SPACE

SPACE exists to share stories of talent who have faced discrimination in the industry and to continue to spark conversations of solutions. This was created to expose these issues that are often hidden and to open doors to a more supportive environment for all.

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Directed, photographed, and created by Serena Liu

WELCOME

SPACE was created for people of colour. Even in 2019, the topic of racism and structural racism is a delicate subject. The fear of coming off as an impertinent person and the fear of the negative blows that might result are feelings that are too common. Speaking out is difficult. The feeling of being alienated and uncomfortable whilst on a job is a common fear that many models face on a day-to-day basis. However, it is important to not dismiss the emotional disconnect that is present when a person of colour speaks about their experiences. As a photographer, I often find myself flooded with a portfolio that is not diversified and does not represent people accurately. More so I have found myself slip into bad habits that echo racist tones. I wish to change this and to create a space for more people of colour in the modeling industry to get involved and for equal opportunities to exist.

Models and other talent in the fashion industry work in an environment that is glamorous on the outside. Models are dressed up and perfected with makeup in order to sell goods. However, models of colour are not often seen as the ideal for "beauty" as there is a belief that models of colour don't push product as well as white models. The lack of representation has encouraged people to speak out and encourage speaking out of these injustices.

SPACE seeks to continue the conversations that are brought up in the media and by movements like #BlackLivesMatter.

"If your community is mostly white, it is not by accident. Do your work, get real, look at the places you've been avoiding. Ask another white person the question you've been unsure about asking. See how you're perpetuating the system of institutional racism; we all are. Become intimately familiar with your role. Explore the places within yourself that you hold back. Can you be yourself a little more? You do this work and people of color will naturally want to engage with you. Why? Because through feeling and exploring your ignorance you've created a genuine opening for my reality. Stepping into this unknown means carving out space for my existence." (Kelsey Blackwell)

Thank you to everyone who shared their stories, perspectives, body, art,
and soul for this project. I hope you enjoy SPACE.

Serena Liu

WHY ARE WE STILL FAILING BLACK MODELS IN 2019?

Originally posted in Refinery29 by Eni Subair on June 2, 2019

In March 2019, The Fashion Spot published its seasonal diversity report, which measures diversity of race, gender and size on the Fashion Week catwalks. The report documented a milestone in racial diversity, with runways across all four cities more inclusive than ever before. In New York, 45.8% of models were non-white. Paris came in second, with 39% models of colour, London in third and Milan – typically the least diverse city – in fourth on 31.8%. So good news in some respects, but on the other hand you have industry veteran Naomi Campbell telling Vogue as recently as April this year that her ads don't run in certain countries because she is black.

The issue of black women's representation within the fashion industry isn't a new topic, but – newsflash – we need to keep talking about it. I was reminded of this again very recently when I was scrolling through my phone and saw a post by New York-based model, Olivia Anakwe. She took to Instagram to write about a common situation she faces as a working model: the way she is treated by non-black hairstylists who are untrained or unable to look after natural, afro hair. This happens time and time again, despite being asked to turn up to shows with her hair in its natural state. Anakwe said: "This message is to spread awareness and hopefully reach anyone in the hair field to expand their range of skills. Black models are still asking for just one hairstylist on every team no matter where your team is from, to care for afro hair."

Earlier this month, seasoned Australian model Ajak Deng spoke on her Instagram stories about feeling alienated and labelled as not good enough by her peers in the fashion industry. In 2016 she announced she was quitting modelling because she could "no longer deal with the fakes and the lies", before announcing her return a week later. Judging by her latest tearful post, those issues have not gone away. Deng said: "You don't know how lonely it is at the top. And not only that, the people that work with you are constantly telling you that you need to be a better person and you're a horrible person on a daily basis. I'm sick and tired." The post was later deleted but after being reposted on a different account, the comments were flooded with support for the model, including a supportive hashtag, #HereforAjak.

In an era where the Fenty Beauty campaign caused a domino effect in the beauty industry emphasising inclusivity, and models like London-born Leomie Anderson are quick to call out issues within the industry, it might feel like we are coming on leaps and bounds – but for many working black models the reality is that not much has changed, and many continue to face discrimination and racism on a daily basis.Thankfully social media has given black women a platform to articulate their struggles. South London-raised Sophia Tassew is plus-size and black. After being scouted as an ASOS insider, her presence on social media rocketed (she has a 10.5k following on Instagram) and she went on to secure a creative placement with Nike and curate her own exhibition. Although she's been in the modelling industry for less than two years, Tassew realised early on that she wasn't on a level playing field. "The creative directions brands take needs to be better," she says. "Brands need to know how best to shoot and capture black plus-size bodies correctly and not just use them as some sort of prop or to fulfil more tokenistic roles. They tend to use particular black, plus-size models for one shoot or campaign, never to be used again. It's a very short-lived e perience."

Discussing the hierarchy in the plus-size world, Tassew says: "I was with a bunch of black plus-size models the other day and we were actually thinking about how we could help behind the scenes and online to reassure any other black women that want to enter the industry. But change has to start from the top. Little things like the makeup artist not being right, the hairstylist not being able to deal with my hair. Many times, I would be on set and they wouldn't have my size, which was ironic as I was hired as a plus-size model. The current climate in the whole influencer/plus-size industry is a little bit problematic for me. Who we shine the light on can be dangerous and I think about it daily."

Tassew spotted a niche in the market for women that looked like her. "I'd walk into a sportswear retailer and feel intimidated by the imagery portrayed to me. I couldn't find things that fit right or women that looked like me. Ordinarily I would have to order my size online if they did have it. There were a lot of hurdles I had to go through even before starting training." So she decided

to tackle the issue by creating a collective called Curves In Motion. "When I wanted to train with people, there wasn't a collective I could relate to. I hadn't run a marathon before in my life so the answer was obvious to me at that point: get a good community of plus women who want to train. Usually before training I would put on a baggy tee and leggings and I thought, Others don't have to do that, so why should I?"
At five foot three inches tall, Vanessa Ohenlenhas defied the odds to become a model and influencer. Despite snide remarks about her height on shoots, she graced her first cover, Beauty Papers, in September 2018 and recently starred in FKA twigs' AVANTgarden zine. She tells me about the troubles she has faced in the industry. "Ordinarily when you have issues you should be able to email your agency and let them know of any problems, but when I would email and I would get a reply three days later, they weren't supportive. I felt as though I wasn't being pushed. All the white women were being put forward for jobs. It was like they wanted diversity and yet it wasn't being backed up." She adds: "I did an editorial with another white model from my agency and when the pictures came out our agencies posted the photos, but mine were hidden. I felt as though I wasn't a priority." The stress has impacted her mental health, she tells me

Like Anakwe, Ohenlen has had hair issues on set. "When hairstylists do your hair they don't want to put much effort into it," she says. "It's like they just can't be bothered, they put more effort into white models' hair." And it's not just hair. "I've seen stylists give non-black models on set about 50 looks but only give me one look. I just thought, Why am I not good enough to wear the Balenciaga full look?"

Choco Models founder Kereen Hurley can relate. In 2016, the 25-year-old former model started her own agency in the hope of giving black models in the UK more exposure. "I was scouted in 2010 when I was at prom but quickly realised I was good at being a freelance model and hardly any dark-skinned models got signed," she says. "There's very much the mentality that there's only room for one of us at a time, which creates division. I had outgrown modelling but I wanted to have a purpose and create unity." If you're wondering why black models aren't more vocal about this issue, then the narrative of the 'angry black woman' could be holding them back. Hurley explains: "People don't want to say anything because they look bitter, like the angry black woman. I've had light-skinned women say, 'Why are you here?' And I explain and they question me further. But you have to choose your battles wisely."

Discriminatory practices such as the brown paper bag test (whereby those whose skin was darker than a brown paper bag weren't afforded certain privileges) have been floating around for decades. One quick look at Blac Chyna's skin-lightening plug or the response to Spice's controversial skin-lightening experiment highlights the rampant colourism within the black community. How has the issue played a role in these models' careers? Ohenlen says: "I think because I love myself more now, I'm doing better, but it did used to really affect me. I felt as though I was seen as less deserving than white or mixed-race women, especially when they would be hyping up the white model on set and say how great she looks and I would have to pretend to be okay with it." Tassew agrees: "There's no denying colourism is present in the industry and I think the industry doesn't want to move away from that as they want to uphold a certain idea. But it's definitely something we have a duty to call out. If you're going to attach yourself to a movement and community and be body positive, that needs to be intersectional."

So what can be done? "I think that's not only down to us as models, I think it's also down to our allies," says Tassew. "The decision-makers, casting directors, those that decide who features on certain campaigns or who goes on press trips. It's about representation and the model feeling like she's going somewhere. When the work isn't coming in, that can take such a hit on your mental health. You start to blame yourself." Ohenlen suggests: "Speaking about it definitely helps but also holding mini talks and conferences where black models come together would be a good start, so we all feel like we aren't alone. It would be good to know there can be changes made and make more opportunities for black models. I know a lot of black creatives that feel as though there isn't room for us to grow and develop." Hurley agrees: "I'm looking to do more talks and videos so people can get an insight into what goes on, so hopefully this can happen in the future. I feel like lots of models are relieved an agency like Choco Models exists because of what's been happening in the industry."

"Growing up in a predominantly white area of Saskatoon I've found it's hard to grasp your identity. I've never felt like I quite fit in. I felt ostracized. More so because I'm mixed I never felt like my racial identity was truly rooted in any one particular place. People always questioned where I was from, or why I acted so "white". It felt like I was lost and I didn't have a group of people to lean on. I was always on the outside looking in and trying to conform to fit within the society that surrounded me."

Sara Mulenga-Woo

Age: 22

Occupation: Freelance Model & Server

Hometown: Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Ethnicity: Zambian/Chinese

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IS FASHION'S NEWFOUND 'INCLUSIVITY' ONLY SKIN DEEP?

Originally posted in Refinery29 by Anita Sengupta on May 9, 2018

There is a multiracial model in almost every hip ad campaign these days. Usually minimally made up and effortlessly cool, she has an Afro and a splash of freckles; or maybe she's dark-skinned and light-eyed; or maybe she has that 'could be from anywhere' look. But is this a sign that we are on our way to a post-racial society, or is the racially ambiguous imagery just being fetishized by the fashion industry?

Colonial Europeans invented the concept of race as a way to distance themselves from the colonized and enslaved. Whiteness was used as a 'scientific' validation of superiority that enabled the imperialistic and exploitative practices of colonialism. Under this taxonomy, multiracial people — particularly those with some white ancestry — were put in a racial limbo: in many parts of the world they were categorized in semi-privileged racial groups, such as the 'Anglo-Indians' in India, 'colored' people in South Africa, and 'mestizos' in South and Central America.

In the United States, multiracial people weren't seen as a distinct racial group, but were simply subsumed into the less privileged racial group and subjected to discrimination. The largest multiracial group were 'mulattos,' or people with Black and white ancestry. By default, 'mulattos' were understood to be Black, but some 'passed' as white, the practice by which they hid their Black ancestry in order to live with the full rights granted to white people. In stark contrast to present-day attitudes, it wasn't just undesirable to look biracial in this context — it was dangerous.

Social attitudes about people of color began to slowly progress during the Civil Rights Movement, but fashion and beauty — industries built on elitism — have been notoriously slow to embrace inclusion. The past few years, however, have seen tectonic shifts in representation. Instagram, which launched in 2010, altered the power structures of visual media. Theoretically, anyone with a well-curated feed could hop the fence into prominence.

Fueled by social justice movements, communities congealed around Insta-celebrities whose types had been excluded by traditional media. People like Sanam Sindhi, a plus-size South Asian influencer, and Mariah Idrissi, a multiracial hijab-wearing model, were demo-

cratically uplifted as icons and later tapped by the industry. (Sindhi was cast in Rihanna's "Bitch Better Have My Money" video in 2015; Idrissi is signed with Select.)

As the aesthetics of cool decentralized and radicalized, the fashion and beauty industries transformed their casting strategies. Young, offbeat brands — including fashion labels like Hood By Air, Eckhaus Latta, and Vetements, and makeup companies Milk and Glossier — ditched the whole 'delicate waif' motif and defined their labels through street casting, booking a diverse hodgepodge of friends, collaborators, and people scouted on Instagram.

The racially ambiguous model has become emblematic of this street-cast, cool kid trend. High-fashion brands don't just want diversity; they want to cultivate a nonconforming, familiar-yet-inaccessible look. A certain type of multiracial person — the type that wears their mixedness on their sleeve with an unexpected combination of features, like industry staples Adwoa Aboah, Jasmine Sanders, and Angelica Erthal — has become the embodiment of nonconformity, a visual representation of the street-casting ethos and the principle of diversity in casting at large.

In March 2017, Vogue ran a cover story titled "The Beauty Revolution: No Norm Is The New Norm," featuring seven models of different backgrounds and sizes; only one model, Imaan Hammam, was Black. However ironic it may be that Vogue claims to be hopping on the beauty revolution bandwagon, the publication serves as a litmus test for the fashion industry and society at large; in the historical context, this cover represents a radical transformation for multiracial people. And for his first full edition in December 2017, editor Edward Enninful cast Aboah as cover star. In contrast to passing, in which mixedness was marginalized and hidden, visibly multiracial models now feature prominently in affirmative sites of social norms. Multiracial looks are normalized and, by extension, mixed identity is validated. There's no cohesive social movement behind it, but it's a quiet sea change that's come with broadened beauty standards and the slow dismantling of social hierarchies.

But when analyzed in regard to the contemporary co structs around mixed identity, the transformation doesn't look so utopian.cratically uplifted as icons and

In the decades after the Civil Rights Movement, multiracial populations grew, and by the 1990s, new narratives around mixedness that were rooted in fetishization started to sprout. Multiracial people were examined with perverse fascination, a pseudo-scientific poking and prodding. An iconic 1993 TIME magazine cover featured a photo composite woman and the headline, "Take a good look at this woman. She was created by a computer from a mix of several different races. What you see is a remarkable preview of The New Face of America."

As objects of fetishization, multiracial people started to be seen as harbingers of a harmonious post-racial future. Their existence suggested that a racially egalitarian future wouldn't require a radical dismantling of white supremacy, but instead could be the result of a gradual, passive blending of racial lines. In the media, multiracial people with white ancestry served a form of diversity that was particularly palatable to audiences used to white dominance; they were different enough to stand for values of diversity and equality, but familiar enough to be recognizable and non-threatening. Their existence suggested that the future could be multicultural and still comfortably white.

This fetishistic narrative still holds weight today, and the trend of casting multiracial models can be seen as its capitalist corollary: a sexier, post-identity world is possible, only now it's accessible via the brand. In January 2017, Nielsen, the data information company, published "Multicultural Millennials: The Multiplier Effect," in which they reported that multicultural millennials — those with African American, Asian American, or Hispanic backgrounds — are viewed with a halo effect, the phenomenon in which a person or group is seen in a positive light, so all their actions are too. Nielsen, naturally, urges marketers to view this as a business opportunity. "Multicultural millennials' evolving, ever-expanding tastes and consumption patterns are influencing those of their parents, their children, and mainstream culture and society," the report advised. "This multiplier effect should and can be harnessed by marketers and advertisers."

And so it has. Mainstream brands have revved up the multicultural millennial targeting in recent campaigns, crafting perfectly formulaic multicultural casts

(see: Pepsi's absurd Kendall Jenner ad). Multiracial people are just a subset of the multicultural population, but for marketers trying to reach a broad audience, casting them is a safe bet. One racially ambiguous model can build connections with multiple demographic groups non-exclusively; someone could look Hispanic enough and Asian enough, for example, to appeal to both groups. And in an ironic perpetuation of racism, models with white ancestry can get the brand diversity points while still hedging close to Eurocentric beauty standards, a bitter echo of the racial limbo multiracial people have inhabited historically.

So while on first glance the rise of multiracial models might look like progress in representation, upon closer inspection it's clear that ultimately, the change is skin deep. The movement for inclusion might have sincere, democratic origins, but once it's tapped by big brands, diversity is nothing more than strategy deployed to support existing capitalist structures. The normalization of different identities ends up being no more than a collateral consequence. We're led to believe that a post-racial world is possible, but we'll have to buy our way there. sites of social norms. Multiracial looks are normalized and, by extension, mixed identity is validated. There's no cohesive social movement behind it, but it's a quiet sea change that's come with broadened beauty standards and the slow dismantling of social hierarchies.

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MANAGING THE SEMIOTICS OF SKIN TONE: RACE AND AESTHETIC LABOR IN THE FASHION MODELING INDUSTRY

Originally published in *Economic and Industrial Democracy* by Elizabeth Wissinger on January 30, 2012

This article explores the aesthetic labor of embodying race. The author's research on fashion models in New York City uncovered a demand for aesthetic labor that differs along racial lines, namely, black models must fit themselves to a narrower set of standards, and experience their race as both an asset and a liability. This difference is evident in the context of the market for black models, where the "white gaze," and the "corporate gaze" intersect. Yet both employers' desire for workers with a particular "look," and workers' willingness to call on personal resources to style that "look" for the job foster a structural bias toward racist practices that are masked by appeals to "aesthetics." Managing one's racial appearance reveals a unique quality of aesthetic labor that emerges only when race is taken into account, arguing for its inclusion among the characteristics workers manipulate when their work is studied as aestheti labor.

...Looking at race in the management of "appearance, corporeality and voice" (Nickson et al., 2003: 191) to get and keep jobs in fashion modeling, however, uncovers important aspects of how both employers' desire for workers with a particular "look," and workers' willingness to call on personal resources to style that "look" for the job, foster a structural bias toward racist practices that are masked by appeals to "aesthetics."

Aesthetic labor describes the process by which workers' corporeality is "appropriated and regulated" for "organizations' commercial benefit" (Nickson and Warhurst, 2007: 158). Workers performing aesthetic labor mobilize self-presentation skills, such as their ability to achieve a stylish and well-groomed look, or speak to customers in a language that fits the image of the company, to embody the organizationally defined image most commonly called for in the "style labor markets" of retail and service work.

In contrast to Witz et al.'s main concern with the "corporate production of the labour of aesthetics as an animate component of the aesthetics of organization" (2003: 35), I focus on how models are managed outside of a strict corporate image, since models are freelancers who sell their bodies to "numerous clients on a per project basis" (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006: 776). Witz et al. found workers aligning their look and demeanor with clear-cut corporate codes, where details of personal behavior and appearance in terms of how to address superiors, whether or not to wear a suit, or how to wear one's hairstyle or make-up, were dictated by one's employer. Fashion models, in contrast, must commodify themselves under conditions that fluctuate from client to client, and with the whims of fashion; for them, the practice of aesthetic labor becomes more involved, mentally and physically, than the practices uncovered by Witz and her colleagues (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006: 777). Looking at the intersection of race and aesthetic labor raised three points. First, there is a marked dependence on subjective evaluation in hiring in model markets that can exacerbate racist tendencies in hiring practices, which my research shows to have two effects. On the one hand, with no objective criteria to measure ability, modeling industry gatekeepers, such as model agents and clients who hire models, subjectively relied on the social characteristics of race and gender, categorized into "types," to recruit and market models. On the other hand, when trying to fit into these "types," black models reported feeling they were held to a stricter aesthetic standard regarding their height, weight, and overall appearance, making modeling jobs not only harder for them to get, but harder to perform.

BLACK MODELS MATTER:
CHALLENGING THE RACISM OF AESTHETICS AND THE FAÇADE OF INCLUSION IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

By Scarlett Newman, 2017

In an industry as influential as fashion is, it is crucial to hold the industry responsible, as we do other creative industries such as film, television and fine art. Black models and influencers of (editors, writers) account for a low percentage of representation in fashion. Black models account for a lower percentage of women who are featured on the runway and large-budget editorial shoots and advertisements. There is a limited demand for black models, and often, a designer can get away with casting one or two black models in their shows. This is tokenism, defined as the practice as only making a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce. Tokenism in fashion is intensely problematic, as it doesn't fully or accurately represent the people who take an interest in and/or consume luxury fashion.

In practice, a token model allows a designer to avoid the accusation of racism and discrimination. In fashion, the differences in the token model could be over-accentuated to be seen as exotic or glamourous, indicators that emphasize the "otherness" that will distinguish her from her white counterpart.

"Types" are often racially defined without explicitly stating so. A designer can call an agency to request a model that is an "exotic" type or a girl that represents an "all-American" type—coded language for their desire for a model of color in the first instance, and a white model in the second. The significance of skin color is implicit in the creation of "types" used to sort women walking in fashion shows or participating in photo shoots. The normalization of this practice can affect the general assumption about how work should be distributed; with the consequence that black models are given fewer opportunities.

In the Autumn/Winter 2016 season, hope was had and supplemented by Zac Posen's runway tribute to Ugandan princess, Elizabeth of Toro. Posen featured a predominantly black casting, 25 of 30 models to be specific. In an effort to promote his vision of diversity, he donned the "Black Models Matter," stamped in stylized white letters by black model, activist and artist, Ashley B. Crew. on a large leather bag (presumably his design). "It's crucial that the new generations see diversity not as an issue, but as an asset, said Posen at the Black in Retail Action Group Gala. "I will continue to battle this on the runway and the red carpet, and for the rest of my life." In the following Spring/Summer 2017 season, Marc Jacobs sent down a majority of white models down the runway in multi-colored faux dreadlocks, a hairstyle typically attributed to black people and black culture. This constant volleying of the concept of cultural appropriation perpetuates the idea that fashion loves black culture, but not black people. It is essential to push the conversation concerning race outside of fashion week even so that the industry can understand the implications of actions that have previously gone ignored. These decisions not only affect black models, but Black influencers: editors, writers, stylists, photographers, bloggers, etc.--which come as few and far between as the models.

Problems like the ones stated above can be attributed to the absence of black influence in the fashion industry. Influencers, people who are at the top of fashion's elite, that make the major decisions that affect the way we consume fashion aesthetically and commercially. It seems impossible for black people, black women, particularly, to penetrate these spaces. Exclusion doesn't just manifest on the runways. It sits at our fingertips as we flip through fashion bibles, publications meant to validate fashion as a respected means of expression. Can we achieve validation without inclusion, especially of a culture that without it we would be devoid of popular culture?

In my research, I have found that quantitative data representing the number of black models to white models is scarce, or improperly sourced. "The Fashion Spot," which is heralded for its "diversity reports" following fashion month, oddly, has no source, or refuses to willfully submit that information to its readers. The website used charts, percentages, and infographics to display the "data" that they have quantified for each major fashion city that has participated in Fashion Month. To try and quantify/qualify the data ourselves (in the most ethical way possible), last year my colleagues Alison Boldero and Nicola Certo and I reached out to the editors at The Fashion Spot to see how they came up with the data that was represented on their Diversity Report. We couldn't get them to cooperate with us. They refused to disclose any information regarding the statistics—well, "percentages" that were on the site. This left us with "missing data" in our efforts to find raw data and actual numbers that showed the disparity between models of color and their white counterparts on the runways.

"Despite media attention to the issue of racial discrimination in hiring models, the industry as a whole has not come forward with the reliable statistics regarding the racial makeup of the modeling workforce. Even Bethann Hardison, the head of the first all-black modelling agency in the United States, and an outspoken critic of fashion industry racism, does not routinely cite government statistics in interviews. To examine the widespread popular understanding that black models are employed less often than white models, in the absence of hard empirical data gathered by a government agency or industry analysts, media outlets as varied as Essence, Ebony, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, Women's Wear Daily. the Guardian, the Telegraph and the Independent, have counted the number of models of color on the runway during one season, or the number of black models appearing in magazine pages, or relied on agencies' self-reported head counts of how many models of color are in their books" (Wissinger 2015).

In a 2013 article in the New York Times, Eric Wilson lamented that even after the grandiose response to Vogue Italia's "Black Issue" (an issue dedicated to Black models), essentially, things remained stagnant in terms of the inclusion of Black models. "The outcry following the appointment of a white fashion director to the staff at Essence magazine, in July 2010, however, stemmed at least in part from the widespread understanding that the fashionnindustry, as the magazine's editor, Angela Burt-Murray put it, 'is overwhelmingly white. 'She went on to point out the underrepresentation of people of color on the mastheads of magazines, the front rows of fashion shows, and as designers and stylists of fashion lines. Overall, within the modeling industry, and in professions that work with models, levels of black employment appear to be far lower than the representative numbers of the population" (Wissinger 2015).

A model's labor requires striving to meet the aesthetic expectation of the client. Often, a black model's [aesthetic] labor requires that she goes above and beyond to visually fit within the white standards of beauty. Unless that is, if she's playing up, or highlighting the things that exotify her. This could include but is not limited to: straightening of the hair, extensive diet and exercise, keeping out of the sun—anything that can be done to minimize their racial characteristics. We don't often refer to the "white gaze" in the fashion industry, but aesthetic labor placed upon black body is just that. Performing for the white gaze.

A blink before the 1970s started, riots sparked across every major American city fueled by racial inequity, disenfranchisement, and poverty. The U.S. government itself realized that there was an urgent need to open the doors of social access and visibility to black Americans. "The anger and resentment poured into urban neighborhoods and fueled the ongoing Black Power movement and enthralled a generation of young people, experimental artists, and the fashion industry, which was increasingly influenced by the street and by popular culture. Fashion didn't like getting political, but it loved being very subversive" (Givhan 2015). Black politics had birthed a bourgeoning black aesthetic that was changing mainstream culture. Film was reflecting the values and concerns of the black community, but was also speaking to the multidimensions of a people. The cult classic film Sweet Sweetback's Baadassss Song by Melvin Van Peebles confronted racism and police brutality head on, Julia, starring Diahann Carroll made its television debut—the first television shoe with a black woman as the lead. Judith was capturing audiences on stage as Alvin Ailey's muse. Black art and expression had a key role in shaping the culture. "The world of fashion was similarly looked to as a place where the culture could find signs of racial progress. Expressions of beauty and glamour mattered. Good race relations required taking note of who was selling women lipsticks and mini skirts, which meant that advertisers began looking for black models" (Givhan 2015). In October 1969, Life magazine featured Naomi Sims on the cover with the headline, "Black Models Take Center Stage." Inside featured a group shot spread of 39 black models represented by a new agency called "Black Beauty," run by a former white model named Betty Foray. Racial progress was made in a multitude of ways from modeling to styling to spokespersons.

At the time, Eleanor Lambert was the most powerful person in the fashion industry. She created Fashion Week, the International Best Dressed Awards, and controlled the narrative of American fashion. In an effort to restore the palace of Versailles, she created a dinner and fundraising solution for high society and high fashion. This was also a grand opportunity to heighten the visibility of American designers. Five French designers (Yves Saint Laurent, Pierre Cardin, Emanuel Ungaro, Christian Dior, and Hubert de Givenchy) and Five American designers (Oscar de la Renta, Stephen Burrows, Halston, Bill Blass, and Anne Klein—who brought her then assistant, Donna Karan) battled it out via runway spectaculars, with the Americans unanimously stealing the show. Apart from the youthful, upbeat, and whimsical performance of "Team America," their win can be attributed to the fresh and glamorous performances of the ten black models used in the show—an unprecedented number at the time. The roster of black models included: Pat Cleveland, Bethann Hardison, Billie Blair, Jennifer Brice, Alva Chinn, Norma Jean Darden, Charlene Dash, Barbara Jackson, Ramona Saunders, and Amina Warsuma.

The French were stunned. They had never seen African American models with such *joie de vivre*. They were in shock. The standout athleticism of Pat Cleveland was well known in the states; to the French, it was a revelation. Years to follow that one night in Paris, Oscar de la Renta said that ultimately, "it was the black models that had made the difference."

Versailles had opened a lot of doors. Black Women were enjoying steady careers and forged ahead with an unprecedented presence that was in demand for years on, into the 1980s to the 1990s. Cue, the birth of the Supermodel. People knew their names, and they attained a level of fame synonymous with the designers of the runways they were walking for. Black women had a certain flair on the runway distinctive of anyone that came before them. Hips flew from side to side and legs charged forward like Clydesdales. Cue, the birth of superstar, Naomi Campbell, who still graces the top runways today. Tyra Banks followed soon after becoming the first black girl to land a Sports Illustrated swimsuit cover. "And Detroit's Veronica Webb swanned down the international runways, maintaining an expression of silent amusement, as if she was just a little too sophisticated for the catwalk silliness. By 1992, Revlon had signed Webb to a cosmetics deal, making her the first African American model to represent a makeup brand (Givhan 2015). Black models thrived and flipped the culture on its head, crossing boundaries and becoming business women. Versailles model Bethann Hardison became a leading activist for the diversity within the fashion industry and in 1989 co-founded the Black Girls Coalition to celebrate the successes of black women in fashion.

By the mid-1990s, the affinity for black models began to decrease. Designers opted for a new aesthetic that excluded black models. Black models were left in the dark to make way for the grunge era and "heroin" chic which fostered that group of models that included Kate Moss, Stella Tennant, and Kristen McMenamy. Models were more homogenous, so the industry didn't require models who were bold, or charismatic. There was no more use for stage presence, a big aspect that had previously granted black models work. "The number of working black models in high-profile runway presentations or appearing of the covers of magazines became so dire that stories began appearing in the mainstream media about the 'whitewashing' of the runway and what it meant for cultural perceptions of beauty, femininity, and worth. The homogeneity continued for a decade. Finding success on the runway was already a bit like winning the lottery, genetic and otherwise. But if fair-skinned women were having a run of good luck, their darkerskinned colleagues were stuck in a losing streak" (Givhan 2015).

The fashion industry has come a long way in terms of diversity and inclusivity, but there's still so much more I want to see. It can be frustrating when having a POC as part of a campaign is seen as a revolutionary achievement when it should be a norm. Even something as small as a makeup brand having a range of foundations for a wide variety of skin tones is seen as a win. Beauty standards are starting to change and there are more definitions of beauty than the utopian pretty blonde, blue-eyed white girl, but I wish diversity and inclusion are become a the standard.

“Though the industry is becoming more diverse there are a limited number of spots for models of color. This makes competition between models of the same ethnic background very high because most of the time only one of us will be cast. Most paid jobs for commercial work prefer white models so I am not usually a contender for most things.”

“The fashion industry is often only inclusive if it is beneficial to sales or marketing. This inclusivity is mostly I find superficial. However I think things are gradually improving especially with mainstream brands like Fenty where the diversity is not limited to one slot per ethnicity, body type, or gender identity.”

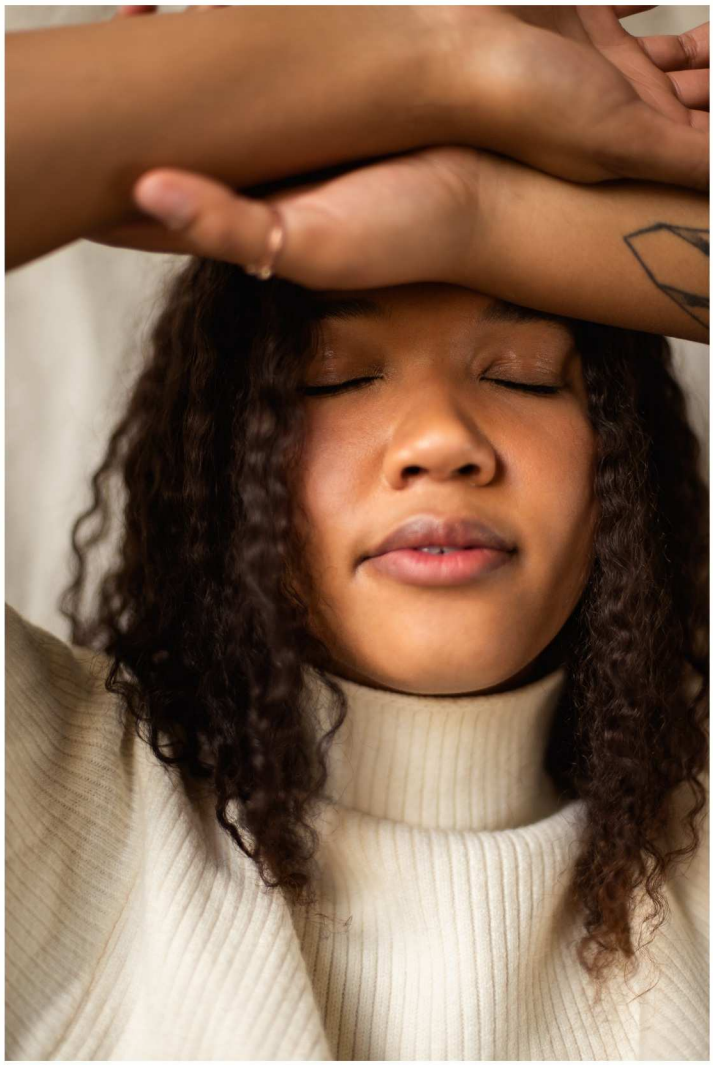
Shanelle Walters

Age: 23

Occupation: Server

Hometown: Born Toronto, ON. Raised in Regina, SK.

Ethnicity: Half Jamaican Half Swedish



"Being a person of color especially in Saskatchewan has contributed a lot to insecurities about my appearance. I remember times in my childhood were I was told by other kids that the features of my ethnicity were ugly and that I would be much prettier if they were different. I was even called n*gger by older kids at school. This has definitely influenced how I style and articulate myself in regards to blending in more to the racial majority. I still think about the things that were said to me and work very hard to be kinder to myself."

"Being a person of colour has not always been easy, but I would definitely say it's character building. Growing up, my parents always said I had to work twice as hard, as my race could be seen as a strike against me. I couldn't be mediocre and black, it was never an option. It was only through hard work that I could attain what apparently came easier to the majority, and as my dad always said "they can't discriminate against intelligence." In university psychology, I learned that this was called "overcompensation." It's why we see so many children of immigrants like me busting their butts all the time; this work ethic has been instilled in many of us from childhood. It puts an added pressure on you, there are some mistakes you just can't afford to make as the world may not be as gracious or forgiving towards you; our margin of error is much slimmer. In most social situations, especially when you're the only one of your race there, you feel as if you're representing your entire race and it can be exhausting. You have to be on your best behavior all the time so that you don't prove the negative racial stereotypes right. Being a POC also requires a lot of patience, you're faced with a lot of ignorance and microaggressions on a daily basis. Adolescence is also a tough time for POC, especially when they are the minority. As a teen, you want to figure out who you are, but you also want to fit in. Trying to figure out how your race plays a role in your identity during this time can be challenging. Fitting in becomes less important as an adult, so I'm much closer to figuring out who I am now. I'd say being a POC has shaped me to be relatively patient and empathetic. I understand what it's like to be judged by solely my appearance, so I do my best not to judge others for any reason."

"I started my modelling career in Saskatoon and sometimes I feel like the only reason I book some gigs is because of my skin colour. It's no secret that Saskatchewan is primarily Caucasian. Being tall, dark skinned and skinny isn't the norm here so I definitely stand out. I feel the beauty standards here are still quite Eurocentric, but because "diversity" is trending, more clients are trying to showcase other ethnicities. I've worked some jobs where I felt genuinely appreciated and seen as just a regular model, without emphasis being placed on my skin colour. I've worked some where they've viewed my blackness as exotic, or my natural hair especially, and really try to play up my African features. I've also worked some jobs where it's very evident I'm the "diversity hire" and I feel I'm only there as a token. At the end of the day I'm grateful for all jobs I've booked, but it sucks that I often have to question my own ability as a model and wonder if I got booked because they like my look or see talent in me, or if I got booked because I was the only black model for consideration and they needed "someone like me." From the beginning of my career I've always practiced being equipped, as I don't expect to be accommodated anywhere. I always bring my own combs and my own makeup to any job. There have been a few times where I've done my own hair and makeup as the onset MUAs or hairstylists had no idea how to style my "unique hair" or apply makeup that is flattering for my darker complexion. However I've also encountered some hairstylists and MUAs who are versed in all skin types and hair textures so kudos to them! It's a nice surprise when I meet a beauty professional who can do my makeup amazingly, or styles my hair in a manner that we are mutually happy with but again I never expect it. When looking to shoot with photographers I also have to be weary and do research beforehand. I check their online portfolios and Instagram. If it's all well, white, that kind of puts me off. From my experience, someone could have a great portfolio and all their models are white. But then when I shoot with them, I'm disappointed as I feel my photos aren't up to par quality wise. Darker skin tones require different lighting and editing techniques. They shoot differently and making more melanated skin tones look good in photography is definitely a skill. I haven't really met many photographers who can efficiently shoot me so that my melanin really pops. I feel this is again a geographical issue, as Saskatchewan is primarily white, but it'd be nice if more photographers here learned to shoot and edit people with deeper skin tones."

THE FASHION INDUSTRY IS OFTEN ONLY INCLUSIVE IF IT IS BENEFICIAL TO SALES OR MARKETING. THIS INCLUSIVITY, I FIND, IS MOSTLY SUPERFICIAL. HOWEVER I THINK THINGS ARE GRADUALLY IMPROVING, ESPECIALLY WITH MAINSTREAM BRANDS LIKE “FENTY” WHERE THE DIVERSITY IS NOT LIMITED TO ONE SLOT PER ETHNICITY, BODY TYPE, OR GENDER IDENTITY.

"I think the fashion industry still has a long ways to go in regards to race. The majority of models in the industry are white, but we live in a very multicultural world. Take a look at the current VS Angels roster for example, there are 16 in total. 13 of the 16 are white, 7 of these white women are blonde and blue eyed (almost half!) and only 3 are WOC (all 3 identifying as black). There is no Asian, Arab, Polynesian or Indigenous representation on that roster at all. There should not be a limit to diversity in the industry, everyone deserves to be seen and represented, it's not just a black and white issue. I'll be satisfied when the fashion industry thoroughly reflects the diversity seen in our world, not even in terms of just race but body types as well. I know my body type grants me a certain amount of privilege as well in this industry. Though plus size models are becoming more accepted I'm sure being a WOC plus-sized model has its own special set of challenges as you have to overcome push-back for not only your race but your size as well. The Western world still has a very Eurocentric standard of beauty, though we've definitely made some positive progress from when I was a child. Representation is important and I'm glad we're seeing more role models in the industry of varying backgrounds, but I hope this newfound wave of diversity isn't just a trend. I don't want POC to feel like tokens anymore; it would be amazing if you walked into a gig and truly saw people of many various backgrounds and races and ethnicities, not just a visibly white majority and a small handful of "ethnic" models. I think as our world becomes more mixed, this will inevitably happen, so I'm hopeful."

Toluwa

Age: 24

Occupation: Full-time student

Hometown: Ottawa, ON

Ethnicity: Nigerian

CONTRIBUTORS

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