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This project will focus on how certain articles of clothing have come to be devalued due to cultural appropriation in popular culture. An in-depth research on the role appropriation plays in the depreciation of an article of clothing's cultural significance will be done beginning with what appropriation actually is and how people tend to define it fluidly. Appropriation, a concept that is steadily evolving, has no stable meaning due to fabricated excuses creating more accessibility to separate oneself from the accusations of appropriation. Depreciation occurs both consciously and unconsciously in our daily lives and brings further relevance as to why the population should be more educated on a topic such as this one. Popularization of a given article of clothing leads to the depreciation of its cultural significance.

Why is appropriation important today? Today many articles of clothing from all around the world are used in fashion either because they are eye catching or trendy at the moment. Take a durag for example; there are more people wearing a durag for fashion rather than it's intended use. It was created as a protective style for those with kinky/curlly short hair but soon became an object of glorification due to its many colors and appeal. Many celebrities did wear durags for the right reasons however, because of the fact much of the younger population look up to them, it was popularized for its charm which is why it is considered appropriation. Here's an example of a durag being used as both a fashion statement and its intended use:



Many people do not consciously buy clothes to appreciate it but because it looks nice or it's something they would want to show off. Let's take the durag for another example. There is a wide variety of colors of durags since its popularization to match with other articles of clothing. This shows that people are now treating it as a fashion statement and justifies the point of depreciation of its original significance argued in the following quote: "At first, the durag became a testament to and marker of blackness. It was simply a symbol of a somewhat shared experience, a mutual understanding. (StaffinStyle)" The durag rose to prominence as a trendy item in the 90's and early 2000's.

Rappers such as Cam'ron, Nelly, and 50 Cent wore them everywhere contributing to its amassing fame

Adults who are hyperaware of their clothing choice wants to fit in in any way, shape, or form and some purchase articles of clothing in order to correspond with the current trend around them rather for their own enjoyment. Evidence of such a thought process is shown in this quote found in the NY Times which states "Rihanna had her silk durags, and now people are wearing it for fashion not even tied right but just to fit in with the culture (Garcia)" In more simple terms, silk durags are being worn because either everyone else is doing it or its appealing to the eye. In the same statement by Garcia, "the culture" refers to black culture specifically because durags are more common in communities of color. Although Rihanna is black, the fact that she wore a durag as more of a fashion statement than a protective style is proof of its depreciation over time. Fashion icons and designers contribute the most to the gradual depreciation of clothes. The fashion industry may appreciate the clothes but what about fans that look up to them? How do fans see the clothes that their favorite performer is wearing?

The cultural meaning behind clothes has often been offset due to the insertion of multiple alternate justifications portraying reasons why articles of clothing should be allowed to be freely worn. When called out to be a cultural appropriator, often times excuses are made as to why

women, when called out to be a cultural appropriator, often times excuses are made as to why clothing should not be restricted. Let's take a silk Kimono for instance. Kimonos hold much significance as a traditional Japanese garment and has become depreciated in places such as the United States. Many designers would call Kimonos an inspiration but there is a solid difference between finding inspiration in something and taking an idea, adding minor changes, and calling it original. Many brands appropriate the Kimono because the floral designs are similar to that of the traditional garb. Valentino for instance made this “Kimono” selling for \$24,500 as shown in figure 2. Kimono from: Garavani, Valentino. “Kimono 1997” (Garavani and Giammetti):



Kimono from: Garavani, Valentino. “Kimono 1997” (Garavani and Giammetti):

Valentino as aforementioned, created a dress which partially resembles a Kimono but some similarities can be seen between this article and an actual Kimono. Floral patterns must be the reasoning behind Valentino calling dresses as such a Kimono. An actual Kimono does not reveal and covers the whole body, usually excluding the hands, feet, and head.

Often times, designers require influence from either another designer or another piece of clothing. A dress such as ‘Kimono 1997’ by Valentino is called a Kimono but why? Simply because of the fact that its designs hold similarity to the actual garment. Many designers or influencers can say the same thing regarding the name of their clothes. Credit must be given where it’s due and it seems naming the article of clothing after the article of which inspiration was taken is

sufficient enough to pass as credit. Names are borrowed and applied to items that resemble the original. An example of such can be applied to the Timb (Timberland Boots). Timbs are such a popular boot in New York City, any boot that resembles a Timb will be assumed to be one. However, once it is exposed that the boots being worn are not Timbs, the boots are called fake Timbs instead of their given name. Point being names that hold much significance may transfer on to other clothing that hold similarities.

In many situations, arguments against cultural appropriation arise because clothing has many associations with different areas of the world. Many interpretive ways are available which allow contrasting thoughts as to whether or not appropriation is occurring to exist. "Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses” reports: “Hence, fashion discourses provide consumers with a plurality of interpretive positions that, because of their diverse associations, can enable them to juxtapose opposing values and beliefs. (Haytko and Thomson 15)” Certain articles of clothing have associations with so many places that an excuse as to why it's not culturally appropriated can be easily argued. One such example that can be applied to this statement is the use of head coverings. The first practice thought of regarding head covering is



the practice of veiling which dates back 13th century BC Assyrian Empire where there were laws that required women to veil. There are several examples of veils seen today as shown here in Figure 3. Head Wraps from: Rudd-Ridge, Tameshia “Head Wrapping as a Spiritual Practice” (Rudd-Rigde):

In “Head Wraps & Cultural Appropriation” Rudd-Ridge argues: “Throughout history, head coverings have been worn for a myriad of reasons. These include: spiritual beliefs, cultural significance, practicality, and fashion. No matter the reason, covering the head is a deeply personal choice. (Rudd-Rigde)” Not every example of wearing a headscarf is considered appropriation based on the intent and reasoning behind it. Wearing a turban has become a popular style option for women but it is



become a popular style option for women but it is also a protective style. Wearing a hijab for instance, just because it looks appealing does not mean it should be freely worn. The same applies for nuns and Orthodox Jewish women. There is much cultural and religious significance to be acknowledged before justifying a reason for wearing an article of clothing such as the hijab.

Accusing one as an appropriator can be arduous at times because there are several situations in which the disadvantaged population being appropriated may not be able to have much of an argument. It is argued in the article "Native American Student Association discusses cultural appropriation in fashion.", "I feel that it crosses the line when the borrowing of those culturally significant items then takes away from the culture that you're borrowing from, (Abbott)" This quote speaks volumes as it properly explains what it feels like to be appropriated to a non-marginalized group. Usually marginalized groups do not have much say in regards to others borrowing their culture. If a designer were accused borrowing a culture and not giving credit, multiple excuses can be fabricated to justify their innocence. One such example could be "Oh it's a variation so it's not the same thing". This kind of mindset shows the amount of power privilege holds in terms of protecting innocence.

Now let's discuss the effect appropriation has on the country of origin. The country of origin in this context is a phrase used to describe where an article of clothing originates from. Appropriating from a given country will more or less always have a negative aspect to it. First designers generate ideas on how to properly plagiarize a given article of clothing and make it their own. This then leads to profit which only positively affects the designer and their brand. Countries of origin often do not receive credit or profit for their traditional garments being used in popular culture elsewhere. This brings back the discussion of garments being widely popularized but only significantly profiting those who appropriated it into popular culture. The idea of being original is very much praised but impossible to achieve. Originality is considered something that can be created by switching someone else's idea into one's own. This is more of an imitation that works in the "creator's" favor.

Appropriation is stealing with the image of borrowing illustrated in the following quote "Somehow, you, as the designer, now become the inventor of that particular item. You're benefiting and profiting from it and the culture that you borrowed it from isn't getting the credit. (Abbott)" The one appropriating is the one generating profits from a marginalized group and claiming it as something of their creation. All ideas gain inspiration from somewhere where some are more original than others but never entirely original. Examples include but are not limited to putting the designs of a dashiki on a hat or shoes instead of just a shirt. From this outlook, depreciation comes into play. Depreciation is when an article of clothing loses popularity thus losing significance all together. By appropriating certain articles of clothing, popularization occurs which leads to the deprecation of the article's cultural significance. The reasoning behind people wearing things because "it looks nice" revolves around this previous statement. A brand such as True Religion was highly popular in the years 2012-2014 because it was very appealing to the eye. As other brands became popular, True Religion was overshadowed by the immense success of those other brands.

Appropriation is established fluidly and many misunderstandings occur as a result. Some may think that wearing a particular article of clothing shows their appreciation of it while others may believe simply wearing the clothes is not appreciative enough. Intent plays a major role in whether or not one should be accused of appropriating. Taking steps such as learning and understanding the cultural and historical contexts behind certain articles of clothing before wearing them can prove good intent. Let's take a Dashiki for example. Dashikis rose to fame during the peak of 2015 because of its trendiness not its cultural significance. Many designers saw an opportunity to make profit using something that everyone was in a craze for. It is a smart move indeed but it's stealing for personal gain.



In America, dashikis were originally worn as a



form of protest for society's unfair treatment of African Americans. It became popularized due to its vibrant colors and designs as shown here in Figure 4. Dashiki from: Ugokwe. "Dashiki Pride" (Dashiki Pride):

The dashiki is a very eye-catching piece, a leading force as to why it was so widely popularized. People eventually do get tired of seeing the same things every day, the exact reason why dashikis are no longer as popular as they were in 2015-2016. The dashiki trend is great proof of the depreciation of an article of clothing's cultural significance. Once something becomes popular, depreciation follows soon after whether it be conscious or unconscious. Popularity of a given article of clothing is surely not due to its cultural significance but because either someone began a trend or it is highly coveted in that given moment.

As quoted in "Cultural Appropriation without Cultural Essentialism" ... "Cultural autonomy signifies a right to cultural specificity, a right to one's origins and histories as told from within the culture and not as mediated from without (Matthes 347)" Everyone has a right to their culture as mediated from their own perspective instead of an outsider perspective. If this definition were applied to appropriation, no one would be allowed to appropriate. However, because of the fact appropriation is loosely applied to everyday life, it may not even be known appropriation is occurring. It seems not to be understood that appropriation can be both aware and unaware.



Appropriation occurs unintentionally without the realization of it. "The Do's and Don'ts of Cultural Appropriation" expresses this point "At my house, getting dressed is a daily act of cultural appropriation, and I'm not the least bit sorry about it. (Avin's)" People are sometimes aware with their cultural appropriation and don't realize how much gravity it holds. People do in fact wear clothes every day which are imported to us but this wouldn't be considered appropriation because imported clothes often time hold no significance.

Let's bring the example of a pair of pants made in China as shown in Figure 5. Made in China tab from: Bloomberg. (Bloomberg). Is it considered appropriation because the tag states the article of clothing was made in a different country? The answer to this question depends on if the article of clothing holds any cultural or traditional influence to the given country. If the pants were worn to commemorate some sort or historic astral event for ancestors for instance then it would be considered appropriation to casually wear them around if it's not within the country of origin. Wearing any article of clothing that holds cultural significance to a country or area of the world because of its wide availability is cultural appropriation. Imagine how it would feel to see a once sacred item become popularized due to trendiness. Trends do not last forever but the impression left by that trend do. Depreciation of a once sacred item will follow its popularization as mentioned earlier. Anything mass produced loses its value and powerhouses such as the United States and China thrive on mass production.

There is no specific way to solve the issue of cultural appropriation but rather finding ways to get brands to educate themselves on the culture they want to use for influence would prove beneficial. Quoted from the article "How to Fix Fashion's Cultural Appropriation

more beneficial. Quoted from the author "How to Fix Fashion's Cultural Appropriation Problem" ... "Cultural appropriation is a complicated topic, and observers said the best solution requires a complete change in the culture methods of a brand or company itself. But a good first step would be to start bolstering a company or brand's awareness across the board on cultural competency — and that means being sensitive to cultural, ethnic and racial differences. (Doupnik)" If companies were to educate themselves on a culture before borrowing ideas for influence it would be meaningful to those who embrace that culture. Acknowledging the culture from which ideas were taken is the least that can be done to show that appropriation is a genuine concern. A solution that would help show this concern would be including a history regarding the piece of clothing and how significant it is to a certain culture with purchase. Not only does the brand educate itself on the culture from which it is borrowing from but the consumer learns about the culture and significance as well.

There are several questions left unanswered that require further investigation. Speaking on the role appropriation plays in the depreciation of an article of clothing's cultural significance has many aspects to divulge into. As the definition of appropriation evolves in accordance to the population, more research will be required such as what it is to properly appreciate an article of clothing. As the definition of appropriation evolves how to appreciate a given article of clothing will also change. It was noticed that through stating what was learned, more questions resulted. The original research question has evolved and in turn provided more insight but also more questions that I need answered. There's a plethora of information yet to be learned but as the meaning of the term is steadily evolving, there is bound to be new research done for a continuation of relevance for this topic. However, implications include but are not limited to constant research as the term appropriation evolves and future popularization of clothes leading to more depreciation. The role cultural appropriation plays in society needs to be better understood. Depreciation of clothing happens as a result of appropriation and will only continue unless steps are taken to divert its progress. It's cool to be original but how can something be original if it gained its influence elsewhere?

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