

## **Sustainable Innovation 2021**

*Accelerating Sustainability in Fashion, Clothing, Sportswear & Accessories*

23<sup>rd</sup> International Conference

Online Conference: 15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> March 2021

Business School for the Creative Industries

University for the Creative Arts

Epsom, Surrey, UK

## **Accelerating Racial Equity in Sustainable Apparel: Barriers to Entry for Racial Minorities**

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The apparel industry accounts for staggering waste and environmental degradation. Twenty percent of yearly industrial water pollution is attributed to the textile and apparel industry (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). The Ellen MacArthur Foundation estimates that the apparel industry could make up a quarter of all carbon emissions by 2030 (2017). This scenario is likely to worsen without intervention.

Minority communities are disproportionately affected by unsustainable practices (Vojnovic & Darden, 2013). Water pollution, industrial waste, and poor air quality plague inner city communities. Yet racial minorities lack a seat at the table for most environmental decision making. Pew Research Center estimates that by 2050, racial minorities will be the majority population in the U.S. (2008), however, current environmental organizations include about 16% racial minorities (Taylor 2014). The solution to these problems may be understanding specific barriers minority race people face in engaging with sustainable apparel (clothing that maximizes positive and equitable social, environmental, and economic impacts, while minimizing the negative) (Moon St al., 2015, Agyeman & Evans 2003).

As von Busch says, “the discourse around sustainable fashion often lacks a socio-political perspective on who and what kinds of consumerism should be sustained and for which social groups” (2018, p. 322). The barriers toward participation in sustainable apparel have been established. Eder-Hansen et al. developed a framework of four barriers: 1) Style 2) Price 3) Availability and 4) Knowledge (2012). Lundblad and Davies confirmed similar barriers, of price, quality and appearance (2016). While some work has been done to understand the relationship between these barriers and gender (Billeson and Klasander 2015, Moon et al. 2015), little attention has been paid to the unique implications for racial minorities. This presents opportunity for research about the similarities and differences between racial minorities and non-minorities in regard to barriers.

Research suggests there may be additional barriers for racial minorities that require further examination including: 1) Discrimination 2) Representation 3) Politicization and 4) Cultural integration. For example, Schuldt and Pearson shed light on a lack of representation of minorities in environmental organizations, advertising, and media (2014, 2016). They found that despite similar beliefs around sustainability, racial minorities were significantly less likely to identify as “Environmentalists” or respond positively to the politicization of sustainability. Gardetti and Muthu (2016) showed important correlations between sustainable practices and cultural heritage, suggesting that items are more likely to be valued and worn longer when they have a sentimental attachment.

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Due to the current trajectory of the unsustainable apparel industry, these hypothesized barriers have a new significance and urgency. Sustainable apparel practices have the potential to decrease the damage being done to our earth. As a growing part of the U.S. population, the involvement of racial minorities must be accelerated. Research identifying barriers that reduce participation in sustainable practices is planned as the first step toward creating an equitable and racially balanced industry.