollywood stars to advertise and expand demand for their products, using television advertising and sponsored game shows (Basten 2008). The international growth of the American beauty industry actualized with the globalization of the American cinema. For instance, the blonde and blue-eyed beauty ideal was well represented in the Hollywood movies, such as Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953) starring Marilyn Monroe. Diversity had boundaries in Hollywood, and African Americans and Asians were not preferable for appearing on the screen (Berry 2000). With the rise of Hollywood, both Western countries and other developing countries with lower income levels and different cultural traditions were exposed to American hygiene and beauty ideals, which shaped perceptions of female beauty (Jones 2008).

Before beauty firms began exporting, each society had a unique perception of beauty, obtained through the years from the traditional views and the physiological characteristics of the people (Yan and Bissell 2014). Beauty and aesthetic perceptions of societies varied considerably over time and between geographies, and thus how cultures enhanced their attractiveness through cosmetics, hairstyles, and clothing was unique. No global perception of what was beautiful existed. For instance, the Korean feminine beauty was to possess an average or even overweight body in size as a symbol of abundance and wealth (Han 2003). Round-faced, chubby women were considered beautiful and healthy in China and Japan (Jung and Forbes 2006), while oversized and curvy Hispanic women were valued as fertile and attractive (Cunningham et al. 1995). Scarification of the skin was a symbol of beauty and productivity, rather than a flaw, in Africa (Frith 2006). However, the certain ideals of facial attractiveness that value high eyebrows, large, round, light-colored eyes, high cheekbones, pronounced lips, a small nose, a narrow face, straight light-colored hair, a slim figure, and paler skin caused the cultural assimilation of fashion and beauty (Kim 2010; Taylor 1999; Mussell et al. 2000).

Globalization gave rise to the Westernization of beauty by diffusing the Western, primarily American, hygiene practices and beauty ideals. In other words, beauty firms converted societal values into brands, commoditized beauty, and, ultimately, exported those commodities to many other countries, carrying strong assumptions of what is beautiful. The commoditization and marketization of beauty eventually changed societal perceptions of beauty worldwide (Jones 2011).

As Western beauty ideals became globalized, local beauty ideals and practices were abandoned. This shift did not occur overnight by force of arms, but it occurred through shaping aspirations. So, due to their influential, global reach, beauty firms, fashion magazines, and Hollywood remained the trendsetters in fashion and beauty. The concept of "world fashion," which is embedded in Western culture and history, began the global diffusion of ideal beauty standards and the appropriation of Western clothing, and it caused profound societal, cultural, and individual impacts for non-Western women.

4. Lack of diversity in fashion

A comprehensive literature review reveals that seven central interdisciplinary categories related to vulnerable consumers in fashion exist: 1) social class, 2) body image, 3) race and ethnicity, 4) sexuality and gender, 5) religion, 6) age, and 7) being labelled as disabled.

4.1. Social class

Historically, dress has been a tool to display privilege and distinctions between social classes (Ewen 1985). According to philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel (1904), in the "trickle-down" theory, the nineteenth century's idea of social evolution, fashion diffuses from the upper classes to the lower ones. In this theoretical model, a social hierarchy exists in society, and a fashion style is firstly offered to and adapted by the top strata of society and then gradually accepted by the lower strata (Veblen 1899; Simmel 1904). Furthermore, the "trickle-down theory" states that fashion is a vehicle of conspicuous consumption, leisure, and waste exercised by the wealthy classes. The dress of fashion leaders

indicate that they did not perform laborious work, have sufficient disposable income to spend on an extensive closet, and are able to wear a dress only a few times before discarding it. The lower classes, who seek to be identified with the affluent, copy the style of the dress worn by the upper class. Once the fashion is adopted by the lower class, the upper class seeks other prestigious looks through consumption for the sake of both distinction and distance from the lower class (Veblen 1899). Therefore, as soon as this emulation is complete, the elite class changes its fashion style to reinforce social hierarchies. The "trickle-down theory" survived the longest in marketing studies, because it explains concepts such as early adopters, fashion leaders and influencers, and cool hunters (Skov and Melchior 2010).

Sociologist Georg Simmel (1904) contributed to fashion theory by proposing two opposing social forces that establish fashion: the need for conformity and individual distinction. Although these are two seemingly conflicting needs, the reasoning behind both is the individual's need to dress for self-expression while simultaneously needing to belong to the group. Flügel (1930) interprets this dual tendency by utilizing the idea of superior and inferior. An individual wants to be like others when others are perceived superior but strives to be different when others are viewed inferior. Therefore, according to Simmel (1904), fashion offers creative tools to express identity as a symbol of hierarchy and an equalizer of appearance.

Many scholars have criticized the "trickle-down" theory and proposed alternative approaches, namely, the trickle-across and trickle-up movements. King (1963), who is the developer of the trickle-across theory, explains fashion as a horizontal movement between individuals who belong to a similar social stratum. In addition, sociologist Crane (2012) supports the trickle-across pattern, stating that fashion occurs based on collective selection, which leads the fashion production to be consumer driven. The author shows evidence of this movement in designers presenting a fashion style in different price ranges, from a high end to a lower end. Mass communication, promotional incentives from fashion manufacturers and retailers, and the exposure of a look to all fashion influencers are listed as the reasons for this diffusion pattern (King 1963). In addition, Carter

(2003) argued that imitation and differentiation in fashion do not necessarily occur one after the other, due to a continuing dynamic interaction between the two. More specifically, he contends that for each class, the need for fashionable dress arises from the internal drive of expressing and asserting one's unique identity. Similarly, by studying the creation and diffusion of fashion, Atik and Firat (2013) argue that trickle-up, trickle-across, and trickle-down diffusions do not occur independently but operate simultaneously in fashion.

By the 1960s, the so-called democratization of fashion had begun, and the industry began to produce and distribute a wide range of products for everyone, which made dressing fashionably accessible. In other words, anyone around the world could imitate a new fashion trend instantaneously. As such, the direction of fashion change was no longer sequential. With the help of global media and popular culture, lower classes, subcultures, and marginal groups were able to influence fashion as much as were the upper classes. Therefore, as opposition to trickle-down theory, trickle-up, or bubble-up, theory occurred as the latest movement in fashion. According to trickle-up theory, mainstream fashion designers are inspired from the streets (Polhemus 1994). In other words, lower income groups and subcultures initiate fashion trends, which flow to upper-income groups. Thus, according to Polhemus (1994), the fashion movement began from the bottom up.

Although the democratization of fashion theoretically brought social equality between classes, the fashion industry's ambition to separate superior high-end fashion from the lower-end mass market is persistent. The high-end market is considered as the editorial look, with high prices, catering primarily to the small elite segment. On the other hand, undervalued mass-market fashion is regarded as the commercial look, with affordable prices, widely available to the larger portion of the population (Mears 2011). If lower-income individuals are willing to spend their limited funds on aspirational purchases from the editorial world, they have the chance to participate in the high-end fashion market. However, eventually, due to financial limits, they will not be able to continue participating to the same extent as upper-class individuals (Schopf 2016).

Nevertheless, since the lower-income group can also participate in the high-fashion market, the display of one's social standing through fashion became more eclectic and subtler. The assessment of social status in dress became embedded in detail. Elite groups are affiliated with the perfect fitted apparel, expensive fabrics, brand name wear, and accessories, such as shoes, handbags, eyeglasses, and watches. Furthermore, a stylish look, through haircut, makeup, perfectly lined-up teeth, and particularly a slender body, became more of a social class signifier than the dress itself. White and ultra-thin bodies are considered the editorial look, which is exclusively populated by middle- to upper-class consumers and producers. On the other hand, the commercial look is identified with the mass market and associated with the diversity of multiples races, classes, and body types (Schopf 2016). Mears (2011) defined the commercial look as "slightly older, slightly more racially diverse, and ever so slightly fuller in figure" (p. 178). Therefore, the different looks of editorial and commercial fashion markets serve as tools that differentiate high-end fashion insiders from the masses and communicate "ideas of gender, sexuality, and race that are mediated by class" (p. 206).

4.2. Body image

4.2.1. Size bias and plus-sized women

> "The plus-size business is often regarded as tertiary, 'a stepchild.' Retailers do not nurture the business...so it leaves few players in the end" (Bellafante 2010).

Between 2015–2016, 41.5% of women aged 20 and over were overweight or obese in the United States, while it was 38.3% between 2011–2014 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015). Surprisingly, in parallel with increasing obesity numbers, weight-based discriminatory experiences in major lifetime events, employment, education, medical care, and interpersonal relationships have increased at disturbing rates, by 66%, over the last decade (Andreyeva et al. 2008). Weight-based discrimination occurs as social rejection, which causes long-term

adverse effects on women's self-esteem (Grilo et al. 1994). However, unfortunately, minimal social and legal sanctions exist to protect the obese female population from such lifelong damage.

Body image has a strong influence on mental and physical health. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory suggests that individuals compare themselves to others who represent the goals and images they desire to attain. When a negative difference exists between one's body image and the perception of what is socially acceptable as physically attractive, body dissatisfaction occurs (Powell and Hendricks 1999). Research has shown that thin and fit bodies are valued more compared to their fat counterparts and have higher social status in society (Christel 2014). Due to this social value, consumers spend approximately 66 billion USD a year on the weight loss and diet control market (Marketdata LLC 2017).

It is evident that weight and height discrimination is prevalent in many facets of society. The fashion industry is ambivalent about catering to the plus-sized market, which makes it one of the most size/weight biased institutions towards fatness. Tacit indications of these biases include the limited presentation of larger bodies in fashion magazines, advertisement, and runway shows; few fashionable clothing options for plus-sized women; size 2 mannequins placed in store windows; isolated plus-sized clothing sections in top or basement levels of retail stores; and small-sized dressing rooms (Colls 2004).

Due to the mentioned biases, apparel shopping is associated with constant frustration, particularly for plus-sized consumers (Colls 2006). For instance, if fat people discuss diet and weight loss with a shop's staff, they feel that they are treated more respectfully because it is what is socially expected (King et al. 2006). Also, overweight consumers have reported exhaustion in finding stores that provide bigger sizes with the correct fit of fashionable, contemporary clothing at a reasonable price (Chowdhary and Beale 1988; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Historically, "above average" female consumers have felt underserved because of limited clothing offerings in comparison to their thinner counterparts (Stearns 1997). Dissatisfaction with shopping experiences due to not being able to choose and wear fashionable clothing in the correct size and fit leads to dissatisfaction

with the body (Cooper 1998). Another reason for apparel shopping frustration is the attempt to hide and disguise plus-sized female consumers. Women's clothing larger than XL or 14/16W is considered plus-sized and separated from the smaller-sized clothing section of the retail store, while men's apparel ranging up to 3X or 4XL is merchandized together (Keiser and Garner 2012). Also, some retail chains sell plus-sized clothing exclusively online but not in their stores, or their online size ranges differ from their in-store sizes (Huffpost 2016). Last but not least, mannequins, which are models of the human body that are used by retail stores to show products on windows, are much thinner than the average woman's body (Kim and Damhorst 2010). Mannequins come in size 2, based on a typical fashion model on today's runways, and it is the industry standard; while an average woman weighs 23% more (Jain, Sharma and Narwal 2012). Cooper (1998) views this lack of diversity in women's clothing sizes as a form of social rejection and fat hatred. Supporting this view that plus-sized women are not a desirable target for the fashion industry, because they are seen as aesthetically unappealing, are attitudes such as those expressed by designer Karl Lagerfeld and Abercrombie and Fitch CEO Mike Jeffries. Lagerfeld was offended by H&M's decision to produce clothes for larger women and stated that his aesthetic vision excludes plus-sized people, using the words "What I designed was fashion for slender and slim people. That was the original idea" (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Similarly, in an interview, Jeffries refused to make larger clothes, stating that "It's almost everything. That's why we hire good-looking people in our stores. Because good-looking people attract other good-looking people, and we want to market to cool, good-looking people. We do not market to anyone other than that" (Lutz 2013). Lastly, the fashion industry relies heavily on thin models with perfect proportions. The lack of presence of larger female models in mainstream fashion media such as advertisements, magazines, and runways play a significant role in the development of body dissatisfaction and body hatred among plus-sized women.

Furthermore, obesity among women of different races significantly differs. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (2015) most recent report, obesity was 11.9%, 35.5%, 45.7%, and 56.9% for non-Hispanic Asian, non-Hispanic White, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic Black women, respectively. Although

the fashion industry places a strong emphasis on thinness as the universally accepted ideal image of beauty and body, Harris (1995) observed that different races place varying degrees of value on thinness. For instance, Anglo-Americans and Hispanics suffer more from body-image dissatisfaction than Black women (e.g., Altabe 1998; Fitzgibbon et al. 1998). White women are more concerned about their weight, engage more in weight loss behaviors such dieting and exercising, and suffer more from eating disorders than do Black women (David et al. 2002). However, it is notable that despite the differing thinness norms between races and ethnicities, increasing physical and mental diseases due to lack of body-image diversity in fashion are non-negligible among women of all races.

4.2.2. Body shape, proportion, and fit

Another area that lacks diversity is the availability of well-fitted female clothing for different body shapes and proportions (Howarton and Lee 2010). Since body shape is directly related to the fit of apparel products (Parket al. 2009), it is inevitable to have fitting concerns for consumers who do not possess the standardized, ready-to-wear body shape and proportions. Some researchers argue that the problem of the lack of realistic women's body measurements and correct garment fits derives from relying on the body size and shape charts developed in the 1940s (e.g., Simmons, Istook and Devarajan 2004; Kasambala, Kempen and Pandarum 2016). This argument highlights that the current sizing systems, including the measurement data and population averages, are outdated and, thus, they do not reflect the diversity of the female body shapes.

Body types that represent target customers are identified, and appropriate ratios and size labeling are developed by apparel companies to suggest the suitability of a clothing piece for particular body dimensions (Glock and Kunz 2005). Many apparel retailers separate merchandising sections based on age, figure type, and size stereotypes and categorize womenswear into four groups: Junior, Misses, Women, and Women Plus Sizes (Christel and Dunn 2016). Junior sizes are designed to fit young teenagers who have short, slender, growing, and youthful figures (ASTM International 2015). Misses sizing is designed to fit a fully

developed female body with breasts and hips, which has not experienced childbirth or body-aging effects, while the Women category is intended for adult women with mature figures (Brown and Rice 2013). Lastly, women's plus-sized clothing is typically defined as sizes 14–72 (Peters 2015; Winn 2004). However, as the female population is increasingly diverse in body shape, these generalizations have become inadequate in defining and meeting female consumer demands.

Varying body shapes and dimensions among women are the result of age, the gain or loss of body weight, changes in diet and lifestyle, and ethnicity (Lee et al. 2007). Unfortunately, apparel manufacturers primarily produce women's clothing that would adequately fit solely the ideal body shape (Makhanya et al. 2014). However, a study by Pisut and Connell (2007) shows that the female population is getting larger than the ideal figure with different body shapes, when compared to previous decades. Also, Simmons et al. (2004) demonstrated through a study based on 222 women that 40% of the female population possessed the bottom-heavy hourglass figure, 21.6% of women were the hourglass (ideal body shape), 17.1% were the spoon, and 15.8% were rectangular shaped.

Although women's body shape, size, proportions, and appearance range dramatically between different ethnicities (Lee et al. 2007), in many Western countries, this fact is ignored. Women from different ethnicities require separately designed and cut apparel to accommodate figure variations (Connell et al. 2006). However, since female clothing production is based on the Western standard or ideal figure, a body that differs in shape and size from the standardized ideal is condemned to experience problems with finding and wearing well-fitted, fashionable clothing (Park et al. 2009). For instance, African American women face fit issues, primarily in the waist and hips, and Mexican Americans have improper fitting in hips because of larger sizing than the standard (Shin and Istook 2007). Similarly, Mexican Americans, Hispanics, and Asians have fit problems in pants length because of being shorter than assumed, while African Americans face the same challenge because of being taller than the defined pants lengths. As is evident in these examples, each ethnic group has unique body shapes and different body dimensions, which should be considered separately.

Exposure to unrealistic, unattainable, and unsustainable body sizes and shapes in fashion catalogs, magazines, and runways, has transformed these unrelenting images to the cultural ideal, which cannot be avoided. Despite only the representation of tall, thin, hourglass-shaped bodies in fashion, female body exists in a variety of sizes and shapes. However, the fashion industry bolsters the myth that women should look like what is presented on the screen and in fashion pages and, thus, excludes different body types.

4.3. Race and ethnicity

“In fashion,
the model “look” is the embodied vision of imagined social differences.
The look is a mirror for social inequalities, an expression of power.
The look is a powerful symbolic representation of the
intersections of gender, race, heterosexuality, and class;
it is the embodied vision of our imagined social distinctions and fantasies”
(Mears 2011, p. 175).

In addition to being criticized for privileging thinness, an ongoing global critique towards the fashion industry involves the lack of race and ethnic diversity found in the mainstream fashion media. On the runway, the idealization of Whiteness remained constant when it comes to the ethnicity of models. For instance, White models walking down the runways of New York, London, Paris, and Milan for the spring 2017 season were 74.6%, and non-White models were 25.4%. Among these, 10.33% were Black, 7% were Asian, 3.36% were Latina, 0.40% were Middle Eastern, and 4.27% belonged to other races and ethnicities (Tai 2016). Critics believe that the lack of racial diversity promotes a blond-haired, blue-eyed Caucasian ideal, and it is considered racist.

Similar to the majority of fashion models, model bookers and fashion producers are predominantly White. Thus, they create and reproduce a fashion culture that overwhelmingly values Whiteness (Schopf 2016). Historically shaped and socially constructed ideal beauty is the preferred look of the fashion producers,

and it influences “their everyday understandings of femininity, race, and class” (Mears 2011, p. 172).

Wissinger (2015) delves into the racial discrimination aspect of the fashion industry and specifically focuses on the experiences of Black models in the high-end fashion market. According to her research, Black models’ success in the editorial market depends on two ironically different conditions: 1) the ability to meet White beauty standards and 2) exoticism or primitivism. Looking the Whitest, such as having European American-looking straight hair, lighter skin, and narrow facial features, helps Black models to stand out and find jobs in the high-end fashion market. On the other hand, a dark-skinned woman who is quite different from White beauty standards is exploited for her exoticism by being forced to “pose and style in exotic juxtapositions to the normative white body” and is presented as an exotic creature with animalistic hyper-sexuality, rather than as a woman. Collins (2000) argues that exoticism racializes Black female sexuality and identifies it as “animal-like” in the context of editorial fashion (p. 140). This representation of Black women is used to serve the cultural fascination of the West about non-Western women’s bodies and reinforce the superiority of “pure” White femininity in the social hierarchy (Mears, 2011, p. 174–175).

Said (1979) defined orientalism as “the corporate institution dealing with the Orient by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it by teaching it, settling it and ruling over it” (p. 11). Taken literally, the term “oriental” is the culturally constructed concept of the East by the West (Kwon and Kim 2011). This Western representation of the East is built upon the idea of “otherness,” which in the context of fashion, accelerates the objectification and consumption of racialized bodies (Sharma and Sharma 2003). For instance, since an oversupply of applicants for the limited Black spaces exists, the baseline body-image standards are higher for Black models. Thus, they face stricter height and weight requirements, compared to their White counterparts, in the high-end fashion market (Mears, 2011). Also, since agencies see lower earning potential than for White models, for the small number of spots available, models of color must constantly compete with each other, even if it means getting paid very little or nothing at all (Padula 2016). The Saidian interpretation of Orientalism, which is

the Western awareness, thought, and expression of the East, explains well the exploitive othering practices of the fashion industry to establish and maintain its White superiority and authority over non-Whites.

Furthermore, sociologist Kanter (1977) introduced the term "tokenism," a phenomenon that occurs when the ratio of dominant to minority group members is heavily skewed in favor of the dominants. According to Kanter's theory, in the context of the high-end fashion market, the ratio is heavily biased in favor of White producers and models. Thus, this imbalance encourages misconceptions about non-Whites' ability to appeal to the high-end fashion audience. Leong's (2013) concept of "racial capitalism," which is defined as "the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person," sheds light on the motivations behind the fashion industry's desire to show a degree of racial diversity via tokenism (p. 2152). Racial capitalism views non-Whiteness as particularly valuable, because it delivers specific social and economic benefits to White individuals and institutions. Therefore, racial and ethnic tokenism in high-end fashion is the result of racial capitalism and is actualized by hiring a small number of models of color to create an illusion of equality. In this process, eventually, tokenized women feel enormous pressure to express themselves and ultimately to belong to the dominant group. Finally, they attempt to assimilate to the standards of the dominant culture and forget their own cultural identities.

The problem of the lack of racial diversity in fashion goes beyond ethnic model employment issues. It dramatically influences the well-being of society as a whole (Padula 2016). The fashion industry fails to embrace the culturally diverse world we live in by defining ideal beauty based on a narrow segment of the female population and by encouraging aesthetic sameness. Women of color of all ages feel left out from the fashion scene, because of the inadequate representation of their appearance.

4.4. Sexuality and gender

Sexuality and gender in fashion is another relevant field of research that has gained multidisciplinary attention. Wilson (1992) argues that fashion of dress has attracted the interest of not only scholars and practitioners but also consumers,

more than other forms of fashion have. She suggests that this attraction is primarily due to the intense intimacy of the dress with the body. Direct physical contact of clothing with the body creates a profound connection to gender and sexual identities. Wilson explains this connection by saying, “when fashion underlines sexuality or when…they go in for gender-bending, many of us may feel threatened and insecure. For women especially, the exaggerated and often arbitrary standards of ‘beauty’…can be disempowering and even offensive” (p. 34).

Based on Wilson’s (1992) view, this section of the dissertation presents the relations between clothing, sex, gender, and the body by examining how dress constructs, signals, and reproduces sex and gender. Before presenting a review of the literature on sex and gender in fashion, it is essential to understand the distinction between these two concepts. Sex is a natural phenomenon that can be described with biological differences between men and women, whereas gender is a cultural phenomenon that can be defined with masculinity and femininity, based on associated characteristics (Barnard 2002).

Berger (1972, p. 47) describes the asymmetrical relationship between men and women by saying “men act, women appear.” Berger claims that in Western cultures, it is the role of men to be the active gender who observe the opposite sex, while it is the role of women to be the passive gender, who are observed by the opposite sex. Similarly, following psychologist Flügel’s (1930) lead, costume historian Laver (1980) argues that women’s fashion is governed by the principles of “attraction” and “seduction,” while the principle of “hierarchy” governs men’s fashion. More precisely, the primary motivation behind the changes in women’s fashion is the desire to attract the opposite sex, while the aim of fashionable men’s styles is the emphasis on socioeconomic status. According to Laver (1980), fashion cycles change based on the principle of “shifting erogenous zones.” This principle argues that male attraction is attained by exposing and concealing various parts of the female body through women’s fashionable dress. Fashion creates thrill and interest towards the female body, by covering up particular parts to build “erotic capital.” For instance, if legs are considered erotic, then they become the new fashionable body part that is trending. Thus, stylish dress would emphasize the legs by exposing them. If legs are no longer considered erotic, skirt lengths will be

longer; the emphasis would move to the shoulders and bust. Thus, cleavage would become fashionable. Similar to Berger (1972), Laver (1980) describes women as the passive objects of fashion cycles, which make a new female body part trendy based on the male gaze. Likewise, French philosopher Beauvoir supports Laver's argument, by stating that fashion incarcerates women to a superficial life, far away from important matters. According to Beauvoir (1972), a woman of elegance turned herself into a "thing" through her preoccupation with dress and appearance.

Rouse (1989) described fashion as an instrument in the definition of sexual and gender roles, which help to shape thoughts of how men and women should look. According to Rouse, fashion does not merely reflect the existing identities of sex and gender, but "they are part of the process by which attitudes to and images of both men and women are created and reproduced" (1989, p. 108). Gender differences in dress may be communicated by the presence or absence of particular accessories, garments, colors, textures, sizes, or styles, while gender differences are ascribed by the members of a culture (Crawley 1965). From a historical perspective, until the nineteenth century, gender distinctions in clothing were not keen in the West. Steele (1989, p. 15) noted that until that time, "men often wore silk stocking, cosmetics, long curled and perfumed hair… petticoat breeches," just like women. Rouse (1989, p. 109) revealed that until the end of the eighteenth century, both fashionable men and women were wearing "ruffs, slashed clothes, furs, jewelry, wigs, and lace." In this case, traditionally, men were in the role of exhibitionists as much as were women, which is contrary to the active/men and passive/women gender distinctions of contemporary dress (Barnard 2002). On the other hand, in the nineteenth century, femininity began to be associated with "frivolity, delicacy, inactivity and submissiveness" (Oakley 1981, p. 83). Women were the property of their husbands and were considered to be too delicate to be active (Veblen 1989). This femininity characteristic was guaranteed with the usage of the corset, which made women unsuited to any activity. Similarly, sleeves in women's dress were constructed in a way that made it impossible to raise the arm to make an aggressive gesture, which reflected the delicacy and submissiveness of women (Oakley 1981). In that era, women's fashion was used to indicate femininity and a husband's financial status and possessions.

On the other hand, after the Industrial Revolution, middle-class men became involved in jobs in industry and commerce that required qualities such as activity and robustness. Therefore, men adopted more unadorned and plain garments and began to wear trousers, which created a new definition of masculinity and thus a strongly distinct gender identity for men (Rouse 1989). Weber (2005) described this era through the "Protestant Ethic," with its focus on "hard work, sobriety, frugality and personal economic advancements," (Davis 1992, p. 38) which had a profound impact on the development of capitalism and the new definition of masculinity.

In the twentieth century in Europe and America, it was acceptable for women to be interested in creating and sustaining a career (Barnard 2002). This model of femininity consisted of being outside of the household, holding positions of authority, and doing a serious job that paid proper amounts of money. In that case, fashion was used to construct, signal, and reproduce the femininity of "career-women," by stating its appearance as wearing "fairly strictly tailored suit…straightish skirt…hemline ending around the knees…[and] shoulders that are padded or otherwise enlarged" (Davis 1992, p. 50).

Although the following periods reproduced the characteristics of femininity, they were still based upon the idea of what the appearance of women should be. Berger (1972) stated that fashion was primarily the concern of women rather than men because the creation and maintenance of looks were considered the primary feature of femininity. Similarly, today, in the twenty-first century, women's fashion consider women as frivolous and decorative beings, who are not suitable to work in industry and commerce, as are men. While men's clothing and fashion are reproduced to be ideal for the office and marketplace, women's fashion and gender identity are still frivolous and decorative (Barnard 2002).

In summary, in the nineteenth century, women's fashion was conservative, based on the conception of women's roles. In the twentieth century, women's fashion was more progressive, which allowed reshaping the appearance of women based on changing social roles (Crane 2012). Today's fashion is attempting to be diverse, but it is confusing and inconsistent. For instance, high-fashion brands such as Burberry and Gucci have attempted to avoid the traditional fashion mentality

and present genderless shows. However, both fashion houses are still predominantly designing clothes made for either men or women. Likewise, famous fast-fashion brand Zara's attempt to be gender neutral was confusing. The Independent noted that "join[ed] the gender-blending movement by releasing a 16-piece collection of unisex items including jeans, shorts, sweatshirts, shirts, and jumpers—all in neutral colors (black, white and grey)" (Illingworth 2017). The collection is entitled as "unisex" and "ungendered"; however, the clothes were solely presented on male and female, rather than non-binary, models. This inconsistent attempt of Zara suggests that clothes are still designed solely for men and women and do not consider LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning) identities. Supporting this inconsistency of the fashion industry, the appearances of openly transgender or non-binary models in New York, London, Milan, and Paris spring 2018 runway shows was only 1.3% (Fashion Spot 2017). Fashion still has a long way to go for gender fluidity, androgyny, tomboys, and transgendered individuals.

Furthermore, patriarchal religious groups place great importance on the control of female sexuality to maintain social order; thus, gender differences in clothing are particularly paramount in these conservative groups (Afshar 1998). Since almost all religions associate modesty in women's dress with gender norms, the next section presents an overview of the stigmatized and, eventually, neglected female minorities, based on their religious beliefs and dress choices.

4.5. Religion: Modest clothing

"A Muslim woman's shopping experience can take up to a week or 10 days, where our counterparts can find everything they need in the same shopping trip" (Malherbe 2016).

The interaction between religion, culture, and dress has been a topic of interest, particularly in the field of cultural studies (e.g., Ajala 2017; Berg and Lundahl 2016). Culture and religion enable the definition of one's identity, which is expressed to the social world through a person's appearance and dress. Since identity is projected through self-presentation, culture and religious belief is a

congruent piece of the dress. For this reason, this section of the dissertation reviews the literature on sacred and secular clothing and presents contemporary examples of how today's mainstream fashion neglects style-conscious women who want to express themselves, while still adhering religious requirements.

The dress code that is related to modesty usually requires clothing that covers the curves and contours of the female body (Scott 1986). Furthermore, more conservative groups of some religions, such as Islam, Anabaptism, and Judaism, require that women's hair to be covered, as it is associated with women's sexuality. Hijab, which is a piece of cloth to wrap the head, means "separation" or "veil" and is designed to separate women from men, for their protection, by limiting the exposure of one's beauty (Fatema and Islam 2014). Although the practice of wearing Hijab exists in various religions, today, it is almost exclusively associated with Islam (Watson 1994). However, modest fashion appeals not only to Muslim female consumers, since an increasing demand also exists from non-Muslim women who belong to other religious communities (Lewis and Tarlo 2011). For instance, the founder of Islamic Fashion Design Council, Alia Khan, defines Islamic fashion as "clothes worn primarily by practicing Muslims who have committed to the Islamic principles of dressing," adding "a secondary following of conservative consumers ranging from people of other faiths, modest consumers" (Khaishgi 2014). Similarly, some fashion brands, such as Aheda Zanetti (the Australian creator of the burkini), embrace the term "modest," rather than "Islamic," to define the brand's fashion focus, to avoid restricting it to any religious segment (Llana 2016). Therefore, throughout this section of the dissertation, the concept of "modest fashion" is used, rather than strictly denoting Islamic fashion.

Historically, modest dress has been stigmatized, because women who cover themselves have been perceived as brainwashed or forced to do so (Sandikci and Ger 2010). Veiling has been considered a symbol of patriarchal authority over women who are subordinated (Afshar 1998). Women's lack of agency in their dress code has been perceived as the oppressive practice of the Orient by the Occident (Ahmed 1992; Said 1978). For the emancipation of women and the modernization of society, abandoning the practice of veiling was considered

critical by the elites of the twentieth century (Hoodfar 1993). Similarly, today, a modest dress code is recognized by Western societies as a symbol of the oppression of women, support for male dominance and religion extremism, and a sign of backwardness (Ajala 2017). However, several studies have revealed the autonomy of women in their choice of modest clothing (Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995; Amer 2014; Tarlo 2015).

The rise of modest fashion has occurred in conjunction with the increase in online modest-fashion influencers, sometimes called "hijabistas" (a neologism formed by combining the words hijab and fashionista) (Ajala 2017). Hijabistas use social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest to show other modest apparel consumers their options and share experiences and views. Furthermore, they aim to spread the understanding that modest clothing is not just a religious obligation but also a fashion consumption choice and a lifestyle. For instance, NabiilaBee, who is a modest fashion vlogger on YouTube, creates "how to" hijab tutorials that were viewed 16.5 million times between 2011–2014. She stated her purpose of pioneering conservative dress with a fashion-forward focus as,

> "I started doing hijab style YouTube tutorials because when I was young, I did not have anyone to look up to. Modest fashion is about covering yourself so as not to show your figure, but that does not mean it has to be bulky or ugly. Within Islam, you cover your arms and legs, so nothing above your ankles or wrists. But there are no rules about colors, so I use colors to express my personality […] People often see Muslim women as oppressed, but we have options and choices and freedom to express ourselves in certain ways. I do not want to take off my scarf—it is not an accessory; it is what I believe" (BBC Radio 1 n.d.).

The rising phenomenon of modest fashion on social media is also noticeable with the emergence of modest-fashion photography, Muslim Beauty Pageants, and modeling agencies, which sparked heated debates about the interpretation of the concept of modesty. The Global Islamic Economy asserts that "there is a wide diversity in interpretation and adoption of 'modesty' among

Muslims across the world (...), geographic/cultural heritage also plays a strong role thus leaving room for diversity" (Thomson Reuters 2015, p. 162).

Large fashion retailers view modest fashion as a niche market. For instance, DKNY and Tommy Hilfiger have created special collections for Ramadan (Arango 2016), and Japanese retailer Uniqlo collaborated with Hana Tajima, a Muslim fashion designer, to design a capsule collection for modest consumers (Paton 2016). Although several attempts to blend "modest" clothing with what is considered regular have been made, veiling is still a stigmatized dress practice in the Western mindset (Gole 2003). Therefore, female modest-fashion consumers still feel the need for normalizing hijab and its meaning in the context of securitization and modernity (Ajala 2017).

4.6. Age: Women over 45

One of the most under-appreciated consumer segments, which is almost invisible in the mainstream fashion, is women over 45. According to the "Midster" report presented by the British online retailer JD Williams, eight out of ten women over 45 do not feel represented on fashion catwalks, and 70% ignored by high fashion (Graafland 2017). Supporting the Midster report, The Fashion Spot's (2017) diversity report revealed that the number of models over 50 who walked down the New York, London, Milan and Paris runways in spring 2018 was 27, which constituted 3.0% of total castings. Furthermore, although, female consumers over 45 have higher disposable incomes than their younger counterparts (Birtwistle 2005), fashion retailers do not offer mature consumers the same range of clothing choices (Dychtwald 1997; Moschis et al. 1997; Nichols 1992). Behling (1999) suggests that women over 45 still want to be fashion conscious in the same way as when they were younger. According to the author, women's interest in fashion decreases continuously after age 55 because of the difficulty of finding stylish yet age-appropriate garments for themselves.

Mature female consumers have specific requirements when it comes to fashion choices. As women age, their bodies go through several physiological changes, such as decreased arm span, sitting height, pelvic breadth, trunk height,

skin elasticity, and weight (Schewe 1988), which require different designs of fashion garments. However, studies reveal that mature women are dissatisfied with brands that offer ready-to-wear ranges, because designers tend to overlook their changing physique and postures (Iltanen 2007). On the other hand, improved healthcare and the cosmetic industry has enabled mature female consumers to feel "cognitively young" (Flanagan 1994). Cognitive age is the age one feels, and it can be significantly lower than chronological age (Bartos 1980). Greco (1986) suggests that cognitively young people view themselves as 10–15 years younger than their chronological age, and they exhibit greater fashion interest in buying fashion apparel products (Wilkes 1992; Schiffman and Kanuk 1994).

According to the United Nations' World Population Prospects report (2017), the female population aged 45–49 and 50–54 were 226 million and 201 million, respectively, in 2015. The same report reveals that the women of 45–49 and 50–54 are estimated to grow to 264 million and 237 million, respectively, by 2030. Furthermore, older female consumers who are wealthy, active, and interested in appearance and innovation are enthusiastic to participate in mainstream fashion consumption (Szmigin and Carrigan 2001; Solomon and Rabolt 2004). Since the number of mature women represents considerable economic power, excluding this growing number of affluent women from the fashion scene not only causes significant implications for market revenue but also results in lost consumption opportunities for mature women. Some fashion retailers have identified this gap in the market and begun to design special collections for mature women. For instance, Zara launched the "Zara Timeless Collection" in 2017, which consists of clothes for older women (Ekall 2017).

Although some retailers have newly recognized this growing market, throughout history, regardless of mature female consumer growth in number in the general population, 45-plus models have been left out of major fashion communication campaigns (Zhou and Chen 1992, Gantz et al., 1980; Greco and Paksoy 1989; Langmeyer 1993). Similarly, today, an age homogeneity exists in fashion campaigns. Models over 45 accounted for 1.9% of fashion campaign castings, which translates to ten models over 50 who were booked in spring 2018 (Fashion Spot 2018). The lack of attention to the mature female segment is caused

by different factors. For instance, Thomas and Wolfe (1995) argue that people who work in fashion promotion and communication are young themselves, which results in ignoring the needs and preferences of the old. On the other hand, Corlett (1998) suggests that lack of representation of women over 45 stems from marketers' usage of existing promotional strategies, which were developed when young consumers were dominant in the market. Furthermore, several researches have shown that marketers associate older consumers with negative stereotypes, such as aging, senility, disability, and unattractiveness (Lee 1997; Long 1998; Tunaley et al. 1999). Finally, a group of marketers avoids targeting the older consumer group because they see this mature market as a dead-end sales opportunity (Nam et al. 2007). One advertising executive explained the view of how mature consumers offer a small return on investment by saying "because they [will]...all die soon" (Miller 1993). Not only are these negative and stereotypical associations on "ageism" unacceptable, but to under represent older women in fashion communication campaigns mirrors the unrealistic age composition of this consumer group, which calls for criticism from an ethical standpoint.

4.7. Being labelled as disabled

Disability is another type of fashion discrimination that we need consider when talking about diversity. Disability is defined as "the limitation of performance in one or more activities that are essential for the daily living" (Mushtaq and Akhouri 2016, p. 126). Although The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1990) protects people with disabilities from discrimination and provides equal opportunities in different walks of life, such as employment, transportation, and public accommodations, societal recognition towards the challenges they face is scarce. Disabled individuals face the problem of adjustment, because society labels anyone who does not fit to the definition of "normal" (Cusforth 1951). Therefore, people with disabilities carry the burden of their physical or mental condition, besides the normalcy expectation of society (Chan and Lempp 2018). This normalcy expectation within social interactions places huge stress on their ability to accept their condition, which in turn

negatively affects their quality of life that is associated with physical, social, psychological, and financial status (Farquhar 1995). As a result, following Canbulut and Atik's (2016) lead, throughout this section of the dissertation, I choose to define this group of individuals as "labelled as disabled" (LAD).

Due to its visual features and its proximity to the body, fashion has an important role in the physical and emotional well-being of a person, which has been defined as enclothed cognition by Adam and Galinsky (2012). As clothes are associated with social readiness and independence (Chan and Lempp 2018), enclothed cognition is defined as the influence of clothing on how a person feels, thinks, acts, and is perceived by others (Adam and Galinsky 2012). Therefore, enclothed cognition is essential to the perception of identity and self-image (Teunissen 2013). Considering fashion's link with self-confidence, social significance, and emotional empowerment, in the context of LAD, individuals' clothes play an even more critical role in their relationship with their immediate environment (Entwistle and Wilson 2001). Cat Smith, who is a doctoral researcher at London College of Fashion, stated the importance of including LAD individuals in the fashion scene as,

"In general, there is real cultural invisibility when it comes to disabled people – in fashion, on TV, in film, in politics, in writing. So, it's certainly important to see disabled models, because seeing people who look like you is important in fostering empowerment and making you feel a little less invisible. Visibility also creates a more realistic representation and understanding of the lives of disabled people" (Marriott 2015).

However, only a handful of examples in the global industry include models with disabilities as the faces of runways, magazines, or billboards. For instance, Winnie Harlow became the first model with vitiligo, a skin disorder that causes loss of pigment from random areas of the skin (Mayo Clinic n.d.), walking on Victoria's Secret Fashion Show runway (Lauriello 2019), and Madeline Stuart, a 18-year-old Australian with Down's syndrome, became the face of GlossiGirl cosmetics and walked at New York fashion week (NYFW) in September 2015 (Waxman 2015). It should be noted that NYFW runways did not feature a model with disability until Madeline Stuart in 2015 (Burnett 2018), because the fashion

industry is slowly ascending towards an overall representation and inclusion of differently abled bodies.

The lack of visibility in fashion creates a constant frustration for LAD women. For instance, Kelly Knox, who is a full-time model with part of her left arm missing and walked in London fashion week in 2017, stated the negative influence of underrepresentation in fashion to her self-esteem growing up by stating,

> "To me, my missing left arm was always normal. I was born with it and we never used the word 'disabled' in my house growing up. It wasn't until 2008, when I started modelling after winning Britain's Missing Top Model [a reality show where a disabled woman wins a magazine shoot], that I realized quite how much society viewed my body as 'different.' I was determined never to wear a prosthetic arm because I know it's only there so I can look 'normal' to others. But it was clearly a barrier; I signed to an agency after the competition but there were no other models who looked like me and I saw others getting picked for jobs that I knew I was capable of. I was surrounded by perfection and felt like I had no chance. I felt alone, ugly, lost and worthless. It made me so angry that I decided I'd have to change perceptions of disabled people in fashion—to show we can be desirable, too. Growing up, I bought loads of magazines and never once saw myself represented. Today it must be even worse for young girls, because social media peddles this notion of 'perfection.' If non-disabled girls are feeling the pressure to look a certain way, imagine how disabled girls, who can't hide behind a filter, must feel scrolling through Instagram?" (Silverman 2018).

According to Disability Statistics and Demographics Rehabilitation Research and Training Center's (2018) annual disability statistics compendium, over 40 million people live with disabilities, including, but not limited to, hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, and self-care, in the US, which equals 12.7% of the total population. Among these, approximately 20 million are working-age adults with a discretionary income of $21 billion, which is greater than the Hispanic and

African American segments combined in the US (Yin et al. 2018). Also, the US Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) reported that LAD individuals constitute "the third largest market segment in the United States" (ODEP 2012). All of these statistics show that LAD individuals represent a hidden but remarkable consumer market for high-quality fashion products. However, although architecture and product design industries have made significant accessibility improvements for LAD individuals, such developments in adaptive clothing—"dress solutions for those with physical or cognitive limitations that prevent them from being able to dress with ease" (Chan and Lempp 2018, p. 27)—are still very limited. For instance, among major retailers in the market, Target announced their adaptive and sensory-friendly clothing line that includes sizes from 00–26 in 2018 (Heasley 2018), and then Tommy Hilfiger launched their adaptive clothing capsule collection for people with limited physical mobility, featuring items such as one-handed zips, magnetic buttons, adjustable waists, Velcro closures, and easy-open necklines in 2019 (Tommy Hilfiger 2019). Therefore, in addition to underrepresentation by underserving LAD women, fashion acts as a reminder that they cannot be a part of it. During an interview with Grazia fashion magazine, Mary Russell, a woman with dwarfism, expressed her fashion consumption experience as,

> "People think, because we're little, people with dwarfism don't care about looking stylish. But I love fashion; it's just very difficult for me to shop off the peg. I have to buy something in its entirety and then pay to alter it—which changes the style and feels unfair considering the often-extortionate price. It makes me feel marginalized, odd and like nobody cares; like I must have the least desirable body shape in the world if clothing is never made to fit me. In some ways, I wish I wasn't so in-tune with how I'm treated in shops, but I always notice the sigh or eye-roll when I ask a shop assistant to bring things down to my level. I leave feeling like a burden" (Silverman 2018).

Previous studies showed that fashion has the ability to enhance both the beliefs of the wearer about his or her own abilities and the way others' see the

wearer's abilities (Kwon and Shim 1999). Since adaptive clothing choices are very limited in the market, LAD women must settle for the small range of pieces that are available. The lack of choice marginalizes the LAD female population and creates the need for a strengthened sense of self, combined with social stigma (Chan and Lempp 2018). Similarly, Chang, Hodges and Yurchisin's (2013, p.44) findings revealed the remarkable role of clothing in LAD consumers life since it helps them to manage their disabilities and "improve their sense of well-being and mental health." As a result, since based on the examples above being fashion-conscious and labelled as disabled are not mutually exclusive it becomes even more critical for these consumers to be reflected in fashion media and served by the fashion retailers and designers.

5. Fashion, self, and digitalization

In this part of the dissertation, the focus of this research is explained in the framework of fashion as a research discipline. Next, the influence of fashion on the identity is discussed. Since social media has become the platform where people share their own sense of fashion style and identity and, as O'Flaherty (2014) reported, "the urge to post anything and everything on social media that is directly linked to fashion has become frenzied, hysterical and masturbatory," the following part continues with the discussion of fashion in the digital era, virtual communities, and online social capital.

5.1. The scope of fashion as a research discipline

With the shift from a manufacturing industry to an image-based creative industry that employs designers and brand and image managers, the fashion industry captured the interest of academic researchers. Since fashion is a hybrid subject that brings together various conceptual frameworks and approaches, scholars from various disciplines, including but not limited to anthropology, art history, cultural studies, design studies, economics, history, sociology, and consumer research, have investigated fashion in global context. For instance, the study of textile and clothing, which represent the materials and the technology available in different civilizations at different times and, thus, provide insights into

the characteristics of most human societies, attracted the attention of historians (e.g., Martoglio et al. 2008; Mead and Pedersen 1995). Also, the social significance of clothing pieces that reflect the political and cultural environment of each nation and their influence upon individuals has received considerable attention as a subject of research from scholars, particularly in sociology (e.g., Baudrillard 1993; Simmel 1904). On the other hand, the combination of fashion's ambiguous nature with the range of choices in marketplace creates confusion, bordering on chaos, for consumers as it relates to construction and deconstruction of self, attracted the attention and interest of consumer researchers (e.g., Cherrier and Murray 2002; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013).

The seductiveness and, thus, the importance of fashion as a research field comes from its power to offer a person the possibility of becoming different, more attractive, or more powerful by indicating social and characteristic manners (Crane 2012). Therefore, people's fashion choices reflect how they perceive themselves, their identity and culture, and their connections with each other in contemporary societies. From another perspective, fashion presents the tools of creative self-expression, which are particularly crucial for those who have been excluded from high art institutions based on gender, class, sexuality, race, and ethnicity (Wilson 1985).

This study utilizes a practice-based approach with the aim of analyzing the social life of fashion beyond the point-of-purchase. Entwistle (2000) argues that situated bodily practice is one of the most appropriate subjects for the study of fashion because it combines institutional effects with the individual's practical actions on their bodies. Therefore, my focus is to document and analyze the actual fashion practices of "under-represented women in fashion" by placing their everyday experiences with their bodies, selves, and identities at the center.

5.2. Fashion and the self

> "In a world which is increasingly compressed… the conditions of and for the identification of individual and collective selves and individual and collective others are becoming ever more complex" (Robertson 2000, p. 71–72).

Fashion has always been described by change. The driving force of constant change and continuous search for new designs in fashion is the need for social groups to express their identity through clothing. Clothing style is an important non-verbal representation of an individual's status, identity, and individuality in society. Therefore, it is essential to understand how consumers use fashion as a tool of identity construction, an expression of cultural identity, and a method of self-presentation.

"To get meaning into things, creative directors and fashion/product designers discover structural equivalents and draw them together in the compass of an advertisement to demonstrate that the meaning that inheres in the advertisement also inheres in the product in question" (McCracken 1988, p. 120). Research on the symbolic meanings of products aims to understand the relation between the identity of a consumer and his consumption patterns (Gardner and Levy 1955). Levy (1959, p. 118) noted that "People buy products not only for what they can do but also for what they mean." Similarly, Goldman and Papson (1996) argue that people may deliver messages about who they are (e.g., fashionable, feminine, successful) by consuming commodity signs. Consumers use their established knowledge and value systems to build self-image and communicate their identity to others (Belk 1988; McCracken1988; Dittmar 1992; Gabriel and Lang 1995).

Several scholars define this culture production system as a network of specialists who work together to create, manage, and disseminate cultural symbols (e.g., Peterson 1979; Becker 1974). However, both Hirschman (1986) and Thompson and Haytko (1997) consider the meaning transfer model a dynamic process and see consumers as active participants in culture production systems who contribute to product symbolism. She argues that when a consumer associates intangible attributes to a product, which does not deviate from communications subsystem sources (e.g., advertisement agencies, public relations firms, traditional and consumer-oriented media), his/her personal interpretation of the product changes the products transmitted meaning. This new meaning may be peculiar to the individual, whose evaluation originates from his/her life experience, which does not necessarily correspond to other individuals (Hirschman 1981). The active participation in product symbolism is shaped further by the consumer's desire to

construct self-identities through fashion (Atik 2009). Fashion, in one respect, is "a cultural production that both limits and enriches symbolic communication, constitute a site of freedom or restriction, submission or rebellion, eroticism or domination" (Faurschou 1987, p. 69).

The fashion system invents cultural meanings in both modest and radical ways. Modestly, opinion leaders, such as the social elite, fashion editors, bloggers and influencers, and celebrities, who are in high demand for their social status, beauty, competence, or talent, can reshape and reform the existing cultural meanings (McCracken 1988). An opinion leader can also be someone who is "cool" looking, admired, respected, and trusted by friends and social circle (Gladwell 1995). More radically, fashion systems can reform the cultural meanings themselves. For instance, hippies, punks, gays, or anti-fashion movements have all been promoted by the fashion system and turned out to be being fashionable (McCracken 1988). The fashion system cannot live solely with the involvement of producers and consumers, because the social, cultural, or political happenings of the time affect the whole process (Davis 1992). While any consumer product can be utilized as a vessel to meaning making through consumption, the particular category of clothing is an outstanding example of using specific consumption behaviors to communicate the self.

The concept of the self (Landon 1974; Sirgy 1982; Belk 1988) has been central to studies of consumer behavior for at least four decades. Since the modern consumer is recognized with his relentless desire for commodities to invent and reinvent his identity (Gabriel and Lang 1995), fashion changed its meaning and became all about belongingness, being noticed, and self-presentation (Adam and Galinsky 2012). The primary functions of self-presentation are to define the nature of a social situation (Goffman 1959), facilitate social interaction, avoid social conflict, and reduce tension in society (DePaulo et al. 1996). A second function of self-presentation is driven by a desire to gain financial and social rewards (or to avoid economic and social losses), which is called strategic self-presentation and defined as "selective disclosures and omissions, or matters of emphasis and timing, rather than blatant deceit or dissimulation" (Jones 1990, p. 175). The third function of self-presentation is self-construction, which is creating a particular identity for

oneself (Baumeister 1982b; Rosenberg 1979), and self-verification, which is defined as confirming an already established identity with specific consumption patterns and taste (Swann 1990). Finally, self-presentation works as a motivational function, which places pressure on people to be who they announce and claim to be publicly (Schlenker 1980).

Smith (1990) argued that consumers subvert and re-appropriate current fashion trends, using raw materials or the foundation of great pieces in their closet (Guy and Banim 2000) to imagine, perceive, present, and craft a unique positive identity. Baron (2013, p. 9) calls the same idea “flourishing style crafting,” which is defined as “intentionally investing time and effort in presenting our strengths, aspirations, tastes and physical assets visually to the world.” Identity scholars suggest clothing as a way of self-presentation that reflects our character and shapes how others view the attitudes and behaviors we embrace and how we view ourselves (e.g., Zimbardo 1969; Johnson and Downing 1979). Adam and Galinsky (2012) proposed a theory called “enclothed cognition” after synthesizing research findings from recent decades, which is about how clothes influence consumers’ feelings, thoughts, and acts, or, in short, the wearer’s psychological processes. For example, clothes have the power to bolster or inhibit one’s sense of efficacy with the feedback received on one’s appearance and clothing (Maddux 2009). Moreover, several studies have presented the effects that clothes have on the perceptions and reactions of others. For example, a study by Morris et al. (1996) showed that teaching assistants in formal attire are seen as more intelligent but less attractive than teaching assistants in less formal or more casual attire. Also, the previous study showed that women wearing a masculine style are more likely to be hired during a recruitment interviews as compared to women in sexy attire, who are perceived as less competent (Forsythe 1990; Glick et al. 2005).

People mostly make their judgments about others based on what others consume and how they represent themselves through what they use and wear (Fırat 1994). Tseelon (1995) argues that self-realization, which is acquiring, reflecting on, and transferring meaning from clothing to the selves as wearers, is a critical element of shaping and developing desired identities. To express identity through fashion, it is not surprising that women spend approximately 12% of their monthly

income on items associated with self-presenting through fashion, such as clothing, shoes, jewelry, accessories, and bags (Statistic Brain 2017). In addition to allocating financial resources, women invest time and effort—an average of 399 hours a year shopping either online or in store and 159 shopping hours devoted to apparel shopping and personal care items (Yochim 2011)—to optimize the image presented to others and manage identity by using material symbols or products (Solomon 1983). Craik's (1994) work adds to this idea by suggesting that clothes open new doors of diverse choices in identity.

5.3. Fashion in the digital era

The growing use of Internet technologies has accelerated the amount of user-generated content as well as how information is created and consumed online (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Authors have shown that the term "sharing" had shifted its meaning with the evolution of online platforms in the digital context. In particular, social networking sites changed the context and speed of digital sharing, which is defined as the "sharing turn" by Grassmuck (2012). A recent report by McKinsey (2012) estimates that almost one out of five online hours are spent by users on social networks in "sharing posts." Turner (2010) labeled this phenomenon as "demotic turn," which is an opportunity for ordinary people to appear in media by sharing information about themselves. The term "sharing" in this sense refers to sharing information such as photos, opinion, taste, preferences, and identity (Henning-Thurau et al. 2007).

The production of the fashion discourse changed when consumers began to seek a platform to show their own tastes and identities (Camiciottoli 2015), and the consumption of fashion changed when fashion-conscious consumers began to seek more than just buying clothes and instead look for fashion knowledge, insights, inspiration, and recommendations (Morandin, Bagozzi and Bergami 2013). The advent of digital technology inevitably led consumers to turn their attention to the use of digital tools as channel of self-presentation (Schau and Gilly 2003). Walther (1996) argues that individuals tend towards ideal self-presentation online, as they have greater control over the information they disclose. Research reveals

that personal websites allow users a higher level of control over the information they publish, enabling them to engage in strategic self-presentation (Papacharissi 2002; Vazire and Gosling 2004). Similarly, social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, provide their users numerous opportunities to establish and experiment with their identities (Zhao et al. 2008; Papacharissi 2012) and ultimately foster self-presentation behavior for the purposes of image construction, earning social status, or exerting influence on others (Dunne et al. 2010).

All social networking platform users use online posts as the representation of self-identity (Schroeder 2002). These self-identity posts on social media are commodities that are public and consumable by others. Consumers express their identity and consumption practices to show their power, social status, and lifestyle, as well as to simultaneously boost their self-esteem (Kapferer and Bastien 2009; Wang and Griskevicius 2014). The New York Times Consumer Insight Group's study (2011), in conjunction with Latitude Research, entitled "The Psychology of Sharing: Why Do People Share Online?," identifies five primary reasons why people choose to share what they do on social media. This study shows that 68% of participants' online sharing activity is about showing other people what they care about and "who they are." In other words, sharing content online becomes a performative act in which the primary focus is self-description, which in turn is one way of the saying "This is me" to the rest of the world.

Therefore, social media posts reveal much about individuals. Besides being utilized as a medium for sharing everyday stories with friends, many users exploit social media as a channel of self-expression for their cultural and personal values to a large audience (Belk 2013; Turkle 1995). Social media users craft *themselves* as a brand that they mediate and control the image of by posting verbal and visual cues daily, facilitating assumptions of others about their identity and culture. Thus, social media has become the platform for people of any race, ethnicity, gender, age, or body type to express themselves, communicate their culture and identity, and share personal fashion style, taste, and opinion with an international audience (Boyd 2015). These people who share the same interest in fashion consumption gather around social media hashtags for self-presentation and self-expression and

form virtual communities. As such, the following part of this dissertation presents the social capital theory framework in the context of virtual communities.

5.4. Virtual communities and social capital

"We seek to pioneer new spaces, to create in them, to live in them.
And in those new spaces, we seek to relate to one another.
It represents our humanity, our freedom" (Fernback 1999, p. 214).

Fernback's (1999) argument is particularly salient in social media, where online individuals connect each other to share their interests, find and offer support, and socialize. The digitalization of fashion discourse through social media has provided new ways of consuming fashion, such as creating and publishing personal style content, following and interacting on other's content, collaboratively exchanging information, and supporting each other (Tuutti 2010). In doing so, active online individuals create virtual communities through user-generated content on fashion.

While examining the fashion consumption experiences of underrepresented women, I was also interested in understanding their self-presentation practices through fashion on social media. Since two theoretical concepts—community and social capital—are highly related to each other (Smith 2008), social capital theory, which is about social resources for individuals and groups, as a framework, fit well for this purpose.

The social capital concept originated in the mid-century social sciences and has been applied in various disciplines, including but not limited to sociology and organizational and consumer culture theory to explain individual and collective behavior (Adler and Kwon 2002). Since the scope of this research falls within consumer culture theory, it is essential to summarize the use areas of social capital in this field.

In the consumer culture literature, social capital theory is used to study the shared consumption interests of transient communities (Cova and Cova 2001; Kozinets 2002), the characteristics and motivations of online and offline

communities of brands (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005), community creation in social networks (Brown and Reingen 1987), individual self-presentation strategies to form an identity within virtual platforms (Schau and Gilly 2003), and socially embedded consumption (Frenzen and Davis 1990). Furthermore, Mathwick, Wiertz, and Ruyter (2008) focused their study on the community-level consequences of social capital accumulation by documenting the process of how individuals participate in virtual communities. Their research determines social capital formation by the normative influences of voluntarism, reciprocity, and social trust.

Due to its being an interdisciplinary research area, the term "social capital" has multiple and different conceptualizations and definitions (Daniel, Schwier, and McCalla 2003). Many researchers have defined social capital as a private good that brings individual benefits to owning individuals (e.g., Burt, 1997). For instance, (Portes 1998, p. 7) defines social capital as a possession that can be gained, by stating that "a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage." On the other hand, other scholars (e.g., Bourdieu 1986, Adler and Kwon 2002, Putnam 1993) conceptualize social capital as a public good, as an attribute of a social unit that is not owned by a single individual but instead exists in the social relationships between people. This stream of researchers conceptualizes social capital with a focus not on individual networks but on how one is positioned in the entire social network (Sandefur and Laumann 2000).

Although various scholars, according to the different disciplines, have defined social capital in different ways, it is "essentially about justifying that social networks are valuable for an individual and larger groups" (Tuutti 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, the social capital framework enables the explanation of the actions, connections, and motivations of individuals in online social networks. Therefore, it fits well with my interests in discovering underrepresented women's self-presentation practices through fashion discourse in virtual fashion communities, specifically on social media.

After closely examining the different conceptualizations of social capital, I attempted to choose a broad definition that would fit the aim of this study and not

limit the scope too much. Hence, I adopted the definition of Mathwick et al. (2008), who described social capital as "an intangible force that helps to bind society together by transforming self-seeking individuals into members of a community with shared interests, shared assumptions about social relations, and a sense of the common good" (p. 833). Accordingly, this part of the dissertation presents the theoretical conceptualization of social capital based on Mathwick et al.'s (2008) work.

According to Mathwick et al.'s (2008) conceptualization (based on synthesized prior conceptualizations), social capital accumulates when infused with normative norms, namely (1) voluntarism (Paxton 1999), (2) reciprocity (Gouldner 1960; Wellman and Gulia 1999), and (3) social trust (Reichheld and Schefter 2000). Figure 1 presents Mathwick et al.'s (2008) model of social capital production. To better illustrate, I placed the related definitions based on prior studies in the presented revised model.

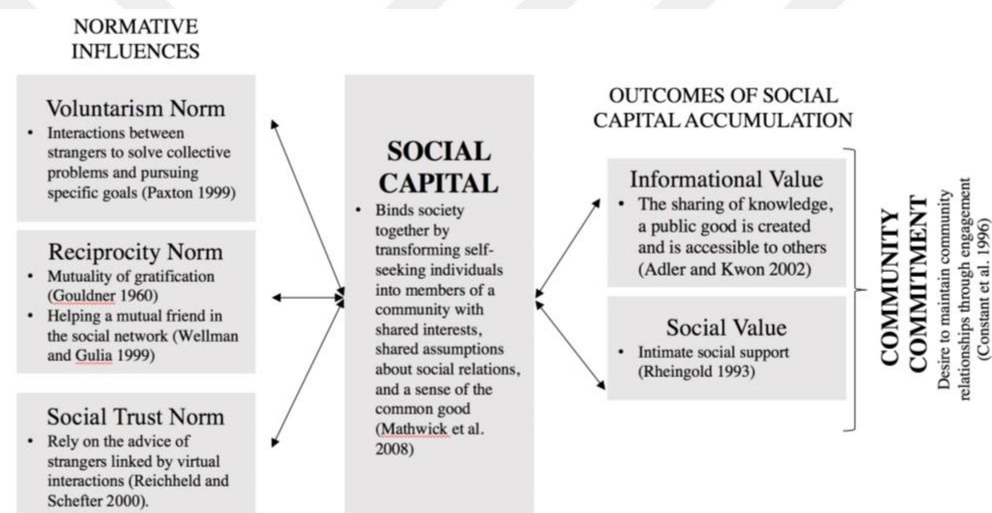
The voluntarism norm refers to online interactions of strangers with common interests who are dedicated to "to solving collective problems and pursuing specific goals" (Paxton 1999, p. 100). These individuals come together as a virtual community based on their willingness. Thus, both joining with and leaving the community is based on freedom and does not consist of any strict restrictions or social ramifications (Balasubramanian and Mahajan 2001).

The culture of voluntarism in the online world occurs due to the freedom of coming and going with impunity. Based on "habits of the heart" (Mathwick et al. 2008, p. 834), contributors of a virtual community are making a "commitment of time and effort that is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization" (Wilson 2000, p. 216). The culture of volunteer engagement in the community raises social capital more effectively than any acts motivated by social expectations (Putnam 1993). Since its beginning, cooperation, collaboration, and a willingness to share resources have been the norms of Internet culture (Rheingold 1993). Therefore, the reciprocity norm in virtual communities is described as the "mutuality of gratification" (Gouldner 1960, p. 168).

Under the reciprocity norm, online individuals provide services to others in the form of knowledge and suggestion at a personal cost with no monetary, but

sentimental, expectations that their kindness to help will return to them in the future (Onyx and Bullen 2000). Repayment could be in some alternate form of help, or simply by helping a mutual friend in the community (Wellman and Gulia 1999). In a virtual community context, participants help others based on morals, and they believe that "it is the right thing to do" (Wasko and Faraj 2000, p. 168). Norms of reciprocity motivate participants to "co-operate, understand and empathize" rather than "treat each other as strangers, competitors, or potential enemies" (Newton 1997, 576), which is a critical factor in the accumulation of social capital (Putnam 1995).

Figure 1. Social capital accumulation model of Mathwick et al. (2008)



The reciprocity norm influences the formation of social trust, which results from repeated cooperation and interactions (Newton 1997). At the beginning of the relationship, participants of the community exhibit "a willingness to take risks, based on confidence that others will respond as expected, will act in mutually supportive ways, or at least will not intend harm" (Onyx and Bullen 2000, p. 24). Based on repeated positive interactions, social trust leads to a sense of cooperation that carries few risks (Hardin 2001). Therefore, social trust becomes the generalized norm of the community, in that "it makes sense to risk entering into exchanges," even though "one does not yet have either an ongoing relationship or reasons of reputation to trust" (Hardin 2001, p. 15). As a result, community

members trust the advice of strangers (Reichheld and Schefter 2000). Therefore, Mathwich at al. (2008, p. 834) conceptualize social capital accumulation as "benefits that are available at the individual or communal level, embedded in and accumulated through a specific social structure and governed by relational norms of voluntarism, reciprocity, and social trust." In other words, Mathwick et al. (2008) conceptualize social capital as an intangible resource that is driven by the normative influences of voluntarism, reciprocity, and social trust.

Social capital accumulation generates value for the members of the social network. According to the social capital theory, the social network functions as a productive resource, and the term "capital" refers to a set of outcomes (Paxton 1999). The informational outcome of the social capital accumulation in a social network attracts new members to the community and serves as the primary motivation behind any social network membership (e.g., Adler and Kwon 2002). Participants of the social network are receptive to the problem-solving process, through social interactions based on a history of trust, which enables the creation of an informational resource that would be challenging to produce in isolation (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Credibility afforded to a virtual community and the feedback and solutions generated for a problem by the participants make the informational outcome of social capital more valuable than the "simple aggregation of the knowledge of a set of individuals" (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998, p. 248). Therefore, when the normative influences of voluntarism, reciprocity, and social trust determine social capital accumulation, this creates an informational outcome for community problem-solving (Mathwick et al. 2008).

Once informational resources are available online, they become a public good that is accessible by others at no cost (Olson 1965). Although the accumulation of social capital as an idea opposes to consume a public good without contributing to its creation, online individuals cannot be prevented from consuming public information, regardless of whether the user is an active member of the community who contributes anything (Wasko and Faraj 2005). Consequently, information seeking an individual-level problem-solving process transforms into information sharing, as participants of the community invest more due to the increased perceived value of the information they receive in return (Clark and Mills 1993).

Virtual communities tend to be socially supportive (Wellman and Gulia 1999), usually by forming a "social core" that is independent of commercial interests (Balasubramanian and Mahajan 2001, p. 109). Therefore, in contrast to offline relationships, virtual interactions have an intimate social support characteristic (Rheingold 1993) that is defined as "social value." These intimate relationships for social support "provide a sounding board for problems and offer camaraderie to participants" (Mathwick et al. 2008, p. 836). The social value of the virtual support system exists in the trust that the community is there to help if needed. Continuous community engagement through virtual interactions deeply rooted in the normative influences of voluntarism, reciprocity, and social trust determines social capital and reassures confidence to the community members. Consequently, as social capital increases, the perceived social value of the community membership will also increase (Mathwick et al. 2008).

Informational and social value outcomes emanate from social capital accumulation and articulate the social connections that lead to community commitment in the form of a desire to maintain engagement in virtual communities (presented in Figure 1) (Constant et al. 1996). Willingness and desire to maintain community relationships generates an ongoing sense of obligation to help others who share similar problems and experiences (Constant et al. 1996). Member participation in the virtual communities is based on a shared faith that the needs of the members will be met through their commitment to each other and the community in general (McMillan and Chavis 1986). Therefore, community members demonstrate a sense not only of belonging and identification but also of responsibility to the continuity of the process and the community's future. Mathwick et al.'s (2008) model, presented in Figure 1, helps to show the potential changes that diverse female consumers can make through their online communities. This impact is empirically demonstrated in Chapter IV of the dissertation.

In the following part of this chapter, research questions are presented based on the thus-far discussed literature review. Furthermore, the conceptual model of this research, which enables the visualization of the literature gaps that this study aims to fill, is also demonstrated.

6. Conceptual model, research questions, and literature gap

The lack of diversity in the fashion industry, which is historically constructed, is presented throughout the literature review. In the previous sections, I exposed the biased aesthetic preferences of the fashion industry regarding size and body shape, the exploitation of non-White female bodies, and the discrimination practices of the fashion industry, which are mediated by class and contribute to the ongoing formation and maintenance of social inequality.

Although some literature has focused on racial discrimination in the fashion market, the dominant focus of these few scholarly work is on Whiteness versus Blackness. Similar to industry practices, the existence of women from other races and ethnicities, such as Asians, Hispanics, Indians, and Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, are ignored in the academic research, and thus they are excluded from the fashion conversation. Also, the literature on body-image diversity predominantly compares the representation of ultra-thin to plus-sized female images, by ignoring other ethnical body types such as Latina and Asians and other body shapes such as petite and in-between sizes. To fill this lacuna in the academic literature, this research aims to demonstrate the gap in the global conversation on diversity between fashion professionals and consumers by highlighting the experiences of underrepresented groups of women of all ages with different buying powers from various ethnic origins and with diverse sexual orientations, body shape and size, physical appearance, and abilities.

The conceptual model that is presented in Figure 2 visualizes the above-discussed literature review and elucidates the literature gap that this research aims to fill. The following research questions (RQ) are addressed to accomplish the purpose of this study:

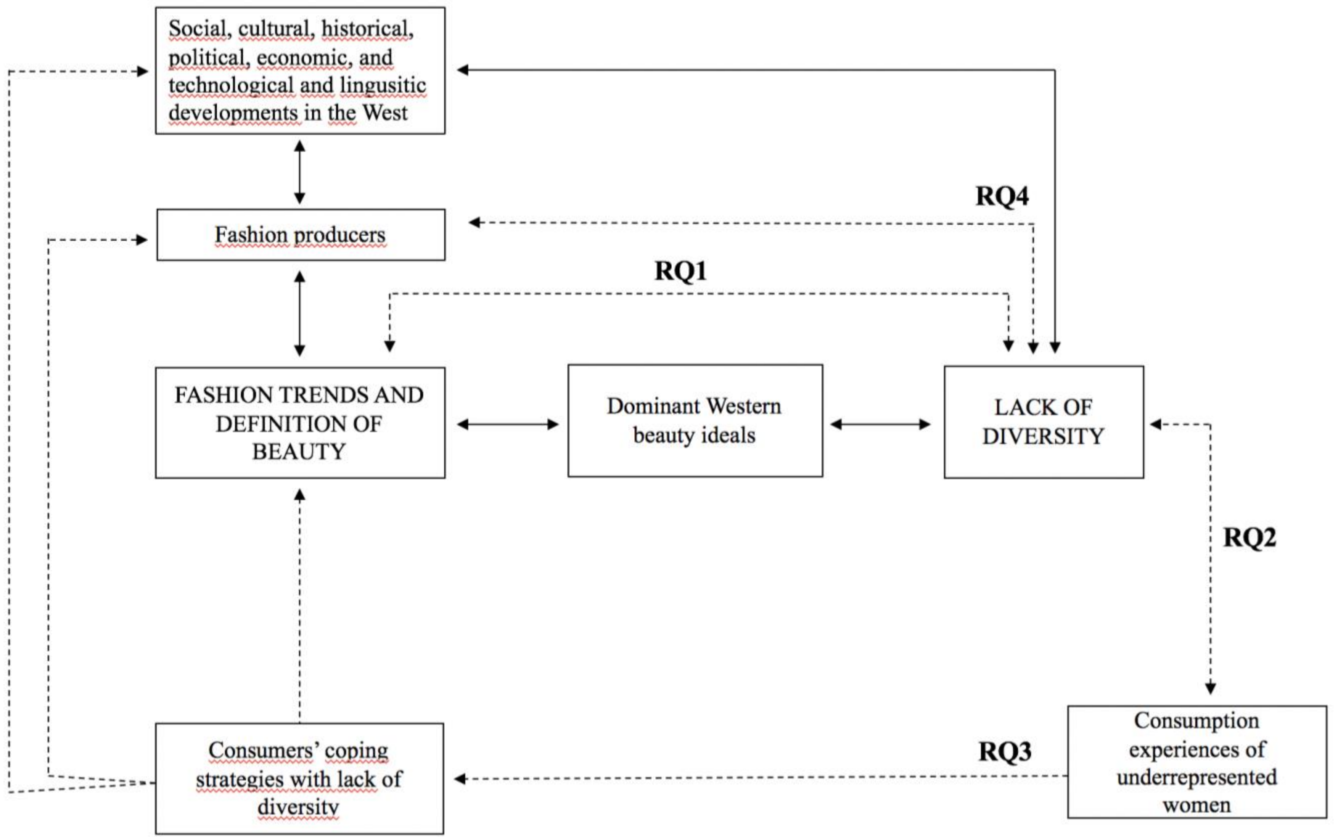
RQ1. Regarding diversity and representation, based on consumers' experiences, what is lacking in today's fashion scene?

RQ2. What are the fashion consumption experiences of underrepresented women?

RQ3. What, if any, are the reactions of female consumers against and coping strategies for the lack of diversity in the fashion industry?

RQ4. What are the perceptions and reactions of fashion producers about diversity?

Figure 2. Conceptual model of diversity in fashion based on literature review



CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter III details the research methodology and design of the dissertation. In this part, I outline the research method and approach, tools of data collection, procedures of the sample selection, research process, data analysis, and limitations of data collection.

1. Research method

Research being undertaken on issues including race, ethnicity, gender, religion, physical ability, and appearance is defined as addressing socially sensitive topics, which have the potential to impact all people who are involved in it by being intimate, discreditable, or incriminating (Renzetti and Lee, 1993: ix). For such research areas, which thoroughly explore the lived experiences and subterranean feelings of individuals, qualitative methodologies are suitable (Liamputtong 2007, 2008). A qualitative approach is particularly ideal when investigating the subjective experiences of ethnically diverse communities to convey sensitivity and minimize distrust towards the research and the researcher (Davies et al. 2009). Therefore, since this study investigates the lived fashion consumption experiences of a diverse group of women from various racial and ethnic backgrounds and different socioeconomic classes, with different religions and beliefs, different sexual orientations and ages, and diverse body types, physical appearances, and abilities, qualitative research, specifically a hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenological approach, was deemed most appropriate.

The hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenological approach is concerned with generating a broad understanding of how individuals perceive a particular situation and their personal and social experiences (Moustakas 1994). It requires

flexible data collection tools such as interviews (Smith, 2007), which allow researchers to gain rich insights about participants' experiences and how they create meaning out of those experiences (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Therefore, an empirical study using qualitative research methods was deemed the most appropriate to obtain rich descriptions and a thorough understanding of the present phenomena (Cherrier and Murray 2007, Creswell 2012).

This study was conducted in Portland, OR, USA, during the 2017–2019, and it is based on 56 semi-structured interviews, which were performed with a diverse group of 38 female consumers and 18 fashion professionals, Netnography, secondary research, and observations. The output of this empirical study entails approximately 31 hours of recorded data and 484 pages of transcript. The following sections of this chapter provide further information about the interviewees, their backgrounds, and the interview experience.

2. Research design

2.1. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews

Patton (2015) spoke of developing an interview protocol as an instrument of conversation about a certain topic, which is the first phase of research inquiry, aligned with the study's purpose. Therefore, before conducting the semi-structured interviews, I prepared two separate interview guides, one for fashion consumers and one for industry professionals, to help direct the conversation towards covering important topics, making a smooth transition between topics, asking key questions, and reminding of areas to probe. Although the interview guides presented in Appendix A can provide an idea about the questions that stimulated the conversation during the interviews, I acknowledge that the order of the questions was tailored according to each interviewee's responses and the flow of the conversation, and the questions were customized for different types of respondents. Also, the interview guide for fashion producers was adapted to different professionals according to their occupation and expertise area. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest that the key questions that are most related to the purpose of the study should be asked in the middle of the interview, after building rapport with

the participants. As such, I began the interviews with warm-up questions, which did not directly pertain the research questions but enabled respondents to answer quickly with ease, to make the rest of interview flow more smoothly. As suggested by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), the interview questions were prepared using everyday language. I made sure that the questions were understandable and accessible to participants by avoiding using theoretical language and jargon. Therefore, during the interviews, I asked one question at a time, listened carefully, tried not to interrupt participants when they were speaking, showed understanding through nodding or other gestures, and expressed gratitude (Rubin and Rubin 2012). As recommended by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), I created a matrix to map whether the interview questions were directly tied to the research questions and allow for the necessary coverage of the inquiry. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the matrix of the interview questions that were designed to elicit relevant answers to particular research questions.

In the first round of semi-structured interviews, my participants revealed that social networking sites are useful platforms to deal with mainstream fashion media. Therefore, conducting a content analysis using Netnography was necessary to fortify the findings and to better understand how women react on social media to the lack of diversity they perceive in the fashion industry. Mayring (2004, p. 266) stated that content analysis can be performed on various forms of data, including textual, musical, pictorial, or plastic; this study utilized textual and visual content analysis.

Table 2. Interview protocol and research inquiry matrix for fashion consumers

	Background Information	Warm-up Questions	Research Q1	Research Q2	Research Q3	Research Q4
Interview Q2	X					
Interview Q3		X				X
Interview Q4		X				X
Interview Q5					X	
Interview Q6					X	
Interview Q7					X	
Interview Q8						X
Interview Q9					X	X
Interview Q10			X		X	
Interview Q11				X	X	
Interview Q12			X	X		
Interview Q13			X	X	X	
Interview Q14			X	X		
Interview Q15			X	X	X	X
Interview Q16				X	X	X
Interview Q17					X	X
Interview Q18					X	
Interview Q19					X	X
Interview Q20						X
Interview Q21				X	X	
Interview Q22			X	X	X	
Interview Q23						
Interview Q24						

Table 3. Interview protocol and research inquiry matrix for fashion producers

	Background Information	Warm-up Questions	Research Q1	Research Q2	Research Q3	Research Q4
Interview Q2	X					
Interview Q3		X				
Interview Q4		X	X			
Interview Q5		X	X			
Interview Q6						
Interview Q7					X	
Interview Q8			X	X	X	X
Interview Q9			X	X		
Interview Q10			X	X		
Interview Q11				X		X
Interview Q12			X	X		
Interview Q13			X	X		
Interview Q14			X	X		
Interview Q15			X	X	X	
Interview Q16			X	X		X
Interview Q17			X	X		
Interview Q18			X	X		
Interview Q19						X
Interview Q20					X	X
Interview Q21					X	X
Interview Q22				X		X
Interview Q23						

2.2. Netnography

Netnography was employed as a supplement to interview data, because previous research suggests that it is a suitable methodology for studying socially sensitive topics, by allowing the researcher to gain profound insights about the phenomena in an unobtrusive way (Langer and Beckman 2005). Semi-structured, in-depth interviews allowed respondents to express their thoughts and feelings freely (Berg 2008), while visual and textual content analysis, through Instagram, served as an efficient source of organically formed data (Galica and Chou 2014) to gain insights about issues, concerns, and perceptions of fashion consumers and producers.

Furthermore, qualitative research focusing on visual images to explore experiences and meanings is gaining interest in the social sciences (Frith et al. 2005). The use of images as a methodology has begun to be used in various disciplines, including marketing (Cavusoglu and Demirbag-Kaplan 2017), anthropology and sociology (Harper 2002). Collier (1957) called this method "photo elicitation," and this approach has been used in various social science research. Also, Barthes (1977) argues that a direct relationship exists between images and the content of their messages, and he separated the characteristics of photographic messages as denoted (objective) and connoted (subjective). Denoted messages are what the photograph represents, and connoted messages are what the viewer adds to a photograph. Barthes contends, "…of all the structures of information, the photograph appears as the only one that is exclusively constituted and occupied by a 'denoted' message, a message which totally exhausts its mode of existence. This unique status makes a photograph paradoxical sort of sign because it is simultaneously objective and invested, natural and cultural" (Barthes 1977, p. 18). Since this study attempts to understand the conned meaning of "diversity in fashion" from the eyes of everyday consumers, Instagram, which supremely combines visual and textual imagery, is selected as the netnographic context.

The growing engagement and popularity of Instagram can be considered an efficient place of organically formed data, where people "live, learn, work and

play" (Galica and Chou 2014). Another reason to choose Instagram as a data source is its usefulness for exploring user-generated social tags associated with images. Instagram encourages users to be as specific as possible when describing an image, by explaining its content with user-generated hashtags (a maximum of 30 hashtags). Also, contrary to other social networking platforms, Instagram offers social, economic, and racial diversity (Duggan 2015). For example, Greenwood, Perrin, and Duggan (2016) revealed that among all Internet users, 32% use Instagram. In addition, 80% of Instagram users are from outside of the US, with females being dominant in this group, represented by 68% (Aslam 2017). The geographic diversity of Instagram is reported to be very high. For instance, leading countries based on number of Instagram users as of January 2018 are the United States, Brazil, Indonesia, India, Turkey, Russia, Iran, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Mexico (Statista 2018). Furthermore, lower income quartile (less than US$30,000/year) users were represented by 38%, middle-income quartile users ($30,000–74,999/year) by 64%, and top income quartile users ($75,000/year) by 31%. Users who live in urban, suburban, and rural areas are listed as 32%, 28%, and 18% of the total, respectively. These statistics show that using Instagram as a data source in this research offered several advantages, including collecting naturally occurring global topical data from an actively engaged diverse population in a time-effective way. To this end, this study employs a qualitative inquiry on textual and visual data generated by ordinary individuals on Instagram

As a famous feature of Web 2.0 technology, social tagging is an increasing phenomenon to categorize and describe a particular content on a social network through user-generated keywords in the form of hashtags (Lin and Chen 2012; Pan et al., 2016). The hashtag, which is a metadata tag, is visually represented by the pound sign (#), usually appearing in the form of a word or a short phrase (i.e., #Hashtag or #ThisIsAHashtag), and its use is most common on Instagram and Twitter. Hashtags are a unique source of data for marketing research, not only for being practical to reach to a large group of like-minded people but also because they provide invaluable insights about the social interpretation, mental representation, and knowledge structure of specific content (Fu et al. 2010; Nam and Kannan 2014).

Various forms of online content, such as web links (links to a video, photo, blog post, or news article), photos, videos, and tweets, can be tagged via hashtags. Hashtags are associated directly and explicitly with brands, products, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings regarding various concepts (Nam and Kannan 2014). Nam, Joshi, and Kannan (2017) mentioned that tags are particularly useful to understand perceptions about non-textual content such as pictures, music, and video. Hashtags are argued to be a valuable data source that provides contextual information about the perception and experience of specific content and allows viewers to better understand the *aboutness* of the image posted (Schlesselman-Tarango 2013).

How the visual and textual data collection procedure was organized is explained in the following section. Visual data includes images posted on Instagram tagged with the hashtag #fashiondiversity. Textual data included all other hashtags attributed to a particular image. The #fashiondiversity hashtag was selected as the starting point for this particular study to allow for a better understanding of how consumers perceive and react to the lack of diversity in fashion.

2.3. Observation and secondary research

I attended several fashion weeks, including but not limited to Portland Fashion Week, which is Time Magazine's Best Indie Fashion Week in the US (Portland Fashion Week n.d.), and FashioNXT Week, which is TIME Magazine's number one fashion show in the US, outside of New York Fashion Week (FashioNXT 2012). I also attended Taste of Style PDX 2017, which is a hair and makeup runway show presented by Portland's hair stylists, makeup artists, fashion designers, and photographers. A thorough list of the fashion events that I attended during this research is presented in Table 4.

Attending these fashion events provided me the opportunity to watch numerous fashion shows in different categories, including ready-to-wear, bridal, couture, menswear, sustainable fashion, accessories, plus-sized, wearable technology, and hair and makeup. Marshall and Rossman (1989, 79) defined

observation as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study.” In addition, Erlandson et al. (1993) mentioned that observation provides a written photograph of the situation under study for the researcher. Affirming previous research, being an observer in fashion shows not only allowed me to observe the latest trends firsthand and become more familiar with the research setting but also provided the opportunity to meet and interview industry professionals. Observation shaped my understanding of the fashion scene and enabled me to gather significant insights and describe the existing situation while experiencing it from both the producers’ and consumers’ points of view.

Table 4. The list of fashion events attended for observation purposes

#	Name of the event	Date	Place
1	Fade to Light: A Multidimensional Fashion Event	March 2019	Portland, OR
2	Unmentionable: A Lingerie Exposition	February 2019	Portland, OR
3	Seventh Annual Portland Fashion and Style Awards	November 2018	Portland, OR
4	Portland Fashion Week	October 2018	Portland, OR
5	FashioNXT	October 2018	Portland, OR
6	Portland Fashion Week	October 2017	Portland, OR
7	FashioNXT	October 2017	Portland, OR
8	Taste of Style PDX	September 2017	Portland, OR
9	Ertan Kayıtken runway show	April 2017	Izmir, Turkey

Furthermore, I followed the industry consistently through the mainstream media. I subscribed to Vogue, InStyle, and Harper’s Bazaar in April 2017. I received their new issues every month, which, as of April 2019, equals 72 issues in total. Following mainstream fashion magazines enabled me to observe the featured models in fashion. Furthermore, research suggests that newspapers are essential sources for academic work and, thus, are widely used by many scholars from different disciplines (Meyer 2018). Therefore, I followed other weekly news sources, including but not limited to New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Huffington Post, Independent, Bloomberg, The Guardian, TIME, Refinery 29, and Forbes. I read and archived a total of 128 articles published between 2014–2019. Table 5 presents exemplary articles that were gathered through secondary research and categorized based on the topics they cover.

According to O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015, p. 130), "a newspaper article may be data in the sense that it is a collection of 'facts,' but it only becomes research data when a researcher specifically assembles a number of articles together with the intention of addressing a research question and undertaking analysis." After carefully reading the newspaper articles before, during, and after the research, I assembled the critical narratives I gathered into my findings to better answer my research questions.

Table 5. Exemplary media articles collected through secondary research

#	Topic	Name of the article	Source	Date
1	**Diversity reports**	Diversity on american september covers increased by more than 30 percent in 2018	Fashionista	2018
2		The S19 runways were more racially diverse than ever — but there's still lots of work to be done	Fashionista	2018
3		Diversity Report: Every Runway at NYFWeek Featured at Least 2 Models of Color for Spring 2018	The Fashion Spot	2017
4		Report: The Spring 2017 Runways Were the Most Diverse in History	The Fashion Spot	2016
5	**Race (dominantly black women)**	In 2018, fashion magazines still have a long way to go representing people of colour	Independent	2018
6		Black women on mags: A step forward or tokenism?	BBC	2018
7		Women of Color Discuss Why Diversity in Beauty Is So Important	Allure	2017
8		7 Brands That Offer Nude Products for Women of Color	Allure	2017
9		Iman Opens Up About Deeply Upsetting Career Moment	The Huffington Post	2015
10		Why black models are rarely in fashion	The Guardian	2014
11	**Height**	The Big Idea? Catering to Booming Petite Market	ABC News	2017
12		I Am The Most Ignored Woman In Fashion	The Huffington Post	2016
13	**Retouching images**	Your favorite selfie filter could be contributing to a mental health crisis	NBC News	2018
14		Telling women about airbrushed beauty ads doesn't help their self-esteem	The Washington Post	2018
15		Self(i.e.) Documentray explores the impact of retouching on self-esteem	Business Insider	2016
16		Thinner, smoother, better: in the era of retouching, that's what girls have to be	The Guardian	2016
17	**Body image (dominantly plus-size)**	Plus-size reinvented: 'We were told to hide, wear a sack – now we want equality	The Guardian	2018
18		Retailers Ignore Most of America's Women	Bloomberg	2016
19		Melissa mccarthy and Chelsea Handler Discuss One Of Fashion's Biggest Problems	Refinery 29	2016
20		Clothing sizes: how vanity sizing made shopping impossible	TIME	2016
21		Tim Gunn: Designers refuse to make clothes to fit American women. It's a disgrace.	The Washington Post	2016
22		Plus Size Clothing Sold Online But Not In Stores Poses Problem For Shoppers	The Huffington Post	2016
23		Vogue editor Alexandra Shulman claims thin models do not cause eating disorders	Independent	2015
24		Just how skinny are store mannequins?	Refinery 29	2015
25	**Gender**	Finding clothes, and identity outside men's and women's wear	The New York Times	2019
26		Joy of unisex: The rise of gender-neutral clothing	The Guardian	2017
27		Imbalanced hormones: When women feel more handsome than beautiful.	The New Times	2015
28	**Maternity**	How maternity fashion has changed over the years	INSIDER	2019
29		Is 'maternity wear' becoming a thing of the past in fashion?	The Guardian	2016
30	**Age**	Doing away with ageism in fashion	The Huffington Post	2018
31		'You don't belong here': My fight against fashion's agesim epidemic	The Guardian	2017
32	**Democratization of fashion**	'The beginning of the democratization of fashion': H&M invited Instagram followers to help design the latest collection for its millenial brand	Business Insider	2018
33		Is fashion a class issue?	Refinery 29	2017

3. Data collection

3.1. Participants of interviews

Johnson (2015) has stated that almost all qualitative research studies recruit participants exclusively based on personal ties. Following Johnson's (2015) conclusion, I identified interviewees to interview through purposeful sampling, which is the technique of selecting individuals who are knowledgeable in their area of expertise and experienced with the inquiry in hand (Cresswell and Plano 2011). The first group of individuals was selected based on the relevant information they could provide for the study (Patton, 2015). Also, interviewees were chosen based on their willingness to participate in the study and their ability to communicate experiences and opinions expressively and reflectively (Bernard 2002; Spradley 1979). After interviewing the interviewees from my social network, I employed exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling, which is defined as a method where one participant refers one or two participants, and each new referral is explored until the study becomes saturated (Vogt 1999). The chain referral of snowball sampling allowed me to reach the target population, where respondents are rare, and developing trust is necessary for the reluctant group of people to take part in formal research. Table 6 summarizes the profile and the background information of the consumer side participants, and Table 7 provides information about the producer side of participants.

Participant selection bias, which limits the trustworthiness and generalizability of the data, may be a concern with using purposive and snowball sampling (Van Meter 1990). However, research shows that by obtaining a large sample size and supporting the interview data with a variety of data sources, sampling bias can be addressed (Atkinson and Flint 2001). Method triangulation, by using multiple data collecting techniques, is one way to answer the research questions efficiently and minimize sampling bias (Tashakkori and Teddli 1998). Therefore, this study used the triangulation of data collecting techniques, including in-depth interviews, content analysis from social media posts, and participant observation.

As recommended by Creswell (1998), each participant was informed beforehand about the nature and purpose of the research. Also, confidentiality and anonymity were assured to create a relationship based on trust, so that the interviewees could feel at ease to reveal private information. The data was collected and held anonymously. No identifying values are used in this dissertation that can link the data to the participants. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and occurred in three ways. I conducted face-to-face meetings in places where the interviewees felt comfortable, including homes, offices, or coffee shops. I also had video or audio call interviews with respondents from different countries and cities. In particular, the producer side of the respondents cited their busy schedules and asked to be interviewed by email. Table 8 presents the distribution of interview types, interview dates, and duration, both with consumer- and producer-side respondents. Rather than determining the size of the sample from the beginning, I continued to collect data until my data reached saturation, with thick and rich narratives to address the research questions (Mason 2002). This means that I continued interviewing until no new data, themes, and concepts emerged (Guest et al. 2006).

An interviewer should remain as neutral and non-biased as possible; otherwise, the interviewee may provide the answers that the interviewer seeks, and the final data would reflect the interviewer's thoughts (Zaltman 2003). To minimize this type of bias, I attempted to avoid ineffective probes that could manipulate interviewees' answers. I tried to speak less and listen more about what interviewees were attempting to say, encouraging participants to talk freely about the subject, letting them proceed at their pace, tolerating pauses, jokes, and laughs to catch many nuances of meaning, and probing to understand better these nuances. Also, I tried to avoid "why" questions, because I wanted to let respondents reveal their feelings starkly rather than evoking personal rationalizations of their actions, thoughts, and emotions (Kvale 1996).

Table 6. Participants as consumers of fashion

No	Name	Age	Marital Status	Height	US Size	Sexual Orientation	Ethnic Group	Origin	Higher Degree of Education	Occupation
1	Victoria	24	Single	5’3”	8-10	Male	Hispanic	PR*	Master in Communication	Social media specialist
2	Adriana	24	Single	5’5”	2-4	Male	Hispanic	PR	Master in Psychosocial Intervention	Unemployed/newly graduate
3	Grace	24	Single	5’6”	10	Male	Hispanic	PR	Bachelor in Business Administration	Law school student
4	Latavia	25	Single	5’4”	8-10	Female	Black	USA	Cosmetology license	Hairstylist
5	Yaritza	26	Single	5’7”	6	Male	Hispanic	PR	Master in Public Health	Nurse
6	Angela	26	Single	5’4”	4-6	Male	Hispanic	PR	Bachelor in Preschool Education	Executive assistant
7	Mila	26	Single	5’4”	4	Male	Black/Hispanic	USA	Master in International Business	Senior sourcing analyst
8	Petra	26	Single	5’5”	2-4	Male	Asian	India	Master in Electrical Engineering	Physical design engineer
9	Julia	27	Single	5’4”	8-10	Male	Hispanic	Colombia	Master in International Business	Social media expert
10	Beril	29	Married	5’4”	4-6	Male	White	Turkey	Bachelor in Industrial Design	Animation designer
11	Divya	29	Single	5’3”	6	Male	Asian	India	Master. in Electrical Engineering	Ph.D. student
12	Wendy	29	Single	5’2”	0-2	Male	Asian	Taiwan	Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering	Software engineer
13	Kara	29	Single	5’2”	2	Male	White	USA	Master in marketing	Real estate coordinator
14	Viviana	30	Married	5’3”	4-6	Male	Hispanic	Colombia	Bachelor in Intercultural Management	Masters student
15	Zaira	30	Married, 1 kid	5’5”	4-6	Male	Hispanic	PR	Bachelor	Housewife
16	Maya	31	Married	5’8”	12-14	Male	White	Egypt	Bachelor in International Studies	Works in a bank
17	Lulu	31	Married	5’6”	8-10	Male	Hispanic	PR	Bachelor	Artist
18	Juanida	31	Single	5’7”	2-4	Female	Black/White	USA	High School	Works in call center
19	Pooja	31	Single	5’2”	2-4	Male	Asian	India	Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering	Imaging scientist
20	Laura	32	Married	5’2”	0-2	Male	Asian	China	Master in Business Administration	Financial analyst
21	Ping	32	Single	5’1”	2-4	Male	Asian	China	Masters in Biology	Statistician
22	Nina	32	Single	5’4”	8-10	Male	White	Australia	Bachelor degree	Social media specialist
23	Sophia	33	Married, 1 kid, pregnant	5’3”	0-2	Male	Hispanic	Colombia	Master in International Business	Logistic specialist
24	Nicole	33	Married	5’4”	14-16	Male	Hispanic	Colombia	Master in Strategic Design	Elementary school teacher
25	Dannie	33	Single	5’5”	10-12	Female	Black	USA	High School	Workforce management
26	Megan	33	Single	5’3”	8-10	Male	Asian	Pakistan	Master in Public Health Management	Health care administrator
27	Amy	33	Single	5’8”	10-12	Male	White	Australia	Master in communication	TV anchorwoman/Journalist
28	Clara	35	Single	5’8”	14-16	Male	White	USA	Bachelor degree	Works in a bank
29	Angela	36	Married, 1 kid	5’2”	4-6	Male	Black	USA	Master in International Business	Technical business analyst
30	Jossie	38	Married, 1 kid	5’6”	12-14	Male	Hispanic	PR	Master in International Business	Translator
31	Chloe	45	Married, 2 kids	5’7”	8	Male	Hawaiian	Hawaii	Bachelor degree	She works as handy(wo)man
32	Pamela	47	Married, 1 kid	5’4”	4	Male	White	Italy	Bachelor degree	Owns a restaurant
33	Miranda	48	Married, 2 kids	5’6”	12	Male	White	USA	Bachelor degree	Renovating houses
34	Rykie	55	Married, 1 kid	5’2”	4	Male	White	USA	Bachelor degree	Real estate broker
35	Ruth	56	Single	5’10”	18-20	Male	White	USA	Master in school of counseling	unemployed
36	Dorothy	57	Widow	5’6”	14-16	Male	Black	USA	High School	Piano tutor
37	Charlotte	61	Divorcee, 1 kid	5'1"	10	Male	White	Australia	Bachelor of Arts in Humanities	Massage therapist
38	Maria	65	Married, 1 kid	5’9”	14	Male	White	Greece	High School	Jeweler

*PR stands for Puerto Rico

Table 7. Participants as producers of fashion

No	Name	Sex	Age	Ethnic Group	Occupation
1	Arda	Male	22	Turkey/White	Columnist at Women Style Turkey Magazine and fashion Vlogger and blogger.
2	Rei	Female	25	USA/Asian	Fashion stylist at a fashion model magazine and fashion blogger.
3	Olivia	Female	27	USA/White	Assistant Manager at a retail store in clothing department
4	Fatma	Female	29	Turkey/White	Founder her own clothing line, full-time fashion blogger. Was an editor of a regional fashion magazine
5	Melissa	Female	32	Turkey/ White	Creator and designer of her lingerie and swimsuit brand.
6	Emre	Female	32	Turkey/White	Owner and designer of her own fashion brand
7	Joy	Female	32	Nigeria/Black	Handbag and accessorize designer
8	Kevne	Female	33	USA/White	Sales specialist at known retail store in fine jewelry department since 2010.
9	Nihan	Female	34	Turkey/White	Area Manager of a world-wide known lingerie brand
10	Tony	Male	35	Nigeria/Black	Fashion designer, owner of a fashion house
11	Lucy	Female	36	Panama/Hispanic	Designer and brand consultant for Tommy Hilfiger, Jordan and other local fashion brands.
12	Michelle	Female	38	USA/White	Fashion designer
13	Dilek	Female	41	Turkey/White	Make-up artist since 1995, who started her career in Switzerland. She worked at fashion shows for 19 years.
14	Riley	Male	43	USA/White	Department manager of fashion/fine jewelry of a retail store
15	Caitlyn	Female	44	USA/White	Editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine.
16	Tito	Male	47	India/Asia	Executive producer of one of the top fashion event in the US outside New York Fashion Week.
17	Becky	Female	50	USA/White	Owner of a modelling agency.
18	Tod	Male	65	USA/White	He owns a nationally sold fashion line. He produced over 150 fashion related events.

Table 8. Distribution of interview types, duration and dates both with consumers and producers

	CONSUMERS				PRODUCERS			
No	**Name**	**Interview type**	**Interview date**	**Interview duration**	**Name**	**Interview type**	**Interview date**	**Interview duration**
1	Victoria	Video call	August 22, 2017	01:02:02	Tod	Email	September 5, 2017	written
2	Adriana	Video call	September 2, 2017	01:27:13	Kevne	In-person	September 6, 2017	01:02:42
3	Grace	Audio call	January 31, 2018	00:38:17	Dilek	Email	September 18, 2017	written
4	Latavia	Video call	October 3, 2017	00:28:26	Rei	In-person	October 6, 2017	00:36:12
5	Yaritza	Video call	April 29, 2018	00:30:41	Melissa	In-person	October 3, 2017	00:41:43
6	Angela	Video call	August 23, 2017	01:28:51	Arda	Video call	August 18, 2017	01:02:19
7	Mila	Video call	September 6, 2017	00:54:32	Olivia	Email	September 25, 2017	written
8	Petra	In-person	September 20, 2017	01:02:17	Michelle	Audio call	October 17, 2017	00:31:04
9	Julia	Video call	August 30, 2017	00:36:58	Lucy	Audio call	September 22, 2017	00:29:32
10	Beril	In-person	January 29, 2018	00:52:12	Caitlyn	In-person	October 26, 2017	00:38:23
11	Divya	Video call	September 13, 2017	01:01:07	Nihan	Email	September 12, 2017	written
12	Wendy	In-person	September 15, 2017	00:41:28	Emre	Email	November 11, 2017	written
13	Kara	In-person	February 2, 2018	00:38:23	Fatma	Audio call	November 4, 2017	00:32:45
14	Viviana	Audio call	September 13, 2017	00:35:58	Becky	Email	December 3, 2017	written
15	Zaira	Audio call	October 3, 2017	00:42:03	Riley	Email	September 1, 2017	written
16	Maya	In-person	September 6, 2017	00:46:53	Tony	Email	October 7, 2017	written
17	Lulu	Audio call	October 4, 2017	01:01:57	Joy	Email	September 16, 2017	written
18	Juanida	Video call	September 22, 2017	01:02:13	Tito	In-person	October 8, 2017	00:35:22
19	Pooja	In-person	September 14, 2017	00:43:04				
20	Laura	In-person	August 25, 2017	00:48:35				
21	Ping	In-person	September 13, 2017	01:15:17				
22	Nina	Email	February 27, 2018	written				
23	Sophia	Video call	August 31, 2017	00:45:42				
24	Nicole	Video call	September 5, 2017	00:51:03				
25	Dannie	Audio call	January 26, 2018	00:28:44				
26	Megan	In-person	September 17, 2017	00:59:07				
27	Amy	Audio call	May 31, 2017	00:39:22				
28	Clara	In-person	January 25, 2018	00:33:40				
29	Angela	Video call	September 11, 2017	00:44:37				
30	Jossie	Audio call	September 7, 2017	00:57:31				
31	Chloe	In-person	October 23, 2017	00:29:14				
32	Pamela	Email	April 9, 2018	written				
33	Miranda	Email	October 25, 2017	written				
34	Rykie	Email	February 2, 2018	written				
35	Ruth	Email	January 19, 2018	written				
36	Dorothy	Audio call	October 19, 2017	00:43:40				
37	Charlotte	Email	April 28, 2018	written				
38	Maria	Email	February 1, 2018	written				
TOTAL DURATION OF CONSUMER INTERVIEWS				**25:30:07**	**TOTAL DURATION OF PRODUCER INTERVIEWS**			**06:15:02**

All of the interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the interviewee to be able to provide full attention to the respondent and ensure that no information was missed during the interview. The interviews were manually transcribed verbatim to be able to revise the questions if necessary (Johnson 2015). Although the majority of the interviews were conducted in English, a total of seven interviews were performed in Turkish. These quotations were translated into English from Turkish with the help of a native speaker of Turkish and English, for accuracy.

3.2. Post extraction from Instagram

As of January 16, 2018, there were 1,712 posts under the hashtag of #fashiondiversity on Instagram. To collect images and their respective hashtags, the Google Docs add-on *Supermetrics* was used to extract all hashtags posted under the pictures including #fashiondiversity into spreadsheets. Before further analysis, posts with at least half of their hashtags in non-Anglophone languages were removed. As a final figure, 1,689 were included in the analysis.

4. Data analysis

4.1. In-depth interviews

Before beginning interviews, I attended several fashion events and took some field notes. After each interview, I wrote down my impressions, emotions, and thoughts and the critical points discovered during the interview. These notes helped me revise my questions, improve the topics to probe, and increase the effectiveness and quality of the subsequent interviews to gain more insightful data. Therefore, the analysis began during the observation phase.

I followed the most advised steps of qualitative analysis (e.g., Creswell 1998, Silverman 2005) to analyze 56 semi-structured in-depth interviews that were conducted with a diverse group of women. Weber (1990) describes content analysis as a systematic technique for compressing a large amount of raw textual data into fewer content categories, based on explicit rules of coding and categorizing. Since I needed to become thoroughly familiar with the dataset, my content analysis began with open coding. I constructed a thematic framework. Thirty-one hours of taped data, resulting in a 484-page transcript, were examined word by word. During the open-coding process, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), I read the interview transcripts multiple times. Based on the meanings that emerged from the data, I created tentative labels for the primary concepts. Once the labeling process was complete, I grouped the primary findings for each interview. Then, I compared and contrasted the transcripts with each other. I cross-checked the meetings for similar patterns and irregularities. I sorted

the themes that were very similar, which eventually became categories and sub-categories. In this phase, while dealing with a mass of raw textual data, I was meticulous in not ignoring any part that initially seemed to not fit any of the categories. Appendix I presents the relevant data for each interview and demonstrates these first-level categories.

Open coding enabled me to break down a significant amount of raw text into first-level concepts and categories. Grouped data presented both patterns and irregularities between respondents (Silverman 2005). To achieve a reliable analysis, after defining the categories and sub-categories, as suggested by Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005), I identified core categories using selective coding.

Following Johnson's (2015, p. 267) suggestion to prevent biases caused by sampling techniques and the familiarity of the context, I was "highly cognizant" when analyzing the data. I conducted regular checks of the transcripts and codes, their self-reflectivity, and theory, aiming for the credibility of the findings (Creswell 2003).

4.2. Social network analysis

Interview data revealed that many of the participants follow influencers on Instagram to keep up with fashion trends and that they use specific hashtags to make a statement. As previously mentioned, since Instagram is a critical platform among consumers to raise their voices about causes, it was highly relevant and necessary to explore the meanings surrounding #fashiondiversity.

Data analysis of #fashiondiversity posts was conducted in two subsequent phases. The first step consisted of a network analysis of textual data (hashtags), which is the procedure of exploring textual structures through the use of networks. The second step included a content analysis of the visuals gathered from #fashiondiversity to verify the findings of the textual analysis.

4.2.1. Textual analysis

The textual network analysis utilized in this study is an extension of social network analysis (Garton, Haythornthwaite and Well 1997), which traditionally focuses on persons as central units with the aim of examining social structures. Here, I chose to focus on text itself as a network of meaning and used hashtags for the nodes of the network, rather than persons, to examine how words are clustered and connected to each other. Compared to a traditional content analysis, textual network analysis allows for a better visualization of text structures and fields of meaning, in addition to metrics of their formation, particularly when a huge corpus of text as obtained from social media must be investigated.

The NodeXL Network Graphing Tool, a free and open add-in for Microsoft® Excel, is a network analysis application that supports network overview, discovery, and exploration for general purposes and is particularly used with network data extracted from social media platforms, such as Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, and Wikis (Hansen *et al.,* 2011). Furthermore, NodeXL helps to explore word association networks within text (Smith 2011), because, in its very essence, the application enables the visualization of networks and provides statistics and metrics of their formation. Moreover, because the application offers simple filtering and flexible display attributes, important structures in the networks can be highlighted very quickly. In this context, I utilized NodeXL to better comprehend and visualize the networks that are formed around alternative meanings of fashion diversity.

In the analysis phase, I focused on understanding the relationship between text nodes (in this context, hashtags are the nodes), by examining how they are clustered and connected to each other using NodeXL. In doing so, I aimed to explore critical word associations about the phenomenon at hand and better visualize the central themes that are formed around meanings of #fashiondiversity. To this end, all hashtags were collected in a spreadsheet, excluding #fashiondiversity, and the data was then cleaned by eliminating redundant data (hashtags in non-Anglophone languages and using emojis).

NodeXL extracted 1,689 vertices (the number of nodes/hashtags in the graph), which were identified with 17,216 unique edges (multiple connections

between two nodes are counted) for 1,712 hashtag groups that performed alongside the #fashiondiversity hashtag. Unique edges are the number of connections between the nodes (multiple connections between two nodes are ignored). The maximum geodesic distance and the average geodesic distance were calculated to be 7.0 and 2.89, respectively. These metrics mean that the two furthest nodes are connected to each other with seven connectors, through two intermediate nodes between the most distant ones. In addition, they indicate that the nodes of this network are relatively close to each other that and network is fully connected.

The Clauset-Newman-Moore clustering algorithm was used to create sub-groups from a larger population. This approach allows for less cluttered graphs when many isolated individuals are included and therefore is the general approach recommended for similar studies (Golbeck, 2015). The Clauset-Newman-Moore grouping algorithm defined more than 20 clusters within this network, which shows that this network is highly diverse. Vertices are plotted into two major networks that are associated with #fashiondiversity, and the minor networks, in which only a few vertices were found to be related to each other, were excluded from further analysis.

In my study, each edge represents a connection event between two hashtags within the data sample period. These edges and respective vertices were then imported into the application to visualize the network and clusters generated around interrelated tags. I utilized the automated steps for extracting networks in NodeXL, which count and merge duplicate edges, group clusters, and visualize the final networks.

4.2.2. Visual analysis

For the overall understanding of a given phenomenon, a combination of visual and textual imagery is crucial (Highfield and Leaver, 2014). Although Saussure’s (1974) semiology places linguistics at the center of sign systems, Barthes (1977) has shown that it is possible to apply the signifier–signified concept introduced for signs to nonlinguistic texts, visuals, and advertisements. As such visual data was gathered, in addition to textual data, and these visuals were analyzed during the analysis phase. I divided the visual data into organized

categories, as advised by Chandler (2005), to fully understand how my respondents interpret the common theme of "fashion diversity," based on Instagram posts. The categorization aimed to ensure consistency across textual and visual analyses and to avoid fragmentation and randomness.

Qualitative research focusing on visual images to explore experiences and meanings is already established in various areas of social sciences (Frith *et al.,* 2005), particularly in anthropology and sociology (Harper 2002). Barthes (1977) argues that a direct relationship exists between the image and the content of its message, as he separated the characteristics of visual messages as denoted (objective) and connoted (subjective). According to Barthes (1977), denoted message refers to the literal reality as it is portrayed in the photography, and connoted message to the inferred symbolic meaning of the message that is influenced by individual's social and cultural references. Barthes (1977, p. 18) contends that "[o]f all the structures of information, the photograph appears as the only one that is exclusively constituted and occupied by a 'denoted' message, a message which totally exhausts its mode of existence. This unique status makes a photograph paradoxical sort of sign because it is simultaneously objective and invested, natural and cultural." Given that the primary research question addressed by this study pertains to the understand the reactions of fashion consumers against discriminative actions of fashion industry, Instagram serves as an ideal context, as it allows for exploring how these actions and meanings are constructed through both visual and textual mediums. Although the data collected from this medium is rich enough to allow for a variety of qualitative analyses (for instance, semiotic analysis), the use of a traditional content analysis was deemed sufficient as it primarily functioned to confirm the findings of textual network analysis. A total of 1712 pictorial data has been analyzed regarding their textual (hashtags) and pictorial components. The findings of the study are supported with examples from visual data, which will be presented in the findings section.

5. Reflections of the researcher

During my Ph.D. studies, I developed some theoretical knowledge of fashion studies. Joining several fashion events helped me to familiarize with critical professional discourse, while as a female consumer with a multi-cultural background, I could familiarize with the consumer discourse. However, from data collection to analysis, I concentrated on maintaining a high degree of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, not to let my pre-understanding, feelings, and thoughts manipulate the phenomenon in hand.

Being an active Instagram user who attends local fashion shows, I acted as a participant observer in this research, by being familiar with the research setting. Participant observation empowered me to notice crucial factors and to gather significant insights while experiencing the social networking platform, Instagram, from the interviewees' points of view. It allowed me to better understand the coping strategies of consumers against lack of diversity in fashion via posts and associated hashtags on Instagram and guided me to make sense of consumer experiences.

According to Arnold and Fischer (1994) hermeneutics, pre-understanding is a vital factor in interpretation that supports, rather than constrains, the interpreter, while finding meanings in the actions and discourses of others. As the authors previously mentioned, since different pre-understandings create different interpretations, I interpreted the results of the Netnography analysis simultaneously with the semi-structured, in-depth interview data to improve the consistency of my findings and to alleviate observer biases. Also, following Johnson's (2015, p. 267) suggestion to prevent biases caused by sampling techniques, I was "highly cognizant" during the data analysis phase. The data triangulation method allowed me to see the fuller picture for the phenomenon at hand, to add depth to the analysis, and to gain multiple perspectives (Ritchie 2003).

A text reflects the author and his experiences, background, social setting, interpretation of discourses, in short, the "self" (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009). When a reader reads the text, s/he interprets the text according to his/her own

"self." So, the text never makes a definite and precise conclusion about what it is and what it means. In that sense, the primary question of my reflexivity is "Can I construct/make sense of this material/text in another way than suggested by the preferred perspective/vocabulary?" Keeping this question in mind, while I was analyzing the data, I did not take the statements of interviewees for granted but instead reflected on how they justify and make sense of their experiences (Sitz 2008).

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

In this chapter of the dissertation, I present the results of the qualitative analysis. In the first part, I identify categories of fashion diversity, other than the ones that are predominantly discussed in the literature, based on the shopping experiences of underrepresented women. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the societal and psychological consequences of underrepresentation by focusing on the fashion experiences of women. Then, the study continues in revealing the coping strategies of female consumers with the lack of diversity by categorizing consumers into four distinct groups, namely, *marginal (creative) consumers, fashion lovers, fashion concerned, and fashion uninterested* (see Atik and Firat 2013). In the final part, I show the diversity understanding of fashion producers within the institutional framework.

1. Lack of diversity and experiences of underrepresented women

"Why is being different so not beautiful?" is the question Allure's editor-in-chief Michelle Lee faced during an interview with five successful women of color, who were models and actresses, and she admitted that the fashion and beauty industries are bounded to old stereotypical attributes of beauty (largely Caucasian), because this is regarded as the gold standard (Fuller 2017). The same question is in the center of global fashion conversation when it comes to diversity. However, the industry's answer to that question does not go further than the minimal representation of a very narrow segment of diverse women. Furthermore, as this dissertation has demonstrated in the literature review, the meaning of "diversity" in fashion is stuck between the discussions of White versus Black, skinny versus plus

sized, young versus old, revealing versus conservative clothing, female versus male, and disabled versus non-disabled. Based on the fashion consumption experiences of a diverse group of women, this part of the findings explores ignored categories of diversity, such as skin shades other than Black and White and women in average sizes, with flaws, shorter in height, pregnant, and with budget constraints. In doing so, this first part of the findings contributes to the literature by discovering ignored diversity categories in the fashion industry.

1.1. Colorism: Skin shades other than Black and White

Although much research exists on Black and White female consumer experiences in the fashion market, a lack of literature exists on the experiences of non-White, non-Black women of color, who are almost invisible in the fashion industry.

> *"We are outsiders of fashion industry. They do not target us because we are not beautiful enough to be targeted. They prefer to ignore brown-colored skin. It is either White or Black. And of course, whiter is better. It is always more beautiful. Although genetically not really possible, in India, if you have white skin like the ones we see in magazines, you are considered attractive. Sometimes I think there should be a pill or cream that bleaches your skin color a couple of shades" (Petra, 26).*

From Black to Indian to Hawaiian native to Asian, each participant woman in this study had her personal stories to tell and recalled the feeling of "not being beautiful enough" due to perpetuated beauty standards of the industry. For some, such as Petra (26), this was the desire to bleach her brown-colored skin to fit into society's definition of "beautiful," due to not seeing her skin shade in mainstream fashion. From TV shows, fashion commercials, and magazine advertisements to celebrity culture, mainstream media have a significant influence on how women understand beauty. Furthermore, women of color are forced to feel that their skin colors are all wrong because of the dominant beauty products in the market, such as foundation, which are primarily produced for White women. Participants highlighted that to match their skin color, they had to blend two or three different

brown foundation shades, and when they cringed at their reflection on the mirror, they felt “ugly,” not only because of the makeup failure, but because of the prevalent idea that only White women are beautiful. Considering that buying beauty products goes hand in hand with learning what beauty means for many young girls, it is indisputable how damaging the fashion industry is for women of color such as Petra. Due to the lack of diversity in production and communication aspects of fashion, women receive powerful messages that their attractiveness and value depend deeply on fitting into the standard definition of beauty. The absence of women with different skin shades in mainstream fashion media creates a one-way colorism, which favors lighter skin over its darker counterparts (Hunter 2002) and tells women of color that they should have lighter skin.

Similar frustration applies to fashion models, who are also consumers, such as Sudanese Nykhor Paul, who has a deeper shade of Black skin. In addition to having to compete for modeling jobs in the fashion market against their White counterparts, models with darker complexions must perform higher levels of “aesthetic labor” (Wissinger 2015, p. 234). They must supply their makeup, because the hired cosmetic professionals do not carry the adequate makeup colors for their skin type or are inexperienced working with skin shades other than White. Nykhor used Instagram to address this problem in 2015 by announcing that she is “done by apologizing for her blackness” (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Nykhor Paul’s Instagram post on Blackness

Source: This image is reproduced from Instagram (2015) under the Fair Use Act for non-commercial, academic purposes only

"As a Hawaiian woman the biggest problem, besides thin hipped and thin legged jeans, is makeup and bras and underwear. My skin tone is definitely not either White or nude. Foundations have gotten better over the years, but I just do not wear a lot of makeup because color palettes make my look so different instead of enhancing. Bras and underwear, or pantyhose back in the day, that claim 'skin tone' were way too light and the ones made for Black women were way too dark. I feel all races and skin tones that do not fit nicely into White, pink, or Black have a bit of hard time finding exactly the right color for 'skin tone,' whether it's makeup or underwear" (Chloe, 45).

Besides makeup products, finding any so-called "nude" clothing item, from underwear to shoes, is a problem for women of varying skin tones. Even if is in the form of clothing, accessories or shoes, "nude" means that it should match the skin color and give the illusion of bare skin (Suh 2017). Women such as Chloe (45) mentioned the lack of skin tone choices in pantyhose and lingerie as a source of frustration in fashion shopping. Most fashion products that are labeled as "nude" are a specific kind of light beige, which is designed to cater a small section of women around the world. Although companies such as Nubian Skin, which offers bras, underwear, and pantyhose in four distinct shades of nude, and Christian Louboutin, which offers a shoe line called "Les Nudes," providing pumps in five different flesh-colors (Laurore 2015), are leading the way in redefining the "nude" trend in fashion, many consumers such as Chloe (45) find nude color shopping discriminative. Fashion producers prefer to cater first to their "perceived" ideal customer and ignore minority demographics. As is the case of high-end shoe label Christian Louboutin, once the product reaches its desired popularity, it is re-created for underrepresented groups. As a result, mainstream fashion's current definition of nude does not just allow specific demographics to buy products that match their skin tone, but it also works as a mnemonic of Whiteness as the beauty norm.

"Seeing more models of color gives me a feeling of recognition/freedom and makes me proud to be recognized as a woman of color. We are gaining

strength in numbers, and we are no longer allowing ourselves to be invisible to the public eye" (Dorothy, 57).

Black model Jourdan Dunn told the Guardian in 2013 that "people in the industry say if you have a black face on the cover of a fashion magazine it won't sell" (Freeman 2014). Blackness is valued so little in the Euro-centric, post-colonial world that it does not add but usually deceases value. Similarly, fashion producers have hung onto the myth that women of color do not move product and are not wealthy enough to be presented on the runways and magazine covers. Therefore, Black women such as Dorothy (57) celebrate the increasing visibility of women of color, such as Lupita Nyong'o, Iman, Naomi Campbell, and Halle Berry, not only because it is rare for Black women to be in the public eye but also because it is even rarer for their physical features to be accepted as beautiful. Although Dorothy acknowledges that true beauty is subjective and women should not rely on a standard definition to recognize their beauty, she also states the difficulty of feeling beautiful when such a powerful industry as fashion is setting society's standards for what beauty means. In addition, the concept of beauty itself holds such a confining power that women tie their inner peace and self-worth to their appearance. As in the case of Dorothy (57), while more representation and visibility in the mainstream fashion media takes pressure off of women of color, underrepresentation causes a devaluation of the self.

1.2. Average "in-between" sizes and ethnic body shapes

Despite 14 being the average size of American women, prior research has revealed that more than 60% of women who wear size 12 or above face difficulty in finding clothing in the same caliber as in standard sized versions (Corrigan 2013). Sizes 12 and 14, which I tentatively call "average" in-between sizes, are found to be the most underrepresented, thus problematic, clothing sizes for women. Clothing that is bigger than XL, or sometimes 14/16W, is regarded as plus sized and is presented separately in retail stores (Keiser and Garner 2012). On the other hand, many brands and designers, including but not limited to Abercrombie and Fitch and Karl Lagerfeld, refuse to make clothes for women who are larger than

size 10, so much so that Karl Lagerfeld, head designer of Chanel, said, “No one wants to see curvy women on the runway” in 2009 (Gunn 2016). Similarly, according to the Bloomberg 2016 report (Banjo and Molla 2016), Nordstrom.com carried only 8.5% size 14 plus dresses, while Nike.com had only five items. Consequently, since many fashion brands max out in size 12, and plus-sized brands begin with size 16, women who are size 12 and 14 face the biggest frustration in finding the right fit and defining their body.

Body-related terminology such as “fat, “plus-sized,” and “curvy” is a sensitive topic in fashion, because women who oppose the dominant fashion discourse that idolizes thin, toned bodies are marginalized, both in the fashion world and in society (Limatius 2017). All three terms, “fat, “plus-sized,” and “curvy,” have specific connotations for female consumers. For instance, “fat” is a historically disparaging word, while “curvy” is considered positive and flattering, and “plus-sized” is considered a politically correct and empowering option (Limatius 2018). On the other hand, it should be noted that the plus-sized concept is strongly connected to the women, which shows that the marginalization of the larger bodies is a gendered phenomenon, as stated by Harjunen (2009, p. 15): “body size has become a central determinant of social acceptability for women.”

In modern Western culture, fat bodies are stigmatized and represented as “repulsive, funny, ugly, unclean, obscene and above all as something to lose” (LeBesco and Braziel 2001, p. 2). In mainstream fashion, fat bodies are not only socially stigmatized but also intensified to be regarded as abnormal, which makes larger and/or thicker women invisible (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Large models are rarely seen on runways, the covers of fashion magazines, or on any advertisements, and the ones that are chosen to represent are all smaller in size than the target consumer (Limatius 2018).

> *“Fashion is still talking only about very thin pretty models or ‘plus size’ models, which seem to encompass a range of different meanings—often obese. It would be nice to see more models that are an average size, like size 12, rather than large or small. I remember recently seeing someone with a similar body shape to me, hourglass, which meant she had larger*

hips and chest and smaller waist, sometimes this shape is considered 'plus size.' I do not think it is plus sized. It is fit and curvy" (Nina, 32).

To reclaim the derogatory connotation of the word "fat," the fashion media "sugar-coated" fatness and invented the word "curvy" (Limatius 2017). As Nina (32) mentioned, a curvy woman need not always be a plus-sized woman. Women who wear size 12 and above want to be considered "curvy" in average size rather than being labeled as plus-sized. "Plus-sized" is considered the politically correct way of saying obese and/or fat. Since the term "plus-sized" is the reclaimed word of "fat," its exact definition is still confusing for female consumers such as Nina (32):

> *"I have a typical Latina body shape. I am not a plus size and not a regular size. Sometimes I go to a regular store and I do not find size 14. If I go to a plus-size store again I do not find a regular 14. I do not want to go to a plus-size store anyways. I am just thick and curvy. I mean I see myself as a voluptuous woman not a plus-size. So, it is very difficult for me to physically shop and find something that actually fits. And I can never buy anything online. I know I am going to return it anyways, so does not worth time. Also, I do not like to get excited about a clothing item and then had to return it" (Nicole, 33).*

On the other hand, women with ethnic body figures, such as Nicole (33), identify themselves as curvy, rather than plus sized. For them, curvy evokes positive imagery and has the connotation of femininity in the form of sexiness, which is related to their ethnic identity as "Latina." However, size identification does not remain the only problem of women wearing size 12 and above. In conjunction with increasing diversity in the US population, America's racial and ethnic composition in body figure and size has shifted, and standard clothing sizes have become an even bigger problem for women with diverse ethnic backgrounds (Clifford 2011).

Prior research demonstrated that variations in size charts and the adaptation of traditional sizing have led to an ever increasing $62.4 billion of returned clothing purchased online (Loechner 2018). As in Nicole's (33) case, inconsistent

and inadequate sizing and body type classifications confuse the consumer and lead to higher product returns and exchanges (Faust and Carrier 2010). Also, as Nicole (33) mentioned, instead of choosing solely on style, size chart variations across brands and stores make the consumer waste time and effort searching for the right fit before the desired style, which, in turn, results in anxiety and annoyance.

> *"I hate shopping because finding the right size is so difficult for me. I am usually 10 or 12. Sometimes for some clothing I do not even fit into 12. So, it is always very frustrating even to try on clothes in a store. I think stores do not have the right fit for my body type. Sometimes I wear a Medium, sometimes it is Large or XLarge. It depends on the brand and the clothing piece. It is even more frustrating when you like something in a store, ask for your size and the salesperson tells you that the brand does not produce for 'bigger' sizes. They literally segregate bigger bodies" (Julia, 27).*

The sizing and fit problem that both Nicole (33) and Julia (27) experience originates in the antiquated size charts developed in the 1940s (e.g., Simmons, Istook and Devarajan 2004; Kasambala, Kempen and Pandarum 2016), when the National Bureau of Standards (now known as American National Institute of Standards and Technology) used US Airforce women to create a series of universal body size measurements (Loechner 2018). In other words, the rigid definitions and measures of women sizes have been problematic since the beginning, particularly for minorities such as Nicole (33) and Julia (27). Even celebrities such as Beyoncé and Melissa McCarthy called high-fashion designers for including women with curvier figures into the fashion scene. In 2016, at the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) when Beyoncé received the Fashion Icon Award in her acceptance speech, she said,

> "When we were starting out with Destiny's Child, high-end labels, they did not really want to dress four black country curvy girls, and we couldn't afford designer dresses or couture" (Docterman 2016).

Similarly, actress Melissa McCarthy told to Refinery29 in 2015 that she began designing her own clothing because she could not find anything she liked, by stating,

> "I've been every size in the world, but after I was a size 12, it was, like, apparently I'm 'done' dressing" (Colon 2016).

As the fashion industry evolved, the US Department of Commerce abandoned the mythical measurements, which were based on a primarily young, active, fit, and healthy demographic, in 1983, and began to adopt more flexible measures to cater a more fragmented market (Stampler 2014). Finally, in 1995, considering that women were getting physically larger, ASTM International, formerly known as the American Society for Testing and Materials, updated women's sizing tables and published its own version (Dockterman 2016). However, the concept of S, M, and L continued to hold their iconic meaning for female consumers such as Julia (27), as a way to describe fit and obtain symbolic reassurance. However, the primary problem that women faced was not just the generic nature of size charts but also the inconsistency in size and fit between brands, which turned women into mere numbers. Figure 4 shows how "size 8" in one brand means something different in another brand.

Figure 4. Size 8 according to different brands

Bust (2012 Curvy and straight standard)	
H&M	34.5"
Zara	35.4"
Ralph Lauren	36"
Ann Taylor	36"
Talbots	36"
Club Monaco	36.5"
J. Crew	36.5"
The Limited	36.75"
Anthropologie	37"
Calvin Klein	37.5"
Guess	37.5"

Waist (Curvy standard / Straight standard)	
Zara	27.6"
H&M	28.5"
Ann Taylor	28.5"
Ralph Lauren	29"
Talbots	29"
Club Monaco	29"
J. Crew	29"
Anthropologie	29"
Guess	29"
The Limited	29.5"
Calvin Klein	29.5"

Hips (Straight standard / Curvy standard)	
H&M	37.75"
Ralph Lauren	38.5"
Ann Taylor	38.5"
Zara	38.6"
Talbots	39"
J. Crew	39"
Anthropologie	39"
Club Monaco	39.5"
The Limited	39.5"
Calvin Klein	39.5"
Guess	39.5"

Source: This image is reproduced from Dockterman (2016) under the Fair Use Act for non-commercial, academic purposes only.

The primary reason for size variations between many brands and retailers is "vanity sizing," which "is the practice of altering measurement specifications for garments to enable consumers to fit into smaller sizes" (Hoegg et al. 2014, p. 70). In other words, brands scale down their size metrics to make consumers feel skinnier in such a way that a woman wearing a size 12 in 1958 wears a size 6 today. By the late 2000s, vanity sizing went so far in forgiving extra weight, that designers had to introduce new smaller sizes such as 0 and 00 to make up for the difference (Dockterman 2016).

The fashion industry's lack of conformity with standard sizing has created an inconsistency of fit, which twists consumers' perceptions of size (Kennedy 2009). Studies have demonstrated that female consumers purchase intentions increase when they fit into a clothing item that is labeled with a smaller size, because it generates positive mental imagery of the self, while mental imagery about being a larger size is destructive to self-worth (Aydinoglu and Krishna 2012). Nicole (33) finds the practice of shopping in the plus-sized department as an insulting and demoralizing experience due to her self-view. Clothing is considered a part of self-view (Belk 1988), and the brand label can be considered the reflection of the desired identity, which is the consumer's self-concept (Berger and Ward 2010). As a social consequence, many women, such as Nicole (33) and Julia (27), compare themselves with the inconsistent sizing charts and evaluate their self-worth based on how they differentiate.

1.3. "Real" women with imperfections and flaws

> *"Least represented women are 'real'—no airbrush, body as it exists, and in a variety of ages, with flaws. I would love to see a proliferation of 'real me' body images. The shaming that we feel for not having the body type or skin is devastating" (Ruth, 56).*

From fashion to social media, we live in a society where all female images are heavily edited, filtered, retouched, and airbrushed, which dictates to women around the world how they should look. As retouched body figures and airbrushed

skin became more blatant and bizarre in magazines, female consumers began to raise controversial reactions over photo manipulations. Consumers such as Ruth (56) voice the damaging effects of not depicting “real women” in fashion media on women’s self-esteem. Women want to embrace their so-called flaws and imperfections, be represented, and not aspire for what the industry perceives and exposes as perfection.

> *“I think to be fashionable you have to be over 5'8", skinny, have glowing skin and hair with colorful eyes. So, your body has to be flawless to rock the fashion items. Otherwise, even if you have the funds to buy the expensive, stylish clothing, you are just mediocre, and clothes are the items to cover up. They tell the rest of the world that you are just ordinary women with common style because your body, face, look in general, because of your genetics, do not allow to be more than that. You can’t be unique. I mean, I do not feel unique with my style. Even though I would have enough money to buy the high-end brands because my body is not flawless, I do not think I will EVER be unique” (Kara, 29).*

My interviewees, such as Kara (29), consider perfection as smooth, tan skin purged of fine lines, freckles, moles, scars, blemishes, acne, warts, zits, visible veins, body hair, razor bumps, cellulite, and stretch marks, slimmed limbs and core, and tightened loose skin. In other words, all these aforementioned physical traits are considered socially undesirable. The retouched images of high-fashion models presented both in fashion and social media create an imaginary and impossible beauty ideal that makes women such as Kara (29) feel inadequate and non-unique, because flaws are communicated to be damages, defects, and glitches.

The retouching and airbrushing of pictures has become common, not only in fashion magazines but also on social media such as Instagram, with the popularity of selfies. The Oxford Dictionaries (2013) define “selfie” as “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media.” Instagram introduced photo filters that allow consumers to adjust contrast and lighting for airbrushing “out” the imperfections. Since selfie posting allows consumers to present their selective self-

promoting photos (Fox and Vendemia, 2016), it has a close relation with the self-regulatory processing model of narcissism (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001). This model is largely rooted in insecurities, where positive feedback from others (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001) in the form of likes, comments, and follower numbers on Instagram leads to the state of mind of adding value to the existence and maintaining positive self-view.

In a society where female bodily perfection is not only required but also expected, beautifying selfies before posting on social media platforms has become so normal that some smartphone brands such as Samsung have embedded automatically editing selfies in their front camera setting (Cosslett 2016), which has intensified the requirement of perfection for women to be considered beautiful. Figure 5 demonstrates how Samsung's front camera with a default "beauty" filter alters selfies. As Mel Wells compares her before and after "beauty filtered" selfies in her Instagram post (Figure 5), she criticizes Samsung by mentioning how damaging it is to tell women indirectly to get rid of their skin flaws, such as freckles, to look beautiful.

Isabelle Whiteley, a photographer and researcher, traveled around the United States and interviewed young girls between 13–18 for her project "That's What She Said," which aims to counteract damaging fashion narratives by reflecting teenagers' beauty experiences (Whiteley 2018). She explained her motivation behind the project with the following statement:

> "I struggled a lot with the pressures and expectations that come with being a girl—with body image, lad culture, assault and pressure from the media and fashion industries. I never questioned these feelings of self-loathing. It was never 'Why do I feel so inadequate?' We expect girls to feel ugly, fat, and to spend large amounts of money, time and energy to change their appearances because 'it's just what girls do'—right? No! We are not born like this; it's how we're taught to feel" (Whiteley 2018).

Figure 5. Automatically doctored selfies by Samsung

Source: This image is reproduced from Cosslett (2016) under the Fair Use Act for non-commercial, academic purposes only.

According to Whiteley (2018), women have learned to view bags under their eyes, scars, and blemishes as imperfections and, thus, as problems. She highlights the damaging effects of the "perfection" doctrine, particularly on young women's self-confidence and self-acceptance, by confirming the widespread presence of photo editing before uploading a picture on social media among teenage girls. After the development of social media filters and photo-editing smartphone apps such as Beauty Plus, FaceTune, Golden Beauty Meter, and Perfect365, young women began to compare their physical appearances not only with models and actresses in magazines but also on their phone screens with their peers, which led to jealousy, competitiveness, and bullying among girls interacting each other.

Similarly, another photographer, named John Rankin Waddell, in his series "Selfie Harm," asked teenagers aged between 13–19 to edit their selfies in five minutes until they thought their selfies were "social media-ready" (Hosie 2019). Images in Figure 6 are presented in an exhibition called "Visual Diet," which aims to reveal the damaging effects of image consumption on mental health. Images in Figure 6 not only show how simple it is for teenagers to alter their appearances, thanks to smartphone apps, but also the tremendous pressure they are under to look

perfect in a certain way, as they have been told. As the images in Figure 6 demonstrate, many girls alter their noses by making them narrower, slimmed their face shapes, and smoothed their skin flaws such as freckles, while others enlarged their eyes, plumped their lips, and added makeup. According to Rankin, although the majority of the young women mentioned that they prefer natural, unaltered pictures, none of them left their selfies untouched. Rankin explained this selfie altering practice of teens, by stating that

> "People are mimicking their idols for social media likes. This is just another reason why we are living in a world of FOMO[1], sadness, increased anxiety, and social media dysmorphia. It's so simple, almost like creating a cartoon character of yourself. Hyper-retouched, sexually gratuitous bite-sized images are served up fast and fleeting. They often leave us feeling hollow and inadequate" (Hosie 2019).

> *"When I look at the magazines or on television, I never see myself. Anyone looks like me. I grow up thinking that I was wrong, and it took a toll on my self-confidence" (Lulu, 31).*

For Lulu (31), underrepresentation in fashion media created a realization that her body was not alike portrayed bodies, which was the communicated ideal in the fashion world. This underrepresentation cultivates the feeling of "being different" and, thus, the belief that "she deserves to be an outsider." Furthermore, all of the retouching activities of the media to achieve the stereotypical perfection create deep psychological problems, including but not limited to body shaming and self-hatred for women of all ages, such as Ruth (56), Lulu (31), and Kara (29). In short, my dissertation findings strongly support the prior research by empirically revealing how the fashion industry creates a severe burden on female consumers to look like the socially constructed ideal beauty, which is mediated through retouched images.

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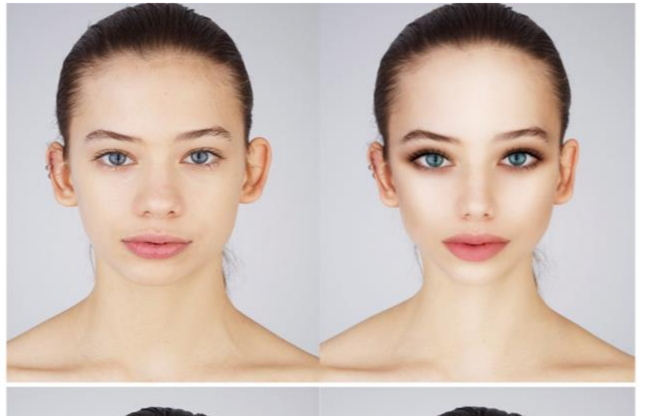
[1] FOMO is the "fear of missing out": a worried feeling that one may miss exciting events that other people are going to, particularly caused by things one sees on social media (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).



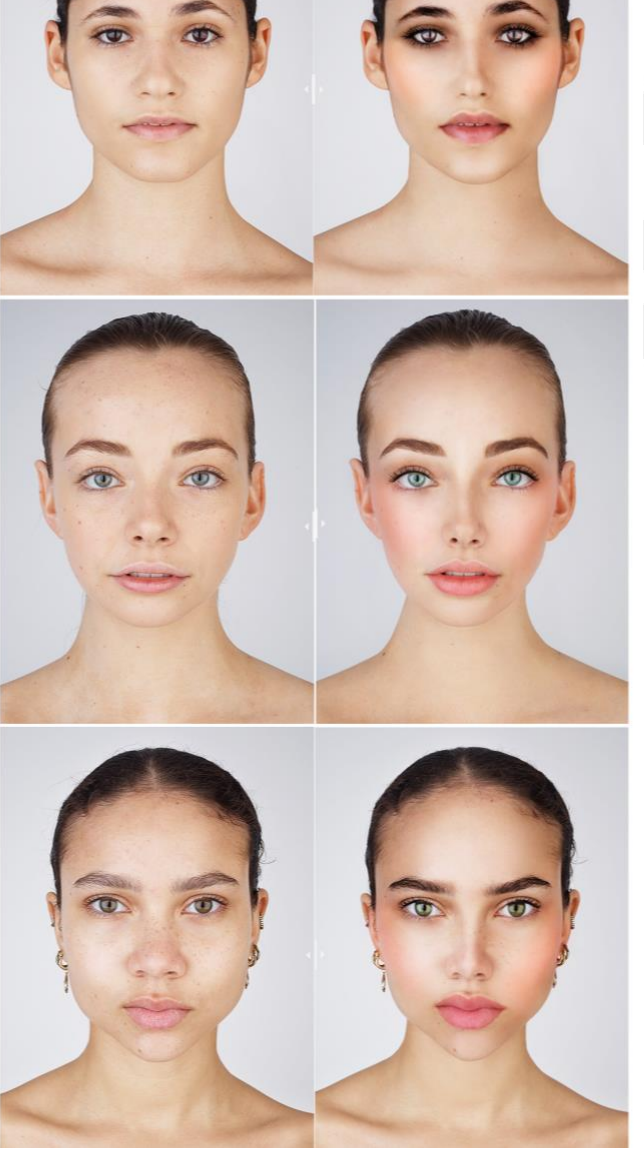


Figure 6. Retouched before and after selfies of teenagers for "Selfie Harm" project

Source: This image is reproduced from (Hosie 2019) under the Fair Use Act for non-commercial, academic purposes only.

1.4. Height—Petite Women

Although petite sizing was recognized as a distinct body type related to Misses' sizing after the publication of National Bureau of Standards on body measurement for the sizing of women's patterns and apparel, most retailers ignored the standards and kept producing clothing for the market that they perceived as demanded (Tamburrino 1992). Therefore, today, retailers have only minimal apparel sections that cater to petite women. Petite women in fashion linguistics refer to "height." The industry considers 5′4″ tall or under women with narrower shoulders and shorter neck-to-waist, arm, and leg lengths as petite (Lauren 2010). According to the National Center for Health Statistics (2011–2014), the average height of American women aged 20 or older is 5′4″, while women who are 5′8″ or taller are only 3.9% of the population. Ironically, in the fashion industry, the minority of the female population, based on height, are represented dominantly; thus, runway models are 5′9″ or taller, and the standard height of a boutique mannequin is 6′ tall (Darwin 2015). This being the case, it is not surprising that petite women feel left out from the fashion scene.

Fashion retailers separate female clothing according to designated age and size ranges, such as Girls, Juniors, Misses, Women's, or Women's Plus Sizes (Morrow 2013). Girl's clothing is marketed to children and preteens and designed for straighter, child-like bodies in loose cuts and child-like designs with brighter colors (Faith 2017). On the other hand, Junior apparel is oriented to teenaged consumers, who have outgrown the children's department and need trend-driven clothing in narrower cuts for their slim, short, and straight silhouettes. Juniors clothing is odd numbered, ranging from 0–15. Misses clothing caters to mature women with developed hourglass figures, which means the cuts are curvier at the bust, hips, and thighs to contour to the body, and the inseam of the pants is longer than Juniors and sized in even numbers, from 0–14 (Davies 2018). Women's or Women's Plus Sizes are designed for taller women with larger-sized figures, so the armholes are deeper, bust lines are lower, and the waist is larger than for Misses. Women's clothing is identified with even numbers from 12, 14, or 16 accompanied by a "W" (e.g., 12W or 14W) (Craig n.d.). Although petite women who are 5′4″ or under represent 70% of the female population in the United States and hold ten

billion dollars of buying power in the fashion industry, very few retailers carry Petite clothing, which is designed specifically to fit women of shorter height (Lauren 2010).

The Guardian reported that the "average" store mannequin is six feet tall, with a 34, 24, 34-inch bust, waist, and hips, respectively, and has extremely narrow calves, ankles, and wrists, as can be seen in Figure 7 (Glenza 2014). This is far different from the average American woman, who is 5′4″ and wears size 14, which is equivalent to a 40.5-inch bust, 33-inch waist, and 43-inch hips (Darwin 2015). Figure 7 visualizes this difference between a store mannequin and an average American woman and sheds light on how the industry discriminates against petite women, who actually represent the average size of the population.

> *"I am envious when I see someone tall wearing a cute swing dress because they look so comfortable, but I can't wear something with that little shape because of my height. Also, skinny jeans and leggings are undoubtedly produced for taller girls because I never find skinny jeans with the right length that do not stack at the ankles. Although dresses zip up just fine, they hug in all the wrong places and drag on the ground. I think I belong to the demographics that retail industry wants to ignore. So, as a smaller-framed woman, who is a size 2, I shop at Junior's section. But I do not want to shop in the Junior's section anymore. Like any other women, I want to wear apparel for women because I am a woman, a bona fide woman! I am a regular-sized customer...only shorter. Sometimes, I go to Loft, Ann Taylor, Banana Republic but the selections of petite clothing are minimal, and the sales representatives are usually confused about how to deal with short women, which makes me so angry. Sometimes, I just want to shout at their face 'Hey, we're just small female adults, not Thumbelina complexes'" (Kara, 29).*

Figure 7. Measurements of a store mannequin versus average American woman

Source: This image is reproduced from (Darwin 2015) under the Fair Use Act for non-commercial, academic purposes only.

The disparity of petite clothing options and the lack of concern of the industry for the petite female consumers is noteworthy. According to the sizing designations of the fashion industry, a petite woman such as Kara (29) should shop from a Junior's section or a Girls' section to find clothes that fit her height and body type. However, Junior apparel styles focus on youthful trends and are designed for growing young girls with straighter silhouettes, which makes it challenging for an adult woman with a petite hourglass figure, such as Kara (29), to find a clothing style appropriate for her size, age, style, and lifestyle.

Since, technically, "petite" is considered short, the industry assumes that the petite women is "tiny" (Darnell 2018). However, although the literal meaning of "petite" is small, a petite woman can be plus sized or regular sized but voluptuous at the same time. Therefore, it should be noted that length is not the only difference between petite and misses clothing. For instance, Kara (29) stated

that she needs regular-sized adult clothing fitting her developed female figure without any alteration needs, which means sleeves, skirts, dresses, tops, and leg lengths should be shorter, armholes should be higher, shoulders should be narrower, and pants should have a shorter rise. Furthermore, while designing clothing for petites other design components, such as reduced embellishments according to the size of the piece, smaller floral and print patterns, more vertical stripes and princess seams, smaller buttons and collars and thinner belts, should be used. Overall, petite clothing should be proportionally sized for shorter women such as Kara (29).

> *"I've also recently really liked the midi skirt and oversized sweater combo but I've tried on multiple combinations, and it never looks right on me. Most skirts are maxi skirts with my height anyways. So, most of the time I have to wear heels" (Kara 29).*

Furthermore, Kara (29) mentioned her desire for trendy fashion items such as knee boots, maxi dresses, and oversized sweaters, which are dominantly designed for women with taller legs and torso. For instance, the length of boots is dominantly designed for taller women. Therefore, knee boots reach to the mid-thighs of a petite woman with shorter legs. Kara (29) described her shopping experience in a store as schlepping clothes in various sizes and styles to the dressing rooms and being left realizing that she had a "weird body" for the fashion market, which led her to feel disheartened against even trying new trendy thing. In other words, wearing trendy fashion styles is a struggle for vertically challenged women. It requires an extra budget for tailoring to fit (e.g., hemming the jeans, dresses, skirts, and shorten straps, etc.) or giving up comfort by usually wearing heels. All of these extra efforts to be included into the trendy fashion scene leave petite women feel physically deformed and emotionally deflated.

Petite women want to feel stylish and grownup as well. Deborah Tumlinson, who is the editor-in-chief of Petite Magazine, intends to represent and empower women with "less-than-supermodel stature" by stating that "We're not all 5-feet, 9-inches tall, weigh 106 pounds and wear a size 0. We want people to know that a 5′2″ woman can be stunning, confident and successful" (Ribitzky 2017). Similarly,

Vanessa Youshaei, who is the founder and CEO of **“**Petite Ave,” a brand design clothes for women who are under 5′5″, began her company based on personal challenges she faced as a 5′0 tall woman (Glantz 2018). She stated her experiences as, “I do not exactly fit the Ford Model stereotype. To find clothes that fit, I shopped in the kid’s section and spent thousands of dollars on alterations. That’s why I started Petite Ave” (Glantz 2018).

Both Deborah and Vanessa, who belong to the underserved demographic of the petite, have experienced a significant burden due to underrepresentation and have decided to disturb the fashion industry by supporting petite women. As Kara (29) mentioned, the industry does not provide enough options for petite women, which creates a deep frustration for women who cannot find fashionable clothing due to their height. In other words, the fashion industry forces petite women to settle for oversized attire, pay for alterations, or shop from Junior’s clothing. The lack of available options in the market is considered frustrating and anxiety inducing by petite women, which makes them feel unexcited and many times miserable about fashion shopping in general. Consequently, this research reveals that fashion shopping for petite women is “soul crushing” as defined by Kara (29), because they buy clothes not because they love the style but because it was the only available option in the market.

1.5. Pregnancy and Postpartum

Although pregnancy is considered one of the most exciting times in a woman’s life, due to both a lack of representation and limited options in the fashion market for pregnant women, it can be a period of vulnerability and stress (Sohn and Bye 2015). Historically, maternity wear was not regarded as a separate market classification until the early 20th century, when Lane Bryant, a maternity clothing brand, launched an inexpensive maternity dress line in 1904 (Musial 2003; Furer 1967). From that point forward, maternity wear has been associated with large, loose shirts or a tent silhouette that hides the pregnant body (Sohn and Bye 2015).

"I do not want to spend tons of money on loose and outdated clothing that I will wear only 3–4 months. Capris, leggings, t-shirts, or oversized dresses with full of ribbons and silly baby graphics…That's what you can find in the market. I don't like to be separated. I don't want to wear maternity-only clothing, forced to change the way I dress in my everyday life and sacrifice my taste. I like to wear miniskirts, skinny jeans, fashionable tops, and cute dresses. I want to feel sexy, cute and chic when I am pregnant too. I want body flattering clothing for pregnancy, which is very hard to find in affordable prices. Currently, I can only shop from a few online stores" (Sophia, 33).

After the 1990s, due to expanded media coverage on pregnant celebrities with their up-to-the-minute styles (Tyler 2001), pregnancy was no longer an excuse for not looking fashionable (Martindale 2012). The increased visibility of the pregnant body through celebrities in the media ascribed significance on maternity fashion in contemporary societies, where pregnant women were a growing portion of total fashion consumers (Goodwin and Huppatz 2010). Furthermore, a developing number of working moms, such as Sophia (33), and a movement in societal expectations for pregnancy led maternity garments to be a bit more stylish, which transformed maternity wear into maternity fashion (Longhurst 2005).

Courtney Klein, the founder of modern maternity label Storq, launched in 2013 with the aim of bringing maternity wear into the realm of high fashion, explained the philosophy behind her brand that caters to this ignored category as,

"Women can be mothers without being fashion martyrs. Current market is a black hole for good taste. Women with a strong sense of personal style feel alienated by maternity and perceive the industry as a whole to be cheap and unfashionable. Why not design pieces just for them that look like the things they would normally buy for themselves?" (Raphael 2016).

Similarly, TV personality Rosie Pope, who starred in Bravo series Pregnant in Heels and chronicled her adventures as "maternity concierge," launched her maternity line in 2008 and highlighted the lack of options in the market for pregnant women, by stressing that,

> "I was shocked at this major moment in life that celebrities and media had caught on to, but fashion hadn't; there was a big void. I lived in New York City, a place where you'd think you could find [stylish maternity clothes], but there was still really nothing to wear. If the off-the-shoulder [trend] is happening in fashion, you should be able to get that in maternity. We're giving people the fashion that they want but in the shapes that fit them. If she's pregnant or not, she wants what's on the runway" (Raphael 2016).

After some specialized boutiques, such as Storq and Rosie Pope, some big retailers, such as Topshop, H&M, The Gap, and ASOS, adopted the maternity clothing movement and began to offer small maternity lines consisting of what consumers were used to buying pre-pregnancy (Raphael 2016). However, although the maternity market has improved compared to the 1990s, women, such as Sophia (33), still think that "looking good" requires more effort and money during pregnancy. She states that maternity fashion tends to identify the mother-to-be with baby graphics, pastel colors, bowties, and ribbons. She wants to find more stylistic variety in the market, and she wants to see pregnant models who advertise the clothing. She highlighted that due to the minimal options in the market, she must shop online, and the garments in her liking are usually available in higher prices, so Sophia (33) must pay much more than she is willing to. Overall, Sophia (33) feels abused by the fashion industry in this stage of her life, because of the cost she pays to be her "everyday self."

Tiggemann (2004, p. 29) stated that "in contemporary Western society, the major focus is on the body's appearance, in particular on body shape and weight." However, pregnant women experience both physical and physiological changes during pregnancy. The primary physical change occurs at around four months of pregnancy, particularly in the bust and abdomen areas, at which time

maternity clothing becomes a necessity (Gersh and Gersh 1981). Typically, a pregnant woman gains around 12.5 kg (29 lbs.) of weight, with an increase of 8–10 inches at the waistline during a 40-week pregnancy (To and Wong 2009). In other words, during pregnancy, women face bodily shifts and a challenge in control over the body, which affects identity and the self and, eventually, arouses ambivalence and frustration about the appearance (Earle 2003). Prior research discovered that due to the discrepancy between the actual and ideal future selves, women see the body as obdurate and out of control during pregnancy and postpartum (Ogle et al. 2011). Therefore, it is not surprising that 40% of pregnant woman are afraid of weight gain during pregnancy (Fairburn and Welch 1990). Similarly, Fox and Yamaguchi (1997) revealed that women who had a healthy weight before pregnancy had a more negative body image than women who were overweight. Overall, in today's weight-stereotyped culture, it is very easy for pregnant women to feel excluded from the cultural norm of beauty, because of the body and weight changes occurring during pregnancy and build up a negative self-image.

> *"Now that I am pregnant, it is supposed to be the best time of my life. Actually, I like being pregnant, but when it comes to dressing, it is a nightmare! Shopping when pregnant is so stressful and frustrating! Especially in the last three months! I am a size 2 woman. When I am pregnant my upper body is still size 2 or 4 but I have a baby bump, which I do not want to hide under loose, ugly, outdated clothes, which make me feel like I am huge. I want people see that I have potbelly because I am pregnant,* not because *I am fat. I want to wear stylish clothes and be proud of my body, baby and style. I want to be chic and fabulous when I am pregnant too. Why it has to be so difficult to find stylish and comfortable maternity clothing that give you confidence and make you feel like 'yourself' in this stage of your life?" (Sophia, 33).*

While previous research has shown that pregnant women with negative body images use clothing as camouflage to increase body satisfaction (Tiggemann and Lacey 2009), in contrast, this study shows that pregnant women such as

Sophia (33) want more fitted clothes that emphasize her body to celebrate pregnancy, and thus the baby. According to Sophia (33), maternity clothing should not be meant to cover the pregnant body, so she expects maternity clothing to be comfortable and fashionable, while making her feel confident about herself. In parallel with Clark and Ogden's (1999) findings, Sophia (33) sees pregnancy as a very special nine-month transition period, which makes her happy and helps her to adopt positive body image. However, this does not mean that she takes a break from body shape and weight concerns. In other words, pregnant women have similar body-image concerns and desire to invest in fashion products and appearance as women who are not pregnant. Therefore, Sophia (33) does not want to hide her body under loose fitting clothes, because she is afraid that her body can mistakenly be seen as fat. She stated that she feels more secure and confident when she wears more fitted clothes that emphasize her baby bump.

Furthermore, Sophia (33) stated that she wants to be proud of her baby by exposing her pregnancy. Today, as more famous pregnant bodies appear in the media, such as Kate Middleton and Kim Kardashian, the level of scrutiny women have faced throughout the history is decreasing. During the medieval times in Western Europe, since regular clothing was easily adaptable to the baby bump, women from all social classes wore their everyday clothing during pregnancy (Baumgarten 1996). From the sixteenth century until the beginning of twentieth century, maternity clothing was designed to hide pregnancy by constricting the pregnant belly either with boning corsets, less-boned curvilinear corsets, bodices, or drapery, so it was very restrictive. After World War II, specifically designed maternity styles, such as skirts with elastic panels to cover and hide pregnant belly and unnecessarily full tops, were introduced to the market. This maternity clothing had nothing in common with regular fashion (Poli 1997). With her two pregnancies in the 1980s Diana, Princess of Wales influenced maternity styles by wearing casual clothing, such as long tunics and casual sweaters over stretchy leggings (Poli 1997). Concealing pregnancy came to an end after the 1990s. Body-conscious culture and feminism changed maternity styles, with its emphasis on fit bodies revealing the human form, which led pregnant women to adopt clinging styles in public instead of draping and concealment (Baumgarten 1996). With the

hypervisibility of pregnancy in American pop culture, for women who can perform pregnancy sufficiently in a glowing and feminine way, pregnancy became the newest accessory. As Renee Cramer (2016, p. 46), the writer of *Pregnant with the Stars*, states,

> "The pregnant female body has gone from being an embarrassing reminder that women have sex and therefore private state of being to being considered public property for regulation and commercial property to be celebrated as sexy."

Consequently, pregnancy became something to show off. Women such as Sophia (33) want to wear a tight-fitting dress to celebrate and acknowledge their womanhood and fertility, verify their sexiness, and show off their blissful and glowing pregnancies, for assurance purposes (Sohn and Bye 2015).

Liminal transitions, which are periods of transition that cause instability and ambiguity, occur throughout the lifespan and might suspend an individual's identity (Noble and Walker 1997). Research proposes that an individual may utilize consumption and possessions that hold a symbolic meaning that represents the self when identity is in flux, to ease changes and transitions during times of liminality (Belk 1988). Pregnancy is considered a significant liminal transition for women, when self is redefined while the body experiences dramatic changes, and sometimes women feel a "loss of identity" due to the role transition from being a woman to mother (Upton and Han 2003). However, the findings of this study show that women such as Sophia (33) do not want to lose their identity, they care about their appearance during pregnancy, and they want to look good and fit, despite the experienced body changes. Supporting the findings of Guy and Banim (2000), women manage identity and body in flux by focusing on the actual self, which is the pre-pregnancy self, and want to make maternity clothing purchases accordingly (Ogle et al. 2013). Therefore, Sophia (33) wants to wear distinctive and fashionable clothing similar to what she wore before pregnancy; thus, she chooses maternity clothing for individuality, in addition to assurance purposes. Consequently, the increasing interest in maternity clothing is linked to the perceived positive image of the pregnant body. This dissertation sheds light on the

necessity of fashionable, comfortable, and yet fitted maternity clothing designed for different stages of pregnancy that does not hide pregnant bodies for assurance and individuality purposes.

1.6. Budget—Middle-class women

Consumers have become more aware and attracted to luxury goods that they cannot afford, particularly after the evolution of the middle class (Entwistle 2000). The consumers in the 57.7 million households that constitute the middle-class market in America, which is 45% of the total population (Amadeo 2019), had around $15.46 trillion of disposable income (after-tax) in 2018 (Bair 2018). Pew research reports that middle-class consumers, whose annual income before taxes ranged between $45,200–135,600 in 2016 (Fry and Kochhar 2018), are more willing to pay premium prices of 20–200% for well-designed and well-crafted goods in higher levels of quality and taste (Silverstein and Fiske 2003). Consumers think that they get what they pay for, whether the goods have evidence of being better than their affordable counterparts or (Plassmann et al. 2008).

> *"I think of fashion as something for models and celebrities. It's something unattainable for the average person as designer clothes are far too expensive. I can only do window shopping for high-end fashion, which is the real fashion for me. When I do online window shopping, navigating around the high-end brand's websites, adding to my cart and leave them there forever, I imagine myself as Holly Golightly wherein the opening scene of Breakfast at Tiffany's; Holly was staring wishfully into the windows of Tiffany's (laughs). So, I believe fashion is not for ordinary middle-class women but more for models, celebrities, and women who have all the funds to play with their look regarding their body and their clothes" (Kara, 29).*

Majority of the women in this study defined "fashion" with luxury, glamor, class, and sophistication, and identified fashion with high-end designer bags and shoes, including but not limited to Gucci, Valentino, Chanel, and Dior. In contrast to the law of demand, luxury goods, which are also called "Veblen goods," such as

the ones listed above, receive greater consumer demand as the price increases due to their socioeconomic position revealing characteristic (Veblen 1899). Since not all of the social classes can afford the same brands, luxury fashion goods in particular refer to material culture and status (Crane and Bovone 2006). Leibenstein (1950) and Bagwell and Bernheim (1996) called this phenomenon the "Veblen effect" and argued that increased price reveals luxury and motivates consumers to do conspicuous consumption, which is the practice of acquiring luxury goods to show off economic power and enhance one's prestige (Veblen 1899). Due to the hedonic pricing of luxury fashion goods, which is defined as high pricing because of not only the quality but also the perceived exclusivity of the product (Wang 2015), for many women, such as Kara (29), fashion is only for consumers who can afford it. Thus, the industry discriminates against middle-class women who have decent jobs but cannot afford high-end designer collections. Due to this segregation, Kara (29) describes fashion as torturous. She enjoys herself by filling up her online shopping carts, and at the end, the total price at the check-out reels her back to reality. She spends a lot time in the "fantasy" of what she perceives as "fashion," while knowing that her budget does not agree with her taste. Therefore, it is frustrating for a woman such as Kara (29), who perceives "fashion" as what she sees on the runway, magazine editorials, and window displays and not affordable.

> *"Fashion as portrayed on runways, catalogs, and magazines, in my opinion, don't represent everyday women at all. Most high fashion seems exclusive to the Hamptons or runways. An everyday woman who works, has children, takes care of home or runs to the grocery store can't relate to and afford fashion" (Chloe, 45).*

Similarly, Chloe (45), like Kara (29), associates fashion with luxury, which is not accessible for an everyday woman. Chloe (45) believes that one must be rich to keep up with fashion. As a working mom who lives in a busy world, Chloe (45) believes that to belong to the fashion scene, a woman should have both the time and the right budget to play with her appearance, including skin, hair, nail, and body perfection, and buy the latest fashion trends.

"There is a misconception that women have a LOT of money to spend on clothing. Trends change so fast. Fashion magazines makes me feel outdated every season. So, I end up wanting to buy new things. When I go shopping, it saddens me with the prices that I see. I want to be fashionable and be able to afford fashion. I get a huge thrill when I can find something fashionable at a price that I can actually afford" (Miranda, 48).

Many women, such as Miranda (48), feel the pressure to dress in different styles every single day thus keep buying more clothing than they need. Writer Caitlin Moran explains this pressure with the harsh criticism that women were judged about what they wear and how they look since the time immemorial, using the words,

> "You know when we stand in front of a full wardrobe and say, 'I don't have anything to wear!'? Obviously, we have things to wear. You can see all the shit from where you are standing, fully dresses, ready to leave the house. What we mean is, 'I don't have anything to wear for who I need to be today.' What women wear is incredibly important and not just because we live in a society with a $1.5 trillion fashion industry… [but because] how we look works by way of our opening paragraph in any social setting" (Dalton, 2018).

Women are expected to live up to fashion standards that are represented in fashion magazines, runways, TV shows, and social media, and if they cannot, they feel unfashionable and like outsiders. Both Miranda (48) and Caitlin Moran highlight how the pressure to keep up their looks up to date led women to heavily rely on cheap clothing, which eventually fueled fast fashion (also see Ozdamar-Ertekin and Atik 2015). Miranda (49) got used to disposable clothing, which is trendy and cheap, because it is the only way for her to keep up with the rapidly changing seasons. Fast-fashion retailers such as Zara, Forever 21, H&M, and Top Shop offer access to runway trends and look-alike, high-end designer clothing at a low price through their supply chains (Linden 2016). Fast-fashion clothing changed the notion of Veblen goods by ensuring consumer demand through the production of the hottest trends in short cycles, which led to women such as

Miranda (48) to be more fashion conscious as desired trend-led looks become in and out of fashion extremely quickly.

For many fast-fashion consumers, such as Miranda (48), Chloe (45) and Kara (29), "real" fashion is considered the luxury high-end brands, while fast fashion is perceived as the copy of it, which they must settle with. Supporting Barnes and Lea-Greenwoo's (2006) research, the majority of participants in this study possess an interest in the looks of public figures, such as celebrities and models, which emerge from runway shows, and cannot afford but still want to wear similar things. Therefore, fast-fashion consumption has become the reflection of social aspirations to convey the desired identity (Linden 2016). Consumer economics and marketing scholar Miller (2013, p. 161) explained the practice of fast-fashion consumerism with the need of pleasure, which is influenced by hedonism, which she defined hedonism "as the ability to experience pleasure in life and is self-oriented and associated with the acquisition of experiences or products that involve fun, fantasy, and pleasure." This hedonic consumption through fashion led consumers such as Miranda (48) to appreciate the fashion trends but not the clothing itself.

> *"I once wore a long red satin Chinese style dress. I heard someone in the Ladies say 'what is she wearing?' and felt like hiding or going home. So, my first cocktail party was a disaster. I didn't have a suitable dress or shoes, and at the time didn't have the money to buy any or borrow any. I felt very self-conscious when people looked at me disapprovingly" (Charlotte, 61).*

Before fast fashion boomed, consumers such as Charlotte (61) associated meaning to clothing items, such as a first cocktail party dress, prom dress, or skirt worn on the first date. They remembered the feeling they felt wearing the item and had memories tied to it. For instance, Charlotte (61) remembers the feelings when she stepped out of mainstream fashion due to her budget constraints and wore a Chinese style dress to her first cocktail party. However, fast-fashion chains emotionally divorced women from their clothing. Women such as Miranda (48) began to only care about buying the latest trendy thing for a cheaper price as soon

as possible to be perceived as fashionable in society. Fashion for middle-class women became a hassle, for it left them looking good but not necessarily feeling good.

Euro-centric beauty and fashion standards are “created and maintained by the society’s elite” (Patton 2006, p. 35). The rejection of the lower income class is reflected in current fashion industry standards. According to Patton (2006), the high cost of trend-leading clothing brands, various beauty regimens, such as plastic surgery, cosmetics, gyms, diets, tanning salons, and hair strengtheners, marginalizes and eventually excludes poor women, who do not have the budget to afford the high cost of achieving hegemonically defined beauty ideals. Therefore, for middle-class women, it is economically devastating and emotionally exhausting to be pressured to stay on top of the cutting-edge fashion revolution. For consumers such as Charlotte (61), Miranda (48), Chloe (45), and Kara (29), the heavy pressure to keep up with the latest trends and to update their wardrobes every season is both emotionally and financially overwhelming. With trends changing and evolving rapidly through fast fashion, it is more of a burden to keep up with trends and stay fashionable. The word “fashion” can no longer be associated with “style.” It has evolved beyond being a symbol of unique expression, and in the eyes of female consumers, it has become even more focused on branding and luxury, which is exclusive to the wealthiest class.

2. Societal and psychological consequences of lack of diversity

This second part of the findings demonstrate three prominent themes regarding how women that I identify as diverse read the societal and psychological consequences of underrepresentation in the fashion industry, based on their everyday fashion experiences. The three sub-sections that are discussed in this part are 1) the fear of social exclusion, 2) body shaming and self-hatred, and 3) sexism and exoticism from racism.

2.1. The fear of social exclusion

Greene (1994, p. 18) stated that "the United States idealizes the physical characteristics of White women and measures women of color against this arbitrary standard." Therefore, for non-White women, Western standards of beauty cause internalized self-hatred and push them to strive for beauty by changing their natural physical appearance with practices such as plastic surgery, skin-lighting creams, and hair straightening chemicals to fit in the society. Unsurprisingly, African American women spent $54.4 million on ethnic hair and beauty products, out of $63.5 million total industry spending in 2017 (Nielsen 2018). However, it should be noted that Black consumers do not only spend on beauty products specifically designed for them. African American women spent significantly greater cash on personal appearance products, such as $473 million out of the $4.2 billion industry in total hair care, $127 million out of the $889 million industry in grooming aids, and $465 million out of the $3 billion industry in skin care preparations (Nielsen 2018). Similarly, Asian American women invest 70% more than the US population on average on skin-care preparation products (Nielsen 2015), and Japan is the number one country in the world performing surgeries to make the eyelid look similar to their Western counterparts (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery 2017). In addition, the fact that women of color carry higher levels of beauty-product related chemicals in their bodies than White women due to the use of more cosmetic products to comply with Western beauty ideals is striking (Zota and Shamasunder 2017). These statistics clearly demonstrate how non-Caucasian women have the tendency of changing their physical appearance to meet the unrealistic beauty standards that favor Western ideals, experience social inequality based on their natural appearance, and facing a physiological threat to their well-being.

> *"I loved magazines when I was a teenager; however, most magazines had no or few black models. This did cause me to have to do my own soul searching to find what worked best for me. I tried so many ways of managing my hair from hot presses, to perms, to Jheri curls and finally weaves. Sadly, chemical treatments ruined my hair, but I finally learned how to embrace my coarse textured hair and choose a style that was more*

> *suited to me. Cutting my hair and ditching the chemicals was terrifying, but I chose to stop the self-hate brought on by a system that implies that black women should straighten their hair with chemicals in order to fit into society. Twenty years ago, I decided to wear my hair in its natural state and in locs (a hairstyle that looks ropelike strands). This decision has given me the most inner freedom which allows me to be true to myself" (Dorothy, 57).*

Since the industry advertises long straight hair as the only signifier of beauty for women (Kim 2010), it is not surprising that hair was highlighted repeatedly by African American women such as Dorothy (57) as the essential beauty issue within the body-image context. Historically, the beauty of African American women, particularly regarding their skin color and hair, has been compared to White beauty standards. During slavery, Black women who had Western features such as lighter skin, White facial features, and wavy or straight hair, were used as house slaves, while women with darker skin color, kinky hair, and broader facial features were enslaved in the plantation fields (Patton 2006). This White supremacist classification based on stereotypical beauty standards, termed "The Lily Complex" by Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003, p. 177), is defined as,

> "altering, disguising, and covering up your physical self in order to assimilate, to be accepted as attractive...As Black women deal with the constant pressure to meet a beauty standard that is inauthentic and often unattainable the lily complex can set in."

Therefore, women of color, such as Dorothy (57), strive to change their appearance to belong to the Euro-centric beauty ideal, loathe their natural looks, and believe that "Black is not beautiful...that she can only be lovely by impersonating someone else" (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003, p. 177).

Dorothy (57) grew up feeling "unacceptable" due to the underrepresentation of Black woman in the dominant fashion narrative, because African American women have been told to assimilate their hairstyle by pressing

or chemically strengthening and to "follow the latest fashions in Vogue and Mademoiselle, to rouge her cheeks furiously" (Wallace 1979, p. 172). They have been told that wearing their kinky hair in braids or dreadlocks and embracing their natural beauty may be considered a radical act or political statement and may convey socioeconomic status (Patton 2006). As a result, rather than wearing their afro hair in its natural state, many African American women chose to wear wigs or undergo harsh chemical processes to fit in with mainstream hairstyles and eventually be acceptable in the society. Therefore, Dorothy (57) fixed herself, particularly her hair, constantly to be perceived as "acceptable" and "normal" and thus to fit into the what society perceives as "beautiful." Many women who do not have the privilege of getting reaffirmation for their facial and physical features from the fashion media feel that their look is not a kind of beauty that is worth celebrating. Therefore, these underrepresented women are forced to feel "ugly" and "different." The assumption of being perceived as ugly and different leads to the fear of social and romantic discrimination, the lack of access to economic and social power, and, overall, the dismay of social exclusion. The dominant representation in fashion creates social stratification and discrimination based on looks and shapes inequality (Berry 2016). Therefore, underrepresented women such as Dorothy (57) strive to recreate their appearance through clothing, makeup, plastic surgery, hair treatment, liposuction, teeth whitening, and many other consumption practices to change how society perceives them.

> *"The stereotype and what the media portray sends a message that we (African American women) will not be accepted if we do not exhibit any of the advertised traits, which is African American women are curvy, thick, bold in style and materialistic. The fear of becoming invisible helps us fall prey to this belief system; therefore, we stifle ourselves and do not rock the boat' so that we are not ostracized by society" (Angela, 36).*

What we perceive is beautiful and fashionable comes to us through a variety of media narratives that we are bombarded with daily (Patton 2006). These media narratives depict impossible standards of beauty and create negative psychological and physiological consequences, particularly for young women

(Malkin et al. 1999). Signified meanings fixed to a group influence their identities, which is trapped in the marginalizing rhetoric (Cottle 2000). As Angela (36) mentions, stereotypical narratives about women of color still exist in the fashion media, and this contributes to oppression and externalization.

> *"When I was a teenager in the early 1970s, I was often frowned upon for dressing like a 'hippy.' Police would harass me and my friends and if we were driving in a car we would be pulled over and questioned. I've been denied entry into certain places by not meeting the dress code or not wearing appropriate footwear or not looking 'cool.' I had to spend the day really disliking myself and feeling as though I was being ostracized" (Charlotte, 61).*

Although Black women, such as Dorothy (57) and Angela (36), clearly verbalize the fear of social exclusion due to the lack of diversity in fashion, it should be noted that this social and psychological consequence came to the forefront in the majority of my interviews, regardless of race. For instance, Charlotte (61) remembers that she was discriminated against by society and the police due to not dressing in a mainstream style in the 1970s. In this case, the mainstream fashion was the look that was trendy and accepted by the society. Therefore, the mainstream fashion is populist and lacks imagination, rejects individual expression, and does not embrace originality and longevity. If a woman decides to dress differently than the ubiquitous style, she would be subject to pejorative connotations. Charlotte (61) described the social consequence of not complying with the dominant and relevant fashion trends as ostracization. As a result, the marginalization of women who do not fit into the socially constructed stereotypical images of beauty and fashion damages the self-conception by lowering self-esteem and increasing the feelings of body shame, anxiety, and depression and the fear of social exclusion.

Zota and Shamasunder (2017, p. 2) noted that "Racial discrimination based on European beauty norms can lead to internalized racism, body shame, and skin tone dissatisfaction." Due to the fear of social exclusion, all women, regardless of their race and skin color, strive to change their physical appearances, become

estranged from their bodies, and naturalize body shame and self-hatred, which brings us to the next part of this dissertation.

2.2. *Body dissatisfaction, body shaming, and self-hatred*

Body dissatisfaction, body shaming, and self-hatred are widespread among adolescents in Western cultures (Neumark-Sztainer et al. 2002) and are important causes of subsequent depression (Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus 1994). Research has revealed that body dissatisfaction is triggered during a girl's physical changes of puberty, when physically maturing bodies stand in contrast to the idealized feminine beauty in Western cultures (Wichstrom 1999), which, eventually, leads to body shame and self-hatred. However, it must be acknowledged that body shame and self-hatred do not emerge due to "troubled individual psyches," but are "systematically taught through processes of socialization in white supremacist society" (Hooks 1995, p. 131). In other words, the devastation of socially constructed and conventional standards of beauty is the primary cause of body shame and self-hatred, which leave psychological scars into the adulthood of women of minorities.

> *"When I was 22, I was on a three months carb-free diet, about to finish my undergrad, desperate for acceptance, a total freak and obsessed with my figure. Trocita (chubby), gordita (fatty), THICK, big-boned, curvy, voluptuous, Latina—you name it—are all adjectives of how people have described my body—to my face. I know that people think I've got it all together, but this battle that I've fought for many years is only getting harder with today's social pressure on what pretty looks like. Like any other girl, I have an Instagram full of models and comparison photos that crowd my self-image, self-esteem and self-worth" (Julia, 27).*

Opinions and attitudes are formed through what we see as dominant in the society that surrounds us. Berger and Luckmann (1966) defined this phenomenon as "social construction" and argued that society is created by habitualization, typification, and institutionalization. Habitualization is described as "any action that

is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be…performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economical effort" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 71). In other words, habitualization is the recognition of one's of internally occurring patterns of behavior, and it does not require interaction with others. Habitualization works concurrently with typification, which recognizes externally occurring patterns of other agents. When two agents typify each other's actions, it entails reciprocal typification. Reciprocal typification merged with habitualization leads to the formation of institutions (Baumer and Tomlinson 2006). Institutionalization is defined as "a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 72). A habitual process historically constructs institutions, repeatedly reproduced and shared by other members of society (Atik and Firat 2013). Accordingly, fashion is an institution, and the conceptions and knowledge of women regarding what is beautiful and fashionable are embedded in society. Therefore, the reality in fashion regarding what is beautiful and fashionable is socially constructed, and it is experienced by women subjectively.

In today's globalized world, all women are heavily exposed to unrealistic images, from both traditional and social media, which dramatically influence their beauty standards and their sense of body dissatisfaction. The massive exposure to media images creates an even more significant burden on ethnically and racially diverse women, who genetically carry different facial and body features than predominantly represented Caucasian women. As Julia (27) mentioned, women are drawn to images, due to fascination, and find themselves comparing their physical appearances with what they see as dominant in traditional or social media, such as the celebrities and influencers they are fans of or follow. The comparison between the socially constructed reality of beauty and the actual "self" causes insecurities, which is, eventually, destructive for self-esteem. For instance, Julia (27) highlighted her frustration when she was striving to change her body, following what she reads as socially acceptable and desirable. Similarly, research has revealed that within the US, various types of cosmetic surgeries are racially and ethnically focused (Kaw 1993); while Asian American and Pacific Islander women seek "double eyelid surgery," African American and Hispanic women prefer body-sculpting surgeries such as tummy tucking, liposuction, and breast augmentation (American Society of

Plastic Surgeons 2017). As Julia (29) mentioned, for women of minority groups, from eating disorders to surgeries, anything that will bring them closer to the desired ideal is sought to feel better and acceptable about their appearance.

> *"I feel anxious about my face. All models are very feminine. I look like my dad. I think my face is more masculine and I don't think masculine face lineaments are represented in the fashion industry. I'm not feeling good about the way I look. I grew up timid and shy. When I was in high school, I wanted to hide all the time. So, if I had the budget, I would definitely do plastic surgery to get rid of male features, for example, my defined jawline" (Megan, 33).*

The conversation on the psychological harms created by the lack of diversity in fashion is not always between Black and White, small and big sizes, tall and short, or young and old. Body shame extends from physical features or mannerisms. Megan (33) feels anxious due to having more masculine facial features and looking similar to her dad. Similarly, the Indian designer Masaba Gupta said to the DailyO that her features were considered not feminine enough to be featured in a commercial for the Lakmé Fashion Week, which occurs bi-annually in Mumbai (Sharma 2018). Sexual dimorphism is defined as "the phenotypic difference in adult human faces that reflect the masculinization or feminization of secondary sexual characteristics" (Vashi 2015, p. 26). Several studies have demonstrated that female faces with feminine attributes are consistently found more attractive than female faces with masculine-looking features (e.g., Cunningham 1986; Rhodes 2006). Similar to Megan (33), Janet, a 26-year-old woman, said to The New Times,

> "I've been teased about my seriously defined jawline since primary. I was told I had a man's face and even though I laughed it off sometimes, it actually made me feel uncomfortable. I always told myself that if I got the money needed, the first thing I'd do is look for a plastic surgeon who could fix the problem. I'm still working on that" (Mbabazi 2015).

For both Megan (33) and Janet (26), possessing a masculine-looking facial appearance, which is referred to as non-feminine, is a challenge and takes a severe toll on their self-perceptions. They both opted into facial feminization surgery for gender confirmation and normality verification.

Overall, insecurity and body dysmorphic disorders (BDD), defined as a "disorder that consists of a distressing or impairing preoccupation with imagined or slight defects in appearance" (Stice et al. 2000), have long been affiliated with the beauty and fashion industries, which act as cultural gatekeepers through their influence on clothing selection and the ideals of beauty adopted by t society (Englis, Solomon, and Ashmore 1994). BDD is not merely the result of the preoccupation with appearance in modern society (Hsu and Vashi 2015). Italian psychiatrist Enrico Morselli first revealed the disorder in 1891 and named it as dysmorphophobia, today known as BDD, which means "ugliness," particularly of the face, in the Greek language (Philippopoulos 1979). Then, in 1903, French psychiatrist Pierre Janet referenced dysmorphophobia and described it as shame of the body due to the fear of being viewed ugly and, thus, ridiculed (Veale and Neziroglu 2010). From a psychological perspective, research suggests that body dysmorphophobia is the result of unconscious feelings, including but not limited to poor self-image, guilt, and inferiority (Phillips 1991). In this modern era, due to the dominant images we see in fashion and entertainment, this disorder not only spreads but is also publicized in TV shows, such as in one episode of *True Life* on MTV, entitled "I Hate My Face." Today, beauty is linked to confidence, which results in empowerment. Therefore, the consequences of BDD as body shaming and self-hatred are devastating for women of minority groups, who are left to feel physically deformed, inadequate, and abnormal.

2.3. Sexism and exoticism from racism

The findings of this thesis show that other consequence of a lack of diversity are related to sexism and exoticism. Throughout history, and still today, the mainstream culture that overvalues the European female aesthetic undervalues and rejects the aesthetic and beauty of other racial and ethnic groups, except for

exoticizing them (Banks 2000). Intensified exoticism is the hyper-accentuated presentation of women of color with a strong emphasis on cultural backgrounds (Cahill 2011). In the visual imagery that the fashion media uses to create a vivid mental picture for the audience, women of color are portrayed "in stereotypical garb, accentuated phenotypic traits, stereotypical contextual cues, facial traits, body traits or environmental related to racial categorization" (Johnson 2015, p. 4). In other words, the media portrayals circulated to our everyday life reinforce cognitive linkages between women of color and stereotypes (Covert and Dixon 2008). Black women presented in African apparel, tribal patterns, and animal print, Latinas depicted to be sexy and fiery, and Asian women portrayed as submissive, wearing a bun, are examples of intensified exoticism in the fashion industry (Millard and Grant 2006). Research by Johnson (2015) revealed that among 278 fashion magazine covers reviewed, Latinas and Black women ranked highest in being portrayed with hyper-sexualization attributes, such as being presented partially and mostly nude in sexy body positions, while Asian women were presented with intensified exoticism stereotypes, such as wearing cultural clothing, such as kimonos and updo hairstyles, with fair skin colors in more passive body positions. On the other hand, no Indian, Pacific Islander, or Native American women were displayed on the cover of any magazines reviewed.

The display of models of color in editorial fashion ranges from "looking White" to the opposite end of the spectrum, exoticism (Schopf 2016). For instance, Marcia Gillespie, the editor-in-chief, described, in a 1976 Essence Magazine article, the desired look of Black women in the fashion industry by referring to the model, namely Iman, as "a white woman dipped in chocolate" (Oliver 2015). The preference of Whiteness is a socially constructed concept that normalizes Euro-centric ideals of beauty and forces subordinate groups to adopt those ideals by masking their ethnic and cultural heritage so they can be accepted (Frakkenberg 2001). For instance, the Black model presented in fashion media with long, straight blonde hair with retouched lighter color skin tone and a narrow nose is the proof of likeness to the Whiteness of fashion producers. The presented exotic woman of color, who carries White female features in Black skin, encourages racism by "othering" women of color and implying that a woman of color who resembles her

ethnicity is not attractive. Models of color who reject achieving the desired look—closer to being white—with their own resources, including time and money, are inevitably "refuse[d], cast aside, not part of the fashion story" (Wissinger 2015, p. 238).

> *Mila (26): Well…I guess the common misconception for black women is that black women are open to sexual experiences and any crazy fantasies, and to show that we dress bold! I mean like mini, bright color dress, statement jewelry, and makeup…and (yes!) tight jeans. God! Men just LOVE the ass! [laughs]. You have to make sure every damn curve of the ass and waist and breasts are defined.*
>
> *Researcher: Have to?*
>
> *Mila (26): Yes, we are sexy, I guess [laughs]...and we know that we have to show it. We learn to dress revealing clothing to assert that. Or maybe we like to prove that our bodies are beautiful too. I don't know, but either case, dressing sexy or revealing doesn't mean that we are open to anything.*

As Mila (26) mentions, the relentless hyper-sexualization or de-sexualization of non-White women in fashion make women of color feel that their bodies are not quite right or normal. For instance, in the context of the high-fashion media, through exoticism, Black women are represented as otherworldly creatures to be admired and observed due to their hyper-sexuality and lascivious nature, an image that closely resembles Collins' (2000) "Jezebel" metaphor. Sociologist Sue Jewell (1993, p. 46) described the Jezebel as a tragic mulatto with "thin lips, long straight hair, slender nose, thin figure, and fair complexion." Jewell's (1993) conceptualization of "Jezebel" dates back to the history of slavery in America. Black women of slavery who had lighter skin, namely, who were mulattoes, were sold into prostitution. Black slaves were constantly pregnant, because the continuance of slavery institution depended upon the reproduction of future slaves. Therefore, Black women were encouraged to reproduce in exchange of "a pig for each baby born, a new dress to the slave woman for each surviving infant, or no work on Saturdays to black women who produced six children" (Rawick 1972, p.

228). In addition, slaveholders systematically influenced the reproduction of young Black slaves to increase their wealth, without paying the cost of purchasing new slaves (Gutman 1976). When young Black females reproduced, their fertility and fecundity were considered evidence of their insatiable sexual appetites (Woodard and Mastin 2005).

Furthermore, light-skinned, freeborn Black women, who were not slaves willingly, became mistresses of wealthy White southerners in return for financial support for their children (Wilson 2014). This formal arrangement was called "plaçage," which was a temporary interracial relationship based on sponsorship between a White man and free woman of mixed ancestry, called "placée," in exchange of long-term sexual services (Aslakson 2012). Consequently, the Jezebel image depicted a sexually promiscuous, lewd, and available Black woman (West 2008). In the context of a White female, the Black female became "a racialized, gendered symbol of deviant female sexuality...whose sexual appetites are at best inappropriate and at worst, insatiable," which equates Black women to exotic creatures with "animal-like" sexuality (Collins 2000, p. 83, 140). As a result of this exoticism, stereotypical images of Black women in the fashion industry consolidate the existing "racial attitudes linking black people with 'savages' from the 'bush'" (Wissinger 2015, p. 229).

> *"Fashion uses Asian women as a symbol of exoticness. If they have an exotic collection then they use Asian girls because they think we are just exotic" (Wendy, 29).*

As Wendy (29) mentions, the othering and exoticizing practices of the fashion industry is not limited to Black women but involves all women of color. Wendy (29) defines Asian women as being exotic. Exotic, in this case, implies that an expected and accepted standard of beauty exists, and Asian women look different than that. Women of color are defined as exotic, because they look different than the mainstream beauty ideal, which is dominantly White. Thus, they are estranged and "othered" from the idealized beauty standard and are never truly accepted as beautiful on their own terms.

While Black women and Latinas are hyper-sexualized in the media through exoticism, Asian women are portrayed as docile, passive, subservient, and erotic females, namely, "The Geisha" or the opportunistic and untrustworthy "Dragon Lady" (Hofstede 1996). Specifically, Asian American women grew up learning to be quiet and invisible or, in contrast, sexual objects, as depicted and persisted in mainstream media and popular culture (Mukkamala and Suyemoto 2018). The submissive femininity stereotype of Asian women dates back to the practice of Asia's military prostitution to American and European soldiers in the twentieth century, when Western men believed that exotic beauty existed only for their pleasure (Moon 2009). Overall, exoticized representations of non-White women accredit a hyper-sexuality (e.g., Black women and Latinas) or passive-sexuality (e.g., Asian women) to non-White femininity, thus reinforcing the superiority of "normal" as White femininity in the fashion industry, and by extension, the social hierarchy (Mears 2011, p. 175).

Wissinger (2015, p. 242) argues that through the practice of sexism and exoticism, fashion producers manipulate racial identities, maintain White superiority and authority over non-Whites, and demand non-White models "to manage their racial characteristics." In the context of fashion, exoticism displays non-White women as objects to be admired, and their racial identities "[become] something to work with, an aesthetic, a quality to be powered up or down," (p. 241). Therefore, the racial identities of non-White models become subjects of Western cultural appropriation, and their races are treated as styling choices, rather than social identities.

After thoroughly outlining the societal and psychological consequences of the lack of diversity in the fashion industry, the following part of this dissertation presents the coping strategies of female consumers with the issue of underrepresentation.

3. Consumers' reactions to underrepresentation

Atik and Firat (2013) reveal the role of different constituents—both consumer and producer agents—in the diffusion of fashion. The authors categorized consumer agents into four different groups, based on their institutional

roles in the fashion system: *the marginal (creative) fashion consumer, fashion lovers, fashion concerned, and fashion uninterested.* Building upon Atik and Firat's (2013) work, this part of the dissertation presents female consumers' coping strategies with the lack of diversity and shows how different consumer agents contribute to diversity or cultural homogeneity in the fashion institution.

Underrepresented female consumers cope with the consequences of underrepresentation in the fashion industry by adopting four different strategies. The first group is "marginal (creative) consumers,"[2] who are activists and have a strong desire for diversity in fashion. They reject the imposed beauty and fashion standards, and with the help of social media, they use fashion and their bodies as tools of resistance, rebellion, and revolution. Marginal consumers contribute to fashion diversity using their social capital accumulated on social media. In this part of the dissertation, building on the work of Mathwick et al. (2008), I also examine the social capital accumulation among underrepresented fashion consumers and present how this aggregation instigates a shift towards inclusivity in the fashion industry. The second group of consumers that I discuss in this section are "fashion lovers," who have a passion for fashion but are afraid to be at the forefront, so they follow the lead of the "marginals." The third group is "fashion concerned," who either have weight and body-image concerns that must be hidden under clothing or do not feel that reflecting the fast-changing fashion trends in their closets is considered as fashionable. Lastly, the fourth group is "fashion uninterested," who chose comfortable clothing to suit their bodies, with minimum effort for public decency, and to protect their bodies against hazards such as harsh or hot weather.

3.1. Marginal (creative) consumers

Creative fashion consumers who are members of emergent or repressed cultures are also called marginals, who seek "to be free from tradition, serve the fashion institution as providers of inspirations for trends" (Atik and Firat 2013, p. 850). Marginal consumers subvert the conventional norms of clothing and beauty

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[2] For the sake of clarity, in the rest of the manuscript, marginal (creative) consumers are called "marginals" or "marginal consumers."

and subjectively redefine the fashionable styles of the period by creating original apparel primarily targeted to their personal needs to express their identities. This group of consumers copes with the societal and psychological consequences of the lack of diversity in the fashion industry by resisting the ideals imposed by society, raising their voices via social networking sites, and eventually creating communities by supporting other underrepresented women. For this study, I interviewed marginal consumers who create their apparel and who are also fashion producers, with their roles as fashion bloggers. Since I had many participants either as professional fashion bloggers or hobbyists, I was able to gather rich insights for the marginal consumers category, which is one of the primary contributions of this study to Atik and Firat's (2013) work.

> *"Beginning in seventh grade, I learned how to sew, and I would always choose a slightly odd pattern in order to make each piece my own. I experienced many years of body shaming, so being able to wear my own creations gave me the courage to stand up for myself" (Clara, 35).*

As I discussed in previous sections (see page 117), the cultural obsession with universal beauty ideals has reinforced the tendency of body shame for women such as Clara (35), who did not meet the unrealistic standards, and eventually leads to psychological problems, such as body dysmorphia, anxiety, and depression (Stice et al. 2000). Clara (35) chose to resist the accepted beauty ideals and mainstream fashion trends that did not reflect her personality. She contributes to the fashion industry differently than the typical fashion consumer culture, by home sewing clothes for herself. Home sewing is defined as any type of sewing activity to create apparel and fashion accessories that is completed at home (Martindale 2017). Historically, while in the nineteenth century, female clothing consumption depended on personal production, home sewing activity of women decreased in the second half of the 20th century, when women entered the workforce, and sewing classes in the school programs lessened (Crane 2012). The decline of personal sewing was also affected by the influx of cheap, ready-to-wear clothing exported from Asia (Courtless 1982). The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century saw a resurgence in home sewing interest and do-it-yourself fashion

participation by women, due to the desire to be close to home and the economic downturn in 2008 (Haider 2014). Mark Hill, the CEO of the Association of Creative Industries in America, reported that today, do-it-yourself crafters are the youngest they have ever been. Millennials between 18–34 constitute 41% of all total crafters, while the 34–54 and 55-plus groups constitute 36% and 23%, respectively (Danziger 2018). The association's report noted that the interest in customizing the fit and bringing individual vision come to life by personalizing fashion items one wears has caused the surge in sewing among Millennials.

> *"At my age, I feel as underrepresented in the fashion industry, which tends to be 'ageist.' Many women in my age have given up on fashion and have opted for comfort above all else and put little or no effort into their appearance, which I consider disappointing and frustrating. I still like to dress up with my girlfriends, and we all make an effort to impress each other. I also like to dress up for a man but like to do so in a classic style, making an effort to avoid trying to look 'too young.' My shape and skin color have altered over the years, and I needed to find a new look. This was a trial and error process and was quite difficult to transverse—my favorite styles didn't suit me anymore, so I've tried to find classic styles and shapes. Although I consider myself normal being a larger size, it is still hard to find larger sizes in many boutiques as they usually sell out or they only stock up to size 12. So, I seek out smaller more specialized boutiques that offer an eclectic selection of styles and varied sizes and have informed salespeople who know what I'm seeking and what will suit me. Also, I sew my clothes or buy vintage clothing and alter them" (Charlotte, 61).*

Previous research revealed that sewing interest has shifted away from economic reasons to creative and psychological reasons over time (Martindale 2017). In this study, the participants' primary reason to sew their own clothes is their being underrepresented and underserved. In today's fashion scene, individuals are encouraged to choose their clothing among fashion-industry-dictated selections consisting of wearing in the form of in and out of trends, including but not limited to color, style, fit, fabric, and brand name (Guy, Green

and Banim 2001). Therefore, both Clara (35) and Charlotte (61) felt underrepresented, due to not seeing their beauty reflected in fashion narratives, and underserved, due to being unable to find clothing they sought. Thus, their interest in sewing personal fashion garments increased with the interest in customized unique clothing that fits their body type, size, style, and age.

Clothing choice is a continuous process of self-presentation, in which a person controls the perceptions of others towards the self (Guy and Banim 2000). While Millennials, such as Clara (35), want to wear the latest fashion trends that fit their body, older women, such as Charlotte (61), with limited budgets, look for more than the trendy clothing. When women such as Clara (35) and Charlotte (61) sew garments for themselves, they have more control over style selection, which provides increased authority in presenting their desired identity. For instance, both Clara (35) and Charlotte (61) have control of many aspects of their clothing, such as tailored fit, quality, color, and pattern alterations, that ready-to-wear purchasers do not. Therefore, garment sewing allows these women to present their desired identity through clothing that they feel good wearing and to communicate their individual vision and taste accurately. Both Clara (35) and Charlotte (61) see sewing as a creative outlet of self-expression and consider the effort, expertise, and pride of wearing something they created more valuable.

> *"My perception of myself is confirmed by my peers who tell me when I look good, and I trust their opinions" (Charlotte, 61).*

> *"I keep posting my pictures on my Instagram account wearing my own designs. Each compliment, like and new follower that I receive gives me fuel to keep creating my style and gain confidence in myself. The compliments I receive are a confirmation of my unique choices in fashion and justification of my beauty. The key, I think, is in knowing what looks good on YOU and what expresses your personality versus what looks good on a store mannequin or other models" (Clara, 35).*

Marginal consumers, such as Clara (35) and Charlotte (61), seek validation of their beauty and fashion style from others. While Charlotte (61) turns to her social network for verification about her style through compliments, Clara (35)

seeks confirmation for her beauty and unique choices in fashion from strangers on social networking sites, namely Instagram. Due to its visual and community dimensions, Instagram is a well-suited outlet for marginal consumers to present their clothing style and "controversial" bodies, due to the lack of representation types discussed in the first part of this dissertation (see page 83). Based on their personal fashion experiences, marginal consumers, such as Clara (35), find a way to reverse the challenges they face due to the lack of diversity in fashion and raise their voices on social media. For instance, the Body-love Movement, a social movement that celebrates the female body by saying "no" to the photoshopping and retouching of body images, accepting unrealistic body images, preying on women's insecurities and sexualization, and the objectification of women in the media and modern culture, arose from women's frustration with the cultural obsessions for ideal beauty (Body Image Movement, n.d.). This movement received and continues to receive support from social media, with 8.7 million posts under the #bodypositive hashtag and 1.1 million posts under the #bodylove hashtag, as of March 4th, 2019, on Instagram (Instagram, n.d.). Similarly, previous research shows that self-styled Fatshionistas, who are "fashion lovers wearing plus-size clothing," state that clothing for large-sized women includes style-agnostic garments and highlight the lack of fashionable clothing options in the mainstream market (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). In general, mass consumers remain silent or fail to act and are thus disengaged from seeking inclusion in the fashion market where they feel underserved (Henry 2010). However, plus-sized bloggers and fat activists, petite influencers, and other underrepresented marginal consumers, choose to disturb the fashion system by demanding clothing that is not simply utilitarian but reflects their personality, lifestyle, taste, moods, and fantasies. By sewing their own clothes, as Clara (35) does, or by altering ready-to-wear purchased clothing, marginal consumers want to fully participate in fashion and use it on their own media outlets.

Gabi Gregg, known as GabiFresh by her followers, began her style blog, "Young, Fat and Fabulous," in 2008 and showcased plus-sized fashion styles. She described the purpose of her blog as more than an outfit-of-the-day outlet, as a platform communicating "a message beyond fashion, about accepting yourself at

any size, and feeling stylish" (Lyons 2010). After two years of blogging, Gabi won a contest held by MTV and became the Twitter Jockey, which helped her to raise the visibility of her social media profiles on the body positivity beyond the Fatshionista—"fashion lovers who wear plus-size clothing"—community (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013, p. 183). She was invited to be a guest blogger in plus-sized retailers such as Faith 21 (plus-sized line of Forever 21) and was then invited to Vogue Italia to produce plus-sized fashion videos and post on VogueCurvy, which is the online extension of the magazine (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). After calling her bikini "fatkini," Gabi began a movement for women of all sizes to love, accept, and embrace their bodies, and in 2013, she began her own swimwear line, which sold out very quickly (Schlossberg 2016). Gabi interpreted the success of her swimwear line, stating that,

> "As a fashion lover and as a consumer, I'm constantly reminded of all of the things I love but that aren't available in my size. The year I wore that bikini, there were very few other retailers offering swimwear to a young, hip demographic. It was super hard to find bikinis in my size. I came into [design] knowing what I like and what I want. I think that being a plus size customer gives me a unique perspective and is one reason why my designs seem to do so well with other plus size women" (Schlossberg 2016).

Gabi contributed to InStyle magazine with a two-spread piece entitled "10 plus-size myths—debunked!" in 2013, and she won a curvy-fashion award in 2014. Her influence increased so quickly that Target commissioned Gabi to help with the sales of its plus-sized line, Ava and VIV, in 2015 (Schlossberg 2016). She was recognized in the fashion world and featured by many fashion brands as a plus-sized model. As of March 10, 2019, Gabi has a remarkable audience of 676,000 followers on Instagram (Instagram 2019), 61,200 followers on Twitter (Twitter 2019), and 220,000 followers on Facebook (Facebook 2019). She explained her motivation of turning a hobby into a full-time career as a personal style blogger to Fashionista as,

> "When I started becoming more active online and learning about body

> positivity, I found forums for plus-size women who like fashion, and that kind of changed my life because I thought I was the only one! This was over 10 years ago; at the time, there weren‘t really visible communities of women coming together to talk about fashion who were over a size 12. In the LiveJournal forums about fashion; everyone would share their outfits and get comments and feedback in these groups where we would talk about clothing. I also simultaneously started seeing actual fashion blogs popping up, individual blogs, and I thought, I love this, but I don't see anyone who looks like me. Even in the forums I was a part of, some of them were not dedicated to plus-size women, and the ones that were, I felt didn‘t really have enough focus on fashion. It was more about body politics, which I obviously love and that plays into my brand, but I thought there should be a personal style blog or a website focusing on young, trendy, fashion-forward clothing, and that‘s what I wanted to do, so I just started it" (McCall 2017).

Similar to Gabi, other underrepresented women who were brave enough to present their bodies and style publicly turned to blogging, and eventually to social media, to be a voice for other women "like them." For instance, Denise Bidot, who is a curvy single mom with 618,000 followers on Instagram, inspires women to love themselves by posting her "completely unretouched—every imperfection and every flaw presented exactly as it photographed with body stretch marks" (Fuller 2017). Bidot encourages other women on her Instagram page to embrace their unique beauty with any perceived imperfections, writing,

> "It's amazing to be a part of the change that's helping women see once and for all that nobody is perfect. We can still be beautiful in spite of our imperfections. It's time to celebrate each other and learn to love the skin we're in" (Fuller 2017).

Other examples of marginal consumers of fashion who have an influence on changing the perceptions of the fashion industry are Laura Wells, a women who wears size 14 and advocates the beauty of in-between sizes to her 79,200 followers on Instagram (Instagram 2019a), and Alessandra Garcia Lorido, Cuban-American woman, who encourages her 82,300 followers to embrace their Latina body type

(Instagram 2019b). These examples of marginal consumers of fashion world can be multiplied. Here, the important thing to recognize is the institutional role of marginal consumers in creating cutting-edge fashion, inspiring other consumers, creating communities, and eventually being recognized by fashion producers (Atik and Firat 2013).

Since the transformation of marginals into fashion authorities as seen from the examples above primarily occurs on social media, particularly on Instagram, it is critical to explore the meaning of fashion diversity on this platform. Also, exploring the hashtags and visuals marginal consumers use to increase their visibility, follower numbers, and engagement on social media will help to better understand social capital accumulation, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections. Therefore, to better understand the practices of marginal consumers on Instagram, I conducted a social network analysis and visual content analysis on Instagram for the hashtag #fashiondiversity. The results of the analysis are presented in the next section.

3.1.1. Textual and Visual analysis of #fashiondiversity on Instagram

Online interaction, engagement, and support are essential resources for marginalized groups, such as marginal consumers, as online environments such as Instagram can be employed as safe spaces (Sastre 2014) or communities of practice (Limatius 2016), "where marginalized identities can be expressed" (Limatius 2018, p. 12). To better understand the critical word associations about fashion diversity on social media, I conducted a social network analysis and visualized the central themes that are formed around meanings of #fashiondiversity. Results were obtained by running NodeXL for 17,216 edges (hashtag connections), which were generated using a specialized macro that identifies word associations within 1,689 hashtag groups (see Chapter III). Vertices are plotted into two major networks that are associated with #fashiondiversity. Minor networks that consist of only a few vertices were excluded from further analysis. The analysis graph that illustrates the most connected hashtags (nodes) in the network is presented in Figure 8.

Marginals use two different groups of hashtags. I defined Cluster 1, tentatively, as "mirroring fashion production practices." This is a call from

consumers for inclusivity in areas such as fashion photography in magazines and lookbooks, runways in fashion weeks, makeup products, fashion bloggers, and modeling agencies. In this theme, consumers share rarely seen inclusive fashion production activities (e.g., Black women featuring a fashion ad, plus-sized woman in a look book, protests for inclusivity) to show that embracing “others” in fashion is possible and make similar looking women feel good. The overall focus is on high fashion, which is also called editorial, and the prominent hashtags used by consumers are #diversity, #highfashion, #fashionblogger, #model, and #fashionweek. On the other hand, I defined Cluster 2 as “self-presentation,” because it revolves around topics that relate to the fashion consumption challenges faced by consumers due to lack of diversity. The focus of the shared posts is on self-presentation, with the aim of beginning a body positivity movement. The dominant hashtags are #bodydiversity, #curves, #bodypositive, #celebratemysize, and #fashionhasnoage. In this context, body positivity refers to size, shape, flaws, skin color, age, gender, facial features, and physical abilities.

Visual content is the primary material for creating an online impression on social media (Ellison et al. 2006). Identification with a community and self-verification, which is defined as the confirmation of an already established identity with particular consumption patterns and taste, follow self-presentation (Swann 1990). Research has found that the formation of relationships and social attraction increases when social media users disclose identity-descriptive information (Ren et al. 2007). The construction and verification of identity is a prominent motivation for providing identity-descriptive information to others (e.g., followers and friends). This information presents how a user dresses and acts, what places s/he visits, and what possessions s/he purchases (e.g., fashion brands) (Forman et al. 2008; Swann 1983; Akerlof and Kranton 2000). Therefore, to better understand the community formation around the #fashiondiversity hashtag and the meanings associated with the diversity concept by consumers, analyzing the self-posted visuals, together with the hashtags, was necessary.

I employed visual analysis for 1,712 posts under the hashtag of #fashiondiversity on Instagram. All images were gathered via taking screenshots that were printed, cut, and sorted one by one to achieve a better sense of the digital

data. Then, I conducted an open-coding process to identify similarities between Instagram visuals and conceptualize themes. The visual analysis phase consisted of individually checking all 1,712 images and noting all patterns, by manually tagging descriptions to the pictures to better see commonalities and irregularities.

As Creswell (2012, p. 248) suggested, after tagging codes to the visuals and counting the frequency for each category, themes, which are "similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database," emerged. As a result, I found ten categories, 1) outfit-of-the-day (body), 2) facial selfies, 3) friends, family, community, 4) so-called opposites, 5) inspirational quotes, 6) makeup, 7) fashion advertising/photography, 8) models and runway shows, 9) magazines and news, and 10) irrelevant, that were included in the codebook. Fifty-six images that I called irrelevant were excluded from future analysis, as they did not load in any of the above categories. Table 9 presents the statistical distribution of the themes emerging from the visual content analysis.

Supporting the clusters of the social network analysis (see Figure 8), visuals gathered around two themes. The first theme revolves around underrepresented women's self-presentation to create a body/skin positivity movement against the lack of diversity in fashion. This theme consists of photos of outfit-of-the-day, showing how in any size, skin color, and age, an outcasted woman can pull off a fashionable outfit. These visuals depict fashion consumers who are confident in their own skin. In addition, selfies showing facial features and skin imperfections load to this first category.

Both the full body and face pictures attempt to explain the beauty of "other." Furthermore, inspirational quotes on fashion diversity, women with disabilities, self-experienced fashion discrimination stories in visual format, pregnant women, pictures taken with friends, family and colleagues from diverse racial backgrounds, diverse body sizes, and shapes, and pictures of the "so-called" opposites in the same frame (e.g., plus-sized woman next to skinny, moderately dressed with sexily dressed, short and tall, Black and White), fall within this category as a depiction of "fashion diversity" by consumers.

The second theme revolves around mirroring the fashion production phases, such as photo shoots, model selection, clothing design, and makeup

products. It is a call for inclusivity in fashion products, such as makeup and clothing, and communication tools, such as fashion magazines, photography, advertising, and runways. Consumers share rarely seen fashion production practices that include diverse women, such as an Asian woman in fashion advertising and a pregnant woman on a magazine cover. In addition, any fashion diversity activism movement and protest news from around the world are posted by the consumers. They attempt to spread the word and encourage fashion producers to embrace and represent all excluded women.

In addition to visual content analysis, I ran a word frequency analysis with NVivo 10 for the hashtags that I gathered from the 1,712 Instagram posts. NVivo 10 is a textual data analysis software that helps with grouping data into themes (Ahlquist 2015). A total of 17,216 hashtags were analyzed, and the hashtags that were used more than 100 times are presented in Table 10. NVivo word frequency results demonstrated a good fit with the two primary themes emerging from visual analysis. To better illustrate how each visual corresponds to top hashtags and primary categories, Figure 9 presents the exemplary visuals and hashtags for each category.

Consequently, comparing interview data with the textual and visual social network analysis results indicated a perfect fit with the primary lack of diversity types that consumers are facing. Textual and visual hashtag analysis revealed that #fashiondiversity represents prominent lack of diversity types, such as body image, skin color, religion, age, pregnancy, and diversity, which have been discovered in the interview data and previously discussed.

Table 9. Statistical distribution of visuals under #fashiondiversity

Category	No. of posts	(%)	Theme
Outfit of the day (body)	714	41.70	Self-presentation
Facial selfies	203	11.86	
Friends/family/community	128	7.48	
So-called opposites	106	6.19	
Inspirational quotes	67	3.91	
Make-up	53	3.10	Mirroring fashion production
Fashion Advertising/photography	176	10.28	
Models/runway shots/	142	8.3	
Magazines/protest news (covers, pages, etc.)	67	3.91	
Irrelevant (porn, dog, food, etc.)	56	3.27	
Total	1,712	100.00	

Table 10. Top hashtags accompanying #fashiondiversity (hashtags counted more than 50 times)

No	Word	Count	Weighted %
1	fashion	475	2,58%
2	fashionblogger	263	1,43%
3	style	155	0,84%
4	plussize	142	0,77%
5	beautywithplus	138	0,75%
6	diversity	135	0,73%
7	curves	133	0,72%
8	curvy	127	0,69%
9	beauty	125	0,68%
10	makeup	104	0,57%
11	model	97	0,53%
12	bodypositive	93	0,51%
13	fashionphotography	92	0,50%
14	celebratemysize	91	0,49%
15	fashionshow	90	0,49%
16	effyourbeautystandards	85	0,46%
17	runway	77	0,42%
18	fashioneditorial	70	0,38%
19	bodydiversity	69	0,38%
20	disability	68	0,37%
21	fashionforwardplus	68	0,37%
22	fashiondesigner	67	0,36%
23	blackgirlsarebeautiful	64	0,35%
24	fashionversatility	59	0,32%
25	honormycurves	56	0,30%
26	fashionweek	55	0,30%
27	lookbook	53	0,29%
28	blackgirlsmakeup	51	0,28%
29	fashionhasnoage	50	0,27%

Figure 8. NodeXL network visualization graph of #fashiondiversity

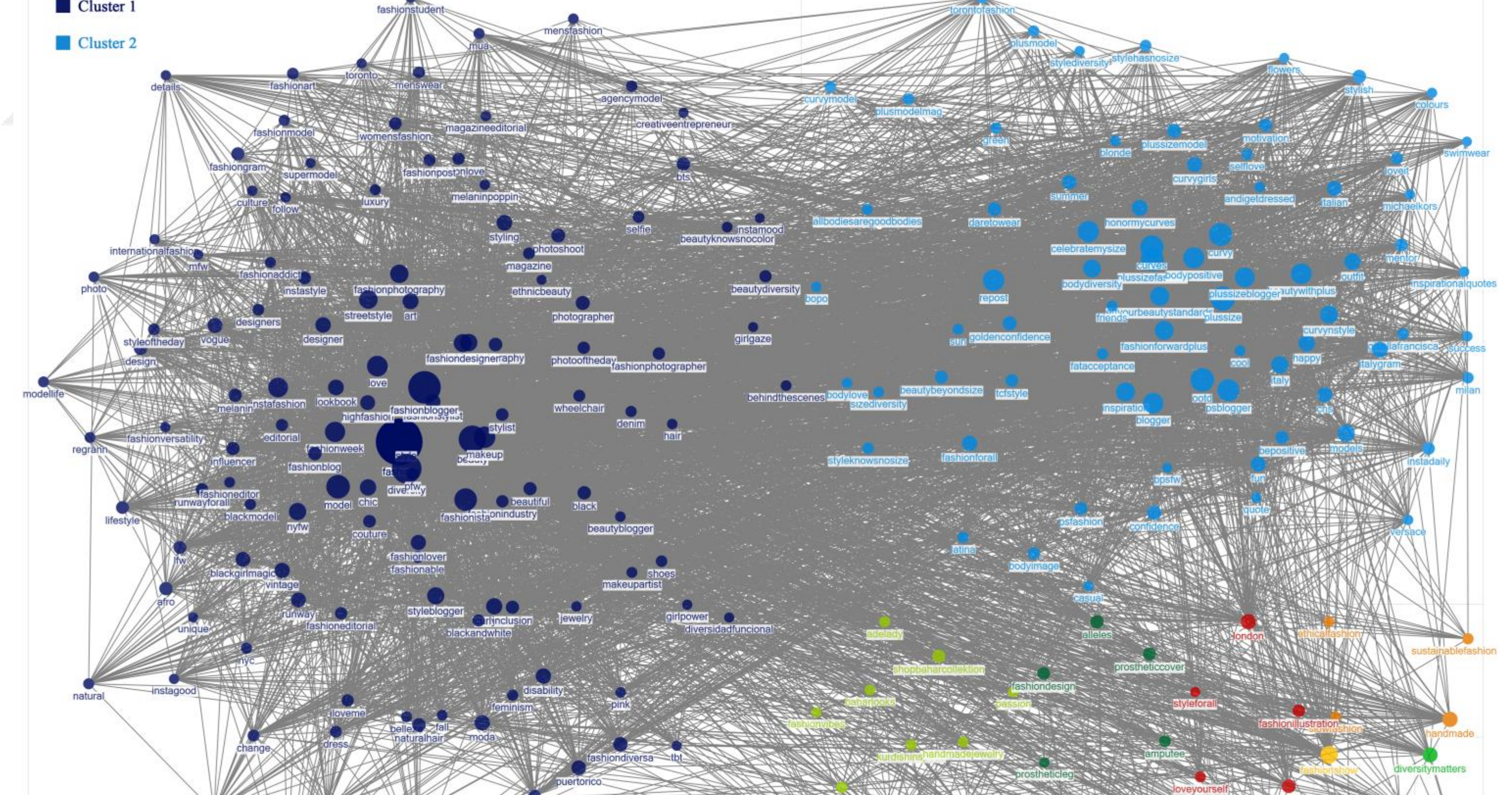
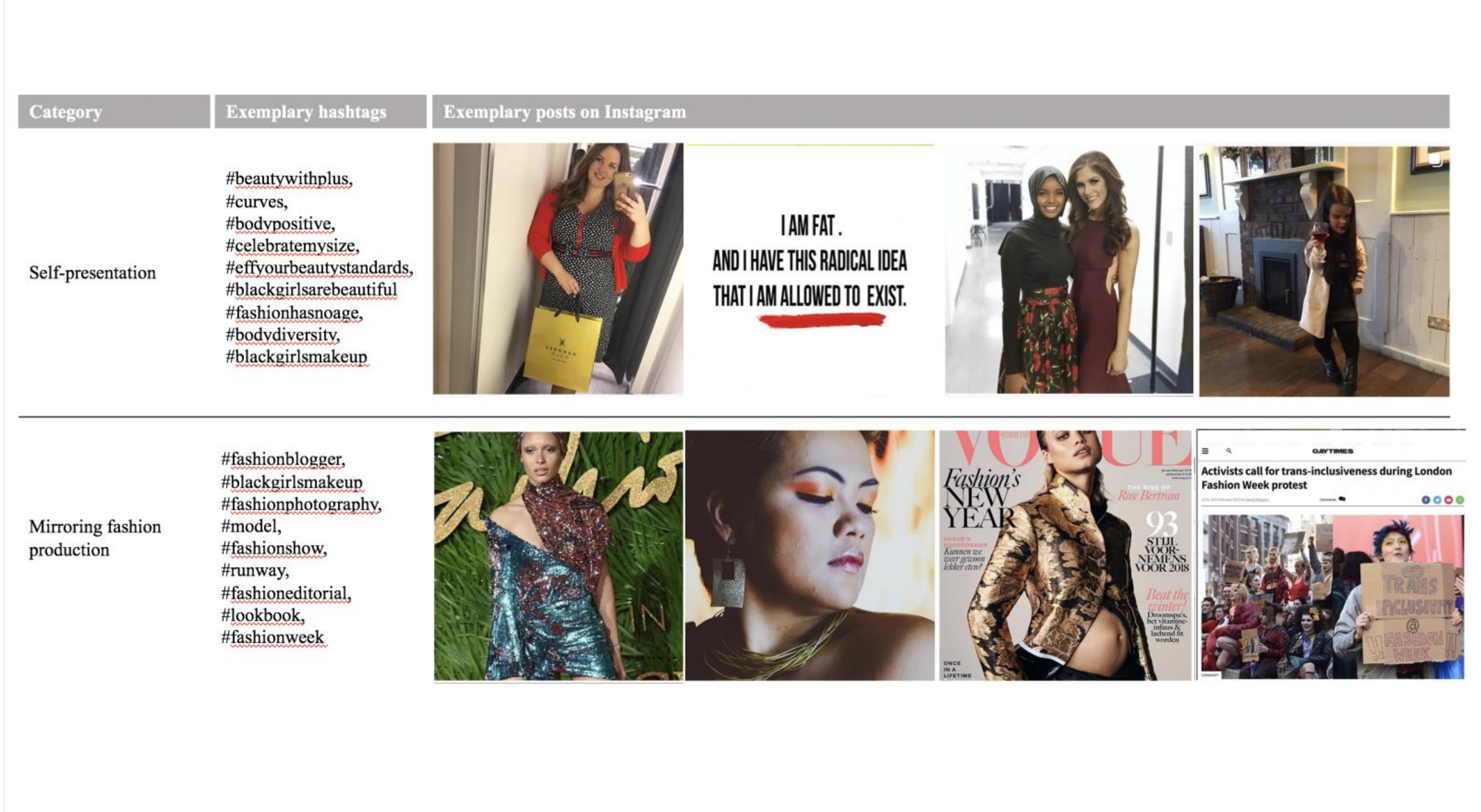


Figure 9. Exemplary visuals and most frequently used hashtags under #fashiondiversity



Category	Exemplary hashtags	Exemplary posts on Instagram
Self-presentation	#beautywithplus, #curves, #bodypositive, #celebratemysize, #effyourbeautystandards, #blackgirlsarebeautiful #fashionhasnoage, #bodydiversity, #blackgirlsmakeup	
Mirroring fashion production	#fashionblogger, #blackgirlsmakeup #fashionphotography, #model, #fashionshow, #runway, #fashioneditorial, #lookbook, #fashionweek	

3.2. Fashion lovers

Interview data demonstrates that most of the female participants of this study are fashion lovers, who are the mass consumers of fashion, with the desire to energize the system (Atik and Firat 2013).

> *"I follow many fashion influencers on Instagram who have similar height like me. For example, Kelly Tucker. She is 4'11". Even shorter than me. I know she is the expert of tailoring and alteration, but she manages to flatter her figure all the time. I also follow Jean Wang who is just below 5 feet. I try to buy the styles these bloggers pull off. I believe the pieces they wear will look the same on me, so I feel more confident buying whatever they wear. I know their pictures are not airbrushed like Vogue magazine. I know they are real women like me. I find them from hashtags like #shortgirlrpoblems, #petiteandfashionable, #petiteandcurvy, #petiteandchic, #petiteandproud, #petitefashion. I check those hashtags to get some clothing ideas as well. If I post a picture of my look in an occasion, birthday or wedding, I use similar hashtags. Maybe, Instagram can make a change to show the world that we are 'awesome and tiny packages' who can pull off the latest fashion trends like regular-sized women" (Kara, 29).*

Fashion-lover consumers such as Kara (29), who does not see herself in mainstream fashion, follow and imitate the style of social media fashion influencers, who are marginal consumers in this context, to cope with the lack of diversity she faces. Research has revealed that the perceived power of an influencer depends on her trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and similarity (Munnukka, Uusitalo, and Toivonen 2016). Therefore, Kara (29) chose social media influencers who resonate with her and eventually become genuinely loyal to a few key social media icons who are "similar to her." She follows these influencers, who are actually strangers that she has never met, to be encouraged, challenged, and inspired. She knows these social media fashion icons are not her friends and that she will probably never meet them. However, Kara (29) does not follow them for who they are but for who they are to her. Kara (29) resonates with

their physical appearances, products they use, places they go, and things that they do, with herself and her unique lifestyle. Therefore, fashion-lover consumers, such as Kara (29), do not follow former fashion models turned out to be fashion bloggers or fashion celebrities but individuals who they call “real.” According to them, “real” refers to individuals who look like them and share not only glamourous fashion but also downsides, such as fashion challenges and disappointments. In other words, fashion-lover consumers follow influencers who are comfortable sharing both their love for fashion but also the frustrations due to similar underrepresentation issues.

The influencing power of marginal consumers, different than other endorsers, comes from their relatability. Although they have a large online following, social media influencers are perceived as ordinary, down-to-earth, and authentic people, who post their everyday lives and are connected to their followers. In other words, fashion-lover consumers seek authenticity to relate to and follow fashion icons who motivate, inspire, and support them to accept their inner and outer beauty and love themselves by being more self-aware, fashionable, creative, or healthy. These consumers cope with the lack of diversity in fashion by following influencers on social media, which ties in closely to the social identity theory developed by Tajfel and Turner (1985), as an analysis of intergroup relations and social conflict. With this theory, Tajfel and Turner (1985) argue that “people are motivated to seek positive social identity by comparing in-groups favorably with out-groups” (Turner and Oakes 1986, p. 240). In this context, when fashion-lover consumers follow a relatable influencer on social media, they develop a feeling of belonging to a group of similar individuals, and their membership to said group becomes part of their personal identity. Naturally, the fashion opinions and support of the members of the same virtual group are more valuable for fashion-lover consumers than those of a different group. For instance, Kara (29) uses the same hashtags that the social media icons she follows use when she posts pictures showing her outfit. She wants to gather other women around the same fashion cause; in this case, it is “petite fashion.” She aims to make an impact by showing others her personal style. She likes to receive verification on her style in the forms of likes and comments. She wants to be admired and praised by her

social media followers, whose opinions she values the most. She also wants to support other petite women with the use of specific hashtags and encourage them to not be afraid to pull off fashion trends.

When choosing an influencer to follow on Instagram, fashion-lover consumers first check the content. They want to connect over a mutual passion, which is fashion in this context. They look for fashion influencers with authentic voices, unique style, and strong and reliable personalities. According to fashion-lover consumers, personalization is critical, and the shared content should be relevant to individual interests. Fashion-lover consumers check influencer accounts for social proof in the form of follower numbers, shares, and likes. These numbers act as evidence that others value the opinion of the influencer and assure that she is credible. The perceived credibility and the authoritative position of an influencer is boosted with high-quality visuals (Newman et al. 2012).

Fashion-lover consumers include social influencers into their fashion experiences in an authentic manner, such as by purchasing similar or the same items as their look-of-day styles, because they know that similar clothes are going to look good on them as well. Furthermore, seeing stylish looks on women with similar physical features encourages fashion-lover consumers to try new styles. This mimicking act of fashion-lover consumers leads to marginal consumers' economic capital. Therefore, fashion-lover consumers are the backbone of marginal consumers. Their desire to be represented in the fashion scene and the profound connection gives marginal consumers their power to influence and inspire fashion-lover consumers.

On the other hand, once the style icons on social media lose their authenticity, and fashion-lover consumers realize it as an act of self-promotion for economic purposes, they draw back their support and unfollow the influencer. This realization occurs after seeing too many sponsored posts from brand collaborations. An anonymous woman (Anonymous 2017), as a guest contributor, wrote on the website "That's Normal," an independently owned pop culture and lifestyle platform, her realization moment to unfollow the influencers, by stating,

> "I'm well aware I have no discipline for being a blogger. I'm not going to lie. It was hard. Jealousy was strong. I wanted to be one of them; I wanted

to wear those clothes. And use those $500 face creams…I'm not sure what came first, the realization that most of them were sent to them for free and they were, or that most of them don't really have a personal style, they just put on what's sent to them and cash it in. And then there were endless selfies, photos of sideboob and almost pornographic make out sessions with the new bae. Not much fashion, just blatant self-promotion. Strangers turned out to be annoying blabbering idiots. Who makes me feel second hand embarrassed for them? No thank you. Unfollow. Unfollow. Unfollow!"

When marginal consumers become fashion producers, by promoting brands or turning into 'designers,' if they lose their authenticity, they transform from being an admired role model to an irritating stranger and eventually lose the support of fashion-lover consumers. Losing support in the form of follower numbers, likes, and comments on Instagram translates to being excluded from the fashion scene as a producer and being transformed from a marginal consumer with influencing power to a fashion-lover consumer.

3.3. Fashion concerned

The next group is fashion-concerned consumers, who are also followers of marginal consumers, such as fashion lovers. The primary difference between fashion-concerned and fashion-lover consumers is that fashion-concerned consumers are merely followers, never contributors, of social media content.

"I hate my arms. I have cellulite on the back like it was not enough to have on my hips. My arms are also flabby. You know loose, sagging skin. It is so disappointing. I feel like I can't look stylish without worrying about my arms. I follow some style inspiration tips on social media. I love tank tops and strappy dresses, but I wasn't buying them because every time I try them on, I get anxiety due to my arms. I found this Muslim fashion blogger called Maryam Asadullah. She is super stylish, and she pairs jeans and gorgeous dresses and tops in layers. I guess due to religious obligations

she has to cover her arms as well. She is a real problem solver to me. Although I don't hide my body due to the same reasons, she helps me to discover how to look stylish by wearing layers and feel confident. Now, whenever I buy a cute strappy top or dress, I wear it with a small cardigan or style it with a button-down shirt by tying it into a crop top or layering it under a summer dress. I still can't call myself as a fashion-forward person though. I am not that creative" (Grace, 24).

Fashion-concerned consumers, such as Grace (24), are self-conscious about a part of their body, due to not possessing the idealized beauty standards that are dominantly represented in mainstream fashion. This anxiety is stronger than for fashion-lover consumers, so that rather than energize and change the beauty ideals by being served and represented, they prefer to hide in their clothes. They believe that they deserve to be ignored by the fashion scene due to their so-called flaws. Therefore, they do not have the desire to change the fashion institution towards inclusivity. They have internalized the imposed fashion ideals as a requirement. Similar to Grace (24), Shannon, a do-it-yourself home craft blogger, mother, and wife, mentioned her fashion concerns in an interview with Alicia Richmond, a wardrobe stylist, by stating,

> "Rumor has it that people don't want me wearing overalls every day. It would be awesome if someone could teach me how to play down my chest while hiding my spare, flat, tummy tire, but without too many temperature rising layers" (Nystul 2013).

Both Grace (24) and Shannon are so caught up in the negative parts of their body and so-called flaws that they overlook their positive features. They both hesitate to be the center of attention, unlike fashion lovers. They want to mask their so-called flaws without wearing oversized and outdated clothing. Since they do not want to be "out of fashion" due to their believed defects and unsuitable body shapes, they consume dominantly basic styles, as the trendiest ones are more daring (Atik and Firat 2013). Therefore, both Grace (24) and Shannon cope with their fashion concerns by hiding their perceived flaws under clothing.

Fashion-concerned consumers are afraid to express themselves creatively. They follow social media icons not to get inspired but to imitate. They hesitate to try new fashion styles until they see a large number of similar people doing so. Therefore, before purchasing a new clothing piece, they ask for a second opinion. They feel the need for verification on a fashion trend, similar to fashion-lover consumers. However, while fashion-lover consumers depend on the confirmation of their social media followers in the form of likes and comments, fashion-concerned consumers rely on the opinion of their immediate networks, such as close friends or family members.

Grace (24) avoids posting any pictures on Instagram that show her arms, even if they are covered. She is afraid that her arms will look big and loose and her social circle will judge her for not attempting hard enough to take care of it. In other words, fashion-concerned consumers are more conservative and introverted than fashion-lover consumers. They do not post their pictures on social media frequently, and even if they do, they avoid posting any pictures showing their physiques and outfits. They are not only the silent customers of fashion (Atik and Firat 2013) but also the silent users of social media. They support marginal consumers' influencing power without carrying the ultimate purpose of doing so. They contribute to diversity in fashion, knowingly or unknowingly, solely by being a "number" in terms of following and likes on social media.

3.4. Fashion uninterested

I did not identify a pure fashion-uninterested consumer among my participants due to being underrepresented in fashion, although my dataset revealed women who focus primarily on the practical functions of clothing while choosing their outfits.

> *"I am not a follower of fashion. When I look at the mirror, I don't see someone fashionable. I don't have the look for it, I guess—also, the energy and time. So, I choose to wear comfortable clothes and shoes. For over 20 years, I have been buying the most comfortable and easy to wear clothes and shoes" (Pamela, 47).*

"I do not consider myself a 'slave to fashion' or represented by any one trend or brand. I prefer to shop for comfort rather than follow strict fashion trends" (Laura, 32).

As Atik and Firat (2013) argue, although in my study, all women were interested in their appearance, it would be wrong to assume that everyone follows fashion trends. Therefore, acknowledging the existence of fashion-uninterested consumers, such as Pamela (47) and Laura (32), who choose to clothe based on comfort, price, and habit, is essential. Since being fashionable every season is considered a race that consumers constantly need catching up with, fashion-uninterested consumers, such as Laura (32), who refuse to follow the new trends, are considered "out of fashion" by fashion lovers and marginal consumers. According to fashion-uninterested consumers, fashion changes, but comfort does not. Furthermore, fashion-uninterested consumers, similar to fashion-concerned consumers, believe that they do not possess the required look for being considered fashionable, so they chose comfort over trendiness. By comfort, they mean oversized, sometimes baggy, clothing and sneakers. Similar to fashion-concerned consumers, fashion-uninterested consumers, such as Pamela (47), hide under clothing, as she believes that she does not possess the ideal look to wear fashionable clothing. Since this group of consumers is considered unfashionable by other types of consumers, their support and activism on social media for diversity movement in fashion is not expected.

"I wear comfortable and basic style clothing because I don't usually have the money to buy trendy stuff. And I don't have both the money and the energy to change my closet every season. I don't have the tolerance for impracticality and the body confidence to wear what is trendy" (Angela, 26).

Supporting Atik and Firat's (2013) study, fashion-uninterested consumers overlap with consumers who feel excluded from the fashion scene due to budget constraints (see page 108). They believe that they cannot keep up with fast-changing fashion trends, as they do not have the budget for it. Therefore, they do

not seek inspiration for their style. They chose basic and comfortable clothing that they can wear for the long term, and if they like something, they buy several, so they do not need to go shopping again. They do not follow any fashion influencers or social media icons and do not contribute to content creation in fashion towards diversity. Marginal consumers and fashion lovers need the existence of fashion-uninterested consumers to compare their style to and identify themselves as fashionable. Although fashion-uninterested consumers contribute to cultural homogeneity in fashion by being passive fashion consumers who accept the exclusion, they have a non-negligible push impact in the activism of marginal and fashion-lover consumers who do not want to be identified as fashion uninterested.

4. Fashion producer's role in fashion diversity

To better understand the fashion experiences of underrepresented women, I needed to understand the diversity perception of fashion producers. Taking a holistic approach, I conducted 18 interviews with a group of producers, including but not limited to a designer, blogger, stylist, magazine editor, fashion week producer, model agency, and makeup artist. Interviews with fashion producers revealed that they have a remarkable role in the cultural homogeneity of the fashion institution. Although different consumer groups have separate roles in shaping a more inclusive industry (as previously discussed), fashion producers are more like-minded, so both their perception of diversity and their contribution converge on cultural homogeneity. In the following parts, I present the diversity perception of different groups of fashion producers within the institutional framework built by Atik and Firat (2013) and show their contribution to fashion diversity.

4.1. Fashion show experts

Fashion weeks are the most significant fashion events of the year and are eagerly awaited both by the industry and consumers and showcase the latest trends in fashion. Furthermore, Vittayakorn et al.'s (2015) study reveals that runway

shows mirror what is in and out and translate into what everyday people wear and how they identify their place in fashion. Based on the research, since latest trends from fashion shows have a remarkable influence on women's daily lives, it was critical to investigate the diversity understanding of fashion show experts, such as fashion week producers and model agencies.

> *"I think as a whole the fashion community is extremely accepting, diverse, and inclusive. As we become a homogenized society and the terms race and gender are blurred. We see that reflected on the runways and in fashion in general. I believe it is so diverse that now the only thing lacking is a balding ☺ [interview conducted by email and the sentence ends with a smiley emoji]" (Tod, 55, Fashion week producer).*

While underrepresented consumers complain about the lack of diversity in fashion, fashion show producers, such as Tod (55), believe that the industry is all-inclusive and "diverse enough." Tod (55) considers only race and gender as the metrics of diversity, while ignoring other forms of diversity, such as ethnicity, age, and able-bodiedness, to name a few. In other words, producers, such as Tod (55), slot women into the existing ideals of fashion by placing only skin color, race, and gender at the center and calling it all-inclusive. Therefore, fashion show producers, who hold the power to define what is right and true in fashion, prevent underrepresented women from finding themselves within the fashion scene, by creating not only strict definitions of in-styles but also the types of physical appearances and cultural backgrounds that can be included.

> *"As a businesswoman running a model agency, I state facts according to the industry rather than opinion and I'm sure that saves me and my business from a lot of chaos. I have to choose models based on brands' preferences and demand, and usually those demands are pretty strictly defined. If they want a 24" waist then I book a model with 24" waist. At the end of the day it is my business and I have to save it. Although I know that 24" waist isn't meant for some, most agencies, including me, don't really think that how a model gets there" (Becky, 50, owner of a modelling agency).*

Models are the faces of the brand and, as discussed in the previous sections, women demand to see models who look like them and reflect their diversity. However, commercially driven company owners, such as Becky (50), justify their contribution to cultural homogeneity (hiring the models who possess the standard beauty features) with the requirement of profits for the maintenance of their business. Thus, model agencies are the followers of the briefings they receive from fashion brands and cast models for look books and fashion events according to the brand requirements. Also, Becky (50) mentioned that the sample sizes she receives from brands are so small that she must choose the skinniest girls. In this case, the fashion industry expects models to fit in the clothes, instead of clothes fitting the models. Agents believe that their job is to tell models to take care of the "wrong" body parts by going on a low-calorie diet or doing excess exercising to fit in the clothes and be cast in the fashion campaigns. Therefore, model agents see models as vehicles to showcase the clothing, makeup, or hair as appealingly as possible, without considering them as individuals with the need for health-related quality of life. Since ultra-slim White girls are frequently requested for campaigns, Becky (50) mentioned that she has a diversity quota in her portfolio. Agencies attempt to sign models who represent different diversity aspects for their portfolio. When a different type of model is requested from them, they do not want to say no. Therefore, agencies attempt to have a diverse model portfolio, by including at least one model with distinct features. However, while signing women of minorities, they feel the need to keep the numbers minimal, for profit purposes.

Since fashion show experts, such as Tod (55) and Becky (59), follow the dictations of fashion designers and stylists, who are called trend watchers by Atik and Firat (2013), while deciding who to include and exclude from the fashion scene, the next part presents the diversity understanding of trend watchers.

4.2. Trend watchers

Trend watchers, who include, but are not limited to, designers, fashion houses, and stylists, are shaping the diversity scope of fashion. As discussed in the previous part, fashion show experts cast models in fashion events, ads, and catalogs based on the brief they receive from designers and brands.

> *"I design swimwear. Swimsuits and bikinis…For years we saw bikinis on slim women. I am a little chubby, and I don't remember wearing a bikini growing up because I didn't have the bikini body. You know, I have fat tummy and love handles (laughs). As a society, we have this understanding that bikini is only for perfect bodies. If you don't have it, then you should wear a swimsuit. It is like an unwritten rule that everybody accepts and follows. So, I design bikinis only for girls who are size 2–10, but I design bigger sizes in swimsuits. They are adorable swimsuits. I feel like because of this social norm big girls don't look for bikinis anyways" (Melissa, 32, designer).*

How a plus-sized woman feels about her body is strongly influenced by how the culture feels about it and whether she ignores and upends prejudices or internalizes them. Although designer Melissa (32) mentions her frustration for not being able to wear a bikini due to underrepresentation and learned cultural norms about fashion, as a designer, today, she follows the same so-called unwritten rules. She only designs bikinis for commonly learned and accepted body ideals and excludes other women who are unfit to show off her designs anywhere. While women in sizes 2–10 have the chance of buying both bikinis and one-piece swimwear, larger women must settle for the latter. By designing only swimsuits, Melissa (32) indirectly imposes what larger women should wear and what is socially acceptable. Ironically, Melissa (32) believes in including plus-sized women in her fashion line by offering them swimsuits. However, she actually excludes them by not serving bikinis in larger sizes and designing a particular item, one-piece swimsuit, "for them," suggesting that larger women are different from skinnier women. Furthermore, she assumes that women with larger bodies will not look for bikinis, because they should know that culturally, they are not allowed to wear them.

> *"If I show you a fat woman, I am promoting to be fat. We use the perfect women because no one wants to see someone that they do not want to be, even though they are. I think the fashion industry is not responsible for the*

people's self-esteem, so it is not responsible for solving the psychological problems that it creates" (Lucy, 36, designer).

Similar to Melissa (32), Lucy (36) prefers to choose models who possess the ideal beauty traits. Lucy (36) treats fat bodies as unhealthy, and she believes that if she designs for larger women, she would be promoting being fat. Therefore, she wants her designs to be promoted by thin models. Both Melissa (32) and Lucy (36) believe that their designs will look better on skinny models.

Similarly, Karl Lagerfeld, the former head designer of Chanel, did not hesitate to disdain women larger than the typical runway model, who is a size 0 or 2, throughout his career. He actively defended his practice of designing for thin women and hiring rail-thin models to walk on runways and pose for campaigns. In an interview with German magazine Focus in 2009, he told the reporter,

> "There is less than one percent of anorexic girls. But there are—in France, I don't know in England—over 30 percent of girls [who are] big, big, overweight. And that is much more dangerous and very bad for health. You've got fat mothers with their bags of chips sitting in front of the television and saying that thin models are ugly. The world of beautiful clothing is about dreams and illusions. No one wants to see curvy women" (Jennings 2019).

Karl Lagerfeld also accused fat people of societal and economic woes on a French television program in 2013, by stating that fat people are "the hole in social security, it's also [due to] all the diseases caught by people who are too fat" (Jennings 2019). All of these statements from designers lay bare their stance against diversity. Many designers, ranging from Lucy (36) to world-famous Karl Lagerfeld, are size-phobic. They are reluctant to design clothes for larger women or hire curvy models, because they believe that women do not want to see "imperfection." In that sense, they stigmatize women with different physical builds than the standardized physique as being "not perfect for fashion."

Furthermore, designers, such as Melissa (32) and Lucy (36), prefer to turn a blind eye to their discriminative practices to keep a competitive edge in the industry. Lucy (36) mentioned that neither the use of skinny models nor standard

sizing should not be blamed for women's body-image issues and low self-esteem. According to Lucy (36), it is absurd to argue that Vogue can create mental illness. Designers believe that before fashion, women go through years of indoctrination from children books to cartoons that evil women are chubby and nice women are slender and perfect. Due to this propaganda, women are unhappy with their bodies more than ever, and their tendency to self-erasure is not something that fashion is responsible for or can fix.

Designers see fashion as a symbol of a particular lifestyle and aesthetics. Therefore, they build fashion around the philosophy of aspiration. According to them, to be aspirational and dreamy, fashion must be unattainable. Consequently, by only designing for women who fit into the aesthetics and lifestyle norms, designers teach women all around the world what beauty and desirability look like, and they contribute to cultural homogeneity by constraining fashion into strict definitions.

4.3. Major retailers

> *"I do not think fashion industry has genuine desire to be inclusive, just brands wanting to be politically correct. It seems like inclusivity is just the new trend." (Olivia, 27, Assistant manager at a department store)*

Fashion retailers, including but not limited to department stores and hypermarkets, hesitate to be size inclusive due to placing a premium on skinny bodies, as discussed previously. Retailers, similar to designers, do not want to be associated with women who fall outside of ideal beauty standards. Since the underrepresentation of minorities and the over-saturation of White, skinny models has become non-negligible in the industry, diversity has become one of the hottest topics. As fashion activists began to fight for diversity and achieve a few wins on representation, particularly on runways, a few retailers began to offer extended size clothing in an attempt to catch up with the size-inclusivity trend. For instance, in 2017, Amazon began to provide plus-sized apparel from retailers such as Michael Kors and Calvin Klein (Nittle 2018). In 2018, Walmart introduced its new plus-

sized line, and Target launched a line with a wide range of sizes from 00–26W. Similarly, in March 2018, Reformation, a sustainable fashion brand, announced their extended size range from 0–22 and XS–3X, accepting their size-exclusive practices by stating,

> "Last year we started receiving a lot of comments on social media and requests from customers for more inclusive sizing. We agree it's unfair that we only offer clothing to a limited size range and have been working on changing this. We're now happy to be launching a collection with more sizes (0–22). We're super sorry we didn't do it sooner" (Rodriguez, 2019).

While a change is occurring within the offerings of major fashion retailers towards inclusivity, employees, such as Olivia (27), see this change as merely gestural. She mentioned that many fashion retailers choose the brands they carry and the styles they produce based on what is trending, and inclusivity in fashion is just a trend. Brands do not want to be inclusive, but they want to be seen as inclusive due to political pressure. Brands get a plethora of positive media coverage when they include a model of a minority group in their shows or offer clothing for minority women. According to Olivia (27), once the industry changes its focus to somewhere else and the next big thing comes along, the diversity and inclusivity "buzzwords" will be forgotten.

Supporting Olivia (27), model Joan Smalls stated the same view in the Business of Fashion panel, as,

> "Sometimes, people jump on bandwagons and do things because it's cool for the season. The next season, they forget the message they were trying to send because it was a 'fad'" (Sharkey 2016).

Consequently, as both Olivia (27) and Joan mention, significant fashion retailers jump on the diversity bandwagon to showcase that "they are aware of the current trend." However, their sensitivity to fashion diversity lasts only a few seasons, until the pressure to be politically correct fades away, so they can return to their comfort zone, selling to women they perceive as beautiful and suitable for

fashion. As a result, the practice of treating diversity is a temporary trend fostering the cultural homogeneity in fashion.

4.4. Fashion magazines

Atik and Firat (2013) revealed that among other media, fashion magazines are essential tools that present what is in and out using imaginary images that fodder the fantasy. Thus, the authors argued that the misrepresentation of women's images in fashion magazines is unlikely to change, since the institutional role of fashion magazines is to create inspiration, aspiration, and fascination, not to reflect reality. Supporting Atik and Firat's (2013) findings, Alexandra Shulman, Editor-in-chief of Vogue UK, believes that the industry should not be blamed for women's low self-esteem and body-image issues and advocates the use of unattainable beauty images in fashion by stating,

> "It's easy to say that a skinny model is responsible for encouraging young women to feel bad about themselves, but I absolutely strongly believe that that is not the case. I think it would be very unfair to say that a model who is extremely skinny should not be on the catwalk or magazine because someone will attach their own feelings about their self-image, and possibly problems they've got with an eating disorder, to that girl. None of us probably feel that great about how we look; the question is when does that feeling of dissatisfaction turn into something that is really harmful?" (Blair 2015).

Fashionista reviewed the diversity on the covers of the top nine fashion magazines—Allure, Cosmopolitan, Elle, Glamor, Harper's Bazaar, InStyle, Marie Claire, Vogue, and W—to see whether they represent the US as a nation. For September 2015–2018 (an analysis of four years), Fashionista reported that Allure, Cosmopolitan, Harper's Bazaar, InStyle, Vogue, and W magazines only featured non-White covers two times, Glamour and Marie Claire featured them one time, and Elle never featured a non-White cover (Branniganaug 2018). The same report acknowledged the notable lack of Asian women's representation and age, size, and

gender diversity on the newsstand. Notably, the striking result was that, in September 2018, globally, not a single East or Southeast Asian origin woman was featured on the primary newsstand cover of any American or European fashion magazine (Schneier 2018).

> *"Personally, I look forward to propelling in a positive direction and seeing the diverse faces of tomorrow's fashion. Cultural and ethnic beauties to be the new fashion industry...I would love to choose models for their attitude, drive and love of the industry despite color or culture. However, unfortunately, racism is everywhere. So, until there isn't any, it will always be an issue. It is hard to break the habit of picking the prettiest White woman out of a group of models because that's all we've known for over a century. Discrimination is another story. The fashion industry will always discriminate based on body types and looks according to branding and trends. That's a whole other ball game. For years, we discriminated against anyone over a size 4, for example. We still do" (Caitlyn, 44, editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine).*

While fashion magazine editors, such as Caitlyn (44), personally want to be inclusive, they accept the dominant White supremacy in fashion magazines and explain it as a socially constructed reality. Due to the belief that a cover model should "sell" an issue on the newsstand (Freeman 2014), presenting a beautiful White woman, which accepts and standardizes Whiteness as the ideal, is still the dominant practice among fashion magazines. On the other hand, women of color on the cover appear on subscriber-only editions. For instance, the September 2018 issue of InStyle features Dutch model Imaan Hammam, who has Egyptian and Moroccan descent, on its cover that is sent to subscribers only, while Jennifer Aniston is on the cover of the version that goes to the magazine shop (Schneier 2018). The practice of mailing to subscribers a magazine with a different cover from the ones sold on the newsstand supports the industry's perception of how the appearance of the woman on the cover can make a difference between sale and no sale. With this approach, magazine covers undermine women of color, promote Whiteness in many places where Whites are not even the majority of the

population, and, thus reinforce racial hierarchy in fashion. The prioritization of one race endorses it as the beauty standard. Therefore, fashion magazines' practice of exhibiting the White supremacy as an inspiration on newsstands for profit purposes supports cultural homogeneity in fashion and other industries.

Furthermore, magazine covers say a lot about other industries as well. In addition to models, fashion magazines featuring White actresses, musicians, social media influencers and designers received a significant PR bump through this promotion. Their inclusion on fashion covers confirms to the related industry that these are the stars and industry icons worth investing in. Therefore, the next part of this section reveals the role of social media icons on fashion diversity, who have immense institutional and economic support behind them.

4.5. Social media icons

Similar to fashion magazines, social media icons, as fashion celebrities, are inspiring dreams by representing images of seduction that regular people follow, trust, and desire to acquire (Lipovetsky 1987). Therefore, the role of social media icons, who were former marginal consumers, on diversity is critical.

> *"Fashion had always been my niche and way to express who I am without having to say a single word. Fashion blogging was where I saw myself being the best person I could be while helping others. It is a healing process and mental check that you do every day by sharing your fashion choices with others. It is for yourself, to accept yourself and love yourself. I just fell in love with it, so I have been in the industry for about five years now and I am never turning back. Fashion blogging saved my life and opened so many new doors and adventures for me that I am so grateful for. No words can describe how it gave me power while I was feeling ostracized. Now that I am working as a full-time influencer, I hope I can create the same feeling for the other women around me. It is empowerment to the nth degree" (Rei, 25, social media celebrity and fashion stylist).*

Rei (25), who was an Asian marginal consumer, received a full-time job as a fashion stylist in a fashion magazine after being recognized as an influencer on Instagram. As discussed in the previous section (see page 126), from being an activist for fashion diversity, she became part of the institution for monetary benefit. She still uses her personal Instagram account to share her fashion style with her followers to inspire and encourage other women. While her role as a social media icon is supporting diversity in fashion, her role as a fashion stylist is supporting cultural homogeneity in fashion.

> *"Every brand in the industry has its own preference. I cannot state a general cast because I simply cannot. What I can say is that casting agencies have expanded and are much more open to every culture now. However, humans are very hard creatures to please. No matter how hard you try, you can never please them all. You can only try your best and do what you can, for those you can. For me, from fashion magazines to fashion weeks, mainstream fashion is reaching for its goal of accommodating all women population. Slowly but surely! As for me, being a stylist, I have to keep in mind the concept, campaign and who I am working with/for while casting a model" (Rei, 25, social media celebrity and fashion stylist).*

While Rei's (25) entrance to the fashion industry was due to not seeing herself being represented in the industry, working as a fashion stylist changed her perception of diversity in the industry. She believes that the fashion industry is reaching its diversity goal and embracing all women. Similar to fashion show experts and trendwatchers, while casting models, Rei (25) follows the guidelines she receives from the fashion producers for the sake of her job. A tension exists between Rei's (25) fashion consumer and producer selves. As a marginal consumer, she critiques the lack of diversity in fashion, while as a producer, she critiques the demands of female consumers for more diversity. As has been discussed previously, due to this tension, if she loses her authenticity and thus the trust of her follower community as a social media icon, she may also lose her job in the fashion industry as a stylist. Being aware of that, while she follows the

accepted rules as a producer, she also attempts to keep her place in the industry through activism for diversity in social media.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter IV in detail in light of the literature review. It outlines the primary contributions of this study on fashion diversity in two separate sections. The first part discusses perception differences between fashion producers and consumers regarding what is diverse, while extending the diversity types that were ignored previously in the literature. Also, building on Atik and Firat's (2013) work, it shows how different types of fashion consumers and producers contribute to the diversity or cultural homogeneity of the fashion institution. Based on Mathwick et al.'s (2008) study, the second part of this chapter demonstrates the social capital accumulation among female fashion consumers and discusses how this aggregation instigates a shift towards inclusivity or exclusivity in the fashion industry.

1. Theoretical Contributions

1.1 Bridging the perception gap regarding what is diverse

The findings of this study reveal that the fashion industry still recognizes the old standards, mostly Caucasian, as ideal beauty and attempts to be "politically" diverse by including a limited number of women from the trending categories mentioned in Chapter II. One significant contribution of this dissertation to the existing literature on fashion diversity is the discovery of other ignored female attributes, such as skin colors other than Black and White, average size, height, skin flaws, life stage, and budget, which are considered discriminative by female fashion consumers. These ignored categories of fashion diversity not only

shed light on the fashion challenges underrepresented women face but also highlight the diversity perception gap between fashion consumers and producers.

Today's society is taught to define universal beauty by the "golden ratio," which dates back to Ancient Greece and rates characteristics such as eyes size, lip fullness, and nose width, while never ranking non-European features as most beautiful (Pallett, Link and Lee 2010). Therefore, valuing Whiteness as beauty also highlights Anglicized features, which are more than just skin color and include less prominent curves, smaller noses, and thinner lips. Although aesthetics are subjective in creative industries such as fashion, producers in the fashion industry assume that creating an image of beauty entails only working with White women who match the "golden ratio," which is discouraging for non-White women, because it is genetically unattainable.

Fashion producers justify their racial discrimination by stating that the choice of models for a particular job must fit the style of clothing and color scheme. The excuse of freedom of creativity enables producers to act as "gatekeepers," which excludes non-White models from the fashion scene (Schopf 2016). High-fashion producers treat the issue of race in fashion as a macro-level phenomenon, while their micro-level practices reinforce the White standard (Wissinger 2015). Fashion producers blur the line between racial discrimination and "lookism" (appearance-based discrimination) and generate a "racial grammar," which shapes Whites' racial cognition and reproduces the racial order to excuse their exclusionary practices. In other words, the fashion industry instigates a collective discourse on race and beauty that normalizes White supremacy and leaves domination invisible. Eventually, this racial grammar contributes to the continuation of White social power by "shaping in significant ways how we see/or do not see race in social phenomena, how we frame matters as racial or not race-related, and even how we feel about race matters" (Bonilla-Silva 2012, p. 174).

Furthermore, Lorde (1997, p. 177) has revealed that the "institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people." This quote supports the ideology of "one type of woman is superior to another, and one type of beauty is superior to another" (Patton 2006). From not exposing belly fat rolls to hiding scars, from gap teeth to

laugh lines, the fashion industry constantly tells women to cover up or fix their "flaws." While every fashion magazine provides helpful tips for "flawless skin and figure" and ways for "downplaying your flaws," it is unavoidable for women to feel insecure in their own skin. Mainstream fashion discourse asserts that only "flawless" bodies can have space in the industry. To achieve that flawless image, smartphone photo-editing applications teach women how to alter their pictures before showing them to anyone or sharing on social media. By retouching the images based on the fashion narratives of what is "perfect," women create an online identity for themselves, which they believe is sexy, attractive, and simply "perfect." However, when they look in the mirror, what they see is never perfect enough.

In Chapter IV, building upon the study by Atik and Firat (2013), I presented the diversity perceptions of different types of fashion consumers and producers within the institutional framework, which demonstrated a perception gap between consumers and producers regarding what is diverse. Due to the diversity perception gap, different constituents of the fashion institution play different roles in contributing to either diversity or cultural homogeneity in fashion. In particular, the rich insights I gathered about marginal consumers and their contributions to diversity within fashion institutions are another contribution of this study to the literature, particularly to Atik and Firat's (2013) work. The roles of the different constituents in fashion diversity are integrated in Table 11 to better illustrate and potentially bridge the perception gap between consumers and producers regarding what is diverse.

Table 11. Summary of how different constituents of the fashion institution contribute to diversity or cultural homogeneity building on Atik and Firat 2013, (p. 851).

Constituents of fashion institution	Institutional role(s)	Contributes to…
Industry constituents		
Creative experts *Fashion week producers*	Believe fashion industry is inclusive enough Discriminate based on body types and looks according to branding and trends	Cultural homogeneity
Model agency	Believe that models should suit aesthetic	Cultural homogeneity
Trend watchers *Fashion stylists*	Concerned about women Feel the pressure to follow standards	Cultural homogeneity
Designers	Rationalizes the use of ideal beauty	Cultural homogeneity
Major retailers	See diversity as a trend	Cultural homogeneity
Fashion magazines	Hold onto old ideals of a great fashion model	Cultural homogeneity
Social media icons	Came out as a marginal consume Became part of the system using main stream trends Capitalize their platform for their own benefit	Diversity at the beginning and then to Cultural homogeneity
Consumer constituents		
Marginal (Creative) consumers	Fell comfortable simply "being" in her own skin Sew own clothes, buy vintage clothing and alter them Active in social media Want to propel fashion in a positive direction Next fashion/social media blogger, content creator	Diversity at the beginning and then to Cultural homogeneity
Fashion lovers	Follow fashion trends on social media Buy the pieces that she sees on a blogger, who represents her Post outfit pictures on Instagram (when they feel good) to be an example for others using hashtags Seek out smaller more specialized boutiques that offer eclectic styles and varied sizes	Diversity
Fashion concerned	Afraid to express themselves so dresses according to others Feel the pressure to keep within certain beauty limits Hesitate to post outfit pictures on social media because of the fear of being judged Rely on the opinion of their immediate network (friends and family) before buying a clothing	Diversity
Fashion uninterested	Do not post and follow fashion related content in social media Hide from the fashion scene Uses fashion for functional purposes Passive fashion consumers who accept the exclusion, Have push impact in the activism of marginals and fashion lovers	Cultural homogeneity

1.2. Understanding the role of social capital accumulation in diversity

Historically, research on community phenomena framed by social capital theory (as discussed previously), which is characterized as a collectively owned resource of support (Bourdieu 1986). Paxton (1999) defined the social capital "as the idea that individuals and groups can gain resources from their connections to one another" and these collectively owned resources can produce certain goods" (p. 89). Building on Mathwick et al.'s (2008) work, this study reveals how marginal consumers raise social capital with the aim to solve individual-level problems caused by underrepresentation in fashion. These consumers use social media platforms to generate social outcomes based on value creation among members. Using the social capital framework to understand the consumption acts of marginal consumers, this study sheds light on community formation, based on an exclusion in fashion and the role marginal consumers play in institutional-level change towards inclusion or exclusion.

> *"I have big boobs. I can't wear V-cut necklines or a regular cropped top t-shirt. There is always soooo much cleavage! I automatically look sexual even with a regular Abercrombie Henley. So, I have to be very careful when dressing up to keep my proportion look good but at the same time not too trashy (laughs). Ohhh, God! Very frustrating! When I was a teenager, it was challenging not to have an inspiration to get advice on how to dress up for my body type. So, two years ago I decided to be an inspiration for girls who have a similar body. I have my Instagram account open publicly. Today I have almost 3,500 followers. I receive many messages every day from other girls asking where I got a button-down shirt, cute bra or bikini. I like to help them by answering one by one. In my posts, I share my outfit looks throughout the week. I advise girls on how to alter their cheap-bought t-shirts or cami tops or how to make a sexy top to look classy" (Victoria, 24).*

While utilizing the social capital framework to explain marginal consumers' fashion practices on social media, other forms of capital, namely

cultural, economic and, symbolic capital, that influence social capital accumulation cannot be neglected. In the context of marginal consumers, Victoria (24) possesses cultural capital, which is defined as the social assets, such as knowledge, education, style of dress, and intellectual skills, that provide social mobility to a higher social status in society (Bourdieu 1986). After experiencing fashion frustration due to underrepresentation, Victoria (24) used her cultural capital to cope with the lack of diversity in fashion. Others, as well as Victoria, use their sewing and photography skills, social media knowledge, and fashion taste to create an online community via social media. They share their look-of-the-day pictures wearing fashion creations that they have made or bought in their public accounts. The motivation behind sharing personal style and inspiration posts on social media with strangers is to help other women to dress their "excluded" bodies fashionably. Marginal consumers' goal is to show other women that there is not a universal beauty and that beauty does not come in one size, skin color, or height, to name a few. They hope to create awareness for other women who feel bad due to not possessing ideal beauty features and be role models to inspire others to look and feel good in their own skin. To advocate their cause and to reach more women, they use hashtags such as #fashiondiversity. To better understand the meanings surrounding "fashion diversity," in the Chapter IV (see page 133), I presented a social network and visual analysis of #fashiondiversity.

In the context of marginal consumers, women support others without expecting any monetary returns. After experiencing constant fashion disappointments, when a woman finds a solution to the challenges she faces, she is willing to share her solution as a suggestion and inspiration to others through her personal social media account. In exchange for sharing style advice, these women, such as Victoria (24), only expect verification for their fashion choices and unique beauty, in the forms of likes, comments, and more followers. The social support that community members provide to each other (marginal consumer presents herself publicly to support others and gets social support through likes and positive comments from others) acts as the "social value" outcome, while style advice and fashion knowledge transfer act as the "informational outcome" of social capital accumulation.

Followers of these marginal consumers see no risk in interacting with them through likes and comments on social media, which fosters the accumulation of social capital based on the social trust norm. After following and observing marginal consumers such as Victoria (24) for a period, followers generate trust and rely on the fashion advice of a stranger whom they have never met face to face.

> *"I am a small-framed woman. I started my Instagram account to post my look-of-the-day pictures and support other petite women who look like me. Today I have 35,300 followers on Instagram. More followers and engagement on Instagram will help to reach more women and be a support for them and get their support to represent them. So, I use hashtags like #bodysizediversity, #smallgirlsarecool, #petitefashion. I ask my followers to use the same hashtags when posting their outfit-of the-day picture to their accounts. So, maybe, we can start a movement around the same problem using the same hashtags on Instagram" (Fatma, 29, fashion blogger).*

Marginal consumers such as Fatma (29) become role models and leaders for others, such as fashion lovers and fashion-concerned consumers, as discussed in the Chapter IV of the dissertation. Another outcome of social capital accumulation that was not mentioned by Mathwick et al. (2008) but which came to the forefront during this study is what I tentatively call "communal value." Communal value forms when the marginal consumer calls her follower community to act as a union and begin a movement around the same problem. In this case, marginal consumers hold a more activist position. In doing so, they aim to be stronger and to instigate a shift towards inclusivity through representation in the fashion industry. Communal value, in this sense, differs from the social value Mathwick et al. (2008) proposed. Communal value is about change and transformation, while social value is more about confirmation and social support. Building on Mathwick et al.'s (2008) social capital production model, Figure 10 illustrates social capital accumulation in the context of virtual communities on social media, namely Instagram, including the influences of other forms of capital, namely cultural and economic capital, to social capital. While the light grey boxes

in Figure 8 are adapted from the study of Mathwick et al. (2008) on social capital accumulation in virtual communities, the black boxes, which extend Mathwick et al.'s (2008) model, stand as a theoretical contribution of this study.

Bourdieu (1986) argued that social capital, similarly to economic capital, may force both inclusion and exclusion. In this context, if marginal consumers such as Fatma (29) receive attention realized by the industry, they are recognized as the pioneers of a fashion movement. This recognition increases marginals' symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is defined as "the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate" (Bourdieu 1989, p. 17). Stated simply, symbolic capital consists of honor and prestige and is produced by and reproduces other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1989). In this context, when fashion producers include the marginal consumer in their creations either as a guest blogger, consultant, or paid partnership influencer, such as GabiFresh (see page 130), their symbolic capital increases. For instance, until Gabi Fresh called her bikini "fatkini," the word fatkini was not in the fashion lexicon. With her social media post, Gabi inspired full-figured women to wear two-piece swimwear, something previously socially forbidden to them. SwimsuitsForAll recognized the opportunity and collaborated with Gabi on a capsule "fatkini" collection for plus-sized women. Moshe Laniado, the CEO of SwimsuitsForAll, legitimized "fatkini" by stating,

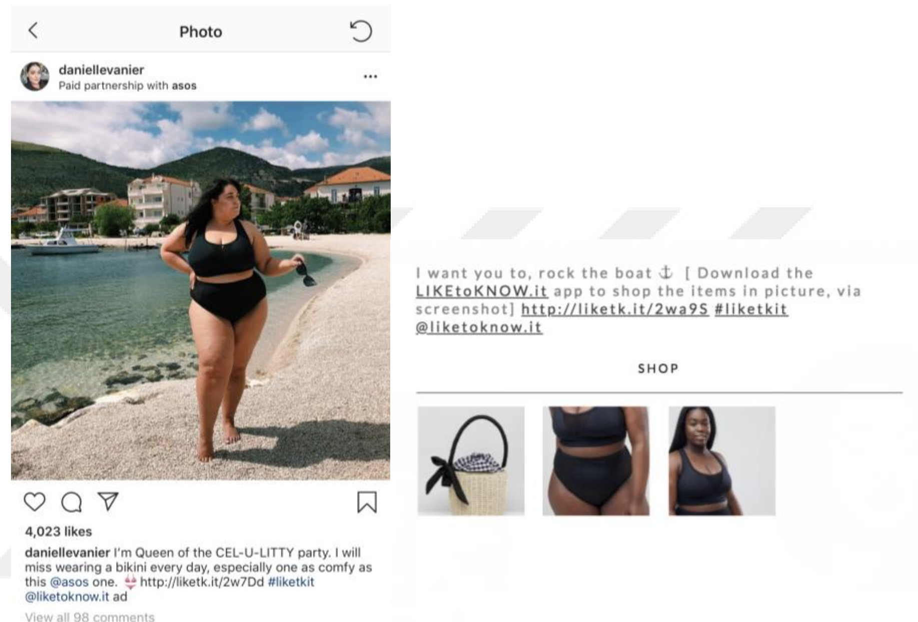
> "Gabi's 'fatkini' stories shed light on the misconceptions about women, body image, and swimwear. She tore down old notions that sexy swimsuits are only for Sports Illustrated models" (Black 2013).

Similarly, interviewee Fatma (29) was hired as the editor of a regional fashion magazine after being recognized as a stylish petite woman on Instagram, and 30-year-old plus-sized Instagram influencer Danielle Vanier (with 110,000 followers) became an ambassador for Nike and a consultant to Curve, the new Marks and Spencer plus-sized line (Cartner-Morley 2018).

Once the marginal consumer is recognized by the industry, her visibility increases, and so do her followers. More followers mean more reach and engagement, which the fashion industry is seeking in order to sell more products.

The marginal consumer becomes the social media celebrity and the face of the "lack of diversity" she represents and uses her social media platform for paid collaborations or selling from her wardrobe. Figure 10 presents Danielle Vanier's sponsored shoppable post on Instagram.

Figure 10. Danielle Vanier's sponsored bikini post on Instagram using third party shoppable link (LIKEtoKNOW)

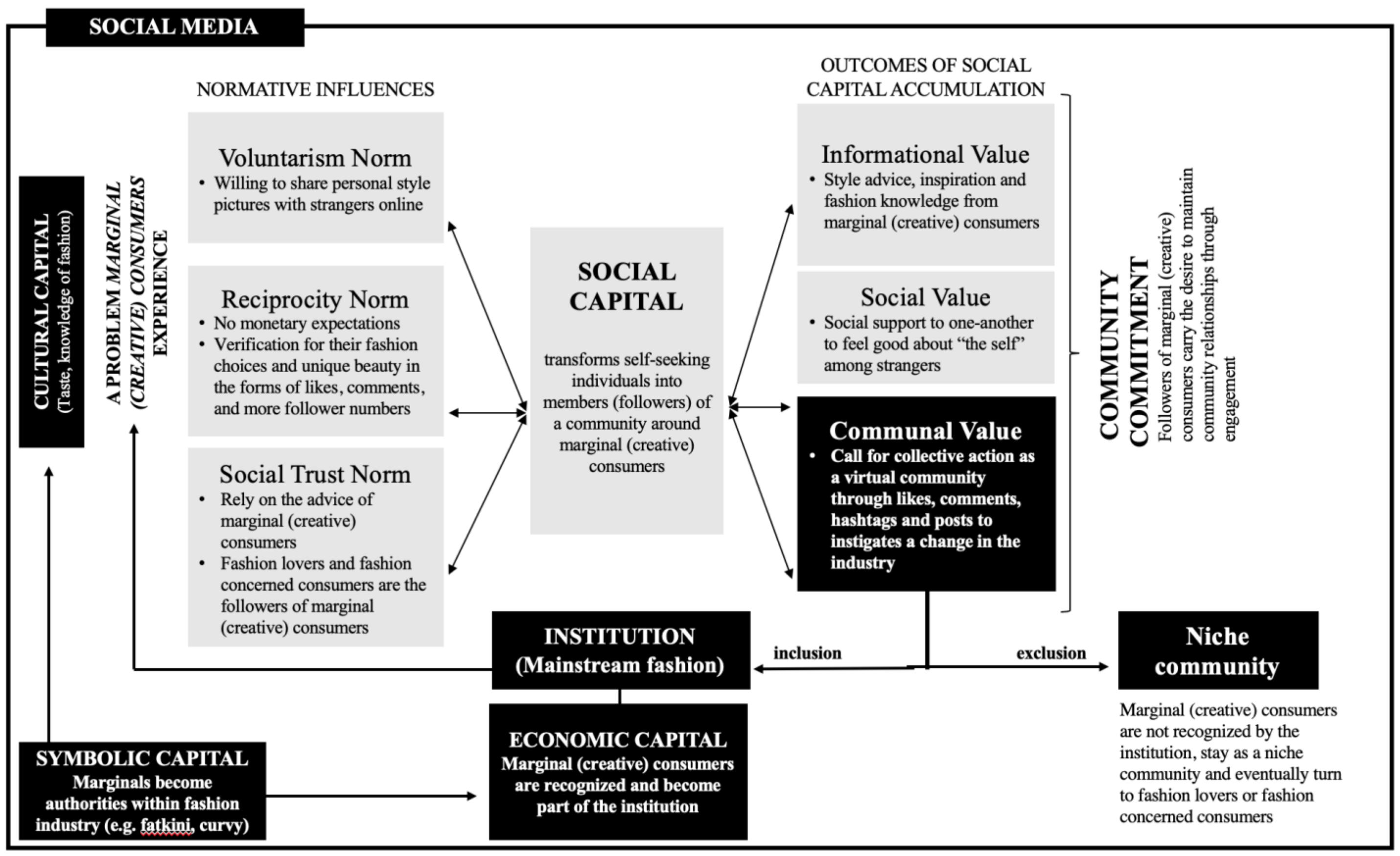


Source: This image is reproduced from (Instagram 2019c) under the Fair Use Act for non-commercial, academic purposes only.

Marginal consumers such as Danielle Vanier and Fatma (29) turn their activism movement into economic capital, which is described as the economic resources such as money, property, and assets that are reproduced by cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). A marginal consumer uses the economic capital she raises from paid partnerships, which thus reproduces her symbolic and cultural capital during the process, in terms of fashion production knowledge, to become a designer and launch her own fashion line specific to the needs of the community she leading. Therefore, the fashion as an alluring institution absorbs the marginal consumer by giving her the opportunity to serve her community through inclusion, but, consequently, marginal consumers become part of the institution and serve its monetary demands.

In the context of fashion consumers, the normative influences of voluntarism, reciprocity, and social trust on the accumulation of social capital, and their outcomes as informational, social value, and communal value, are illustrated in Figure 11. This figure demonstrates how a once-excluded fashion consumer establishes herself in the fashion market or merely transforms into a fashion lover or concerned consumer in a niche community. In other words, if a marginal consumer cannot get more followers, grow her visibility, and be recognized by the fashion industry, her followers leave her lead and find other marginal consumers as role models. Consequently, the marginal consumer who could not get out of the loop transforms into either fashion lover or fashion-concerned consumer.

Figure 11. Social capital accumulation in the context of fashion consumers (extended model of Mathwick et al. 2008)



CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I present an extended version of the conceptual model that highlights the primary findings. I also discuss the managerial implications of this research and the limitations of the study, together with recommendations for future research.

1. Summary

As discussed in this thesis and summarized in Figure 12, below, dominant fashion trends and the definition of beauty based on Western ideals are historically constructed and socially accepted phenomena. Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated the discriminative fashion practices of the industry based on producers' learned aesthetic preferences. I have revealed that the dominant academic and professional discourse regarding the lack of diversity surrounds social class, body image, race, age, gender, religion, and physical ability. On the other hand, further critical discriminative fashion practices, such as failing to consider skin colors other than Black and White, height, in-between average sizes, skin flaws, maternity clothing, and budget, are overlooked. As a result of being underserved and underrepresented by the fashion industry, women face severe societal and psychological consequences, such as the fear of social exclusion, body shaming, self-hatred, sexism, and exoticism from racism, as discussed in Chapter IV. Furthermore, technological advances, such as selfie altering applications in smartphones, fuel society's distorted perception of beauty and thus incur significant negative consequences.

To cope with the lack of diversity, women turn to social media, namely Instagram, either as marginal consumers or as mass consumers (who consist of fashion lovers and fashion-concerned consumers). The marginal consumer acts as

the leader of the virtual community created on Instagram, supported by mass consumers. Once the marginal consumer reaches a remarkable number of followers, her social capital and influence power increase, which forces fashion producers to recognize the cause (e.g., fatkini, petite, curvy, androgynous fashion) and include it in the fashion system. Sometimes virtual communities create their own fashion language related to the diversity type they are fighting for, and once they receive recognition from the industry, these special phrases become the new terminology used by society and the industry. If the marginal consumer loses the community support of mass consumers, she again faces exclusion from the industry, the diversity type she was representing turns into an "outdated temporary trend," and she transforms into a mass consumer as either a fashion lover or fashion concerned.

2. Managerial Implications

"Society requires better ethical conduct from marketers than they are providing, there is a societal expectations/ethical reality gap" (Laczniak 1993).

Femininity and identity are closely linked with fashion and its representation in media. Many women take their cues from these representations as to what is the norm, which creates unrealistic ideals that women must live up to regarding what a woman is and how she should look. As this study reveals not being adequately represented in the fashion industry sends a negative message to the generations coming up in the world. Fashion professionals should acknowledge that women are complex in their cultures, ages, sizes, bodies, and skin types. Representing only one culture, age, or body type implies that all women should aspire to mirror those in advertisements and attempt to live up to unrealistic ideals.

My findings regarding what is diverse for producers and consumers have revealed that inclusivity and diversity are two distinct concepts. Similar to my findings, Steven Kolb, CEO and President of the CFDA (CFDA, 2019, p. 2) defines diversity as "the mix, simply a measure of difference," while inclusivity stands for "a climate in which diverse individuals come together to form a collective whole, enabling and empowering individuals to make contributions

consistent with their beliefs and backgrounds." In the context of this dissertation, inclusivity implies that women can comfortably express their cultural backgrounds and physical appearances without feeling the need to downplay their differences. Diversity understanding of the producers in terms of booking limited number of models of color or plus-sized women who carry similar features to the dominant and Caucasian beauty standards is ineffective without inclusivity.

Producers should acknowledge that diversity is not just a trend. Diversity is not just about race and skin color but also differences in age, gender, sexual orientation, and physical abilities. The homogeneity of the industry offers a lack of opportunity and access to fashion for underrepresented women. With this dissertation, my goal is to take a step in the right direction by talking about the biases in the fashion industry and forcing the industry to listen and participate.

Figure 12. Extended version of the conceptual model based on the findings of the research

Social, cultural, historical, political, economic, and technological and lingusitic developments in the West

e.g. Selfie editing behavior through smart phone applications

- The fear of social exclusion
- Body dissatisfaction and self-hatred
- Sexism and exoticism from racism

Fashion producers

New fashion linguistic e.g. Fatkini, Petite, curvy, androgynous

FASHION TRENDS AND DEFINITION OF BEAUTY

Dominant Western beauty ideals

LACK OF DIVERSITY

- Colorism
- In-between sizes
- Ethnic body shapes
- Real women with flaws
- Height – petite women
- Pregnancy and postpartum
- Budget

Social capital accumulation through the support of virtual communities

Loss of community support

Consumers' coping strategies with lack of diversity

- Marginal (creative) consumers
- Fashion lovers
- Fashion concerned
- Fashion uninterested

Consumption experiences of underrepresented women

3. Limitations and future research recommendations

As mentioned in the literature review, since fashion has historically and primarily been aimed at women, this dissertation has focused explicitly on the experiences of female consumers and has not included the fashion consumption experiences of men. An interesting future avenue of study may be to conduct this research with male consumers with different cultural backgrounds and characteristics and investigate their experiences and perceptions of diversity in fashion. Furthermore, although I have attempted to create a diverse sample of participants, another limitation of this study is the lack of interviews with women with physical disabilities and with non-binary, transsexual, and queer women. A continuation of this study with a focus on gender or physical disabilities requires further research.

The qualitative method of conducting in-depth interviews for this study restricted the number of interviews included in data collection. While local participants were interviewed in person, to provide a diverse sample including women around the world, 24 out of 56 participants were interviewed by audio or video phone call. Also, due to time difference and busy schedules, many of the fashion producers agreed to participate only via written interview. Therefore, for 14 participants, email interviews were employed, which is the method of sending the interview protocol (composed of only open-ended questions) to the interviewee by email, receiving a written response, and engaging in further email exchanges, if necessary, to dig deeper into the questions. Furthermore, while the sampling of fashion consumers was as diverse as possible, due to the network and reference limitations, the same sensitivity could not be reflected in the sampling of fashion producers. Therefore, conducting this research with a more diverse group of fashion producers is another area that warrants further study.

As previously discussed in Chapter IV, the unification between academic and professional associations and the fashion industry does not exist, particularly in the plus-sized classification of female apparel. A study to clearly define the plus-sized women demographic and psychographic should be considered as a topic for future studies to reduce disparity in inconsistent size ranges for larger women.

Furthermore, while profoundly investigating marginal consumers' successes through inclusivity in the fashion institution, this study did not explore the reasons for their failure. Some assumptions could be that perhaps, the dominant beauty standard is so prevailing and powerful that any marginal trend dissolves quickly. Revealing the causes of these consumers' defeats in the fashion institution through social media is another topic worthy of future research.

In conclusion, this dissertation is a powerful reminder for fashion professionals to promote diversity and for academia to conduct scholarly work on the subject. It shows why representation in every form of beauty is so essential for women's physical and emotional well-being. Fashion producers should consider that beauty lies in differences and that no women should be made ashamed of their uniqueness. It is time to leave the conventional gold beauty standards of the past behind—for good.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol For Fashion Consumers

Introduction

1. Introduce yourself and inform the interviewee about the purpose of the research. Make sure the informant acknowledges to be tape recorded and notify the respondent when the recorder is on.

Purpose of the study

I am writing my Ph.D. thesis on current fashion system and its diversity issue. I interview with female consumers from various age groups, races, ethnicities, cultures and subcultures, religious views, social class, body types and sizes, *gender* identity and sexual orientation to understand and get insights about their experiences with apparel shopping.

2. Get some background information on interviewees such as age, the higher degree of education, ethnicity, and occupation. Inform the respondents about the anonymity of the research by ensuring them that their names and any identifying information will not be used in final report or publications.

Inquiry process

Warm-up to get the interviewee in the interviewing mindset

Start with a compliment about an accessorize, clothing or shoe worn by the interviewee.

3. When I say "fashion", what comes to your mind?
4. How about your clothing style? Can you describe your clothing style? How do you feel about your fashion style?
5. Can you tell me about your shopping routine? When do you prefer to shop? Who are you going shopping with? What are your favorite stores/brands?
6. What kind of pieces are appealing to you to wear? Why? How those pieces make you feel?

7. Are there any types of clothing that you avoid wearing? Why? Can you describe your feelings when you see this piece on someone else?
8. Can you tell me what does fashion means to you? Can you describe your thoughts and feelings when you think of fashion?
9. How do you feel about fashion/clothing shopping?
10. Can you remember any negative experiences with clothing shopping in a physical store or online? Any positive experience while shopping?

Experiences and feelings about diversity in fashion

11. How do you evaluate people based on their clothing style/look? Do you remember any example of including/excluding someone based on her appearance?
12. Can you remember any situation that you felt judged/excluded by others based on your clothing style? Can you give me more detail about the situation? How did you feel? How did you react?
13. Where do you see yourself in the fashion system? Do you feel represented? Do you ever feel underrepresented? Why? Can you please give me an example?
14. Can you remember a situation where you felt discriminated while clothing shopping due to your ethnicity, skin color, body type, culture, values, religious clothing? How did you deal with it?
15. Do you remember a situation that you cancelled/rescheduled an event because you did not like your outfit/look? Can you tell me more about your feelings that day?
16. Have you ever experienced pressure because of the fashion/beauty system's ideals and standards? (e.g. dieting and working out, age-defying creams, plastic surgery…etc.)
17. What would you say is, from your perspective, the most commonly held misconception in fashion industry about women of your culture? Why do you think fashion industry make those assumptions? How did you notice that assumption about women of your culture?
18. When you think about the current fashion industry, do you say, fashion industry is diverse and it is representing all women? Can you give me

examples of representation? What kind of women you see on runways, online catalogs, magazines?

19. How do you react to these? Do you do anything? Can you give an example?
20. When it comes to giving a reaction, social media is one popular place today to raise voice. Are you a social media user? What social media channels are you using?
21. When you face a positive or negative experience in fashion, do you share in social media? Can you give an example about sharing a fashion post on social media? Do you care about your outfit/look when you post on social media?
22. Do you follow any fashion bloggers on social media? Based on what you chose the blogger that you follow? Can you name them? Did social media change your fashion consumption? How?

Suggestions and opportunities for improvement

23. What would make you happy to see that is changed in fashion industry? Can you please give me some examples?
24. What are consequences of not being fully represented in fashion industry for women of your culture, age, body type characteristics? If you see more women looking like you in media how would that have changed your consumption and perception of yourself?
25. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interviewer Reflections

After the informant leaves, take some time to indicate your reactions and observations about the interview.

The date and place of Interview ………………………………………….

Describe the respondent's attitude toward you and the interview questions

……………………………………………………………………………………

Anything that has bearings on the research's objective or interview questions.

……………………………………………………………………………………

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol For Fashion Producers

Introduction

1. Introduce yourself and inform the interviewee about the purpose of the research. Make sure the informant acknowledges to be tape recorded and notify the respondent when the recorder is on.

Purpose of the study

I am writing my Ph.D. thesis on current fashion system and its diversity issue. I interview with female consumers from various age groups, races, ethnicities, religious views, social class, body types and sizes, gender identity and sexual orientation to understand and get insights about their experiences with apparel shopping.

2. Get some background information on interviewees such as age, the higher degree of education, occupational background and experiences.

Inquiry process

Warm-up to get the interviewee in the interviewing mindset

3. Can you describe what it is like being in fashion industry? What is exciting to you about the fashion industry? What does fashion mean to you? Can you describe your feelings when you think about fashion?
4. How did you choose to have a career/to work in the fashion industry? Since how many years are you doing this job? What do you consider to be your biggest satisfaction and dissatisfaction with your occupation?
5. What do you like the best about fashion? What do you dislike the most about fashion?

Getting insights about the fashion industry

6. How do you describe today's fashion and the way people get dressed? What is in and what is out? Which currently under-appreciated idea/style/trend in fashion do you think will gain traction?

7. What kind of feelings do you observe/experience in consumers while watching a runway show?
8. What kinds of issues are you experiencing/observing in today's fashion industry? What is the biggest challenge/problem fashion authorities/managers/CEOs needs to address? What ethics and ideas will become paramount as fast fashion evolves?
9. How do you choose your models? Based on what? What kind of models are appealing for fashion industry? Why? Can you please describe her look/appearance to me?
10. What kind of women those models are targeting? Can you please give me examples of your target women? What is her persona and what does she look like?
11. Beyond the current fashion capitals like New York, Milan, Paris, and Tokyo, where do you expect the next wave of fashion ideas come from? Why?
12. How about representation? Is current fashion system embracing new things, groups, trends, political and religious views? Is fashion industry diverse enough? Communication (runways, billboards, magazines, smart phone app catalogs…etc.) and production wise (shopping for clothing for different body types, size, norms)?
13. Can new independent designers from different cultures and tastes survive in the current fashion market/in retail?
14. Is discrimination/racism in fashion an issue? In what ways? Can you describe what discrimination in fashion is?
15. Can you remember a moment that you experienced discrimination at work? A situation when you/your company were accused of discrimination? In what ways? Can you please explain more?
16. Do you think mainstream media - from fashion magazines to fashion weeks - accommodate all women population? Are there any women ignored in fashion industry? Who are they? Why do you think they are ignored/neglected?
17. What are your feelings about the recent increase in women of color on the runways, advertising and product catalogs? Do you think using models

with different skin colors is enough to make women all around the world feel represented?

18. Is diversifying the runway and fashion magazines/billboards possible? How? Do you think diversifying fashion is a good idea?
19. What new tools have the biggest impact on fashion industry?
20. How do people express their thoughts and feelings about their good or bad experiences in fashion?
21. How are social media influencing the fashion industry? Who is winning/losing? How social media is changing the consumption patterns of consumers?

Suggestions and opportunities for improvement

22. How can the fashion industry become more accessible and inclusive?
23. How can you sum up your prediction of the future of fashion industry?
24. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interviewer Reflections

After the informant leaves, take some time to indicate your reactions and observations about the interview.

The date and place of Interview ……………………………………….

Describe the respondent's attitude toward you and the interview questions

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Anything that has bearings on the research's objective or interview questions.

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VITA

Lena Cavusoglu was born in 1987 in Izmir/Turkey. She received a BA degree in Public Relations and Advertising with a full-tuition scholarship from Izmir University of Economics. She has a master's degree in Strategic Design, Design of the Value Offering from Politecnico di Milano, Italy, in 2011 and a MBA degree from Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA USA, in 2013. Her research interest concentrates on consumer behavior, fashion studies, social media influence on consumption and identity, and qualitative research.