



Colorism in the Fashion Industry
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Meet the Author *Ashley Triblet*

My family and I love fashion. I love keeping up with the latest trends and designers. My favorite designers are Chanel, Balmain, Yes Saint Laurent, Michael Kors, Kate Spade and Teamaker. I often play dress up, as a child. Soon

I started drawing my own designs at the age of ten. I started my own fashion blog in my freshman year of college. I also was a pre-college scholar at Parson and Pratt University where I studied fashion.

I chose the topic of colorism on fashion runways because it's repeatedly seen but colorism is not always addressed, even in our daily lives. We see colorism in our families, circles of friends and in our work environments. I will be honest; I've experienced it myself mostly in fashion industry and a few circles of friends. Working in a corporate fashion office on my first day, I was told I won't be able to sit in certain offices or at a particular desk because of my skin tone. I was shocked or taken back by this comment because I never dealt with outright colorism. This issue affects me because I have always dreamt of working in the fashion industry.

While growing up, I always heard that it would be hard getting into the fashion industry because I am black. Colorism was a nothing but added pressure I had to deal with. It is said that to get in the industry you have to be skinny, light skin or white. No one has ever told me I can't do anything because of the shade of skin tone before however, being a black woman, I was expecting to deal with racism, but perhaps more suppressed. I think colorism is something seen often but can be addressed. I was raised as a child to treat everyone respectfully and keep a positive attitude no matter what situation you find yourself in. It may not always be an easy

situation to be in but sometimes you can catch more bees with honey. My viewpoint is, it is always more important to show the individual beauty in each of us, which showcases the wonderful diversity.

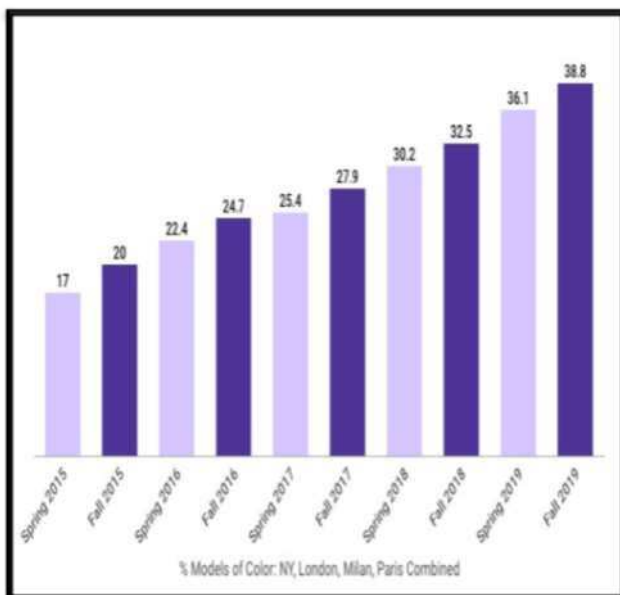
Introduction Colorism on the Fashion Runways

Is colorism involving dark skin models and fashion companies when casting models in the fashion industry? Today, diversity is affecting in the fashion Industry but are these

improvements enough? Do lighter skin models have a privilege in the industry? Is there enough representation of dark skin models in the fashion industry? Colorism is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group”. Colorism is a symptom of racism, which started with slavery.

Today, colorism plagues minority communities,

which also plagues the entertainment and fashion industry. According to mic.com a study found that after looking at a fashion magazine for three minutes it caused 70% of women to feel depressed, guilty and shameful. (Powell, 2012). That means the average woman sees 400 to 600 advertisements per day and not many of those ads that represented dark models. As you can see in the chart above shows the increased percentages of models of color. These percentages include Asian, Hispanics, and black models. According to The Guardian “in a new report, 78.2% of all the models featured in Spring 2016’s fashion adverts were white. In a



breakdown of the statistics, 8.3% of models featured in ads were black, 4% were Asian and 3.8% were Hispanic.” (Elan, 2016)Which increased from 2015.

Diversity Issue



Portrait of Naomi Sims: Portrait of American fashion model, New York, New York, 1975. (Photo by Anthony Barboza/Getty)

Colorism plagued the fashion industry since the black models began to pave their way and open more opportunities in the industry for other people of color. For example, model Naomi Sims was consistently turned down by agencies who told her she was too dark in the beginning of her career. (Chetty, 2019)

Colorism is also shown when people push for change in the industry. They often received negative feedback for their desire to help change advertising, according to Tracy Elise Ross who is an designer and actress she states "While I was

a contributing fashion editor at Mirabella and New York Magazine in the '90s, I pushed for and encouraged the use of models of all colors in our shoots (which was often met with blank faces). (Wagner, 2018) She voiced her opinion and pushed what she wanted to see in magazines. applauded her for speaking out for her thought-provoking viewpoint. According to an in BBC model Leomie Anderson "says she's faced racial discrimination in the modeling industry. She says, "lighter-skinned girls get more work than darker-skinned girls" She also

states that “she has noticed some change but reckons “there's a long way to go” when it comes to giving work to darker-skinned models.” (Izundu, 2015)

Impact of Colorism in the Fashion Industry (D)



The brand Fashion Nova targets mostly women and now recently men of color. If you scroll through Fashion Nova’s Instagram and website, you will notice there’s barely any dark skin women or black women in general. You can’t go on your Instagram without seeing reality stars, celebrities, influencers or everyday people who are mostly people of color promoting this brand.

According to revelist.com Beauty YouTuber Jackie Aina exposed Fashion Nova she stated that the brand perpetuates colorism. She has addressed her concerns with the brand about prompting unrealistic beauty standards that do not align with her personal values and platform. Jackie states that she will no longer collaborate or support Fashion Nova after it refused to include more dark-skinned models on their website.” (Battle, 2019)“According to Femestella.com sites “It was literally fifty shades of beige, with a few models in the tan-deep category thrown in. Most of the models are either Hispanic, white, light-skinned, or racially

ambiguous. It's almost like Fashion Nova does the brown paper bag test before the models can work for them. " (Stevenson, 2019) This can lead to less revenue for the industry and brand.

Impact On Consumers(e)

It is so vitality important for consumers to bring races into the fashion market, which keeps it a strong industry. Representation and inclusion of all people of many shades in fashion are necessary because fashion illustrates a tremendous part in developing how we view and value people. If the in the industry doesn't present all various shades of people, then certain races will be ignored or devalued. Consumers can start feel devalued and overlooked which as well may result in consumers not supporting this brand or agency. Just like when consumers weren't wearing or supporting certain designers' clothing lines after expressing discriminating symbols of a certain race.

Consumers are impacted by colorism when they fail to find a reflection of themselves in the fashion industry which also affects consumers supporting or buying products in a partiture brand. It is hard to find that reflection because their skin tone shades are not truly represented in the fashion industry. This is an ongoing challenge for consumers. These are some of the challenge's consumers face which stem from the runway. We must look for ways to lessen the impact on the fashion runway and give more opportunities to all shades. A fair representation of all consumers should be on the runway.

Suggestions for change in the industry

My suggestion for changing the negative impact of Colorism is to showcase the wonderful diversity in everyone. When women see other models dressed in clothing that looks like the consumers are more likely to buy the clothing because they have an example of what they will look like when they wear it. It also improves an individual's mood and makes them feel more accepted. If we fix our opinions about different skin tones and races, we can fix this problem and make changes for the future of the runways and the fashion world.

There should be an equal number of races and shades in each ad or fashion show. For example, have six Blacks and six Asians, also six Hispanic models walking in a show or for a photoshoot. There should be a variety of skin tones for each ethnic group. Also Hire more dark-skinned models for the runway and on social media, ads or websites. Because of this issue designer, Zac Posen used black models in his fashion show in the year of 2016. According to The Guardian“(Posen used black models exclusively for his New York fashion week show and the hashtag #Blackmodelsmatter on his Instagram). Whereas other parts of the industry are playing catch up; all the models at the Vetements and Balenciaga shows were white.”

I applaud the designer Zac Posen for stepping up to try and rectify this issue. However, it would take a lot more designers to step up and do the same to bring more attention to this colorism on the runway. Since this is a global issue and affects many other ethnic groups other than black models. Having an equal number of other models from all backgrounds or ethnic groups should be seen in all fashion shows across the world not just in New York Fashion Week.

Conclusion

If mic.com states that 70% of women felt depressed after looking through magazines perhaps the answer is necessary for darker tone men and women to see more representation of themselves in a confident position. If we truly want to decrease depression in society and express real culture through fashion, then colorism needs to be put to rest. Colorism is the daughter of racism, which started with slavery. We can also improve by changing our mindset about colorism which stems from racism. This acceptance educates all ages and improves the future modeling industry. We must also keep in mind we do not want to define the future requirements for young future runway models and designers.

When I draw my designs as a child, I didn't pay much attention to the model's skin tone because that didn't influence my creativity. My influence was on the beautiful clothing and styles worn by the models. It is important to spotlight all races, gender and skin tones which are needed to improve the runways and the fashion world. I think designers have a long way to go but this is a matter of choice. We all can work together for world change, so other countries will follow our fair representation. This issue of colorism isn't only exclusive to females, male models have experienced this issue as well. Colorism is a global issue that has affected many other ethnic groups as well. To represent mankind in its true forms then all races, body size, gender, and cultures should be showcased on the runway and through social media or advertising.

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