

The Fashion Pact's Injustices

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Abstract

Background: The environmental and human consequences of the fashion industry are now well characterized and can no longer be ignored. Clothing consumption is projected to increase from 62 to 102 million metric tons between 2019 and 2029, likely exacerbating those issues (World Bank, 2019). In response to the magnitude of the environmental and human impacts of the fashion industry and the growing concern of consumers in this regard, international initiatives have emerged. One of these is the Fashion Pact, which aims to provide impetus to "bend the curve away from environmental crisis, and towards a more just, durable, and ecologically responsible fashion industry in which all parties are able to thrive." (The Fashion Pact, 2021, p. 6) The Fashion Pact is led by a steering committee of 14 CEOs of fashion companies and co-chaired by the CEO of luxury group Kering, François-Henri Pineault, and Paul Polman, co-founder of IMAGINE, an organization that promotes the involvement of private companies in addressing the climate crisis and inequality. The steering committee is the sole decision-making, i.e. objective-setting, body within the Fashion Pact.

Research issue: Although the fashion industry's value chain can be divided into three tiers: (1) production, (2) logistics and sourcing, and (3) design, sales and marketing (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2011), the Fashion Pact's steering committee only includes representatives from the 3rd tier. The lack of representation of the 1st and 2nd tiers in the pact's leadership constitutes a procedural injustice in its objective-setting process.

Methodology: We will argue that the Fashion Pact's objective-setting process is unfair using Brighthouse and Fleurbaeys's (2010) definition of procedural justice.

Results (argument): Procedural justice refers to justice in a decision-making process. Procedural justice requires that the parties who will be affected by a decision have a voice in that decision. Brighthouse and Fleurbaey (2010) propose that stakeholders who will be the most affected by a decision also have more power in the decision-making, following the principle of proportionality.

It is clear that the absence of stakeholders from the 1st and 2nd tiers of the fashion industry in the Fashion Pact's governance is unfair, first because they represent the majority of workers in the fashion industry (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2011); second, because these stakeholders – particularly those from the production tier – suffer the bulk of the industry's human and environmental impacts. Indeed, 90% of clothes are

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produced in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where political and organizational capacity limits the enforcement of occupational and safety standards. Garment workers are at increased risk of respiratory diseases, cancers, reproductive diseases, work-related injuries, and deaths (Bick et al., 2018). These workers' wages are often below what is required to cover "base necessities" and are predominantly female, subject to disadvantageous gender-based power relations (Kates, 2019) and have low education levels (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2011). Finally, the fashion supply chain is buyer-driven, meaning that it is "[g]lobal buyers determine what is to be produced, where, by whom, and at what price" (Fernandez-Stark et al., 2011, p. 7) leaving little power to the 1st and 2nd tiers. By contrast, the Fashion Pact's steering committee's composition exclusively includes CEOs from the fashion industry's 3rd tier – the most powerful within the industry – whose individual financial, health and symbolic capitals are significant. Thus, considering the principle of proportionality, workers in the 1st tier of the fashion industry, and to a lesser extent those in the 2nd tier, should have a voice, and a strong one, in the Fashion Pact's objective-setting process.

One could argue that the more there are stakeholders in the decision-making process, the more resources (time and money) will be necessary to reach a decision (Himmelreich, 2022). In fact, the efficiency of decision-making is an argument put forward to justify the fact that decisions are made only by the 14 CEOs of the Committee (The Fashion Pact, 2020). While we agree that it would not be efficient for all workers to participate in the Fashion Pact's decision-making process, we argue that mechanisms could be put in place to ensure that their voices are heard, e.g. by including union or non-profit representatives.

Conclusion and relevance: The absence of representatives from the 1st and 2nd tiers of the fashion industry in the Fashion Pact's governance is a procedural injustice and it needs to be addressed for its own sake, but also because it leads to another injustice – a substantive one, that is the absence of human rights objectives in the Fashion Pact. The Fashion Pact's three pillars and objectives are environmental in nature. Thus, although the pact aims to promote a "fashion industry in which all parties are able to thrive", it leaves aside the fashion industry's social justice issues. Importantly, sustainability initiatives must address environmental and social justice issues (Campbell, 2016). Including representatives from its two first tiers – particularly from the 1st one – would reasonably have brought forward the need for such objectives. Worryingly, by focusing on environmental goals, the pact may help perpetuate the injustices experienced by garment workers. However, it is not too late to revisit the Fashion Pact's objectives and objective-setting mechanisms.

Keywords: Fashion Pact, procedural justice, fashion, sustainability, human rights.

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