

REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSION IN FASHION INDUSTRY

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Overview

The UK fashion industry plays a significant role in the global fashion infrastructure by connecting international supply and retail chains with both internal and external media production markets. According to the Prince's Responsible Business Network research, the un-unleashed potential of women¹ in the workplace brings approximately £23 billion of loss to Britain a year and roughly \$3.2 trillion globally. The study of the representation of women in London² found that more than ¾ of Londoners say that their city's diversity in public advertising is underrepresented. Therefore the ads they see in public areas are irrelevant to them. As a result, out of £380 million of the investment into advertising in public areas³, 75% has no return-on-investment due to the audience mis(under)representation. In addition to that, the objectification of women in public media decreases brand loyalty and trust by discouraging 82% of women from the purchase when they see women-objectifying⁴ ads.

The issues around representation and inclusion of women in the fashion and fashion-related industries create a significant deficit in net and the talent pool growth at the national and international levels. Resolving them is an integral part of the sustainable economic development in the country and in global fashion infrastructure.

Objective

The information provided below reveals the areas for improvement to ensure inclusivity, fair and equal representation of women and girls in the UK's fashion industry.

¹ Women at Work: The Facts <https://gender.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/factsheets/women-and-work-facts>

² The Women We See: The UCL Institute of Education https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2018_women_we_see.pdf

³ Transport of London Annual Advertising Report 2017/18 <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/tfl-advertising-report-1718.pdf>

⁴ Advertising Benchmark Index (ABI) [report](http://womennotobjects.com) on women objectification in advertising <http://womennotobjects.com>

1. The evidence of poor access, inclusion or representation of women to the goods and services produced by the fashion industry

- **Discrimination of women at LFW runways**

According to Fashion Diversity Report 2018⁵, Spring/Summer was the first season where a London designer hired female model without child-sized body features. During London Fashion Week (LFW) in 2018, there was no representation of women over the age of 50 or women with disabilities. The Fashion Diversity Report 2019⁶ shows that London and the rest of the Fashion Weeks in Europe continue to promote images of prepubescent, childlike women inside the fashion industry and in its public media and advertising.

Recommendation: Given that London is one of the most diverse cities on earth, the catwalks of LFW must reflect its inclusivity too. LFW acts as a showcase to the world, offering the best of what the UK has. Therefore, it must take social and global responsibility for the diverse and inclusive representation of its fashion producers and its multicultural audience. Different age groups, body shapes, ethnic backgrounds and abilities – should represent both London women and women globally.

- **Objectification and gender stereotypes on LFW runways**

'Epic fails'⁷, 'When Models Fail'⁸ and 'How Gracefully These Models Fail'⁹ – just some of the headlines from the media coverage which would never associate with the male's image in fashion and moreover male's image in public. Female models often fall on the runway due to exhausting working hours walking in incredibly uncomfortable footwear on slippery floors. The normalisation of the hazardous working conditions for the sake of the creative idea traumatises not only the model who have experienced physical and emotional pain but also compromises the image of an entire social group that model is associated. Models on the catwalk represent real people in life. Therefore their image, integrity and wellbeing should never be compromised over the creative idea.

- a. *"As an ex-model, this is still the most painful and embarrassing moment of my life. Trust me, I know how this feels, terrible experience, this happens when the ankles are exhausted from the stretch of the heels. Every ankle has a stretch limit – yours could be 4" heel, but for the models, it goes to 6" and beyond interchangeably, for a period 4-6 hrs and more of continuous wearing. I left this job 12 years ago, but I still feel pain in both ankles when I stand on heels for more than 1hr." - Jean*

⁵ Runway Diversity Report Fall 2018 <https://www.thefashionspot.com/runway-news/786015-runway-diversity-report-fall-2018/>

⁶ Runway Diversity Report Spring 2019 <https://www.thefashionspot.com/runway-news/807483-spring-2019-runway-diversity-report/>

⁷ Business Insider <https://www.businessinsider.com/even-models-fall-a-look-at-epic-fails-on-the-catwalk-2011-9>

⁸ Entertainment channel 'Exedran Compilations': When Models Fail (10.5M views) <https://youtu.be/ajEuqkMrF4E>

⁹ ELLE Watch How Gracefully These Models Fail (18.5M views) <https://youtu.be/fnLpSqGiBW4>

Recommendation: No one should ever forget that models who wear even the most fabulous "art pieces" aren't objects – they are humans. Therefore designers and fashion show producers must never compromise the health and safety of models over the creative idea. As in any other business, the obligation to provide safe working tools and environment applies to all types of employment. Comfortable footwear and hazard-free working conditions during life shows (un-slippery and sturdy surfaces, obstacle-free walks, safe and comfortable to eye lighting and others...) would significantly decrease the number of incidents and traumatic experiences on runways. Moreover, it will help to build an image of women free from social objectification, ridicule and harmful gender stereotype of a 'silly-woman'.

- **Exclusion of models on a period from work**

It is a well-known fact in the modelling industry that models having periods are less likely to be cast for a show or a photo/video shoots because of their period¹⁰.

b. *"Models are expected to be flawless as they show off the most beautiful clothes in the world, not bloated, spotty or God-forbid, leaking." - Kashmiri Gander*

The industry requires that female models must always wear thongs to ensure their underwear doesn't show through clothes. Such practice not only forces discomfort¹¹ at work during the period but also puts models at risk¹² of the life-threatening infection – toxic shock syndrome (TSS) often caused by the use of tampons. The facilities where the castings, a live show or a photo/video shoots take place often aren't equipped to support women with periods. Therefore when the 'leak' happens, there is no place to get a menstrual hygiene item. Moreover, the harsh competition conditions during the castings, put female models into a situation when the need for a 5min-loo-break to change the sanitary item, is equal to losing a job. Such adverse experience increases the levels of stress, insecurity and can cause permanent mental and physical health issues.

Recommendation: Periods happen to all females, and it's a natural phenomenon that must be acknowledged by the fashion industry. So, having a female-friendly approach to its biggest workforce is critical. All casting and live events spaces must have women-friendly facilities to allow female models to feel secure and able to express their individual needs openly. Providing the emergency sanitary kits with a sanitary towel, disposable underwear and wet wipes at the show or casting location, would make a significant improvement in the life of female models and the industry at large. There also should be more flexibility on what types of underwear models can wear to feel comfortable and confident when working during their periods.

- **Exclusion of plus-size girls and women from brand communication**

¹⁰ Independent: models are expected always to be flawless.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/london-fashion-week-2016-model-what-its-like-to-have-your-period-lfw.html>

¹¹ Alexandria Morgan, Fashion Model: Spilling tea on fashion industry <https://youtu.be/MoWnl5wfOYk?t=858>

¹² DailyMail: Model loses second leg because of a tampon
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-5276685/Model-loses-second-leg-toxic-shock-syndrome.html>

The findings of the survey on plus-size¹³ shopping on Britain's High Streets show 90% of plus size women say they feel unwanted by high street fashion shops, 2/3 say plus-size ranges are very poor, only 1 in 10 plus-size UK women feel comfortable asking for help in-store, 2/3 of plus-size women prefer to try on items at home rather than in-store, 93% of plus-size women say they buy clothing to hide body parts, only 7% buy clothes to keep up with fashion trends.

- **Exclusion of women 'over-50s' from brand communication**

Another survey revealed¹⁴ that 89% of respondents 'over-50s' said that the UK brands weren't interested in them, and 74% felt that fashion media has never represented them at all.

c. *"Advertising always is behind the curve. A bunch of men in their forties who are scared of getting old runs it". - Vicki Maguire, CCO at Grey London.*

- **Exclusion of girls and women with disabilities from brand communication**

The diversity agenda often overlooks disability in fashion education, garments production, representation at fashion shows, advertising and even on the shop floors. There are over 11 million people in the UK¹⁵ (16% of all population) with a limiting long term illness, impairment or disability. Around 6% of children are disabled, compared to 16% of working-age adults and 45% of adults over age 65. According to the World Health Organisation¹⁶, about 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability – an impairment that may be cognitive, developmental, intellectual, mental, physical, sensory, or a combination of them.

Recommendation: By representing diverse types of women in branded content, equipping the store floor and showcase windows with diverse-looking mannequins, (small, medium, large in size, physically impaired, representing different skin colours, and having different hair types) will not only increase the brand engagement and add over £6 billion of net to the industry, but also will promote social inclusivity and openness of the brand, city, country and nation.

Women over-50 make up a 1/3 of the UK's population and hold 80% of the wealth with spending power. It's a significant loss to the fashion industry not utilising such buying potential due to a discriminatory attitude towards the third biggest fashion audience. It is time for women's wear brands to consider promoting their goods to women of all age groups, which will help both: the business growth and to champion social responsibility.

Finally, women and girls with disabilities should become an integral part of the women's fashion production, media and advertising – as designers, models, stylists, shop assistants, an image and decision-makers. The fashion education programs should

¹³ DailyMail, Plus-Size Women Abandoned by the UK's Fashion Industry. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2722960/Plus-size-women-abandoned-UK-shops-9-10-ditching-fashion-completely.html>

¹⁴ CampaignLive Survey: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/50+-age-group-grey-area-brands/1429270>

¹⁵ Disability facts and figures: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disability-facts-and-figures/disability-facts-and-figures>

¹⁶ World Report on Disability https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/en/

promote the production of clothes and shopping spaces that will help, support and suit all people, including those with special needs. Challenging fashion exclusivity and 'fashionable' norms, will open up a way to the new lines of clothes, enhancing the sensory, cognitive, acoustic abilities and social integration of all members of our society. Representation of people with disabilities should be seen not only as an economic opportunity to expand the fashion business and fulfil the needs of 15% of the global population but also as a creative opportunity for developing new types of fabrics, abilities-enhancing designs.

2. The evidence of experienced discrimination and unfair treatment based on appearance (identity) by people or institutions within the fashion industry

- **The discrimination of women in management and leadership roles**

Another problem the fashion industry has – females work, but males still rule them. While 75% of fashion workers are women, yet men are more likely and more often awarded with praise¹⁷. Women designers compared to their male colleagues, are described to appeal to the everyday consumer using words such as "comfortable" or "grounded". Men designers, in the meantime, are described as major artists, "soul of a poets" or a "boundary crossers".

- d. *"Seeing the Moschino show yesterday makes me so sad and I feel so hurt that someone has, the way it looks to me, unquestionably used my SS16 and SS17 collections as inspiration without granting me any credit. As a young designer one is so vulnerable and they probably thought this would go unnoticed. I will make sure it doesn't."¹⁸ - Edda Gimnes, London-based female designer who had met with someone from Moschino in New York in November 2017 to show her sketchbooks and work to. – Following up the incident, Moschino has released a statement refuting these claims, saying: "Trompe-l'œil has been a long-standing motif embedded in the Moschino DNA. This collection was Jeremy's Scott love letter to fashion .*

Men currently run 86% out of 50 major fashion brands¹⁹. Only 3 out of 10 listed famous fashion designers of all time were women. Even if women created certain fashion houses at their time, today they often have male creative leaders. Finally, regardless of a large number of LGBT fashion designers and image-makers in the industry, the representation of LGBT women in fashion is highly outnumbered by men. Out of 143 LGBT fashion designer's list, only 7 are women²⁰.

¹⁷ Fashionista: Gender Issue in fashion industry. https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/en/

¹⁸ Dazed, style and culture magazine: Moschino copies emerging designer's work <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/41535/1/moschino-copies-edda-gimnes-jeremy-scott-statement-milan-fashion-week-ss19>

¹⁹ BOF: How can fashion develop more women leaders. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/voices/discussions/how-can-fashion-develop-more-women-leaders/less-female-fashion-designers-more-male-designers>

²⁰ Wikipedia: LGBT Fashion Designers https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:LGBT_fashion_designers

Recommendation: Fashion industry's workforce and leadership must have equal representation of both genders, including non-binaries. In order, to prevent underrepresentation of people at all infrastructural levels, the industry must adapt free from stereotypes attitude towards women and their ability to contribute to production, to creative direction and decision-making process. In addition to that, fashion education system, must not only teach young talents how to collaborate with the seniors and industry leaders, but also how to protect their ideas and designs, from unscrupulous individuals and companies too.

- **Discrimination of women and their ethnic and cultural background in fashion media**

About 90% of media created images are lensed by white men²¹. Women photographers, regardless of their ethnic background, find it hard to enter the industry²². Clients and PR agencies often subject females ability to deliver great work and discriminate them against their male colleagues.

e. *"PR agency once told me outright that some clients prefer men. They said that the client loved my work, but they're just not comfortable with a woman photographer." - Kristina Wilson, female photographer*

The fashion houses rush to declare their brand's equality and inclusivity publicly, but when it comes to producing real work, the white models are still more favourable among casting and creative directors compared to the models of colour²³.

f. *"In Europe, not being diverse is not a problem. We have black and Asian casting directors being told not to cast black and Asian models to their face. A prominent photographer once told me: I don't shoot blacks." - James Scully, Casting Director*

g. *"Black models are still asking for just one hairstylist on every team no matter where your team is from to care for afro hair. After one lady attempted and pulled my edges relentlessly, I stood up to find someone who could possibly do my hair. This is not okay. This will never be okay. This needs to change. No matter how small your team is, make sure you have a hairstylist that is competent at doing all types of hair."²⁴ - Olivia Anakwe, Model*

Sadly, but up to these days, even the editors of the biggest and the most influential fashion publications tend to form very in-diverse teams and discriminatory environment at the workplace. The former editor of UK Vogue, Alexandra Shulman, fell into the trap when asked about a photo of her 50 members of staff which every single person was white.²⁵

²¹ Already Made: Breaking into a 'Boys' Club' of commercial photography. <https://alreadymade.org/about/>

²² Racked: Sexism in fashion photography <https://www.racked.com/2017/11/30/16720374/photography-sexism-fashion>

²³ Refinery29 <https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/fashion-industry-lack-of-diversity-discrimination>

²⁴ Daily Mail – FW hairstylist unable to style black hair

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-6796183/Model-calls-hairstylists-unable-black-hair-Paris-Fashion-Week.html>

²⁵ The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/nov/18/exclusive-fashion-world-new-vogue-change>

- h. *"Other stories crossed the line of discrimination based on religion when a Muslim or Jewish devotee wanted to dress according to their beliefs about modesty and take time off for a religious break; my boss quickly got rid of such people who didn't meet her 'look' requirements. Now everyone who works in the office is thin and 99% white, with the glamorization of eating disorders and other issues.²⁶" - an anonymous person*
- i. *"A major Editor-in-Chief told me that although I was brilliant, I looked 'too scrappy' to work on a print publication, so I could either get a makeover or work in digital, where I was allowed to look 'more creative.' The same EIC refused to promote a colleague because she 'didn't look like right for the magazine,' i.e. she wasn't beautiful/thin," - an anonymous person*

No different is the British Fashion Model Agents Association approach to those who should represent the women's fashion²⁷. It states that ONLY GIRLS having clear skin, good hands, regular features and matching the following size criteria for figure: 34-24-34 in (standard clothing size S-XS-XS), can become models for womenswear brands. Although the British Fashion Council (BFC) endorses it²⁸, such an approach to model criteria hardly matches their advocacy for a 'positive fashion' concept.

Recommendation: A toxic ideology adopted during the colonial period, that ONLY white people can be thought-leaders and trend-setters, that ONLY white people have buying power and that ONLY the white skin is the most favourable among other skin shades, create nothing but separatism between the cultures, social groups and individuals. The history of humankind provides countless evidence that abilities to contribute to the art and science, political and economic development of humanity come from people with different ethnic backgrounds regardless of their social status, belief system or skin colour. Globalisation has enabled racial interchange, and different people are ready to contribute to the industry's growth and sustainability. So, to make fashion representative and inclusive, the media, creative teams and models must come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, different age groups and have various features and abilities.

- **Unfair treatment of women: humiliation, abuse, exploitation and gender pay-gap**

During the fashion weeks, hundreds of models are travelling to the most prominent fashion cities in the hope of getting a job. However, many tend to go home financially worse off than when they arrived.²⁹

- j. *"It always feels like a gamble to make the journey to fashion week with the risk you'll go home owing more than when you arrived. Maybe 40%, maybe*

²⁶ Fashionista: Bullying Survey <https://fashionista.com/2019/01/fashion-industry-workplace-bullying-survey-2018>

²⁷ BFMA Requirements for a women's wear models <https://www.bfma.fashion/what-it-takes-to-be-a-model/>

²⁸ British Fashion Council: Positive fashion model programme: <https://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk/BFC-Initiatives-Support/BFC-Initiatives/Positive-Fashion/Model-Programme>

²⁹ BBC: Fashion models are in a life of debt <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-47145680>

more, go home with zero. That's why the modelling job is so stressful." – Model

- k. *"Now everyone became vocal about sexual exploitation, but no-one wants to talk about money. The lack of information is the main problem. The models don't know what they are supposed to receive." - Ekaterina Ozhiganova, Model*
- l. *"The problem is that the girls are seen as "disposable" by many agencies, and it's an open secret that at fashion weeks some big agencies take the approach that hundreds of girls can be 'thrown against the wall to see what sticks'. Often girls from eastern Europe and Africa are the most vulnerable." – Esther Kinnear, co-founder of Linden Staub*

Among other issues in fashion, there are stories of the model who was drawn on with a permanent marker to show which parts of her body were 'fat'; the model who was made to run around a studio in stiletto heels until she collapsed; the hopefuls kept in a room for ten hours with no food or water; some had their hair hacked off without their consent, or even be treated worse than animals³⁰.

- m. *"I was very disturbed to hear from the models this morning that they (Casting Directors of Balenciaga) made more than 150 girls wait in a stairwell for over three hours. They turned off the lights, shut the door, and went for lunch, leaving models with only the lights of their phones to see. Not only was this sadistic and cruel, but it was also dangerous, and left some girls permanently traumatised." – James Scully, Casting Director*
- n. *"I have lost count of the times I faced abuse." – London-based model Rosalie Nelson*

The exploitation of people in luxury fashion houses no differs from the exploitation of workers in the sweatshops³¹. Most of the times, the employment at 'big-label' means that employee won't get paid at all. The reason for the unpaid work is justified by the privilege to work for a fashion house. The message coming from the industry that working in fashion is hyper socially validating, even though you don't get paid. The industry has created an illusion of an exceptional world outside ordinary life, which denies all the norms of labour conditions, calling them instead 'a luxury lifestyle'. In cases when payment is agreed, it may be paid not in full amount or paid in unpredictable ways that cannot be turned into cash. For example, the employee can be given a voucher for a designer boutique or a flight-ticket to fashion shoots or accommodation in hotels.

- o. *"When we think of exploitation, we think of sweatshops or sexual harassment. However, I want to make clear, that exploitation exists at the very heart of the powerfully symbolic and economic centre of the big luxury brands. Stylists, makeup artists, young designers, interns, assistants – all being exploited, but in a different form." – Giulia Mensitieri*

³⁰ Daily Mail: Sadism in fashion
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-4303058/Models-reveal-ugly-truth-fashion-industry.html>

³¹ Guardian: Chanel shoes, but no salary.
<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2018/sep/02/academic-exposing-ugly-reality-high-fashion-giulia-mensitieri>

- p. *"He (Creative Director) was earning £11,700 a month but I was on the minimum wage. Even £90 a month more would have made a difference to me. But he wouldn't do it." – anonymous female designer*

What about fashion media producers? The British Vogue has also been criticised for using unpaid interns in month-long placements despite the new editor Edward's Enniful commitment to increasing diversity at the fashion journal³². Tanya de Grunwald, a campaigner for fair internships, said she had reported Vogue to HM Revenue and Customs.

- q. *"The workplace 'shadowing roles' require the duties of a 'worker', an official employment classification. Under the employment legislation, anyone who is acting as a worker must be paid at least the national minimum wage." – Tanya*

Since the fashion industry lacks centred HR system and governing policies, it also tends to set up unrealistic expectations in its workplace³³. Work-life balance — or the lack thereof — presented a particular sticking point.

- 1/3 of respondents of the survey said they work more than 10 uncompensated hrs/week.
- 83% of people said they're expected to be available to their bosses via text or email even when they're not on the clock.
- More than 50% said that it's not uncommon to feel like "there isn't time to do basic things like eating or going to the bathroom."
- 58% of people reported being at least somewhat dissatisfied with their work-life balance.
- 87% said that employees don't feel safe addressing issues with their supervisors.
- 88% reported having cried after a workplace encounter.
- Finally, 84% said their work environment has made them consider leaving the fashion industry entirely.

- r. *"I would love to go back in time and tell my 17-year-old self NOT to pursue fashion design," wrote one respondent, while another described her job as a buyer for big-name department stores as "the most abusive workplace I've ever been in, including working at [a] prison." – anonymous person wrote.*

Compared to the already horrendous average 20% gender pay gap in the industry, the NYT shared information that designers like Karen Millen had an even more staggering 49% gap, while beauty brand Benefit Cosmetics reported one that sat around 30.7%³⁴. What's more, the luxury UK brand Burberry not only indicates a 26% pay gap, but the men at the company have historically received higher bonuses as well. UK fast-fashion retailer 'Missguided reported that 46% of the pay gap favouring men³⁵. The London - Next happen to become the first fashion retailer in the UK's fashion industry to face an equal pay claim, as thousands of female store staff are demanding up to 30 million pounds in

³² Graduate Fog <http://graduatefog.co.uk/2018/5399/vogue-edward-enniful-unpaid-internship/>

³³ Fashionista: Bullying Survey <https://fashionista.com/2019/01/fashion-industry-workplace-bullying-survey-2018>

³⁴ TeenVogue: Gender Pay Gap <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/gender-pay-gap-fashion-industry>

³⁵ BOF: Gender Pay Gap <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/news-analysis/fashion-gender-pay-gap-2018-2019>

back pay from the high street retailer³⁶. Over 300 store workers stated that they earn £7.50 an hour - an average of £2 less than the mostly male warehouse workers.

- s. *"There aren't many legal concepts to grasp than this one – staff doing comparable jobs should get the same amount. However, women's work is traditionally always less valued. The physical and mental demands on the shop floor are no less than those in the warehouses. The only thing of less substance is the minimum wage paid to women." - George*

Recommendation: Discrimination and exploitation in fashion must come to an end. The glamorization of cruel management behaviour can even lead to suicidal behaviour of the employees as a result of harrowing fashion job experiences. It is a real loss not only for the fashion industry but also to society as a whole. If the industry can't hold onto people who expect basic levels of human decency to be a part of their jobs, then the people who rise to the top and set the culture are more likely to be those who think that bullying, constant overtime and discrimination are regular even in 2019. For making fashion representative and inclusive, the industry, in a matter of URGENCY, must establish a central HR system/union to enable governing policies for equal, fair, safe and decent working conditions to all people of all genders at all levels of fashion design and media production.

Summary

The glimpses of positive and women-friendly fashion from the individual professionals and small-business owners are not enough. To make British Fashion industry fully representative, inclusive and sustainable, the Labour, Equality Act, Women Rights, Health & Safety and Intellectual Property regulations, must serve as a primary foundation for the industry's operations and communication with employees as well as the media relations with the public. Moreover, the breaches to comply with the national and international standards must be taken seriously by the law governing institutions, and offenders must face the prosecution as in any other business or social environment.

³⁶ Fashion United: Gender Pay Gap at London NEXT
<https://fashionunited.uk/news/business/next-faces-30-million-pound-equal-pay-claim/2018030928579>