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Investigating Queer Perceptions of Rainbow Washing in the Fashion Industry

by

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Abstract

Background

Since the Stonewall Uprising in 1969 there has been a notable rise in LGBTQ+ advertising as companies have recognised the commercial potential of this market segment. However, this increase has been accompanied by performative activism and inauthentic engagement, referred to as rainbow washing. This research aims to explore queer perceptions of this advertising and its broader implications on identity, representation, and consumer trust.

Methods

Fourteen LGBTQ+ identifying participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Participants represented varying genders, including male, female and transgender, and sexual orientations such as gay, lesbian and bisexual. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 core questions and subsequent follow up questions. To ensure a shared understanding of the concept, participants were provided with visual stimuli and a brief explanatory overview of rainbow washing prior to discussion.

Results

Thematic analysis revealed four main themes including, *Clothing and Identity*, *Representation*, *Authenticity* and *Future aspirations*. These themes reflect both emotional and critical responses to current fashion advertising practices.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study contributes to the limited literature on LGBTQ+ consumer perspectives in the context of rainbow washing and the fashion industry. By highlighting the psychological effects of inauthentic branding, it reveals the need for more genuine and inclusive marketing strategies.

The findings offer a foundation for future research and advocate for a more ethical approach to LGBTQ+ representation in fashion marketing.

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List of Abbreviations

BPS – British Psychological Society

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

LGBTQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and other

UAL – University of the Arts London

Statement of Originality

I, *Alexandra Damar*, certify that:

- This is an original and individual piece of work and no part of this has been written by anyone else.
- I have acknowledged (appropriately referenced using the APA referencing system) all sources and citations.
- No section of this assignment has been plagiarised.
- This work has not been submitted for any other assessment.

Alexandra Damar

09-05-2025

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alexandra Dumar". The script is cursive and fluid.

09-05-2025

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

In 2009, President Obama officially recognised June as Pride Month in the US (Lee, 2022), a celebration rooted in the 1969 Stonewall Uprising. This was a pivotal moment in LGBTQ+ history when activists resisted police brutality and began the modern queer rights movement. Decades later in 2014, the first legal gay marriages took place in the UK (Marriage [Same Sex Couples] Act, 2013). In the following year, same-sex marriages were recognised in the US (BBC, 2015), resulting in 26 million Facebook accounts putting the Pride flag on their profile pictures to show solidarity (Dewey, 2015). The economic influence of the LGBTQ+ community is growing and as the attitudes towards the community are changing, there is a potential to market towards this newly accepted group (Coombes & Singh, 2022). Corporate marketing strategies targeting LGBTQ+ consumers have shifted over time, reflecting societal changes in acceptance and visibility. However, recently there has been an emergence of campaigns which may not reflect a company's deeper organisational values and contain a lack of long-term advocacy and support. These campaigns are often referred to as 'rainbow washing'. This is where a brand uses LGBTQ+ iconography in advertising to signal support, without taking meaningful action to further back the community (Champlin & Li, 2020).

Authentic advocacy and rainbow washing can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between. Some brands have prioritised their queer consumers and have positively impacted the community. For example, MAC's VIVA GLAM lipstick, available all year round, has donated 100% of proceeds to LGBTQ+ and AIDS organisations since 1994 (MAC Cosmetics, n.d.). In addition, Levi's brings out a pride collection every year and has been supporting the community in a variety of ways since 1982, such as, donating to the first AIDS clinic, participating in Pride parades, joining the UN Global LGBTI Standards of Conduct for Business and continuing to educate employees, as well as customers, about LGBTQ+ rights and issues (Levi Strauss &

Co, n.d.). On the other hand, brands such as H&M have been accused of rainbow washing due to their lack of transparency for donations and geographical contradictions (selling Pride merchandise in countries with anti-LGBTQ+ laws) (BBC, 2018).

While some corporations continue to take part in performative allyship, this contrasts rising global anti-LGBTQ+ political rhetoric and legislation. While LGBTQ+ rights have advanced in many Western countries, they are increasingly faced with opposition from conservative and far right movements which prioritise ‘traditional values’. For example, the US President, Donald Trump, declared there were only two genders (male and female) and the Trump administration (2025-present) have rolled back diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) programmes in the federal government (Wendling & Epstein, 2025). In Italy, the Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, has undermined LGBTQ+ rights by restricting same-sex parental rights, banning surrogacy domestically and its use abroad by Italian citizens, as well as limiting IVF to heterosexual couples (Rizzitelli, 2023). Similarly, Hungary’s 2021 ‘anti-LGBTQ+ propaganda’ law prohibits the “depiction and promotion” of “diverse gender identities and sexual orientations” in public communications such as public education, media and advertisements (Amnesty International, 2024). Fewer companies published Pride campaigns during Pride month 2022 compared to 2021 (Basak & Piper, 2022), suggesting the growing rhetoric is changing support levels for the queer community. Nonetheless, these regressive policies around the world have made the LGBTQ+ community a popular topic of discussion both in parliament and in society.

Despite this visibility, the psychological and cultural impact of rainbow washing on LGBTQ+ individuals, is under researched. There has been previous research on rainbow washing, particularly with regards to the major corporations which participate during Pride

month, but less specifically on fashion related companies and their effects. Additionally, most of the previous research consists of qualitative content analyses of advertisements or social media campaigns and less involve gaining insight from those in the community.

Fashion is key to how we express our identities and for some queer people, it is an indicator of sexuality, gender and preferences (Rudd, 1996). Fashion plays a role in queer subcultures, visibility of the community and has historical ties to queer moments in history such as the AIDS crisis (Picardi, 2020). Nevertheless, the fashion industry's exploitative or superficial engagement with LGBTQ+ consumers remain overlooked.

This dissertation investigates the perceptions of rainbow washing in the fashion industry from LGBTQ+ members. The links between sexuality, gender and fashion are discussed in relation to explicit queer marketing strategies. A qualitative research design was carried out through semi-structured interviews with 14 LGBTQ+ members (aged 20-31). Included were lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals, who were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Topics discussed include clothing and its relation to sexual identity and gender, rainbow washing in the fashion industry, Pride month and the use of the Pride flag. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis.

This dissertation begins with a literature review critically analysing previous literature surrounding the topic. The methodology is then explained, followed by the results of the data analysis. A discussion is then presented following analysing results and comparing with previous literature's findings, as well as limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

Clothing is a non-verbal form of communication which displays identity by showing individuals thoughts and feelings through codes and signifiers (Akdemir, 2018; Angerosa, 2014). Queer identity can be complex so dress can be symbolic for expressing this to others (Rudd, 1996). Recognising this, fashion brands have increasingly used the symbolic power of clothing to align themselves with social justice causes, including LGBTQ+ rights. This chapter reviews previous literature on the relationship between clothing and identity, the rise of corporate social responsibility, and the implications of brand activism on LGBTQ+ visibility and representation. Together, this literature offers a critical foundation for the present study.

2.1 Social Identity Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Virtue Signalling & Tokenism

The etymology of the word *queer* is uncertain, but its meaning has evolved significantly over time. Initially used to denote something ‘strange’ or ‘eccentric,’ it came to imply a sense of being ‘unwell’ in the 18th century. In the 19th century it then became associated with homosexuality (Cresswell, 2021). Today, in Western society, the commonly accepted definition involves a person who has a sexual or gender identity which does not correspond with traditional ideas of sexuality or gender (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Despite these shifts, the term has consistently been linked to a sense of otherness and a position outside of social norms. Throughout history, communities have formed among individuals who do not conform to dominant societal norms, for example, the development of gay communities (Wilkinson et al., 2012).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains that in many social situations people don’t think of themselves as individuals, but rather as a group, which can impact self-definition and interpersonal behaviour (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Social movements, such as the LGBTQ+

rights movement, play a part in the construction of new identities and cultural codes that can be received by the whole community (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Taylor et al., 2009).

Previous research has found that gay individuals use clothing to express their sexuality and signify group belonging (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005; Holliday, 2001; Rothblum, 1994; Taub, 2003). Before gay liberation, clothing choices and mannerisms were used to communicate sexuality subtly and safely between the community (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005). However, Feinberg et al. (1992) found that despite clothing carrying meaning, it is too simplistic to say that meaning always reflects social identity. There are other contextual components individuals consider when dressing such as limited clothing choices, brand perceptions and relations to personality.

While Social Identity Theory highlights how group affiliation influences self-expression, Social Cognitive Theory builds on this by exploring how external influences, such as media and symbolic representations, can shape personal identity and behaviour. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) discusses the links between behaviour, environmental factors and personal factors (Nabavi, 2012). Within personal factors there is self-efficacy which is concerned with individual's beliefs of their own capabilities. The theory explains that individuals observe other behaviour and environmental factors which influence their self-efficacy and, therefore, self-perception (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2015). The media presented by companies, that individuals consume, can alter behaviours and perspectives on topics and themselves, either intentionally or not (Pajares et al., 2009). New ideas, behaviours and social practises are distributed by symbolic modelling to foster a global consciousness (Bandura, 2009). Shanafelt (2008) explains that flags can evoke social solidarity or be a symbol of separation, for example, most individuals understand a rainbow flag as a symbol of Pride.

This powerful icon can bring the community together through its symbolic meaning and rich cultural history.

Building on this understanding of media's role in shaping identity and social norms, it is important to recognise how companies harness symbolic representations, not only to foster inclusivity, but sometimes to strategically enhance their image through performative acts. In the past few decades, companies often participate in virtue signalling, which is when actions are solely motivated by the wish to exhibit good social conscience or political convictions to gain recognition and approval (Oxford University Press, n.d.). This performative activism is done with the aim to alter public perceptions of the company, for example to make them seem LGBTQ+ friendly through rainbow washing. Tosi & Warmke (2016) call this concept '*moral grandstanding*' and argue it is actively harmful to the functioning of public discourse because it impairs our collective ability to improve moral beliefs and promote healthy change.

Virtue signalling often involves featuring public figures who belong to minority groups or are associated with particular social justice issues, to make a brand seem inclusive. This performative allyship falls under *tokenism*, which is when diversified characters or content are incorporated in campaigns, for their appearance rather than genuine representation (Van Beers, 2022). Diversified minorities might be present, but their lived experiences are not reflected, allowing for problematic stereotypes to arise (Van Beers, 2022; Carbone, 2021). Kanter's (1977) tokenism theory, which focused on women in the workplace, proposed that when tokenism occurs, those identified as 'tokens' often feel further marginalised, experience increased scrutiny, and face intensified cultural boundaries rather than greater inclusion or acceptance. Therefore, the use of individuals to convey a politically just image can have contrary effects on those individuals. This often happens in rainbow washing campaigns where

LGBTQ+ models or icons are used as the face of the campaign. However, Yoder & Sinnett's (1985) case study on tokenism found that male tokens did not experience marginalisation in the workplace but rather received additional support and progressed more rapidly than their non-token counterparts. This suggests that the negative consequences of tokenism cannot be attributed exclusively to underrepresentation.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

The tension between appearance and authenticity in tokenistic practises highlights the broader struggle of how brands engage with social issues. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies aim to be a framework for ethical, meaningful engagement with communities. CSR is the commitment by a business to act ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life for its workforce, local community and society at large (WBCSD, 1998). It emphasises actions and consequences, for example, better brand reputation therefore increased sales, rather than truly changing company values (Wettstein and Baur, 2016). In addition, there are different levels of CSR depending on activity related to support of a community (Kim, 2023). Furthermore, 'CSR fit' is the extent to which a CSR programme is congruent with a company's core business, image or target market (Kim & Ferguson, 2019). When companies have a high CSR fit, they are perceived to be more authentic (Kim, 2023), highlighting the importance of the relationship between brand perception and activism. However, the definition for CSR is not finalised due to varying approaches of understanding (Van Marrewijk, 2003).

Vredenburg et al. (2020) explored brand activism as an emergent marketing strategy due to the rise of CSR tactics. They define brand activism through four characteristics including brand purpose (beyond economic interest), engaging with controversial or political topics,

having a progressive or conservative stance and their corporate practises aligning with purpose and values. They argue activist marketing is important for market success as it changes brand perceptions and it is a potential for wider social change. Similarly, inauthentic brand activism is unethical because it is misleading and can cause a sense of distrust from customers and limit social change. However, this work focuses on business objectives and how companies can market to their consumers better. While this is important, it does not recognise the personal effects of brand activism on consumers both in the LGBTQ+ community and not.

2.3 Rainbow Washing

The growing adoption of CSR strategies by brands has been accompanied by the rise of inauthentic activism which is often driven by a desire to enhance social approval rather than effect meaningful change. Rainbow washing is when a brand uses LGBTQ+ symbols and iconography in advertising to signal their support, without taking meaningful action to further help the community (Champlin & Li, 2020). It is derived from the term *woke washing* which refers to the appropriation of social activism language in marketing (Dowell & Jackson, 2020). Other well-known examples of this include greenwashing (environmental), pink washing (breast cancer) and racial justice advertising. With rising support from younger generations regarding the community, brands have begun to implement their support into advertisements for both profit and popularity (Foret, 2023; Carroll, 1991; 1999). Rainbow washing strategies commonly involve branded packaging, public statements of support, temporarily adopting Pride related profile pictures and incorporating queer symbols or featuring LGBTQ+ individuals in campaigns (Rowe, 2023). Such tactics often rely on overt visual elements, including the Pride flag and slogans like “love is love,” to signal inclusivity. Nonverbal symbols, particularly the rainbow flag, are frequently used to reinforce verbal messaging and provide contextual depth in content (Um et al., 2015). However, the symbolic use of the

rainbow flag is not universally interpreted as a mark of genuine support. Wolowic et al. (2017) found that while LGBTQ+ individuals may associate the flag with positive meanings and feelings of safety, it does not inherently guarantee authentic allyship or institutional commitment. Some radical gay groups consider the symbol a commodified, white identity which does not consider the diversity of the community (Hauksson-Tresch, 2021).

In addition, Nölke (2018) analysed LGBT-specific media advertisements and found that the representation in these types of campaigns is predominantly focused on white, healthy, middle-class, gay men. These portrayals in campaigns often reinforce previous beliefs about the LGBTQ+ community, which further marginalise groups who are already underrepresented in mainstream media, such as lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender individuals. This type of stereotyping can become harmful because it leads to expectations about the social group and restricts opportunities for that group (Grau & Zotos, 2016). This suggests not all LGBTQ+ marketing appeals to the whole community and might have different impacts on consumers.

Given the complexity of symbolic representation and the selective portrayals within LGBTQ+ advertising, it is important to explore how consumers perceive such campaigns, particularly in relation to the authenticity of brand support. Previous research has investigated LGBTQ+ advertisement style and how it effects perceived rainbow washing. Wulf et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative study examining LGBTQ+ support in brand advertisements by comparing the use of vague messaging and imagery. Participants were shown different advertisements with varying levels of LGBTQ+ imagery and vagueness of claim. They found that concrete messages of support were less deceiving to customers, resulting in better brand and ad evaluation. In addition, the use of the Pride flag decreased perceptions of rainbow washing for both non-LGBTQ+ individuals and those who are in the community. However,

similar to many other studies, this work focused solely on gay and lesbian couples and did not address other minority groups within the LGBTQ+ community or their associated flags and symbols. Furthermore, the advertisements predominantly featured either lesser-known or fictional companies, therefore neglecting to acknowledge the established reputations of recognised brands, which could influence the reception of LGBTQ+ campaigns.

Ignatzek & De Jong (2022) also explored brand perceptions of LGBTQ+ images in fashion advertising and the impact on brand authenticity. This study used a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews, asking questions regarding perception, authenticity and preferences. They found that participants perceived the brand positively, neutrally or negatively. Those who perceived it neutrally appreciated the inclusion in the advertisements but were sceptical of the brands intentions due to past experiences with other fast fashion brands who were only inclusive during Pride to make a profit. This suggests individuals cannot form solid perceptions about brands without consistent support beyond Pride month. This study however used images for the advertisements which were based on common and stereotypical displays of the LGBTQ+ community, meaning if other members of the community, such as transgender individuals were used, perceptions could be different.

While previous research has examined consumer perceptions of LGBTQ+ advertising, it often overlooks the distinct perspectives within the LGBTQ+ community itself. As individuals interpret the world through the lens of their past experiences and predispositions (McLeod et al., 2017), queer individuals, who are shaped by unique lived experiences, may perceive targeted advertising in ways that differ significantly from their heterosexual counterparts.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature

While existing literature on rainbow washing includes both qualitative and quantitative studies, much of this research predominantly centres around brand advertising and marketing strategies, rather than the lived experiences or psychological impacts on individuals. Studies grounded in social identity theory and social cognitive theory, related to fashion and clothing as forms of self-expression, particularly emphasise the significant role of dress and symbolic representation in the construction and communication of identity. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how fashion brand's rainbow washing campaigns are perceived by members of the LGBTQ+ community and exploring the implications on queer visibility and representation.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Fourteen participants, aged 20-31, were interviewed. Participants were members of the LGBTQ+ community, including five lesbians, four bisexuals, two gay people and three queer people. Pronouns of participants included she/her (5), she/they (3), he/him (2), non-binary (3) and any pronouns (1). Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling, using existing queer networks through personal connections and university. Due to the personal nature of the study, previously knowing participants helped aid a rapport and ensure comfort. To recruit participants, they were directly contacted through email or Instagram (see Appendix C).

3.2 Methods & Materials

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative approach was chosen (Creswell & Poth, 2017) to investigate the perceptions of rainbow washing in the fashion industry by the LGBTQ+ community. Participants engaged in one to one, semi-structured interviews (self-designed) comprising of 14 core questions. Follow-up questions were asked based on responses to allow for exploration of topics and further data. Questions discussed demographics, clothing choices and rainbow washing. Prior to the rainbow washing questions, participants were presented with three visual examples of rainbow washing (See Appendix C), accompanied with a brief explanatory overview to ensure understanding of the concept for those unfamiliar. Interviews were recorded on Microsoft Teams and transcribed.

3.2.1 Interview stimuli

Three images were shown of pride campaigns which could be perceived as rainbow washing. The stimuli featured campaigns from Marks & Spencer (2019), Adidas (2022), and

H&M (2018), each representing different forms of rainbow washing. M&S's 'LGBT Sandwich' was selected due to its viral notoriety, increasing the likelihood of participant awareness. Adidas's campaign, although featuring queer artists and models, was included to highlight the disconnect between its branding and corporate practices. H&M, a fast-fashion brand known for superficial LGBTQ+ advocacy, showed surface-level inclusivity. Together, these cases demonstrated the broad range of rainbow washing.

3.3 Procedure

Interviews took place online via Microsoft Teams with the information sheet, consent form, debrief sheet and interview stimuli being sent to participants at the beginning of the interview. Once they read through the information sheet and consent form and consent was given, the recording began. Verbal consent was confirmed, due to the anonymous nature of the study. The interview and data withdrawal process were then explained, and a personal pseudonym was given to each participant. Fourteen core questions were asked in an informal nature with a conversational tone (See Appendix C). Once the interview was complete, the recording was stopped, and participants were asked to read a debrief form.

3.4 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was used to identify common themes in the data to develop an understanding of queer perceptions of rainbow washing. The interview recordings were automatically transcribed using Microsoft Teams and then manually edited to correct any errors in the transcripts.

The coding process was conducted in Microsoft Word over three iterative stages. During the initial round, I familiarised myself with the data, generating preliminary codes to highlight

noteworthy segments. In subsequent rounds, I refined these codes in a separate Word document, clarifying their definitions and beginning to organise them into broader categories. Following this, I developed mind maps to visually structure the relationships between codes and emerging themes. The sub-themes were continually reorganised into broader overarching themes until a finalised structure was established in which each theme coherently encompassed its associated sub-themes.

3.5 Research ethics

This research adheres to the ‘University of the Arts Code of Practice on Research Ethics’ and the ‘BPS Code of Human Research Ethics’. Ethical approval was sought and granted by the Psychology Research ethics Panel on 13.02.25. Given the sensitive nature of this research, which engages with personal identity and emotional experiences, ethical protocols were implemented to ensure participant comfort and autonomy. These measures included: (1) emphasising their right to decline answering any question, (2) explaining their right to terminate the interview at any time without penalty, (3) allowing data withdrawal up to two weeks post-interview, and (4) providing access to support services via the debriefing sheet. To further reduce potential distress, interviews began with neutral introductory questions, allowing participants to gradually begin the discussion before addressing more complex topics.

3.6 Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge my position in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2019), as a queer-identifying, cis-gender, white researcher, which may impact participants' perceptions and therefore their responses. I maintained awareness of the possible power dynamic between researcher and participants and how my tone and interpreted emotions could

influence answers. To reduce these effects, I aimed to speak in a neutral tone, avoided leading questions, and consciously mirrored participants' language and perspectives to avoid imposing my own opinions. By affirming their views and asking follow-up questions based on their expressed experiences, I aimed to encourage openness while minimising researcher bias.

4. Results

This research aims to explore queer perceptions of rainbow-washing within the fashion industry, with particular focus on ideas such as clothing and self-expression, the perceived impact of rainbow-washing campaigns, their influence on queer visibility and representation, as well as broader reflections on the topic. As an explorative study, the themes were not predetermined but emerged from the participants' narratives, allowing the data to guide the direction of the analysis rather than being shaped by set research aims.

This section will cover the identified themes and sub-themes, discovered through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019). Thematic analysis resulted in four key themes with two to four subthemes, respectively: *Identity and Visibility*, *Representation*, *Authenticity* and *Future Aspirations*. A themes table has been used to present a summary of the themes and subthemes identified (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. *Themes Table of Queer Perceptions of Rainbow Washing in the Fashion Industry.*

Identity and Visibility	Representation	Authenticity	Future Aspirations
Clothing and Identity	Focus on Cis-Gender Men	Brand Motivation	Transparency
Sexuality/Gender Expression	Lack of Transgender representation	Pride Month	Workforce
Symbolic meaning of Pride Flag	Stereotyping	Rainbow Washing	
	Diversity in the Community		

4.1 Identity and Visibility

This theme explores how participants understand and express their queer identities through fashion, and how visibility is experienced both personally and socially. Clothing, expression and participants views on the Pride flag are explored in this theme.

4.1.1: Clothing and Identity

Participants spoke about how clothing affected their confidence and is influenced by their personality, for example, one participant said they “feel more confident” when they think they “look good” in their outfit (P1). Another participant explains clothing is “a very large part of ... self-expression” (P12)

Other participants however were negatively affected by their clothes. Their confidence decreased and they felt “self-conscious” wearing clothing they felt didn’t reflected them positively (P7). In addition, “wearing Pride stuff” made them “feel alienated, not seen” (P4), highlighting the need for clothing to portray one’s identity.

4.1.2: Sexuality/Gender Expression

Participants said clothes were a signifier of their sexuality and that they might “dress gay” even if “it’s not necessarily conscious” (P1). Other participants explain the clothes they wear express their “sexuality and personality” (P5) and are a form of “self-expression” (P12).

Another perspective emerged from gender queer individuals, who explain “gender is more of something [they’re] conscious of” (P12). Participant four explains how clothing is a signifier for their gender:

“As like a trans person, to express gender identity, as especially like pre medical transition [clothing is] the only kind of clue you can give people to hopefully get ... perceived in the way you want to be perceived” (P4)

4.1.3: Symbolic Meaning of Pride Flag

The Pride flag means different things to different participants. Some see it as “a symbol that is there for the whole gay community” (P4), creating a sense of togetherness and connection. It could be seen as an “indicator of safety” (P10) for some, particularly noting where and when the flag is used.

Other participants expressed fewer positive attitudes toward the usage of the Pride flag, explaining its use on clothing products feels “like you have to identify yourself” (P4). The symbol highlights the otherness, rather than allowing queer people to integrate.

Another participant reflected on the use of the flag, emphasising its often overlooked historical and symbolic significance, and questioned the intentions behind its presentation:

“It's reducing the flag down to, like, just being a rainbow, when it's not just a rainbow, it is symbolic” (P6)

4.2 Representation

Participants reflected on the representation of queer individuals in mainstream media, particularly within the context of rainbow washing campaigns. This theme covers discussions around which identities are included or excluded, the persistence of stereotypical portrayals, and the extent to which the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community is acknowledged.

4.2.1: Focus on Cis-gender Men

Participants spoke about the main queer representation being cis-gender, white, “homosexual men and [their form] of queer culture, as opposed to like the wider community” (P6). They discussed how this was “misrepresenting” (P9) when the media only shows “queerness that is palatable” (P3).

4.2.2: Lack of Transgender Representation

Following on from the previous sub-theme, participants said there was “barely anything that includes trans people” (P12) when talking about Pride campaigns and what clothing is available for transgender people. Several participants highlighted the lack of genuinely inclusive products in mainstream fashion. One participant described it as “absolutely outrageous” that there is “no affordable underwear for trans people” (P4), highlighting how the industry often overlooks the basic needs of the community. Another pointed out that while unisex clothing has become increasingly “trendy”, the models representing these products are rarely queer, making it feel like a missed opportunity for authentic representation (P12).

4.2.3: Stereotyping

Participants frequently critiqued the limited and inauthentic portrayals of queerness in mainstream media. One described these depictions as “narrow stereotypes” (P6), while another noted they “don’t really connect with [their] perception of [their] own queerness” (P1). This highlights a disconnect between lived experiences and media narratives. For some, these representations felt more like the work of “corporations” than “gay people” (P7), reflecting a broader sense that queer identities are being commodified for commercial gain rather than genuinely represented.

4.2.4: Diversity in the Community

Participants acknowledged that the queer community is inherently diverse and cannot be encapsulated by a singular representation. It was noted, it is a “broad” space (P10), comprising of “very diverse pool of people” with varying identities and experiences (P11). Participants suggested this diversity challenges portraying the LGBTQ+ community as one.

4.3 Authenticity

When discussing rainbow washing the topic of authenticity and intentions of brands were commonly mentioned. Participants discussed brands motivations when it came to Pride campaigns and the commercialisation of Pride month.

4.3.1: Brand Motivation

Some participants felt brand's goal is often a "money grab" (P6), to profit off the community. One participant went on to explain they thought brands were "exploiting" the queer community to "hop on the trend" during Pride month (P13). This reflects participants views that Pride campaigns are not motivated by supporting the queer community but focus on monetary gains.

Another participant explained a company's motivations were made clear from the reputation and the systemic history of the brand, rather than the current campaign:

"The same people [are] holding the company, so are they actually doing the work or are they just trying to keep selling?" (P11)

This reflects participants' views that, for a campaign to be perceived as authentic, it must align with the brand's core values over time and be supported by consistent, ongoing commitment.

4.3.2: Pride Month

Participants observed a notable increase in Pride-related campaigns during the month of June and reflected on how this seasonal emphasis influences perceptions of brand authenticity. They expressed concerns about having a "false sense of security" when brands support the queer community during Pride month (P3). This is because outside of June some

brands marginalise the queer community rather than show consistent support. Another participant commented on the “lack of understanding” surrounding Pride month and its history, suggesting companies are not properly researching queer history before benefitting from it (P12).

The temporal concentration of Pride-related campaigns in June was also noted by participants. Some expressed the view that limiting support for the queer community to a specific period created “separation” (P3) and makes the queer community seem “so different” (P4).

On the other hand, some participants viewed the temporal focus on LGBTQ+ Pride as valuable, describing it as “a useful tool for getting conversations going” (P1). They emphasised that, given the ongoing stigma surrounding queerness, having a “designated part of the year” dedicated to visibility can foster greater social acceptance and understanding of the community (P3).

4.3.3: Rainbow Washing

Participants spoke about how rainbow washing’s exploitative nature does not benefit the queer community. They argued it “commodifies [queer people] rather than educates” cis-gender, heterosexual people (P3). It was widely felt amongst participants that rainbow washing is one-dimensional and “feels opportunistic” (P11).

4.4 Future Aspirations

When reflecting on LGBTQ+ representation in media and marketing campaigns, participants offered suggestions and aspirations for future developments. Several emphasised the need for change in how the fashion industry engages with LGBTQ+ communities, particularly in relation to transparency and internal company structures.

4.4.1: Transparency

Participants desire more information to be available regarding Pride-related campaigns. One participant expands, explaining information needs to be “signposted” on “the clothing tag” or with “the barcode” (P4). This demonstrates how easy participants believe it would be to educate and be transparent with how companies are supporting the queer community like they claim to. Other participants noted that larger corporations “aren’t transparent with people” (P10). They suggested that by withholding information or failing to present the full context, these companies may exaggerate the benefits of their campaigns, ultimately weakening their impact. Some even suggested the lack of transparency was to distract customers from other issues within the company:

“[Companies] try to throw it in your face, as a way to like, divert you from what they actually do” (P14)

4.4.2: Workforce

Many participants emphasised the importance of “uplifting queer voices on their teams” as a means of ensuring more meaningful campaigns (P3). These would be able to reflect lived experiences and “the actual struggles of the community” (P14) because the target audience are being included in the creative process. Discussions frequently highlighted company structures, particularly the inclusivity of the “recruiting process”, as a critical factor in shaping the future of LGBTQ+ marketing (P14).

The need for internal education and support was also mentioned by participants. One participant explained if even support is external, queer staff could still be marginalised, stressing the need for support to be “reflected internally too” (P10), through “educating [companies] own staff” (P12).

Some expressed the need for queer brands to be promoted to benefit the community. One participant would prefer “gay [brands get] amplified rather than normal brands become gay” (P12), further supporting the notion that queer culture needs to come from people within the community. The “core values of the company” need to reflect queer acceptance for campaigns to be authentic and impactful (P14).

5. Discussion

Extensive prior research has established a strong connection between clothing and sexuality (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005; Holliday, 2001; Rothblum, 1994; Taub, 2003). Building on this foundation, the present study sought to explore queer perceptions of rainbow washing within the fashion industry. It examined whether such marketing practices carry greater significance in this context due to the symbolic and expressive power of clothing. The analysis identified four main themes including *Clothing and Identity*, *Representation*, *Authenticity* and *Future Aspirations*.

This chapter intends to discuss these four main themes which emerged from the interviews with LGBTQ+ individuals regarding perceptions of rainbow washing in the fashion industry. Strengths and weaknesses, as well as implications for future research are also discussed.

5.1 Identity and Visibility

This theme drew on psychological theories about collective identity and the impact of environmental factors on our self-perception.

Participants frequently described clothing as influencing their confidence, both positively and negatively. This aligns with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which explains that self-efficacy is shaped through the interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors. In this context, clothing functions as an environmental influence that can affect one's sense of confidence and capability.

Participants go on further to explain how clothing can help express their sexuality, aligning with previous research on gay identities (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005; Holliday, 2001; Rothblum, 1994; Taub, 2003). While some participants deliberately dress in ways that express

their sexuality, others indicated that this is not a conscious choice. This suggests that LGBTQ+ media and culture may influence individuals' fashion choices, either intentionally or subconsciously, as supported by previous research (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Pajares et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2009).

On the other hand, gender queer identifying participants explained they used clothing to express their gender, rather than sexuality. One participant (P4) expanded, explaining how for pre-transition transgender individuals, clothing and makeup is the only thing which can aid being perceived in the correct way. Expressing gender through clothing was not something what was previously considered; however, previous literature supports the claim that clothing is used to position individuals as their desired gender (Jones & Lim, 2022; Marques, 2019; Teti et al., 2020; Tullio-Pow et al., 2021).

These findings underscore the significance of clothing in shaping individuals' self-perception, which highlights the importance of critically examining instances of performative activism within the fashion industry. Given the central role clothing plays in identity formation, the ways in which it is marketed and represented carry substantial implications for how individuals understand and express themselves.

Finally, within this theme, the symbolic significance of the Pride flag emerged as a key point of discussion. Participants expressed varied perspectives on its use in fashion marketing campaigns.

Some viewed the flag as a collective symbol capable of conveying different meanings depending on context, such as safety or acceptance. This aligns with previous research on symbolic modelling, which suggests that symbols and icons can facilitate shared understanding across diverse audiences (Bandura, 2009). In this instance, the Pride flag was often associated

with feelings of solidarity, reinforcing the broader communicative power of symbolic representation by flags (Shanafelt, 2008).

However, not all participants shared this positive interpretation of the symbol's repeated use. One participant (P6) noted that the historical significance of the Pride flag is often diluted in rainbow washing campaigns. This is perceived as superficial and lacking meaningful engagement with the flag's origins. Similarly, another participant (P4) remarked that the flag now functions more as a marker used to identify queer individuals, rather than as a symbol that honours its original purpose and intent. When its use fails to acknowledge its historical significance, some participants interpret its use as an act of rainbow washing. This contrasts previous research which found that the use of the Pride flag decreased perceptions of rainbow washing (Wulf et al., 2022). The finding does however agree with Wolowic et al.'s (2017) findings that the Pride flag does not always guarantee allyship or institutional commitment. This finding on the symbolic meaning of the Pride flag makes important points about the intention of its use and how that is received by members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Overall, this theme illustrates that clothing, and its associated symbols play a central role in the construction and communication of queer identities. This reinforces its significance when examining rainbow washing and the authenticity of fashion marketing strategies.

5.2 Representation

The second identified theme focused on queer representations in mainstream media, particularly within the context of rainbow washing campaigns. Participants discussed the prevalence of dominant, often stereotypical representations, while also highlighting the frequent exclusion of certain members of the LGBTQ+ community. The conversations

emphasised the diversity within the queer community, suggesting that authentic representation is complex and cannot be achieved through a one-size-fits-all approach.

Within the theme of representation, participants frequently expressed frustration over the disproportionate focus on cis-gender gay men in mainstream media. Effeminate gay men, in particular, were described as the most socially acceptable and visible queer identity, often positioned as the default representation of the LGBTQ+ community. This narrow portrayal was seen to marginalise other queer identities, especially transgender individuals, whose representation was noted as lacking or entirely absent in rainbow washing campaigns. Participants highlighted that this absence not only reflects broader patterns of exclusion but also signals a failure to address the specific needs and experiences of the wider LGBTQ+ community. Other research supports this finding that representation of the queer community is often narrow and exclusionary (Nölke, 2018).

Furthermore, when discussing stereotypes of the community, participants explained they do not often identify with the portrayals of their community. Many individuals commented on the size and multiplicity of the community, highlighting the wide range of identities and experiences it encompasses. These findings are supported by previous research, which similarly argues that no singular representation can capture the full complexity of the LGBTQ+ community. When attempts are made, they often present a commodified, white identity (Hauksson-Tresch, 2021), as previously discussed regarding cis-gendered white men.

Overall, this theme highlights the challenges of representing queer identities within LGBTQ+ campaigns. The findings suggest that comprehensive representation of the community is often lacking and may be inherently difficult because of the community's intersectional nature. These insights point to the need for further research focused on how

specific segments of the community can be represented more effectively and authentically in fashion marketing and media.

5.3 Authenticity

This theme covers discussions about brand authenticity and intentions regarding the LGBTQ+ community particularly during Pride month. Participants reflected on their personal experiences with rainbow washing and shared their perceptions on other Pride-related marketing campaigns.

Many participants reflected on what they perceived to be the underlying motivations behind brands' Pride campaigns. These efforts were frequently viewed as driven by profit and a desire to capitalise on seasonal trends, rather than stemming from authentic support for the LGBTQ+ community. As one participant (P11) noted, when a company engages in Pride marketing while simultaneously upholding values or practices that marginalise queer individuals, their support is perceived as disingenuous. This finding relates with previous literature concerning 'CSR fit'. The research explains that when a company's core business is congruent with their CSR strategies, they are perceived to be more authentic (Kim, 2023; Kim & Ferguson, 2019). In this case, participants spoke about a brands core values not matching with their campaign, overall dampening the impact of it and worsening their CSR fit. Similarly, Wulf et al.'s (2022) study found that individuals valued the inclusion in LGBTQ+ related advertising but were sometimes sceptical due to past reputations of brands. These findings suggest that consumers critically evaluate Pride campaigns, considering a brand's broader values and actions before perceiving them as genuine.

Furthermore, some participants observed that queer-focused campaigns are largely concentrated within Pride Month, with minimal visibility or engagement outside of this period. During Pride month, companies often adopt temporary rebranding strategies, collaborate with queer creatives, and release targeted collections aimed at the LGBTQ+ community. However, the lack of sustained representation throughout the rest of the year was perceived as marginalising, contributing to a false sense of inclusion and acceptance. This finding is related to research about virtue signalling, where companies strategically try to enhance their image through performative acts (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Previous research found this to be actively harmful in the functioning of public discourse as it impairs the ability to accurately judge brands values (Tosi & Warmke, 2016). These findings support this claim as participants reflect on their struggles due to this false activism.

Furthermore, the temporal separation and intensified focus on the queer community during Pride Month led some participants to feel further marginalised from mainstream society. This aligns with research on tokenism, which suggests that symbolic inclusion can actually reinforce feelings of exclusion and heighten cultural boundaries (Kanter, 1977). Participants described how brands' collaborations with queer icons or celebrities, limited to Pride month, used these individuals as tokens rather than as ongoing representatives of the community. Such portrayals were perceived as inauthentic displays of allyship. As discussed earlier in relation to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), media representations shape how individuals view themselves. Consequently, participants expressed concern that tokenistic portrayals of queer figures may lead consumers to internalise a similarly superficial sense of their own identity.

However, other participants discussed Pride month in a more positive light, reflecting on its ability to encourage conversations and give the queer community a specific time to be highlighted. This aligns with Yoder & Sinnett's (1985) research which found that tokenism can

allow marginalised groups to progress more rapidly because they are being focused on and receive additional support. The emphasised visibility during Pride month enables sustained attention to issues such as homophobia and social acceptance, preventing these concerns from being overlooked or deprioritised in broader societal discourse.

Despite participants opposing opinions on Pride month, they consistently emphasised the importance of sustained and cohesive support for the LGBTQ+ community in order for brand actions to be perceived as authentic. Previous research has also supported this claim (Cummings, 2021), suggesting for these campaigns to be positively received, companies must consider the broader social and cultural context in which they operate to ensure their initiatives benefit both the queer community and the business itself.

Lastly, within this theme, participants commented on their perceptions of rainbow washing and its opportunistic nature. Findings support Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) research on how people identify false brand activism. The research defined the term through characteristics of a business such as brand purpose, engaging with controversial topics, having a progressive or conservative stance on the topic and having good CSR fit. Although rainbow washing engages with a controversial topic and has presents progressive stance, it does not align with authentic brand purpose and fails to impact wider company values. Participants explain, when all of these characteristics are not considered, advertising seems inauthentic and shows companies true monetary motivations.

Overall, this theme highlights the importance of authenticity in brand campaigns and shows consumers' ability to recognise performative activism. It underscores the need for

brands to adopt a holistic and sustained approach to supporting the LGBTQ+ community in order to drive meaningful change and ensure the success of their campaigns.

5.4 Future Aspirations

The final theme reflects participants suggestions and aspirations for future engagements with the LGBTQ+ community by the fashion industry.

Firstly, participants expressed a desire for greater transparency regarding brands' Pride campaigns. Suggestions included simple measures such as providing information on clothing tags or using barcodes that direct consumers to dedicated sections of a brand's website outlining the purpose and impact of their Pride collections. This aligns with previous research, which found that concrete messages of support are less likely to be perceived as deceptive and are associated with more favourable brand evaluations (Wulf et al., 2022). The present findings support this, indicating that when brands clearly communicate donation details, campaign impacts, and educational aims, their efforts are more positively received. However, participants noted that this level of transparency is often lacking, with many brands falling short of these expectations.

In addition, one participant (P14) observed that overt displays of support, when not accompanied by transparency, can feel like a deliberate attempt to divert attention from other questionable business practices. This reinforces Kim and Ferguson's (2019) findings on CSR fit, highlighting the importance of aligning Pride campaigns with the company's broader values and operations to maintain credibility.

Furthermore, company structure and workforce were noted as another aspect companies could improve on. Many participants expressed a desire to see more queer

individuals in leadership roles, giving them the ability to reflect real lived experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. The media individuals consume can influence their behaviour and opinions, either consciously or not (Pajares et al., 2009). As such, seeing queer individuals address authentic struggles and lived experiences can provide validation and shape how audiences perceive themselves and their own identities. This highlights the need for queer representation in both campaigns and internal operations.

The need for internal education and support for staff was also noted. The definition of CSR includes improving the quality of life for a company's workforce as well as wider society (WBCSD, 1998). This suggests that for campaigns to be perceived as authentic and aligned with effective CSR strategies, companies must also demonstrate internal inclusivity to improve quality of life for their workforce. Participants emphasised the need for more inclusive hiring practices and highlighted the importance of providing meaningful support systems within the workplace specifically tailored to LGBTQ+ employees.

Overall, this theme highlights both the concerns surrounding rainbow washing and potential approaches toward more authentic engagement. For businesses to genuinely support the queer community, it is essential they engage in meaningful research to understand the needs and preferences of their LGBTQ+ consumers. Without well researched strategies, campaigns risk being perceived as performative and are unlikely to generate meaningful or lasting impact.

5.5 Strengths, weaknesses and future implications

A key strength of this research lies in its qualitative approach, which provided rich insights into LGBTQ+ perceptions of rainbow washing. This is an area underexplored in existing literature that often centres on advertising techniques rather than consumer impact. By focusing on the fashion industry, this study addresses a critical gap and highlights the need for

further research on how LGBTQ+ advertising influences self-perception across different sectors, other than the fashion industry. The first theme (*5.1 Clothing and Identity*) highlights this need for further research on the psychological impacts of performative activism on queer people. As mentioned previously, the amount of Pride campaigns are going down (Basak & Piper, 2022), so a longitudinal study, looking at queer perceptions of Pride each year, could be valuable. This could capture changing views, the impacts on different queer generations and changes in corporate approaches.

The sub-theme of *Focus on Cis-Gender Men* (in *5.2 Representation*), highlights participants views that this section of the queer community are disproportionality shown and therefore researched. This research captured a diverse range of sexual and gender identities, offering a more inclusive representation of the queer community, compared to previous studies that focused predominantly on gay and lesbian individuals. However, while ethnicity and nationality were not explicitly recorded, some participants raised these aspects in relation to global perspectives. Future research should explore the intersectionality of race, culture, and nationality in shaping perceptions of queer advertising.

In addition, the participants of this study were predominantly students living in London, some of whom attend UAL, or are in the fashion space. This could lead to political and cultural biases, resulting in increased scepticism of rainbow washing and fashion brands intentions. For example, Participant one doesn't "support [fast fashion brands] as a concept", showing their other values, such as sustainability, having strong impacts on their purchasing decisions. Participant 12 commented on how "queer people also care about most other people in the world", when referring to political views. This shows that the participants of this study hold liberal views which could influence how they perceive rainbow washing. Future research should contain a wider pool of participants, from differing backgrounds, to gain a more representative sample. While a quantitative research design could be used to broaden the

sample size and generalise findings, the deeply personal nature of this topic needs further qualitative exploration to first establish a meaningful foundation for this approach.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored how queer individuals interpret, and respond to rainbow washing in the fashion industry. By analysing our discussions, it became clear that while LGBTQ+ visibility has grown, it often falls short of genuine inclusion. The four themes identified including, *Clothing and Identity*, *Representation*, *Authenticity*, and *Future Aspirations*, capture the often conflicted experiences of participants. These insights not only reveal the emotional and cultural impact of inauthentic branding but also challenge fashion brands to go beyond surface-level gestures. Ultimately, this research emphasises the urgent need for LGBTQ+ marketing practices to reflect the diversity and depth of queer lives, not only during Pride, but all year round.

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Appendix A: Reflective Statement

Writing this dissertation has been a long and challenging journey which has really opened my eyes to what conducting research is like. It's not only helped me grow in academic terms but also in other areas of my life, and it's definitely strengthened my views on the topics I've explored. Being able to study something I'm so passionate about has been a great opportunity, and I feel lucky that I've never lost interest in what I'm writing about. I think there are so many other angles to explore on this topic, and I hope this research serves as a reminder that queer voices and perspectives deserve more attention. This whole experience has confirmed that I really enjoy research and getting to real, tangible conclusions, which has solidified my plans to continue in higher education and pursue a career in research in the future.

Throughout the research process, I experienced both highs and lows. One aspect I feel I dealt with well was time management. In everyday life, I tend to take on too much with work, family, friends, exercise, and university. This is often at the expense of my alone time, which can lead to burnout. Knowing this was something I'd struggled with before, I made a conscious effort to prevent it during this project.

The most helpful step, although it may seem simple, was setting clear boundaries with my managers and friends. About a month before the deadline, I let them know I wouldn't be available for extra shifts or social plans. In the past, I'd say "yes" out of habit, even when I really needed that time to focus. Once I communicated this, my schedule opened up, and I no longer felt guilty for prioritising my work. It genuinely reduced my stress and reminded me that it's okay to temporarily prioritise one area of life while stepping back from others. That said, one thing I didn't manage as well was making time for exercise. I found that if I worked out in the morning, by the time I showered and ate, it was harder to get into the flow

of writing. In hindsight, I wish I'd planned better to include it, as exercise is a way I decompress, so skipping it for a few weeks added its own kind of stress.

Balancing everything has always been a challenge for me, so I'm proud that with this project, I at least managed to stay on top of the work and avoid burnout.

One part of the process that didn't go so smoothly was getting my ethics form approved. We were encouraged to submit it by the end of January, but I ended up sending mine in during early February. Because my topic was quite personal and I hadn't reviewed the form properly, it wasn't as straightforward to get through the approval process. It didn't get signed off the first time and was sent back to me several times.

This all happened within a week, but unfortunately it fell on a weekend when I had plans to be away. When I saw it had been rejected, I panicked and rushed to make edits without properly looking over them. This just led to more mistakes and more back-and-forth between me, my supervisor and the approval team. I did get it approved in the end, but the whole thing felt quite chaotic. Looking back, I think if I'd just slowed down, stepped away for a bit, and given myself space to properly review things, it could've been handled a lot more calmly.

This experience taught me the importance of knowing when to log off and come back with a clear head. I also realised that I need to plan for delays, for example, people taking a few days to reply or things not getting approved straight away. That is definitely something I'll take with me into the corporate world, especially in roles where I'll need to communicate with others to get things done efficiently.

Although I stayed interested in my topic throughout the project, I found writing the literature review particularly difficult. Partly because my specific area hasn't been researched much before, it was hard to find relevant studies, which made me feel discouraged and led to a

lot of procrastination. Even when I did start writing, I struggled to find a structure that made sense, and that only added to my stress. It got to the point where I avoided it altogether, especially since I had other sections I felt more confident working on. Eventually, I had a call with my supervisor to talk through the structure, which really helped. Once I reorganised the literature based on his guidance, everything started to come together more naturally.

In the future I know I need a better system for keeping track of my research. In past projects, I'd just throw everything into a Word document, but for this project I tried using a table with summaries. Unfortunately, that didn't really work for me either and I found it hard to format it in a way that made sense. I'm someone who learns best visually, so I think a more organised, colour coded method would help. Using Excel or trying a different approach like a synthesis matrix could make a difference and make me feel less overwhelmed with the volume of research.

Lastly, another aspect of this dissertation that I feel went well was the participant interviews. While I was aware of my positionality as a researcher, I think already knowing some of the participants and the fact that many of them also live in London, really helped build a natural rapport. I was able to create a comfortable space where people felt safe enough to open up and share their genuine thoughts, including topics that either upset or excited them. I scheduled around three interviews a week, over five weeks, which helped me stay on track and maintain a steady pace. Having the interviews close together also meant I was constantly immersed in participants' perspectives. This allowed me to notice recurring themes and follow up on points raised by previous participants. This meant the later interviews were even more insightful. I found that as I went along, the conversations became more smooth and less structured, but the depth and value of the findings increased.

This experience showed me how important it is to be flexible and responsive during interviews. It also taught me the value of doing a round of practice interviews beforehand, especially when speaking to participants I don't already know. I think this would help me feel more prepared and get into the right mindset for in-depth conversations in future research.

Overall, this dissertation has taught me a lot about research and time organisation. I am grateful for the opportunity to have studied at a university which has given me freedom to choose my research topic and supported me through the whole process.

Appendix B: Dissertation Time Plan and Reality

Time Plan:

	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
research proposal				ethics				due!
literature review research								
ethics application								
writing literature review								
data collection								
data analysis								
writing introduction								
writing methods								
writing results								
writing discussion								
writing abstract								
check references								
appendices								
reflective statement								
final edits								

Reality:

	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
research proposal				ethics				PD due!
literature review research								
ethics application								
writing literature review								
data collection								
data analysis								
writing introduction								
writing methods								
writing results								
writing discussion								
writing abstract								
check references								
appendices								
reflective statement								
final edits								

Appendix C: Approved Ethics Application

ual:

Research Ethics Approval Form – Student Research Psychology Research Ethics Panel (PREP)

Guidance:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please ensure that you have read the UAL Code of Practice on Research Ethics, UAL Code of Practice on Educational Ethics, and the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics before completing this form. • Please complete this form electronically. While completing it, delete all the text in green font, which is meant to guide you. • Section A is to be completed by the student and Supervisor / Unit Leader. • Section B is for PREP and UAL Sub-Committee use only. • Once Section A has been completed, the form should be submitted to the relevant staff member (e.g., Unit Leader, Course Leader) by the student. Instructions on who to submit the form to will be given in each unit. • Incomplete applications which are missing question responses, signatures, documents for the participants (Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, Debriefing Sheet), or relevant appendices (e.g., study advert, questionnaires, instructions, interview questions, tasks, stimuli such as images) will be returned to the student for completion. This will delay the review and approval process.

SECTION A

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT

Name:	Alexandra Damar
College:	London College of Fashion
Course and year (if applicable):	Psychology of Fashion, Third Year
Unit for which this study is being conducted:	Final Major Project
Study title:	Investigating Rainbow Washing in the Fashion Industry

The UAL codes of practice set out four key areas for ethical consideration. Which one or more of these ethical principles does this application for ethical consideration relate to?	
a. An ethics of care is supported by the Educational Ethics Sub-Committee as a positive ethic that is the University's responsibility to foster in relation to students, educational content, educational process including material resources, and in students' relations with anyone who participates or interacts with their work.	Yes / No
b. The principle of social justice obliges the student to identify the risks and benefits of participation in creative or investigative practice. Any risks to persons participating should be weighed against any potential benefits – to the participants or the student, and also the wider benefits to society of the knowledge gained. As with the principle of respect for	Yes / No

<p>persons, there is a need to promote equality and racial justice and protect vulnerable groups.</p>	
<p>c. Respect for persons recognises the capacity and rights of all individuals to make their own choices and decisions. It refers to the autonomy and rights to self-determination of all human beings, acknowledges their equality, dignity, freedom, and rights. An important component of this principle is the need to provide special protection to vulnerable persons, both students and in student activity involving others.</p>	<p>Yes / No</p>
<p>d. Beneficence is the principle of acting for the good and well-being of others. It requires students to serve the interests of others. In so doing, students comply with the principle of neither doing, nor permitting, any foreseeable harm as a consequence of creative or investigative practice. This is the principle of non-maleficence, it is the principle of doing no harm.</p>	<p>Yes / No</p>
<p>The specific duties of promoting equality and good relations are assumed under these principles, as defined by the Equality Act 2010.</p>	

1. Please provide the rationale behind your study, including a brief literature review, the gap in the existing literature that the study will address, study aims / research questions, and hypotheses (if the study has a quantitative component). Indicate whether the study is qualitative or quantitative and what design it will use. (600 words max, excluding references)

This research aims to identify the impact of rainbow washing in the fashion industry on LGBTQ+ members. The links between sexuality and fashion are to be discussed and alternatives to the possibly harmful marketing tactic identified.

In 2009 President Obama recognised June as Pride month (Lee, 2022), which aims to pay respects and remember the actions of the Stonewall Uprising in 1969. This is said to be the starting point for the LGBTQ+ liberation movement (Rusch, 2023). Rainbow washing is when companies implement pride campaigns into their marketing strategy and appeal to the LGBTQ+ community but don't benefit the community (Champlin & Li, 2020). Many companies celebrate pride month during June by having rainbow patterned merchandise and collections, editing their logos on social media and advertising with same sex couples (Johns, 2022). These instances are also referred to as performative support or slacktivism, where companies prioritise financial gain over genuinely upholding the principles they claim to advocate for (Jaquez, 2011).

The problem with commodifying awareness and identity is there is no guarantee that money will result in an outcome for the community (Abad-Santos, 2018; Rusch, 2023). The way sexual orientation is used as a descriptor in marketing can create a distorted view of the gay and lesbian market and open perception to stereotyping (Um, 2010). Schofield and Schmidt (2005) explored the role of fashion as a signalling tool for expressing gay identities, finding that gay men often use clothing to communicate their sexuality and identity within their community. This highlights the importance of clothing for individuals in the LGBTQ+ community, making its exploitation for monetary gain potentially harmful.

The way people dress and their sexual identities have been linked and are supported through psychological theories. Social identity theory suggests individuals perceive themselves as part of social groups and the characteristics of group members define and shape who they are (Hogg et al., 1995). Clothing is a non-verbal form of communication which communicates individuals' thoughts, feelings and desires (Akdemir, 2018). Throughout history, people have used clothing to express their identity and align themselves with specific groups, for example in subcultures like punk, grunge, and mod movements. This supports the idea that dress

can be very important in expressing identities, therefore making it an important topic to look at regarding rainbow washing and the commodification of the LGBTQ+ community's identity.

On the other hand, from a business point of view, 24% of US internet users are more likely to consume from companies who are openly LGBTQ+ friendly (Martell, 2019). Displaying the rainbow colours can be helpful as it creates a safe space for LGBTQ+ members by signifying the area/company is open and accepting of all forms of sexual identity (Rusch, 2023). This demonstrates that rainbow washing can have both positive and negative effects, highlighting the potential value of exploring alternatives that may be more effective and considerate options.

Significant gaps remain in the research on this topic. While there is extensive literature on rainbow washing in general, there are less studies focusing specifically on the fashion industry. Additionally, most of the existing research consists of quantitative content analyses of advertisements or social media campaigns. Although qualitative interviews with members of the LGBTQ+ community are limited, those that have been conducted provide valuable insights into the perspectives of those most directly impacted.

A qualitative research design is proposed, with semi-structured interviews on members of the LGBTQ+ community. Topics to discuss include; rainbow washing in the fashion industry, clothing and sexual identity and potential alternatives to explicit pride campaigns that are currently popular.

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Um, N. (2010). Seeking the holy grail through gay and lesbian consumers: An exploratory content analysis of ads with gay/lesbian-specific content, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 18(2), 133-149, DOI: 10.1080/13527266.2010.489696

2. Does your research involve participants?

No*

Yes

***If you answer 'No', you do not need to complete Questions 3 to 11. Instead, please go to Question 12 and continue from there.**

3. Who will the participants be? Please tick as appropriate.

Students at University of the Arts London

Staff at University of the Arts London

Other*

***If you answered 'Other' please specify below.**

Participants will be people from the LGBTQ+ community from a range of different ages, all over 18. The aim is to have multiple sexualities and genders including male, female and non-binary, and will be from any ethnicity. Participants must living in the UK currently.

4. How will participants be recruited and how many will be involved?

Participants will be recruited through convenience and snowball sampling methods, therefore will mostly be students. They will be approached through email and direct messaging. It is expected there will be about 10 participants who are interviewed.

5. What will participants be asked to do and for how long? Describe the entire study procedure, including the measures (e.g., questionnaires) or the interview questions that you will ask them to complete or answer.

The interviews will take place on MS Teams. Participants will be sent the participant information sheet and given time to read it over and then the same with the consent form. Following giving consent, the interview will commence, and the recording will start, through MS Teams . Interviews will take about 30 minutes.

Participants will be asked their age, occupation, pronouns and sexuality. Before starting the interview questions, a statement will be provided to encourage participants to share their honest opinions openly and freely. They will be reassured that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions and that their genuine perspectives are more valuable than responses they might consider to be 'politically correct.'

Questions will be asked in a semi structured format so it is conversational and builds a rapport.

- I want to start off by talking about what your clothing means to you, if anything.
 - o Do you think a lot about what you wear when you get dressed in the morning?
 - o Do clothes affect your confidence?
 - o Are you restricted by what you can wear, for example by work, university or other outside pressures?
 - Do you find this limiting? Do you not mind?
 - o Do you use clothing to express yourself?
 - o Do you use clothing to express your sexuality?
 - If not – do you think other people express their identities through clothes?
 - Do you think their personality and identity is visible through their style?
- The interviewer will then explain the definition of rainbow washing and give some visual examples to ensure all participants have a clear and consistent understanding of the topic. Participants are then asked the following questions.
- If you have noticed these campaigns during Pride month specifically, how do you feel about brands promoting LGBTQ+ causes during pride month versus the rest of the year?
 - o If suggests campaigns all year round – do you think LGBTQ+ collections should be permanent or have another suggestion?
 - o How important is it for you that a brand actively engages with LGBTQ+ issues year-round?
- If you have seen any campaigns where you suspect rainbow washing or a pride campaign you thought was legitimate, how did it make you feel?
 - o Did it change your attitudes towards the brand?
 - o Did it make you want to buy/not buy from the company?
 - o For suspecting RW – what do you think they could have done differently?
 - o For legitimate – do you think this type of campaign is applicable to all brands?
- What impact do you think rainbow washing has on LGBTQ+ visibility and representation?
 - o Do you think rainbow washing can still be useful for the community?
 - o Only negative or positive effects, or both?
 - o What are your thoughts on the use of the pride rainbow flag for many of the campaigns?
- Do you know of any or can you think of any other alternatives to explicit LGBTQ+ marketing, like the use of rainbows?

Following the interview questions participants will be sent the debrief sheet. Participants will be asked to confirm they consent to the use of their data and reminded they have 2 weeks to email researcher with their pseudonym to withdraw their data.

6. What potential risks to the interests of participants do you foresee and what steps will you take to minimise those risks? How will you inform participants of the risks and the steps you are taking to address them? The BPS defines risk as the 'potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort or stress to human participants that a research project may generate.' It includes risks to participants' well-being, self-esteem, social standing, values, privacy and reputation, beliefs, employment / livelihood, personal relationships, freedom, commercial interests (e.g., intellectual property), and so on.

This research project is deemed low risk in accordance to the recommendations and research guidelines posited by the University of the Arts London (UAL) and the British Psychological Society (BPS). It may potentially pose risk to participants mood and wellbeing. With regards to the respect principle of the BPS code of ethics, the questions about sexuality and personal identity could be intrusive or uncomfortable. The topic being discussed is deeply personal and touches on challenges that may not have immediate solutions but require time and understanding to address which might be distressing to some. To hopefully counteract this participant will be allowed to skip any questions they feel uncomfortable answering. They will also be allowed to leave the interview at any point. In this case the recording would be stopped, and the participant would be allowed to go. If the participant seems distressed but doesn't want to leave, the recording will stop, and more casual conversation will be encouraged. Asking more simple questions about their clothes and favourite pieces

to try and calm them down in the moment. Once they feel okay again, they will be asked how they want to proceed and whether they want to withdraw their participation in the study. If they still don't feel comfortable, they will once again be told they are free to go.

The BPS code of ethics also references competence, so with a topics like rainbow washing, exploitation and discrimination the interviewer will need to be well educated on the topic and sensitive to all groups and opinions.

In the participants information sheet, these risks will be discussed as well as helpful services in the debrief sheet.

LGBTQ+ support services and mental health resources that will be included in debriefing materials:

LGBTQ+ support services:

Stonewall – charity for advocating LGBTQ+ rights in the UK, offering information and resources to local services

Website: www.stonewall.org.uk

LGBT Foundation – support, advice and resources for LGBTQ+ individuals

Phone: 03453303030

Email: info@lgbt.foundation

Website: www.lgbt.foundation

MindOut – mental health service run by and for LGBTQ+ people, offering advice, advocacy and peer support

Website: www.mindout.org.uk

Email: info@mindout.org.uk

Mental Health Services:

Mind – offers advice and support

Phone: 03001233393

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Website: www.mind.org.uk

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) – support, with a focus on suicide prevention

Phone: 0800585858

Website: www.thecalmzone.net

Furthermore, all mentions of names will be replaced with pseudonyms starting from the data transcription stage of the analysis. Any identifying data will be masked in the transcription stage as well. Interviews will take place online. Participants will be submitting their consent to the study (which includes their email addresses) separately, before the actual interview. These consent forms will be dealt with in a way that is specified in the last paragraph of this section. Participants will be able to withdraw their data up to 2 weeks after they have completed a study.

The data collected for this study will be completely anonymous, with the exception of participant emails requested to schedule the online interviews and the audio recording. This audio data, along with participants emails will be deleted immediately after transcription is completed. Transcription data and analysis will be retained until after the exam board deadline / the final degree classification has been awarded in case any questions or issues arise. After this, data will be deleted. At no stage will the data be passed onto anyone beyond the researcher, the supervisor, or those involved in the project.

7. What potential risks do you foresee to yourself as the researcher and what steps will you take to minimise those risks? For example, does your research raise issues of personal safety for you or others involved in the project, especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises?

This study is considered of minimal risk to the researcher. Potential risks to the researcher are not expected. In the unlikely event of unforeseen negative events, the researcher will take steps to mitigate the negative impact (e.g., contact UAL counselling services or GP).

8. Please attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, and Debriefing Sheet you plan to give participants.

Please tick here if the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, and Debriefing Sheet are attached in the appendix at the end of this form.

9. Does your project involve children / minors (anyone under the age of 18) or vulnerable adults? The BPS states that vulnerable populations include 'children, persons lacking capacity, those in a dependent or unequal relationship, people with learning or communication difficulties, people in care, people in custody or on probation, people who have suffered physical or psychological trauma and people engaged in illegal activities, such as drug abuse.'

No. Go to Question 10

Yes*

***If you answer 'Yes', you may need to obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and seek ethical approval from the relevant UAL ethics sub-committee. Discuss this with your Supervisor, Unit Leader, or Course Leader. Please be aware that a DBS check normally takes 4 weeks, but can take longer.**

I confirm that I have obtained a DBS check.

I understand that I need to go through the PREP review and the UAL ethics review process.

Please Note:

It is a presumption of academic research that, wherever possible and feasible, the information on which the research is based should be preserved, so that it can be made available to future researchers. However, the privacy of participants must be respected. Please refer to the UAL and BPS ethics codes before answering Question 10.


10. Will you be obtaining personal information (e.g., name; postal, email, or IP address; recorded images or audio; date of birth) from the participants?


	No. Go to Question 11
	Yes*
<p>*If you answer 'Yes', please give details. In your response, please indicate: Why do you need to collect personal information from participants? How will you store and use this information during the course of your research in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)? What parts of this information will need to be confidential? How will you ensure that no one can link participants' identity to the rest of their data? Will you exhibit or publish the information? Who will have access to the data? Will you retain information after the research is concluded? If yes, how? If information is to be destroyed, explain why this is appropriate.</p>	
<p>The interviews audio will be recorded on MS Teams on a laptop so they can be transcribed and analysed. Data will be stored on One Drive and only accessible to researcher and their supervisor. Participants will be given pseudonyms such as P1 or P7. Participants will be asked their age, occupation, pronouns and sexuality, all of which are not identifiable. Transcripts will be anonymised immediately, and all direct quotes used will not be able to lead to the identification of participants. Personal contact information (participants emails) will be stored separately from participant data, and deleted followed transcription of their interviews. Data will be retained until degree grade has been finalised by London College of Fashion.</p> <p>Regarding data management, only the researchers listed in this ethics approval form and relevant staff members at the London College of Fashion will have access to the data. To comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation, all data (recording, transcripts, and any other form of data) will be stored on password-protected, encrypted devices or on UAL-managed systems, such as the researchers' UAL email and OneDrive folder.</p>	

11. Will payments to participants be made?	
	No. Go to Question 12
	Yes*
<p>*If you answer 'Yes', please state amount and whether payment is for out-of-pocket expenses or a fee.</p>	

<p>12. If the project is to receive financial support from outside the University, please give details. Include any restrictions that have been imposed on the conduct of the research by the funding body or sponsor. Both financial propriety and the protection of commercial rights are important for you, the University, and other third parties (e.g., sponsors, participants).</p>	
N/A	

13. Will any restrictions be placed on the publication of results?	
X	No. Go to Question 14
	Yes*
*If you answer 'Yes', please state the nature of the restrictions (e.g., details of any confidentiality agreement).	

Student Declaration:	
<p>15. I confirm my responsibility to deliver the project in accordance with the Code of Practice on Research Ethics and the Code of Practice on Educational Ethics of the University of the Arts London (the University), as well as the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics. In signing this form, I am also confirming that:</p>	
<p>a) The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.</p> <p>b) There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of the researchers conducting this project.</p> <p>c) I understand that I cannot start data collection until I have received ethical approval from the relevant ethics body (e.g., PREP).</p> <p>d) I undertake to conduct the study as set out in this application unless deviation is agreed by the University and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter sent by the relevant ethics body (e.g., PREP).</p> <p>e) I understand that, if I decide to make substantial changes to the study method (e.g., the design, participant recruitment method, procedure), I will need to submit a revised ethics form.</p> <p>f) I will store data on UAL-managed systems and will follow the data protection principles at all times.</p> <p>g) I understand and accept that the ethical propriety of this project may be monitored by the relevant College Research body and/or Educational Ethics Sub-Committee.</p>	
Signature of Student:	
Date (dd/mm/yyyy):	27/01/2025

Unit Leader or Supervisor Declaration:	
16. I support this project and have reviewed and approved the current ethics application.	
Name:	Maxi Heitmayer
Signature of Unit Leader or Supervisor:	
Date (dd/mm/yyyy):	30.01.2025


SECTION B

FOR UAL COMMITTEE USE ONLY

Approval of Psychology Research Ethics Panel:

- The Psychology reviewers recommend that:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	This student's Ethics Approval Form is approved as minimal ethical risk .
<input type="checkbox"/>	This student's Ethics Approval Form is approved as more than minimal ethical risk and so will be forwarded to the University's Educational Ethics Sub-Committee for final approval.
<input type="checkbox"/>	This student's Ethics Approval Form must be resubmitted after the student has made the required modifications indicated in the PREP's feedback.

Name of Reviewer 1 (Psychology Team Member / Unit Leader / Supervisor)		Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	
Name of Reviewer 2 (PREP Chair / Deputy Chair)	Dr Soljana Çili	Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	13/02/2025
Signature	Reviewer 1	Reviewer 2 	

Approval of University's Educational Ethics Sub-Committee (EESC):

All 'more than minimal risk' documents will be sent to EESC.

- The Educational Ethics Subcommittee (EESC) recommends that:

<input type="checkbox"/>	This student's Ethics Approval Form is approved as minimal ethical risk
<input type="checkbox"/>	This student's Ethics Approval Form is approved as more than minimal ethical risk
<input type="checkbox"/>	This student's Ethics Approval Form must be resubmitted, and the following modifications should be made (see below):

Required Modifications List (if applicable)	1)		
Suggested Modifications List (if applicable)	1)		
Name		Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	
Signature Chair of EESC			

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Version: 2, Dated: Wed 5 Feb 2025

Study title: Investigating rainbow-washing in the fashion industry

Introduction

My name is Alexandra Damar and I am a student at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (UAL). You are being invited to take part in the above research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand what the study involves. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information. If you are happy to take part, you will be asked to provide consent before engaging with the study.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to identify the impact of rainbow washing in the fashion industry on LGBTQ+ members. The links between sexuality and fashion are to be discussed.

Who can take part in this study?

This study is open to anyone who is part of the LGBTQ+ community of any gender. Participants can be any age over 18, from ethnicity or nationality and of any occupation. Participants must be currently residing in the UK.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not wish to.

What will I be required to do if I take part?

The research will be conducted through 30 minute interviews, taking place online, over MS Teams. Interviews will be held between February and March. You will be asked your age, occupation, pronouns and sexuality, followed by some questions about what your clothing means to you and your use of clothing to express your sexual identity. Then the interview questions regarding rainbow washing will be asked. These questions will be of a personal nature.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

This research could pose risk to your mood and wellbeing. It will be discussing sensitive topics such as identity, sexuality and exploitation. To minimise this risk, if you feel distressed during the interview, the researcher will stop the recording and you will be able to have a general conversation to ease your nerves and then either continue or withdraw from the interview. You will be allowed to not answer any questions or withdraw your participation at any time during the interview. Following the interview, resources will be shared regarding support for the LGBTQ+ community and mental health.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Taking part in this study could help you understand how clothing can relate to one's identity. It also can foster future conversations about topics discussed and encourage you to research these more.

How will my information be used?

Any data obtained will be used solely for research purposes. This also applies to personal data, which will be used with your consent.

You can stop taking part in the study at any time while completing it, without giving a reason, and without experiencing any detriment. You can ask for your data to be withdrawn and destroyed within 2 weeks after completing the study. You will be given a pseudonym which you can use to withdraw your data up to 2 weeks following the interview. If you wish to do this, email the researcher with the pseudonym you were given and state you want your data withdrawn, Audio and transcription data, and email will then be deleted.

All data will be accessible to me and relevant staff at London College of Fashion. The data will be analysed while stored on UAL-managed systems. The anonymised data will be stored on systems managed by UAL until the research has been assessed and the grade has been confirmed by London College of Fashion. Your email and recorded audio of the interview will be deleted after interviews have been transcribed. No one except me and relevant staff at London College of Fashion will be able to link any identifying information to the rest of your responses.

You can find more information about UAL and your privacy rights at www.arts.ac.uk/privacy-information.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results will be written for my dissertation for the BSc (Hons) Psychology of Fashion at London College of Fashion. The report will not contain any information that may lead to your identification.

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions, require more information about this study, or would like to receive a summary of the study results when they are ready, please email me, the researcher, at a.damar1120211@arts.ac.uk

What happens if there is a problem?

This study has been approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Panel at London College of Fashion, UAL. If you have any concerns about the study, you can contact Maxi Heitmayer at m.heimmayer@fashion.arts.ac.uk. They will do their best to answer your query. If you have further concerns or wish to complain about the study, please contact researchethics@arts.ac.uk.

Thank you for reading this Information Sheet and for considering taking part in this research.

CONSENT FORM

Version: 2, Dated: Wed 5 Feb 2025

Study title: Investigating rainbow washing in the fashion industry
Researcher's name: Alexandra Damar

Please complete this form after you have read the Participant Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to participate.

If you decide to participate, please tick each of the boxes below to consent to different elements of this study. Please note that you may be deemed ineligible to participate if you do not consent to any of the elements.

Item no.	Item	Tick
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and asked questions which have been answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I confirm that I am over 18, live in the UK and identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community.	
3.	I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary.	
4.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to 2 weeks after my interview without giving a reason, and without suffering any adverse consequences or penalty.	
5.	I understand how my data will be stored and consent to the processing of all data for the purposes explained to me.	
6.	I understand the potential disadvantages and risks of participating and the support that will be available to me should I become distressed during the course of the research.	
7.	I understand that confidentiality will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any reports or publications.	
8.	I consent to my interview being audio recorded.	
9.	I consent to my data, including anonymised quotes, being used in written up or published work resulting from this research.	
10.	I understand that honesty is important to the research and will do my best to answer the questions accurately and honestly.	
11.	I agree to take part in this study.	

DEBRIEFING SHEET

Version: 1, Dated: Mon 27 Jan 2025

Study title: Investigating rainbow washing in the fashion industry

Researcher's name: Alexandra Damar

Researcher's email address: a.damar1120211@arts.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part in this study! Below is some more information about the aims of the study and what happens next.

What are the aims of this study and what are we expecting to find?

As mentioned earlier, my study explores the impact of rainbow washing in the fashion industry on LGBTQ+ individuals. Through my research, I found a strong connection between fashion and identity, which led me to investigate how people feel about their identities being commodified and exploited for profit rather than genuinely supporting the LGBTQ+ community. At the same time, I realise some may argue these marketing campaigns can increase visibility and awareness for the community. I wanted to understand the perspectives of LGBTQ+ individuals on this issue and explore whether opinions within the community vary.

What are some of the benefits that may result from this study?

This study explores a topic that has received little attention in existing research. The intersection of sexuality and fashion, particularly in relation to rainbow washing is under researched. LGBTQ+ studies themselves have only been around for about 50 years, and the specific impact of rainbow washing remains underexplored. As more brands adopt rainbow washing practices, it's important to examine its effects now, before it becomes normalised, much like greenwashing has in the context of sustainability.

Where can you find more information about this research topic?

Below are some links to articles which I have found useful to understanding the concept:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattsymonds/2024/06/26/how-to-detect-rainbow-washing-versus-genuine-lgbtq-support/>

<https://www.vox.com/2018/6/25/17476850/pride-month-lgbtq-corporate-explained>

<https://www.katie-martell.com/blog/2019/6/27/pride-or-pandering>

Academic paper:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00913367.2024.2317147#abstract>

Schopper, T., Berbers, A., & Vogelgsang, L. (2024). Pride or rainbow-washing? Exploring LGBTQ+ advertising from the vested stakeholder perspective. *Journal of Advertising*, 1–18.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2024.2317147>

What should you do if you need support at the end of the study?

If following the interview you are distressed here are some LGBTQ+ support services and mental health resources:

LGBTQ+ support services:

Stonewall – charity for advocating LGBTQ+ rights in the UK, offering information and resources to local services

Website: www.stonewall.org.uk

LGBT Foundation – support, advice and resources for LGBTQ+ individuals

Phone: 03453303030

Email: info@lgbt.foundation

Website: www.lgbt.foundation

MindOut – mental health service run by and for LGBTQ+ people, offering advice, advocacy and peer support

Website: www.mindout.org.uk

Email: info@mindout.org.uk

Mental Health Services:

Mind – offers advice and support

Phone: 03001233393

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Website: www.mind.org.uk

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) – support, with a focus on suicide prevention

Phone: 0800585858

Website: www.thecalmzone.net

Contact details

If you have more questions about the study or would like to request a summary of the findings when they are ready, please contact me using the email address provided above. If this study has harmed you in any way or you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study, you can contact researchethics@arts.ac.uk.

Thank you once again for your contribution to the study!

APPENDICES

(Study advert, interview schedule + interview stimuli)

Study advert/message

Participants will be recruited through emails and private messages.

Email/message:

“Hi! I’m working on my dissertation about rainbow washing in the fashion industry at London college of Fashion.

I’m looking for LGBTQ+ individuals over 18 to take part in a short 30-minute interview. It would be great to hear your thoughts and experiences on this topic!

If you’re interested or want to know more, let me know.

Thank you,
Alix”

Interview schedule

Numbered questions are the main questions and indented questions are further questions I could ask based on previous answers.

- I want to start off by talking about what your clothing means to you, if anything.
 - o Do you think a lot about what you wear when you get dressed in the morning?
 - o Do clothes affect your confidence?
 - o Are you restricted by what you can wear, for example by work, university or other outside pressures?
 - Do you find this limiting? Do you not mind?
 - o Do you use clothing to express yourself?
 - o Do you use clothing to express your sexuality?
 - If not – do you think other people express their identities through clothes?
 - Do you think their personality and identity is visible through their style?
- The interviewer will then explain the definition of rainbow washing and give some visual examples to ensure all participants have a clear and consistent understanding of the topic:

Rainbow washing is when companies use Pride themed campaigns to market themselves to the LGBTQ+ community but don’t actually provide any real support or benefits to the community (Champlin & Li, 2020). For example, many companies celebrate Pride Month in June by selling rainbow-themed merchandise, changing their logos to include rainbow colours on social media, or featuring same-sex couples in their advertisements (Johns, 2022). However, these efforts often lack genuine contributions to LGBTQ+ causes.

Here are a few examples of rainbow washing which interviewer would recap and show images:



M&S released a “LGBT” sandwich in 2019 with lettuce, guac, bacon and tomato. Popular media population, Pink News, was not impressed and sparked a discussion online to deem whether this was offensive or not. The food company did not make it clear whether they were donating to any causes other than their own profits but in reality they donated 10,000 pounds to the Albert Kennedy Trust and 1,000 euros to BeLong in Ireland. However, the donations were unclear and some saw this as exploitation. *(Investigating “Rainbow Washing” in Advertising during Pride, 2024)*



H&M started holding pride campaigns in 2018. They release a range devoted to the LGBTQ+ and create a story around the campaign for example, in 2023 it was about 'chosen families' featuring Dominique Jackson, a transgender model. H&M say they donate to local pride activities and yearly to United Nations Free and Equal (UNs global initiative to combat homophobia and transphobia- which works with awareness campaigns in the US) however, I could find no information on how much is donated or what those donations go towards. Furthermore, their clothes are produced in countries where being gay is illegal, they are made by people who aren't allowed to wear their clothes. *(Celebrating Pride at H&M | H&M GB, 2023)*



In 2022 adidas partnered with queer artists and designer, Kris Andrew Small, for a collection. Queer athletes were models such as Tom Daley and the collection was available to buy for the EA SPORTS FIFA 2022 game. However, the same year adidas sponsored the 2022 Fifa World Cup in Qatar, a country where it is illegal and openly disapproved of to be part of the LGBTQ+ community. *(Adidas Launched Pride Content Series Including Tom Daley and 2022 Pride Collection Comes to EA Sports FIFA 22, 2022)*

Participants are then asked the following questions.

- If you have noticed these campaigns during Pride month specifically, how do you feel about brands promoting LGBTQ+ causes during pride month versus the rest of the year?
 - o If suggests campaigns all year round – do you think LGBTQ+ collections should be permanent or have another suggestion?

- How important is it for you that a brand actively engages with LGBTQ+ issues year-round?
- If you have seen any campaigns where you suspect rainbow washing or a pride campaign you thought was legitimate, how did it make you feel?
 - Did it change your attitudes towards the brand?
 - Did it make you want to buy/not buy from the company?
 - For suspecting RW – what do you think they could have done differently?
 - For legitimate – do you think this type of campaign is applicable to all brands?
- What impact do you think rainbow washing has on LGBTQ+ visibility and representation?
 - Do you think rainbow washing can still be useful for the community?
 - Only negative or positive effects, or both?
 - What are your thoughts on the use of the pride rainbow flag for many of the campaigns?
- Do you know of any or can you think of any other alternatives to explicit LGBTQ+ marketing, like the use of rainbows?

References:

- adidas Launches Pride Content Series Including Tom Daley and 2022 Pride Collection Comes to EA Sports™ FIFA 22.* (2022, June 10). Adidas News Site | Press Resources for All Brands, Sports and Innovations. <https://news.adidas.com/football/adidas-launches-pride-content-series-including-tom-daley-and-2022-pride-collection-comes-to-ea-sport/s/75da5773-3234-4cfa-90e5-910ad1da9b12>
- Celebrating Pride at H&M | H&M GB.* (2023, June 5). H&M. https://www2.hm.com/en_gb/life/culture/inside-hm/pride-2023-chosen-family.html?srsltid=AfmBOor-pTJ3GIL5diGi2VQLV-VQF77AcSUuBj8adsjIHOCBHog2ii1K
- Investigating “rainbow washing” in advertising during Pride.* (2024, February 28). Www.falmouth.ac.uk. <https://www.falmouth.ac.uk/news/rainbow-washing-advertising-pride>

Interview stimuli



Marks and Spencer

Adidas



H&M

Appendix D: Evaluative Commentary

Anonymised transcript:

Transcript

5 March 2025, 01:52pm

● **Alix Damar** started transcription

AD **Alix Damar** 0:04

Perfect. So I just wanna confirm that you just read the participant information and the consent form. And are you still OK to give consent?

P6 0:14

Yes, I read them and I'm happy to give consent.

AD **Alix Damar** 0:17

Yay, OK.

So I'm just going to start off by asking you some like basic questions. But before we get into those, I just, as you just read, reiterating that you can withdraw for up to two weeks, so if you decide you don't want to be part of it anymore, that's completely OK. Your like pseudonym, because it's anonymous, is P6, so you'll just send me an e-mail saying like I'm P6. I don't want to be part of this anymore. And then I'll, like, delete everything. It's completely OK.

P6 0:44

OK.

AD **Alix Damar** 0:52

And also if I ask you any questions that you're not like comfortable with or you don't want to answer, we can skip them or stop the interview, there's no issue.

And also, there's no pressure to answer in in any certain way, like, I just want to hear your opinions on things and already people have given me a range of opinions and it's just better to have what, like you actually think rather than whatever you think you should think.

P6 1:19

OK, perfect.

AD **Alix Damar** 1:21
OK.

So I'm going to start off with some simple ones.
How old are you?

P6 1:27
I'm 20.

AD **Alix Damar** 1:29
And what is your occupation?

P6 1:33
Student.

AD **Alix Damar** 1:35
What are your preferred pronouns?

P6 1:38
She and they.

AD **Alix Damar** 1:41
And in your own words, what is your sexuality?

P6 1:46
Queer.

AD **Alix Damar** 1:50
So, first I'm gonna ask you about, like your dress and what clothing means to you, if anything.

P6 1:57
Nice.

AD **Alix Damar** 1:59
So do you think a lot about what you wear when you get dressed in the morning?

P6 2:04
I think it depends on like what's going on that day, but I guess often I just

think like prioritising comfort and like prioritising, like not, like being comfortable in the sense of, like, physically comfortable but also being comfortable and like the clothes I'm wearing are expressing who I am, and they're not trying to be another thing.

AD Alix Damar 2:30

Mm hmm. So would you say that clothing affects your confidence? Like what you're wearing?

P6 2:36

Yeah, definitely.

AD Alix Damar 2:39

Mm hmm.

P6 2:39

'Cause, I think if I'm wearing something that I'm comfortable in and that I feel is representative of me, I'm automatically gonna be more confident because I'm not then trying to act in the way I think someone who wears those clothes would act, if that makes sense.

Clothing affects confidence

Feeling comfortable and wearing things that are representative of them makes them feel more confident

AD Alix Damar 2:57

Mm hmm. Do you feel restricted by what you can wear? Like, for example, when you go to university or like compared to when you go to the pub or out with friends or something?

P6 3:08

Yeah. I think like there's certain contexts where what I would want to wear would be like happy, comfortable wearing doesn't feel as appropriate, so I have to make different choices. Like especially like with like uni for instance, like it might, I don't know the right words, but it just might just be a bit, not a bit much, but like.
Yeah, I can't really expand on that one right now.

Dressing for university comes with more social expectations

AD Alix Damar 3:37

I think I get what you're saying.

No, I think I think I get what you're saying.

Do you, so would you say that maybe outside of university you use clothing to express yourself and your sexuality more?

P6 3:55

Yeah, I'd say definitely outside of uni 'cause, I think with uni like there's a lot of different like factors going on with like thinking about how what you wear is going to be perceived because there's not only like the other people like around you, like peers and stuff. Then there's also like academic staff and it's like sometimes it's like whether or not I'm going to be taken seriously for wearing what it is that I would want to wear when I'm like interacting with like academic staff.

Consider who they will be seeing when they get dressed

AD Alix Damar 4:24

Mm hmm. Do you think that that has to do with like the fact that you go to like a world-renowned university in London, like you're doing a sciency degree?

Expressing themselves through clothing might mean they aren't taken seriously in their careers

P6 4:37

Yeah, I think that definitely plays like a part in it. I think there's also like a lot of, like, preconceptions around what, like a STEM student is and then by default, what a STEM student then looks like and behaves like and presents like. And I think that I don't fit that and then I don't want to then, like, exacerbate that by then, say, like turning up with, like, a really fun colourful shirt with like a patterned tie on because then that's then adding to the like, oh, there's this difference. And I want to be able to be taken seriously in a space that can be quite like, more traditional, I'd say. So yeah, I think that definitely plays a part in it.

AD Alix Damar 5:23

Yeah, that's that's so understandable.

OK, so now I want to move on to rainbow washing, what, like my dissertation is about.

Firstly, just so we are on the same page and like can clarify, do you know what rainbow washing is? Like could you describe it if you do?

P6 5:46

So is it like when companies all like market as being like LGBTQ+, like positive and friendly and sometimes like use the flag or like terminology to like market their stuff.

Has a basic idea of rainbow washing

AD Alix Damar 6:03

Mm hmm. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That's like, yeah, that's part of it.

Would you like to go through some like examples that I've come up with so that we can like go over?

P6 6:15

Perfect.

AD **Alix Damar** 6:16

The full yeah, like definition so.

You can open the interview stimuli Word document.

P6 6:24

Nice.

AD **Alix Damar** 6:28

OK, so from my research like what you've said, rainbow washing is when companies target the LGBTQ+ community, often using pride flags, and this is also often during June, like Pride Month. But they don't holistically support the queer community.

Whether that's through other practises or they're doing things that are openly like anti-gay in other parts of their company. So for example, the, the one at the top is M&S. They made like an LGBT sandwich.

P6 7:12

Yeah, I remember seeing that.

AD **Alix Damar** 7:15

The, the online publication Pink News basically sparked an online debate saying, is this all right or is this poking fun at the community or is this kind of targeted towards the queer community but not actually doing anything serious to help?

It wasn't clear like when you were just buying the sandwich in the shop, it wasn't clear whether M&S was doing anything to help the queer community. In reality, they donated 10,000 pounds to a British trust and 1000 euros to an Irish trust. But,

It isn't exactly clear why those those amounts were chosen or or anything like that.

And so some people thought that it was kind of using it just as a ploy.

Like, oh, that's kind of funny like during prime month.

The, the second one I think is the Adidas campaign on the the picture. So this was adidas's 2022 Pride collection. It was a collaboration with a

queer artist called Kris Andrew Small, and it was modelled by queer athletes such as Tom Daley, and it was also featured in like the FIFA 2022 game, so it was a really big collection for Adidas. But in the same year, Adidas sponsored the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which was hosted in Qatar, which is a country where it's not only illegal to be queer, but it's frowned upon and the country or the rulers, the government of the country, made it clear that 'just because you're in our country doesn't mean we're going to adhere to a Western values', particularly with like alcohol, and that was lgbtq+ community. So it's kind of, Adidas is saying that they support the queer community, but then they're also doing a business deal that isn't like ethical.

P6 9:28

Yeah.

AD **Alix Damar** 9:30

And then the last one, H&M, probably the most popular like fast fashion, pride, like known for its pride campaigns as well as like Primark and stuff. They've been doing campaigns since 2018 and they say that they donate to local pride activities and UNs free and EQUAL initiative, which is a campaign to like combat transphobia and homophobia worldwide. But in the US, it's mostly awareness campaigns, so like making people aware of the gay community, or the queer community like as a whole. But H&M doesn't really go into the specifics of these donations. I was looking through multiple different parts of H&M website and it wasn't really clear what they were doing. It was more just what the campaigns were throughout the years.

P6 10:29

OK.

AD **Alix Damar** 10:30

And also, H&M clothes are created in countries where it's illegal to be queer, so. It's kind of, the people making the clothes can't even wear them, type thing.

P6 10:45

Yeah.

AD

Alix Damar 10:46

So yeah, does that kind of like give you a bit of a rundown? Do you have any questions about it?

P6 10:52

No, that was great. Thank you.

AD

Alix Damar 10:54

OK, perfect.

So, now I'll get onto the the questions [laughs]. So if you have noticed any of these campaigns during Pride Month specifically, how do you feel about brands promoting LGBTQ+ causes during Pride Month versus the rest of the year?

P6 11:18

When they're only done during Pride Month, it really does just feel like a money grab in a way to be like 'oh, like, look at us like we're doing this good thing, so you should spend your money, because like we align with like queer rights'.

But then if you then think about it, like, if they're not doing it at any other time of the year, then why is it that they're only choosing pride month to do it and it doesn't feel like it's because of like visibility because if it was about visibility, it would actually be more beneficial to not be doing it when there's all that stuff happening, like to be doing it like a much longer term thing.

Pride campaigns can feel like commodifying queer community

If doing a campaign during pride month, doesn't feel like its about visibility because queerness us visible during that's month – visibility should be clear not just in pride month

AD

Alix Damar 12:05

Mm hmm. So do you think that these campaigns should be like more all year round? or not like centred around a certain month?

P6 12:17

Yeah, I think them being, all year round or, but or not necessarily like all year round, but like not them appearing on the 1st of June and disappearing again as soon as June's over.

Because I understand obviously around like the clothing and stuff, lots of people will be wanting to buy that for pride like events, which obviously going to be in around that time of year but, so it does make sense, like from business perspective, to have them around for June, but maybe if they were like contributing in other ways to the community and not only

Pride merch has benefits during pride, for events etc

contributing at that time, then it wouldn't feel as like, much of like a money grab or like, a, like appropriating like queerness for profit.

AD

Alix Damar 13:16

Yeah, yeah, for sure.

If if you can think of any of the of these campaigns where you've either seen rainbow washing or seen a campaign which you thought was legitimate, how did that make you feel? If you can remember?

P6 13:40

As in, so with that question, do you mean, do you know when you said a legitimate one is that one that, I think is like ... wait, what did you mean by that? Sorry.

AD

Alix Damar 13:51

So if you saw a campaign and you were like, 'oh wow, that seems like they're actually doing a good thing for the queer community', like, you could see that they were donating or they were, you know, trying to.

P6 14:07

Oh, OK. Yeah, that makes sense. No, no, that makes sense. 'cause. I thought that that's what you meant. But then I didn't wanna go. Go off on one. If that's not what you've meant.

AD

Alix Damar 14:09

Yeah, like.

Yeah.

P6 14:21

I guess when I've seen one in the past, I believed one, well, I was led to believe that there was like proper like donations and support going into the like back into the community and with that I remember feeling, like not annoyed by it because I can get quite annoyed by the other ones that do, just feel like, like they're, like, appropriate in Pride Month for profit.

So I felt like, 'OK, yeah, that, that it looks legitimate, they're doing a good thing, this is beneficial, it's increasing visibility, there's no harm here'.

And I think also with that, they'd actually used designs by queer people, which also then made it feel more authentic, It wasn't just a random design done for the sake of it.

Suggestions:

Donations are beneficial

When campaigns feel genuine, they don't annoy them but if they feel fake its upsetting

Queer designers make collections feel authentic

AD

Alix Damar 15:17

Hmm. Yeah. Do you think that that made you want to buy or not want to buy, like, well, I guess if it was legitimate, did it make you want to buy from the company more or do you think it didn't really affect those types of purchase intentions?

P6 15:35

And it made me want to buy more and like, consider buying more. And like looking into that brand, like in other times of the year.

Genuine campaigns impact purchasing decisions all year round and for other products

AD

Alix Damar 15:48

Hmm, OK.

Well, you've been you've been kinda mentioning about queer visibility, like what impact do you think Rainbow washing has on LGBTQ+ visibility and representation in mainstream culture?

P6 16:08

I can't, I I think at times it can be quite actually reductive because often these like, especially the tops, like, I'm thinking of like the white tops with the like 'love is love' and like 'pride' and like just like a rainbow on them and it can like really like reduce like being queer down to like [pause] I don't, to like, it almost misrepresents it. Like obviously, yes, like love is love and like it's good like we have pride. But like, that's not all that queer identity is. And I think it can also like the focus on like...

Rainbow washing negatively impacts queer community

Reduces community to one thing, misrepresents a lot of it

AD

Alix Damar 16:46

Mm hmm mm hmm.

P6 16:56

Almost like, party clothes and pride clothes, which obviously are needed for pride, but like, can also then detract from the fact that being queer isn't always a party, like it's not always easy and also, a lot of it feels more centred around like cisgender like homosexual men and like their like form of queer culture as opposed to like the wider community and lots [audio cuts out]

Queer identity isn't one thing

Some campaigns focus too much on the positives, detracts for the struggles of the community, different parts struggling more than others

AD

Alix Damar 17:34

You went silent.

I still cant hear you. No. Oh, hello.

P6 17:43

Hello.

I don't know why that happened.

AD

Alix Damar 17:48

Oh.

P6 17:49

But yeah, I feel like it can be more targeted towards like cis het and, like gay men, and that can be reflected in like the clothing.

AD

Alix Damar 17:59

Mm hmm mm hmm.

P6 18:01

But then also I guess it can be beneficial, especially like if you're young and you're seeing these clothes for the first time and they've got like, words and phrases that you identify with and you think like, 'oh, if I wore that like, I would feel confident like present as myself'. So I guess it's like one of those things, like it depends on the context.

Pride campaigns more useful for younger, newly 'out' individuals

AD

Alix Damar 18:25

Mm hmm. Yeah, well, kind of on that note, what are your thoughts on the use of the pride flag? Sort of, solely as the face of the pride like campaign? Do you think that there are other symbols that could be used or or other things you would want to see?

Collections can be good or bad depending on context

P6 18:48

And I think if you're gonna use the pride flag you should be using the one that, like the intersectional pride flag that has, like the, the trans, yeah, with the trans colours and like the black and the brown, because I feel like that flag's more like authentically like part of the community, like part of the community and like represents a lot more people.

Use of progress pride flag better – feels more authentic to wider community, represents more people

But I think like in general like using the flag sometimes, like if it's done nicely and like tastefully like. Yeah, like the pride flag like, it's important like it represents, like queer history. But it can just feel like people have stuck a rainbow on something for the sake of it. Like, when it'll be like a completely like random image that's just got like that rainbow gradient on it, and then it's suddenly a pride top and then that just feels like it's

Traditional pride flag represents history but can be exploited for the sake of the campaign

Campaign should be intentional

been done just for the sake of it, there's no thought and intention behind it. I think it's about the intention, like if it looks like there's like a creative thought and a clear intention behind it, then yeah, why not? But when there's not that, then it can just feel.

AD **Alix Damar** 19:46
Mm hmm.
Yeah.
Mm hmm.

P6 20:09
A bit like it's reducing the flag down to like just being a rainbow when it's not just a rainbow, it is symbolic.

Pride flag overused

AD **Alix Damar** 20:22
Is there any other like points you wanted to mention or any other thoughts you have on the topic?

P6 20:30
I think that's everything.

AD **Alix Damar** 20:32
OK, cool. Well, that's all of the questions I had.
That was you had some really nice points, especially about the. Using the flag with the trans and the POC like colours because I had someone else mention that as well and obviously now that it's on my radar it makes complete sense, but before I wouldn't have thought about that.
And I think that like you're right, it's more inclusive and the original like pride flag that was kind of formed in a time when, like the first wave of, I don't know what to call it, but.

P6 21:19
Yeah, there, there wasn't like the same like social movement and like, understanding of intersectionality when it was created. It's like, I don't mind it, but I guess like now if a company's going to use it, I'm like, why not just use the other one? But yeah.

Pride flag is representative of its time, but now there is more intersectionality so other flags should be used

AD **Alix Damar** 21:19
Like.

Yeah. Well, I guess as well that shows the importance of having queer artists and queer people collaborating on these types of things because then they know like what to include because they experience it themselves.

P6 21:47

Yeah.

AD **Alix Damar** 21:49

Yeah.

Well, that's so perfect. Thank you so much.

I also the other document I sent you was the debrief sheet, that just kind of has a bit more information about the study and as well it has a few articles in a paper about rainbow washing if you want to read about it.

P6 22:09

OK, perfect. Thank you.

AD **Alix Damar** 22:10

So yeah, you can just look over that in your own time.

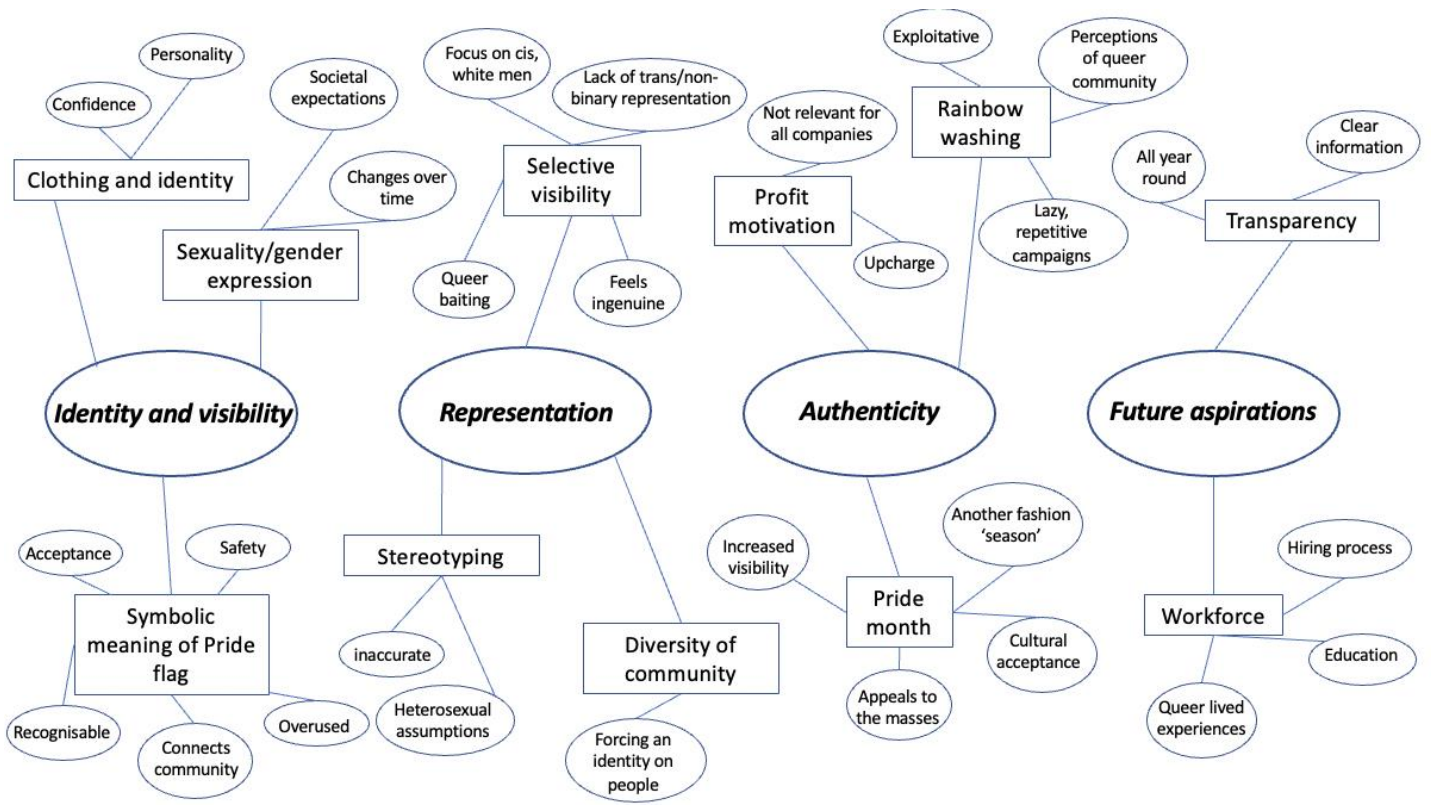
Yeah, I'm going to start recording.

P6 22:18

Yeah, I hope that was helpful.

● **Alix Damar** stopped transcription

Thematic Map showing Queer Perceptions of Rainbow Washing:



Themes Table:

Main theme	Sub-themes	Example quotes
Identity and visibility	-clothing and identity -symbolic meaning of PF -sexuality/gender expression	"If I look good in my outfit, I feel more confident." (P1) "Sometimes wearing Pride stuff makes me feel alienated, not seen." (P4) "It's like you have to identify yourself" (wearing the pride flag) (P4) "it's a symbol that is there for the whole gay community" (P4) "it's reducing the flag down to like just being a rainbow when it's not just a rainbow, it is symbolic" (P6) "[the pride flag] might be a massive like indicator of safety" (P10) "I carry the flag to feel a little bit more visible." (P1) "it's more an expression of my gender than it is of my sexuality" (P11) "I'd say the clothes that wear express my sexuality and personality, quite a lot" (P5) "for me clothing's like a very large part of myself expression" (P12) "my style can give like a little bit of a tell-tale kind of situation of my sexuality" (P14) "[clothing is] the only kind of clue you can give people to hopefully get ... perceived in the way you want to be perceived" (P4)
Representation	-focus on cis, white men -lack of trans/non-binary representation -stereotyping -diversity in the community	"The rainbow washing mainly targets white gay men, which harms visibility for others." (P3) "[rainbow washing] picks and chooses is the queerness that is palatable" (P3) "when you think of gay, you think of like, a, an effeminate gay man, you know, gay white man" (P4) "centred around like cisgender like homosexual men and like their like form of queer culture as opposed to like the wider community" (P6) "There's barely anything that includes trans people." (P12) "it's absolutely outrageous ... they've got no affordable underwear for trans people" (P4) "It feels like queer representation is just one narrow stereotype." (P6) "they don't really connect with my perception of my own queerness" (P1) "[queer representation] can be quite actually reductive" (P6) "that's not gay people, that is corporations" (P7) "very diverse pool of people from the community" (P11) "the community is so big" (P9) "queer space is such like a broad thing" (P10)
Authenticity	-profit motivation -rainbow washing -pride month (beyond June, commercialisation)	"It feels like they're just profiting off our community." (P13) "It doesn't feel like it's about visibility, it feels like a money grab." (P6) "it all feels very exploiting ... profit off ... hop on the trend" (P13) "the same people holding the company so are they actually doing the work or are they just <u>tying</u> to keep selling?" (P11) "[rainbow washing] commodifies it rather than educates" (P3) "[rainbow washing] can make you feel a little bit like used like you're a marketing campaign" (P5) "[rainbow washing pride campaigns] feels quite opportunistic" (P11) "it should be portraying a political or a message that at least enforces or helps gay people" (P12) "it's just for show ... there's no real commitment." (P13) "the lack of understanding why Pride Month is a thing to begin with" (P12) "Pride month it makes sense as a useful tool for getting conversations going" (P1) "If you really care, it should be visible all year round." (P4) "They only change their logo for June, then it's back to normal." (P7)
		"If it was something that was constantly promoted throughout the year, I feel like I would feel less exploited" (P13) "companies need to be consistent rather than just one month ... queer people being ignored for the rest of the time" (P2)
Future aspirations	-transparency -workforce	"big companies aren't transparent with people" (P10) "have that signposted ... say on the barcode ... on the clothing tag ... have information" (P4) "[large companies] try to throw it on your face as a way to like divert you from what they actually do" (P14) "Support needs to be reflected internally too, not just externally." (P10) "if you want to do a pride or queer collection, then have people in your team" (P11) "events or uplifting queer voices on their teams or even like, campaigns with queer individuals" (p3) "amplify smaller queer designers voices and work" (P7) "be more inclusive in like your recruiting process" (P14)