

## Fashion Week's facade of equality is so last season

Although it tries to be inclusive, London Fashion Week is behind the trend

By [Lucy Furneaux](#), Muse Editor (2016/17)

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Image: Maria Kalinowska

The 2017 Fashion Week season has been praised by media for being the most inclusive yet. In both the Spring/Summer collection in October and the recent Autumn/Winter showcase last month, there have been more models of colour and greater diversity of age than ever before seen; the launch show by Teatem Jones even featured amputee models Kelly Knox and Jack Eyers in a striking display of diversity. But this just isn't enough anymore.

The Fashion Spot's biannual diversity report examines shows and castings from the fashion weeks in London, New York, Paris, and Milan. Following the S/S17 showcase in October, the report announced that the season had been the most diverse in history, and this trend looks set to continue following the recent A/W17 season. For the first time, every single show at New York Fashion Week A/W17 featured at least one model of colour, with non-white models making up 31.5 per cent of castings.

The full diversity report for the more recent A/W17 season is yet to be released, but analysis of individual shows emerges almost immediately after the closing parties. This year, London appears to have not fared quite so well as NYFW: at last month's show, just over a quarter of models were non-white, and in his show featuring 44 models, Christopher Kane opted to cast just three people of colour. This was, however,

at the expense of featuring more models from other marginalised groups.

Generally, models of colour, older, disabled, and plus-size models all fit the bill for conventional beauty other than their particular distinction so as not to diverge too much from typical custom. Even the 'racial diversity pointers' issued to designers by the Council of Fashion Designers of America last year, which received much praise for their upfront addressing of the issue of racial discrimination in the industry, stated that designers should "Make an effort to add diversity to [their] line-up" because doing so "affects... how we are seen as an industry". The motive wasn't to improve the industry itself - just its image.

But even if Fashion Week could represent every social group on the runway, it still wouldn't be enough - for one blindingly obvious reason. Fashion Week isn't about the models at all: it's about the clothes. It's about the market. What matters isn't the people modelling the clothes on the catwalk, but those who are buying them - and by and large, those are clothes that only a tiny minority of people can afford.

However 'diverse' the fashion industry claims to be, it doesn't care about the people who model the product. According to Model Alliance, an advocacy group for US models, nearly 60 per cent of models have been pressured into losing weight by their agencies. The men and women on the runways, including a great many girls not yet out of their teenage years, are subject to constant criticism of their bodies, habits, and choices. To the crowds who flock to the catwalk, and the designers and brands behind the scenes, they are mere carbon-copy walking mannequins.

The fashion industry is enormous, and arguably crucial to the British economy; it makes up around £28bn of UK GDP. But it manages this only through the commodification, tick-box tokenism, and dehumanisation of its models, at once gazed upon and invisible to the exclusive elite. Given the increase in recent efforts to silence marginalised groups, it's time for the fashion industry - which prides itself on constant innovation - to start again, and provide a real voice, and safe employment, to those on the catwalk.



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