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Deconstructing the Democratic Fashion Analogy

Abstract:

This paper investigates the semiotics of fashion and role of dress in democratic society, demonstrating how a seemingly innocuous act of getting dressed epitomizes a socio-cultural force. Utilizing anthropological theory and dramaturgical analysis, we examine how clothing mediates social relationships and challenges the presumed autonomy of individual choice. In clothed society, meaningful membership is constituting and constituted by the dynamic and fluctuating composition of a powerful, enduring industry. The introduction of a fashion democracy illuminates the interdependency of the individual and this dynamic, reinforcing structure.

THE ROLE OF FASHION IN SOCIETY

In contemporary Western society, fashion appears relatively trivial compared to more critical topics such as climate change or global conflicts. Fashion can be fickle, even frivolous, as individual motivations to dress range from vanity to indifference. As sociologist Sophie Woodward articulates, “within popular and academic discourses, clothing and fashion are therein seen to be superficial and unimportant, as material objects situated at the periphery of the body” (2005, p. 21). This paper argues that fashion and dress are anything but unimportant, as they are elements of an unconscious system individuals participate in every time we decide what to wear, what to buy, or how to judge others’ fashion choices. In clothed society, meaningful membership is constituting and constituted by the fashion *habitus*, the dynamic and fluctuating composition

of an enduring structure. We, as individuals and as a collective whole, impact changes in this system, playing a part whether we want to or not, for fashion will always be an aspect of culture, and “there is no way out of the game of culture” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 12).

While individuals contribute to the development of fashion, fashion is not a passive agent, but rather a social force that pushes back. Communications scholar Arthur Berger reminds us that fashion acts as “a form of collective behavior,” in which “the choices that people often make frequently are decisions to go along with millions of other people” (Berger, 1992, p. 114). With this concept in mind, fashion is an institution where individuals are both the performers and the spectators. Individuals are actively taking notes on how to best abide by unspoken communal agreements, as well as inadvertently following those agreements. The role of the individual within this collective behavior cannot be overstated, as without the individual, fashion would not act as a social force. Consider an ethological analogy: how would a school of fish choose a direction without the guidance of individual swimmers? As the individual can make their own choices, those choices must be coordinated within the school; moreover, while a fish may try to choose a direction, they are also at times pushed by the tide. At times the impact of the social force of fashion pushes the individual to make choices they may not originally make, as “we do not notice the power of fashion because we don’t understand how it works. All we recognize is the passion we feel to be fashionable” (Berger, 1992, p. 126). At some time or another, everyone has put thought into their dress, whether it be for a big interview, a date, or a special occasion. Berger questions, “Is not fashion really an iron fist in a velvet glove?” (1992, p. 126). The push to play into the social force known as fashion is something that lurks over everyone’s shoulder while they gaze into their closet, the need masquerading as a choice. While the individual may think they are responsible for choosing how to dress, are they really?

RELATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO CLOTHING

When an individual looks at their total wardrobe, they consider an accumulation of choices they made at one point or another, and the daily assembling of an outfit becomes a visualization of some aspect of their identity. As with all material culture, clothing is meaningful. An individual's daily outfit choice acts as a physical manifestation of how they define themselves, reminding us that "clothing is not seen as simply reflecting given aspects of the self," but rather as "co-constitutive of facets such as identity, sexuality and social role" (Woodward, 2005, p. 21). Through this connection to dress, quotidian fashion choices act as external means of relaying the individual's internalization of self. Fashion in this sense can tell you more about selfhood, than the individual may be willing to share on their own verbally. An individual's wardrobe has the ability to act as a physical account of themselves, externalizing that selfhood (Woodward, 2005, p. 22). By merely hanging in a closet, a "symbiotic relationship between person and clothing is created," as one cannot be independent of the other (Woodward, 2005, p. 33). Just as the clothes cannot publically represent the individual if they are left on the hanger, the individual cannot be truly represented without the clothes, although the absence of dress would also act as a fashion statement in itself. And while the individual may have one or two articles of dress within their repertoire that they routinely select - as well as a few they never reach for, the composite wardrobe is important to consider. At some point, every piece of clothing within an individual's wardrobe found its way there; although it may remain or be cycled out, it once existed apart from the individual's externalization. Consider gifts. Even if the individual accepts an article of clothing into their wardrobe that remains unworn, its social significance remains; there is purpose in its arrival. No article can be overlooked.

Fashion as a Language

Individual agency in wardrobe creation can be compared to the acquisition and use of language. Berger asserts, “the language of dress is much more limited than language itself, since we have an almost unlimited number of words at our disposal while our personal dress is limited to the clothes that we have purchased” (1992, p. 89). Given unlimited means, the individual theoretically has access to any and all clothing, however, they limit themselves through the incorporation of only a select few. To draw out the metaphor, the existence of all the clothes available in the world is equivalent to a lexicon. Like words, clothing is theoretically available to everyone, and as we make our personal selections, we are integrating these articles of clothing into our wardrobe. This wardrobe is our metaphorical personal speech, centered on our vernacular, dialect, and vocabulary. Through this, every time we get dressed, we choose specific articles of clothing from within our wardrobe to curate an outfit, just as we would pull specific words from our personal speech to create a sentence.

In this sense, fashion can be viewed as a form of language, in which the individual builds their vocabulary according to their own sense of self. And while the individual essentially has the freedom to incorporate any article of clothing into their wardrobe, then assemble any outfit from within that wardrobe, there is more at play than simply the wills and wants of the individual. This interdependency relies on cultural logics, “seen in paradigmatic form in the dialectic of expressive dispositions and instituted means of expression which is observed in the intentionless invention of regulated improvisation” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 57). Individual agency, whether in language or in wardrobe, relies upon individual interpretation of a preexisting script set against a prescribed backdrop.

Dramaturgical Analysis

Individual interpretations can be analyzed using the concept of dramaturgy as introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman (1956), in which the individual's presentation is a performance, conscious or unconscious. When the individual gets dressed and goes out into society, they are performers on a stage, projecting themselves in a way that their looks and actions are exaggerated to best "fit" the role they have assigned themselves or have been assigned to play. It is often an unconscious transformation, as many are unaware they are behaving in this way, taking the stage unknowingly. On the other hand, "we find that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (Goffman, 1956, p. 10). No matter the individual, they are not exempt from this performance, whether cognizant or not, just as they are not exempted from the ever-changing structure of fashion.

DECONSTRUCTING THE DEMOCRATIC ANALOGY

Democracy, Habitus and Symbolic Capital

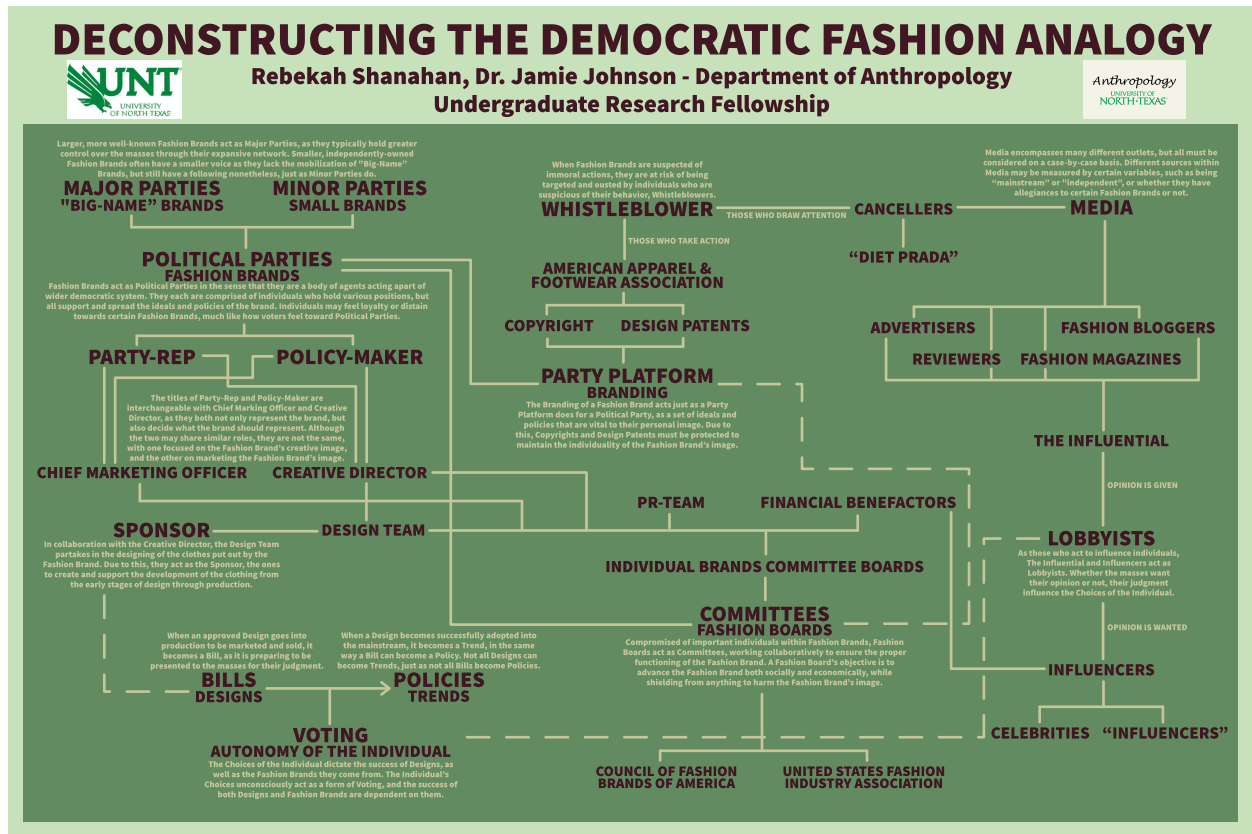
As individuals making impacts to the construction of fashion, this system acts as a democracy. A democracy is a "governing system based on the will and consent of the governed," and in the case of the realm of fashion, we are all among the governed (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). Within this conception of a fashion democracy, all individuals are active participants, although in a variety of different ways. As we all choose articles of clothing to add to our wardrobe and subsequently create outfits, we are involuntarily contributing to the greater

institution of fashion. In the sense that democracy is “a network of mutually reinforcing structures,” the existence of a functioning fashion *habitus* is lurking under the surface as well (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). As a system which formulates and organizes itself, the concept of the *habitus*, or “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures,” is critical to understanding the democratic fashion analogy (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). The *habitus* is a series of systems hiding in plain sight. It has “an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions,” brought into existence by the very individuals participating (Bourdieu, 1990, 55). And although it is a system that adapts to the impacts made within it, mutating as per the influences enacted upon it, it is not led by a single guiding force.

The *habitus* acts in conjunction with the collective consciousness, “objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). Similarly, the individual is also innocuously guided within society through their own symbolic capital, which act as resources for the individual to gather means to mobilize themselves further within society. The individual’s symbolic capital is broken down into their cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital, with each allowing the individual to extend their reach into the respective fields of each form of capital. The individual acts as an agent in each of these fields, as they can withdraw or expand their relations within a field as suitable to them. In the case of the fashion *habitus*, the individual is unknowingly an acting agent, as they are participating in its evolving structure unwittingly, although their impact within said structure is dictated also by their symbolic capital.

Fashion Democracy Flowchart:

At this stage in the research, we outline the democracy of fashion in an info-graphic flowchart, as seen below. The flowchart may be followed clockwise, but readers may further cross-reference with the subsections explaining the functioning of the fashion democracy.



Above: flowchart of the fashion democracy

Voting

Voting: Choices of the Individual

To begin, the role the individual takes within the democratic fashion analogy is role of the voter. However, there are no required conditions, such as age or citizenship, as there are with other acts of voting throughout history. Rather, all individuals partake in voting, and there is no possibility to opt out, as the act of voting itself is a passive, unconscious action, where the

individual has no choice but to participate. The act of voting takes form in the choices the individual makes when they choose an outfit, and then are seen by any other individuals in said outfit. By wearing an outfit, and allowing it to be seen by others, the individual is therefore voting, as they are giving their own conceptions into the fashion *habitus*, making a small ripple out. This voting is likely made on the daily, with the possibility to vote several times per day, depending on the number of outfit changes, as well as the possibility to be voted upon, consciously or not. The perceptions of others' votes may prompt the outfit's replication or deletion. Hence, the choices the individual makes when they create an outfit are not without influence, calling the autonomy of the individual into question. As mentioned previously, there are societal manipulators that function to control the choices of the individual. A dramaturgical analysis reveals this through the social pressure individuals may feel to be perceived as fashionable or not, as "the daily dilemma of assembling clothing involves the mediation of factors such as social normativity and expectations, as dressing involves not only individual preferences but fundamental cultural competences" (Woodward, 2005, p. 23). The impact of these societal manipulators influence individual votes, while the individual then influences other potential votes through their own personal choices, a cycle which reinforces the *habitus*.

At meta-level, distinction influences action within particular fields. However, in democratic society, an individual's daily choices regarding dress can be considered inter-class action, as individuals, regardless of their social and economic standing, mobilize elements of symbolic capital. For example, members of lower or higher classes may see an individual outside of their class and be impacted, allowing for cross-class influences. As stated by Berger, "in democratic societies, the source of changes in fashion is not so easily located, and often styles move up from lower-class and working-class people to the upper classes, and from young people

to middle-aged people who are under pressure” (1992, pp. 114-115). In other words, it is easier for styles and trends to flow inter-demographically, than intra-demographically. For example, someone of a lower class may see an individual of a higher class and attempt to recreate their outfit with less expensive items of clothing, or it may be vice versa, with a higher class individual wishing to recreate a look with more expensive items of clothing. As it can be difficult at times to pin down an individual to an economic class, it is unreasonable to assume the fashion *habitus* is not inter-class, as who cannot easily say who is influencing whom.

While individuals are influenced by each other’s choices, their voting is even more limited than that, narrowed down due to their personal wardrobe. The individual’s wardrobe is filtered by more than just their own personal preferences, such as colors or styles, but also by more impervious restrictions such as economic limitations or moral guidelines. When it comes to economic limitations, an individual may operate on a budget that precludes their ability to spend large amounts of their income on clothing. As for moral constraints, an individual may refuse to wear clothing that is harmful to the environment, animals, or people during its production, thereby boycotting such products. Hence, while the same individual may choose to promote ethical clothing as an extension of self, that choice can still greatly constrain their options when adding new clothes to their wardrobe.

Political Parties

Major Parties: “Big-Name” Brands; Minor Parties: Small Brands

Regarding the contents of an individual’s wardrobe, fashion brands within those wardrobes take the designation of political parties within the democratic analogy, acting as agents working within the wider democratic system. Similarly to political parties, fashion brands

are comprised of individuals holding various positions within the brand, but all stand as a united force of support for and upkeep of the brand's ideals and policies, maintaining the image and functioning of the brand through various means. Although, it is not just as simple as saying every fashion brand is a political party; rather, fashion brands can be divided into major parties and minor parties. "Big-name" fashion brands take the form of major parties, as they hold enough power and influence to control the market, and be relatively well known by the masses. Major party fashion brands are often backed by large corporations, with extensive funding and an expansive network with the capacity to reach a wider range of individuals. On the other hand, smaller fashion brands are minor parties, typically independently-owned fashion brands. Due to a lesser funding and expansion of their networks, they lack mobilization to reach the masses as larger fashion brands do. Despite having a smaller voice, much like minor parties, small fashion brands still have a following. Individuals may have loyalty or disdain toward certain fashion brands, much like how voters feel towards political parties. However, an individual is free to follow as many fashion brands as they like, whether they have the means to add merchandise to their wardrobes or not. This impacts voting, as members can simultaneously vote for several brands they appreciate every time they dress. Negative feelings towards a brand can empower the individual to seek out other options.

Policy-Maker & Party-Representative: Creative Director & Chief Marketing Officer (CMO);

Sponsor: Design Team

When it comes to a fashion brand's image, the creative director and chief marketing officer (CMO) of the brand are those who not only represent the brand, but also dictate what the brand itself should represent. In this sense, a fashion brand's creative director and CMO

interchangeably represent a policy-maker and party-representative. Through setting the tone through choosing what embodies the fashion brand's image, the two coordinate the way the brand may be perceived by the masses. Despite the two having an overlapping of similar roles, they are not to be considered the same, as the creative director is more focused on the fashion brand's creative image, while the CMO is dedicated to the marketing of the fashion brand's image. To distinguish the two further, the creative director is in connection to the fashion brand's design team, overseeing and guiding them, in relation to their focus on the fashion itself. As I'll discuss further later, a successful fashion design acts as a bill, and thus the design team acts a sponsor. Design team members are individuals who create the brand's fashion output, supporting it from its conception to its final product. Design team members are sponsors in the sense that they back designs of the moment, or designs that will at least best embody the brand. While their designs may be guided by leadership from creative directors, influenced by other team members, or affected by broader social trends, these sponsors create the designs and introduce them to the masses for judgment. Their designs contribute to the *habitus*.

Party Platform: Branding

In relation to a fashion brand's image, their branding becomes their party platform, through the set of ideals and policies that are put in place to best represent them. Although various fashion brands may have an overlapping of certain aspects of their brand's image, each fashion brand should uniquely compile qualities that distinguish them from other brands, while also garnering interest of the masses. These material qualities may appeal to different individuals, such as fabric, colors, or other design specificities, which can double as facets to distinguish them and cement their place in the fashion democracy. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu

describes, “these conditions, perpetuated in the mode of utilization – i.e., in a given relationship to culture or language-function like a sort of ‘trade-mark’, and by linking that competence to a particular market, help to define the value of its products in the various markets” (1984, p. 65). These demarcations made between brands are secured through protections such as copyright and design patents, in order to protect the designer’s originality and the fashion brand’s individuality, as well as to protect the intrinsic and extrinsic value of the design. However, these copyrights and design patents need protection as well, as they can be overlooked or ignored in the effort to capitalize on a trend.

Media

Whistleblower: American Apparel & Footwear Association & “Cancellers”

When fashion brands are suspected of immoral actions, such as stealing a design or mistreating it’s workers, they run the risk of being targeted, and subsequently ousted, by individuals suspicious of their behavior, who we will don the title of whistleblowers. These individuals right the wrongs of fashion brands, and come in two different forms: those who take action, and those who draw attention. One example of whistleblowers that take action are the American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA), who act as a protector of fashion brand’s intellectual property rights, such as copyright and design patents. The AAFA self-identify as to be “the trusted public policy and political voice of the apparel and footwear industry,” standing with fashion brands and working to protect their intellectual property (AAFA, 2021). These whistleblowers have their fashion brands’ legal protection in mind; a decision of copyright infringement entails legal and financial ramifications.

Whistleblowers who draw attention, such as “cancellers”, may not impose legal penalties, however, being cancelled carries serious consequences. A fashion brand can be targeted by cancellers for issues beyond violations of intellectual property rights, but also for actions such as cultural appropriation, or partnering with unsavory individuals within the industry. Once a canceller has a fashion brand suspected of immoral actions in their sights, the masses’ judgment may prevail. While an individual can cancel with or without a platform, more notable cancellations amount to small social movements, where many individuals take the shape of whistleblower to call attention to immoral actions of a fashion brand. In this case, the actions of these whistleblowers can lead to a form of political consumerism, damaging both the social and economic capital of a fashion brand.

Political consumerism acts as a form of intentional action regarding purchasing decisions; purchasing of a good from a particular brand, supports that brand economically and socially. Broken down into boycotting to buycotting, political consumerism is a social movement that can either help or hurt a fashion brand’s prospects. Boycotting, or “the intentional avoidance of a good or service,” can take place when whistleblowers deem a fashion brand or its products undeserving of support, possibly due to a social force of other individuals protesting them (Kam & Deichert, 2020, p. 72). Boycotting a fashion brand may also be due to the moral preferences of an individual, as discussed earlier. For example, if a fashion brand uses real animal fur in its products, an individual may advocate against them for personal reasons, while if a brand is accused of cultural appropriation, an individual may join a larger rally to avoid their products.

Comparatively, individuals may partake in buycotting, “the intentional consumption of a good or service,” if a fashion brand in some way can be believed as worthy of support (Kam & Deichert, 2020, p. 72). Individuals may partake in buycotting if a fashion brand is known for

using ethically sourced materials, or for donating a portion of their profits to charity. A reasoning behind political consumerism may be “that boycotting is oriented toward punishing corporations for past transgressions”, while “buycotting is oriented toward rewarding corporations for virtuous deeds,” with both methods acting as a technique toward either coercing a change or encouraging continuation (Kam & Deichert, 2020, p. 74). As Bourdieu explains, “and once again it is the most paradoxical property of the *habitus*, the unchosen principle of all ‘choices’, that yields the solution to the paradox the information needed in order to avoid information” (1990, p. 61). An individual must possess some amount of information to make an educated choice regarding political consumerism – knowing what should be avoided is guided by knowledge of what ought to be avoided. In the age of technology, “information – especially negative information – [can] be transmitted quickly, easily, and on a massive scale and thus [allow] for large-scale, coordinated boycotting and buycotting campaigns to take flight” (Kam & Deichert, 2020, p. 85). Through the spread of political consumerism and the influence of whistleblowers on the Internet and social media, fashion brands can gain notoriety quicker than they may be able to contain it. Once a canceller has cast a fashion brand into a negative role, the stage has been set.

Diet Prada

For a real-world example, consider the Instagram account “Diet Prada,” run by industry insiders Tony Liu and Lindsey Schuyler. As of the writing of this paper, their account stands at 3.1M followers, and is dedicated to calling out injustices in the fashion industry in posts that are “playful, light-hearted and frequently devastating” (Stoppard, 2017). The pair launched their account in 2014, and since have been a much-feared team of cancellers within the fashion

industry, due to their unflinching call outs of any individual or fashion brands. They began posting as a means to “call out purportedly copycat fashion designs,” but have since expanded to documenting “phenomena usually discussed in whispers, such as cultural appropriation and sexual harassment” (O’ Conner, 2021, p. 105). Diet Prada doesn’t always negatively impact brands; they also act to promote smaller fashion brands being trampled by “big-name” brands, pushing individuals to recognize and support them through boycotting. On the surface, Diet Prada may simply be two individuals with a sizable online following, but their power as cancellers extends beyond their Instagram platform. As whistleblowers, the consequences for being noticed by Diet Prada can be devastating.

On November 21, 2018, Italian fashion brand Dolce & Gabbana were to hold a multi-million dollar fashion show in Shanghai, titled “The Great Show”, showcasing their new designs with a Chinese heritage influence. But the show never took place, falling apart hours before models were to take the catwalk. Because, on the other side of the world, Diet Prada spearheaded a cancellation of the new fashion line by Dolce & Gabbana in the days leading up to the show, calling out cultural appropriation in the line’s promotional advertisements. Those involved in the show fled the venue, distancing themselves from the fashion brand, not wishing to be associated with the disaster. In the end, Dolce & Gabbana’s founders Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana posted an apology video, and the scandal as a whole cost the fashion brand millions and millions in revenue. Through this confrontation between a whistleblower and fashion brand, Diet Prada flexed the power of two cancellers, tanking both the image and economic prospects of a big-name fashion brand for perceived immoral actions. As Stoppard puts it, “Diet Prada throws its accusations around like hand grenades” (2017). In this instance, Diet Prada invoked a punishing form of political consumerism, made possible by their status as whistleblowers.

Media

While cancellers, like Diet Prada, may be whistleblowers, they also exist within the realm of media. But media is a broad term within the fashion *habitus*, as its encompassing nature means that those within it need to be taken on a case-by-case basis, to determine the source of information various outlets are spreading. The purpose of media is to communicate and spread information to masses, and therefore enable individual judgments regarding certain topics. Media outlets can be measured by certain variables, for one, whether the media outlet is “mainstream” or “independent”, as this might affect the opinions and selective information being shared. Mainstream media outlets may have certain ideals or information they are required to disseminate, or to refrain from disseminating. Meanwhile, independent media outlets may not feel the same pressure to control the information they share, leading to a wider range of topics that may be entertaining to their audience, but that place them in a precarious position within the industry.

Similarly, media outlets’ affiliation and allegiances to certain fashion brands may also be a source of control over their information output. If a media outlet has a relationship to a certain fashion brand for example, that media outlet may be unlikely or unable to share negative information regarding that fashion brand. On the other hand, a media outlet with no ties to fashion brands has the freedom to say whatever they want about whomever they want. However, being an independent media outlet doesn’t always come with a free pass to spread information; they may often face consequences for their bold honesty. Revisiting Diet Prada as an example, they did not escape “The Great Show” fiasco without retribution. Shortly after the cultural appropriation accusation disaster for Dolce & Gabbana, the fashion brand announced their

intention to sue both Liu and Schuyler of Diet Prada for defamation, with the litigation still in process today. International law notwithstanding, Diet Prada could face the consequences for their spread of information. In the end however, media's purpose is to spread information as a means to inform or influence the masses, regardless of potential consequences.

Lobbyists

Among The Influential: Fashion Bloggers, Magazines, Reviewers, & Advertisers

Lobbying is a well-organized tool of persuasion in a democratic society. Within the realm of media, organized actors such as fashion bloggers, magazines, reviewers, and advertisers act as one type of lobbyist: the influential. The influential act as apart of the fashion industry, who use their power and influence to try to guide the masses toward certain perceptions about various fashion brands and trends. Although their "influence is very great," and they manage to coerce a number of individuals through their spread of information, "they are not always successful in getting a certain look or style adopted" (Berger, 1992, p. 124). As the influential, they are the lobbyists who give their opinion, even if it is not necessarily wanted. As with many forms of media, often the spread of information leads the public to unconsciously draw connections between themselves and what they see, and these connections enable people to draw conclusions about the world around them. While some of the influential propagate information regarding how individuals should act or what they should look like, others covertly spread information about how not to act or how not to look. Through "creating dissatisfaction with the way we are," the influential compel individuals to perform as fashionable actors, turning the dramaturgy of an individual against them (Berger, 1992, p.115).

Influencers: Celebrities, “Influencers”, Financial Benefactors

As we recall, the role of the lobbyist is to act as an influential force on the masses, forcing their judgments onto individuals and pushing the individual to question their own judgments. Through promotion or denouncement of particular fashion brands, fashion designs, or trends, they influence perceptions, as “most products only derive their social value from the social use that is made of them” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 21). These lobbyists wield their power to shift the opinion of the masses, and in turn decide what is trendy and what is not. While the influential have been established as one type of lobbyist, the other type is made up of celebrities or individuals who are popularly known as “influencers”. An important distinction between the two is influencers are individuals whose opinions are important to the masses. As lobbyists in general act to influence individuals, influencers are those who individuals want to be influenced by when making judgments, as they may be perceived as more trendy or fashionable if they make the same choices as the influencers they look up to. Similar to the influential, influencers may be endorsed to look or say certain things about various fashion brands, if they have some kind of association. Influencers may even push for their own brand if they have one, coercing individuals to want to support them as well. Another type of influencer is one more directly in relation to the fashion brand itself, that of financial benefactors. Due to their monetary input and support, financial benefactors may also be asked to share their judgment on how to run the fashion brand, or they may feel obligated, even entitled, to offer their unsolicited advice.

Committees

Committees: Fashion Boards

The financial benefactor is often sits on a fashion brand's committee board. Fashion boards are comprised of important individuals within a fashion brand, who collaborate to ensure its proper functioning. Individuals who are involved in all aspects of a fashion brand come together to advance the brand both socially and economically. Fashion brand's committee boards will often include other actors within the brand such as the Chief Marketing Officer and Creative Director, as well as team leaders, such as the representatives from the PR-Team or Design Team. Those within the fashion brand's committee board are aware of the image the fashion brand hopes to uphold, and work together in keeping with industry standards in effort to mobilize their brand. All the individuals who partake in the fashion brand's committee board act as parts within a functioning whole, thoroughly investing themselves in the success of the brand. As investment acts as "the sense of *illusio*, belief, an involvement in the game which produces a game," committee board members are simultaneously strategizing their placement within the greater fashion *habitus*, while unknowingly contributing to the functioning of that same *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 86).

There are also committees in which fashion brands band together to mutually benefit each other. Two example committees, the Council of Fashion Brands of America and the United States Fashion Industry Association, both act as forces of collaboration to support the fashion brands that are affiliated with them. In these types of committees, fashion brands work together to boost themselves or their ideals in the fashion industry, putting aside differences so they will all reap the benefits. Similar to fashion brand-specific committee boards, the larger, cross-brand committees work toward the best interests of all the fashion brands in cooperation, resulting in shared support of combined goals and ambitions. Cross-brand committees, create innovative

methods of both shifting and directing the market, while still playing by the unspoken rules of the industry.

Bills & Policies

Bills: Fashion Designs; Policies: Trends

As mentioned previously, a successful fashion design can be likened to acting as a bill. To clarify, a fashion design would be considered “successful” when it makes it past the stages of design, approval, and past production to be marketed and physically sold to the masses. By going through this process, the fashion design is being prepared to be presented for judgment to the masses, just as a bill would be put up for consideration. In this sense, when a design becomes successfully adopted and integrated into the mainstream, it then becomes a trend, in the same way a bill has the prospect to become a policy. However, not all bills become enacted into policies, and the same is true for fashion designs becoming trends. A fashion design must be fully incorporated into the mainstream to become a trend, otherwise it maintains its designation of simply a fashion design, as it did not become popular enough with the masses to advance to the title of trend. To become a trend, a fashion design must be popular throughout the majority of the voting population. As “tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference,” many individuals may simply go along with the trendsetting of a fashion design regardless of its long-term success (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56).

It is with this transformation from bill to policy that we come full circle back to voting. The promotion of a fashion design to trend is reliant on the choices of the individual, a topic that has been formerly discussed. Advancement of a fashion design to a trend is where the importance of the individual’s choices come into play. In this instance, the individual now

controls the success or failure of a fashion design, and perhaps the fashion brand behind it. While it has been established that there are a number of influential forces acting upon the individual, the vote the individual casts is still their own, and the motivations are still their own. The choices the individual makes may be a small ripple within the larger structure of the fashion *habitus*, but they still carry an impact. When a large enough number of individuals make the same choice, casting the same vote, a discernable difference can be made, one large enough to push a fashion design to become a trend – or to cancel one out. While the power of the individual should not be diminished, the real power is the individual as part of a larger whole. As a fashion design grows, more individuals may feel inclined to join the masses. Participating in a rising fashion design acts as a push for individuals as “inclining agents to ‘cut their coats according to their cloth’, and so to become the accomplices of the processes that tend to make the probable a reality” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 65). That reality, if achieved, is a trend. The cooperation of many individuals making the same choices is what really gives the individual the power to impact and control the rise of fashion design to trend. The fashion industry is reliant upon voting choice, thereby regulating dynamics within the fashion *habitus*.

CONCLUSION

Through the fashion democracy, the power of the individual runs at the core, for “fashion involves, among other things, the freedom to choose and make choices” (Berger, 1992, p. 126). This gives the individual a chance make their own impact. Every individual is given an opportunity to partake in something larger than themselves, an aspect of life and culture everyone is a part of. While this paper introduces the concept of a fashion democracy, it is vital to keep in mind this is not a fixed conception. Rather, it is a dynamic, reinforcing structure,

constantly fluctuating and adapting to changes as per the individuals that exist within it. It acts as a structure which “adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps to bring about because it reads it directly in the present of a presumed world, the only one it can ever know” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 64). Guided by the interdependency of the individual, the fashion *habitus*’ functioning will always adapt to the impacts made on it, modifying itself in time with the stimuli that are directing it. The configuration of the structure of the fashion democracy will continue to endlessly change, as is the nature of the *habitus*, existing just beneath the consciousness of the masses.

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