As of late, issues pertaining to diversity have taken the main stage in public conversation both domestically and globally. None of this can be done without understanding and accepting diversity and developing ways to include and represent every group. Diversity includes, but is not limited to: race, color, religion, religious creed, national origin, gender identity, sexuality, veteran status, ability status and age. Although the fashion industry is open to more diversity than average – for example there are many openly homosexual designers, it purposefully excludes certain groups (e.g., the plus sized). The fashion industry is not exempt from these forces of burgeoning actions towards inclusion of all diverse populations. Understanding diversity for fashion professionals is both an ethical and moral responsibility. Moreover, from a business standpoint, it is very important because fashion is sold to and consumed by a diverse population. Identifying diverse groups can also highlight niche markets that can be profitable and fill a void for many diverse groups.

The issues of equity and diversity make headlines. The minority group making headlines as of late is African Americans. The recent slaughter of black men at the hands of law enforcement has heightened racial tension and magnified the need for intervention. Race is a legally protected aspect of diversity. Following these murders there has been subsequent lawsuits citing the systematic targeting of black men by law enforcement. These murders all stem from archaic stereotypes perpetuated by the media and at times the fashion industry.

It is not uncommon to watch runways in Paris, Milan and New York that feature the absolute minimal diversity. Arguably, the most inclusion we see from designers is when they feature aspects of black culture through hair, make up and design. But when the face of a brand is a white model donning a black aesthetic, it sends a mixed message to the public: that these visuals are only desirable on non-black individuals. Kylie Jenner, a prominent socialite, has made headlines with over-lined lips and successive lip injections; which set off a wave of females striving for similar lips. However, when the make-up company MAC posted a photograph of the voluptuous lips of a black model, the comment section was flooded with racial slurs.

Increasing visibility of diverse groups would accurately depict the society we live in, and the fashion industry has the authority to disseminate this concept. An important aspect of a corporation is ethical cultural responsibilities. The fact that many of these groups are minorities does not mean they should be ignored. These groups are legally protected. They exist and are not disappearing. Minorities consume fashion, the religiously devout consume fashion, veterans consume fashion, and the disabled consume fashion. We all have the right to the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. In order to meet the needs of these populations, we need to identify, accept, address, and respect the diversity they offer.

As fashion oriented professionals, it is our duty to set norms. We need to ask questions like “what is important for us to consider as a group,” and “what is important personally, to be valued and heard?” Then we need to answer these questions with the guidelines of respecting and listening to the voices of others, speaking from the “I” perspective, seeking understanding.
before being understood, and embracing discomfort. This process will enable the industry to properly include diverse groups and fill the void created by catering to the majority and excluding the minority.