

"They love the culture, but not the people": A Content Analysis of Cultural Appropriation Claims Against Fashion Designers and Brands from 2013 to 2020

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Keywords: Cultural appropriation, inspiration, media, misappropriation, apparel design process

In the 21st century, the fashion industry continues to face accusations of culturally appropriating historically oppressed groups (Vezina, 2019). In some cases, the use of cultural textiles, images, and patterns lead to an appreciation of cultural diversity, whereas in others, the use of cultural symbols in fashion are considered inappropriate (Pozzo, 2020; Vezina, 2019). Inappropriate use of cultural symbols in creative design is the potential effect of designers creating products based on their own conceptual interests. The prioritization of one's own personal interests in lieu of considering the potential subjugation of another group is an antecedent to social power inequities. Critical theories such as critical race theory (CRT) (Tate, 1997) provide a framework for understanding issues of power and oppression when race and racism are central in the analysis, and serves as a framework for understanding the potential power inequities that exist in the apparel design process. It is suggested the nature of the fashion industry is to turn a "blind and deaf ear" to misappropriation (Shirwaikar, 2009); however, this is an issue if certain communities are repeatedly being misrepresented and mistreated to appease design interests.

Although cultural appropriation in fashion has received much attention from the media, there has not been a clear analysis of cultural appropriation claims against fashion designers or brands. The design process involves cyclic manipulation and designer communication and interpretation of sources of inspiration to meet design goals (Eckert et al., 2000). Interpretations are often based on the cultural context and the interpreter's knowledge and experiences. However, having an appropriate understanding of the source's cultural context prevents the loss of accurate interpretation and the creation of new meanings that misappropriate the source. Thus, those who do not conduct appropriate research of the original cultural context risk potentially perpetuating structures of dominance, marginalization, and imbalances of power (D'Silva et al., 2018).

Therefore, the aim of this research was to explore instances of appropriation by FD&Bs, determine cultural sources of inspiration in appropriated designs, and understand how acts of appropriation preserve institutions that harm historically marginalized communities. The study objectives were guided by the following research purposes: (a) to determine how fashion designers and brands have been accused of cultural appropriation and the cultures that are used as sources of inspiration and (b) to understand how acts of appropriation impact historically marginalized communities. To achieve the study's objectives, a latent content analysis of 72 media articles, was utilized to focus on the underlying meanings of cultural appropriation through different news sources that discuss fashion design and cultural appropriation. Articles that detailed a single instance of fashion designers or brands culturally

appropriating cultural elements to produce clothing and/or textiles were selected as the data samples.

To explain how cultural appropriation has been fashioned in media coverage, three major themes emerged: a) the white narrative, b) the capitalist motive, and c) negligence in the research process. Each theme presented a pattern of the industry's current practices and how these practices perpetuate further harm for the source culture and communities. In the white narrative theme, cultures' and communities' traditions were fetishized, stereotyped, and marketed as more "acceptable" by donning the fashion item on white models. In the capitalist motive theme, practices were contributing to the further marginalization of minoritized groups and interfering with the source communities' methods of survival. In the negligence in the research process theme, practices championed a "glamorization of colonization" by utilizing significant, traditional, and generational cultural elements to create a "fashionable" representation while ignoring and, essentially, erasing the communities and cultures they are derived from.

This research demonstrates that appropriation is an active, not passive process (Nelson, 1996), and provides many important contributions. First, the dissemination and understanding of the nature of cultural appropriation are falling short of educating designers and consumers of the appropriateness of cultural appropriation and the harm of cultural misappropriation. Second, as FD&Bs are inspired by cultural elements from source communities, they should treat the source communities as valuable actors in preserving their cultures. This process involves a collaborative initiative. FD&Bs should actively pursue and secure the permission of the communities, engage with and understand the cultural histories of the elements they want to utilize in design, and hire people from the source communities as the creative designers and compensate the communities for use of their traditional cultural elements. Third, this research supports the implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion curriculum in fashion and clothing and textiles programs. Fashion educators must consciously invest in making fashion education a facilitator in developing fashion professional change agents (Pasricha & Kadolph, 2009). Theory and concepts committed to human activism and justice should be integrated into the fashion classroom and space should be created that challenges students' intellectualism and criticality, reflecting on the ways our practices contribute to the perpetuation of an inequitable system.

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