Are There Biased Assumptions About Hiring in the Fashion Industry?

There seems to be some misconceptions brought upon the fashion industry as a whole, even though not all brands meet these misconceptions. So how do we make it clear to people?

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The fashion industry has forever been a very competitive place. Our world thrives off of new trends and expensive looks, so why not hire the best of the best designers? It is an industry that is always evolving. High end designer brands need to keep themselves current and at the top at all times because it can all easily slip away. Sometimes they may not even use their designs as a way to keep themselves current and in the business, sometimes they will use ad campaigns and current issues that are happening in the world to make a statement. Designers access to social media has allowed them to post a new trend and within minutes it will be viral around the world. The game has changed from waiting for fashion shows to see what's next, to always being

exposed and kept up to date. This business will forever be competitive and in your face, but that is what keeps it from becoming boring or dull.

Now as much as the high end design brands love evolving and creating new ideas, it is still an industry built off of history and trust. They love to hire new graduates to welcome them into the fashion world and give them their first job, but the main designers have been there and stay there for years. This brings up many different assumptions and arguments made about the fashion industry, and the top two are racism and sexism. Throughout the history of fashion, just like the history within our world, not all races or genders have been treated fairly or gotten the same opportunities as others. This may have to do with the time period or in other cases based on the region of the brand. I recently wrote a case study that focused on the brand OffWhite. The Creator, Virgil Abloh, posted pictures on his Instagram story of his Christmas party at OffWhite's headquarters in Milan, Italy. He got a lot of backlash for there being a lack of diversity within his staff. As I looked more into it, I found that the African American community put a lot of weight on Abloh's shoulders to fix the lack of diversity within the fashion industry. So I decided to do some diligent research and really find out how racist and sexist the fashion industry is, but I also decided to look a little deeper than just those two factors. I was curious if brands hired based off of skill and credibility, or if it was indeed based off of race, sex, age, appearance, and sexual orientation.

To really figure out the answer to this, I decided to narrow it down to five designer brands that are global, this way I could find out if culture and region played a part in each brand. So the brands I researched were Louis Vuitton, Hermés, Rolex, Tiffany and Co. and Dior. When I took my approach on researching, I decided to be very current with it. That meant I could not limit

myself to just the web, I had to use social media as a reference too. It helped me look at and

study the brands through a consumers eyes, which allowed me to depict whether their social

media was a front or not.

Starting with Louis Vuitton, which was founded in 1854, in Paris, France. This high end

designer brand has been around for almost two hundred years. The main issue with racism this

company has dealt with was the speculation of Louis Vuitton sponsoring human zoos in the late

1800's and early 1900's. Below is one of pictures that surfaced to social media during the

speculation.

While you're now complaining about Gucci and last year it was Prada and Moncler, did you know that in the late 1800s and in the early 1900s Louis Vuitton sponsored human zoos where black People were looked at as exotic circus like creatures.
Here is a picture of a Louis Vuitton

However, there was no evidence found that proved that Louis Vuitton was actually sponsoring this event during the "Paris Colonial Exposition." Instead what some say is that this is where Vuitton would showcase his trunks which were inspired by different cultures. All that aside, there have been no forms of recent racism evolving at this time. What I captured from their social media, specifically Instagram, is that they are a very traditional company. They gain a lot of their inspiration from traveling the world to get different cultural ideas and themes. They have variety of ethnicity within their models, both male and female, and many well known people wear and model their brand. The only thing I can speculate is that they like their models skinny. They tend to be very traditional in the idea of wanting women to be tiny. This speculation is not actually said anywhere, just something I picked up on. Below are some examples from Louis Vuitton's Instagram feed.
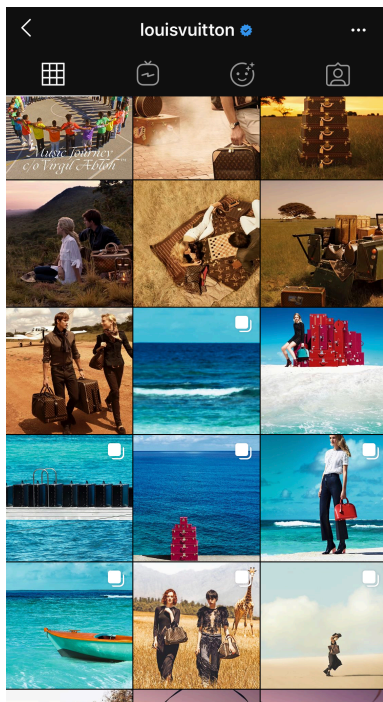
The first picture demonstrates how much they base their brand off or traveling and exploring. The second picture is of Sophie Turner, from Game of Thrones. This demonstrates how they feature celebrities.

When it comes to designers, they recently hired Virgil Abloh to be head designer for their menswear line. Some may say this is a stunt to bring more diversity to their staff, but Abloh is a very talented and credible designer. He owns OffWhite and he was Kanye West's creative director at a time. This hiring was solely based off of credibility.

To summarize I believe that Louis Vuitton has evolved and become more culturally diverse. They still hold a traditional clean cut look, but also bring in different inspirations. The brand has a lot to do with traveling the world and experiencing different cultures. The brand's employees seem to reach diversity within both men and women. It is not the most diverse brand I have seen, but they are definitely not shut out to incorporating the up and coming designers and models.

The next brand I looked at was Hermés, founded in 1837, in Paris, France. I found in their history that there was a dispute between one of Hermés saleswomen and Oprah Winfrey. This was back in the early 2000's when Winfrey was denied access into the store located in Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris, because the store was closing very soon. This became public quickly with all types of speculation going around saying it was because of her skin color, gender, appearance etc. The chief executive officer for Hermés USA went on her show to formally and publicly apologize. That seems to be the only dispute I could find on the company and they handled it very well. I found that their Instagram had very diverse models, yet very skinny, and their Instagram TV was inspiring and real. They show and discuss the creation

behind some of their pieces in addition to having segments with some of their models where they discuss topics like humility, generosity, and desire. They even do background and history on some of their designers and their favorite lines released. I did find that a majority of their designers have been there for years, so they do like to keep it traditional. One of their designers, Leila Menchari, is 93 years old. That can be seen as very motivational for both the new up and coming designers, and the older ones. Below are some examples from their Instagram feed.
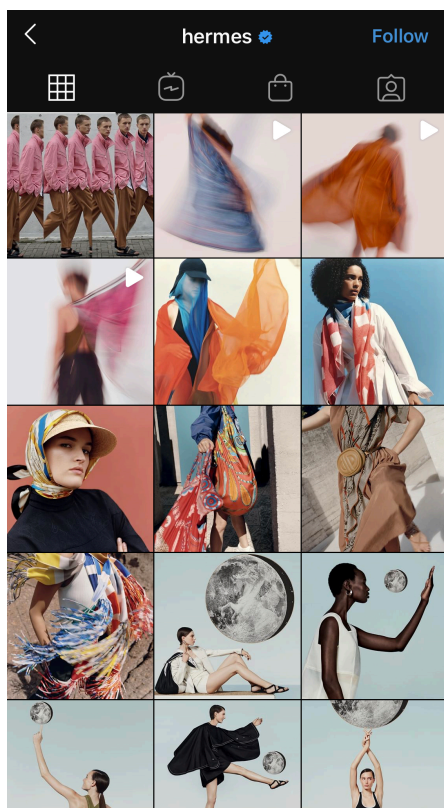
The first picture is their feed as a whole. The second picture shows they have diverse models, but very skinny.

It seems clear that this company is diverse and positive. They like to invest time into their designers and allow them credit, and also do segments on the models discussing what is important to them, which makes them seem like normal people. It allows us to feel more

connected to the brand rather than it seeming like an untouchable idea. Hermés seems to represent the fashion industry well.

I decided to look into Rolex next. Even though it is not a brand based off of clothes, it is still a very successful brand in the industry. The company was founded in 1905, in London, United Kingdom. The original brand name was Wilsdorf and Davis by Hans Wilsdorf and Alfred Davis, but was renamed Rolex in 1908. The company's headquarters are also based in Geneva, Switzerland now. When doing research I did not find any big scandals in the brand's past. Rolex seems to have a good reputation, and has made their Instagram very inspirational. The feed is filled with mini segments that dive into successful filmmakers stories. It is supposed to show how these film makers were just normal graduate students, but they worked really hard to never quit and get where they are today. It is supposed to drive motivation into Rolex's following. All of their models are very normal looking people, compared to the other brands I have researched that have a very certain look or the models are very skinny. Below are some examples from their Instagram feed.
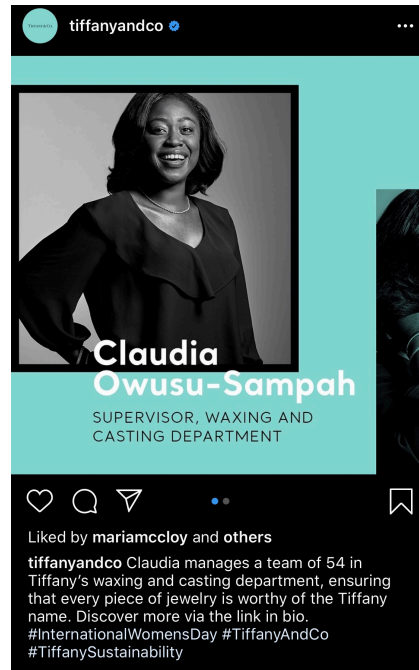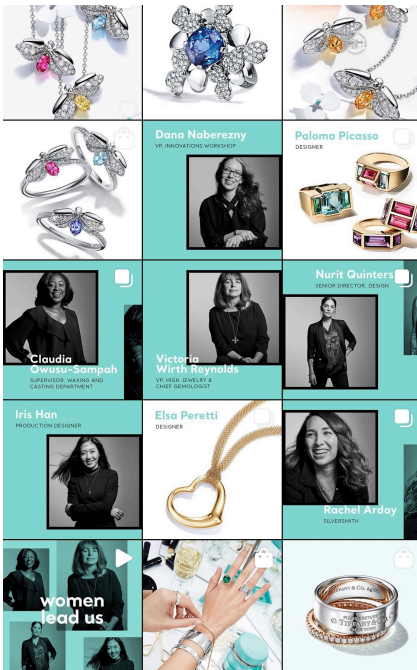
The first picture is their feed, which shows all of the film makers they have done segments on. The second photo is a closer look with a description of Katheryn Bigelow who is a film maker.

Rolex gives out awards each year to people they think have inspired the world or achieved something great. I really like the message behind this company. This brand is based off of the idea of "the fundamental belief in unlimited human potential in continuous improvement, in always pushing the boundaries and taking the long term view." I think that attitude shows that their brand is a worldwide community.

The next brand I looked at is based in America. Tiffany and Co. was founded in 1837, New York, NY. In 2014 Tiffany and Co. faced a lawsuit with one of their long time employees. It seemed that when there was a change in management Michael McClure faced racial discrimination. He stated that despite the fact the store he represented increased sales by 15 percent, when other stores had only increased by 1 percent, they still refused to give him a raise. Tiffany did make a statement denying that the company discriminates against different races etc. It seems that the company has come a very long way since the dispute though. Their Instagram feed is solely focused on women empowerment, and dedicates posts to the inspiring women who work at Tiffany and Co. They have a variety of diversity within there feed, and seem to be accepting of everyone. Below are pictures from their Instagram feed.

The first picture is their feed filled with all of their women designers and a little spotlight on them. The second picture is of Claudia Owusu-Sampah, who is the supervisor at the waxing and casting department.

This is really a brand for women today. Its main purpose is to empower women through the greatness they have achieved and beautiful jewelry. They love their employees and celebrate them regularly.

The last brand I research was Dior, which was founded in 1946, Paris, France. Rihanna was the first ever black women to be on the cover of Christian Dior's magazine, which happened in 2015. Many people looked at this as not a time to celebrate the accomplishment, but to shame how long it took for this to happen. It is very late on Dior's part to finally put a black woman on their cover. Dior did not seem to be discouraged by the comments made, the company focused more on how excited they were to work with Rihanna. After looking at the brands social media, I still noticed a lack in diversity when it came to ethnicity. They are very big on feminism in fashion, Maria Grazia Chiuri, who is the creative director of Christian Dior, received the France's

highest honor after her Paris haute couture show. She expressed that her focus is too bring

feminism instead of femininity within the fashion industry. Since her debut Dior has shifted

towards women and posts segments on their Instagram TV discussing the importance of

feminism. It is nice to have Chiuri as a new face because Dior typically has been dominated by

male designers. Below are some photos from their Instagram feed.
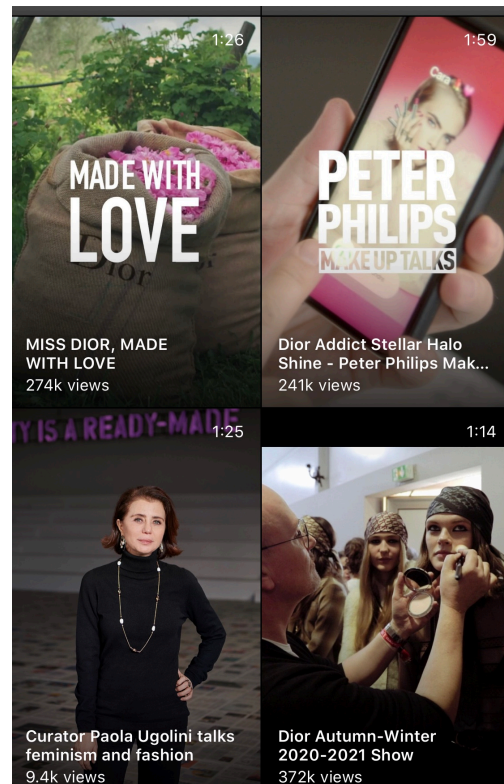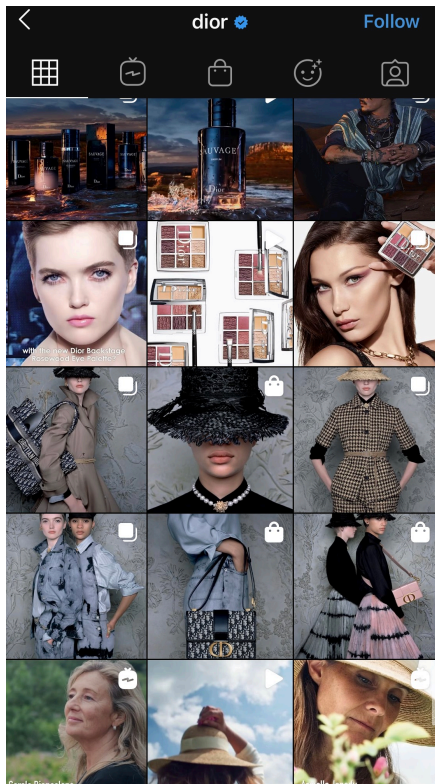
The first photo is representing Dior's feed, and features videos of Maria Grazia Chiuri.

The second photo is their Instagram TV, featuring videos about feminism and their products.

I believe the brand still has a lot to do diversity wise, they did not really take the

comments back in 2015 and address them. It is nice to see that they are shifting towards and for

the women in our world.

Taking all of this information in, the good and the bad, I believe that the fashion industry has become fair to a point. I wanted to show times in the past where the company's have dealt with backlash or have been called out on things that are not okay. This industry is very opinionated, especially its consumers. Keep in mind the companies I exampled here do not represent the whole entire industry. I believe with my research I found a fair amount of both improvement and setbacks in the industry. The argument I was trying to figure out was whether or not high end designer brands hire based off of skill and credential, or if it is based off of race, sex, age, appearance etc. I can confidently say that a majority of the brands I looked at hire based off of skill and credentials. The only thing that seemed very old fashion to me was that some brands still only hired skinny petite models. Nowadays it is celebrated when companies have models of all shapes and sizes. I understand that these designer brands are still for sale to a certain class in society, but it would go a long way for their business if they opened up to different kinds of models.

So the problem we are trying to solve is the continuous misconceptions towards the hiring credentials in the fashion industry, and how do we stop it? What I am suggesting is that all these high end fashion brands need to team up and learn from each other. A majority of these brands are doing an amazing job at really getting their messages out there and showing off the designers behind their works. Other brands are not doing enough and those companies are the ones that cause people to speculate about the fashion industry. We need to hold a universal expectation above these brands, and I know it sounds cliche, but it is not going to be done unless there is teamwork involved. Designers do not want this industry to be label racist or sexist, they want to appeal to everyone. The industry has really come a long way, there just needs to be more

logical thinking when they are creating their platform. They need a team of people who are going to look at what the company is putting out, whether it be a clothing line or on their social media. This team needs to filter out all of the worst case scenarios and find the solutions for them before the public does is before them.

I think it is unfair to blame the fashion industry for racism or sexism, the industry has evolved just as our world has, if not faster. This industry is excited to accept people that are usually turned away, they strive to standout and be different. Yes, designer brands do need to be cautious of what they say and do since so many people are watching them, but from what I have learned is that most brands have formed their work around a community they feel passionate about. They hire based off of skills yes, but they also hire based off of who they feel will help design their vision. It is truly an industry that does not care to be sensitive about feelings if they do not like what someone puts out. The industry needs to stop being shamed for misconceptions that society has dragged on for years. The industry needs to start being celebrated for inspiring others and for providing a community that empowers all people.

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