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Inclusivity in The Fashion/Modeling Industry

African-American model Chanel Iman once said, “When there is more diversity on the runway, it makes our world more inclusive (Packham, 2016).” This quote is a reflection of the thoughts many people have regarding inclusivity. In the last few years, it has been noticed how much body and beauty standards have changed in today’s society. The truth is that this has caused the fashion industry to become more diverse than ever. Although the fashion industry always preferred the typical body shape, skin color, height, and age, nowadays, that is no longer the case.

The real question here is whether or not the fashion industry is inclusive enough. It is worth noting there has been a transition in the fashion industry. Integrating models of color, with disabilities, with different sexual orientations and body size, are only a few examples. Embracing plus size models in the runways has become more than just a symbol of change, but a new concept of beauty standard in women. One great example is the plus-size models Ashley Graham. Ashley is the tenth highest-paid model in the world and has not only appeared at several important catwalks such as Tommy Hilfiger but also in magazines cover such as Vogue and Bazaar (Day, 2018).

Another model that has broken all the barriers and standards that prevented her as well as others from being part of the fashion world is Kate Grant. Kate is a 20-years old and is the first model with down syndrome. Not only that, but she also became the face of Benefit Cosmetics (Settembre, 2019). Both models Ashley and Kate have challenged the perception of beauty and

have become role models to those that are working to one day be able to achieve their goal as models. They both are real proof that inclusivity is happening right now. Although one has indeed seen more inclusivity now than in the earlier 2000s, there is a lot more to be done for the fashion industry to be considered inclusive enough. According to *Fashinnovation.nyc* (2019), “The problem of fashion inclusivity is enmeshed within the industry and ranges from a brand’s board of directors to the marketing heads”. This could be interpreted in many ways, but one thing that could be said is that many brands can be very inclusive, while many others still challenge the concept of inclusivity. One incident that proves this happened in 2014 when the chief executive of Abercrombie & Fitch stated that he would only hire good-looking people and that only straight-sized and Caucasians can wear his clothes (McGregor, 2014).

Victoria’s Secret is another brand that seems far from becoming inclusive or inclusive enough. Although they have tried to integrate more models of color and different ethnicity, they only showcase models that are extremely fit, tall and good-looking. According to Weiss and Kast (2018), “There’s a body type and a size type that they believe in. It’s big tits, tiny waist, tall skinny legs...If they don’t have the body that Ed [Razek, Victoria’s Secret’s senior creative] deems the perfect woman’s body, they will not be in the show". This has caused many critics from everyone because they are selling a physical ideal that is far from looking like its actual customers (Weiss & Kast, 2018). Many of Victoria’s Secret customers are asking for more diversity and inclusivity in their so famous yearly fashion shows.

As a result of this controversy, many are wondering how inclusivity became such an important topic in the fashion industry. The truth is that many people think that this first became a trend. According to Jackson (2019), “Like many other fashion trends, the push for greater

diversity reflects the prevailing cultural and political mood... diversity is clearly a trend with enormous financial reward". In other words, many brands and fashion designers became more diverse and inclusive because they knew that it was the right thing to avoid any controversy and to succeed nowadays. One great example is when Marc Jacobs was practically forced by the black community to cast models of color after featuring white models wearing fanciful dreadlocks (Givhan, 2017).

It is not a lie that consumers, especially females, with the help of social media have tremendously influenced the fashion industry. Women are coming together to change the beauty standard that is portrayed in the fashion world and the media. For years, they have seen how brands have idealized slim bodies, light skin colors, and tall girls. Nevertheless, they are demanding more representation from every brand. They not only want people to look like them in the fashion industry but also want to see a reflection of themselves in the catwalk.

Although inclusivity and body positivity has become a great way in which many females to feel identified, it is getting to a point where it is also promoting overweight. It is okay to enhance the beauty in a plus-size model (sizes 10-14), but making females think that being a size 20 or 24 is perfect is no right at all. Kelly Brown is a plus-size influencer and size 24 models that created the hashtag #FatAtFashionWeek (Colon, 2018). Although the reason for this was to celebrate plus-size females in the fashion industry, it might negatively impact the health of many by encouraging them to be or get fat.

It would be great and very positive to dismantle a few current standards because some people do not get the message that is being sent when promoting inclusivity. For example, being a plus-size model does not mean that your weight needs to get to a point where your health is

negatively affected. Also being inclusive does not mean that brands are going to stop hiring white skinny and tall models just to give the chance to other ethnicities. This kind of issue not only happens in the fashion industry but also in other industries such as entertainment industries where in many cases, a woman needs to look attractive to conduct a tv show.

In conclusion, it can not be ignored that the fashion industry has been pushed to change its beauty standard. This is because many consumers feel the need to see themselves reflected in the catwalks. Models like Ashley Graham and Kate Grant are challenging the perception of beauty standard and the typical skinny, light skin-color, and tall model that they always considered to be ideal. Although this has been a positive change, there is still a lot more to be done in several industries including the fashion industry, where not only body positivity and diversity are promoted, but also the well-being and health of female models.

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