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The Fashion Industry's Response to their Ever-Changing and very Diverse Consumer Base

Tiana Van Leuven

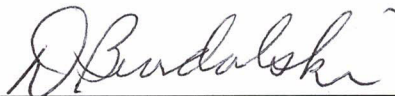
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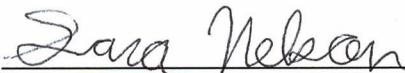
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

College Honors

Departmental Distinction in Fashion Design and Merchandising



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Two hundred years ago, if you looked around the country, it would look very different from how it looks today. Fashion has existed for even longer. The fashion industry was built upon a foundation relative to its history but like every business out there, changes must be made to adjust to the customers' ever changing needs and desires. The industry began as a way to provide people with clothing in a mass market system. Today, around the United States, people go to retail stores to purchase clothing instead of making it at home or have it made by a tailor. Since the beginning of America's establishment it was men, women, and children who wore clothing to be covered for five reasons: modesty, protection, adornment, decoration and status. Throughout history, clothing quickly began to hold more meaning than simply functionality or modesty. It now holds a deeper meaning in its construction and appearance. Fashion cannot simply retreat into nonexistence. During the past few decades, some American demographics have become more vocal about how they want to participate in fashion. People do not want to be told how to or expected to dress a certain way. Concurrently, with certain demographics becoming more vocal, other consumers are doing the same. Fashion now has even less rules than when the industry began, yet only the consumers on the lower end of the industry seem to know this. The industry needs to keep up with the demands of their customer. The purpose of this research is to showcase how the fashion industry represents their American consumers in the past and how the industry is and can adjust to their ever-changing diverse consumers.

Demographics are an Essential Part of the Business

The fashion industry has to be aware of who they are serving. Demographics are statistical sets of data about a population regarding a plethora of categories including age, race, gender, and income (Dictionary.com). Demographics are just one type of market segmentation that the industry uses, which reveals which markets exist and what type of consumers are in these markets. It is important for the industry to be aware of who the consumer is in order to better serve their needs. Demographics relay specific information about people in a certain population, who also happen to be the consumers of the fashion industry. Just about all humans shop and wear clothing. Having a better understanding of consumers will be insightful for fashion companies. For businesses, getting to know the customer or forming and maintaining a relationship with them can assist in the retailing process. A large part of the fashion industry and many other industries is marketing. Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large(Definition). Market segmentation is the process of defining and subdividing a large homogenous market into clearly identifiable segments having similar needs, wants, or demand characteristics. Market segmenting is important because it allows focus to be put on certain markets in hopes of creating a better relationship, thus reach marketing goals. One way to segment a market is by using demographics. Once aware of the different demographics, and the markets within, fashion companies can choose whether or not to target a specific market.

Since it was developed as a nation, the United States has always been a home to people of all ages, races, and identities since it was developed into a nation. These inhabitants all took part in the culturally dictated behavior of being fully clothed in public therefore; clothing had to

be acquired one way or another. Before the 1900s, clothing was made in most households. Presently, there are still some cultures, such as the Amish, that make most of what they wear each day at home. However, generally shopping is a behavior that almost every demographic must take part in, in order to be covered. The U.S census records the names, sex, ages, and race of each person. The fashion industry uses sex, age, and race in researching and targeting specific markets.

The Lesser Represented Communities Play Just as Large a Role

The fashion industry in America flourished during times when society only acknowledged the white man. Liberties for other demographics such as African Americans came later in history. Three groups of people who do not get as much acknowledgment from the fashion industry today are: people of color, the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual, and plus community) and those with mental and or physical disabilities or abnormalities. The five most populated cities in America are: New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia (US Census). These five cities have an enormous amount of consumers to serve inclusive of hundreds of races, yet most of the industry still seems to target only one consumer market; Caucasians.

The LGBTQIA+ community is full of individuals that are either not recognized by society or go against many *rules* that society may live by, for example gender norms in dressing habits. The *plus* part of the acronym covers many different identities that people can use to label how they choose to live. Cross dresser is one of the identities that are recognized by the 2015 United States Transgender Survey (2015). This term is among a list that includes gender fluid (identity

is not fixed), bi-gender (more than one identity), and non-binary (not male or female). The definition of cross dressing is to wear clothing typically worn by the members of the opposite sex (dictionary.com). This definition does not specify whether the wearer identifies as the opposite sex or is even attracted to the opposite sex, just as being gay or a lesbian does not mean you dress like the opposite gender as well. Cross dressing is simply wearing the opposite sex's clothing. The reason behind wearing clothes of the opposite sex can be endless. Fashion brands have originated with the understanding that boys wear boy's clothes and girls wear girls clothes and since the two sexes develop differently, the clothes should be made differently too. Yet that is not how every consumer chooses to dress. There are entire markets such as these that do not adhere to stereotypical ideals of society that are being completely ignored by most of the industry.

Individuals who have mental and/or physical disabilities or abnormalities can be any sex, gender, race, or identity. Focusing on the disability aspect of their lives, the fashion industry does not have very much representation of this community. They may or may not need certain accommodations to for their clothing and accessories, but what is relevant is that they be a part of the industry just as much as any other consumer could be. Their differences should not inhibit their participation of higher levels of the industry such as runway shows. The industry focuses on their idea of average and markets their product the same way. Diversifying the models used in marketing imaging seen by the consumers can have a huge impact on consumer interest.

Many retail stores adorn their walls with images of only one body type, more than typically a tall, white, fit, male or female model. Stores are also typically separated by sex, whether given their own departments, own floors. Size range and sizing is another factor stores either restrict or barely recognize. Many retail stores for example will only carry extra small to extra large or sizes zero to twelve in female clothing. Some of these stores may be able to order extended sizes but not all.

African Americans and Hispanics make up about a third of the United States population. In major cities where major fashion and retail shopping is guaranteed, such as NYC, Hispanics and African Americans make up more than the white population. Los Angeles has the same number of Hispanics and whites; this is without counting African Americans. Similar statistics apply to the other cities as well (US Census). However, minorities who are considered majorities in these cities are still not receiving recognition in the fashion industry. Quite recently, people with darker skin tones could not go to the drug store and find foundation that matched their skin tone let alone find a pair of *nude heels* or undergarments. People of color were also rarely seen modeling on runways or in fashion editorials.

Paying attention to how demographics are changing is important when you focus on the gendered components of the stereotypical fashion icon as well as the monochromatic skin tones. Most people, including the fashion industry, look at the world in black and white. There are males and there are females. Today, however, society has begun to recognize that biological sex and how one identifies can differ. Therefore, shopping is not as simple as going to the women's department if you have a vagina and going to the men's if you have a penis.

Clothing departments as well as sizing are two parts of the industry that are strictly bifurcated. Something as simple as a white t-shirt can be made in the same size but be constructed differently for male or female clothing. What the consumer actually wants to wear is not though. Some women want to wear men's clothes and vice versa. Unisex clothing is an idea that has been done throughout history. Before medical technology allowed mothers to know the sex of their child pre-birth, any preparing of the child's wardrobe included only neutral color tones and styles. Clothing was also very neutral in style until around the late 1800s early and 1900s for children until the age of 7 mainly because masculinity did not need to be defined at such an age (Paoletti 21).

Consumers: the Ones Who Wear the Clothes

Consumers have existed for generations and shopping was a behavior conditioned to each of us. History played a huge role in how these behaviors adjusted over time. Gendered clothing was a practice influenced by a gendered society. Men and women were expected to wear clothing designed for their sex. Women were seen as inferior and took care of the children. Their children, boys and girls, until a certain age, had what was considered during the time, a feminine appearance to them until transition to adulthood took part. This practice soon developed negative feelings toward males going against gendered clothing. G Stanley Hall theorized that punishment in the form of putting little boys back in their baby dresses, created the belief "that being female was shameful and inferior" (Paoletti 96).

History of How Consumers Shopped

The history of fashion gives insight into why consumers behave the way they do today. Unisex clothing is a concept that dates back to the white infant gown worn during the 1800s. Much of early infant, toddler, and children's clothing were quite similar in design and could be passed along to brothers or sisters. Infant boys were still seen wearing the white baby dress into the 1940s (Paoletti 35) However, the Lord Fauntleroy Suit is a direct example of how views on boys in feminine clothing changed. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was published in 1886 and the main character wore a *knickerbocker suit of black velvet, trimmed with fur*. This style for boys was popular through the end of the 1800s. In the Beginning of the 1900s with the assist of other popular children publications, such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain, the Lord Fauntleroy style, developed a *pretty effeminate mamma's boy*' view (Paoletti 66-71). *Lord Fauntleroy* and Mark Twain's work contrasted immensely. The characters from both stories are quite opposite of one another. Overall, the start of the 1900s began the descending acceptance of boys in feminine clothing. This acceptance conditioned consumers to rethink clothing choices and has since made it more difficult for men to break the gendered clothing barrier.

This occurrence is when gendered clothing took over most of societies understanding of fashion but through different trends, unisex clothing reappeared. The "unisex era" was between 1965 and 1985. During this time designers offered menswear looks for women, such as the pantsuit, and men were offered more neutral garments such as turtlenecks, and ponchos (Paoletti 101). 1968 was the year runway recognized gender-neutral with Paris shows exhibiting 'simple silhouettes and graphic patterns' (Chrisman-Campbell). Retailers welcomed but then quickly dismissed the trend but the impact stayed behind.

Unisex clothing relates to the topic of cross dressing in a couple of ways. First, one must consider that there can be different degrees of cross dressing. Garments that are fairly unisex in appearance, such as white t-shirts or sweatpants may be different only in sizing matters. Even within our gendered sizing guides, not every female woman will prefer female cuts and sizes and not all men will prefer male cuts and sizes. Cross dressing can also be done quite dramatically with top to bottom styling for personal expression or for theatrical reasons. Drag is a good example of this. Drag is a theater term that refers to men dressing up in women's clothing. Not all entertainers that participate in drag are homosexual or identify as something other than straight. Titles such as female impersonator just as clearly describe what drag is (Conger).

Unisex clothing is clothing that is constructed one way and sold to both males and females. Some styles with construction differences could still be considered unisex, but they would be found in separate retail departments. Seeing retailers selling unisex merchandise, even if in niche departments, is proof that they are aware of the demand. Few fashion brands partake in the creation of unisex clothing but this is changing. In 2007, Rad Hourani began his career in the fashion field by launching a unisex collection at the age of 25 (RAD). His first collection included ensembles with edgy silhouettes and layering. In the past decade since Rad's collection, the unisex movement has thrived. In 2015, gender neutral and unisex styles were seen in several New York Fashion Week shows such as Hood by Air, another collection that uses bold silhouettes. Telfar, a brand created by a New York designer, Clemens Telfar, is a "fusion of fashion and functionality" (Meltzar). The designer stated, "I feel like if something looks good on *you*, it's for *you* to wear" (Meltzar).

Unisex collections use a mix of models. A reflection of varying the usage of models has been seen in other collections as well. Men are being used to model in womenswear shows and women are modeling in menswear shows. One day it could have been catastrophic to mix prints but today the runways are full of ensembles that the *average* consumer would be threatened by. Unisex collections are just a start. Although, many infant and toddler specialty stores may have sections of unisex styles, adult clothing stores are almost always divided by two main departments; men's and women's. Unisex departments or unisex stores are the next step in responding to the diversity present in consumers.

Gendered Clothing: an Accepted Practice

This idea of gendered clothing still exists and is one of the largest reasons behind why we choose what we wear each day. Even though fashion has rules that are meant to be broken, the tradition of wearing clothing relative to who we were born as has become set in stone for the majority of the population. Some cultures do allow for some curtailing of these "American" traditions. In Scottish culture, their men often wear kilts, which is a skirted garment. Though the reason why Scottish men wore them in the past may not be the same reason why some men wear them today, the fact that they are still worn by both Scottish and non-Scottish men indicate a change in society in America. Those who do not wear kilts for cultural reasons have their own reasons behind their clothing choice. These reasons can range from functionality, to simple comfort and can be seen on men of all personality types and identities.

Gendered clothing may also be why such a strict sizing guide exists for both men and women. In construction, each sex has explicitly different patterns to follow. The bodies of

female and male differ in main features, but if one were put in a room of nude people facing a wall and was told to identify each person's gender, there would be anomalies. Ladies Home Journal ran a contest in 1905 regarding guessing the correct sex among twenty images of infants. Not a single person was able to guess all of them correctly (Paoletti 24). Just about all babies are born with similar facial features that change as they become adults. However, as we grow, many women, especially athletic women, have broad backs, similar to men's, and many men can have a defined buttock and thigh area similar to a woman. Everyone has differences to their bodies, but not every female is going to be 100% different than every male. GFW or Gender Free World is a newer clothing brand that was established under the idea that "our pants have disproportionately restricted the access to our choice of clothing on the high street and online" (Gender). So they have created a collection of shirts that are not offered in typical small to large sizes. Their sizing guide is based off of variations between a person's shoulders, bust, waist, and hips. Newer brands like GFW may offer insight to how the sizing system will change in the future.

At the same time, society's view on patriarchy almost always put females as inferior. This social organizational structure may be why woman started wearing pants and eventually even suits. Women rebelled against this structure, dressing more masculine gave females a supposed advantage over other females. During the world wars women had to go to work as their men were over-seas. Rosie the Riveter grew in popularity (Hancock). Rosie represented the women who had to take over men's jobs during the war. Women were working in all areas, doing any of the jobs the men were only expected to do. On the contrary, a man dressing more feminine, because of the inferior understanding, is not as common and comes with a negative

connotation. Searching for clothes by gender has become a normal shopping behavior. The earliest shopping catalog *Sears Roebucks &co* had “departments” within its pages. Headings within the catalog included *Furniture Department, Sweaters for boys and Youth, and Ladies’ Silk* (Sears Roebucks). The United States Census does not record gender identity, other than male or female. Other gender surveys exist but are not used for nearly as much statistical studies. How someone chooses to identify can directly affect how they choose to dress. A transgender individual, for example may report their biological sex on the census, but may live their life as the opposite biological sex and dress as such. This can easily be why the fashion industry only recognizes the two gendered markets, mainstream society and the government only recognize either or.

Gendered clothing is a concept that plays one of the largest roles in why each person chooses what to wear each day. The entire concept is socially constructed and can be traced as far back as ages of royals and peasants. However, the roles of males and females varied throughout history, often with new generations rebelling against older generation styles and traditions. For instance, pink and blue did not always represent girls and boys respectively. Pink at a point was actually looked at as more superior and masculine. All babies wore white gowns as infants and even continued to wear dresses until the romper or jumper was invented (Paoletti 52). Functionality played a role in what children wore and at times stirred the pot to what girls were expected to wear. Several times in history, gendered clothing was worn not because of superiority but simply because new parents who were forced to wear dresses as babies, refused to put their own babies in the same type of clothes.

Therefore, new generations would rebel against how they were dressed as children (Paoletti 75). Gendered clothing is created in numerous ways. The construction, sizing, and overall aesthetics differentiate from traditional male and female garments. There are different sizing guides for males and females. The use of colors like pink red and purple for females and blue green and yellow and embellishments like hearts and bows or boats and trains respectively, signified a garment as only for either a boy or girl. A study regarding sex and color, published in *Current Biology* signified that adult men and women had similar color preferences to their younger selves. “Neurologists Any Hurlbert and Uazhu Ling reported finding a ‘robust, cross-cultural sex difference in color preference’; women preferred reddish-purple hues and men greenish-yellow” (Paoletti 97). This study supports the idea of gendered clothing and the associated colors with males and females. Gendered clothing has eventually become almost an unconscious understanding for the majority of consumers. For instance, some parents want to know as soon as possible the sex of their baby so stocking the nursery in either pink or blue décor could be finished before the birth. Other parents decide not to know the sex before birth and they continue to prepare their nurseries with neutral pastels. “68% of young people believe gender is non-binary”, meaning it is one or the other (Saner). The understanding of having a gender identity other than female or male is becoming more wide spread. With this idea in mind, clothing choice does not always reflect the identity of the wearer; it reflects opinions of the parents.

The Stereotypical Fashion Icon

The fashion industry is responding to the diversity of their consumers by focusing on two aspects: the roots of the industry and the products themselves. For quite some time the fashion industry solely represented or marketed to one type of figure: a white, slender, male or female. Not only does this make the customer feel as if that is the only body type acceptable in fashion but that is how the entire industry is run. A very small percentage of the customers actually represent the figures emphasized in marketing and runway shows. Fashion designers clothing designs include a ubiquitous array of looks that are not always for the standard size eight. If the entire industry made clothing for the white, slender, model, a majority of designers behind the clothing would not even be able to wear their own designs. Runway shows are starting to become more diverse and even going against gender norms. This past fashion week, Fall/Winter 2016 had the highest statistics of racial/ethnic minorities, range of body sizes, models with unique appearances on the cat walk. Majority of the collections presented had at least two African American models (Report). Plus size models are being seen in plus size collections as well as collections intended for the non-plus size Models with imperfect skin are also not only walking on the runway but becoming the face of certain brands like Winnie Harlow. People who others look at with negative beliefs because of certain abnormalities in their bodies or on the exterior are walking side by side with these *typical* fashion icons. Their differences are not inhibiting them. Some have even reached across boundaries to become designers themselves, and are being recognized for it like Madeline Stuart. The roots of the industry are and have not been who they showcase, the one type of body. The designers and multitude of other workers behind the clothing are of all sizes and skin tones. The focus on diversity in the runways also needs to be emphasized at the retail level. Understanding that all

customers are not the same skin tone or same size starts with understanding the fact that the same skin tone garments and accessories will not work on all, just as *one size fits most* does not intend to fit all.

Consumers can connect more to a brand when they can relate to the brands overall message. A runway show with models with the same idealistic appearance, the same walk, and the same face, or a retail store displaying with the same face in every graphic is not going to connect with too many different consumers. Models that appear confident and are not the *perfect* visual allow consumers to see that the idea of beauty does not have one version. Seeing a variation in models skin tones and body types tell consumers that the clothes can be for anyone and shows how clothes will look on different body types.

Models are also starting to be seen wearing clothing for the opposite sex. This visual gives the average consumer the idea that the fashion rules are looser than once thought. Fashion participants also do not have to be the average able bodied human. Disabled consumers are also getting a face in the industry. Models with either or both mental and physical disabilities are modeling and even designing clothes. They are not only taking part in fashion as a consumer, but also participating directly in the industry, proving that anyone can. Everywhere you go has people with mental and physical differences or disabilities, according to the U.S census, one in five people in America have a disability (US census). These people are treated as such, as a disability, as different. They are not represented as equal or looked at as such. Most disabilities however, do not limit the person's ability to get creative with fashion.

Decades ago someone with a disability or someone that looked different would not be the first person on a stage or walking in a runway show. Willow Harlow is an example of a big change seen on the runways. She got her start on the American television show America's Next Top Model after being discovered on Instagram by the show host, Tyra Banks herself. Harlow has the skin condition, Vitiligo, causing her skin to lose pigmentation on parts of her body (Winnie). Due to her success on the show and in the modeling world, she is now walking in shows at fashion weeks around the world, proving a 'blemished' face is just as beautiful as an 'unblemished' face. Another example of change is fashion designer, Madeline Stuart. Madeline is a girl from Australia with Down syndrome who has committed herself to modeling as career. After receiving global recognition through social media, she soon modeled in runways such as Mercedes Benz Fashion Week and was featured in leading fashion publications such as *Vogue*. Madeline, is not the industry's average model, yet she has achieved model fame and even launched her own line this past February (Madeline). Both of these girls represent more communities that do not get enough representation in the fashion industry.

Many target markets are either being left in the dark or ignored completely. Yes, some retailers are adjusting, some new brands are emerging, and some diversity is being seen in marketing visuals, but there is much more that the industry can do. Not every retail store has to change either; the merchandise itself is not 100% of what the industry is about. The experience of purchasing the product is just as important. Fashion shows and magazines are what consumers admire for inspiration and creative direction. The designers are behind the scenes, but play just as big a role as the models wearing the designs, and the garments themselves.

The Stereotypical Customer Does Not Exist

The stereotypical customer is not who he or she was 100 years ago. People are not just shopping to dress themselves for the weather or for a special event; they are now shopping to express themselves each day. However, retail stores still service their floors or website as if this is still how consumers behave. Many stores have men's, women's, and children's departments or just simply focus on just one, *Children's Place* is an example of this. Almost everything in retail stores are separated by gender and size, which mostly range from extra small to extra large within each gender.

The industry needs to stop putting an emphasis on one type of consumer. At the retail level, stores need to reduce their importance of only merchandise and who their target customer is and instead focus on customer service and the overall shopping experience. Adjusting a retail model, by changing departments or adding new lines are ways to show consumers that retailers acknowledge all types of consumers. The experiences at the retail level can affect a customer's overall opinion of the industry. This is where the consumer plays the largest role, retail stores are where majority of people shop. Therefore, limiting consumer's experiences with stereotyping and old-fashioned shopping systems can severely restrict the advancement opportunities within.

The stereotypical fashion icon does not even have as large a range as the stereotypical customer. The stereotypical customer is the *average* teenager or adult, whereas the stereotypical fashion icon is a *perfect* body and face. Most models used in fashion shows,

advertisements, and photos, have all the same qualities: white skin, tall, slender build, and typical masculine and feminine traits alike.

The average consumer represents women who are about 5' 4" and a size 12 or 14 and men are 5' 9" with a forty inch waist (Peeke). But the true range of consumers can be anywhere from size 00 to 30 or higher. They can be tall or they can be very short and petite. They may wear clothing made for them or they may go for unexpected choices for style preference or simply because of comfort. There is nothing average about the average consumer today. Fashion ambassadors, models, and designers, are starting to represent the true *average*, which is a diverse range of individuals with unique features and abilities.

What is known as the stereotypical customer and who the actual average consumer is differs so much because of changing demographics and changing within society. Society played a role in why the stereotypical customer and the actual average consumer today are so different. The stereotypical customer plays up the idealistic image of the fashion industry, whereas an actual average consumer is an actual average human being. The white male, historically, was the American staple. Clothing industries were established in America after couture houses flourished in Europe and immigrants brought their skills to the states. Charles Fredrick Worth was one of the first courtiers. He was a white male whose House of Worth dominated the 19th and 20th century and played a large role in early fashion adaptations. Fashion publications of all kinds, including sewing patterns, order catalogs, and magazines, displayed Caucasian individuals.

Products expected to be worn by the customers were even stereotypical, assuming gender roles and preferences. Women traditionally wore skirts and men wore pants, though for children this varied through the years. Slacks became a more regular garment for women around the twenties and thirties. This could be related to the positive outcome of the Women's Rights Movement in 1920. A contrasting view was given by an Earnshaw's (fashion publication) Marshall Gibraltar, who said the cause was because of more casual lifestyles" (Paoletti 108).

Consumers also got larger. The average size went up nearly three sizes over a couple decades. People never were fully Caucasian (Gibbons), but throughout the decades, more and more blending of cultures resulted in babies with an array of skin tones. With the equality of all: men, women, black or white, any and everybody were partaking in everyday activities, like shopping. People at first and still for some looked at women as inferior and men as superior. It was easier for women to be masculine but harder for men to be feminine. With the changing in society and people being able to be more how they identify, going against gender norms is becoming more okay. The stereotypical customer was not the same as decades back.

Consumers are greatly diverting their styles from traditional trends. Individuals may have been doing this for years or just recently but pop culture icons like actors, singers and the like assist in trends following the trickle up theory in fashion. The trickle up theory is when a trend starts with consumers and travels up the industry ladder. Jaden Smith is a prominent example. Jaden who last year was named as the new face of fashion house Louis Vuitton's Spring/Summer 2016 womenswear collection has been known to wear unexpected

garments such as dresses and skirts. He is “normalizing” the trend for future generations (Hudson).

The Industry Has Began to Catch Up with Their Consumers

One of the first places fashion designers and brands showcase their work is on the runway. Runway shows present collections and trends of future seasons. Fashion shows occur year round and are the ideal way to showcase a new line or collection. The runway has potential to completely transcend the inspiration and meaning of the collection from the designers’ perspectives. Fashion runway shows date back to the late 1800s and early 1900s (Idacavage). Not nearly as extravagant as current day runways, the first runways shows displayed new designs in simple formats with models acting as mannequins in showrooms or walking around *soirees* hosted by the designer. With the number of designers and interested buyers growing, this show soon turned into a twice a year event that we now know as Fashion Week (Idacavage). In the recent past, runways have been washed in the same face. The styles change from season to season but the models appearances stay the same. But in the past decade or so, variation in the models’ sizes and skin tone are evident. For fall Fashion Week, in Paris, Milan, New York, and London, more woman of color walked the runway than ever before at 27.9% according to the 2017 Diversity Report conducted by TheFashionSpot, (Report). Also, men and women are being seen walking in all shows, not just men in menswear shows and women in womenswear shows. Some designers have even begun to showcase the beauty of who the everyday consumer is. Women and men of all types are modeling. Diversity on the

runways is at its all time high. The typical face of fashion is beginning to change where fashion is first showcased.

Fashion publications today, are secondary after runways in how designers display their work. Historically, publications were one of the only ways to get trends and news reached consumers. Catalogues, such as *Sears roebucks &co* were considered fashion publications, but today, publications including *Vogue*, *WomensWearDaily*, and *Instyle*, are fashion authorities. In these publications fashion is showcased in photograph form on models and styled with other pieces combining merchandising and marketing in a layout form. Today's publications have changed a great amount from the original Sears Roebucks catalogue and the first *Vogue* issue to today's online ordering format and the signature September issue of *Vogue*.

Vogue: Inside a Top Fashion Publication

Vogue magazine has been published in America since 1892 when it was founded by Arthur Baldwin Turnure. In the early issues, the covers were hand drawn or illustrated. The first color photo cover did not appear until 1932. Before photos were even used however, white females were always depicted in the art work on the cover. In 1933, the first known model was to be photographed for the cover. Toto Koopman was featured on the cover. She was a biracial, bisexual Dutch-Indonesian woman who was also a spy in World War II (Oloizia). *Vogue* routinely used known woman as their cover models. Back in 1893, the first September issue of *Vogue* was released. September issues of fashion publications are seen as one of the more important releases of the year. This has to do with several factors, one being the time of the year and advertising (Schiffer). September issues reflect the quality of how the publication is doing

compared to others. The time of year is important because it is the beginning of the fall/winter season, the beginning of the year in fashion. The September issue is full of advertisements for hundreds of fashion brands and gives way to a change in seasons in both fashion and in America. The magazines with more advertisements appear to be more widely recognized by companies and consumers.

The cover of the September issue is just as important as what is inside, but it greatly affects who picks up the magazine. In previous *Vogue* issues, the iconic fashion model of the time was always on the cover, which was a white slender woman. The first African American model graced the cover of *Vogue* in August 1974. The first September issue that featured an African American model was in 1989, which featured the face of Naomi Campbell. *Vogue's* editor in chief, Anna Wintour, "claimed that Conde Nast (*Vogue's* publisher) executives were stunned when she chose to put a black woman on her first September issue" as their new editor (Stern). This was despite the fact that a black woman had been on the cover before under previous editor, Grace Mirabella. Although Anna Wintour made this decision in 1989, an African American had not been seen on the cover of the September issue again until 2010, a full twenty one years later. There have been several non-white cover models, including Rihanna, Jennifer Hudson, and Michelle Obama, but considering the significance of the September issue proves the lack of diversity amongst the models used throughout the publication.

Since the September issue is known for its advertisements, which typically target a specific market, I decided to review seven September issues to truly see how diverse the contents were and how many different consumers advertisers were actually targeting. I was

able to review either one or two September issues from each decade starting in 1982 and ending with 2017. In brief, I did not see much variety in the visual contents until the most recent two issues.

The first issue I reviewed was the 1982 September issue. It featured Isabella Rossellini, an Italian actress and model. Throughout the entire issue I observed the same face and figure on every single one of the five hundred and eighty pages. However, I was able to find two African American models among a Calvin Klein and Fernando Sanchez advertisement. I also found one Hawaiian model, evidently modeling for a Hawaiian based collection. Every one of the models throughout the issue seemed to be in their twenties and was slim in size. The issue also displayed a plethora of feminine styles except, fashion brand Saint Laurent Paris featured women in business pant suits that resembled menswear.

Five years later in the 1987 September issue, a white American model, graced the cover. Again this issue was also full of young models with light skin. In the over eight hundred page magazine, Saint Laurent again showed variety and used a black model in one of their ads. A model of possibly mixed race was also part of the New York collections feature. One aspect of this issue that did stand out was the appearance of plus sized brands and models. Danskin Plus had a four-page article that featured white models, but successfully showed models different shapes and sizes.

Eleven years later, the visual contents of *Vogue* were starting to show some variety. The 1998 issue featured Renee Zellweger, a white American actress, on the cover. Inside the issue featured several non-white celebrities throughout its six hundred and eighty pages, which

included Halle Berry, Mary J Blige and Lil Kim. I did take notice of the make-up brands advertised throughout the publication too. In more than one of the ads, for L'oreal Paris and Revlon, African Americans were featured among the lighter skin models. High fashion clothing brands were lacking in diversity however.

Starting in the new millennium, I was able to review the 2001 September issue. Once again, a white model, Linda Evangelista was on the cover. Greater diversity within the pages manifested with Yves Saint Laurant, GAP, and Banana Republic all using black models throughout some of their advertising. This issue also included a Burberry ad featuring a unisex vibe with grunge styling and a YSL ad also featured a plus size collection.

About ten years later, alas an African American was again seen on a September issue cover. American actress, Halle Berry was the first black model on the September issue cover for over two decades. *Vogue*, is continuing to show diversity among its pages. More of the female models are wearing edgier, less feminine clothing. Older models are appearing more for brands that appeal to the mature market as well. Different ethnicities appear on many ads, but not as much on the ads from high fashion brands. One thing that did peak my interest in this issue was that an article on a black male Attorney General came directly before Halle Berry's feature. This brings back the inferiority issue between men and women, even though she was on the cover, his focus came before hers in the inner contents of the fashion magazine.

The last two magazines I was able to review were the 2015 and 2017 September issues. The 2015 issue featured African American singer Beyonce Knowles, and the 2017 featured white actress Jennifer Lawrence. Inside both of these issues, it is clear that *Vogue* and its

contributors have continued to expand upon their knowledge of the presence and acceptance of diversity. Brands including Prada, YSL, J Crew, Vera Wang and Roberto Cavalli have all used more than just white models in their branding and advertising (Wintour).

The rise of African Americans and other minority cultures in pop culture have played a huge role in how publications like *Vogue* reach out to their customers. *Empire*, a recently popular television show with a mainly African American cast, was featured in the 2015 September issue. Other black advocates like Michelle Obama, Lupita Nyong'o and Serena Williams have also been on the cover of *Vogue*. Other celebrities like Gigi Hadid, model, and singer, boyfriend Zayn Malik, were also displayed on the cover. Their cover featured them wearing clothing most would assume would be worn by the opposite sex. The article discussed how they dress themselves from one another's closet. Gigi and Zayn are both huge social media icons and are also part of the millennial age group that tends to stray from gender norms in fashion. *Vogue* is absolutely showing their effort in reaching out to the diverse consumer base of the fashion industry by how they chose to layout the contents of their publication.

The fashion industry as a whole has not been responding to the changes at nearly the same pace as they are happening. Unisex clothing existed for babies for generations. Throughout the second half of the 1900s, specifically the unisex era (1965-1985) styles such as grunge done by Tommy Hilfinger and punk designed by Jean Paul Gaultier or Anna Sui experimented with similar unisex styles that could be worn by both genders. Denim may have originally been seen and used as "working" pants because of their durability, but in the 70s and 80s they were also a symbol of nonconformity (The Evolution). Jeans also have very little

construction or visual differences between male and female jeans. More recently, men have been known to wear skinny jeans and styles known as ‘boyfriend or girlfriend’ jeans reflect the masculine fit but are made for women, both reflecting an unexpected fit for the wearer.

Genderless clothing lines have existed for more than a decade now and entire unisex retailers are appearing such as 69us, who has a showroom in Los Angeles as well as an online site.

Weekday, a store in Sweden is another example of a unisex retailer. (Anne).

Fashion Is Not Just Clothing

Another aspect of the industry that for a while was treated as binary is skin tone. In reality, skin tone is not standard, nor is it a matter of either or yet the industry has produced merchandise under the idea that the color *nude* is one specific shade. Traditionally, the *nude* shade was the skin tone of a white person: a peachy, beige color. Pantone, a color matching system used across industries, even recognizes nude as the skin tone of the average Caucasian (Pantone). Makeup brands, as it makes sense, offer the greatest range of skin tone in their products. Fashion brands mainly involved in lingerie and footwear carry skin tone covered merchandise. However, a nude pair of heels or a nude toned brassiere was only *nude* for Caucasian girls. In 2013, footwear designer Christian Louboutin launched a collection with the tag line “Nudes for All!” He was the first major designer to include shades for many different skin tones. The shoes are now available in seven different shades and styles (Friedman).

Lingerie is another niche in the fashion industry where matching undergarments to the body’s skin tone can come in handy so that the undergarments are hidden under the clothes. Also in 2013, Naja, an intimate apparel brand introduced their “Nude for All” collection. This intimate

collection also came in seven different shades of nude (Hughes). Makeup brands are still beating out clothing brands in the challenge of serving the larger range of consumers. This past year, well known singer and now thriving fashion connoisseur, Rihanna launched her makeup line called Fenty Beauty. The line features forty shades of foundation which is one of the largest ranges compared to other brands. Most brands from drug store to high end make up have a variety of shades but Fenty's range of color had everyone talking when it first debuted in 2017.

Social Media: the Connection Between Industry and Consumer

Social media is a compilation of online platforms and communication channels that are used by people to share information, profiles, assumptions, observations, perspicacity, apprehension, and media itself. It facilitates communication and interactions between different groups of people from all across the world (Moran, 2012). Social media is used by 81% of the U.S population according to a study taken in 2017 (U.S.). It is now one of the easiest ways for businesses to access their consumers and to evaluate their needs or desires. In many cases consumers very clearly state what they like and dislike on social media. On more than one of these platforms such as Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat, users can directly reach out to businesses or independent brands to address their concerns or opinions. Users do not only use these outlets to directly interact with brands. Networking can be done without actually meeting a person. Making connections can be as easy as hash-tagging the contents of one's post.

Social media is a huge source of information for brands. A large part of marketing has become completely web-based. Companies can use statistics such as click-through rates and programs such as a customer relationship management (CRM) program, to observe online

behaviors. Spending hours scrolling through Instagram is nearly the same as walking around Manhattan people watching. All demographics use social media, nearly all ages are on there too (Social). From the user's point of view, social media can become an online community of people you may never actually meet. A community where one can *share their story* and most likely not be the only one to have the experience. A place where no one is the same but no one is different (Willis). There is no stereotypical anything. Trolls, or people who do constantly post negative comments exist, but the amount of support on social media surpasses them.

Social media has even begun to be an outlet for everyday people to build a following and become larger than just another face in the crowd. A funny or interesting video can get viewed by a few people, who then share for others, and the cycle continues. The amount of people who can see the same post within minutes is unbelievable. Social media can not only be a place where celebrities, singers, or models for example are discovered by society but social media is now also an entire branch of the fashion industry. It is also used by many other industries such as entertainment.

Girls and boys alike who may still be in school, or still living with parents can now wake up one day with thousands of friend requests, messages, and/or comments because somewhere across the internet their profile or their post was seen by the right person at the right time. Being discovered on social media requires no experience, or even any recognized interest. The requirements of networking and having to know the *right* people are completely pushed aside. Forbes writer John Rampton wrote about ways to grow a social media presence. His list includes engaging with others, linking accounts hash-tagging, and consistency

(Rampton). Winnie Harlow, the now well known model with skin condition vitiligo, was discovered on her Instagram by America's Next Top Model host, Tyra Banks. Justin Bieber was even discovered online through his song covers on Youtube. Both are now thriving in their careers. One fashion blogger, who was named 'blogger of the moment' by *Vogue* only two years after starting her blog in the midst of law school, is Chiara Ferragni. She has no background in fashion but her social media credentials helped her gain a blog now worth 8 million dollars (Fateh).

Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Youtube are just some of the major social media platforms that are used every day by more than three quarters of the country (U.S). Unbeknownst to many of these users is the fact that social media can be a way to earn money. It is a way for everyday people to share their opinions or report their findings on anything from weather, movies, trends or the latest electronic. A Brand Ambassador is someone hired by a company to represent a brand in a positive light and by doing so they can help increase brand awareness and sales. Fashion brand ambassadors can now be any average consumer that a brand takes a risk on and send promotional merchandise. The person would have a high follower count and known reputation on social media platforms where he/she would share his or her opinion on the products. This would be an example of how a consumer at any age, in any city, can potentially become involved in the fashion industry by just partaking in social media. Already established brands and companies however, also needed to adjust to the uproar of social media.

Analysts, managers, specialists, influencers, and marketers are only a handful of positions that can be directly involved with social media. These jobs exist because the fashion industry now understands the influence of the internet and its connection between customers and brands. Entire brands begin on social media, whether entirely e-commerce based or advertising. These brands can then thrive from the immense following they receive. Fashion Nova, a woman's clothing brand based in California, sells celebrity inspired body conscious apparel. After a little more than a year of having an Instagram account, Fashion Nova grew to have four million followers. The popularity of their online store forced their headquarters to increase the number of employees from ten to two hundred.

The fashion industry and social media intermingle in endless ways. Networking can be done in the palm of one's hand. An entire business can be established, shared, enjoyed and loved without ever needing to walk into the store. Established fashion brands can utilize social media during their creative process to research trends, colors, and styles. Inspiration is a click away. Focus groups are already together in one place. Creations are debuted straight from camera to site.

Before social media, the fashion industry was very "top-down" dominated business. Trends start higher up in the industry, like the runway instead of at the bottom, like on the streets. Now, the "average fashion blogger can influence major designers via social media outlets" (Sellors). It is also easier for the average person to be more involved in high fashion. Fashion week runways are posted directly online, if not aired live; "people from home can interact and engage in the fashion shows just like the attendees" (Sellors). The time when high

fashion was only for the upper-class is quickly coming to an end now that anybody with a smart phone or internet access can gain awareness of new trends and brands.

Going Directly to the Source: Inside the Industry

In order to get a deeper understanding of how the industry is responding to changes I wanted to go directly to the source. I was able to reach out to business owners who have worked directly and indirectly in the industry. After speaking to them, I was able to get a better understanding of how the industry must respond to their consumers and the corresponding demographics. The overall message that I received after speaking to each of the business owners was the idea that companies do not have to adjust. The clothing does not need to change, but the way the customer is thought of needs to change. Yes, design and sizing guidelines are specific to male or female consumers yet they can be adjusted, but the shopping experience has just as big an effect on purchase decisions.

Patrick Wilson, owner of menswear line Black House Academy, spoke about how he does not dictate who his customer. He simply focuses on the craftsmanship and final product, not on who is going to be underneath the garment. He does not have much direct contact with the final consumer, but he has considered using female models to display his menswear collections. He has no objection to who buys his clothing.

Michele Bielhart, owner of Victorian Bridal, mainly serves women, but has had an array of customers throughout her 34 years in the industry. Michele commented on the importance of customer service and making the customer feel welcome and special regardless of any physical quality. She also does not dictate the customer; instead she adapts her service for the

customer. She has had experiences in the past where she has made accommodations for customers such as private appointments, but does not turn anyone away.

Susan Golembiski, the more recent owner of Janrae, now called Frock, has completely reversed the branding of her store. Originally, the store serviced the stereotypical medium-class and middle aged woman. Today, with better quality clothing, and Susan's merchandising touch, Frock serves any and all types of people who want to wear quality merchandise. She occasionally transforms her retail space into an event space, where she holds events to bring in clientele and focus on the brand experience. She pays attention to her customer and fills her store with merchandise that appeals to them.

JD, owner of Holistic Skateshop, gave me a different perspective of the industry. Skateboarding has its own culture and its own style of clothing. The skate culture assists in bringing the androgynous attitude to clothing choices. Since skating has an entirely different culture than fashion, nothing about it is mainstream. Therefore, JD does not cater to the same customers as Susan would; he pays attention to his customers by throwing himself directly into interacting with them in their own environment. He himself is a skater, so this is fairly easy for him.

The last owner I spoke with was Julia Katerman from Mixx Boutique. The name of her store perfectly describes the customer that she serves: a mix of people. She serves her community and is welcoming to every consumer that walks through her door. Through the ten years she has owned Mixx Boutique, she learned to pay more attention to the customer. At first she carried merchandise that was higher priced and had a different aesthetic, but soon she

recognized that the market was not there. The clothes are not going to sell in the wrong demographic. She now also has a range of prices to enlarge her customer base even more. She is open-minded to the concept of fashion and enjoys the free range of creativity involved.

Overall, after speaking with industry professionals directly, I am more aware of their views on the changing demographics and diverse consumer bases. Not all companies are able to quickly change their target markets, but companies are able to change their view on all markets. Although clothing is fashion, the industry is not all about the pieces of fabric. The consumers bring the process full circle and they are just as important if not more important than the actual clothes.

The fashion industry would not be the same had consumers not spoken up. If the industry remained the same as in the 1800 and 1900s, the world would be pretty bland. The practice of wearing clothes may not go away but the meaning behind the clothes may have never gotten past functionality and modesty. Fashion became an industry only because clothing has a deeper meaning. Clothing could have remained part of any average department store and seen as a generic necessity. The industry may have been founded during a time where clothes had little meaning and the roots may have grown deep but because the consumers changed, if the industry wants to continue it had to respond. The fashion industry is not made up of only Caucasians and it does not serve only Caucasians. The less represented communities have fortunately spoken up and got noticed. The response was not immediate but the less represented consumers do not get enough recognition in society in general. Media and current events as well have triggered the fashion industry to hasten their pace. The past few years have

been milestones for much of the industry. Fashion is a means to express oneself. Consumers are doing this more than ever and the industry needs to match the pace.

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