

# A PROMISE OF DIVERSITY?

PRACTICING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION  
IN DANISH CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

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**AUTHORS** In futurum: Moussa Mchangama, Frederik Larsen & Jessica Petersen

**ART DIRECTION** Ingrid Magnifique Baraka

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Founded by Frederik Larsen and Moussa Mchangama, In futurum is a Copenhagen-based sustainability and social justice consultancy and research platform that guides businesses and organizations towards a just and sustainable future.

This research project and report was funded, conceptualized and conducted by In futurum:  
Moussa Mchangama, strategic communicator & advisor, specialising in value creation, social justice perspectives and consumer culture. MA in Modern Culture & Communication.

Frederik Larsen (PhD), organizational anthropologist specialising in industry research, sustainability, and the critical development of businesses.

Jessica Petersen, research assistant, MSc international public administration and politics, works with sustainability and climate justice.

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# FOREWORD

Over the past years we have experienced a dramatic increase in the interest in anti-discrimination, diversity, inclusion and social justice when we advise companies and organisations. Diversity and inclusion as a topic have become a commodity in itself, making the need for knowledge-based approaches to corporate efforts needed. Furthermore, the complex relationship between a more environmentally sustainable future and a just future is slowly becoming clearer in industrial contexts as sustainability always is a global perspective that takes everyone and everything on our planet into existence. In our experience, some actors that have done serious sustainability work are now beginning to unfold socio-environmental or climate justice perspectives and the way companies and industries must think of their relationship to the planet and to people. But often it seems that the direct impact of company practices is difficult to connect to a wider sense of justice—to a human-centred perspective that highlights that there are always humans involved somewhere and somehow, when businesses make decisions, and that no-one should 'pay the price' for those decisions, neither locally nor globally. That is why we embarked on a research

project that explores current diversity and inclusion practices in the Danish creative industries; to contribute to the knowledge production within this area, to strengthen awareness on complex issues, to address core concerns and to mitigate change for those who we believe need it the most.

Over the last year we have collected research literature, interviewed advisors and companies and invited people to share their personal experiences of working in the creative industries as minoritized individuals. Some of the findings from this research is presented in this report. The purpose for the research and for the report is fundamentally to address inequalities, and to push a human-centred approach to how we work together, why and how we produce products and who are allowed to make decisions and participate. But there is also a more specific purpose. Our aim is also to provide insights and offer recommendations on how companies can approach diversity and inclusion in ways that make people feel safe, seen and heard.

As advisors we experience how issues of inequality and lack of diversity can be difficult to address for many companies. Some do not see how it affects them, others feel unable to really affect change while others identify both the need to engage and see the value of diversity, but do not know how to act. With some newly established companies, we experience a deep desire to help facilitate change—but this need is often hindered by business models or a need for economic decision making that makes new approaches difficult. We hope that this report and the recommendations we offer will help some address these issues, and identify their role in creating more just industries, whether in designing products, in managing supply chains, in marketing, consumer outreach or when nurturing workplace cultures.

Although the research literature has provided important theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the research, the active engagement of the case companies, the advisors and the individuals in our reflection groups have been invaluable. Their willingness to share and to be vulnerable has been crucial to providing nuanced, complex

and sometimes uncomfortable perspectives. For companies, sharing information about things that are difficult is unusual, so we want to thank the companies for allowing us to present their insights. When it comes to taking on new initiatives connected to D&I, it seems like the case companies that have years of experience with sustainability work are a bit ahead. Maybe due to the fact that they have experience with the trial-and-error culture of embarking on new business journeys into foreign land and with adopting new systems, regulations, data gathering, international policies and frameworks, etc.

Overall, they still face the overall challenge on the lack of frameworks, knowledge and structural perspective. We believe it will be incredibly helpful for other companies to gain insights into the considerations and complexities highlighted in this report. In order to allow for more openness, all 7 companies have been anonymized in the report. We want to thank the advisors, Thandi Dyani, Fahad Saeed, Mona Mohammed Ali and Veronica D'Souza who kindly offered their perspectives for the purpose of this research.

We hope that this report will contribute to their work also. Lastly, we want to extend our sincerest gratitude to the 10 individuals who bravely offered their personal reflections on working in and around companies in the creative industries. As critical perspectives still involve a risk to job security for many minoritized people, their reflections are presented anonymously. We believe that a fundamentally just way of working must centre on people and not companies, and their reflections have provided the situated, human perspectives on societal structures necessary to nurture a just approach.

The report presents perspectives on diversity and inclusion and assumes an intersectional lens. A main topic throughout is on the experiences of racialized people, as their ethnicity or colour cannot be 'hidden' in a workplace as compared to, say, economic upbringing that although important, can be considered a more discreet identity marker in the context of meeting other people. This focus does not exclude the importance of other experiences, but provides specificity and scope to the report. Furthermore, we have worked to ensure that involved individuals could also bring perspectives and lived experiences that encompass, but are not limited to, religious background, nationality/legal status, migratory/refugee experience, queerness, sexuality, gender, family experience, bodily ability, age, class and educational background. It is our hope that more perspectives will be added to the body of knowledge over time.

# INTRODUCTION

# WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Like in many other industries, companies in the creative industries are experiencing a growing pressure to address issues of diversity and inclusion in their marketing, when hiring new employees or when developing new products. A changing global political climate has shaped contemporary consumer preferences as the demand for responsibility in products and production, as well as more diverse representation are influencing the commercial and creative industries' ability to stay relevant. Diversity, sustainability, and political awareness have become central themes for businesses due to their positive connotations, meanings, and applications to resonate with more

demographics and become social and environmentally responsible<sup>1</sup>. The growing public awareness of sexism, misogyny, racism and discrimination as well as the importance of individual identity has created a new culture that companies have to operate in, both in marketing products and in developing the company. Companies are being challenged on their external communication and on the identities of their employees. In the creative industries, companies that work with aesthetics, lifestyles and identities, and where images are central to value creation, have a specific relationship with representation. As such, consumer-oriented companies in fashion, design and beauty navigate the need

for diversity and inclusion in a very specific way. In some cases, the attention to marketing and image-making means that the internal company perspectives can get overlooked. Similarly, the lack of representation externally, in campaigns for example, often mirror a lack of diversity internally in the companies. Lately, the attention to diversity has led to a surge in the variety of visual expressions used in marketing of different skin colours, gender expressions, cultural backgrounds, abilities and lifestyles. The new climate has meant that more and more companies have introduced new core values related to fairness and social justice<sup>2</sup>. However, capturing the diversity of people is a complex and multi-dimensional

task as identity relates to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, non/abled bodies, age and so forth<sup>3</sup>. But the corporate attention to diversity is not always experienced by the people working in the companies, meaning that the impact of efforts is, oftentimes, more focused on external factors than internal human experiences.

Studies suggest that this new organisational and marketing paradigm is about branding companies as sustainable and inclusive to achieve further profit while responding to the needs of the public<sup>4</sup>. Godwyn finds that efforts to become more socially responsible has little to do with accountability, and should instead be understood as being mainly a strategic tool for corporations to brighten up any tarnishing of their name that might have occurred from past socio-environmental externalities such as pollution, degradation, and slave-like labour conditions<sup>5</sup>. Thus, questions arise concerning on what and whose terms fairness and justice is extended<sup>6</sup>. Such practices

reflect motivations that has overwhelmingly focused on how a diverse workforce both external and internal may generate greater economic benefits and effectiveness for the corporate operations<sup>7</sup>. This raises further questions on whether the existing measures towards diversity and inclusion can deal with and is enough to address social justice since mainstream efforts have commodified diversity and does not probe deeper into the gap between structural power hierarchies and diversity practices<sup>5</sup>. Following this notion, marginalised and minoritized people are defined in terms of the social and economic value they provide to corporations, and less on the social justice that has been claimed through marketing strategies<sup>6</sup>. It is in this context that the present report examines the rhetoric, experiences, and practices of diversity and inclusion in creative industries in Denmark. Spurred on by the paradox of representation, we explore the complexities of how companies engage with diversity and inclusion and how minoritized people are sometimes being seen but not always heard.

The report seeks to provide an embedded, people-centred perspective on experiences that moves beyond business models to understand the role of representation, the strategies for inclusion in place and what value diversity holds to the current practices. This report therefore seeks to answer: How are the current Diversity & Inclusion practices of Danish consumer-oriented companies in the creative industries impacting minoritized social groups? We present a short theoretical framework for addressing D&I, findings from an explorative study of 7 Danish companies in the fashion, beauty and interior design industries, insights from 4 experts and reflections from 10 minoritized people working in the industries. Based on the study we present 7 recommendations at the end of this report from how companies can begin to address the problem that people with minority status may begin to be seen, but are rarely heard.





THE DIVERSITY IN OUR TEAM IS BAD.  
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TAKEN PLACE.

## Chapter 1

# POSITIONING, PRIVILEGES & POWER

The growing attention to diversity and the marketing opportunities diversity represent to companies, risk creating strategies that focus more on visibility and branding than on inclusion and human wellbeing. At the same time, many companies struggle to engage with diversity and inclusion altogether. Like other aspects of societal responsibility that companies are increasingly faced with, creating inclusive workplaces and diverse representations are seen as complicated, a factor that becomes a hindrance for action in itself.

The report presents findings from our own research project, with the aim of understanding corporate practices and marketing values of D&I in the interaction with social groups impacted by the D&I agenda. These explorations hinge on the notion of D&I that entails the extent to which groups once marginalised, oppressed, or ignored are allowed to be seen and heard in their full identity<sup>8</sup>. Throughout the report, the concept of intersectionality is used to examine how the complexity of different identity categories, inequalities and their intersections impact and shape the current D&I

practices of the Danish creative industries and how those efforts are experienced by minoritized individuals.

Throughout this report, we use the overall term D&I to capture the complex variety of corporate efforts to manage, measure, communicate, facilitate and incorporate new perspectives, business opportunities and/or people. At the end of this report, we bring critical perspectives on what next steps are needed in order to make sure, that D&I work actually centres human experiences and safe and just working environments. Furthermore, we use the term 'minoritized people' when talking about individuals interviewed in our reflection groups. This term reflects the fact that many of them have different identity markers that in the local context of Denmark gives them a minority status, although they might—in a global context—be part of a global majority.

## DIVERSITY

The understanding that people differ from one another on multiple dimensions and in different contexts and situations. Experiences, race, characteristics, gender, sexuality, income, and nationality are only a few examples of this. These differences can be looked at from an intersectional lens in considering how everyone's identity impacts their life, experiences, and views.

## INCLUSION

Actively working on an environment, system, or structure that is accessible to or includes everybody. This is done mostly to include people who have been excluded throughout history because of their identity (gender, race, religion, etc.). It is recognising that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.

# INTERSECTIONALITY & PRIVILEGE

Intersectionality describes the exploration of how racialization, gender, sexuality, class, religion, ableness and other factors influence the way people perceive individuals, the way one interacts with society, and how one perceives oneself<sup>3</sup> (Hill Collins 2016). Intersectionality shows how these different factors overlap, creating unique experiences of oppression, privileges, and possibilities<sup>9</sup>. The structural dimension of intersectionality focuses on the individual experiences of people at the intersections of multiple identities; a person can be advantaged belonging to certain social categories as a source of social and political empowerment, while simultaneously be disadvantaged belonging to other social categories<sup>10</sup>. Positionality is a concept that refers to the social and political context that forms your identity. These identity markers presuppose your understanding, world view as well as your social mobility and privilege. Hill Collins<sup>3</sup> defines privilege as operating on a personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional level and gives advantages, favours, and

benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups. Privilege is characteristically invisible to people who have it<sup>11</sup>. In fact, privileges are unearned, and they are granted to people in the dominant groups whether they want those privileges or not, and regardless of their stated intent which historically have been white, cis-gendered, heterosexual able-bodied, middle-class individuals who have benefited from the hierarchy of power and oppression. The 'paradoxes of intersectionality' shows how privileged identity categories are used to gain advantage over other identities that relate more to disadvantage<sup>9</sup>. By doing so, people end up reproducing structures that generate inequalities along both identity categories. Hence, our study seeks to analyse how an intersectional understanding of D&I may uncover unhidden truths, implicit inequalities and societal forces that may influence the way in which D&I practices are carried out by companies in the Danish creative industries.

The model in figure 1 visualizes the multiple dimensions of intersectionality. In the center, a person's ability to be seen and heard is shown and the aspects that affect them in individual, societal and corporate settings. The outer ring presents the structures and systems that affect people's opportunities in and beyond these settings.

The existing literature presents a clear paradox on D&I practices concerning the use of minoritized groups, as well as for what reasons they have been included in the process of becoming diverse; related to the ability to be seen and heard. The literature also shows a clear gap in exploring the efforts of D&I in the Danish market accredited to the marginal attention given to socio-political issues due to its welfare system. Current practices have been argued to create an illusion of

fairness, whereby the presence of minoritized groups externally and internally for businesses is seen as enough<sup>8</sup>. The impact of corporate D&I efforts rests on the interconnectedness between the economic, social, and political dimensions of society and current norms constructed through historical-cultural archives. The ability of some groups to both be seen and heard, while others are either seen or silenced is related to the privilege of one's position in society, and how societal structures presupposes specific understandings of the world, as well as the level of social mobility that social groups hold in a system of oppression, power hierarchies and discrimination.

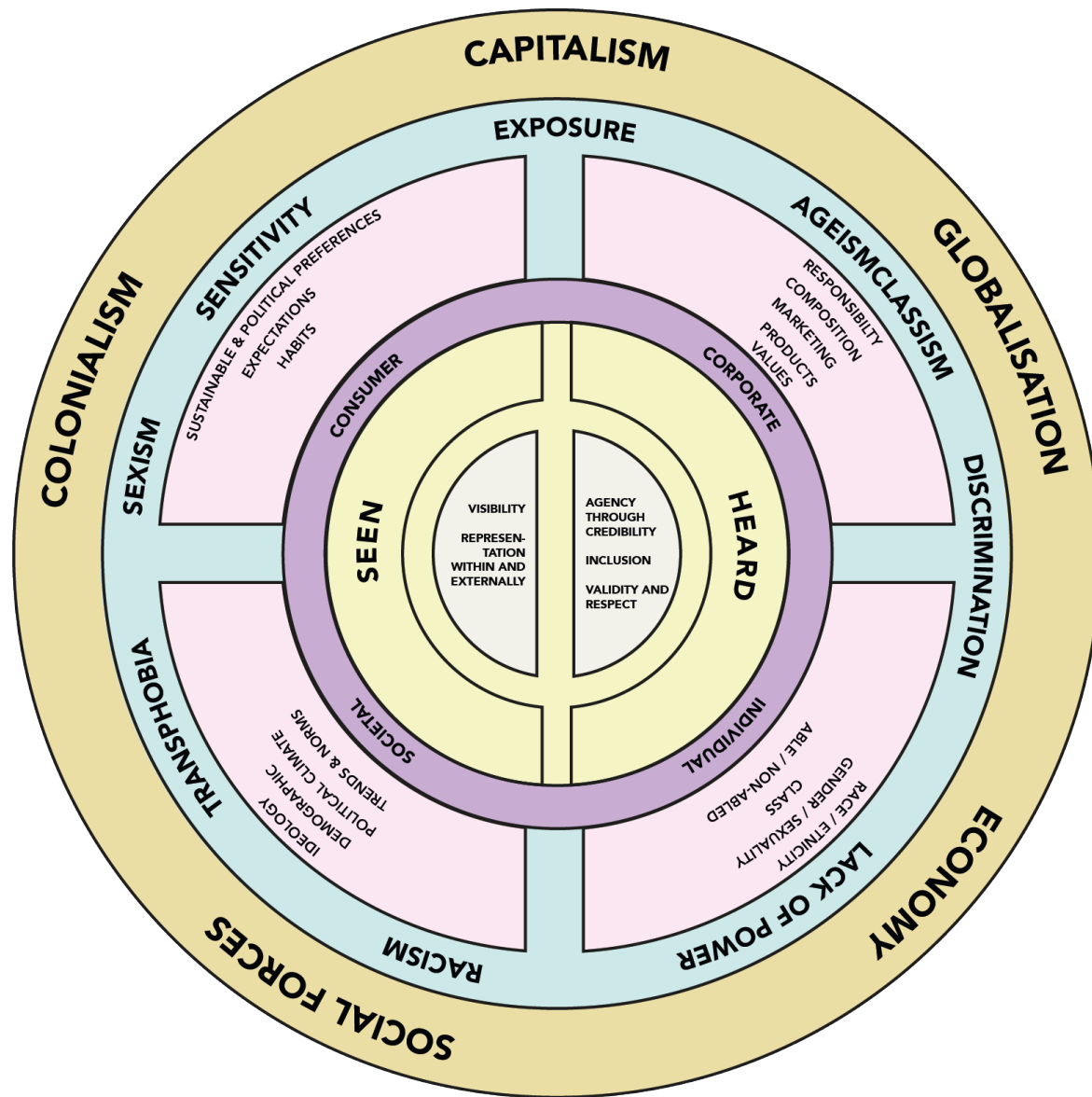


Figure 1. Our conceptualisation of the relationship between corporate practices, individual experiences, and societal forces in setting the scene for D&I. Credit In futurum, 2022, if using this figure.

## Chapter 2

# METHODOLOGY

For the study, we collected evidence of practices and perspectives by examining the intersection between companies, minoritized individuals and structures affecting the D&I. This was done through a qualitative multi-method design consisting of interviews with 7 company representatives from small and medium sized companies in fashion, interior design and the beauty industries combined with content analysis of their digital platforms. Secondly, interviews with four minoritized D&I advisors and practitioners were conducted, as well as four reflection group interviews consisting of 10 minoritized individuals in total. The participants were presented with questions about their experiences of working in the industries, of how they gained access, and what attracted them to the industry in the first place. They were also asked to reflect on current D&I initiatives and their experiences of changes. In order to allow openness, the participating companies have been anonymized and so have the answers from the group participants. Similarly, the identities of the participating companies were not disclosed to the group participants, nor the other way around. This approach allows for a study of how cultures, social forces and structures form and shape the realities of the current D&I practices in the Danish creative industries.

A qualitative thematic content analysis was used for all empirical material collected to systematise themes and perspectives as it allows for the role of language and persuasion in both narratives, experiences,

and feelings to be explored in-depth and systemised for analytical purposes<sup>12</sup>.

Several limitations and ethical considerations are apparent in taking an embedded, people-centred, and intersectional approach based on experiences that moves beyond business models to understand the role of representation, the strategies for inclusion in place and what value diversity holds to the current Danish D&I practices. Our approach has provided deep insights, rich details, and understandings, but as in all social research, the knowledge produced in this research project is not value-free. Ensuring full consent and making each step of the research process participatory is challenging as it consists of a continuous negotiation and giving-up space as multiple realities and ideas may be in contradiction. Therefore, the insights we present only provide windows into greater realities and processes that form the Danish Creative industries' current D&I practices. The study was not able to include and address all identity-markers in the intersectional lens as the identity of participants only covered some markers related to race, sexuality, age, ethnicity and one participant being non-abled bodied. We allowed the participants access to the selection of quotes to ensure consistency with their intended meaning, but we have used the entirety of the interviews as basis for our analysis and recommendations.



## Chapter 3

# UNFOLDING D&I WITHIN THE DANISH CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

This section presents the findings from the study, structured into three focus areas. The first section unfolds how the case companies from the fashion, beauty, and interior & design industries address and engage with D&I. The second section unfolds societal context through understandings and experiences of D&I advisors and practitioners. And lastly, the third section unfolds the lived experiences of 10 minoritized individuals working in the industries.

*Focus 1*

# **CORPORATE COMPLEXITIES OF D&I—INTERVIEWING THE CASE COMPANIES**

# MOTIVATIONS & HINDRANCES

Language, the media and society at large are described as main drivers for why the companies have started to address socio-political issues such as D&I. The head of communication in one of the beauty companies explains the current changes as: "We have more recently taken on diversity, because as a brand today you have to address the growing critical buyers; it is something we should deal with to make [change] go faster but the first step is to take it seriously within your company." The head of CSR from one of the fashion companies on the other hand understands the need for change as one related to being part of staying relevant for the next generation of workforce; being an attractive company within the fashion industry that can continue to grow. The co-founder of a small beauty company explains that the D&I journey have been difficult to enter as: "BLACK LIVES MATTER made us very embarrassed about being two white founders who are claiming stuff, saying stuff, because we felt it was from a very narrow angle. And for example, we wanted to do a photoshoot with a diverse look. And we simply couldn't do so. So, we tried to recruit. And we had to give up."

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One company describes the socio-political movements of society as one that has been uncomfortable, but very necessary: "The waves in our culture such as BLACK LIVES MATTER and #METOO creates an un-comfortability in shaking the ground that we stand on for all of us, (..) and even some of our employees have reacted to it and found it complicated." Many of the companies interviewed also spoke on D&I as being managed by designated department such as Human Resource or Corporate Social Responsibility. Most of the companies found their way into D&I through sustainability and responding to climate change. The intention behind D&I practices for the interviewed companies in conjunction with the new and slow shift from sustainability only being about the environment to one that is also social, provides insight into what dynamics influence the running's of businesses. It reflects how they respond to the needs of society in combination with their own economic motivations, thus deciding what is important to engage with from a company perspective.

The un-comfortability raised by some of the companies also raises questions concerning the exposure of companies to a broader and diverse audience in understanding why D&I is being pushed by specific social groups, as well as what forms of societal or experienced oppression exist to generate waves of push-back. The identity of the companies determines the way in which D&I is approached, and for what reasons D&I should be addressed<sup>9</sup>.

Efforts or internal debates often mirror the positioning and privileges of individuals within the companies, making it highly individual what is deemed necessary. This is a main factor in companies deciding what to do and why to do it, but it is a fragile process if it is mandated by individuals and their experiences in driving internal conversations and developments around D&I topics. Furthermore, it makes it easier for management to decide not to do or say anything, if efforts are carried by individuals, not collective group efforts. All companies mention a big will and ambition to work with D&I but also add complexities, difficulties and internal disagreements as part of the process, highlighting both the newness of this concept in many corporate contexts and the personal, emotional, political, economic and cultural perspectives of entering into this field.

## TARGET GROUPS, REPRESENTATION AND INTERNAL COMPOSITION

Looking at the companies' respective consumer target groups also shed light on the extent to which company practices seek to address D&I. One beauty company describes their target group as mainly women over 45 who's appearances are similar to the founder's, with "Scandinavian features"; blue eyes, straight dark-blonde hair, and clear skin. Another describes their consumer group as people who look like themselves but also younger people. One fashion company describes their consumer group as crossing generations and genders due to

their long existence. One of the smaller fashion companies stands out from the rest as they do not believe in having target groups, because this form of thinking cannot comprehend the diversity of people, as they argue. Interestingly, in speaking on who their products are for, challenges on D&I are revealed by one of the interior design companies:

**“(..) WE ARE A BIT CHALLENGED SOMETIMES IN REGARDS TO DIVERSITY, BECAUSE WE ARE A DANISH DESIGN COMPANY. SO, WHEN FOR EXAMPLE I GET APPLICANTS OF INDIAN BACKGROUND, AND THEY HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DANISH DESIGN HISTORY, THEN THERE’S A DILEMMA (..) [THERE CAN BE AN IDEA THAT] ONLY DANISH PEOPLE CAN UNDERSTAND DANISH DESIGN, WHICH IS NOT TRUE. BUT STILL, THERE ARE SOME TASTES AS TO WHERE YOU GROW UP,”**

explains the head of product development. This reveals nuances related to the challenge of becoming inclusive as it shows who the brand is for, who they want to be for and who can be part of decision making, then. This is a point to be considered for all companies with defined consumer groups as intersectionality shows how the positionality of those in power will shape and define the efforts according to their frame of reference<sup>11</sup>. This is due to the underlying priorities that will influence the extent to which company efforts seek out new diverse audiences as the value of a company guides all actions<sup>13</sup>. The above quote highlights the necessity for addressing your own specific value sets and how they define work culture, history and who can be involved. They inherently reflect internalized biases and expectations to others and it is adamant to work with what those ideas mean when recruiting or inviting new social groups or people with other backgrounds in.

Visual representation of a diversity of people is mostly expressed in campaigns, on company websites, and on other platforms. Often racialization and sexuality are identity-markers used in their diversity efforts and to a lesser extent, body size, age, fluidity of gender and physical abilities. All companies speak of diverse visual representation as a strategic and/or political move in following the trends and political debates of society, thus staying relevant in a crowded digital era. Interestingly, all companies describe diversity

as part of their values while simultaneously reflecting on the fact that their internal company composition is predominately normative. The earlier quote explained one company's internal composition as two white founders. This is something echoed by all companies in which the lack of diversity is best exemplified by the quotes of companies themselves: "We're not diverse at all. We are very white, able-bodied and in the same age group (..)" says the head of product development in a participating interior design company. And similarly in a beauty company:

***"THE DIVERSITY IN OUR TEAM IS BAD. THAT IS SOMETHING WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND IS ALSO OUR SOFT SPOT. WE ARE REALLY TRYING EVERYTHING WE CAN TO WRITE IN OUR JOB POSTS, THE WHOLE ENCOURAGING EVERYONE TO APPLY. BUT IT IS ALSO PART OF THE STORY OF THIS COMPANY THAT ALMOST ALL HAVE BEEN AT THE COMPANY FOR MANY YEARS, SO THAT BIG OF A REPLACEMENT HAVE NOT TAKEN PLACE."***

The head of CSR of a fashion company describes themselves as international, yet they are "Still very white. We don't have any people with disabilities. (..) And I think some of the challenge is that people generally are afraid that if you open this topic, it ends up being necessary to have quotas." The quotes highlight various reasons as to why the internal composition have been more difficult to change but mostly as a dilemma for recruitment and talent attraction.

This is related to a very recent exposure and pressure on the Danish industries to change or address its inherent lack of diversity<sup>8</sup> (Khamis 2020). Now, companies find themselves at a critical crossroads in which new talent, new understandings and new work values are prioritised<sup>14</sup>. It is a specific point of interest for the companies who describe themselves as international, as 'international' appear to predominantly encompass European or American markets and/or employees that have similarities to a Danish workforce and consumer culture. This can be seen as way to negotiate internationality while remaining within the zone of comfort, a point Liu raises on how to uphold the status quo<sup>6</sup>.

## MANAGING DIVERSITY

The work culture and environment of companies are also affected by D&I practices. Several different but similar words are used by the companies to describe their working environments: 'fixed', 'equal', 'flat hierarchy' and 'democratic structure'. The different companies describe their efforts in ways that centre internal communication and establishing a sense of 'belonging' as a way of making sure that societal or cultural issues can be addressed in what is experience as an open forum. For one fashion company, several different strategies are also wanting to be implemented to expand ways of addressing biases, but much have not been implemented because the management level has not felt a need. Another fashion company also tries to work with the standard of 50/50 gender in anything they do. Speaking on capturing employees, and making sure the working environment is safe, they explain that an employee handbook has done some of the work but that it has mostly been about being a 'tight team' (some employees have been there for 20+ years) and creating a good working environment which is about mindful language, conflict resolution, and a procedure for anti-

discrimination, while also working towards an external whistle-blower. One interior design company tries to avoid exclusion by having English as the main professional language and communication platforms that connects all staff. Many of the case companies have created internal methods that seek to allow people to be heard. Efforts mentioned are a sounding-board for reflection on values, a diversity-board in generating new understandings for the whole company, knowledge-sharing with marginalised and minoritized talents to counter status quo, as well as staff workshops on social issues. Furthermore, companies are expanding existing employee handbooks on welfare related to different forms of gender, sexuality, and family constellations; publishing blogs and journals on company websites as a tool of awareness-raising; donating to social projects; and creating political stunts and events to spark confrontation. The mentioned efforts shows that the case companies are different places in their D&I process and several different efforts towards D&I are simultaneously taken by the companies as a means to become more socially responsible. The CSR manager from a fashion company speaks on her ambition to developing and setting

standards for D&I as a means to do more internal measures in mapping representation. This, however, has been met with resistance from management, until the CSR manager framed the topic as a business opportunity. This resonates with other interviews in that efforts can both happen due to political, social, ethical or legal reasons, but that there, in many instances, are economic concerns connected to decision making, hindering many decisions in times of economic turmoil.

Although no formal or informal frameworks have yet been put in place in one of the participating design companies, the head of sustainability speaks on D&I as a topic that needs to be: “normalised because you can’t manage what you don’t measure.” The creative director and co-founder of a fashion company described how they find the process of D&I in Denmark to go slow because they want to have a conversation on “making sure that we are doing it in more aspects from external partners, contractors to campaigns that have an inclusive mindset.” Becoming socially responsive is therefore, a process of addressing both internal policies and external business actions. Hence, the journeys of companies are very different, and one particular action point may work for one company but not for another<sup>4</sup>, a point one of the representatives highlight when mentioning a feeling of being ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t’, in terms of D&I efforts. Questions should be raised on what kinds of value these practices bring to the table, not just for the companies, but for the humans they are tailored towards. Many of them are internal initiatives that, while engaging with specific topics perhaps, do not necessarily address many root causes of the

issues themselves<sup>1</sup>. None of the practices aim to address structures and the hierarchy of power that company practices are built upon and maintain; structures that throughout history have marginalized or excluded minoritized people, who’s current D&I efforts now seek to include<sup>15</sup>. Rather, they remain within the narrative of continuous growth for companies, which in turn does not only require a diverse workforce but also staying on the map of relevance for consumers<sup>16</sup>. In this sense, these industry moves towards D&I can be seen as an escape from a culture and history of discrimination within the creative industries that does not necessarily dismantle said historic systems. The efforts contribute to an upholding of specific standards for what diversity should look like, and how deep it can go as means of escaping internal replacement<sup>9</sup>.

The insights from the company representatives and the analysis of their digital presence exemplify some of the challenges that companies in the creative industries face. And they expose the difficulties in creating representational change and more inclusive workplaces, if structural inequalities and privileges are not addressed. In our own work with companies, we encounter similar hindrances and experience the discomfort some feel when addressing inequalities in practice. Therefore, we need to stress how important and unusual it is for the companies to so freely share their words and thoughts on their own practices.



“

*IF IT'S A TOXIC ENVIRONMENT TO BE IN FOR WOMEN, WHY THEN ARE WE NOT CHANGING THE IMPACT ON WOMEN, EVEN THOUGH WE CLAIM TO CARE ABOUT EQUALITY.*

## Focus 2

# ADDING SOCIETAL, CORPORATE & CULTURAL CONTEXT

The previous section presented perspectives from the companies. To understand the context they operate within, this section presents insights from the interviewed advisors' experiences of being directly impacted as a minoritized person as well as being a practitioner working to create change within the creative industries.

The four advisors are: Diversity, Equity and Belonging (DEB) advisor **Thandi Dyani**; **Fahad Saeed**, Diversity manager and founder of Sabaah, an organisation for LGBTQ+ ethnic minorities; **Mona Mohamed Ali**, founder of FIIRI Agency and D&I editor at Vogue Scandinavia; as well as Inclusive sustainability advisor **Veronica D'Souza**. The four advisors were asked to speak on their work experiences advising Danish companies and unfolding some of their key insights into the current status of D&I in a Danish context.

## ADDRESSING HISTORICAL INEQUALITIES

Visual representation is, by all advisors, described as a matter of living up to existing beauty standard in which the most visual difference is based on skin-colour. The efforts concerning diverse representation is categorised as soft attempts that pleases the new societal demands while also staying within the comforts of companies since diverse representation is seen in campaigns, not necessarily in creative teams or in company composition. Ali explains that: “(...)The industries are sort of painting a picture of ‘we’ve come a long way,’ and it’s great to see more diverse faces. But it’s on the outside. What I think needs to be done now is from the inside.”

Dyani echoes this point in explaining that the professional setting rests on decades of discriminatory representation in broader Danish media, and stereotyping of certain groups that has affected the way certain people are looked upon and used within the companies. The conditions that follow diverse representation in the Danish creative industries are also explained to be based on an unequal playing field

in which the most powerful determines who are seen as credible and who are not. Ali explains that this has been the main reason for creating FIIRI Agency as a way of displaying the full diversity of human beings, an openness not given to herself when she was modelling. The current ability of the industries to capture the full complexity of diverse representation is understood as smaller, but necessary, steps. Importantly, though, these steps inherently affect those who the imagery reflect, because representational efforts often are not followed by deeper action. Whether or not decisions on representations are

***“(...)THE INDUSTRIES ARE SORT OF PAINTING A PICTURE OF ‘WE’VE COME A LONG WAY,’ AND IT’S GREAT TO SEE MORE DIVERSE FACES. BUT IT’S ON THE OUTSIDE. WHAT I THINK NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW IS FROM THE INSIDE.”***

deemed as conscious or unconscious, decisions made by companies still lead to levels of exclusion, as society unknowingly ranks attractiveness based on the status quo<sup>17</sup>. Unpacking the meaning and influence of current efforts related to representation have been a main priority of the advisors. Diverse visual representation is important for the sense of belonging of an individual, but visual representation is dependent on the team behind the ideas and campaigns.

Ali describes how often, there is an issue in the fashion education received as it only represents a small group of people: “(..) I just thought it was bizarre how all the books that we read didn’t have any Black designers, we didn’t have any famous Black photographers. And for me, it’s heart-breaking, because you feel like you don’t see yourself.” D’Souza also explains that her experiences have shown that there is a very fine line between authenticity and discrimination if the team behind the efforts are not diverse themselves as they may be blind to what can reproduce structural inequalities.

Saeed also explains that practices on D&I are shaped by the incentive of companies to change:

**“WHERE REAL CHANGE COMES IN IS WHERE YOU SEE A CHANGE IN STRUCTURE (..) BECAUSE DIVERSITY ONLY ON A REPRESENTATIONAL LEVEL CREATES THIS WHOLE GAP OF INEQUALITY.”**

Change is therefore not only about the appearance of the models hired but also about changing mindsets, the meanings attributed to the appearance and how companies try to deal with this. Opening up how people are seen, showcases the politics of representation, and how editorial decisions of inclusion and exclusion inevitably convey what is celebrated and what is left out in stereotypes and ideals<sup>8</sup>.

## EQUALITY FOR SOME?

In the experience of the advisors, D&I rests on the idea that Denmark is inherently equal and therefore, generic changes to internal company policy are seen as good enough. Dyani speaks on the role of business models in creating wellbeing within D&I by exemplifying efforts of gender equality in her work: "If it's a toxic environment to be in for women, why then are we not changing the impact on women, even though we claim to care about equality." The current practices of the Danish creative industries are described as having been affected by a global conversation concerned with equity, inequality and justice that contests and challenges the current Danish idea of an equal society which have resulted in a previous disregard for D&I. Saeed explains the latter as the main reason for the pushback he has met in his work as a D&I advisor:

"I often experience workshop participants who haven't asked to be there. I experience some resistance (..). So, it's basically translating to them why it matters to address diversity. One is the business approach (..) and the other is a whole conversation about who basically gets to be seen as full human beings in society." Yet, the idea of equality in the Danish society rests on an understanding of everyone in society being similar and having the same position which has erased the voices of many minority groups, and their historic and lived experiences. This erasure ties into the second approach by Saeed on seeing people as full human beings.

Current D&I practices in the Danish creative industries are also described by the advisors as taking place within specific networks that

mainly benefit the few, give opportunity to few and changes very little for the inclusion of more diversity in the creative industries. The identity and experiences of the advisors have provided them with distinctive standpoints

that sheds light on both a society as well as industries that are not organised to integrate minoritized individuals. To counter this, the advisors seek to contest the power within the status quo via their different approaches of demanding the right level of payment for uniqueness (Ali), speaking up in homogenous and less diverse spaces with important agents from companies (Dyani), using the method of storytelling to situate the impacts of their action onto themselves (Saeed), as well as creating a social-anthropological business and advisory (D'Souza). The efforts by the advisors' rests on the vision

to create alternative spaces and practices that incorporate the concept of equity along with inclusion. All the advisors express the need for removing barriers, gatekeepers and expanding to include different voices in the D&I journey to cover different representations and experiences rather than using the same models and tropes to speak on issues related to D&I. The notion of 'opening doors' is also noted by Dyani as being the main purpose of her advisory on racial equity and gathering different leaders in realising the role of companies in embedding social disadvantage and maintaining power<sup>18</sup>. D'Souza exemplifies this as saying "you are constantly aware of the power relationship between the majority and the non-majority. It is something the majority does not have to think about because they benefit from that power imbalance." Saeed further adds that D&I in Denmark is still at a stage of acknowledgment, so the meaning of inclusion is not something anyone is ready to address. Ali also notes this as being the main driver for starting FIIRI; showing that the talent exists as a way of critically questioning

companies claiming that it is challenging to find diversity: "It's about constantly finding a solution to make sure that people are involved and creating a community where we are not waiting for somebody else" (Ali). Efforts by the advisors therefore sheds light on how diversity is nothing without inclusion. Dyani however, also notes that even the word inclusion is not enough to address the systemic oppression felt by subject groups:

***"THE TERM IS VERY MUCH ABOUT INCLUDING PEOPLE IN AN EXISTING HIERARCHY AS IF THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS THE BEST THING WITHOUT UNPACKING WHY THEY WERE NOT THERE IN THE FIRST PLACE (..), SO WE WANT TO CREATE SPACES WHERE WE CAN ALL BELONG"*** (Dyani).

The advisors, therefore, expand the responsibility of companies to one that must account for the intersection of capitalism with that of colonialism, alienation, and the patriarchy to uncover the dimension of D&I being excluded from current practices<sup>6</sup>.

## Focus 3

# THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WORKING IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AS A MINORITIZED INDIVIDUAL

The following section presents the personal experiences of working in the creative industries as a minoritized person. The perspectives were shared in four reflection group interviews and address the efforts and practices of D&I in the Danish creative industries, the industries' impact on their identity, their own experiences as minoritized and marginalised in the industries, and their ability to envision D&I. Most of the individuals have racializing identity markers, while—as a group—simultaneously encompassing experiences and identity markers that span religious backgrounds, nationality/legal status, migratory/refugee experience, queerness, sexuality, gender, family experience, bodily ability, age, class and educational background. All 10 participants have been offered a small monetary fee to counter an ongoing history of emotional labour and exploitation, with the option of donating this fee to a chosen NGO.

## ON THE VALUE OF FEELING SEEN & BEING HEARD

All participants across the three reflection groups described their passion for the creative industries as one related to the impact on culture and identity: "Seeing oneself creates a vision and purpose for people, it generates imagination and an incentive to dream about the impossible." The creative industries have for the participants become a way of climbing up the social ladder as minorities as well as adapting, fitting in and finding oneself in the world, while simultaneously being confronted with not feeling represented in said industries. Efforts to create diverse representation were described by all participants as non-existent until a few years ago, and a matter that intensified with the wave of Black Lives Matter. Many participants that have entered the industries within the last couple of years all explained how the wave created an interesting position for them as people of colour or Black with a newly found popularity or demand. This demand, that companies all of a sudden are 'fighting' over minority people, is not experienced in a comfortable way from the participants, as it 1) adds a level of tokenization (ie., a company just needs 'someone' in order to allude to inclusion) and 2) because an issue because the recent need to include

people is often derived from places of guilt or shame, something the participants then also need to cater to and 'help' managers or industry actors cope with. All participants expressed that regardless of the current efforts by companies and the industries at large, there is still a very narrow understanding of diversity and that it is often a hypocritical one. A participant working in the beauty industry points out that most of the diverse representation is still based on Eurocentric features, other participants speak on unnatural body-measurements while all points out that the current efforts still have to be digestible to the majority of Danish consumers; a point several scholars have also addressed.<sup>14,19</sup> The Black Lives Matter movement both confronted society with an unfolding of a truth different from the reality experienced by the majority population in Denmark, as well as provided a window into the realities of those minoritized and marginalised. Yet, the current efforts of D&I still follow the old script of the creative industries illustrating extremes, playing with aesthetics, and defining archetypes rather than seeking in-depth understanding of why D&I must be a plurality of identities<sup>16, 20</sup>. This makes one of the participants point out that the



industries, although having branded themselves as diverse, there is less “practicing what they preach because diversity is not only color, but also sexuality, age, socio-economic status etc., so it is a Tick The Box mentality in having diversity at the lowest level of the industries but not inviting diversity onto the guest list of mingling with powerful people in the industries.” The quote exemplifies how the effort on diverse representation stops at marketing and branding. This makes another of the participants point out that

***“We are seeing so many different diverse models, but I think it is a very different view when it comes to who is actually in the fashion companies internally: how good are we at representing these different identity markers internally? How many are working in this position? it is fine that we send out a campaign with a plus size model but if they can’t get a job in a company then it does not matter, so we have only changed commercially which also shows that the industry is a weapon against our own existence.”***

Hence, the change towards D&I is described as one that has nothing to do with the industry becoming more accommodative. Rather, powerful actors have felt a pressure to change to increase the diverse representation to continue profit flows while also having difficulty recruiting<sup>21</sup>. This is someone everyone in the reflection groups respond to and highlight as an ever-existing perspective that they navigate on a daily basis in their work lives.

## WHO GETS TO INCLUDE WHO?

All participants describe that they have had a hard time feeling valued and finding their voice in their respective industry. Many feel that there is a lot at stake as their positions are controlled by someone else. One participant explains that “I feel like non-people of colour don’t really realise what it’s like to be a person of colour. I have not experienced full awareness at work, and the higher you go up the chain of command, the worse it gets in terms of people understanding what it’s like to be a person of colour and be a woman.” Another participant speaks on how there is less inclusion of minorities because of the disparity of wealth. The value of minoritized people in corporate settings is described as one related to the ethnicity or skin colour of the person instead of their qualifications, specifically as their minority status in itself means that employers expect them to handle situations or educate others. This makes one participant explain that: ***“You’re Black, so we will ask you!” But Black is not my education, Black is not my qualifications and black is not my entire personality.”***

A majority of the participants speaks on how they have had to work double as hard to be qualified for a higher position in which one participant also explains how minorities that enter the Danish corporate setting in higher positions are faced with judgment compared to a heterosexual, cis-gender, white man who throughout time have been in positions of power. Another participant provides an example from their work setting

in which a manager blatantly says to an intern: “Fat girls can’t wear this item, no offense.” A third example of minoritized and marginalised people being de-valued is regarding payment in which the models and international participants express that they are paid less than their Danish, white colleagues although providing “diverse aesthetics to brand outlook”; and “having years of experience in their field.” This raises awareness on how value is negotiated and prioritised within the industries<sup>16</sup>, something that inherently will reflect on D&I practices and whether or not individuals will feel like they have value in certain spaces. All participants, when presented with the words used by company representatives on their work environment, explain that they are an illusion of how the industries ought to be, and a lingo used for recruitment because it looks good on paper. Although the corporate setting claims to be so-called ‘colour-blind’ and based on equality, some individuals seem to belong and others stand out from the majority<sup>9</sup>.

A participant also accredits the treatment of international talent to a “general distrust of foreigners in Denmark.” Another participant explains that “if you’re not going to give me that opportunity, because I’m not a typical Danish Girl, then what am I supposed to do?” Therefore, many sit with a reality of working in industries that “does not have space for them” as echoed by Ahmad<sup>22</sup>. Although many have been in the industry for long, have built careers for themselves, and have all the right competences, the attitudes towards them are still based on an unbothered-ness to their existence as a denial of the power inequalities inherent<sup>6</sup>.

# THE ROLE OF MARGINALITY IN HOMOGENOUS INDUSTRIES

Navigating the industries as minoritized individuals has meant that the participants often have had to take on the task of D&I themselves. All describe having to speak up or creating their own efforts such as an anti-bias workshop for management although not being paid; models speak up to their agency and tries to set standards for their work conditions; creating their own companies to escape the stress of discrimination; and others describe speaking up in staff settings. Intersectionality makes clear that the lived experiences uncover a process of othering of minorities in the industries<sup>3</sup>.

The participants who work with product development even point towards their product development processes as experiences where their perspectives are excluded or not deemed valuable in the hierarchy of aesthetics they work within. In this sense, there exist a competition between realities seen as legitimate which means current D&I efforts does not stream vertically but horizontal in the industries as **“there is an influx of people at entry level who are not given the opportunity to grow in a company because there is not a will to understand their experiences.”** Yet dealing with human complexity must extend beyond the recruitment level in taking accountability for creating safe spaces but also understand what the current practices rests on<sup>23</sup>. Several underlying structures are at play in the interaction between

the industries and the marginalised. Another participant also speaks on how corporate Human Resource departments feel like **“the engine room of how white privilege operates; people being so entitled to the difference between themselves and those minoritized.”**

A participant with refugee experience talks on feeling invisible in the massive wake of corporate responses to help Ukranian refugees, while that help has not been extended to other refugee groups.

The lived experiences of the participants present a contrast to what has been presented by companies in which their arguments are seen by the participants as justifications for continuing the exclusion of specific groups because of their blindness to privilege<sup>24, 8</sup>. Another participant explains that the fashion industry is based on exploitation and oppression of everyone else than the very few who benefits from its current arrangements: “I have directly experienced how my designs and ideas have been appropriated without credit given.” Hence, intersectionality and critical diversity studies sheds light on the lived experience of oppressive structures or systems, and how they are directly enforced by the actions of companies who reinforces the marginality of the minoritized<sup>9</sup>.

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## Chapter 4

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS & A WAY FORWARD

The findings from the interviews provide complex and insightful perspectives on how D&I practices in the companies and in the industries at large affect minoritized people. The study we have conducted was explorative and does not represent the breath of either initiatives or experiences. However, drawing on the existing literature on diversity, inclusion, social justice and equity, as well as our own study, we propose the following insights and recommendations for companies and organisations in the creative industries on how to engage.



# D&I AS AN ESCAPE FROM A HISTORY OF DISCRIMINATION

*Engaging in D&I-work can be seen as a tool for responding to social and cultural movement without really addressing root causes for inequality. As such, there is a risk that the conventions in the industries that have enabled or even encouraged exclusion, persist. Exposing histories of discrimination highlights the unequal playing field in who gets to decide what D&I is concerned with and why it matters for each company, respectively.*

*The interviewed case companies highlight this when addressing that 1) company composition, especially on management level, is often quite homogenous, 2) that there are internal discrepancies on how 'important' D&I-work is and where and with whom it should live and 3) that it should be executed in a way that doesn't limit commercial perspectives or will add (employer) brand value.*

# RECOMMENDATION

*In order to create a more accessible company and increase the opportunities for minoritized people to thrive, addressing inequalities at all levels, past and present is necessary. This calls for a focus on equity – see further below.*

# 2

## **CORPORATE VULNERABILITY, FRAGILITY & FEAR OF EXECUTION AS A HINDRANCE FOR PROGRESS**

*Even though they have ambitions to continue their D&I efforts, several case companies express a fear around engaging in D&I work (and especially communicating about it), due to the complexities of the issues and a reluctance to being part of larger movements connected to specific social changes.*



*Possibilities are challenged by a fear of being 'called out', doing things wrong, being accused of woke-washing, pink-washing, or facing so-called shitstorms from angry followers on social media. This fear is big and seems complex as it very quickly diminishes possibilities of doing something – and, as several points out, often reflects the fact that the people who feel afraid often don't have any personal issues at stake when commenting or communicating on any of these topics. As the issues affect the personal level, companies can have a difficult time responding correctly as an organisation. This creates confusion, and it can seem difficult to get a strong sense of security or knowledge. Even on a company level, examining personal responses and experiences can therefore be necessary, something that can also contribute to mitigate the clashes between (good) intention and (hurtful) experience.*

# RECOMMENDATION

Addressing and mapping what that fear actually is. Doing that involves asking questions. For example:

- *Is the fear of a shitstorm a fear of being called out by people who have previously been silenced?*
- *Is that actually 'threatening' or just making certain people uncomfortable?*
- *Is the fear of being called out overshadowing the change the company or you personally could support others in making?*

*Accepting one's own limitations and have the courage to feel uncomfortable when dealing with injustices. The impulse to ignore or reject the uncomfortable is a hindrance to change, and allowing the time to reflect creates an opportunity for action.*

# 3

## VISUALITY OF REPRESENTATION VS INTERNALITY OF INCLUSION

*In consumer-facing industries, working with a visual aspect in corporate representation and marketing is a significant way of addressing social and cultural change. Often, however, this is limited to the most 'accepted' identity markers, such as gender, sexuality, body (in terms of size), and ethnicity. In other words, certain types of minority identities are presented, for example cis-gendered white gay men or lighter-skinned mixed people, instead of gender non-conforming*

*or dark-skinned people, and so on. Embodying the complexity of identity and how it affects and embodies all of us is a rarity, often also reflected in the fact that current visual communication does not represent internal company composition. This can mean that knowledge and awareness of D&I issues awareness is limited and decisions are made by individuals who have no experience of minoritization. Combined with the fear of execution, this can suggest why companies tend to stay to certain 'more accepted' tropes in addressing these topics instead of challenging narratives and representation on a grander scale.*

# RECOMMENDATION

*Make sure minoritized people are part of the decision making—and that they feel safe and supported in making those decisions, that should not uphold the status quo. If there are no people to include, use that realization as a starting point for an internal process before engaging in external representation.*

# 4

## MANAGING WHO & MANAGING WHAT

*Whether formal or informal, all companies employ a management system or approach. In a D&I-context, it seems that the case companies that have managed their sustainability efforts for a number of years are a step ahead of the industry. When it comes to taking on new initiatives connected to D&I, they have experience with the trial-and-error culture of embarking on new business journeys into foreign land and with adopting new systems, regulations, data gathering, international policies and frameworks, etc. Overall, there is, however, one big challenge in that several address that working with D&I becomes problematic in terms of said management systems; mainly a lack of managerial approaches to diversity; a lack of systematized frameworks or knowledge; a lack of industry standards or sanctioned approaches as this is seen as 'new grounds'; a focus on the lack of possibility of 'data collection' due to legislative reasons; etc.*

*These perspectives all one thing in common; their managerial perspective of people having to fit into categories, boxes or systems in order to be accounted for and in order to be accepted.*

*Through that lens, D&I work becomes a challenge if one understands D&I as something thoroughly grounded in human complexity and as efforts that, while systematized in methodology or approach, might not be as categorical as many companies and employees are used to. And while there understandably is something deeply satisfying in being able to account for progress in numbers, this perspective begs the questions: who is managing; who is being managed; and what does everyone even think they are managing - that is, what kind of system can account for human complexities? What kind of success parameters or KPI's should we work with if this is a new way of working? How can we go about challenging the status quo of our current practices so they in themselves dismantle barriers.*



# RECOMMENDATION

*Allowing the time to do things properly and to consider complexities and long learning curves.*

*Reflect on whether the approach you have taken to D&I serves people or only the company's reputation.*

# 5

## INVISIBLE INEQUALITY FROM THE TOP, VISIBLE INJUSTICE FROM THE BOTTOM

*An important aspect highlighted by both D&I experts and reflection groups is that the experiences of entering the industry as a minoritized person in recent years is an experience of uncertain promise and opportunity insofar that there is opportunity, but that the circumstances still feel uncertain. Many highlight how they*

*experience a vast gap between themselves and their management level, no matter how many years of experience they have. They experience very different realities and management often don't seem to realize so. This calls for a heightened focus on the fact that many Danish companies operate with an internalized company culture that should be 'hyggelig' (informal and cosy), democratic, calling themselves 'family' etc., all aspects that are important in masking hierarchal structures and potential inequalities. They are, however, often experienced by minoritized people participating in our reflection groups.*

*And as suggested by the experts, seeing how these industries are built on a history of oppression, discrimination and exploitation, and that conversations are taking place more widely in society, minoritized individuals have a heightened awareness on inequalities and unfair treatment – and especially unaddressed inequality. "If you want to have a voice, you can have a voice," says a representative highlighting a complexity between the different interviews; company representatives experience a work culture that is democratic and accessible, but employees do not necessarily have the same experience. This does not always mean that management is not trying to foster openness, but the internal hierarchies does not offer the same access to everyone. Therefore, experiences of exclusion or discrimination can remain hidden.*

# RECOMMENDATION

*Addressing hierarchies and power imbalances is the first step. Claiming to have an informal or family-like work culture is not a guarantee for equal access and voice.*

*Fostering a culture where complex conversation can happen, and where issues are allowed to be addressed even if they cannot be resolved immediately is an important step.*

*Creating a whistle blower system can function as a tool for allowing experiences of injustices to be heard in spite of hierarchical structures.*

# 6

## **WAITING FOR SOMEBODY, SOMETHING, SOMEONE— *SOME SORT OF SOLUTION***

*Time is an ongoing theme in all of the interviews, be it with the case companies, the experts or the reflection groups. Both in the sense of times changing (both for the better and for the worse simultaneously), with society's understanding of topics changing (same) and with the idea that societal, cultural and structural change takes time—a long time. This, however, is expressed with varying sentiments; from the perspective of observing that things are happening or changing, albeit slowly (several case companies), to the hurting and*

*impatience expressed by several people in the reflection groups over the lack of progress, to the ongoing critique from experts on the fact that the change is visual, not structural. Commenting on this, several case companies experience the barrier of lacking something; people, knowledge, data & insights, expertise (or funding to hire it), industry legislation, etc. Interestingly enough, however, it's the barrier that the reflection groups most often call out as an example of hypocrisy—being that it's the privilege of the privileged to stall, while someone will continuously face the consequences or experience ongoing trauma or hurt. The tendency to push responsibilities to others is common, when it comes to social as well as environmental issues. Often companies express how other responsibilities come first, but addressing D&I issues is not only important for the safety of employees, it also allows companies the opportunity to learn and develop.*

# RECOMMENDATION

*Engaging in internal development processes exploring how D&I efforts can build and strengthen company values. Especially for smaller companies, connecting social responsibilities with the core values creates a foundation from which to operate, market, communicate and take action.*

# 7

## “BLACK IS NOT MY EDUCATION”

*With the increased focus on D&I, some minoritized people working in the industries are experiencing new opportunities and attention. While this is seen as positive, some participants express experiences of being viewed as authorities on race or other minority issues. As one puts it: ‘black is not my education.’ Appreciating minoritized employees as more than their minority*



*status is crucial. While personal experience of discrimination may make minoritized individuals more knowledgeable, it does not automatically imply a responsibility to educate others. Similarly, assuming a familiarity or sense of community between people with similar ethnic or cultural backgrounds also reduces the complexity of individual identities. One example of this is expressed by a participant addressing her mixed Caucasian Chinese identity and being subject to derogatory statements about 'the Chinese' referring to Chinese suppliers. The experience of being both 'one of them' and 'one of us' at the same time describes the complexity of minority identities. The experience also exemplifies how company cultures that assumes a homogeneity that allows for racial slurs certainly exist.*

# RECOMMENDATION

*Engage in building a company culture where stereotypes and assumptions are challenged. Whether perceived 'positive' assumptions about knowledge of certain issues or negative stereotypes expressed as a form of shorthand between colleagues, they are part of a structural discrimination.*

## Chapter 5

# A WAY FORWARD: BUILDING CULTURES THROUGH A LENS OF SAFETY & TOXICITY

The recommendations above all point to the need for structural change and not simply managerial systems or more visual representation. The structural issues in creative industries are part of societal and historical developments, of economic systems as well as

aesthetic traditions. And although the structures are societal, they can have very personal effects. A recurring theme runs through the reflection group interviews and conversations with experts and is expressed concisely by Dyani: there is no reason to include new people into existing hierarchies or

industries, if they are not made to belong there. Several of the individuals in the reflection groups highlight how Black Lives Matter and #metoo has made minoritized people more 'sought after' as workforce, models, etc., but still are made to feel like they are exoticized, othered and should be grateful to enter a work culture that potentially has never included them before. Therefore, centring efforts around the concept of safety might prove a valuable lens.

Many companies and individuals are beginning to understand how toxic work environments have been towards women, for example, in the wake of #metoo. That realization can be expanded to include other minoritized people that have worked in corporate culture and industries where white, heteronormative, patriarchal structures prevail. Thus, understanding toxic or unsafe work environments is a key task in creating a culture of belonging. As one person in the reflection groups states, it was the visual side of the fashion industry that lured them in, only to find that it was a toxic work environment to be in on a daily basis. What engaging with D&I is ultimately about addressing inequalities, and to push a human-centred approach to how we work together, why and

how we produce products and who are allowed to make decisions and participate. In other words, who has value.

All of this, however, does not happen if companies and organizations do not dare to challenge the status quo. That is, without the concept of equity being unfolded as a new corporate practice. In a Danish context, D&I in itself is relatively new, but equity and belonging perspectives are slowly beginning to unfold. Equity, in its essence, is the concept of building systems, giving access or adding entry points for people who historically have been excluded. Not just to include them in the first place, but also to actively counter the fact that people who do not 'fit in' will usually have to take on large extra amounts of work before they will be accepted into an established system or work environment. Working with equity in itself, therefore, can often prove a valuable lesson in examining one's own biases, privileges and how far one is willing to go. As such, equity is a step towards changing systems altogether and ensuring that many more people will be able to belong—for the benefit of all of us.

With this report we have sought to explore how current D&I practices of Danish consumer-oriented companies in the creative industries are impacting minoritized social groups. To address this, practices, and perspectives in the intersection between companies, minoritized individuals and structures concerning the D&I agenda needed to be unpacked to better understand the role of marketing and branding, identity and culture, as well as the role of knowledge and business management in developing D&I. The collaborations and participation of company representatives, minoritized D&I advisors and the minoritized individuals working within the Danish creative industries were examined to assist in determining the impact and ability of current D&I practices to not only represent but also encompass the complexity and diversity of identity to give agency which is at the essence of the D&I agenda.

It is clear that the efforts of the companies to pursue D&I have affected the ability of minoritized to feel seen and heard within the Danish creative industries as less have been done to reflect the lived realities of those affected by marginality. These findings raise further question on whether current business models are able to reflect the voices they claim to cater for, and do they accurately represent the complexity

of identities or are they based on what corporate personnel believes diversity to be? Confronting the power and privilege of the status quo in D&I generates discomfort, adding to the challenge of probing deeper into oppressive practices of the creative industries and individual behaviour. However, fleeing from this discomfort in addressing D&I only perpetuates the same inequalities in which minoritized are included based on a hierarchy of value and the benefits they may contribute with because of their appearance. The findings, therefore, suggest that the D&I agenda in the case companies is largely limited to diverse representation in marketing and branding while social inequalities remain unaddressed in corporate settings, reproducing the marginality of those the agenda seek to target.

The questions the report raises, are rooted in deeper discussions on the importance of situated knowledge and representation, as well as reawakening conversations on reflexivity and notions of being spoken for or allowed the autonomy to exist and be heard. The concern for how these industries are changing, is a concern for the wellbeing of those excluded and marginalised. Hence, we are in need of new ways of including people that also changes the values and models of companies, as well as addresses the larger

structures and historical- cultural archives in which our practices are based. The efforts on D&I in **the Danish creative** industries are still fairly new, and therefore are still able to change its course for something better and just. These are important lessons for the future and prompt reflections on the extent to which D&I can ever be achieved without the incorporation of equity.

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# A PROMISE OF DIVERSITY?

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In futurum