This book examines fashion as a phenomenon driven by fear as much as desire. It presents a collection of cases written during the course "Critical Fashion and Social Justice" at Parsons School of Design, which investigate the dynamics that propel aesthetic competition, anxiety, and bullying.

Fashion is always mimetic, a desire conditioned by competition, fear, exclusion and violence.

FEAR OF FASHION

Critical Cases on the Anxiety of Fashion
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"The enemy is fear. We think it is hate; but, it is fear."

Mahatma Gandhi
illustrations:
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FEAR OF FASHION

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We usually think of fashion as having to do with attraction and seduction, and when somehow it is meant to be the expression of identity, that identity is already there, awaiting and ready to come out. Thus it may be a little awkward to set fashion in relation to fear and anxiety. We know fashion is shallow, and how can someone be afraid of something as frivolous, beautiful and “democratic” as fashion?

The question of fear in relation to fashion is perhaps not so much about a fear of the phenomenon itself, as much as how fashion thrives in a social dynamic that reproduces and even amplifies anxiety and fear. With the rise of a multitude of subcultures and styles, and all accessible through the Internet, there is no longer a dominant culture or marker of prestige. Likewise, with the cheap and accessible clothes available at cheap prices and a flooding of thrift finds and second hands, there is a sense amounts many that fashion has lost its exclusivity. As Dana Thomas notices, with the corporatization of couture, the luxury conglomerates — LVMH, Prada, and Gucci - have become industrial giants, or “behemoths that churn out perfume like Kraft makes cheese” (Thomas 2007).

But even a diversity of goods does not necessarily mean everything goes. Rather, it seems like consumerist status games bleeds into more realms of social competition. Every occasion needs new clothes, every sport, every event, and if you go to a show, buying the t-shirt proves you were there and didn’t only watch the stream. The signifying goods are all the more available, as well as the copies, but the positional competition seems to intensify: for every “in” there is an “out.” (Hirsch 1976)

This reader is a collection of essays that explore some of the many faces of fear that intersect with, or are propelled by, fashion. The essays are short case-studies presented by students in the “Critical Fashion and Social Justice” course at Parsons School of Design, The New School in New York, during the fall of 2016. We hope these short compositions may highlight some of the troubles of fashion, and also offer some avenues of hope.
OBJECTS OF OPPRESSION

CONFORMITY & PERFORMATIVITY
Rebecca Aguilera

Fitting In: Can Girls Really Choose the Right Outfit in High School?

As I fixed my plaid-checkered skirt to make sure I fit standard dress code regulations, I looked down at the backpack that held my computer and books for class. There were no parameters for accessories with uniform check. It was a denim backpack with white hearts, tan leather detailing, and a stain from a pink highlighter seeping through the fabric and onto the front pocket. Picking up the bag, my friend turned to me saying, “When are you going to get a good backpack? The designer bag would look so much better with your uniform, especially in pink.” This type of “helpful comment” exemplifies microaggressions within the fashion system (von Busch & Bjereld 2016). Even though every student wore the same thing every day at the private Catholic school, the feeling of insufficiency in my accessories, and lack of them coming from the “right” designer, made me feel like an outsider—one that would never fit the mold in a sea of similarity.

With teenage girls in particular, there is an unspoken rule of what designers and brands are worn. Growing up in an upper-middle class, prominently white neighborhood in the suburbs of Los Angeles, California, the popular brands to wear were the likes of Juicy Couture, Abercrombie & Fitch, and Hollister. If other brands were worn, girls would often criticize their outfit and not want to be associated with them, not because of cost, but because these brands were not considered “cool” or desirable. Movies like Mean Girls and Clueless have depicted this type of dress bullying between girls, with characters being socially ostracized for wearing the wrong dress or color to events.

Vanessa O’connell of the Wall Street Journal writes, “teens and adolescent girls have long used fashion as a social weapon…Today, guidance counselors and psychologists say, fashion bullying is reaching a new level of intensity as more designers launch collections targeted at kids” (2007). Not only does this bullying teach girls at a young age that their social rank is defined by their exterior appearance, but also it shows how wearing a particular brand can give a sense of power and domination to the person wearing the clothing. With school in particular young girls are molding their identities,
trying to find where they fit within the structure. This feeling of what to wear spreads beyond my experience in Los Angeles and “in one study, more than one-third of middle-school students responded ‘yes’ when asked whether they are bullied because of the clothes they wear” (O’Connell 2007). This type of behavior around clothes also shows young girls are bullied based on their appearance, income, and taste. From my personal information, what is interesting about fashion bullying with girls is that they are not after the approval of men, but the approval of women or the people in their inner-circle. This is further perpetuated as women grow older, buying designer goods like handbags and heels not for men, but to evoke envy within other women, raising the question, “Can women increase their level of attractiveness based on who they wear?”

As David Graeber dissects in his article on The Baffler, bullying should be analyzed through the “institutions that encourage such behavior and that suggest cruel people are in some ways admirable—or at least as deserving of sympathy as those they push around” (Graeber 2015). High school girls bullying other girls about what they wear does not happen as home, but at school and the functions they host. Graeber’s three-way relationship with bullying of aggressor, victim, and witness exemplify why and when girls pit against each other. Graeber explains this as a “three-way scenario, in which one party pummels another while both appeal to those around them to recognize their humanity, we’ve all witnessed and participated in, taking on role or the other, a thousand times since grade school” (Graeber 2015).

“Popular” girls use calculated techniques such as passive-aggression and sarcasm to show their authority and domination in fashion taste. This type of bullying is further spread through social media, exhibiting bullying as a form of contagion. As Rebecca Rosen writes in her article, “Violence is Contagious” she states, “violence seems to spread not just via human connections but also via media” (Rosen 2013). With today’s social media sphere, the feeling of exclusion because of dress can be spread faster, and what is deemed unfashionable shows up on the phones and feeds of other students, making the bullying spread faster and more as a contagion. This contagion is spread further through the usage of social media because of how dress appears in photos. Photos act as a confirmation of belonging by being photographed together.

In the movie, Mean Girls, popular girl Regina George tells a girl, “That is the cutest skirt I’ve ever seen.” The girl’s face lights up, thinking she had Regina George’s approval, only to walk away and have Regina declare to those around her, “That is the ugliest f*ing skirt I’ve ever seen.” This type of passive aggression has the victim thinking she is fashionably appropriate, only to later be victimized by Regina and the witnesses to the act because Regina has declared it is not fashionable. This encounter took place in the hall-
way at high school. Graeber’s point of structural domination displays why school is the perfect structure to exhibit bullying. He writes, “normally, a child’s first instinct upon being tormented or humiliated by someone much larger is to go someplace else. Schoolchildren, however don’t have that option. If they try persistently to flee to safety, the authorities will bring them back” (Graeber 2015).

After I was told my backpack was not appropriate for school, I went home and begged to get a new, designer backpack. For my birthday that year, I asked for a pink designer backpack because my bag with the hearts I loved so much in the summer had “fallen apart”—or so I told my parents. Three months after my accessory criticism occurred, I received my pink designer backpack with a keychain for my birthday in December. By the time we returned from Christmas break, I was participating in pictures at school with my friends. The photos included all of us wearing our white button down blouses encrusted with our high school’s logo, our blue and white plaid checkered skirts, backs facing the camera, showing off our matching backpacks.
Constance Haas

Hijacking Fashion: the visual representation of hooligans

Having as their motto “Loved by few, hated by many, feared by all”, British football die-hard supporters have become internationally known for their unwavering support for their team and violent brawls against opponent supporters. It was in the late 70s that ‘Football firms’ began making waves through the soccer scene (Thornton 2003). Majoritarily consisting of working-class men, these groups of football hooligans were known for travelling together to follow their team of choice, and most importantly engaging in violent behavior with supporters from other teams. With the example of the rivalry between West Ham and Millwall, supporters have among others invaded the pitch to taunt players, bricks have been thrown into crowds, and such events of mass violence both inside and outside stadiums have left many injured, stabbed or even dead (Allen and Mendick 2009). Besides being reputed for their relentless behavior, these football gang members have also led a new youth fashion movement. Status-laden ensembles and expensive brands have become key in the construction, expression and understanding of the ‘casual culture’. Evident since the appearance of these groups, football fanatics seemingly favor some brands and styles over others. Amidst the Adidas sneakers and Burberry scarves, Stone Island jackets have in particular become a product of choice. Referred to as ‘Stoney’ by those in the know, Stone Island emerged out of Italy in the 80s. With football fanatics travelling to Italy for matches, the brand quickly got adopted and brought back to the UK. The Terrace Casuals, as the various groups of ‘stylish’ football fanatics have come to be known, took the brand at heart, by deciding to flaunt the brand’s logo over its team’s colors and jersey. Over time, the brand has become integral to the understanding of the casual culture. By first examining the interplay between the brand and hooligans, this essay will subsequently attempt to highlight how desires, behaviors and especially violence, as is the case in British football culture, can spread through networks.

While brands such as Lacoste and Burberry fought actively against their brands being ‘taken-over’ by less appealing groups, the ‘chav’s’ in the UK and the teenagers from the French banlieues (often used pejoratively
to describe suburbs) (Tungate 2005), Stone Island does not appear to fight such application of their brand. On the contrary, it can be argued that the brand plays off of this association with football hooligans. The distinctive logo placed in evidence on the arms seems to be of particular appeal to hooligans, as it offers a signaler for them to recognize one another. Although the placement and shape of the logo might also bring to mind the Nazi armband, the brand continues to include the symbol in the majority of its garments’ design. The origin of the logos is explained on the website in the following:

“Thus it was born, the first collection with a strong marine identity that needed an important name. This was chosen by analyzing the most recurring words in the novels of Joseph Conrad: Stone and Island. At which point, personalization that was just as strong became necessary, like the badge, a label held on by two buttons showing the Wind Rose and acting as the insignia of a military captain”.

Incidentally, Joseph Conrad is the author quoted saying: “The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness”, which is ironic considering the brand has become the emblem of football hooligans known for their ‘wicked’ ways and violent behavior. Moreover, the images displayed on Stone Island’s website additionally bring to mind associations with football hooligans. Featuring a picture of 25 men, including the founder of the brand, each man is wearing a stone island jacket with military boots, their threatening stance and stare at the camera resonates with the unsettling imagery of hooligans.

The brand’s conscious association with its “label-conscious but not particularly upmarket” (Tungate 2008) hooligan consumers is not only intriguing from a branding perspective, the hooligans’ choice of brand is of great interest from a sociological perspective. As football hooligans opt out of wearing their team’s jersey, their choice of clothing brands becomes of high relevance. In an environment of fierce rivalry, ostentatiously displaying designer labels becomes an additional way in which sub-groups can categorize and especially differentiate themselves from others. With its recognizable logo and steep prices, considering Stone Island jackets range between $800 to $2000, such items lend themselves perfectly to the die-hard football fanatics. By enabling them to identify each other and show their belonging to their group of peers, the jackets help create an ‘in’ group, which in turn deepens the separation from others. As perfectly explained by a reseller of Stone Island jackets: “These brands were initially very hard to source and only available in Europe, so a culture of one-upmanship emerged with guys trying to outdo each other with rarer, more expensive and more innovative pieces. Stone Island fitted perfectly into this, with their boundary-pushing designs” (Leach 2016).
Indeed, besides being referred to as the brand of hooligans, Stone Island is also known for highly innovative garments. From heat-reactive to reflective garments, the level of innovation in combination with the military-looking designs help make this brand the perfect embodiment of the butch masculinity of hooliganism. In addition to creating a visual group identity, the brand initially also had the advantage of being more subtle than the football team’s jersey which would attract unwanted police attention. Although, with its proliferation, the association of hooligans and Stone Island became as evident as it would have with the jersey. As documentarian Jason Williams (2002) explained after conducting undercover research on Hooligans;

“It was looking the part that concerned me more. To pass as a football hooligan I had to look like one and that meant wearing the right kind of gear. There is a fascination among football hooligans with designer labels such as Lacoste, Burberry, Aquascutum and in particular with Italian label Stone Island. […] Unfortunately for them, their taste in clothes can be their undoing. I was turned away from a pub in Cardiff on one occasion.”

Originating from the study of uniforms, Stone Island jackets have in turn become a uniform in themselves, as their recognizable aesthetic and strong visual signifiers have come to encompass the football hooligans.

This particular fascination with Stone Island, and in turn virality is thought-provoking. As stated on the brand’s website: “Having immediately become a cult phenomenon, still today it maintains its position as a contemporary point of reference for younger generations” (Stone Island Official Website 2016). The use of the word ‘cult’ is especially relevant considering the brand’s consumers. From a group of football supporters going to Italy in the 80s, the brand has transformed into a symbol recognized across the country and across borders. Christakis and Fowler’s research in ‘Connected’ (2009) helps build an understanding of the dynamics of a group such as the football hooligans and the virality of Stone Island jackets. This study connects our behavior to our social ties by looking at the role of our network, which is defined as the following: “While a network, like a group, is a collection of people, it includes something more: a specific set of connections between people in the group. These ties, and the particular pattern of these ties, are often more important than the individual people themselves” (Christakis & Fowler 2009:9) These ties would in turn inform our being. Our attitude, preferences and desires would arguably be built based on the people in our surrounding. This is however not a one-way street, our relationship towards our network would rather be reciprocal; we are influenced by it, and we influence it.

The effect of our social ties is additionally connected to the transmission of violence. Christakis and Fowler argue the following: “violence – in both minor and extreme forms – can spread through social ties […] It
can spread either in a directed fashion (retaliating against a perpetrators) or in a generalized fashion (harming nondisputants nearby)” (2009:4). Just as violence can spread through our network, it is also argued that positive behavior and benefits can be disseminated through such ties. As we are each part of a complex web of individuals and connections, this helps clarify how a behavior and certain desires can be diffused outward from a starting point. The complexity and breadth of our social ties, especially with the increasing importance of social media, make “the age of globalization synonymous with the age of contagion” (Sampson 2012:2). The intensification in connectivity make the diffusion of ideas and behavior especially rapid and broad. As such, it is argued that we are affected not only by people we know, but also by individuals beyond our direct social ties. Influence in fact goes beyond the immediate connections and thus have significant consequences.

Looking at hooligans from the lens of the network and contagion, the spread of violent behavior and desires (e.g. Stone Island jackets) appears more comprehensible. This perspective shows that these football supporters are not perhaps intrinsically maleficent and have an innate desire to perpetuate violence, that perhaps their networks plays the significant part in producing and reproducing violent behavior. These social ties help cultivate that devotion to the team and desire to belong to the group of supporters, while the jackets helps demonstrate it.

This network theory also helps explain how hooligans came to be such a spread sub-culture. Hooligans need the network as its value lies in enabling each person to achieve more than what could have been achieved on their own. The spread of beliefs, desires and behavior through networks enable a gathering of similar individuals, which in turn tends to “magnify whatever they are seeded with” (Christakis & Fowler 2009:31). From the naive attempt of a single football fanatic attacking the rival team’s supporters
alone, the network gathers and creates individuals with similar intentions to reinforce its cause. From this, the network does not only stimulate the diffusion of violence, it also displaces the ethics of it. As Christakis and Fowler argue; "morality resides in groups rather than in individuals" (2009: 5).

Furthermore, clothing, and especially a certain uniformity of dress, like is achieved through the widespread use of Stone Island jackets, helps cement that particular network, and in turn intensify its power. It not only intensifies the sense of belonging and devotion to the ‘in’ group, it also singles out the ‘others’. Simmel pointed out this dichotomy of fashion already as early as the beginning of the 20th century, stating that fashion signifies union within the “uniformity of a circle” and also the exclusion of all others (Simmel 1904). As such, adhering to the group’s dress code indicates group identity, while automatically excluding those who do not dress within the dictated style and taste. The interplay between the ‘in’ and ‘out’ group must also be considered in regards to time and space. While in other instances the ‘casuals’ might simply blend in the crowd, the jackets take on a new meaning in relation to a match. With the jacket being associated to the group and its activities, the simple display of the brand under such circumstances help incite fear. The sight of the jacket and especially its notorious logo are efficient in signaling others the belonging to the group.

As the intermediary between oneself and others, the mediator between the internal and external, clothing is a much relevant topic when trying to understand the social dynamic of any being. Fashion becomes especially relevant in the context of a group, where garments can take on additional layers of meaning, and in turn structure perception, behavior and interaction. The Stone Island jackets and their relation to hooligans exemplifies such phenomenon, while additionally shedding light onto the ways in which desires, feelings and attitude spread through our societies.
Uniform yet unequal: school uniforms as class markers

What do most teenage movies recounting the ordeals of high school have in common? The illustrious school uniform. From Blair Waldorf in the TV show ‘Gossip Girl’ to Harry Potter, uniforms are a constant in popular culture. Considering the spread of uniforms, now found throughout public, private and boarding schools, and in a wide array of countries, this essay will question the power dynamics at play in the adoption of uniforms. What does the particular choice of garment mean for the articulation of uniforms? How did the uniform we have come to know come to be? Looking at history, it was in 1552 that the school of Christ’s Hospital, founded in London, introduced uniforms to its students. As a charity school, its student body consisted of “fatherless and poor children” (Scott 2014:2). Due to such factor, London citizens were asked to provide the clothes for students, notably a long blue coat and yellow stockings. Having kept this clothing ensemble to this day, the school claims to have the oldest school uniform still in existence. It was only 400 years later, in the 1900’s, that the trend reached the United States, and mostly in relation to private schools. It subsequently took another 80 years for uniforms to be introduced in public schools. Since then, school uniforms have increasingly spread throughout the country. The past 10 years have especially been marked by an increase in the number of schools requiring pupils to wear uniforms (National Center for Education Statistics 2016).

One cannot talk about uniforms without pointing out the topic’s long-standing debate. On the one hand, the ‘pro-uniform’ defenders argue that such outfits flatten out class and income distinctions, making schools an equal playing field. With the somewhat inherent nature of clothes as items of distinction and in turn categorization, such reasoning appears sustainable at first glance. Uniforms are also said to facilitate the construction of a school identity and in turn enhance cohesion and obedience. On the other hand, opponents claim that uniforms do not provide a solution to the manifestation of income differences. Just like items of clothing can differ in quality according to their price points, accessories (e.g. shoes, belts, backpacks) can signal wealth, and consequently the absence of it. Furthermore, uniforms...
can be criticized for repressing the ability for children to express their individuality in critical developmental years. While an endless rhetoric of for and against arguments can be made, this essay will not look at whether the problem lies in having a uniform, but will rather evaluate what particular garments school uniforms most often consist of.

The notion of school uniform brings to mind specific imagery. Across schools and continents, the style of uniforms cannot be said to vary immensely. The Browning School’s dress code will here be taken as an example. Situated in New York’s Upper East side and with a yearly tuition of $46,300, this all-boys school is considered one of the city’s elite private schools. Their dress code states the following:

School uniforms are required at all times. Pre-Primary boys wear khaki pants, red or white shirts (long or short-sleeved collared polos or turtlenecks) with a navy blazer. Most boys wear white sport socks […] Shirts are required to be from Lands End but the khaki pants and navy blazers may be from anywhere. Many parents opt for Lands End for all uniform pieces to ease the process. Middle and Upper School boys wear button down shirts and ties rather than polo shirts and these may be purchased anywhere. (The Browning School Parents Association)

It is interesting to note that the school directs parents towards two stores in particular to purchase the items of clothing: Lands End and Brooks Brothers. The former retailer’s polo shirts range between $20 to $45, khaki trousers between $30 and $40 and a blue blazer is priced at $99. The offerings of the latter store, Brooks Brothers, are in a higher price range: shirts sell for $60, ties for $45, khaki pants for $50, and blazers range from $178 to $250. As such, a minimum of $150 or $333 will have to be spent in either store for the required uniform. This makes the assumption that parents only buy a single pair of trousers and polo, which seems unlikely as this would signify wearing the same shirt everyday of the week. On top of that, there are additional expenses incurred by acquiring sportswear and shoes. While this might not represents a hefty price for parents in New York’s Upper East Side, this is a considerable sum in other income classes. Such expense is also sizable considering the frequency at which it has to be made due to the speed at which children outgrow their clothes. That is, students will need more than one ensemble of clothing in their coming years of studies.

If the choice of the garment was purely intended to put all students on the same stand, why not adopt more casual, perhaps cheaper and more age appropriate uniforms? Why do the majority of schools that have uniforms not appoint jeans and a white t-shirt as their garments of choice? Considering parents of different income can purchase the required items from different stores and, as such, at different price points and quality, uniforms cannot claim to eradicate inequalities. In other cases, when no choice is of-
ferred in the place of purchase, the cost incurred is relatively more steep for some families than others. Finally, as expressed in the below quote, the particular types of garments demanded by schools, (e.g. blazers, shirts, ties) are potentially more expensive than less formal clothing.

Over the years, I found that the items we could wear to school were so much more expensive than the items that were forbidden. Finding corduroys or nice khaki pants is more expensive than getting a pair of jeans from T.J. Maxx! Sweaters are more expensive than sweatshirts; leather shoes more expensive than other materials (Ilyashov 2016:4)

Multiple theories could be articulated to explain the choice of these particular items of dress. First of all, such private schools often have long histories (e.g. Browning School was established in 1888) and as such, keeping ‘traditional’ ensembles would help maintain their ‘prestigious’ heritage. At Eton, a British boarding school which has educated 19 of the country’s Prime Ministers, students are still seen sporting tailcoats, while Harrow, another reputable British school, has kept its straw hats. Utility and practicality do not seem of great concern. Secondly, it can be argued that such strict school uniforms help separate the realm of the individual (e.g. during the weekend) and the student (e.g. at school). Shirts, blazers and especially ties, are garments that limit movement and comfort. The restrictive nature of such garments would in turn potentially help condition the behavior of children within the academic setting; linking discipline to the garment.

Nevertheless, to what degree do such theories explain why all students of Browning school are required to wear khaki pants and a blue blazer with a polo in primary school and a shirt and tie thereafter? Could these explanations instead be extrapolated to notions of class? Besides fitting within the stereotypical imagery circulated in popular culture of upper class students, such items of clothing can be interpreted to have other connotation in the larger realm of society. Khaki pants, white shirts and blazer closely resemble the attire for high-end sports such as golf or even horse riding. The formal nature of the outfit additionally echoes the dress codes implemented in a number of white-collar professions (e.g. banking, law). So what does the continual use of such ensembles mean for schools? What system is being reproduced and why?

According to Veblen, members of the leisure class buy items as a means to display wealth. The purchase of such luxury items surpasses subsistence needs and solely serve the comfort of the owner. Demonstrating an ability to pay through consumption would in turn help the leisure class to uphold and enhance their social status. As commodities become an evidence of wealth and reputability, they are considered essential in displaying the belonging to a social class. This first premise could be equated to the continued use of traditional and culturally privileged clothing in school uniforms.
Such attire indicates to others the belonging to a particular, and most often more well-off, social class or group. It arguably serves as a means to uphold the symbols that have come to be associated with the elite. The 19th century sociologist went on to explain that while conspicuous consumption becomes honorific, consequently “the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit” (Veblen 1899: 74). This would subsequently result in the members of each class to aspire and continuously strive for the lifestyle of the next higher stratum. Again, this ideology can also be related to the use of school uniforms. While their use began and still today remains associated with elite institutions, their proliferation into a wider array of schools is notable. As such, uniforms could symbolize lower classes trying to emulate the symbols of the leisure class, and thus uphold that their way to consume is the right way to consume. With a fear of being disregarded as inferior, perhaps the adoption of uniforms signals the constant aspiration to emulate the high social stratum.

If such theory holds true, then school uniforms may be linked to cultural violence. While from a utopian perspective uniforms have the potential of strengthening children’s interpersonal ties by disregarding income inequalities, a realist perspective could counter argue that uniforms are in fact an additional way of reaffirming and deepening social divisions. That is, uniforms may just another way in which fashion “perpetuate(s), structure(s) and legitimize(s) violence” (Von Busch 2016:95). This by no means implies that the Browning School parents are in on this maleficent ruse to uphold their legitimacy, but rather points towards deeper rooted issues. Uniforms could be part of a hidden yet integral way in which students and individuals come to view and especially judge others. From one peer to another judging the quality of his clothes, to one school for another. Perpetuating the upper-class ideals and upholding that members of the ‘in crowd’ are those of wealth, categorization based on social hierarchy becomes and remains acceptable.

Lovett (2013) goes further by establishing a correlation between uniforms, class identity and the theory of memes. Concentrating on working-class students, the study examines how these individuals performed their identity through school clothing, especially blazers. As Dawkins’ theory explains, “the esteem with which an idea is held by people allows that idea to replicate itself” (Ibid:3). In these cases, blazers were associated with the notions of power, advantage and social success. In turn, students saw a social advantage in wearing a garment that they not only valued, but was also valued by others. As a symbolic marker, the students’ use of blazers attempted to “negotiate themselves out of their disadvantaged social position” (Ibid:11).

This case study of school uniforms by no means tries to paint the ‘elite’ as a maleficent group disseminating their power over the ignorant
lower classes. Yet, this essay does attempt to question the underlying and more hidden dynamics that come into play with school uniforms. With social equality still being a far reach, understanding the different processes that come to constitute how one sees one another can help mitigate societal issues and stimulate the development of more equality. Perhaps rethinking school uniforms, and in particular the specific set of garments required, can be a step forward towards a more cohesive and inclusive society.
Keeping it Real: Commenting on Fake Goods

It was 1996 when Susana was part of the vicious world of elementary school as a third grader—a world where kids hide their claws under their stacks of books and disguise their malice behind innocent demeanors. Her parents enrolled her in the most expensive private school in Cartagena, Colombia because it offered an education in English, which they felt was critical for their daughter’s future. Despite the fact that Susana attended one of the most exclusive schools in her poverty ridden hometown of Cartagena, her parents were working class folk. Although likely considered well off by the rest of the city, they were by no means “wealthy.” With the majority of their paychecks going towards their eldest daughter’s education, Susana’s wardrobe was evidently not a top priority. They dressed her in practical clothes—the concept of “in style” was not in their vocabulary and often her clothing was “designed” and sewn by her mother. The school had a uniform of navy shorts and white shirts, thus, the students’ only outlet for personal style was through their accessories. After the holiday break of her third grade year, Susana wore to school what she believed were an innocuous pair of counterfeit Nike sneakers. Their authenticity proved to be more important to her classmates than her eight-year-old self could have ever anticipated. My sister Susana shared this story with me in her adulthood and expressed that this microaggression had a macro impact on her life growing up. As a teenager, she was focused on “fitting in” and wearing the “right” clothes so she could reduce her chances of being excluded. She became hyperconscious of brands and chose to only wear brand name shoes up until her adulthood. Now Susana is more mindful of the design and materiality of a shoe as opposed to its brand name.

Counterfeit sneakers are ultimately just sneakers designed, shaped, and assembled to mimic the aesthetic of a brand name shoe—in this case, an added-on “Swoosh” completed the fake branding of Susana’s sneakers. In the world of certain Columbian elementary school kids, however, owning authentic brand items was of utmost importance. At the time, Nike shoes were exclusively all the rage, worn by girls and boys alike. One would assume
Nike was a school sponsor because of the student’s endorsements. A pack of boys approached Susana and brought to the attention of the whole class the questionable authenticity of her shoes. The leader of the pack claimed that a “real” pair of Nikes had a total of seven swooshes per shoe and were confident that hers would not pass a swoosh test count. Susana remembers she lied and made up swooshes saying that some were on the inside of her shoe and on the soles where they could not immediately see. She lied because she knew these shoes were fake and understood the gravity of such an offense in the eyes of her brand-conscious peers. Susana did not manage to escape their grip—they did not believe her and proceeded to ridicule her solely because of her lack of branded shoes. They taunted her as a means to plummet her into self-consciousness as if it served like a cruel victory that would akin them to Nike herself, the Greek goddess of victory and strength. She believes the kids targeted her as a potential owner of knock-offs because they knew her family’s social status. In this school environment, status was shown primarily through your shoes, watches, and car. Not only were kids sporting Nikes, they were also studded with fancy Tag Heuer watches and their parents all drove of the year car models. They knew that she had never vacationed in the United States like her other classmates and that she dressed a bit different from the other kids. They may have targeted her and made up this fake system of seven swooshes as a way to shame a kid they already knew did not have an upper hand financially. In this school, having American goods meant that either your parents could afford to pay the excessive prices in Cartagena or that your family was able to go on trips to the United States and stock up on branded goods. Susana’s family could not afford this luxury to travel so even purchasing shoes from heavily discounted stores like Marshalls or T.J.Maxx or Ross was not an available option.

Susana recalls that although the general population of Colombia was poor, there was still a grand importance attributed to branded items. Objects weren’t just objects to people—the object’s brand carried its relevance, importance, and served as outward displays of wealth. It’s like wearing dollar bills pinned to your clothing. Counterfeit goods are readily available in Cartagena. Perhaps people purchased these items in the hope that they would “pass” as originals or simply because they liked the aesthetic. In the case of her parents, they purchased them because they were affordable shoes that alluded to the more Americanized life they wanted for their children.

This anecdote serves a microcosmic example of the direct violence that occurs not just in elementary schools, but in the macro scale of the fashion system. The kids are acting as agents speaking the values of their societies—they are the ones embodying the violence. “Through the total dissemination and ubiquitousness of fashion, our peers are the ‘judges’ of our
relation to fashion, referencing our dressed expressions to the latest shared trends, and the social comments are the verdicts of the jury.” (Fashion Praxis Collective, 52) Whether you are walking down the street or sitting in a classroom, you are still in a public space and your mere presence enables others to observe you with a critical eye. If Susana had worn authentic Nike shoes would she have been included as opposed to being excluded from the intangible group of authenticity the children had crafted? Or is it less about the specific shoes and more about her family’s social standing in the context of this elite school?

To serve as a contrast to Susana’s childhood story, I will introduce my aunt Cristina. Cristina is a well off woman in her 40s whose husband is an important man—he is the president of one Colombia’s largest banks. She is a successful businesswoman herself so one can imagine the quantity of designer goods that she may have. Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Dior—these brands surround her like Forever 21 and Zara surround the majority of America. Her peers know her as a fashionable woman who only wears and possesses high quality items. Little do they know, every once in awhile she indulges in fake designer bags. One week she may be wearing a $5,000 Louis Vuitton bag and the next she may wear her latest find straight from the black markets of China. Due to her evidently high socioeconomic status as observed by her peers, they would never question the authenticity of her possessions. It would possibly be unfathomable to them that a woman of her class would find something appealing about knockoff goods.

As Zygmunt Bauman wrote in Perpetuum Mobile, “Progress is no longer thought about in the context of an urge to rush ahead, but in connection with a desperate effort to stay in the race, to avoid disqualification or falling out.” (2010: 59) Back when this incident happened, Susana would consider her fashion progress as being linked to her hope of “avoidance of being excluded.” (2010: 59) As a result of this experience, Susana is filled with fashion fear—this inescapable sense of dread surround the possibility of others judging what she is wearing. The fear is bound into the objects she wears, as if anxiety was sewn right into the seams. Although the Nike shoes had proven to be sources of criticism, Susana could not escape the object. Her family could not afford to buy her a new pair of legitimate Nikes and have her stop wearing the publically shamed imitation sneakers despite her slightly damaging experience with them. She had to continue wearing the very object that symbolized her exclusion from a group of higher socioeconomic standing. Susana mentioned that before this she had seen shoes as purely functional objects—a shoe was just a shoe to her. As an eight-year-old she had not conceptually grasped the meaning of brands and what it meant to wear a certain brand instead of another. “Understanding the meanings attached to owning certain products or brands, known as consumption sym-
bolism, is an important aspect of children’s socialization into the consumer world.” (John 2003) Children don’t deeply understand or care about brand names until they’ve gone beyond perceptual cues into understanding them in a conceptual and symbolic level. (John 2003) If they act like they do care deeply about a brand, they are likely serving as mirrors of what their own parents or what society deems to be important. The social emphasis on brands infiltrated her mind—this is the moment she became a branding-conscious zombie like the rest of us. This is the moment where the notion of a copy went from being innocuous to threatening. As Bauman wrote, “If you do not wish to sink, keep surfing – and that means changing your wardrobe, your furnishings, your wallpapers, your look, your habits – in short, yourself – as smoothly as you can manage.” (2010: 59) As for Cristina, she can remain afloat with the same level of admiration from her peers regardless of whether she is wearing a fake handbag from China or the real deal. Luckily for Susana, perhaps a relationship with fashion could serve as a ladder that she could climb to escape her past demons disguised as counterfeit Nikes. If the shoe doesn’t “fit”, she can now buy another pair that will.
In the February 2008 issue of *Vogue*, for which first-time presidential candidate Hillary Clinton was supposed to be on the cover, Editor-in-Chief Anna Wintour expressed her distaste for Mrs. Clinton after she cancelled the shoot last minute. In her Editor’s Letter, Wintour asserted:

Imagine my amazement, then, when I learned that Hillary Clinton, our only female president hopeful, had decided to steer clear of our pages at this point in her campaign for fear of looking too feminine. The notion that a contemporary woman must look mannish in order to be taken seriously as a seeker of power is frankly dismaying. This is America, not Saudi Arabia. It’s also 2008: Margaret Thatcher may have looked terrific in a blue power suit, but that was 20 years ago. I do think Americans have moved on from the power-suit mentality, which served as a bridge for a generation of women to reach boardrooms filled with men. Political campaigns that do not recognize this are making a serious misjudgment. (quoted in WWD 2008)

In discussing three kinds of dangers apparent in our world (threatening the body, economic livelihood, and a person’s social position in the world), Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman writes in his book *Liquid Fear* that life eventually becomes a “continuous search for, and perpetual testing of, strata-gems and expedients allowing us to stave off, even if temporarily, the imminence of dangers…” (Bauman 2006). Under the intense pressure of being a woman in politics (while dually having the role of being the wife of a male politician), Hillary Clinton likely recognized this third danger early on in her career and began strategizing ways to avoid threats to her social/political status. It is unfortunate that the perception of her clothing ranks so high on the hypothetical list of these threats. Therefore, if at a certain point in Clinton’s 2008 presidential campaign she felt as though being on the cover of *Vogue* might threaten her chances of winning, then it is only natural that her response would be to cancel it.

Nearly a decade has passed and Hillary Clinton is closer to The White House than ever before. However, this time she has Wintour on board. According to *Business of Fashion*, Ms. Wintour has been recruited as
a style consultant and industry liaison (Abnett 2016). As one could expect, campaigns designate funds to creating a look and finding their candidates’ presidential fashion style; and like any personal stylist, the goal for the hired consultant is to relieve their client of having to decide what to wear (Abnett 2016). However, it seems in this case that Clinton knew exactly what she wanted to wear—her famed pantsuit. She just needed someone to fetch the best-designed version of it (and throw in a hot pink gown, when need be) (Goldberg 2016).

Clinton is no stranger to the pantsuit—she’s been wearing trousers and button-up shirts since the 60s, when she was a student at Wellesley College (Farra 2016). It’s no wonder why she would stick with the ensemble; as Erica Euse states in *Vice*, “…pantsuits are an essential tool for American women operating in spaces historically dominated by men” (Euse 2016). President of The United States certainly falls into this category. Megan Garber of The Atlantic describes it as an ‘empowering paradox…a statement outfit that makes its statement by saying as little as possible.” Does Clinton, who has proudly declared in her Twitter bio that she is a ‘pantsuit aficionado’, really like wearing pantsuits? Or has she simply sacrificed her freedom for self-expression while in the pursuit of power? As we have seen most egregiously throughout this election cycle, fear plays a major role in politics. However, fear is also at play in the fashion of politics; although Hillary Clinton wears her pantsuits with confidence, by doing so, she might be attempting to entirely remove her personal style from the narrative of her political legacy.

In 2011, ‘fashion guru’ Tim Gunn said that Clinton must be confused about her gender because of her choice of dress (Lopez 2011). By making such a statement, Gunn is using his opinion of Clinton’s clothing as ammunition in a personal attack, intended to make her fall victim to his supposed elite position in the industry. According to professors Otto von Busch and Ylva Bjørerd, this is exactly what direct fashion violence is: a hostile action taken where clothes are the target (von Busch & Bjørerd 2016). Perhaps it is the direct violence such as this that led her to choose a rather simple outfit in the first place. Nevertheless, it is rather unlikely that Clinton’s style will ever go unattacked, as the wardrobes of female politicians’ (and the wives of politicians) are a major talking point in the media—arguably more than their male counterparts (Parr 2016). Yet women likely couldn’t get away with wearing a ‘uniform’ as in the way men do when repeated wearing a black or navy suit, simply because of the beauty standards that women are held to, but of which men are seemingly exempt (Purdy 2004: 102).

As Daniel Purdy explains in his introduction to J.C. Flugel’s “The Great Masculine Renunciation and Its Causes,” men dress in dark uniform to avoid calling attention to themselves as ‘objects of beauty’ (Purdy 2004: 102). “Today the President of the United States wears clothes that are similar
to the garments worn by a college senior at his first job interview," he con-
tinues, noting that an American man’s lifetime uniformity of dress has been
the norm since 1795 (Purdy 2004: 102). There’s no use in wondering why the
media doesn’t focus on the clothing of a male politician—most often, they
simply adopt a historic uniform. In turn, when said politician finally strays
from the norm it becomes newsworthy, as in the case of President Obama’s
khaki suit—a White House fashion moment that had the internet buzzing
(Harris 2014).

In 1930, Flugel wrote that men have surrendered their claim to be-
ing beautiful and aim to only be useful. Men with ‘exhibitionsitic desires’,
however, then live vicariously through women and their ‘sartorial display’.
He gives the example of a man’s pride when he has a well-dressed woman on
his arm. Although the pride may be accompanied with envy of the woman’s
freedom of style, it is also a way that he identifies with her. Clearly, norms in
dress have changed dramatically from this time and we are seeing a reemerg-
ence of menswear (after all, there is now a Men’s New York Fashion Week).
For politics, however, the sacrifice of men’s fashion remains, making a female
politician’s job that much more difficult. If she dresses like a man, she’ll be
criticized of looking like a man; but if she dresses too feminine she risks be-
ing perceived as weak or unfit for the role. Hillary Clinton certainly isn’t the
first to experience said struggle: both Angela Merkel, the current Chancel-
lor of Germany, and Margaret Thatcher, former British Prime Minister (of
whom Anna Wintour is accusing Clinton of following too close a lead) have
had to find a personal style that wouldn’t overshadow their policies or limit
their potential for career growth (Parr 2016). On the other hand, the cur-
rent British Prime Minister, Theresa May, has a uniquely feminine style (see:
shoes) and could be a sign of changing times (Parr 2016).

Lyn Polo, the costume designer for the popular television series’
“Scandal” and “How To Get Away With Murder,” (both of which feature
powerful, African-American female protagonists with impeccable style)
spoke to Vanessa Friedman of The New York Times about Clinton’s wardrobe
choices, saying, “I think America, and the electorate, is finally ready to em-
brace [...] the idea of women politicians wearing something that is fun and
feminine, without it being an issue. It’s about time. And I am really proud
of her that she is trying new things” (Friedman 2016). Is Hillary Clinton
actually trying anything new at all? Didn’t Anna Wintour state the obvious
when she called out Clinton for using the same sartorial strategy as Margaret
Thatcher? Friedman also compares Clinton to both Thatcher and Merkel,
arguing that because Clinton has thrown in a little leather and beading her
pantsuits are somehow different from theirs.

As it turns out, Clinton’s style is subtly different, but only for her use
of symbolism—a way to make people talk about the meaning of her clothes
rather than simply about what she’s wearing. Her nod to the Suffragette Movement during the Democratic National Convention in her monochromatic white pantsuit made her look presidential, but the message is what truly mattered. In one simple gesture, Clinton was able to convey to women all over that she is with them. By doing so, she also reappropriated the pantsuit—what was once a garment stereotypically worn by women seeking the man’s power is now Clinton’s claim to femininity.

Even Anna Wintour, easily one of the most powerful women in fashion, failed to understand that attracting more negative attention to Clinton by criticizing her wardrobe choices would only exacerbate the issue of
how female politicians are portrayed in the media. The Editor-in-Chief’s expectation of the potential Commander-in-Chief is entirely problematic because their worlds could not be more unalike. Wintour maintains power in an industry that is predominantly defined by femininity; whereas Clinton is attempting to take the highest office available in a historically patriarchal realm—one that reaches far-beyond the scope of Wintour’s experience. Given this, one might think that Wintour could have swallowed her pride to support Clinton, regardless of whether or not she helped Vogue sell any magazines.
TRICK OR TREAT!

HORROR
The Ghostface mask popularized by Wes Craven’s slasher film *Scream* first had a cameo role in my life when I was an elementary school student in Miami, Florida. On Halloween day children chose to dress up as they pleased—the typical costumes for girls ranged from Disney princesses, witches, to angels while the boys dressed up as superheroes, ninjas, and pirates amongst other G-rated costumes. In the second grade I was an innocuous nurse dressed head-to-toe in teal scrubs. I recall looking around and being slightly startled by a popular costume I had seen on multiple kids—the now classic Ghostface mask costume from *Scream*. After watching the film in my adulthood, I began to question whether disseminating a costume of a character associated with violence and murder was appropriate for children and adults alike. Is a costume just a costume or are the character’s original characteristics somehow transferred onto the wearer?

The process begins for parents at their local Halloween stores when the day has finally arrived for their child to pick out their costume for the new year. There are countless “harmless” costumes for little boys ranging from police officers to pumpkins, but what if your child is instead drawn to the darker, more sinister isles of the store? Blood spattered clothing, guns, bloody axes, swords, and nunchucks—all kinds of lethal weapons made of plastic safe enough for a kid to “use.” What if your kid wants to be a zombie hunter with fake blood all over his clothing, a bullet belt, and a plastic rifle? Or what if they want to be the grim reaper with a scythe or wear a Ghostface costume? Ultimately, your child is still the same kid who draws with crayons at school and just learned how to tie their shoes a week ago underneath the fake blood splattered costume. To children, Halloween serves as harmless ticket to escape their usual garb and try something bold that is out of character for them. They should remain innocent regardless of who or what they choose to be, but in some cases a costume is not just a costume—it can affect the wearer’s behavior.

The iconic Ghostface killer from *Scream* is known for going on a killing spree in the fictional town of Woodsboro, California. In the film, the...
costume serves as a concealer of identity allowing for multiple characters to be considered by the viewer as the possible killer. The killer becomes anonymous throughout the film since their true identity is unveiled in the final scene. In the case of children wearing this costume, it is harmless but the visual of the character still carries a dark and emotional undertone linked to the murderous film star. Since a child is seen in costume at school and usually accompanied by their parents while trick or treating, there is no sense of threat to outsiders. They are, in fact, just children out having fun while dressed as someone or something else. Similarly, there is not a general sense of fear in a giant crowd of costumed adults such as during the NYC Halloween Parade that marches proudly down 6th Avenue.

In his book *Liquid Fear*, Zygmunt Bauman wrote, “Fear is at its most fearsome when it is diffuse, scattered, unclear unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us with no visible rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen.” (2006: 2) Although people are dressed as frightening ghouls and “things” that seem like they escaped from the sets of a horror movie, there is a collective feeling of enjoyment in this kind of crowd. The mass of people electively chose to gather together for the shared cause of Halloween—this significantly lowers the feeling of a looming threat. There is still a sense of suspense of in the air, however, when we snap back into reality from our dazed states. Only then do we begin to acknowledge that ultimately we do not know what the people surrounding us are capable of regardless of how benign they may seem. As a group, there seems to be a general understanding that these are all “normal” people that just happen to be dressed spookily for Halloween. You feel that you are surrounded by the same seemingly harmless folks you encounter on a daily basis in your routine through the city. No one would actually hurt you; even a man with blood spattered clothing waving a bloody axe in the air is probably harmless, right?

This notion of fictitious fear and murder linked to a costume can be turned into reality as shown from the recent ‘killer clown’ trend that gained momentum in late September 2016. As stated in an article by Melissa Chan, a reporter for *Time* magazine’s online news, “The frenzy was born in South Carolina in late August after unsubstantiated reports surfaced that clowns were spotted trying to lure children into the woods. The craze has since ignited a national phenomenon, with scary clown sightings reported in more than two dozen states from Alabama to Wisconsin.” The act of donning a clown costume spread as a contagion from person to person through news outlets and social media networks. There was a viral Facebook post of a clown incident in Marion Country, Florida that travelled throughout our networks and reached people in other parts of the country. Once an idea
reaches someone who finds it to be appealing, they may choose to enact it. In this case, the idea of becoming anonymous through the adoption of a clown costume as a means to alarm and intimidate others became widespread. As Georg Simmel, the German Sociologist, wrote in *The American Journal of Sociology*, “Imitation, furthermore, gives to the individual the satisfaction of not standing alone in his actions. Whenever we imitate, we transfer not only the demand for creative activity, but also the responsibility for the action from ourselves to another. Thus the individual is freed from the worry of choosing and appears simply as a creature of the group, as a vessel of the social contents.” (1957: 542f) The notion of dressing as a clown served as an empowering cloak of anonymity that allowed to wearers to feel immune to what is expected from a person out and about in broad daylight. They were comfortably able to instill fear in unexpecting bystanders behind the comfort of their disguise. Some clowns were not just out for to scare, some had more intentions in mind. The clown craze made its way across the ocean to the UK and Sweden, among other countries. Several instances of actual attacks resulted in Europe— In October, a teenager was stabbed by a clown in Sweden and in South Yorkshire, a teenager was hit with a branch. A viral intimidation tactic manifested into direct violence.

The idea of children wearing a Ghostface costume on Halloween is almost sweet in comparison to the adult ‘killer clowns’ who have real intention to scare others. The gory costumes parents buy for their children on Halloween are all fun and games for one day, but may ultimately be desensitizing them to violence. Due to their possibly frequent exposure to violence in films, on the Internet, in games, and in television, they may be becoming numb to the vocabulary of weapons and blood as a result. Reality and fiction may be difficult for children to distinguish— especially in a world where malice may spontaneously appear in their hometown dressed as a ‘killer clown.’
DESIRE S
Bright cerulean balloons decorated the high ceilings of the booming party hall in the Bronx. As I walked into the large hall, the space and decor resembled the countless other baby showers I had attended. Nearly 100 guests, large round tables, and blue decorations scattered across in line with gender norms of the sex of the anticipated baby. This was a large affair and celebration as it was a five hour party to celebrate the arrival of the baby. As I sat with friends, I noticed there were many children in attendance who I did not personally know. They ran and played as if in their own world within the party. At one moment, I noticed two children, a boy and girl, who were called into the middle of the dance floor. The little boy was dressed to the tune of Uptown New York City street fashion with a fitted NBA logo cap, a logo crewneck sweater, dark wash skinny jeans, and Timberland construction boots with loose lacing. The little girl’s outfit I don’t remember as clearly as I was mesmerized by how tight the little boy’s jeans were, the low hanging from the waist, and the cleanliness and styling of his laced boots. Adults surrounded them like master puppeteers in setting their bodies up to dance to a **bachata** song. As the children awkwardly got closer, they swayed side to side and his demeanor replicated those of the passionate heartbroken singers of the genre- a serious facial expression combined with the biting of his lower lip. He looked towards the crowd for affirmations of his dancing. Viewers began to yell out, “get lower,” “turn, turn,” “just like that!” in Spanish and the young boy as the leader of the dance followed the instructions he was given. Of course, after a few minutes of their dancing much to the dismay of adults at the party, they began to get tired of being the focal point and the little girl stopped and walked away.

Although it has been years since I witnessed this moment, this was the first time that I noticed a phenomenon within children’s clothing. At the moment, I reflected on what it must feel like to be dressed in such a manner at a young age. The little boy was perhaps no more than 3 years old and ran around awkwardly in extremely tight jeans and boots that easily could have slipped from his foot with loose lacing. Childhood is often thought
as moments of freedom and discovery, yet I couldn’t help but think of how restricted and conscripted the young boy looked. Not only was he thought to be fashionably dressed by the crowd, but he also appeared to be a miniature of the adult men at the party. He received approval from guests, who called him “cute”, brought attention to his miniature outfit details and egged him on as a performer and example of masculinity.

The rising attention of celebrity children’s fashion and the trend of twinning, wearing the exact or similar outfit as your child has steeped U.S. culture. Social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat are flooded with these visuals through hashtags like #twinning and #fashionabletwinning. This phenomena of increased attention to childrenswear and style can be seen through multiple lenses that reveal not only patterns, but the attraction and purpose of these trends. Children’s clothing viewed through mimetic theory, illuminates the desires of parents and adults who partake in these trends. Rene Girard’s mimetic theory is “the process by which we learn how and what to desire. Any subject’s desire is based on that of another subject who functions as a model or mediator”(Shullenberger 2016). Children are often limited in their decision making and power over their bodies. Parents or adults who dress them are able to utilize their own power and desires in dressing children. Fashion thus becomes the mediator of how parental figures enact their desires through their children. Although I never met the parents of the child, their desires became self-evident through the child’s clothing.

Judith Butler in her groundbreaking essay, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” states that gender is the sum of a stylized repetition of acts in which we learn and perform a series of constituted acts that naturalize our views and beliefs on gender. Butler’s work on gender complements mimetic theory seen through this young boy whose dress reveals the parental desires of abiding to a gender binary but also of ascribing to a specific performance and expression of masculinity, informed by race, ethnicity, and class. The child thus in his dancing and fashion instituted the idea of masculinity within a public setting. His performance, both literal and theoretically, received applause and affirmation from the crowd as his dancing, demeanor, and dress cemented this form of masculinity for the viewers. His observed and confirmed performance was not only to the delight of adults in the room, but a lesson in development and identity for other children.

According to cognitive-developmental theory, gender identity is postulated as the basic organizer and regulator of children’s gender learning (Bussey & Bandura 1999). Children develop the stereotypic conceptions of gender from what they see and hear around them. Once they achieve gender constancy—the belief that their own gender is fixed and irreversible—they positively value their gender identity and seek to behave only in ways that are
congruent with that conception. Spaces such as birthday parties and baby showers are thus critical spaces in the learning and confirmation of gender performance. The child I observed is presumably no older than 6 years old a moment in development when gender begins to be perceived with consistency as opposed to toddlers who still view fluidity in gender, most evident through play in makeup, hair, dress, and with other children.

In this light, it can be argued that children’s wear trends such as twinning is an act of violence. A child’s process in unpacking and discovering gender identity is interrupted with a violent force of roles, dress, gestures that starts to define them without their equal participation in the process. These acts of violence result in internalized attitudes on how they can perform gender based on the modes observed and taught to them. If our social networks, environments, and their practices inform our performance of gender, then our networks not only enforce gender as a series of acts but as repeated cycles of violence. Gender norms may vary based on the networks and as Butler has argued it becomes enforced and regulated by the codes applicable to the network’s perception of gender.

The enforcement of gender norms through networks and spaces not only works to keep its participants in line, but unleashes and supports a cycle of violence against those who are transgressive. An example of this is through gender neutral clothing for children. There is a rise of brands catering to this disruption and request from parental figures for infants and toddlers yet the options can become more scarce as a child develops and ages into their school years. Furthermore, they can also become susceptible to physical violence and bullying where clothing acts as a silent surface in schoolyard tauntings.

Non-normative dress in gender expression does have real consequences for both the parental figures and children who engage in these dress practices. Even within the fashion elite, the dynamics of bullying are possible. Jenna Lyons of J.Crew was infamously susceptible to this violence. In April 2011, the J.Crew catalog featured a spread titled “Saturday with Jenna” as a day in the life and style story of Lyons. In one image, she is shown with her then five year old son laughing and his toenails are painted in a bright pink with an image of the bottle, also for sale, at the bottom of the page. The caption below the picture reads, “Lucky for me I ended up with a boy whose favorite color is pink. Toenail painting is way more fun in neon.” The image was controversial and was covered in mainstream media outlets. It received thousands of comments ranging from supportive and celebratory to thoughts of encouraging “gay or transgender” identities. Lyons received media attention based on her status however there are everyday acts of isolation, bullying, and violence that never make it onto the news that work to inform us of the consequences in stepping out of a binary.
Events like a grand baby shower or smaller moments during a commute are the most fundamental in how we internalize, shape, and perform our gender identity. Dress and fashion is the surface where we can finetune our expression of gender identity and for children the freedom to play and create a hodgepodge image and practice for themselves without repercussion is critical.
Do we always say what we mean, or do we misrepresent our own thoughts, perceptions, and schemas to the point of miscommunication? We have much to learn from semantic satiation. To contextualize, semantics is the study of meaning from a linguistics viewpoint. Semantic satiation occurs when words or phrases are repeated to the extent to which their meaning is lost and they are perceived as insignificant sounds. However, it is not solely the repetition of these terms that take away their significance. Words lose their meanings and connotations over time, and what they may have meant less than a century ago is obsolete now. This includes the way we think about what these words are actually denote. Fashion is indirectly and unintentionally plagued by semantic satiation. Chokers, necklaces that tie tightly around one’s neck, are not thought of as threatening, even though the verb “choke” is a rather violent action. Similarly, a wife beater, a term used to describe a white men’s tank top, does not directly correlate to a man who physically beats his wife. However, the term “wife beater” is more complex through both its regard for and implied relationship between genders. Men’s tank tops are often referred to as “wife beaters,” while women’s tank tops are not. Additionally, the term ‘wife beater’ is not used in every context where there is a white tank top worn by a man. This asks a few questions: where did the phrase “wife beater” come from? What does it imply or promote? Is the name still relevant to its origins? The phrase can be examined thoroughly through semantics and cultural associations.

The term “wife beater” is particularly interesting, as it is associated with various marginalized cultures in regards to race and socioeconomic status. It is often associated with “redneck” and “hood” culture, which both differ dramatically from one another. Rednecks— synonymous with hillbilly or country culture— are often thought of as white farmers who work long hours on remote ranches in the MidWest, Mid- and Deep South. There is a connotation that they are overworked, perform hard manual labor and are heavy drinkers. Hood culture, however, is often associated to “lazy” people of color (PoC) in inner cities that are rampant with drug addiction and gang violence.
Going forward, it would only be fair to acknowledge that within these two tropes, there is a clear racial bias. While there is a connotation of stupidity and dirtiness surrounding rednecks, the commonly perceived redneck and hood cultures respectfully depict white people as more hard-working than PoC, where hood culture associate PoC as leading negligent lifestyles. Both, however, are depicted as having low incomes and drug and alcohol problems. These tropes are organized and perpetuated in mainstream media. Television series such as The OC and Cops often depict lower class men in white tank tops. The protagonist Ryan from The OC is known to come from a working class background with abusive parents who suffer from alcohol addiction. Aside from his race (being white), he fits the profile of someone who grew up in the hood (George 2013). The show Cops is a reality-style show that follows police officers across the United States, Hong Kong, London and the Soviet Union. Many of the suspects are from lower-middle-class backgrounds, in both inner cities and small towns, and wear wife beaters (Thomas 1989). Both of these depictions in the media indicate to viewers that this piece of apparel should be associated with people who are lower-class, criminals, and drug users. Through these media forms, the wife beater becomes a synecdoche for the working class.

However, white tank tops are worn by men cross-culturally and in all lines of work. They are present among men in white-collar offices, and even by President Barack Obama. However, these men in these occupations are not associated with hood or redneck culture. They are perceived as as intellectuals, and are praised for their work. The term wife beater is hardly ever mentioned in the breakdown of their outfit, although it is almost always there. Why is this? It is because the wife beater in these occupational spheres is not just worn by itself. It is hidden under layers of perceived professionalism that manifest themselves in button-down shirts, blazers, suits; clothing that represents power. But what kind of power? What is the difference between the power of the CEO and the power of the janitor cleaning the floors of the same high-rise building? It is the executive vs. the employee; the one who orders, and the one who does. But does the executive truly have power if their subordinate does not carry out the work? In that scenario, who really has the power?

I wish to expand on this by referencing the 2004 pop culture hit film “Mean Girls”. The principle, Mr. Duvall, resembles white-collar professionals in his attire, wearing a blazer, long-sleeve button-down, and slacks. He carries himself with eloquence and demands respect from his students. However, as tensions in the film rise, he is forced to be tougher on the students. At the climax of the film he forces the female student body into the gym, and removes his blazer and button-down, showing himself in a white tank top and slacks, symbolizing the removal of his professional image. In doing so,
he removes the facade of the suit and levels with the students in order to get down to business and achieve something with an alternative level of authority. This instance is unique as it compares the ideas of commanding power by presenting oneself as professional with commanding power by stripping down professionalism. Mr. Duvall strips himself of his perceived power and taking physical and metaphorical action, which truly makes him powerful (Michaels and Waters 2004). However, wearing a wife beater on its own equates to not having power and is frowned upon, even though the item of clothing is the same. This shows that there is power in revealing one's aggressive and assertive self from a facade of professionalism rather than showing strength and grit through labor. This leads to a lack of respect for blue-collar employees, suggesting a reason for why men in blue-collar professions, who wear white tank tops without the facade of a blazer or button-down, are more likely to be more violent.

In addition to authority, the white tank top represents physical intimacy and a private persona. Therefore, taking off a tie and white button-down is indicative of taking off the public persona that a suit has and gives insight into a man’s homelife as opposed to what he hopes to show or promote about himself regularly. In circling back to “Mean Girls”, Mr. Duvall exposes himself by removing his button-down and blazer, as if to imply that a physical scenario would take place. While the situation remains appropriate, it indicates that power lies within oneself and can only truly be used once exposed.

Having explored the various connotations and representations of the wife beater in 21st century culture, one can refer back to its meaning overall. The term carries a dangerous connotation upon first hearing it, but after repetition, it becomes normalized. This is not unlike a multitude of phrases in American culture such as “long time no see” and “hip-hip-hooray”, each of which originated from racially targeted insults or scenarios. Franchesca Ramsey, a YouTube personality and online activist, displayed a video delving into the history of six particular terms that originated at the expense of marginalized groups (Ramsey 2015). Alongside the history, she addressed how the confusion one might feel implementing this new knowledge into their everyday language. In moving forward, one must be aware of how their language and its origins have shaped the world and how they perpetuate existing societal structures. Ramsey would argue that phrases such as “[I was] sold down the river” are acceptable to use now because slaves are no longer being traded across the Mississippi River as they once were. However, considering that domestic abuse remains a prevalent issue, the term “wife beater” ought to be discouraged.
CHOKE
Off with their heads: the reinscription of the choker

“Someone please tell Anne Boleyn, chokers are back in again.”
–Courtney Love ‘Old Age’.

During the last years of the revolution in France, after the last guillotines had chopped the last heads, royals started wearing red strings around their necks to commemorate the dead. This fashion was known as à la victime. Women also chopped their hairs short to emulate the way the hair had to be done for the execution to take place. This gruesome trend gave way to the myth of the bals des victimes, which were elaborate feasts in which one could only attend if they had lost a relative to the guillotine. Considering the terror of Robespierre which was taking over France, the desire to honor the victims that had fallen became increasingly important, and perhaps revolutionary to do so.

Anne Boleyn, the infamous queen of England, had her official portrait done just before her execution by her husband Henry VIII. In it she was wearing a string of pearls close around her neck with a hanging gold B. It’s a gruesome coincidence that mere weeks after the unveiling of the portrait she would die beheaded by the king. The choker gained some associations with these ‘dangerous’ women as Anne Boleyn was the one who convinced Henry VIII to divorce his wife and marry her instead so she could produce an heir. When she failed to so, she was tried and executed.

In equal measure, around 1863, a painting by Manet titled ‘Olympia’ gave the choker associations with the underworld of prostitution. In it, a woman is lying naked in a bed with only a black string tied around her neck. Thus, prostitution became associated with the chokers during the late XIX century. The painting is remarkable because the woman is portrayed as having no shame in her sexual exploits and thus the work received a lot of criticism. Similarly, in their boutique ‘Sex’, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren sold leather chokers associated with BDSM and sexual deviancy. These instances can be read under the lens of liquid fear, as people find
things to be afraid of in every corner “Most fearsome is the ubiquity of fears; they may leak out of any nook or cranny of our homes and our planet. From dark streets and from brightly lit television screens. From our bedrooms and our kitchens. From our workplaces and from the underground train we take to get there or back. From people we meet and—people whom we failed to notice. From something we ingested and something with which our bodies came in touch. From what we call ‘nature.” (Bauman 2006: 4)

Through this brief history of chokers, we can see it has associations with death, revolution, danger and sexuality. Thus, during the 90’s, the hey-day of girl power and feminism, the choker came back in style. It became the accessory to have and has recently enjoyed a revival with the 90’s mania. Whilst not everyone knows the history of chokers, wearing one could be seen as a silent nod to all the women out there who have sported the look despite its associations with the underworld and death. Whilst Fashion can be used for violence, perhaps reclaiming a piece of garment that came to symbolize the deaths of dangerous and unpopular queens, the prostitutes of the XIX Century and the sexual deviancy the punks proudly portrayed can also be seen as a way to bring back some justice to these people. That is the sentiment behind la mode à la victime. These women were celebrating and remembering their fallen family.

The history of chokers is important because it helps illuminate how symbols that came to embody the underworld through the networks at the time, could also be rewritten and repossessed of meaning to exemplify an era of feminism that went from big cases like the Nicole Brown Simpson law to popular culture instances like the Spice Girls. Although pop culture can be dismissed as incapable to foster social movements, fashion has brought forth a lot of the visualizations of political freedom. The normalization of women in trousers in the world of haute couture came hand in hand with the feminists and freedom movements of the 1970’s. Whilst the feminist movement was doing what has been considered the serious work of changing the laws and giving women political freedom, Yves Saint Laurent was showcasing women wearing men’s suits. Pop culture helps normalize instances of progress and changes in mentality far before laws change. Another example of the relevance of popular culture in exemplifying social change is how gay men and women started showing up in television long before gay marriage was legal.

Feagin and Vera state, “Liberation sociology can be a tool to increase human ability to understand deep social realities, to engage in dialogue with others, and to increase democratic participation in the production and use of knowledge” (Feagin and Vera 2001: 35). When the 1990’s started showcasing women wearing chokers who also preached a message of ‘girl power’, it became clear that the social mentality about women and the moral standards
they had been held to in the past were changing. Women in chokers were no longer dangerous and overtly sexual in the media, but empowered young successful women little girls could hope to emulate. As such, the normalization of chokers and the cooption of a symbol of violence can be seen as a conversation on the social codes we use to classify people. If successful young women who became famous preaching a message of wholesomeness and empowerment for women wear chokers then can it be a social code for sexual prowess and victimhood?

Apparently, the conversation is not over. The dominant fashion system has lauded the choker as the accessory du jour. Runways showcase them, fashion magazines write stories about them and yet the social codes written in the object -the string tied around the neck- seems to be subjected to different interpretations, as is to be expected in items that get rewritten. When the Punk movement took the Swastika, people who still associated it with Nazism were appalled and did not understand the sarcastic meaning behind it from a group that largely opposed white supremacy. So it is with the choker. When Vaishnavi wore a choker in her hometown she was told that was the symbol of prostitutes and was asked to take it off. Using Barthes theory, the signified is different for a young generation who grew up associating chokers with the girl power of the 1990’s than it is for those who associate the signified (the choker) with prostitution. Reinscribing objects with meaning can be a difficult task that will also largely differ depending on generational differences. Even though there are still instances of violence as shown by Vaishnavi’s story, it is clear that symbols can be rewritten of meaning. The ubiquity of the choker and its popularity with a young demographic have helped it transcend its origins in the revolutionary and in the underworld.

Women who used the red string after the French Revolution considered it a power move, the last one they had left after the revolution that robbed them of the life they had known and been promised at birth. These women were mourning their dead and defying a France that had just killed its noble class. To wear a red ribbon was to showcase an affiliation to the dead nobles—or even at times, they were worn by women who had been imprisoned and survived. To use a choker in the XIX Century was to denounce one’s status as a prostitute and flaunt one’s sexuality in the face of ‘good’ society. In the 1990’s it became associated with feminism through popular culture. Women like the members of the Spice Girls and Courtney Love normalized feminism and ‘girl power’ for their young fans. Thus, their fashion choices became symbolic of the message they were preaching. There women appropriated the one accessory that is easy to replicate so it can be accessible to everyone and that had a strong and dark history of symbolic meaning.

However, this repossession of meaning for the choker does come with ironic subtexts. 2016 has seen the recession of thought back to mi-
sogynist ideals that had been overcome in days gone by. The United States elected a president who, on several occasions diminished women to mere objects and dispossessed them of value and agency. That the choker is back in style in a time when the discussion on reproductive rights, sexual agency and consent are being called into question are reminiscent of the contexts in which it has flourished before. Perhaps the choker will come to symbolize the mourning of the French Revolution once more as we watch, not just traditional politics, but our popular culture, descend into misogyny. Far are the days of 90’s pop feminism and girl power.
MOVEMENT
Rap, the music genre, was born as a tool to express the justice that inner-city communities wished to see actualized. In popular media, consumption is at the centerfold, and in a society where identity is so heavily based in the products on which one consumes, open critique about the violence of that system on lower-income communities isn’t common. Macklemore, a Caucasian Seattle-based rapper, has made a career of shedding light on urban issues through his hip-hop music. Particularly in his work, WING$, Macklemore addresses injustice and the system of violence through his lyrics about urban culture, income, and buying the next best set of sneakers.

In the song, Macklemore walks the listener through the feeling and excitement of purchasing a new pair of sneakers—the dream the sneakers promise, the envy of others, and emptiness of consumption when a new pair of sneakers emerges on the market. In his song, Macklemore writes,

“We want what we can’t have, commodity makes us want it
So expensive, damn, I just got to flaunt it
Got to show ’em, so exclusive, this that new shit
A hundred dollars for a pair of shoes I would never hoop in
Look at me, look at me, I’m a cool kid
I’m an individual, yeah, but I’m part of a movement
My movement told me to be a consumer and I consumed it
They told me to just do it, I listened to what that swoosh said
Look at what that swoosh did
See it consumed my thoughts” (Macklemore 2012)

Macklemore argues something similar to Kant here. Though it appears that we are acting in freedom by making our individual choices of what to purchase and wear, we aren’t in actuality. We are acting more like animals, trying to adapt and survive, satisfy our basic desires of status and acceptance. “Kant reasons as follows: When we, like animals, seek pleasure or the avoidance of pain, we aren’t really acting freely. We are acting as the slaves of our appetites and desires” (Sandel 2009: 12). With this song, Macklemore is giving the listener a choice—be a part of consumption and a victim of marketing or take
off the sneakers and leave commodity behind. Wing$ shows the justice in being truly free, and through his lyrics, Macklemore builds that relationship between freedom and justice.

Addressing the violence of consumption through music is uncommon in the rap genre. The marriage between fashion and culture, like any movement, is “informed by and informs ideas and influences both the understanding and progress of social issues. Therefore, each of the areas examined in the text informs social justice and the process of justice rendering” (Capeheart and Milovanonic 2007: 5). In this case, examining his lyrics reveals the injustice of hip-hop and fashion, particularly sneaker culture.

“On the court I wasn’t the best, but my kicks were like the pros
Yo, I stick out my tongue so everyone could see that logo
Nike Air Flight, but bad was so dope
And then my friend Carlos’ brother got murdered for his Fours, whoa”
(Macklemore 2012)

To further understand the unique perspective provided by the artist, a deeper understanding of the underlying values and culture of the community must be addressed. One of the primary values of this particular demographic is respect (Kubrin 2005: 439). The respect of an individual often times encapsulates the self-esteem of an individual, especially among males. This
is because men in street culture have fewer personal or financial accomplishments to measure status by, so having a material object to wear to display status (Kubrin 2005: 440). With materialism, objects “play an important role in establishing self-image and gaining respect. The street code calls for the bold display of the latest-status symbol clothing and accessories, a look that loudly proclaims that the wearer has overcome the financial difficulties faced by others” (Kubrin 2005: 440). These objects garner respect, and when one purchases or endorses objects like Air Jordan sneakers, they are placing their self-esteem into the sneaker and will defend their self-image and demand the respect the object promises through concepts of desire.

With his status as a successful rapper, those still living in low income areas and urban communities look to Macklemore as a trendsetter and man to be respected. For Macklemore to rap about the emptiness behind the consumption of sneakers creates a conversation about consumption practices in general, but particularly in low income areas. Macklemore addresses nihilism in rap and sneaker culture and provides a message of finding confidence outside of sneakers. Macklemore uses his platform to address major issues in consumer culture, and gives a rhetorical call to action, “Will I stand for change, or stay in my box / These Nikes help me define me, but I’m trying to take mine off.” (Macklemore 2012) asking inner-city youth, his primary audience, to join him in restructuring how they find meaning in consumption.
Logging into any social media platform, you’re immediately flooded with hashtags. From #BlackLivesMatter to #BreakTheInternet to the arguably trivial #[Celebrity Name]IsOverParty, hashtags are a quick and easy way for masses of people to join a movement. Immediately following Brexit, and then swiftly adopted after the 2016 USA Presidential election, was the birth of the #safetypin movement. While intentions are good, hashtag movements such as wearing a safety pin or a t-shirt proclaiming feminism can be classified as a method of easing your white, privileged guilt.

The safety pin movement sprung into action when Allison, an American living in Britain, wanted to show support to those most at risk because of the Brexit vote. Inspired by a movement in Australia to support Muslims at risk of violence, she tweeted:

“So I have an idea similar to #ridewithme to help protect those [b]eing abused as a result of Brexit referendum - but I need your help. I’d like to come up with something that can be made by anybody anywhere to pin on their jacket or coat to signify that they are an ally. I quite like the idea of just putting a safety pin, empty of anything else, on your coat. A literal SAFETY pin!” (as cited in Cresci 2016)

The idea was straightforward, but the well-intended fashion statement doesn’t require wearers take action to make the world safer.

The original intention of the safety pin movement, straight from the woman who started the trend, was to be an indication that you are committed to taking action to help: “If you put the pin on, to me you are pledging to stand up. It can’t just be an empty gesture. You are pledging to make a difference.” (Cresci 2016: para. 10). It wasn’t long, however, before people started wearing safety pins because it was “easy.” Of wearing the symbol of safety, a man quoted by the New York Times said “I don’t have to think about it.” (Safronova 2016: para. 10). Another person quoted said that “It’s a matter of showing people who get it that I will always be a resource and an ally to anyone and everyone who wants to reach out.” (Safronova 2016: para. 4)
Statements such as these indicate that the wearer is a passive participant. The wearer volunteers to be approached, but doesn’t require themself to take action. The wearer invites others to reach out to them and be protected by the wearer’s privilege, rather than the wearer using privilege to fight injustice. In fact, the action of wearing a safety pin is passive to the extent that the wearer may not even realize they’re doing it.

The safety pin movement is clicktivism at its finest. Clicktivism - a term used to refer to social media activism - has good intentions and reaches many, but it has no real plan or clear end goal. As *New York Times* staff writer Malcolm Gladwell says, “Social networks are effective at increasing participation—by lessening the level of motivation that participation requires” (2010: para. 19). Hashtag movements are easy to join—all you have to do is share, tweet, or reblog—but take no real action. In his essay, Gladwell references the Civil Rights movement and the authority figures necessary for successful mobilization. In social media activism, there are no authority figures. Everyone’s voice is equal, and shouting to be heard. The lack of organization leads to a lack of clear action to take, thus causing these contradictory statements regarding the meaning of a movement.

Long before the invention of the safety pin, wealthy people wore fibulas - early and expensive versions of the device - to advertise their high socioeconomic status. Walter Hunt developed and patented the modern safety pin in 1849. Originally called the “dress pin,” safety pins were used for “ornamental, common dress, or nursery uses” according to his patent (Hunt 1849: para. 5). The common use was for fastening diapers, garments, and other pieces of fabric. In the 1970s, the use of the safety pin evolved in the Western world. In the punk scene, safety pins were worn stylistically. While some argue they wore safety pins to hold together old clothing, it is clear from the ways they displayed the pins that it was a fashion decision, especially once safety pins were adopted as body piercings. The fashion industry then adopted safety pins as a stylist choice, such as the Versace dress worn by Elizabeth Hurley in 1994: the dress was held together by oversized safety pins. Factoring in the Western history of the safety pin, it is interesting to see how the meaning of the device has evolved from a symbol of the oppressor to a purely aesthetic choice to a symbol of safety. With the fluctuating symbol of the safety pin in mind, one can easily question the validity of wearing a pin as a method of activism. Further, the fact that publications such as *Vogue*, are encouraging readers to “shop them all” and participate in this movement by wearing expensive safety pin items designed long before the start of the movement contributes to the murky waters regarding this issue (Farra 2016: para. 2).

People have been dressing the part of activists since long before Brexit and the 2016 Presidential election. Back in 2012, hundreds of Ameri-
cans wore hoodies to protest the murder of Trayvon Martin by neighborhood watch coordinator George Zimmerman. The hoodie was another example of a well-intended political fashion statement that reacted to an individual, rather than restructuring an oppressive system. As Henry A. Giroux wrote in response to the trend, “Zimmerman’s dreadful act is symptomatic of a larger war being waged on poor and minority youth that places them in ongoing conditions of uncertainty regarding their education, health care, employment, and also their future, particularly in terms of whether they will live or die” (Giroux 2012: para. 3). Similarly, activists donning safety pins are not problems in themselves. Rather they too are symptom of structural oppression. Donning a hoodie to combat the murder of Trayvon Martin, or wearing a safety pin to label yourself as a “safe” person, doesn’t take direct action against the systematic oppression. It reacts only to the symptom. As far as I’ve been able to tell in my research, following a political fashion trend hasn’t improved anyone’s safety.

The case of performing political beliefs goes both ways. Just as swiftly as people stuck on safety pins, people immediately treated New Balance sneakers as a symbol of white supremacy when the company issued the following statement supporting Trump’s stance on the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement: “The Obama administration turned a deaf ear to us and frankly, with President-elect Trump, we feel things are going to move in the right direction” (Mettler 2016: para. 2). People from all reaches of the political spectrum took this as a statement of support for Trump, or at the very least, an indication that New Balance cares more about making money than it does about the lives and wellbeing of marginalized Americans. Trump protesters tossed or burnt their New Balance sneakers, sharing photos and videos across social media platforms. On the other hand, American Neo-Nazis embraced the shoes as their “uniform” immediately following the statement from New Balance (Mettler 2016: para. 15). As Neo-Nazi blogger Andrew Aglin wrote, “We will be able to recognize one another by our sportswear” (Mettler 2016: para. 16). Just like a visible safety pin is the uniform of an activist, wearing New Balance is indicative of white supremacy.

While the safety pin movement was started with the best intentions, it is not an effective form of mobilization. The contradictory history of the safety pin, as well as the network structure of the movement, means there is no clear goal nor course of action to enact real change. It is a way to claim involvement with a movement while keeping a safe distance, even though history has taught us that you must take direct action to enact change.
ANATOMICAL ASSAULT

PROVOCATEURS & ENDEAVOURS
The life of Pablo: Narco aesthetics and mafia women in Colombia

‘Narco’ is a word used in Spanish to denote the culture of drug dealers. From the days of Pablo Escobar, Colombia has been associated with that word. Known in popular culture as the home of cocaine and the great drug lords like Escobar, Colombia has waged a war against drugs for more than fifty years. The mistake is that ‘Narco’ isn’t just a word to denote drugs and drug dealing in the country, it is much more than that: it is a culture and an aesthetic that encompasses everything the rich society of Colombia has hated for centuries and what the poorest areas of Colombia have aspired to become. More importantly, ‘Narco’ has come to represent the ethics of fast money and ostentatious taste.

The ‘mafia doll’ is a term that has come to represent the various women who were not in the business per se but who came to become the ultimate display of power for the drug lords. In a culture of fast money, the ideal of beauty became voluptuous bodies that were to be displayed. Demure was for the upper classes. In a country where the poverty levels in the 1980’s, so called the lost decade, reached 48.4% (Caetano 2015), Pablo Escobar and the likes became the aspiration for men and the best catch for women. The ethics narco culture imposed in the country was of fast money and ostentation, which in turn got reflected in the taste for women and developed a new beauty standard. They were voluptuous and wore tight fitting clothes. In fact, there is one particular garment that has come to represent these women: jeans without back pockets, otherwise known as body sculpting jeans. They are designed to make a woman’s backside look bigger and more sculpted.

This garment has become an object of distaste and rejection by the middle and higher classes of Colombia, as they have come to become a symbol of the violence that drug dealers inflicted on the country. However, internationally, this is the best sold jean model the country has. In 2012, the jean represented a revenue $10.9 million dollars (Lancheros 2013). So why does it come to represent such rejection in the country? It brings more revenues than any other garment for export. Why are we, as a country, so troubled by being associated with curvaceous women and body sculpting garments? Be-
cause it is too close a parallel of the drug traffic and the violence inflicted on the country –and the mafia dolls- in the 1980’s. The jeans become a parallel for the drug trafficking that occurred in Colombia. The vast majority of the violence stayed at home and the end result was exported. So the jeans that are associated with violence get rejected at home and are desirable overseas. This same parallel can be made with plastic surgeries. With the desirability of curvaceous women came a culture of surgeries and Colombia is considered one of the go-to places for body alterations. In the past 15 years, the international demand has grown by 50% and the most common procedures are breast implants and liposuctions -two procedures that would achieve the curvy ideal.

During the dark days of ‘el cartel de Medellín’ over 20,000 people (Bedoya 2013) suffered violent deaths directly related to drug trafficking. The women who stood by the side of mafia lords didn’t fare much better. The plastic surgeries to attain the ideal body so their mafia men wouldn’t leave them, the domestic violence and the associations with the illegal world, plague these women long after their lover dies, not to mention that a significant number of them start out through prostitution to get their desired
drug lord. Their body is a place of violence that came to become the image of ‘narco culture’. Although not a new phenomenon, due to its violence and the power the druglords managed to attain, images like Escobar paying money to kill police officers, bombs on airplanes and trashcans became the norm. Thus, the incapacity of the state to control the power money could buy druglords and the violence it produced became engraved in society and the desire for fast money became a new ethical norm for a part of the population, both national and international.

The image is important and in Colombia, the image of the ‘mafia doll’ came to represent everything wrong with the culture. As Von Busch states “(...)the full implications of uniformed violence and warfare, that the power of the image is used for real political goals, as a core component in a ubiquitous war: aestheticized power struggles are components of every lifestyle” (von Busch 2015). The sculpting jean, known as ‘sinbol’ in Colombia became the polarizing item that waged the war against ‘Narcos’ in Colombia. These jeans are a symbol, not just of bad taste, but of fast money, loose ethics, prostitution and more importantly, death and violence. These women, decked in ostentatious tight fitting outfits were the realization of the fast money for their men, they became a symbol of why a violent war in Colombia was waged to make fast money. The class differences in Colombia have always been very steep and these women became the prize, and the possession for the men engaged in drug dealing who wanted a chance to enter the world of the higher classes. For the rest of Colombia, these women were the ailment. They were a visual image reminder of the bombs in airplanes and the regime of terror the ‘cartels’ had over the country.

But the truth is, the ‘mafia doll’ is just as much a victim as the other Colombians. She was subjected to the same, if not more in some cases, violence from the mafia. However, as Shullenberg argues, “The ancient solution to such a “mimetic crisis,” according to Girard, was sacrifice, which channeled collective violence into the murder of scapegoats, thus purging it, temporarily, from the community. While these cathartic acts of mob violence initially occurred spontaneously, as Girard argues in his book Violence and the Sacred, they later became codified in ritual, which reenacts collective violence in a controlled manner, and in myth, which recounts it in veiled forms” (Shullenberg 2016). The mafia dolls became the scapegoat in a country that couldn’t, and still struggles, to criminalize great drug lords and eradicate the festering and poisonous ‘narco’ culture from its imaginarium. The only defense mechanism the society has so far is to reject the fashion of these women, their over voluptuous bodies and their skin tight clothes and deem them ‘distasteful’, associate them with the mafia and thus instruct their sons and daughters not to interact with such people otherwise they’ll be condoning the violence that has plagued Colombia for over four decades.
It bears to question the role the higher classes of Colombia played in the conflict that was played out in the 1980’s. The steep class differences in the country have been the source of many violent outpours throughout the story of the nation. The differences play such an important role, Bogota is stratified from one to six, where strata six is the highest one. These neighborhoods have the most expensive houses and are home to the elites of the country. The logic behind this was that the higher strata pay more for services to subsidize the services of the lower strata. The real consequence of this is the city has a handy guide to know who is in your social class and who is not and thus can repudiate and keep out those who do not belong. Narco culture is born from a desire to belong to the higher classes of Colombia. Unfortunately, as Bourdieu explains, it’s not enough to have monetary capital, cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) is also necessary and thus, no matter how much money someone like Pablo Escobar made, he was not invited to belong to strata 6, try as he may to belong to it.

Ultimately, the higher classes of Colombia feel compelled to maintain the status quo and by scapegoating mafia dolls and the violence of narco culture they don’t need to deal with the class differences that gave birth to the violence in the first place. Mafia dolls embody bad taste and the lack of cultural capital that money cannot buy and thus they become both the object of desire of the lower strata who may still be under the impression that money can buy a space in the elites of Colombia and they are also the object to repudiate. They embody the excess of the nouveau riches and the violence inflicted on the country that ultimately affected everyone. Mafia dolls stand in the middle of the conflict, their bodies sites of violence where the conflict between the classes and the conflict with narco culture that has so destroyed the country are played out. They are an easy scapegoat for a country to purge their guilt in the part we all played in the conflict. After all, it is much easier to blame the symbols of violence than to examine the reasons why it played out in the first place.
Black Widow: When Fashion Bites Back

Lorena Bobbitt cut off her husband’s penis while he was sleeping and threw it out of her car speeding away from the scene of the rude beheading. Yet, after over half a year of legal battles, she was acquitted of malicious assault on the basis of a temporary insanity plea.

Over the course of two trials held in November 1993 and January 1994, the defendant dressed for the part she was to play. Lorena was constantly outfitted in high necked, sensible blouses in colors that whispered authenticity, veracity, and innocence: white, gray, and blue. She breathed her story of aggravated domestic, including sexual, abuse by her infelicitous husband. Her hackneyed testimony complemented her overall look of a disassembled victim of her circumstances. Her plea was that she had an “irresistible impulse”: “He always have orgasm and he doesn’t wait for me to have orgasm… He’s selfish, I don’t think it’s fair, so I pulled back the sheets and I did it” (Margolick 1994). Echoing the rationale of the merry murderesses of Chicago, Lorena’s husband had it coming, and he only had himself to blame. Lorena had the uncontrollable urge to act upon on her sexual anger to dismember him. Her somber demeanor and muted appearance implored, “if you had been there, wouldn’t you have done the same?”

This case study analyzes Lorena Bobbitt’s dressing tactics at the second trial, which acquitted her of all criminal charges. This case study shows how the choice of the items of dress on Lorena is predicated upon structural and cultural norms of what a woman and a female victim should look like. Relevant to the discussion in this case study, the defendant is a cisgender female who identifies as a woman. Therefore, the analysis is circumscribed by that scope. This case study shows that the defense’s use of the clothing items within the existing heteronormative structure of appropriate femininity as opposed to virile masculinity is itself violent in that the dress strategy forces the defendants to victimize themselves. It then transfers to mimetic violence against women as a class, ultimately scapegoating women as victims by their own hand to the degree they are able to enact their own womanliness. Finally, the study concludes by showing that these enactments of violence un-
derscores women’s “wounded attachment” to the state and complicates how they can make claims to their status of being victims.

Lorena

Over the course of a bitter January eight-day trial in the Manassas, Virginia courthouse in 1994, Lorena Bobbit continued her plea from the previous November’s trial that found her husband not guilty of malicious assault. Lorena claimed that there was a documented history of abuse, including repeated marital rape, exacted upon her by her unfaithful husband. It was only in a fit of uncontrollable and uncharacteristic rage that she picked up that knife and severed the symbol of the manhood and virile masculinity that upheld her husband’s physical and emotional violence against her. The trial’s undergirding social issues were summarized by the Chicago Tribune coverage of the trials: “The Bobbitts have come to represent all that we might find right or wrong with modern relationships: A communications gap, male brutality, female victimization, abuse of power, the nature of ‘manhood,’ revenge of the meek, what constitutes just deserts and the touchy question of male backlash against uppity women who victimize men through reverse discrimination” (Page 1994).

Born in Ecuador and raised in Venezuela, Lorena was an attractive young woman who fell in love with a red-blooded, ex-military American man, John. At court, she was the very picture of what the public wanted to imagine: a gold crucifix hung around her neck over her high necked, buttoned up ivory blouse with a dainty floral design over the breast. Her dark hair is held back in a half-up ponytail secured by a scrunchie, leaving wispy bangs over her furrowed forehead. Her makeup was very simple, evidenced by some eyeliner and lip tint. Dark circles under her eyes and deep frown lines around her mouth were her only other accessories. The entire manufactured look reified the stereotype of a young devout, Roman Catholic Latina, whose fiery fury led her to the temporary insanity that caused her to seek the ultimate revenge on her husband. Other times, Lorena wore a subdued gray checkered blazer, and yet another time, she was enveloped in a somber, deep blue turtleneck. Always, the gold crucifix is present and visible, consistently and constantly reminding the jury of her piety and devotion to a higher being and perhaps also obedience to a higher law.

Wounded Attachments

Political theorist Wendy Brown (1995) asserts that due to various marginalized and disenfranchised groups’ refusal to be absorbed into mainstream culture, the historical process of the democratic political project has gen-
erated politicization of identities based on race, gender, and sexuality. This identity politics is complemented by a host of anti-discrimination policies and services that reinforce the “wounded attachment” victims have to the state, where the victims are only recognizable to the state based on their politicized identities. For Brown, the prevailing mode of multiculturalism is disempowering to those who have been marginalized by colonialist, capitalist, and “democratic” agendas.

It is this aspect of identity politics that allowed Lorena to use clothing to fashion her identity as a victim of her circumstances. By fashioning herself as the victim, innocent and appropriately feminine, against an ex-military man with a history of violence and uncontrolled sexual virility, Lorena makes her implausible temporary insanity plea shockingly credible. For after all, she is otherwise an appropriate female and looks the part in her high-necked conservative outfits and gold crucifix. Therefore, Lorena is recognizable to a jury of seven women and five men vis-a-vis her politicized identity of a battered wife and devout Roman Catholic. Because she looks the part of the housewife next door, Lorena must be a “good” woman.

**Fashion as Cultural and Structural Violence**

In some ways, Lorena Bobbitt was not just a victim of domestic violence. She was also a victim of fashion violence: she was a subject to a fashion system that enabled her to attain acquittal and therefore freedom. But this was paid at the cost of politicizing her own feminine difference and otherness. Whereas some contemporaries may have lauded her as a feminist hero and a sociosexual vigilante, this retrospective critique problematizes how Lorena fashioned herself a stereotypical victim in order to gain the jury’s and the world’s sympathy. Applying Galtung’s theory on violence, Otto von Busch and Ylva Bjereld show how the fashion system can enact cultural and structural violence (2016: 86).

Cultural violence is exemplified in the norms around acceptability of appropriate femininity built on historical social attitudes about virginal, pure, demure, and good women, an archetype constructed in opposition to sexually virile masculinity. This cultural violence is systematized in the legal system that reifies the above described strategy of dressing the defendant as a victim deserving of acquittal. Lorena’s counsel deployed this defense mechanism by emphasizing Lorena’s pallid femininity with her buttoned-up somber garments and her Roman Catholic identity with her gold crucifix. Moreover, the jury buys into this fashioning of Lorena as a victim, a battered woman otherwise devout, pious, and therefore “good.”
Black Widow, or the Fashion Beast

The widespread media coverage of this highly contentious trial and its more jarring verdict of acquittal mediated the multiplication of the subtle use of dress to fashion politicized identities. The strategy was deployed recently in the infamous Casey Anthony trial in 2011: the defendant, made under with minimal makeup and a subtly frilled pale pink button up blouse, was acquitted of her two-year-old daughter’s murder. The defendant’s strategy for court appearances to gain acquittal is simply window dressing for modern progress in gender equality. Lorena is not really deserving of acquittal because she is a battered woman. She is in non-culpable of her crimes because she looked like a victim of her circumstances and an otherwise, good woman and wife. Her actions were not rational and can be easily explained by her temporary insanity plea. Again, she, after all, looks like a good woman.

In the vein of Rene Girard’s theory on the mimetic nature of violence, Lorena sacrificed her own claims to rationality, donned a guise of innocence, and scapegoated her own class as a battered woman for a more appropriate version of femininity (Alison 1998). At court, female defendants, such as Lorena, have the mimetic desire to acquire the innocent look of appropriate women and wives who may be victims of domineering men. Here, the object of mimetic desire is collapsed with the scapegoat, resulting in the current paradox experienced by female victims - the defendant must be recognized as a victim of male brutality by presenting herself as fragile, good women deserving of the justice system’s patriarchal protection.

Lorena may have won her own trial. But it was, in totality, a loss for women everywhere: that for women as a class to claim innocence, we must still aspire to represent an identity of appropriate femininity. Particularly in Lorena’s trial, the majority female jury see themselves in Lorena: the mimesis of desirability of the look of innocence (and claims to it) was palpable and ultimately effective for the defendant. Lorena got her acquittal, but women as a class will continue to pay for her just deserts.
Not-So-Total R

Whirl of images from night of attack

Idabs at her face on the witness stand yesterday.
HYPERSEXUALIZATION
Throughout history women have been conditioned to believe that they must reconstruct themselves to fit the standard of beauty of the time, whether through corseting, hair removal, breast implants, Spanx—the list is endless. Being in the age of agency, women have gained more freedom and control over their bodies than they have had pre-women’s suffrage. My apologies, that was women*, as in White women with money. Let me explain. So we are aware of the privileges attached to Whiteness, as well as the privileges attached to money. When you remove those two key factors, you remove the privileges as well. So even though we may, arguably, be in the age of agency, of being able to exert independence and autonomy through personal action, my agency as a low-income woman of color is significantly limited because it goes far beyond my ability to make my own choices in regards to my body. It is dependent on the security of exercising my agency. If there are consequences attached to exercising agency, is it truly freedom of choice?

The hypersexualization of the female body is everywhere: billboards, magazines, commercial advertisements—it is impossible to escape at times. This hypersexualization works directly with violence against women, as media leads us to see the female body as an object that can be used for pleasure and molded to our imagination. This is done by removing the human from the body, turning the body purely into an object to be used and abused. Such as with the Dolce & Gabbana advertisement in 2007 featuring a woman pinned down by a man lunging over her, surrounded by four other men standing by, as if waiting for their turn. The woman stares off into the distance, the main focal point of her body being her glistening leg displaying that her only use in the advertisement is to be an object for the men to use as they please. This is not separate from the hypersexualization of the Black body as well. Particularly in Western history, the Black female body has been subject to extreme objectification and violence at the hands of White patriarchy. This is due to the removal of humanity from the human body to allow for objectification.
Growing up with a full figure that blossomed at a ripe young age of twelve, agency was something I never acquired and was never allotted. My body was at the whim of every male’s gaze, every protective mother’s disapproval, and every pop culture reference. I was taught how to alter my body to fit the standard of the day and how to carry myself in just a way to not draw more attention than my body already garnered. Most of all I was taught how my body will never be acceptable as is. The 21st century is all about bigger and better. Bigger lashes, fuller lips, thicker hips, and ample breasts have become a part of the so-called American aesthetic. Those who do not have these features naturally do what they can to have them, while those that do have these features still face objectification in a way that is often swept under the rug. Cultural appropriation is not just an issue of not giving credit where credit is due. There is a much deeper problem that allows for cultural appropriation to exist. Systemic racism, which thrives off of power, puts issues like cultural appropriation, fetishization, objectification, and tokenism into play, but it is easy to gloss over these issues and not acknowledge the root cause of them. Cultural appropriation relies on common stereotypes, exoticism, and objectification of marginalized people for profit and for exploitation. I would argue that plastic surgery for the enhancement and alteration of body parts, i.e. breast implants, lip fillers, butt implants, etc. is its own form of cultural appropriation. The cultural aesthetics are placed on new bodies, but the bodies in which they originate from continue to face oppression. Compare the response to reality star Kylie Jenner’s lip fillers and the launch of her lip kit line in February 2016 to the Mac lipstick advertisement also in February 2016 of the color Royal Romance on Black model Aamito Lagum. As someone who has heard the term “N*GER LIPS” in reference to their naturally full pout, I can’t help but feel resentful of people that make a choice to adopt an aesthetic that is not natural to them and not face what comes with it.

Prominent sociologist and founder of the discipline of peace and conflict studies, Johan Galtung, created what is commonly known as the Triangle of Violence. Divided into three classifications, the diagram is broken down into direct, structural, and cultural violence. (Galtung 2009)
This method of classification can be applied to a number of issues, and one can utilize these classifications to better analyze cultural appropriation from the lens of violence. When cultural aesthetics are placed on normative bodies, the way in which they are viewed is different. It shifts the aesthetic and normalizes it for the person using it. However, when the aesthetic is kept within its original margins, the marginalization remains in place. Dr. Otto Von Busch, professor in the School of Design Strategies at Parsons School of Design further illustrates Galtung’s Triangle of Violence into a diagram of an iceberg that further breaks down the categories into the form in which the type of violence is applied and the expression that they take. In “A Typology of Fashion Violence”, he explains each section of the iceberg and how it is an outline of the cultural legitimacy placed on the judgment and exclusion of people based on appearance. He explains the foundation for this typology being cultural violence,

“It is not visible, but is always submerged in everyday cultural behaviours. It contains the norms and ideals of fashion, deciding what is fashionable or not, and as a consequence, who is in and who is out…At the tip of the iceberg, above the surface of experience, direct violence is positioned. This is visible fashion violence, based on foundations established in cultural and structural violence…the prerequisites for direct fashion violence are hidden beneath, in cultural and structural violence. Without the norms and ideals established in cultural values, and without the structural mechanism of exclusion of those deviating from these cultural norms and ideals, direct violence would not be possible.” (Von Busch 2016)
What is the difference between Saartjie Baartman, known in the early 19th century as the Hottentot Venus, and Kim Kardashian, the reality star and fashion mogul? The way in which we view Kim Kardashian’s body and how the media objectifies her is linear in the history of Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman removed from her home in the Gamtoos Valley of South Africa to be put on display in human zoos and freak shows throughout Europe due to her full figure and particularly large buttocks (South African History Online 2013). The main difference between these two women is agency. Women like Kim Kardashian that hold privilege freely exercise their agency without observable consequence, whereas women like Saartjie Baartman hardly have the opportunity to freely exercise their agency in the same respect.

The way society has praised, critiqued, and analyzed Kim Kardashian’s famed derriere is correlated to the way Saartjie Baartman’s body was gawked at and observed like a scientific specimen by people throughout Europe in the early 19th century. After her death in her mid-20’s, Baartman’s body was made into a plaster cast before being dissected and put on display at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, where people from around the world could see the cast of her body, as well as her pickled brain and genitalia on display up until 1974 (South African History Online 2013). Kim Kardashian’s curation of her body has been at her own hands, known for her nude selfies and magazine covers that #breaktheinternet. However, the way in which these two women, both made a spectacle of for their exoticized body parts, are viewed by society is a representation of the hypersexuality of the female body and the fetishism of Black body parts. The way in which Kim Kardashian is praised for and made into an idealized beauty standard due to ample assets versus the violence and objectification placed upon Saartjie Baartman for her “primitive” body is why this issue of the appropriation of assets is inherently violent. Between 2013 and 2015, during what Vogue dubbed “the era of the booty” (Garcia 2014), buttock augmentation surged by 86% (Ghose 2015). The norms and ideals put in place that present a need for an individual to get plastic surgery, the lack of representation of deviations from the normalized standard of beauty, and of course the literal violence of the dissection of the body to adhere to these societal standards create the theme of plastic surgery and violence.

Body modification in the 21st century has become the face of personal agency. In arguments around equality, the topics of feminism and plastic surgery get tossed around in relation to female agency. My question is, however, would women feel the need to get plastic surgery if we were never conditioned to believe we needed it? That if we lived in a society that never questioned a person’s individuality, that we would be adequate as we are?
Tom Ford has created a world of sex, allure, and femininity in luxury fashion. For the fall 2010 eyewear ad campaign, the company used a striking and sexualized image. The model is shown gritting her teeth, a trickle of blood drips just below her collarbone, with what appears to be the notion of her breastfeeding a raven swaddled in a blanket. This image has the intentions of exhibiting allure and the desire of pain and pleasure.

This image exhibits the triangulation of desire in youth, beauty, and fertility (albeit a raven), because the traits depicted are societal constructs humans have been taught to imitate. The model shown is a scapegoat for the male gaze and violent sexuality. Girard defines the scapegoat as crucial in mimetic theory because, “when acquisitive mimesis, setting community or group members against each other, gives way to antagonistic mimesis, which unites members of the group at the expense of the victim” (James 1998). For desire to exist there has to be another object to mediate the message being communicated, this case being the model.

Tom Ford’s image also reinforces the public image of breasts and breastfeeding as an object of desire. Although the advertisement is not a hypersexualized depiction of breasts, their display and exposure to attract attention reinforces that breasts are objects to view and allure the gaze towards the brand. The disruption exemplifies Jacques Ranciere’s theory of aesthetics and the concept of “the sensible.” Rancière argues that what we, as a society, have a sensibility for the “disruption” of the sensible. He describes the disruption of the sensible as those “who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed...it defines what is visible or not in a common
space” (Birrell 2008). Tom Ford’s disruption of the sensible through this hyper-eroticized animalistic mother exhibits who is accepted in society by standards of beauty, class, and race, as well as who can add to this narrative solely based on the symbolisms and narratives he chooses to depicts in the image, and the power he has exhibited in the fashion hemisphere.

This photo hints at the societal desire to inhibit violence against women. In a review from an article titled, “A nipple-biting crow flies in for Tom Ford ad” by David Gianatasio, he writes, “I’d make this my screensaver here at the office, but my co-workers would probably tell me to get-stuffed—just like that bird.” This comment proves the image is exhibiting a desire that women are objects that can, and should, take delight in pain—this “depiction of women as sex objects who are also victims of aggression inculcates the idea that submission is a desirable trait in women,” (Stankiewicz and Rosselli 2008: 581). The woman, in this case, is giving submission to the raven, to sustain life (via breastfeeding) or to take pleasure in the pain of biting her nipple.

The fashion force Tom Ford demonstrates in this photo and through his “ideal woman” shows the desire and life force of sexuality and fertility, both feminized concepts by Tom Ford, in this case. The fashion house’s choice to have the model provide the act of providing food, an innate behavior to sustain life, to a raven that is symbolic of death creates a juxtaposition. Known as a sign of prophecy, death, intelligence, and fear, the raven raises question as to who the female form should be giving life to. The use of the raven adds a depth of dark allure—one that has been imitated throughout time.

These symbols lead to the main point of the ad: to imitate and therefore buy the brand. Imitation comes from the root of desire, and Girard explains this in his mimetic theory. With mimetics, “people imitate each other, get jealous, fret anxiously about status and appearances, and fight viciously over what appear to be trifles…Girard insists that we look exactly here for the key to human psychology and culture” (Taylor 2002). When there is a desire to imitate, there is a desire to produce violence, creating a dynamic that is continuously perpetuated because of fashion’s speed of production. This creates competition because the goal is to obtain the exclusivity Tom Ford encapsulates and feel as the model does in this image—pain and pleasure.
“In this country of billboards covered in tits, and family news agent full of it, WHS Smith top shelf for men, I’m getting embarrassed in case a small flash of flesh might offend”

-Hollie McNish

Got milk? Shaming breastfeeding

We live in a world where breasts can be exposed as long as they are in magazines, porn and even fashion, but a mother breastfeeding her child can be considered indecent exposure. Being topless for women is a much debated subject in today’s media. Instagram considers it against its policies to display the nipple and has often removed photos and blocked accounts of mothers breastfeeding their children (Lynch 2015). The outrage was such that Instagram clarifies that its community guidelines allow breastfeeding photos although female nipples are still banned. Also interesting, male nipples are not banned on the social platform. The benefits of breastfeeding for children are widely spoken about: the longer a child breastfeeds the larger their chances of survival, the ideal being exclusively to breastfeed for the first six months of life and then alternate breastfeeding with regular food up to two years of age (Unicef 2015). Despite the fact the paybacks are astounding, only 2 out of 5 (Unicef 2015) children worldwide are exclusively breastfed in their first six months of life and one of the main detractor seems to be community social rules.

The stories of women getting kicked out of public spaces for breastfeeding their children are abundant, and the shame attached to feeding their child is quantifiable. In the UK, a third of women feel ashamed of breastfeeding in public and 6 out of 10 women take steps to hide the act (Siddique 2015). In fact, the maternity wear industry has taken steps to accommodate these feelings of shame by selling baby nursing blankets that hide the breastfeeding child. Many mothers go to public bathrooms to feed their children so they can be hidden from view, however, these acts are not comfortable for mother or child. The blankets are uncomfortable to children, who in any
case should not be hidden under blankets. Public bathrooms are not guaran-
teed to be in pristine conditions and more often than not are unsanitary.

The idea that breastfeeding must be hidden from view can be juxta-
posed with fashion’s obsession with nipples, as they are constantly paraded
in runways around the world (Moussavian 2016) and high fashion maga-
zines (Dykes 2011). This leaves the feeling that the problem with breastfeed-
ing in public is the lack of sexuality attached to the act of feeding a baby.
Ultimately, these blankets are not present to protect the baby but the delicate
public gaze. There is an idea that breastfeeding a child may cause offense
and so the industry delivers by hiding the baby and the nipple from sight.
The female nipples lives in two different realms, that of the unsexual -the
motherhood- and that of the sexual -high fashion magazines, porn, censor-
ship-, because society cannot unite both it opts to censor both out through a
disapproving social gaze.

Female bodies are designed to give milk and our networks continue
to proliferate ideas that female nipples be expelled lest they are in a fashion
and/or porn. Nipples are only to be sexual, they cannot also be the means to
food, essential food, for a child. It seems that the characterization of women
as sexual beings is incompatible in our society with that of mother and giver
of life. Our networks are much to blame for these beliefs. Regardless of laws
protecting mothers, pictures in Instagram are still being banned, women are
still getting kicked out of public spaces and most women still hide the most
natural of body functions. Our networks perpetuate this idea because in to-
day’s world most laws actually protect breastfeeding mothers as they recog-
nize the importance of this food for newborns. As Sampson states: “some
of these accounts point to the intensification in connectivity brought about
by network technologies as a possible trigger for increased chances of infec-
tion from wide-ranging social, cultural, political, and economic contagion”
(2012). This leads to believe that our networks continue to spread the idea of
female breasts as sexual and continue to ban it, no matter how hard the gov-
ernment tries to protect mothers who feed their children. Fashion perpetu-
ates these ideas with language as décolletage, with instructions on how to use
your breasts for seduction, and models baring their nipples in runways and
editorials; it is not just porn that teaches men that nipples are purely sexual,
but women too are made to think of their breasts as only sexual.

A second idea that comes to mind is that in the statistics quoted
above, women are afraid and ashamed of breastfeeding in public despite it
being their right. Bauman’s liquid fear can fit in with the uneasiness mothers
feel when they are in public and their child is hungry. As he points out

“Fear is at its most fearsome when it is diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached,
unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us
with no visible rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can
be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen. ‘Fear’ is the name we give to our uncertainty, to our ignorance of the threat and of what is to be done - what can and what can’t be - to stop it in its tracks - or to fight it back if stopping it is beyond our power” (2010).

The threat women face is intangible, as it is not a real threat in as much as disapproving gaze which is impossible to grasp, and yet 60% of women feel the need to cover in public for fear of an unidentified social threat. Perhaps the fear of being kicked out, of social embarrassment, of being classified as someone ‘sexing it up’ when they are merely participating in the ritual of motherhood. This intangible threat, because as we’ve pointed out breastfeeding in public is legal almost everywhere, is the fear of the social norm, of being shamed for using nipples for something other than sex as fashion has taught us to do.

This can also cause real damage to women, who having to live in secrecy and hide away their bodies are unaware of the dangers. If women do not pump the breast milk out, either by breastfeeding or using a pump, the milk can rot in their bodies and they will need surgery. Not breastfeeding is more than a vanity choice but that is not advertised. Women are unaware of these dangers and of the fact the body will produce milk. Therefore as is often the case for women, they are forced to face the violent consequences of society’s moral standards. A woman might feel shamed to breastfeed and will not be aware of the medical complication of keeping the milk inside her body as opposed to letting it out of the body. Of course, in a world that has sexualised breasts it is not surprising an organ with an actual function is reduced to a sexual object.

The objectification of woman is a recurrent theme in fashion. From the display of their bodies in ad campaigns, to impossible beauty standards, the fashion world has been in charge of selling us dreams from the beginning of the XXth century when advertising became an industry. From the pages of every fashion magazine women are taught how to act, who to be, how to display their bodies and, more disturbingly, how their relationship to their bodies should be. When a woman sees headlines along the lines of ‘how to best display your cleavage’ or Vogue who recently declared that ‘cleavage is over’ (Reinstein 2016). Women are taught to be ashamed of their bodies and to think of it in terms of pleasing, not just the male gaze, but a more obscure force: society’s gaze. Women are taught to conform to ideals of sexuality and taste, oftentimes restricting their bodies. The problem lies when a woman becomes a mother because there are functional elements in the female body that cannot be constricted by society’s disapproving gaze. Feeding a child to provide it the sustenance it needs to survive needs to be a superior need than the sexualization of women and our networks need to start shifting into that mentality.
GOOD
GOOD AMERICAN:
“A Fit Like No Other”

“The body revolution is here.” Bold, black and white, and on the homepage, reality star Khloé Kardashian has launched her denim collection, entitled GOOD AMERICAN. The brand includes sizes 00-24 and claims to be “A new definition of sexy”. Styles with names such as “GOOD LEGS” and “GOOD WAIST”, this popular culture mogul has found a way to fit women of all shapes and sizes and make them look GOOD. As quoted on the brand’s website:

“GOOD AMERICAN is a denim focused fashion brand designed for a curvier, sexier and stronger shape.

Made in Los Angeles, GOOD AMERICAN is dedicated to having a positive impact on the community by working with manufacturers of jeans in the United States and supporting charities that empower girls to realize their true potential.

The pivotal brand originated from a conversation between Khloé Kardashian and Emma Grede about what it means to be a woman today. “We believe everybody deserves to be shown off. Fashion should be made to fit women, not the other way around. Body ideals really have shifted in the last few years”, says Emma.

“Emma and I both agreed there was something missing from the denim community,” says Khloé. “Whenever we bought new jeans, it was hard for us to find a pair that fit our body types, and even when we did they’d always need alterations. We knew if we both had this problem, there must be tons of girls who did too. So we set out to make a denim line that’s sexy and flattering, and made to fit you – not the other way round.”

The virality that is Khloé Kardashian, as well as the rest of the Kardashian-Jenner mogul, has spread rapidly within the last few years. Khloé’s collection seems to be timely, as the conversation around curvy women and size inclusivity has grown, such as with Tim Gunn’s Washington Post article that
SIZE CHARTS

On the below charts, the Waist and Hip measurements are body measurements while Leg Opening, Front Rise and Inseam are product measurements.

### GOOD LEGS

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called out designers for ignoring the average sized American woman, or Re-
finery29’s #SeeThe67 project which brings visual representation to the 67% 
of women in the United States that are considered plus-size. She is the “cul-
tural amplifier”, making commodities a hot topic. The conversation around 
Khloé has continuously been re-routed back to her body. Her weight loss and 
glorified “revenge body” has sparked a social media phenomenon and even 
worked its way into a hit reality television show. Using personal experience 
as her platform, she states that fashion should be made to fit the body—not 
the other way around, as so many women have been conditioned to believe 
in this industry. Body ideals have changed, she states, as a recent study from 
Washington State University shows that the average woman in the United 
States is now between a size 16 and a size 18 (Christel 2016). It is about time 
to see clothing reflecting curves, right?

There are a few key things to note about this collection. The exclu-
sivity of who can purchase, the accuracy of the fit of the denim, and the true 
representation in the brand image. When we talk about including all women, 
that includes all women, of all socioeconomic backgrounds, abilities, racial 
backgrounds, and body shapes. Thus far, the faces the brand has represented 
as their #goodsquad on their GOOD AMERICAN Instagram account are 
mostly women of color with a few variations in body type, and almost ex-
clusively celebrities and women in popular culture. So how inclusive is this 
exclusive brand in reality?

When addressing the issue of exclusivity, as mentioned on the web-
site, GOOD AMERICAN denim is only available online and in select Nord-
strom stores. Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography at Durham 
University and self-proclaimed feminist geographer/fat activist Dr. Rachel 
Colls mentions in her contribution to the journal of Social and Cultural Ge-
ography that many plus-size women feel ostracized or intimidated by re-
tail environments and therefore choose to shop online (Colls 2004). Many 
stores lack a plus-size section, or have it placed in the furthest part of the 
store mixed in with maternity or home goods. As most women in the United 
States, particularly plus-size women can attest to, fit is never a guarantee. 
Dr. Deborah Christel of Washington State University notes in her article in 
Clothing Cultures that there is as much as 17 inches in variation between 
sizes from different retailers (Christel 2014). This poses an additional chal-
lenge for plus-size women to find clothing that fits. It is essentially impera-
tive for women to try before they buy, because as we know, one size does not 
fit all. With GOOD AMERICAN’s in store availability only being at select 
Nordstrom locations, many women interested in purchasing will have to buy 
online and put their faith in the $200 denim.

Another glaring issue that needs to be addressed about this collect-
tion of denim is the accuracy of fit. The body is diverse in its various shapes
and sizes; however, GOOD AMERICAN’s sizing chart is pretty off the chart in terms of accuracy. Most brands use an hourglass shape as the basis for their design silhouette, and size up from their straight sizes of 00-10. Defined by Bradley Bayou, celebrity stylist and author of The Science of Sexy, an hourglass shape is considered to be when the bust and hips are around the same measurement, and the waist is at least 25% smaller than the hip and bust measurement. The hip measurement is done with the widest point of the hips and buttocks, and the waist measurement is done with the smallest point of the waist, typically at the bottom of the rib cage. With GOOD AMERICAN, the sizing chart is as follows:

Based on the size chart, none of the sizes reflect an hourglass figure of at least a 25% difference between the hip and waist measurements. The larger the size, the smaller the ratio between the hips and waist gets, with a size 24 having less than an inch between the hip and waist measurement. Fashion blogger Jessica Torres did a review of the three styles offered with her and two straight size friends as test subjects. Torres, who typically wears a size 18, stated that the quality was “no better than Forever 21” in terms of fit. Each of the three women, size 18, size 2, and size 4, had fit issues. As someone who is between a size 14-16 and now considered to be a part of the average size of women in the United States, this collection is not representative of me. As a woman with a 33” waist and 49” hip, none of the listed sizes would fit me properly. As a graduate student from a low-income background, I would not be able to afford them anyways. We cannot ignore the complications with this collection and its reflection of societal norms and ideals portrayed through fashion. American culture is obsessed with remaking, the idea that you are never good enough so you must keep trying. The fashion industry has capitalized on this, pushing products to allow consumers to appeal to the beauty ideals of the moment. As Khloé stated in her desire to create an all-inclusive brand, she wanted her denim to reflect every woman. However, is Khloé, or any of the Kardashians, a true reflection of the average American woman? It is important that a brand that claims to represent all women be accessible to them. If all women cannot fit or afford your clothes, then whom are you truly representing?
Kendall Jenner & Cultural Appropriation: A Tale of Two Accusations

Two years ago, Free People released a short video advertisement featuring a dancer who says that she’s practiced the performative art of ballet since the age of three. In the campaign, the model spins, jumps, stretches—basically everything a consumer who isn’t trained in ballet would expect a ballerina to be doing in the studio—while appropriately wearing her ‘pointe’ shoes and talking about her passion and discipline for the dance. Unfortunately for the company, the ballet community wasn’t having it. ‘Ballet-truthers’ outed the brand for using a clearly untrained ballerina to be a voice for their community, when she was simply used to inauthentically promote the company’s clothes (Brooks 2014). Their next attack, however, on Kendall Jenner’s appearance in a feature video for her October 2016 Vogue España cover, is not wholly justified.

In the 60 second short, Jenner is dressed like a ballerina as she, too, spins, jumps, and stretches across a dance studio, similar to the Free People advertisement, but clearly with no training whatsoever. The visuals are accompanied by a voice-over of herself speaking about the freedom of embodying a child-like spirit, saying that she loves ‘being a kid,’ to ‘run around like a child,’ act adventurously, to have a good sense of humor, be around people with good energy, etc. At no point does she attempt to practice ballet or even utter the word. As soon as Jenner posted the video and accompanying photos to her social media accounts, however, Twitter was up in arms. “Kendall Jenner’s ballet photo shoot is literally SO offensive you can’t just put on pointe shoes and go for it oh my god,” one user stated, which sums up much of the criticism towards the model (McIntosh 2016). Some may take offense by the use of the ballet studio as the set design for Jenner’s shoot because they have worked long, hard hours perfecting their craft in a similar space, to which this supermodel is then simplifying to the reminiscence of childhood memories, but does that actually harm anyone?

In the same two-week span that the ballet debacle took place, Jenner also walked the runway for Marc Jacob’s Spring/Summer 2017 show among various other models—many of whom were also white—as they were all
styled wearing big, colorful dreadlocks in their hair. Comparing the two controversial fashion moments, one Twitter user wrote, “okay cool, you’re offended that kendall jenner did a ballet shoot but where is your outrage when she appropriates black culture?” (McIntosh 2016).

Cultural appropriation—widely recognized as the borrowing from any culture that is not your own—is defined by Kovie Biakolo as “the concept that gives a label to the experience of being from a culture that has been disabused of its power by other cultures who now seek to borrow from it, at no cost, and with no reverence for history” (Biakolo 2016). As Biakolo explains, what separates cultural appropriation from cultural exchange is a hierarchy of power and an ignorance of the culture’s legacy. At first glance, one might wonder why no one working for or around Marc Jacobs bothered to enlighten him on this crucial aspect of a topic he was clearly engaging in. Unfortunately it seems that whether or not he was consciously aware of the harm he would cause, Jacobs just simply didn’t agree that it was a problem. In his response to the criticism he received after fashion week, he remarked:

And all who cry “cultural appropriation” or whatever nonsense about any race of skin color wearing their hair in a particular style or manner - funny how you don't criticize women of color for straightening their hair. I respect and am inspired by people and how they look. I don’t see color or race- I see people. I’m sorry to read that so many people are so narrow minded…Love is the answer. Appreciation of all and inspiration from anywhere is a beautiful thing. Think about it. (The Cut 2016)

It’s unfortunate that Jacobs, a brilliant designer and alumnus of The New School, didn’t fully inherit or understand the values of his alma mater. If he had, he, too, might see this statement for how problematic—and violent—it really is.

In their essay, “A Typology of Fashion Violence,” professors Otto von Busch and Ylva Bjereld use peace/conflict researcher Johan Galtung’s ‘typology of violence’ by applying the levels of cultural, structural, and direct violence to the fashion system. The first, cultural violence, is the foundation of this tri-level pyramid. They note that this form of violence is “hidden within our own cultural formations, embedded into the way we see the world and judge others,” while also describing it as “the soft power which legitimizes an order that supports the abstract mechanisms of structural violence and the acts of direct violence” (Busch & Bjereld 2016). In the case of Jacobs’ dreadlocks, if we understand white supremacy as being the bottom layer—the cultural foundation for which oppression takes place—we understand that when black women straighten their hair it is not a form of cultural appropriation, but rather a means of survival (Donaldson n.d.).

In her online article published by New York University, titled “Hair Alteration Practices Amongst Black Women and the Assumption of Self-Ha-
tred,“ Chanel Donaldson digs deep into the structural violence that women of color in the U.S. have faced while being forced to adhere to white beauty standards in order to keep a job. She notes that by wearing their hair natural, it is often considered ‘unkempt,’ deeming these women as ‘unemployable’. Donaldson also discusses the role the media plays, arguing that because there are very few African American role models in the spotlight who don’t alter their hair, then it is not surprising why young girls would not aspire to, either. These are prime examples of the structural violence embedded into the American racial landscape.

Lastly, this brings us to direct violence—an identifiable act that is made possible by these other layers. Cultural appropriation is a form of direct violence because it specifically oppresses a group that is already marginalized by society through cultural and structural violence. Not all direct violence is specifically targeted towards those who are disenfranchised, but when it is, we see just how harmful it is when these three levels of violence build upon one another. Therefore, when Marc Jacobs dresses his white models in dreadlocks—a hairstyle that has origins among Egyptian culture and associations with the Rastafari (Ashe 2015)—while entirely ignoring the harmful implications this has due to the historical oppression women of color have faced in the U.S., he has carried out a direct act of violence. In addition, Jacobs’ rebuttal to his critics was nearly just as detrimental to communities of color. Jacobs is very well contributing to the further normalization of oppression, strengthening the cultural and structural levels of violence which could allow for greater direct violence.
We must quit using the term cultural appropriation so loosely, as if the meaning is open to interpretation. If everything is cultural appropriation, then nothing is cultural appropriation; if we find every borrowing of culture (or art, expression, etc.) to be problematic, when it occurs in such a way that is truly harmful to a community, then it won’t be given necessary critique in the mainstream media. Though he just misses the mark with his argument—stating that it’s “not exploitative to embrace and share one another’s practices,” while conveniently overlooking the role power plays in this unequal exchange—Matthew Waterton of the *Independent* does make a valid point when he writes, “By trying to push these non-issues, these people are only hurting their cause, as they appear increasingly petty” (Waterton 2016).

In terms of cultural appropriation, the violence created by the video of Jenner prancing around in ballet attire is miniscule in comparison to Jacobs’ decision to dress Jenner and the rest of his models in dreadlocks, despite many of them being white, and then defend this act by criticizing women of color for straightening their hair. By shifting the focus from whom is being oppressed to those that simply feel offended, the general public may begin to view the entire issue of cultural appropriation as a call for attention by those they consider ‘petty’, rather than a call for action by those who are victims of cultural, structural, and even direct acts of violence fueled by ignorance and/or prejudice. Being a ballerina is a choice, being a racial minority is not.
“NUDE”?
A Study in Nude: The Exclusion Of People of Color

Any student aspiring to work in the fashion world ends up interning during New York Fashion Week at least once during their schooling. My first experience was working Market Week for Yigal Azrouël. I ran garment bags around Midtown and the Flatiron District, made coffee, and dressed models for clients in the new collection. There were 2 models I interacted with, one who was white and another who was Ethiopian. Each were wearing nude thongs, however one thing was certain: it did not appear nude on the Ethiopian model. The pale pink-khaki blend of the thong matched the white model’s skin and stood out like a sore thumb on the other. Why did the Ethiopian model not have a piece that matched her tone for her to in fact appear nude? Did she have to expose her entire body for her to truly be nude whereas the white model could hide behind a thong matching her skin color? Why would she have to do so? This conundrum sparked an interest in what nude truly means in the fashion industry and the implications of setting a standard for human tone.

Establishing any sort of norm in the fashion industry is an indirect form of fashion violence. It others those who do not fit, as to say “you cannot be fashionable because you are not this and therefore do not belong here”. As discussed in von Busch’s and Bjereld’s “A Typology of Fashion Violence”, norms are established through cultural violence and can relate to size, color, and style (von Busch and Bjereld 2016). In regards to color and race, designers often focus on the white, slender figure, with a disregard for people of color’s skin tones and body shapes. The color “nude” has become another method of normalizing the white figure and alienating people of color (PoC) in the fashion world.

“Nude” is always pale, never darker than khaki. It often resembles a mix between a light brown and light pink. In assigning this shade associated with fair skin to the color, nude becomes classified as a specific color and is removed from the association with the state of being nude, or nudity. This is seen on two levels, one where it is implemented in our everyday language, which serves as a base for the second, where it is exhibited in several sectors.
of the fashion market. Of those, this essay will explore its’ relevance in mannequins and skin care.

**Language**

Part of this problem is rooted in language and how language defines form.

The day before he was shot and killed in Memphis, Tennessee, Martin Luther King Jr. detailed the ways that homonyms can affect our views of various races and ethnic groups, and how this can change our bias. He recites:

“Somebody told a lie one day. They couched it in language. They made everything Black ugly and evil. Look in your dictionaries and see the synonyms of the word Black. It’s always something degrading and low and sinister. Look at the word White, it’s always something pure, high and clean. Well I want to get the language right tonight” (1968).

Webster’s dictionary exemplifies King’s words; with definitions for the word white including “free from moral impurity”, “not intended to cause harm”, and “favorable or fortunate”, and definitions for the word black including “dirty, soiled”, “thoroughly sinister or evil”, “indicative of condemnation or discredit”, and “marked by the occurrence of disaster”. Connotations such as these exhibit the thoughts European imperialists had when colonizing Western Africa, believing whites to be superior and anyone else less than and evil.
Through this, one delves into the definition of nude. Until August 2015, Webster’s dictionary included the definition of nude as “having the color of a white person’s skin” (Zeilinger 2015). This definition not only strictly alienated PoC, but it established a norm against them. It directly separated being nude as a state of being and transforms it into a color only to be attained by a small demographic of the population. After receiving hundreds of complaints from online individuals, Webster has since removed and redefined this part of the definition, however, this new definition does not acknowledge nudity as a state of being and still associates it with a specific color. Webster’s new definition includes “having a color (as pale beige or tan) that matches the wearer’s skin tones”. This definition has two separate parts; first it states that nude is a color matches the wearer’s skin, which suggests that is changes based on person-to-person. This remains true to the idea of nudity. However, it then specifies that the color is “pale beige or tan”, which directly states that it does not change person-to-person, it simply just is pale-beige or tan. This eliminates anyone darker than “tan” - which is a relative term - and says that nude does not exist for them. While this definition is not as overt as the previous one, it perpetuates the already established norm of white as the default, allowing exclusion of PoC in the fashion industry to continue.
Mannequins

It is crucial to analyze mannequins because what consumers see in shop windows are their first impressions of that store. Mannequins are predominantly, quite literally, white. According to Emily and Per Ola d’Aulaire -- both independent writers who co-wrote “The Mannequin Mystique”, the earliest finding of any form similar to a modern-day mannequin was when Howard Carter, an English archaeologist and Egyptologist, discovered a wooden torso found next to a chest of the Pharoah's clothing dating back to 1350 B.C. However, during the first half of the second millennium, European fashion dolls rose to popularity as a way of exchanging fashion trends across nations. Their torsos were made from wax and wood, and their faces of porcelain (d’Aulaire 1991). The decision to use porcelain promoted the same ideal of fair skin that royals did with powdering their faces, and even given that Europeans have fair skin, a minuscule amount of them match the color exactly. It is only recently that stores have begun using wood-carved or black mannequins, challenging the idea that white is the basis in fashion.

Skin Care

Not dissimilar to the original porcelain used to create dolls’ faces and the powdered faces of European nobles, skin care companies have taken to adjusting the color nude to more overt levels of violence. Skin bleaching creams have become particularly popular in an attempt to conform to white standards. Not only are these brands physically harmful to the users’ skin, they are explicit in telling consumers that their natural skin color is wrong on some level and that it ought to be adjusted with their product. They have spread to South- and East-Asian cultures through brands such as Fair & Lovely, marketed to women, and Fair & Handsome, marketed to men, both of which are native to India. In the early 2010s, Fair & Lovely released an ad showing a dark-skinned Indian woman using the product to increase her chances of being hired for a well-paying job to support her parents, alongside Fair & Handsome who, around the same time, released an ad depicting the well-known Indian actor Shahrukh Khan looking back to before he became famous and claiming Fair & Handsome was the key to his success (Pathak 2014). Both companies released ads blatantly showing the privileges of those with lighter skin and are indicative of colorism among PoC. Colorism describes how people of color with darker skin are at a greater disadvantage than people of color with lighter skin, especially those who are able to pass as white. These colonial products and advertising methods perpetuate the norm of whiteness and marks the PoC community as “other”. They tell PoC “this is the standard, this is what your skin color should be” and do not acknowledge that nude is a spectrum rather than a definitive color.
A Potentially Progressive Future

In the midst of these ill-intended products, there is a silver lining. Designers are speaking out on behalf of PoC and adjusting the color nude in their collections. In 2013, Christian Louboutin released a line of shoes titled the Nudes Collection of pumps and stilettos with a range of five shades from “fair to rich chestnut”. Christian Louboutin, in debuting his collection, acknowledges his previous lack of inclusion, “I’ve always done a nude shoe but only using the colour beige,” but a colleague’s statement of “beige is not the colour of my skin” encouraged him to reconsider (2015). By listening to marginalized groups, Louboutin shows an attempt at understanding of issues that downplay PoC in the fashion industry and making active reform to fix them.
AUTONOMY
Karmenife Paulino went viral in early 2016. Her photography project, Reclamation, circulated the internet and was picked up by Huffington Post, Mic.com, Paper, Jezebel, and many other digital outlets. Paulino, a 22-year-old Wesleyan University alum, was raped her freshman year and “until her junior year said nothing of the attack, feeling that as a woman of color, the attack on her body and mind would go unrecognized” (Frank 2016). After sharing her story within the university community, she received rejection and interrogations from spaces she relied on support rendering her powerless. To heal from the pain, depression, and isolation she began to create performance pieces in public spaces on campus with other sexual assault survivors and students who were rejected and pushed out from greek life and student organizations. In seeking safety, the photo project arose as a tool to heal from the violence experienced in multiple university spaces.

The scenes are staged in front of and inside classic greek life university houses built nearly one hundred years ago. According to her description, “Reclamation is a photo project seeking to reclaim fraternity spaces, ones that have been marked as dangerous for the Wesleyan community, through a reversal of both role and gaze.” Paulino stands confidently as a dominatrix in the images clad in black underwear, fishnet suit, leather straps and a whip. Her subjects and submissives are young men with “Frat Filth” t-shirts made silent with gag balls standing or kneeling beneath her. Fetish fashion for this project is critical as the performance of dress is what allows her to disrupt roles and transform fear to empowerment. As described in the book, Fetish Style, “the process of dressing for performance in ‘putting on the character’ becomes synonymous with “putting on the costume” (Lunning 2013) The clothing in Paulino’s case becomes an exaggerated form of her internal and interpersonal process of reclaiming her power.

Fetishism in western Europe rose against Victorian values in the late nineteenth century and was later coined through the study and exploration of sexual deviance. The term came to not only move away from notions of sexual perversion but encompassed multiple themes of power, perception
and coded objects over time. Fetishism was closely aligned to a subculture of practitioners and after 1965, its clothing and influence in fashionable clothing became more apparent and accessible (Steele 1996). The history of fetishism and the closely aligned fabrics, objects, and poses makes Paulino’s work instantly recognizable and compelling. The usage of fetish clothing and scenes simultaneously invites and may cause feelings of unease for the viewer as fetishism in the contemporary continues to occupy space for a subculture that is still related to perceptions of perversion. As such, fetish fashion acts as a vehicle and amplifies her unapologetic desire for justice and disposal of fear.

Paulino’s photo project addresses the systemic violence often experienced in cases of sexual assault. In looking at fashion and everyday violence, there is a lesson that can be applied to Paulino’s work. “Fashion is a practice and a social instrument, used in power games; it signals allure and attraction but also exclusion and bullying.” (von Busch & Bjereld 2016) Not only does her outfit represent a role reversal in the direct physical violence experienced, but it is a transgression in transferring the shame and violence that Paulino embodied to her “submissives” through t-shirts that read “Frat Filth” in a font style commonly used by Greek life organizations. These same sentiments can be seen in public comments on the various websites that reported the project. Many posts were by members of the Greek community and although they understood the sentiment of the project they struggled in understanding why public humiliation had to occur on the steps of the Greek houses. A constant theme that survivors of sexual assault encounter is the appropriateness of how to grieve and heal. In the cases of Paulino and Emma Sulkowicz, known for carrying a mattress to classes at Columbia University, their artistic vehicle has received critical attention often on considerations of “appropriate” methods to seek justice and heal from violence. For the Greek life organizations she performs in front of, Paulino becomes “the dangers that threaten one’s place in the world- a position in the social hierarchy, identity, and more generally an immunity to social degradation and exclusion” (Bauman 2006). Part of the issue is that like fetish clothing, attention to violence within greek life organizations are meant to stay hidden within drawers not open for all to see. Paulino’s use of shame and parody fits neatly within a historical trajectory of how oppressed peoples have expressed injustice and created vehicles of survival and healing. Paulino as an Afro-Latinx woman with Caribbean roots continues the use of the body to call attention to injustice. With no other outlet available, the African diaspora, for example, has relied on the body to express frustrations, celebrations, and hold critiques of social conditions and inequalities. Through song and dance, enslaved persons mimicked their master’s stance and customs. Parodying Greek life in the photo essay
through dress, discourse and the body was a method to expose the contradic-
tions of an institution recognized for creating community.

Clothing within this case study can also be seen as a mediator for the relationships between oppressed and oppressor or rapist and victim and injustice or justice. Fetish fashion becomes the only true tool that can grant her the justice she desires. Paulino in media interviews describes the struggle for the campus community to address not only her crime but the presence of her rapist in shared spaces. After granted the institutional justice she sought, the remnants of the crime and internalized violence and trauma could not be healed through traditional forms of justice. Clothing is both a vehicle and mediator in enacting justice in the face of fear and violence. Through wearing symbols of power from BDSM she symbolically eliminates the possibility of direct violence being enacted towards her. In BDSM, the dominatrix occupies an active role and is in a position of authority. In the use of constriction across her body, she enacts boundaries for both her submissives and the viewers. Her body is clothed entirely but her skin is largely visible through the fishnet body suit. Similarly, the leather bondage she wears draws attention and gaze to her body, its movement, flesh and nerves (Lunning 2013).

Fetish fashion relies on the creation of desire and in her usage she binds the images and power display within a performance of fantasy. The temporality of both fetish fashion and the photo performance remains within its domain of erotic drama and rituals. Once the clothes and images are stored away, the social dynamics remain unchanged. For BDSM enthusiasts, engaging in the performance and experiencing the erotic attraction and pleasure from the clothing is a continuous cycle. The thrill of the desire of fetish fashion for Paulino is intrinsically connected to her personal journey. Reversing the gaze and stepping into the role and clothing of fetish fashion becomes the only tool that can dig beneath the surface. Her photo project has broadened its reach and continues to live on a Tumblr blog. Paulino’s work has continued to inspire sexual assault survivors globally in self-defining vehicles in addressing trauma, fear, and violence. Her confident stance and broad smile dressed in leather chains is a welcomed message for a global community in reclaiming agency and bodily autonomy.
JUST DO IT
Just Walk In: Taking a Stand Through Seated Design

The fashion world boasts innovative, diverse designs, yet a vast majority of models strutting the runways look much the same. The models have similarly body proportions, stature, and are typically white. According to the research done by writer, speaker, and filmmaker Jean Kilbourne, the body type represented in the media represents only 5% of women in the media, and the average models weighs 23% less than the average woman (Kilbourne 2006: 2:10). This is evident in fashion shows, on billboards, and in countless publications. Furthermore, fashion’s love for the able-bodied, Eurocentric beauty ideal can be seen in the Sundance reality show *Push Girls* as Angela Rockwood tries to break back into modeling after becoming a quadriplegic:

Rockwood: “Do you guys have any open calls for modeling?”
Receptionist: “Thursdays from 3:00 to 4:00.”
Rockwood: “And do I have to ask for anyone in particular?”

Each of her phone calls carries on in a similar fashion, with all of the receptionists having ableist speech and displaying shock at her being in a wheelchair. The othering of seated persons is a prevalent form of structural violence in the fashion industry.

Sociologist Johan Galtung’s typology of violence includes three levels: direct, structural, and cultural. In his writings, violence is described as being “present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations” (Galtung 2009: 80, original emphasis). In the world of fashion, this translates to be “Everything that attacks or undermines physical or psychological integrity and dignity” (von Busch 2016: 95). Fashion violence can be seen in all aspects of the industry, from hair and makeup artists only being prepared to handle certain skin tones and hair types, to the labeling of Plus sizes, to the sketch of a garment often being drawn in a standing position.

All of the violence in the fashion industry can be sorted into Galtung’s three categories, and clothing being designed solely for able-bodied
people fits into the structural level of the pyramid of violence. As Mia Schai-
kewitz explains, “Being in a wheelchair does create an image in other peo-
ple’s minds, so I think it’s nice if they see somebody that looks like they’ve
taken an effort in their appearance. I think most people haven’t seen sexy in a
wheelchair, and that’s why they can’t fathom it. (Push Girls 2012: episode 1,
15:53) This ideology about people in wheelchairs fits into structural violence
because it is a constant, silent form of oppression. The absence of clothing
designed with the seated body in mind affects millions of people each day,
thus making it a systemic issue.

As can be seen in a later episode of Push Girls, being in a wheelchair
doesn’t stop you from wanting to participate in fashion. Regarding a shoe
shopping trip with Auti and Chelsea, Tiphany said, “Your first pair of high-
heeled shoes after being injured is so important, because it brings back your
sex appeal and makes you feel like a woman again” (2012: episode 3, 13:10).
The cast of Push Girls shop for shoes just as an able-bodied person would,
even though the shoes aren’t compatible with their body types. For example,
Chelsea references how difficult it can be to keep your ankles upright when
you don’t have control of your legs. Despite these obstacles, the girls still care
about how they present themselves using fashion.

One designer is bringing the “When you can’t stand up, stand out”
theme of Push Girls to life. Lucy Jones first got the idea for Seated Design in
2012 when her Design Communication professor challenged her to “design
a project that could change the world” (Fernandez 2015: para. 1). Jones drew
inspiration from her cousin, Jake, who is paralyzed on his left side and un-
able to dress himself without assistance. Jones worked with United Cerebral
Palsy, multiple focus groups, and a woman with multiple sclerosis as her fit
model and consistent source of feedback.

Whereas most designers can, to a degree, ignore comfort when
planning their garments, Jones kept in mind the physical needs of her cli-
ents. The shape of the seated body is very different from the shape of the
standing body. Traditional garment slopers--or patterns, in layman’s terms-
would not be compatible for someone who spends their life sitting. Tradi-
tional pants, for example, have excess fabric bunched under the knee when
bent and at the crotch when seated. They also pull down at the back of the
waist, and lie unevenly at the ankles. Jones had to factor in the placement of
the kneecap when bent, the spread of the butt and thighs when seated, the
largely developed muscles in the shoulders, as well as other factors (Fernan-
dez 2015: para. 7).

By designing for wheelchair bound individuals, Jones is combatting
the structural violence dictating the exclusivity of the fashion industry. As
Otto von Busch states, “Violence appears as an inherent part of the distinc-
tion between ingroups and outgroups, between those who are ‘in’ and those
who are ‘out’” (2015: 265). Creating designs for physically disabled people allows them to move into the ‘in’ group. Yet to avoid further othering disabled people, Jones conducted her design process so that anyone can be more comfortable while sitting, regardless of level of physical ability. Of her design process, Jones said “Just like there is a ‘petite’ section and a ‘maternity’ section, I want disability to be included in the designer’s approach from the very beginning” (Fernandez 2015: para. 9). Had Jones intended her designs to be specific to disabled people, she would’ve maintained the distinction between able-bodied and disabled.

Furthermore, the fact that Jones won multiple competitions facing her graduating class means that her designs have the seal of approval from established leaders of the industry. Each year at Parsons, senior fashion students compete for a myriad of internal and external competitions. Jones took home the Womenswear Designer of the Year award, as well as being a co-winner of the “Empowering Imagination” competition fostered by Parsons and Kering (Fernandez 2015). These awards were presented from a panel of judges, including designers, editors, buyers, and other professionals in the fashion industry. The support from those bestowing the awards, as well as the many articles written about her work, give Jones the authority of being a designer respected by her peers and superiors in the fashion industry.

Until seated design becomes commonplace, there will still be cultural violence in the fashion industry regarding people restricted to wheelchairs. To further combat this violence, Jones posted her pattern guidelines online so other designers may work with her research and include accessibility in their own work. Jones’ ongoing project is an important step toward eliminating that violence and making fashion accessible to all people, not just able-bodied ones.
Fashion companies form the industry (beehive); violence along the tracklines to compete for design talent.
Seize and Desist: Mitigating Violence Against Designers

“I want to be creative and create my own designs, but the team leads care about what’s going to sell. What else could I do?” lamented April.

I met April at a fashion, wearable technology, and intellectual property law symposium held at the New York Law School. April and I quickly struck up a conversation about our common roots in the Deep South and our relative naivete to the subject matters of the conference. Whereas I came to the conference out of my own academic curiosity, April attended the conference out of professional interest to understand the legal ramifications of copying in fashion design.

April is currently an accessories designer at Ralph Lauren. Previously, she worked at other mass market brands Joe Fresh and Ann Taylor LOFT. She recounted how at all of these companies, she has been asked to make interpretations of the hottest, best selling styles from high-end labels or straight from the runway. April will often make several versions of a bag or a shoe and present them to the team leads. These interpreted versions vary from near exact copies to less derivative styles with reminiscent elements of the original design. Almost always, according to April, the team leads would pick the designs that most closely replicate the original design.

Perhaps, we could be less sympathetic with regard to the copying of high end houses that already charge several thousands of dollars for a pair of shoes or a bag. However, copying also occurs from the bottom-up. Over the last few years, numerous Etsy designers have had their works copied and mass produced by the likes of Urban Outfitters, Forever 21, and Zara. Even April recalled how once at Joe Fresh, she was asked to copy a quilted bag design by a local New York designer. At the time, the bag was widely popular and commanded around $200. However, Joe Fresh appropriated the design nearly down to every stitch and placed its version in stores at the more mass market friendly price of $29.99. Clearly, that is a $170 difference between the original and the copy. Of course, consumers who want to buy that unique design are much happier to pay 30 bucks for an acceptable dupe. These kind of stories are a dime a dozen, and we sympathize with the underdog, in-
dependent designer. We condemn the apparent violence inflicted upon the design-jilted originator.

However, what my conversation with April elicited is that there is other violence being overlooked. For the middle designers like April, there is immense violence at play. This violence is mediated in three different ways. Using Johannes Galtung’s approach of characterizing violence as structural, cultural, and direct and as interpreted by Otto von Busch and Ylva Bjereld, I examine how these types of violence are exacted and mediated (2016). Then, I offer a visual model of how to understand the mapping of the violence contagion.

First, structural violence is embedded in the fashion system and parallels the industry’s division of labor. The team leads at these companies are enforcing rules and regulations that are aimed to drive business and sales. The leads are concerned with the bottom line. They are also answering to executive leadership, stockholders, and ultimately consumers who want to buy the trending styles of the season. Therefore, in order to maintain competitiveness in the fashion system, leads instruct middle designers like April to create copies of popular styles that will sell, sell, sell. Perhaps, the analogy is for fashion businesses to remain solvent, they are experiencing liquid fear. Zygmunt Bauman describes how early modernity was solid and postmodern modernity is now liquid. Postmodern modernity is liquid in that it can at a given time have multiple temporalities of a present time. In his liquid modernity, the sense of progress is no longer about shared involvement of individuals in society but is about individual survival (Bauman 2006). In fashion, there is a perpetuum mobile, or social dynamic, in which progress is articulated as each individual’s avoidance of exclusion. As people fear exclusion, the individual’s relation to fashion is a continuous cycle of becoming (hedonic treadmill with temporary happiness as its constant goal) aiming to avoid exclusion and escape the fear of exclusion (Bauman 2010). In other words, as consumers vie to purchase the most Instagram’d styles, fashion companies run along the treadmill, pushing its designers to copy the fads, rather than create new designs. The flow of references, historical and contemporary, itself perpetuates the fluidity of fashion’s modern liquid state.

Second, cultural violence is mediated through bullying as direct violence. Middle designers such as April do not get to decide what is designed for each season’s line. This role is afforded only to the headlining creative designers. Rather, middle designers follow the leads’ instructions. As April described, she does not have a real choice and often feels stuck between a rock and a hard place. She describes feeling empathy for her fellow designer from whom she is mandated to steal, copy, appropriate, and co-opt. She also laments her distress in not being able to repudiate copying in the fashion industry and at her company. Certainly, creative designers and busi-
ness practice managers are not unaware that copying designs is illegal. After all, copying has been endemic to the industry since the founding of the first Paris couture houses: Madeleine Vionnet was so fearful of counterfeits that she imprinted her own thumbprints onto her clothing labels. Some critics and designers may even find it immoral. But often times, it is not that bullies are unaware of their reproachful actions. It is rather that they may be keenly aware of their actions and yet, they chose to prey on the resistance (Graeber 2015). The fashion industry have constructed a structure in which middle designers are nameless. In the 2004 landmark Harvard Business School case study on Zara, it was reported that the retailer had over 200 in-house designers (Ferdows et al 2004). One can only imagine the size of Zara’s in-house design team, over a decade later. In this way, April is a proverbial cog in the wheel. What little resistance she may show to the creative leads is only fuel for their bullying of her. She could be threatened with a demotion or termination. At best, she endures a hostile work environment in which the bullying not only forces her to do something illegal (copying others’ designs) but also prevents from her making her own designs a reality.

Third, the direct violence reinforces the structure of the fashion system. As a budding designer, April dreams of the day that she can break from the restraints set upon her by Ralph Lauren and establish her own label. However, as the adage propagated throughout the industry resonates: she has not yet paid her dues. For celebrities of other namesake, breaking into the cutthroat fashion industry necessitates only a flash of their blue bloodlines. Or transitioning from one industry of celebrity into eponymous labels in fashion retail has become the norm: Gigi Hadid’s recent collaborations with Tommy Hilfiger and Stuart Weitzman, Kylie and Kendall Jenner’s eponymous department store line, Khloe Kardashian’s Good American denim line, to just name a few. But for middle designers like April, they must continue to work up the corporate ladder, hoping to one day to rise the ranks of named and credited creative director. Without the patronage of the industry elite or achieving celebrity by another means, bootstrapping one’s own way in the industry is as difficult as ever. Not everyone can be an overnight viral Instagram success.

Perhaps I am being too harsh. I wanted to hear the other side of the story. So, I attended a lecture featuring David Lauren of the Ralph Lauren eponymous name and brand (Innovation at Ralph Lauren 2016). Though he has been with his father’s company for over seventeen years, he only recently transitioned to his new role as Chief Innovation Officer. In his talk, Lauren says that new ideas are a “healthy virus” and innovation is an “energy” that spread throughout the company. Per contagion theory, it seems very plausible how fervor for creativity can spread as teams cross-function, or as his “special ops/navy seals” of leads contract, germinate, and disseminate
the virus of innovation throughout Ralph Lauren. After all, according to the company heir, innovation is core to the Ralph Lauren DNA. However, what may also be spreading like a contagion throughout Ralph Lauren and other companies with mass market labels is the violence and bullying of the nameless designers who are lost between the seams of the stitched narrative. This narrative, as David Lauren so eloquently reprised in his talk, is one of being intrinsically innovative, next-generation, and cutting edge. To my surprise, Lauren discussed the company’s “see now, buy now” approach to its most recent collection. In order to combat immediate copies from hitting the shelves of Zara and H&M within weeks of their runway debut, Ralph Lauren, as have many other houses, has made their items available immediately, rather than six months later. For Lauren, the company is catering to tech savvy, liquid modern millennials’ need for immediate gratification. Yet, when you peek under the hood of this seemingly well-oiled fashion machine, you see, from April’s perspective, innovation may be less original than Lauren is purporting.

The spread of violence maps out like a honeycomb structure. April experiences violence from her immediate supervisors, the bullies. The violence is supported by the institution of Ralph Lauren the company and is exerted like a contagion throughout its 25,000 global employees. The violence is also supported by the larger structure of the fashion industry and perhaps its inherent, historical culture of copying best-selling items and aesthetics in order to satisfy consumers. The pods of middle designers within design team and creative lead map side by side in the industry honeycomb matrix of fashion labels. In this colony, the pervasive consumer may be the queen bee, who may choose to select from any given uniform honeycomb fashion label hexagon at a time. In Bauman’s fashion perpetuum mobile, we cannot stop consuming. In order to feed the fashion beast, symptoms such as the bullying of middle designers like April and the suppression of her creativity are just that - symptoms with all of its connotations of being necessary side effects. For even industry giants such as Ralph Lauren, being able to satisfy consumption needs is itself an anodyne to society’s viral capitalistic drive to not fall off the accelerating hedonic treadmill.

You may observe and respond that social media has democratized access for getting budding designers’ creations to center stage. After all, as I learned from the day-long symposium at which I met April, Rebecca Minkoff became a household name partly due to her early leveraging of then-nascent social media tools such as Instagram to advertise her brand at zero overhead cost. The rise of technology offerings to capture moments have disrupted the fashion industry in ways that have changed how brands position ready-to-wear as the now present. To combat live social media postings by bloggers and traditional media figures alike, many fashion houses, such as the “in-
novative” Ralph Lauren, have started selling their next season’s collection at
time of presentation so that consumers will buy the “originals” first, rather
than wait for the trickled-down versions at their local H&M. Trends, in turn,
are also more fleeting. It has become as if Bauman’s hedonic treadmill has
been turned up to ten times the normal speed. Meeting the demands of the
ever capricious consumer, fashion companies would exert more dominance
over their designers to make what will sell. Time can not be wasted on flirta-
tions with novelty.

To combat copying and counterfeit production, counsel for fash-
ion labels send cease and desist letters requesting that copycats immediately
refrain from continuing their illegal behaviors. However, the industry fig-
ureheads should also seize and utilize the talents of design upstarts and en-
courage their true innovation, rather than stifle their creativity. Consumers
should also desist from undergirding the honeycomb of violence by getting
off the hedonic treadmill once and for all.

Footnote: The scenario with “April” is based on an actual conversation I had with an ac-
cessories designer. The conversation is recollected from memory and the respondent’s
name has been changed for privacy.
“THAT’S ALL”
No Pay, No Gain: Unpaid Internships and The Violence of Fashion Work

After wrapping up a 12-hour Saturday photo shoot, Carine Roitfeld, the Editor-in-Chief of her namesake magazine, *CR Fashion Book*, posted to Instagram a quote of herself saying, “When you love fashion, there is no weekend...It just blends together.” Everyone in the studio promptly reposted the photo from her page onto theirs, as if reminding themselves that enjoying the unbearably long day was a good thing, the fashionable thing to do, all whilst reminding their followers that they work in fashion, and that this is what fashion people do.

I landed my internship with CR through a friend and former intern. In my ‘interview’ (no questions were asked other than what my availability was) I was told that as a Production Assistant I would be point-person for anyone on set: *Carine might need an espresso, we’ll have you order catering for the next day*, etc. After two weeks of running through the city to fetch Carine’s lunch (chicken noodle soup—everyday) or the Art Director’s cigarettes, cleaning up after the models and crew, and loading and unloading massive duffle bags of garments and accessories until late into the evening—all to return the next morning completely exhausted but with a forced smile on my face—I began to question what it was I was working for.

Although employees of many industries suffer both mentally and physically from having to take on entry-level positions or internships that offer little or no pay in order to jumpstart their careers, the fashion industry’s particular emphasis on glamour and body image—coupled with a demand for a rapid pace of innovation and the fear of exclusion—shows how the issue of labor exploitation becomes both exacerbated and then simplified into a lifestyle to which its workers are expected to prescribe.

For those who have connections via elite friends or institutions, the unpaid internship is widely-known as the gateway to working in the fashion industry. Designers, marketing strategists, writers, and nearly any other title will take on positions without compensation (though employers will sometimes offer school credit) solely to get their foot in the door or to have a big name listed on their resume. Taking an internship out of the fear of
not being able to get a job any other way is all too common. Speaking to the *New York Times*, Alec Dudson, a former intern and now the founder/Editor-in-Chief of *Intern* magazine, discussed the increasing prevalence of unpaid internships among college graduates of all disciplines, stating:

> There is a culture of internships, a situation whereby it is completely normal for young people to think that working unpaid is just part of the process. Nobody even questions it. I wasn’t the only one confused about where the boundaries lie, how much of this stuff do you have to do before someone takes you seriously? (Williams 2014).

The unpaid internship being ‘a part of the process’ is the first element of the fashion industry that an aspiring employee is expected to embrace.

The U.S. Department of Labor has outlined six criteria for employers to adhere to if they are to hire unpaid interns. To summarize, they are as follows:

1. the experience must be educational
2. it is for the benefit of the intern
3. the position is not to displace a regular employee
4. the employer receives no immediate benefit
5. the intern is not entitled to a job after the internship
6. the employer and intern both understand that there will be no compensation.

Of these six criteria, only one has been adhered to in my employment at *CR*: that no one has promised me an actual job. The last point also rings true, but only on the basis of mutual assumption. In pursuing and accepting this uncompensated position, I was entirely motivated by the allure of the environment and my hope in the possible; but having lunch with Bella Hadid is nothing more than a perk and holding onto ‘what if’ is starting to seem foolish when I am sacrificing my time, energy, and overall well-being without even the promise of a serious benefit.

This is not exclusive to fashion, however, as the number of unpaid internships in all fields, both creative and otherwise, seems to be rising (Greenhouse 2012). “I’m just wondering at what point how many internships is too many,” said Lea, a Parsons School of Design alumna, a statement which echoes the current state of the job market—with less paid positions, students and graduates alike are staying at unpaid positions longer (Greenhouse 2012). However, as unpaid positions gain increasing popularity, many internship programs, including the most coveted positions once offered by Condé Nast, are being cancelled due to lawsuits filed by exploited workers (Williams 2014). In one aspect, this could be considered a good thing—that no one else will have to run errands all day for no pay—but on the other
hand, we have to address how else students and graduates can make their way into the job force, and what the nature of work will look at companies in their post-intern era.

Naturally, when weighing the pros and cons of my own position, I revisited the iconic performances of Meryl Streep as Editor-in-Chief Miranda Priestly, and Anne Hathaway as Priestly’s assistant, Andy, in The Devil Wears Prada. At one point, Andy, who practically does the job of an unpaid intern, complains to a colleague named Nigel (Stanley Tucci) about her ruthless boss and he simply tells her to quit. “I can get another girl to take your job in five minutes—one who really wants it,” he says (Frankel 2006). Although this a dramatized fiction film, it was clearly inspired by real-life powerhouse Anna Wintour and her role at Vogue. It illuminates some of the harsh realities of the industry that society too often brushes aside, or in this case, glamorizes. “Wake up, six,” Nigel continues, referring to her waist size, before giving a monologue that justifies every exploitative aspect of Andy’s job by convincing her of the important role the magazine has in creating culture (Frankel 2006). Of course there are laws preventing such workplace harassment, but that isn’t to say that such violence doesn’t actually occur.

Fear and violence are present at every level and in all sectors of the fashion industry—not just in the grunt work of unpaid internships. Working in an industry that notoriously values a certain type of body can surely be stressful to anyone who feels like they don’t mirror that image. In addition, due to the rapid pace of the industry, mental health also comes into question. In an article about this issue, John Galliano is quoted saying, “I was afraid to say no... I thought it showed weakness. And with more and more success, I would just say yes. And keep on taking more work on, which took its toll” (Allwood 2015).

Due to the industry’s neglect towards issues of mental and physical well-being, those who ‘burn out’ or question the fashion system are threatened with the fear of exclusion—_if you can’t keep up, then you might as well quit_ (Allwood 2015). However, it is very often that those who choose to work in fashion are either women or members of the LGBT community, all of whom remain marginalized in today’s society. Therefore, if someone feels accepted in the fashion industry, they could very well be afraid of entering a new sector where they have a greater chance of being excluded. Similar to the world of fashion, Zygmunt Bauman wrote about reality television that “the inevitably of exclusion, and the fight against being excluded, are what that reality boils down to” (Bauman 2006). In addition, the need for constant renewal and innovation in the fashion industry is better understood in the context of Bauman’s theory of ‘perpetuum mobile’: those who work in the fashion industry are like the hunters, where they thrive off of a “utopia lived rather than being lived towards.”
Many industries have unpaid internships, long hours, and the potential for employees to face drastic mental health issues. However, when coupled with the fashion industry’s intense scrutiny of the physique, pressure to appear composed in order to maintain one’s image, the lingering fear of exclusion, and the demand for a rapid pace of innovation, we can begin to see how immense the problem of labor in fashion really is. However, all of this is veiled under the illusion of what fashion stands for: beauty, glamour, prestige. What is it that Miranda Priestly says at the end of the film? Ah, yes—“Everyone wants to be us.”—or so we think.
Eminent Domain: Thoughts on Liberation Fashion Studies

Not all heroes wear capes. Can fashion studies scholars be the ones to free “slaves to fashion”? Liberation fashion studies has the potential to cut the ties that tether individuals to the fashion system’s unjust laws and social caprice. Modeled after liberation sociology exemplified by Paulo Freire and his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by uplifting the stories of the marginalized, disenfranchised, and ignored, fashion studies scholars can liberate fashion subjects from its feudal roots and showcase the agentic possibilities to transgress boundaries and break fashion laws, beyond just forgoing the social taboos of wearing white after Labor Day.

In her discussion of Meera Sethi’s “Upping the Aunty” photo project, fashion studies scholar Vanita Reddy attempts to show how Sethi provides an alternative discourse to the ideas of fashionability in a dual sense: aunties of the Indian diaspora can be fashionable in the sense of articulating a different fashion sense and are fashionable in the sense of being able to fashion their own aunty style. “Upping the Aunty” picks up where previous projects such as Minh-Ha T. Pham’s “Of Another Fashion” digital archive of the fashions of US women of color have left off. Sethi’s project is political in that it depicts how the social practice of clothing oneself is entangled in narratives of fashioning a self and a diasporic identity. In her recent presentation about her new book *Fashioning Diaspora: Beauty, Femininity, and South Asian American Culture*, Reddy imbues Sethi’s project with the a heavy heaping of political import, proclaiming the subversive acts of these aunties making a name for themselves in spaces that are not their original own.

Vanita Reddy’s analysis of Sethi’s “Upping the Aunty” is celebratory of the counter discourse the project offers to dominant discourses about who can participate in fashion and codify its laws. Of note, the subtext of Sethi’s and Reddy’s critique is framed within the Western fashion paradigm. For Reddy and Sethi, aunties brazenly break all the rules by pairing silk saris with Reebok sneakers, sandals with thick socks, and plaids with embellished florals. As described by the creator, the project “aims to challenge our understanding of fashion, how it is defined and created” (Sethi 2016a). Again,
“fashion” appears to be understood as Western fashion with a capital F. Sethi further adds in the description of the inspired paintings in her two-part project:

“As an example of transnational, diasporic cultural production that pays homage to the fabulousness of aunty style and her role in changing, shaping and performing social and cultural knowledge, the project challenges dominant, Eurocentric narratives of feminized immigrant and diasporic communities, national identity, street style and popular fashion (Sethi 2016b).”

Reddy, the fashion theorist, and Sethi, the digital archives curator and artist, both proclaim the counter-norm, subversive nature of “Upping the Aunty.” They celebrate it as radical, perhaps even liberating. Mainstream media source NPR seems to concur.

But how does this project compare to similar projects seeking to spotlight the fashions of the fashion system’s downtrodden and ignored? Take for example, “Advanced Style.” Widely successful with two published books, documentary film, and numerous public appearances and media praise, Ari Seth Cohen’s blog-turned-fashion-manifesto seeks to “to captur[e] the sartorial savvy of the senior set” (Cohen 2016). What differentiates Cohen’s participants from the aunties in Sethi’s project is that the former set is demonstrably intentionally participating in fashion whereas the latter’s intentionality is ambiguous. Sethi herself admits that she does not know whether the aunties featured in her project are active citizens of the fashion system (Fashioning Diaspora 2016). Cohen’s agenda is also different from Sethi’s. Cohen aims to spotlight the sartorial fluency of seniors, a demographic often excluded from the fashion system’s citizenship. Fashion-ability of these participants already existed. Sethi is simply providing them platform to be seen and recognized. Cohen does not project political agency unto his project’s participants. Many times, these participants have already been wearing their age and sartorial choices loud and proud and are authors of their own personal style blogs. In contrast, Sethi appears to be bestowing agentic possibilities on the fashion choices of aunties.

Another counter-discourse and ironic project is “Accidental Chinese Hipsters” curated by Allison Kuo (2014). The now-defunct blog archives photos of mostly older Chinese immigrants whose outfits may suggest that they are regular patrons of Urban Outfitters and beatnik Brooklyn thrift shops. As the project’s title makes explicit, the hipster chic style of the featured participants is purely incidental. These participants are not tethered to any fashion rules. They recklessly mix prints, leave accoutrements askew, and pay no heed to proportion control. As the curator, Kuo shows how the hapless results of these older Chinese can be interpreted by fashion enthusiasts, perhaps even cognoscenti, as hipster chic. She does not claim intentionality on part of the participants but rather underscore the irony of styling fashion.
and accidental fashionability. Like Sethi and Cohen, Kuo puts marginalized fashion subjects under the spotlight. But unlike Sethi and Cohen, she neither projects political agency onto the participants nor does she laud their already existing political agendas. Fashion and fashionability, in the case of “Accidental Chinese Hipsters,” is of unadulterated happenstance.

In thinking of fashion and fashion studies ability to liberate individuals, I praise “Upping the Aunty,” “Advanced Style,” and “Accidental Chinese Hipsters” for different reasons. All of these do celebrate the styles of demographics castigated from the fashion system and, perhaps also, from fashion studies’ canon. However, the respective projects’ creators’ treatment of their participants and articulation of their sartorial intentionality and political agency is varied. Not to denounce Sethi’s project as completely problematic, I worry that she risks extending the aunties’ intentionality and agency to unsubstantiated hyperbole. Furthermore, fashion studies scholar Vanita Reddy’s over-celebratory analysis of Sethi’s project is not only dangerous of poor academic research practices but also irreverent of allowing the project participants to truly speak for their own. By prescribing how to interpret these cisgender, femme, heterosexual aunties’ fashion choices, Sethi and Reddy silences the voices of the aunties and, as the ensuing Q&A session evidenced, are tone-deaf to necessary critiques of the terminology of the “aunty,” the diasporic space in which they exist and occupy, and intentionality of being in fashion or of another fashion(ability).

To circle back to the questions set out at the top of this case study, I remain agnostic as to whether fashion can liberate its subjects and whether fashion scholars can be the chainbreakers. As one insightful interlocutor points out in the “Fashioning Diaspora” presentation by Reddy and Sethi, are these aunties not only raising the ante, as the project’s title plays upon, but is aunty fashion also anti-fashion? Or are these aunties’ fashion of another fashion, as in the case of “Advanced Style”? Perhaps still, they are incidentally fashionable, similar to the case of “Accidental Chinese Hipsters”? Without in-depth narratives from the mouths of the participants themselves, we cannot know for sure. We can only speculate. To speculate and then to claim as truth, as Reddy and Sethi have done, is what I consider to be dangerous and irresponsible. As artists, curators, and fashion studies scholars, we cannot retrofit qualitative data to our hypothesis and research agendas. Whereas her goal to tie in the intimacy between fashion and the politics of belonging for the Indian diaspora is admirable, important, and necessary, Reddy exercises a privilege of eminent domain that disempowers and objectifies the individual aunties and perhaps also aunties as a demographic. In other words, using her privileged status of academic, Reddy appropriates the private selfhoods of aunties for use of her public scholarship.
In the broader spectrum of fashion studies scholarship, many academics have interpreted the works of designers, the dress practices of certain social groups or individuals, and the retrospective of (sub)cultural styles with an overarching agenda to show that fashion and fashion practices of the demos matter. But such a liberation agenda can and should not come at the cost of projecting intentionality and agency where there is not and of (mis)speaking on the behalf of those who are already ignored by the fashion system. The aunties are individual fashion subjects and are ends in and of themselves (see Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [1785] with Introduction by Christine M. Korsgaard 2012). Reddy and Sethi toe the line of treating the aunties as means to their own artistic and research ends. Furthermore, with regard to Reddy, constraining her analysis within a Western subtext does not relinquish these aunties’ personal dress practices from their colonial hold. This is not liberation.

Footnote: As defined in NPR’s coverage of Sethi’s project, “An ‘aunty’ or ‘aunty-ji’ (depending on where you want to fall on the graph of respect and familiarity) is what you call a lady roughly around your mother’s age. So, the family friend who has seen you grow up, your mom’s co-worker, the lady next to you in the grocery line or the nosy neighbor whose questions about your love life you endure because she makes a killer biryani — they all qualify” (see Misra 2014).
Chasing after a Utopia of No End: The Dichotomy of a Beauty Vlogger

According to YouTube Trends (2015), “In the past ten years over five billion hours of beauty tutorials have been uploaded to YouTube. That’s about 100,000 years worth of contouring, eyelash curling, makeup reviews, and hairstyle how-tos.” Although Michelle Phan calls herself an old soul dreamer with a childlike faith, her newfound celebrity status tells a different story. Forbes ranked her as the top ten highest grossing YouTubers in 2015 (earned about three million dollars) along with fellow millennial and YouTuber Pewdipie (Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg). Not conforming to her celebrity status, Phan has written articles and participated in developing make up tutorials with numerous fashion magazines like Teen Vogue, Vogue.com and Vanity Fair.

After her success on YouTube, Phan co-founded Ipsy, a beauty service where a consumer is sent a glambag with five key beauty products every month for a nominal fee of ten dollars. It is interesting to see how Phan’s image on YouTube transitions to her image as a businesswoman. Even though her image changes, her motivation to help her audience remains the same. In her book Make Up (Enhanced Edition): Your Life Guide to Beauty, Style, and Success-Online and Off, Phan maintains that she is passionate about being a make-up artist and teaching others about how to be comfortable in their own skin. Moreover, consumers who subscribe to Ipsy also follow make-up tutorials of the same beauty products on Ipsy’s and Phan’s social media pages. Phan’s popularity amongst the beauty community and her success as a professional sheds light on three questions —Why do subscribers give Phan an authority to advise them on beauty and fashion, what kind of reactions does Phan’s popularity generate on social media and how does YouTube help in facilitating positive or negative responses from the subscribers?

Allegory of Networks

Christakis & Fowler (2009) claim that “social network is an organized set of people that consists of two kinds of elements: human beings and the
connections between them.” The authors also argue that unlike societal connections, ties formed through social network don’t follow a hierarchy from the top. Every user on YouTube has access to creating their own channel and subscribing to channels created by other users. However, the ties for beauty vloggers on YouTube are different from that of other social networking sites like Facebook or Instagram. A study by Google Zurich supports this argument through a qualitative study on linking (Wattenhofer et al. 2012). They state that YouTube deviates significantly from traditional network characteristics through homophily (a type of linking where users subscribe to already popular channels), reciprocal linking (users subscribe to channels not on the basis of their social relationships) and assortativity (how users build their subscriptions - reciprocal or non reciprocal). Google Zurich’s theory challenges Christakis & Fowler (2009), by substantiating that the chain of events are not controlled by the vlogger but by a collection of “connected individuals.” Through Homophily, every person associates with every other person who resembles them; this resemblance in beauty vlogging works more in terms of their geographical location or the products that the vlogger uses regularly. For example: being a second generation American with a Vietnamese mother, Phan appeals to a wide variety of young women from all over the world. She becomes a hybrid character by being approachable to audiences of different cultures, ethnicities and social backgrounds. The combination of hybridity and homophily increases the subscribers of her YouTube channel through which she now earns money. These changes gradually raise her to a higher status in the eyes of the rest of beauty community. Her channel’s views increase as her videos often appear on YouTube’s “Trending Now” section. In this manner, the social network unknowingly functions as a platform for two key activities. Firstly, YouTube maps the system of social ties existing offline to an online community even amongst users who maintain anonymity. Secondly, a vlogger’s personal YouTube channel leads the subscribers to follow similar channels. For instance, Phan uses her online social ties to direct subscribers to her business Ipsy’s YouTube channel. In order to maintain her social ties with subscribers across different channels, Phan needs to constantly generate videos on YouTube.

Exclusion and Inclusion- A Double Edged Sword

Roland Barthes in his book The Fashion System (1967) insists that fashion cannot exist without language. Beauty vloggers inscribe to Barthes’s claim by talking about fashion through YouTube where everyone’s voices can be heard by everybody who has access to the internet. However, the inner workings of the social networks continuously feed on the desires of people to keep the system working without any hindrance. Sociologist Zygmunt Bau-
man uses the term “perpetuum mobile” to posit that fashion always normalizes the present system and works towards “becoming” a “utopia of no end” (Bauman 2010: 61). Due to perpetuum mobile, a beauty vlogger is caught in the fashion system’s cycle of generating original content and a subscriber is caught in the cycle of responding to that content. For example, Phan has posted about 182 make-up tutorials between 2007 and 2016. She produces different content by developing a new storyline with every video. However, she also intelligently repeats certain “beauty looks” every few years. In in 2007, 2010 and 2014 ,Phan posted tutorials about achieving a natural look where the intent of the video was the same but the style of the tutorial was different.

Bauman claims that we are still living in times surrounded by dangers including the danger of being excluded from social hierarchy (Bauman 2006: 3). Get Off My Internets is a website devoted to targeting bloggers including fashion/beauty bloggers. Their forum has streamline of comments from 2011 to 2016 on Michelle Phan. Comments like “I can’t stand her”, “She used to have a pretty face but her insecurity got the better of her” and “Her incessant promotion of her ‘Disney fairytale love story creeps me out” are common for this platform where the members make sharply critical comments. According to sociologist Galtung (1999), “cultural violence is hidden within our own cultural formations, embedded into the way we see the world and judge others. Michelle Phan was an amateur blogger when she started off and now that she is part of the fashion system, she is condemned. On the one hand, cultural meritocracy (being “in” or “out”/ “right” or “wrong” ) is used as a privilege to “correct those who dress differently” (von Busch & Bjereld 2016: 97). On the other hand, this power is also used to judge vloggers like Michelle Phan who become an expert on fashion through an unconventional path. Bauman and Fowler’s argument on danger of exclusion and social networking respectively gives rise to Galtung’s theory of cultural violence. YouTube, a social network where every subscriber can participate becomes a platform where the vlogger is excessively admired for their beauty and talent. Yet, at the same time the vlogger is condemned for their authority to advise a large community on how to achieve the ideal standards of beauty. Michelle Phan is simultaneously appeased and degraded for the narcissistic nature of her work. Therefore, in these contemporary times, transitioning from a novice blogger to a professional businesswoman is a double edged sword.
Power
The definition of the word appropriate is to “take (something) for one’s own use, typically without the owner’s permission.” This definition is strikingly similar to the definition of plagiarism, which is “the practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one’s own.” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2004) With the prevalent example of the Marc Jacobs Spring/Summer 2017 collection featuring 52 models, with about 15 of them being models of color, Jacobs’ has come under the scrutiny of public opinion in regard to using multicolored wool dreadlocks to adorn the hair of the models. As many are noting, placing dreadlocks on the heads of predominantly White models is disingenuous to the Rastafarian culture from which they are a staple of identity. In his now deleted Instagram post he responds to the controversy by stating

“all who cry “cultural appropriation” or whatever nonsense about any race or skin color wearing their hair in any particular style or manner- funny how you don’t criticize women of color for straightening their hair. I respect and am inspired by people and how they look. I don’t see color or race- I see people. I’m sorry to read that so many people are so narrow minded… Love is the answer. Appreciation of all and inspiration from anywhere is a beautiful thing.” (Elle 2016)

The danger of the colorblind ideology extends far past how we as a society view race and race relations. In the fashion industry, the colorblind ideology creates a vacuum to produce fashion and fashion ideals without context or consequence. With conversations surrounding racial equality in terms of representation in fashion, there has been much discussion as well as controversy on the topic of cultural appropriation. In what many would claim as our current “post-racial” society, it is difficult to identify aspects of racism, as it is much more covert compared to the pre-civil rights era (Wise 2010). Many of the offenders of this issue may not understand what cultural appropriation means, the forms it can take, or its inherent effects. However, what separates the definitions of plagiarism and appropriation is not meaning, but
rather that one is treated as an intellectual crime, and the other is evolving into an American pastime. The way plagiarism is addressed comparatively to cultural appropriation is vastly different. It is imperative to respect the origin of creative works, particularly in an industry that thrives off of creativity and originality. However, that same respect in not upheld in what many designers call “taking inspiration from other cultures”. The use of aesthetics from various cultures is often coined “cultural exchange”, however, rarely is there an even exchange between both parties involved.

Jacobs’ response to this controversy is a product of the color-blind ideology. When he was asked for the inspiration behind the collection, he paid tribute to the 80’s, punk subculture, Boy George, Harajuku girls, Marilyn Manson, and rave culture. However, it is noted that he did not reference Rastafarianism or Black culture as inspiration for the use of the faux dreadlocks. This is not his first experience with failing to acknowledge the roots of his inspirations or exploiting the Other for creative purposes. In his Spring/Summer 2015 collection he featured his models wearing Bantu knots, which he termed “twisted mini buns” (Elle 2016). Now, why is this a problem? Is it really so bad to be inspired by a culture and portray that through art and fashion? This heavily debated topic brings about the argument of the need to share culture to create cohesion. In a time where making an effort to understand the Other is imperative for progression, is it necessary to get hung up over something as small as “twisted mini buns”? As simplistic as it is to brush off these situations as honest mistakes, or attribute it to being color-blind, it devalues the lived experiences of marginalized people—the Other—that are affected by issues of oppression.

In the case of dreadlocks specifically, Black women who wear them for cultural aesthetic are continuously reprimanded, such as with the case of Black actress and singer Zendaya Coleman being criticized by the television show host Guiliana Rancic on Fashion Police for wearing faux locs to the 2015 Academy Awards. Rancic referred to Coleman’s hairstyle as looking as though “she smells like patchouli oil. Or, weed” (Bryant 2015). In September 2016, a federal appeals court ruled against a lawsuit filed by the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission for the case of a company refusing to hire a Black woman who wore dreadlocks. The company in question offered to hire her, but only under the stipulation that the woman remove her dreadlocks, or the offer would be revoked. The court stated that the hairstyle was a “mutable choice”, which would not be considered to be protected by Title VII—the Civil Rights Act of 1964—which is the federal law that prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, and religion (Gutierrez-Morfin 2016). Due to this imbalance of who is allowed to use cultural aesthetics without penalty is why we must broaden the discussion of “cultural bor-
rowing/inspiration/exchange” to a discussion of the imbalances caused by systemic racism.

In the fashion blog Beyond Buckskin: About Native American Fashion authored by Dr. Jessica R. Metcalfe, the aim is to promote cultural appreciation and authenticity through education. The blog serves to empower Native American designers and artists while bringing awareness to Native American fashion. In February 2015, the blog brought attention to the London based brand Kokon to Zai, commonly referred to as KTZ, using strikingly similar designs of those from Native American designer Bethany Yellowtail. While providing a platform for indigenous people is necessary, that is not what happened with KTZ’s Fall/Winter 2015 collection. The brand spoke to Women’s Wear Daily about their use of indigenous aesthetics in which they stated was “a tribute to the primal woman indigenous to this land, who evolves into a sexualized, empowered being” (Keene 2015). While Kokon To Zai has been participating in numerous fashion weeks since the brand launched in 2003, Bethany Yellowtail has yet to receive the same deserved recognition on a mainstream level. Though Yellowtail’s designs are seen, they are seen under a different guise, one that only makes the designs visible through a Eurocentric medium. This brings about the question of who truly benefits from the use of culture in fashion? In an industry that is dominated by White patriarchy, the privileged group is disproportionately benefitting from the group they exploit, while keeping the oppressive margins in place.

Historian and philosopher René Girard explains what some call a form of imitation through his Mimetic Theory of “we desire according to the desire of the other” (Alison 1998). Cultural appropriation can be explained through mimetic theory as desiring what others desire, infiltrating the chain of innovation to fill a perceived void for the consumer. When consumers see that these aesthetics have been labeled fashionable by the White males of the industry that is when they begin to appreciate and desire it. However, this is what makes cultural appropriation inherently violent. As stated in James Alison’s *The Joy of Being Wrong* he analyzes Girard’s Mimetic Theory by stating,

“this imitative desire leads to conflicts, which are resolved by a group’s spontaneous formation of unanimity over against some arbitrarily indicated other who is expelled or excluded…In this way we humans create and sustain social order. The mechanism of the creation and maintenance of social order by means of the expulsion of the arbitrarily chosen victim depends for its success on the blindness of its participants as to what is really going on” (Alison 1998)

When the group that is being profited off of is not desired by society for what they are, but rather what they produce, it continues the marginalization of these cultures and continues the hierarchy of Eurocentric ideals. However, what is necessary to this system is the blindness of the consumer. The capi-
talist system relies on its participants not being able to make decisions for themselves. Through media we are told what is desirable—jobs, food, body types, hair, clothing, places to travel, etc. while subconsciously pitting those things against their undesirable opposite. From a young age we are taught opposites, that everything exists in a dualistic system. Up and down, black and white, right and wrong. So it only comes naturally that when we are being conditioned to desire something, we are also being conditioned that its opposite is undesirable. This duality is what makes actions like Marc Jacobs using wool dreadlocks or Bantu knots harmful. While being colorblind in a post-racial society is made to seem desirable, acknowledging systemic racism in a White patriarchal society is made to seem undesirable. Being that we do not truly live in a colorblind society since there are still systems of oppression set up all around us, not seeing color as an individual does not erase the history or the current oppression of marginalized cultures that are subsequently being profited off of vis-à-vis the color-blind ideology. Being blind to the problem only allows the problem to remain in place.
Fashion Moves In, Who Moves Out?

The George Washington Bridge leads nearly 300,000 commuters between New Jersey and Northern Manhattan everyday. On the New York side, low cost charter buses, car poolers, and passenger vans make periodic runs to New Jersey many of which carry Uptown residents working in Jersey factories. This area which spans from the edges of the Hudson River to Broadway holds a one square block sized bus station. The bus station was built in 1963 and at its peak moments has seen buses traveling through the tri-state area, small shops, and off-track betting. Designed in the 1960s urban renewal style, the station is a cement eyesore colored in the reminders of the daily traffic and pollution that plagues its surroundings. The structure and its area has been ignored for decades becoming a main stay for the 1980s crack epidemic, homeless and runaway youth, and seniors with nowhere to go. The George Washington Bridge Station began to see bus lines discontinued, shops closed, and off-track betting ending citywide. The decline of the station and building went unrecognized until someone realized a prime opportunity in Manhattan was being missed.

In 2008, the George Washington Bridge Bus Station was announced to receive its largest renovation with oversight by the George Washington Bridge Redevelopment Venture LLC, a private development company, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to a tune of $183 million dollars. In 2014, the New York Times documented that the new terminal will have an additional 120,000 square foot devoted to retail space (Chen 2014). As a lifelong resident of the Washington Heights area, my family and friends were mostly excited for the changes. They oohed and ahhed at the prospect of having a Marshalls, Blink Fitness, and even rumors of the Gap and a Trader Joe’s. The year after this project was announced and not too far away in the Kingsbridge section of the Bronx, the 77 year old Stella D’Oro baked goods factory closed. The factory was torn down and a plaza with restaurants and a BJs’ Wholesale Club was erected. Down the road, another plaza was built with a TJ Maxx, Dick’s Sporting Goods, and as of 2016, a Forever 21 Red on the horizon.
The happenings in these two communities are part of a process that has become a household name- gentrification. From San Francisco to New York City, gentrification has been difficult to define but easy to describe. Gina Diaz is quoted in the compiled text The Metropolis and the Modern Life: The Gentrification Debates: A Reader, with an agreed definition by most in the field as:

“gentrification is an economic and social process whereby private capital (real estate firms, developers) and individual homeowners, loft conversions, and the construction of new housing stock. Unlike urban renewal, gentrification is a gradual process, occurring one building or block at a time, slowly reconfiguring the neighborhood landscape of consumption and reduced by displacing poor and working-class residents unable to afford to live in ‘revitalized’ neighborhoods with rising rents, property taxes, and new businesses catering to an upscale clientele” (Brown-Saracino 2013)

Part of this process of displacement becomes marked not solely by additional housing stock or luxury homes but by retail space. Fashion retail in particular is growing in both these areas and has not received the same attention or backlash that luxury homes or the addition of an organic supermarket has received. What is it about fashion that makes it safe from gentrification debates?

Part of the sentiment I heard in both these neighborhoods is the relief of traveling downtown to access their favorite stores or purchase the latest trends for an event. For communities that have long been denied access based on distance to even the most affordable of fast fashion brands or mainstream stores this seems like a huge win and benefit. However, if their new stores are problematized, we can see the role of fashion retail in continued displacement of people and communities.

In this light, major fashion brands occupy a savior-like role when they open in communities who previously did not host national retailers. TJ Maxx, Forever 21 Red, and the like are framed as opportunities to improve communities. There is a contagious feeling that spreads through media and residents that fashion with a capital F has arrived. The colonial nature of the conversation reinforces what fashionability looks like, with an elitist trickle down effect, and how it can only be accessed through consumption from these brands. Williamsburg, Brooklyn, for example, has become one of the hottest and most expensive places to live in New York City and has come to be defined by mostly white millennials through television shows such as Girls and Broad City. However, Williamsburg was previously an industrially driven neighborhood and Brooklyn was for a long time mentioned from a place of fear and violence. The fashionability and appeal that was created through the influx of high end boutiques, creative brands ushered in a new identity and demographic.
These brands pride themselves of democratizing fashion and yet are only just beginning to expand from lower Manhattan. This trend disrupts and reveals the notion of New York City as a global fashion capital since most do not have access not only financially but spatially. Furthermore, many of the individuals in the communities mentioned above are first generation immigrants. Fashion is never spoken about in its role in displacement in the United States, much less in its participation abroad, thanks to the expansion of free trade policies. Many of the immigrants that I encounter in both the Washington Heights and Kingsbridge areas migrated because of the impact of neo-liberal policies in Latin America in the late 1980s and 90s. Some in the United States continue to work in fashion production in local shops and industrial spaces. The popular framework that communities are coming into the light or brought out of the dark ages is not only problematic but not enough to define communities and the people who engage with fashion everyday- even without mainstream brick and mortar stores close to them. Fashion retail works to drape across race, class, language, and other identity markers towards a specific image of fashionability and taste. However, the fashion industry maintains these rigid categories and offers promises in its physical presence it may not be able to keep. One continued argument made at community forums and popular media is the rise of employment that these shops will bring to the community. These positions although they do bring employment opportunities often overreach to the capacity of fashion retail in ensuring model working conditions and living wages.

Fashion, as part of the process of gentrification, like other industries, impacts the ability for small and independent businesses to thrive. Although often embraced as frivolous, fashion is a serious player in the gradual increase of commercial rents and the cost of living. From Washington Heights to Kingsbridge, community residents are sold the image of accessibility. However, as a lifelong resident, I am of the opinion that what we seek is not access but equity. Dressing both individuals and the visual codes of a community in the latest fashion trends works to obscure the real issues that lay underneath. Just because Northern Manhattan and the Bronx can boast about H&M and a Forever 21 Red, structural and systemic issues continue to exist despite “looking modern.” The George Washington Bridge Project and many other “revitalization projects” that involves fashion retail need to be observed more thoughtfully and critically. In the words of spoken word artist, Crystal Valentine “You can’t renovate a borough without burying the people who already live there.” If as community residents we aren’t attentive to the trends, then our consumption practices might be what displaces us in the end.
Presents:
InstaPride

Hippies
Happy Hippie: Turning That Frown Upside-Down and Back down Again

Just grab your cellphone out of your pocket and search for @happyhippie, #instapride, and @mileycyrus on Instagram to familiarize yourself with the Happy Hippie Foundation that the multi-millionaire, singer/songwriter, and exuberant public figure Miley Cyrus created in September 2014. Beware, however, since further invisibility of gender nonconforming individuals may be the result from the increased selective visibility. The foundation’s 150 character bio on Instagram reads, “Rallying young people to fight injustice facing homeless youth, LGBTQ youth and other vulnerable populations.” At the age of 22 years old, Miley said, “I’ve experienced fame, and money, and all that shit—and none of it will make you as happy as when you’re actually fighting for something.” (Krockmal 2015) Happy Hippie resulted through her mindfulness of her position as an influential figure in popular media. She decided to use her own visibility to bring others whose stories are seldom told into the limelight alongside her. This raises a question— who gains on Cyrus’s attention? She acknowledges that she is privileged and considered to be a person of high societal standing. As a result, she decided to channel her power towards creating a foundation that serves as a safe-space for those who have been marginalized by today’s society.

The Happy Hippie manifesto found on the organization’s website states,

“People who say WE can’t change the world ARE wrong.
We will make some noise and cause a scene!
We will challenge each other and the world & will stop pointless judgment.
We know that the people sleeping on the sidewalk could have been us or our closest friends if our lives were just a little bit different.
And the people we see sleeping on the sidewalk COULD be our friends if we gave them the chance.
It’s time for us to speak up for the people in our streets, our cities, our world.
It’s time for us to grow our passion, shine bright and change the future.
John Lennon said it best: ‘A dream you dream alone is only a dream.”
A dream you dream together is a reality.
It is essential to our lives to do good for others!
The only way we can truly be happy is if we are making others happy!
That is this Hippie’s goal!
#HAPPYHIPPIE”

As a 21st century initiative strongly linked to social media, Happy Hippie partially lives in a digital world where emojis and “likes” roam free. The logo itself is a simple riff on a smiley face—a ubiquitous symbol of happiness in popular culture. The foundation’s logo, a classic yellow smiley face with the letter ‘H’ instead of eyes, is physically propagated through online sales of a smiley printed t-shirt, hoodie, pet bandana, dog collar, and dog leash all sold on her merchandise website. The image is otherwise mostly disseminated through Miley’s posts about the foundation to her 56.5 million followers on Instagram and to the Happy Hippie Foundation’s 551,000 followers. (Both figures as of December 2016) Her social media mavens spread awareness of her cause through digital means.

Miley has made the choice of not being a publically passive bystander for people experiencing injustice by establishing this foundation and choosing to be a public advocate for the LGBTQ+ community striving for social equity. She presents herself as active ally with open arms to those in need of support. Specifically through her #InstaPride campaign in collaboration with Instagram in May 2015, Miley has created a portrait series to showcase people across the gender spectrum as a means to raise social awareness. Transgender individuals now have a spotlight on them through the photo sharing app. Those who are generally unseen in the public limelight are now seen— but are their lives being presented as entertaining spectacles?

The yellow themed portraits shared on Instagram showcase individuals who appear to be incredibly happy to be a part of the project. They appear to be full of confidence and joy—they are in fact able to share their stories with millions in the hope of serving as role models in inspiring others to be themselves. As Miley said in an interview with TIME magazine, “The portraits and the people in them are meant to serve as positive examples for young people who might be struggling to figure themselves out, as well as reference points for those who might not personally know anyone who doesn’t feel at home in their own body.”(Steinmetz, 2015) The aim was to share positive images of people who are in the minority—people who are not cisgender like the majority of the world—as a means of creating a digital brave space. The majority of the represented population in the media is cisgender, which means that their self-identity is aligned with their biological sex. By nature, social media platforms such as Instagram do not act as safe places for transgender individuals to share their stories with safety, comfort,
and assured acceptance. Sharing your story with the public requires bravery in overcoming the sense of fear attached to the vulnerability of sharing a part of yourself with others. Since these platforms are available for the public to access, it would certainly help to develop a thick skin and brace yourself for potential backlash when sharing personal stories. As Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens write in *The Art of Effective Facilitation* in the context of teaching students, “…We propose revising our language, shifting away from the concept of safety and emphasizing the importance of bravery instead, to help students better understand—and rise to—the challenges of genuine dialogue on diversity and social justice issues.” (2013) Like all social media platforms, Instagram serves as a source of visuals that we can view to compare our lives with those of others. You do not just have your cake and eat it too—you can see their cake and want to eat theirs too.

As Geoff Shullenberger mentions in his essay about mimesis, violence, and Facebook, “The structures of social platforms mediate the presentation of objects: that is, all ‘objects’ appear embedded in, and placed in relation to, visible signals of the other’s desire (likes, up-votes, reblogs, retweet, comments, etc.)” (2016) Every ‘like’ spreads a slightly unpleasant heterogeneous mélange of hatred, love, insecurity, and support, among other standpoints, across the social media landscape.

The campaign is comprised of beautiful pictures of real people, but they are not real pictures. Miley’s chosen few were placed in a totally alternate space from their realities—away from their homes and dressed in yellow clothing in front of a yellow background wearing quirky accessories. Their bodies are carefully curated by the #InstaPride team to ensure they appear as they want them to appear. They are all a part of this warm, comforting, yellow utopia that is accepting of non cisgender individuals in our widely heteronormative society—it is an unreal dream space. By creating this carefully selected visibility, those who were already invisible are even further plummeted into invisibility in the social media realm. To be more inclusive and share genuine visibility, all kinds of individuals should be showcased—from an array of race, religion, sexual orientation, language, etc. Individuals in their “raw” state without curated makeup and carefully selected clothing. Transgender people who show themselves as they are—candidly, open, and fully themselves in their own daily environments would be more impactful and honest.

The #InstaPride campaign shares stories of individuals who may have struggled in the past with their identities and are now fully accepting of themselves. The campaign talks about personal stories but it does not, however, talk about violent structures. As Von Busch and Bjereld state in *A Typology of Fashion Violence*, “Aesthetic elitism seeps into social life, culturally legitimizing the judgment and exclusion of others based on their appear-
This was written in regard to Johan Galtung’s typology of violence as a triangular model going from the top down as direct, structural to cultural violence. The tip of the iceberg is visible fashion violence based on the hidden ideals of structural and cultural violence. Gender oppression and discrimination exists in our gender binary system. #InstaPride attempted to address this but the campaign did not go beyond the surface of injustice. Structural gender oppression is evident in our standards of beauty, values, and social norms among other forms. The structural oppression has effects that affect our institutions and individual beliefs whether we are conscious of it or not. As Shullenberger states, “Moreover, social media platforms perpetually enjoin users, through various means, to enter the iterative chain of mimesis: to signal their desires to other users, eliciting further desires in the process.”(2016) By raising awareness through the campaign, desire enters part of the equation. Transgender individuals may feel a sense of admiration for those featured in the campaign, but with admiration comes a feeling of not being as accomplished as they are—we admire traits we find attractive in others that we may not have ourselves. Those featured have been selected out of the pool of those who are othered and were brought forth to the limelight while the rest remained in the murky pool of exclusion.
Parties are inevitable in the world of fashion. They are a large part of what makes the industry seem glamorous: a space you can enter only if you’ve earned an invitation. I had just finished conducting an interview when it happened: I got invited to a party hosted by one of the biggest designers in Amsterdam. My interviewee was friends with Bas Kosters, and intended to go straight to the reveal of his new collection immediately after our talk. He invited me along, and I felt woefully unprepared.

I would normally plan an outfit at least several hours in advance when going to a party, and dress on the outside how I want to feel on the inside. What I wore then didn’t look at all how I wanted to feel on the inside. That day I’d dressed for physical comfort in loungey clothes. I dressed to bike to the opposite side of Amsterdam, and to sit for an interview. I did not dress to impress.

Biking to the party from my interviewee’s house, we got caught in the rain. I wore waterproof hiking shoes, a flannel shirt, patterned leggings, and wet hair from the ride. A nylon camera bag acted as my purse, and my shirt was several sizes too big and once belonged to my grandfather. I remember arriving at the party feeling extremely self-conscious. Everyone else had clearly put effort into their appearance, and I was just lucky to have worn waterproof mascara. I was immediately afraid of being othered for my sense of style. Not only did I stick out like a sore thumb, but I also couldn’t speak the language to defend myself and my outfit to others. Even if people were commenting on my appearance in Dutch, I couldn’t have understood, which was perhaps the scariest of all. I tried to put on an air of confidence, but I wasn’t sure I was very convincing until Kosters approached me. He told me that I look cool, and that he liked my outfit. I suddenly felt much better.

Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman wrote in *Liquid Fear*, “To prevent a catastrophe, one needs first to believe in its possibility” (2006: 15). I never believed I might attend a Dutch fashion party, and you can only prepare for the disasters you expect. I didn’t recognize the possibility I’d be invited to a party that evening, so I didn’t factor the potential occurrence into
my outfit when getting dressed that morning. I dressed only for what I had planned: a long bike ride to an unknown part of Amsterdam. It wasn’t until after I could no longer do anything to prepare that I knew I had the option of attending a party.

Horror lies in the lack of a plan. Had I planned on attending a party dressed in such a manner, I wouldn’t have feared it. The horror struck me because I couldn’t prepare for what I didn’t know to be possible. Bauman said it best: “...The inevitability of exclusion, and the fight against being excluded, are what reality boils down to” (2006: 18). Dressed as casually as I was, I excluded myself from the fashionable group. In my mind, I’d built a reality in which I was a scapegoat due to my style, or lack thereof. Yet I was excluded in that I stood out, as evidenced by Kosters’ approval. Once the designer bestowed his approval, I approved of myself and reshaped my reality.

This cycle of approval fits into philosopher René Girard’s mimetic theory. Girard’s theory informs us that human desire isn’t linear:

All desire is triangular, and is suggested by a mediator or a model. This imitative desire leads to conflicts, which are resolved by a group’s spontaneous formation of unanimity over against some arbitrarily indicated other who is expelled or excluded, thereby producing a return to peace. In this way we humans create and sustain social order (Allison 1998: 9-10).

I feared becoming the scapegoat in the situation of desire at Kosters’ party. I feared unintentionally othering myself through my unplanned--and what I deemed unfashionable--outfit. Kosters’ approval meant I wouldn’t be othered, as the people at the party to support him would, through mimetic theory, also approve my outfit once they learned it was desirable.

In an essay evaluating the similarities between Girard and tech investor Peter Thiel, journalist Geoff Shullenberger stated: “By starting a new Internet business, an entrepreneur may create a new world” (2016: para. 16). Thiel supported new worlds, because he knew they would be successful based on mimetic theory and the triangle of desire. In Thiel’s case, the desire was seen through likes, reblogs, upvotes, etc., all of which are obvious depictions of desire for the content of the post. Yet the desire fits into the triangular system because of the algorithm of social media. The more popular content is, the more opportunity there is for the content to be seen and to become more popular. In the case of Kosters, he decides what is popular in his own brand, and in the people in his circle. Yet the popularity of his brand is determined by its consumption.

Following mimetic theory, there is unavoidable violence in the Kosters brand. There must always be a scapegoat, and there must always be desire. Koster is the king of his own world, but with the constant potential of being dethroned by his subjects, becoming the scapegoat. In the instance of
the party, I worried I would be the scapegoat, until Kosters granted me his approval, thus causing me to be the desired, rather than the ostracized.

A highly recognizable example of this cycle can be found in the 2004 teen comedy Mean Girls. When Cady Heron moves to the suburbs of Illinois, she gets swept up in two opposing teen cliques. Cady finds genuine friendship with Janis Ian. However, she also gets invited to be a part of the Plastics, the elite clique at their high school. All’s well for Cady until she falls for the ex-boyfriend of Regina George, the leader of the plastics. Cady and her friend Janis decide to team up and take Regina down. One of their tactics for turning Regina into the scapegoat is to cut holes in her shirt where her bra is. However, this plan swiftly backfires when Regina merely shrugs her shoulders, and walks out of the dressing room with confidence. The next day, the school is full of girls mimicking the style. There was the potential for Regina to become a scapegoat, but since she portrayed the style with a confidence implying desirability, her peers desired to copy her.

In the cases of the party and of the Mean Girls, there is exclusivity. Being invited to join the group or the party grants you a level of inclusion and desirability, but there is always a risk of becoming a scapegoat. To be desirable, there must be an othered someone to be compared against. In the triangular cycle of mimetic theory, I wonder what came first: the outfit or the approval. Kosters approved of me based on what I wore. However, without my unplanned outfit, Kosters might’ve had nothing on which to base his approval.
SLAVES
Redressing without re-dressing: imprisoning individuality

From successful TV shows such as ‘Orange is the New Black’ to countless movies, life in prison has always been a source of curiosity. Considering the United States’ ever increasing prison population (currently more than 2 million inmates) (Prison Policy Initiative 2016), the documented disarray state of prisons and the rate of recidivism, perhaps even more attention should be given to the approach adopted by the US incarceration system. However, Scandinavia, which includes Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, appears to have a handle on many situations including prisons. With the example of Norway, ranked first in the UN’s Human Development’s list, the country leads in literacy, education, health care and per capita income (Moore 2016). Running their prisons also emerges as something they have mastered.

While the emblematic orange or black and white striped jumpsuits ubiquitously come to mind when thinking of prisons in the US, now worn by high-security and traveling inmates (Neilson 2016), Scandinavians have opted out of the uniforms. Their reputation for humane prisons is undoubtedly supported by the principle of allowing its inmates to wear their own clothes. As rehabilitation and redressing seemingly trump the intention to punish or obtain revenge from a societal point of view (James 2013), the whole premise on which Scandinavian prisons rest is fundamentally different than its American counterpart. The absence of uniforms complemented with the prison cells looking like dorms and the fact that prisoners with lighter sentences or on the verge of release have the door key to their own cell, all appear to counter “the punishing conditions that satisfy an American sense of justice” (Larson 2013). As such, the system relies on taking away their freedom as a consequence of their act, without stepping on their rights: “the implication in the Swedish model is that sentenced individuals are still primarily regarded as people with needs, to be assisted and helped” (James 2014).

By unpacking power relations, especially in regards to slavery, Patterson’s work (1982) in some ways helps enlighten the constituent element of the prisoner/prison relation. Examining slavery and its cultural aspect, the
author points out how the removal of the slave’s rights, turns him or her into a social nonperson. By no longer being part of any legitimate social order, the slave becomes socially dead. Although slavery is an obviously much different and extreme comparison, this examination of power relations does reflect the incarceration and ostracization of prisoners in some ways. Through the forcible separation from the outside, the prisoner is isolated from the social realm, and in some ways becomes socially dead. One example is the removal of prisoners’ right to vote. While the majority of states prohibits felons from voting while in prison, “prisoners in Norway can vote, and in order to get their votes, candidates show up for election debates, televised live from inside the prison” (Moore 2015). Another manner in which the prisoner is dissociated from his social self is clothing. The removal of all personal belonging to some degree marks the erasure of individuality. As clothing is arguably closely associated with the representation of an identity, the interplay between uniforms, incarceration and self-development is an interesting one.

As a visual marker, uniforms broadly help mediate interaction between individuals. Hertz (2015) comprehensively defined uniforms as differing from more general clothing by inferring ideas of formality, restriction and external control. While dressing behaviour is generally structured through widely-accepted informal social practices, uniforms are more explicitly regulated. Thus, “groups that enforce uniforms do so explicitly, precisely, intentionally, and officially” (Ibid.:44). Uniforms in that manner serve a number of functions. Among others, uniforms situate the ‘other’ by setting out power relations, signalling status and indicating expected behaviour for the wearer. As such, the wearer’s identity is understood in correlation to that uniform. In this interplay, uniforms have long been understood as a tool to regulate human bodies and minds. Thus, in highly hierarchical and/or regulated environments such as in the military or prisons, uniforms have become somewhat of a given. On the one hand, uniforms create strong visual and hierarchical boundaries between groups. With the clear example of incarceration, prisoners and guards have very distinct clothing ensembles. The authority is placed with the guard while obedience is demanded from the inmates and enforced through punitive measures. On the other hand, uniforms may also attempt to iron out differences, to make all wearers somewhat homogeneous and congregate in a unified appearance. While uniforms in other circumstances allow for a certain degree of deviation, with accessories or shoes, prisoners do not have such ability. That is, there is no room left for personal expression. The identical ensembles of clothing result in a mass where singularity and individuality are removed, consequently “suppressing their individual identities while retaining and enforcing the institutional identities individuals are meant to display” (Hertz 2015: 51). By removing
all belongings and adopting the uniform when entering the prison system, prisoners are forced to shed a part of their social self, mute their individuality and act is the way that is required of them. In both instances, separation and association, the garments are purposefully manipulated in a top-down approach to promote an idealized state of control and conformity.

A number of researchers have delineated the potential consequences of uniforms. As the famous Stanford Prison Experiment conducted at the Stanford University in the 1970s demonstrated, the simple act of assigning students to the roles of inmates and guards, with the corresponding uniforms, radically altered the individuals’ behavior. This process was defined by Adam and Galinsky (2012) as ‘enclothed cognition’. Examining clothes in relation to the wearer’s psychological processes, their research helped demonstrate the ways in which the feelings incited through clothes can translate into actual real-life consequences. Depending on the symbol meaning of the clothing and the psychological experience of wearing it which reminds what the clothes represent, the wearer’s behavior can change. As such, clothes and especially uniforms do not only affect the way others see an individual, they also impact the way an individual sees himself. With perception resulting in factual consequences, uniforms have the power to tailor thoughts and behavior to fit the circumstances. Just like wearing a suit or a lab coat has been demonstrated to make the wearer act differently, prison uniforms are no exception. By visibly treating the prisoner as nothing else than a criminal through the uniforms, the prisoners will most likely behave as what is expecting of them: criminals. Such dehumanization linked to clothing and its repercussion on behavior was further exemplified in the Utah Department of Corrections in 2006. Allegedly, by giving new uniforms in the color of plum wine and allowing cosmetics, disciplinary problems decreased (Neilson 2016). In an effort to “alleviate that indignity, the goal was to give back to the female inmates the sense that they are people, individuals who matter” (Ibid).

With Scandinavia’s unusual approach to the justice system and the treatment of prisoners, the absence of uniforms is thought-provoking. As previously exemplified, removing the uniforms may help not to situate the prisoner as ‘other’. In contrast it may preserve a prisoner’s self-worth, autonomy and identity. By solely removing the inmates’ freedom while maintaining many of the other rights, the estrangement with the outside world is minimized. Promoting a rather open system that attempts to resemble normalcy aims to facilitate the prisoners’ return to society. By forgoing the uniform, inmates are allowed to wear what they would otherwise wear outside of prison, maintaining the channel of expression that clothing enables. While such benefits continue to be demonstrated, the Utah Department of Correction appears as one of the very few American prisons to have under-
stood the detrimental effects of strict uniforms. In fact, many prisons have moved in the opposite direction: “a handful of facilities have returned to stripes, [...] claiming that colored jumpsuits didn’t look punitive enough and that the public loved it” (Ibid). Others have also replaced the orange jump-suit with the traditional black and white striped uniforms explaining that orange had been made ‘cool’ through the TV series ‘Orange is the new Black’.

Yet, one cannot overlook the fact that the U.S. population is much larger than all the Scandinavian countries accumulated. With a larger overall population, hence comes a larger number of inmates. It has even been found that “several prisons in the U.S. each hold nearly twice the prison population of Finland” (Larson 2013). While smaller incarceration number means a more manageable population for Scandinavians, the U.S. proportionally has a larger amount of its population in prison. In fact, the U.S. incarceration rates are the highest in the world, about 10 times those throughout Scandinavia, which are among the world’s lowest. Additionally, with nearly 80% of prisoners being rearrested within five years of their release, the U.S. has one of the highest recidivism rate in the world (Moore 2016). To help situate the gravity of such number, Norway has one of the lowest, at 12%. The reality of American prisons is gloomy, where “the vast majority [of inmates] has never received competent health care, mental health care, drug treatment, education or even an opportunity to look at themselves as humans” (Larson 2013: 8)

With fashion being considered as too mundane to take seriously more often than not, uniforms are another example that points out the actual pertinence of the field. Uniforms are one of the ways in which prisoners are withdrawn from society and from themselves. As a common thread through our societies, clothing is key in interpersonal relations. Yet, clothing is also something of a highly personal nature. Through the dress practices in which we engage, both consciously and unconsciously, fashion helps us to situate ourselves in our environment and to build a personal narrative. By taking this ‘tool’ away, part of the individual’s self is stripped away. As such, while forcing inmates to wear uniforms may be a means to make them realise the seriousness of their criminal offence, there is also a danger of it removing their sense of self essential in any individual. As this essay hopes to have demonstrated, a more humane approach, which includes allowing prisoners to wear their own clothes, seems to have positive results in certain countries and instance, and as such results cannot be overlooked.
Old Voices, New Choices: Who Can Change the Fashion System?

In April 2013, about 1,134 people lost their lives in the garment factory disaster at Rana Plaza in Savar, Bangladesh. International Labor Organization’s Director-General Guy Ryder called it the worst industrial catastrophe of its kind in history. Housing five garment factories, an eight-story building collapsed, trapping many workers for several days. This incident wasn’t unprecedented. The Rana Plaza buyers were fully aware of the unsafe working conditions. Three and a half years after the tragedy most of the garment factories in Bangladesh have still failed to implement the required fire and safety measures. According to 2016 report of the International Labor Rights Forum (ILO), Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety (The Alliance) and the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety (The Accord) were established in 2013 to avoid any such disasters in the future. However, the report concludes by questioning the brands under The Alliance and The Accord on the issue of delaying the safety procedures to protect their own political interests. Due to the unjust nature of the capitalist system, it is important to analyse alternative methods by which sustainable clothing brands and consumers can contribute to the fashion system.

Although organizations like ILO have their own universal principles of justice and most sustainable clothing brands adhere to these standards, the fashion system has yet to make a change. Many sustainable clothing brands claim that by buying ethically and avoiding fast-fashion retailers, an individual can affect the fashion industry. However, can social justice really be achieved in the fashion system and is it solely dependent on a consumer’s buying choices?

The Psychology of Want vs Need

“As I stare at it, I can feel little invisible strings, silently tugging me toward it. I have to touch it. I have to wear it. It’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

(Kinsella 2000)
Rebecca Bloomwood is the central character of Sophie Kinsella’s best seller — Confessions of a Shopaholic. Like many “chick lit” novels including Devil Wears Prada, Elegance, and Fashion Babylon, Shopaholic’s plot revolves around the protagonist, absolutely smitten with consumer labels and convinced that wearing something “fashionable” is the only way for her to be included in the fashion system.

Like with Bloomwood, the sensation of being drawn towards clothing is inevitable for most people. However, eminent philosopher Kant argues that “when humans act to avoid pain or seek pleasure, they don’t act freely but are slaves of desire” (Sandel 2009). In contrast to Kant’s moral ethics, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud points out that the balance of a human’s system can be disrupted if desire of the external world is conflicted with that of the internal world (Miller 2014). Freud’s theory justifies being discontented with fashion, thereby explaining the transitory nature of fashion and the rise of consumer demand for change. Hence, consumers neither have control of their purchases, nor have control over the production of the fashion products.

According to the sociologist Jean Baudrillard objects can be treated as symbols and can be manipulated using the “logic of desire” (Tseëlon 2014). For example, if we assume that a white tee shirt is a code or a sign then making little changes in this sign can change its target market. Producing the tee shirt in organic cotton can make it more desirable to an ethically drawn consumer whereas producing the same tee shirt in viscose rayon can make it more accessible to the fast fashion market. Baudrillard also points out that desire is not motivated by a need that an object can fulfill but is instead motivated by the creation of an image (Baudrillard 1993 [1976]). Sustainable clothing brands should express efforts in developing a specific image to inspire consumers to think about fair trade and just fashion. However, Capeheart and Milovanovic (2007) maintain that “social justice is not just concerned with individuals but with what is just for the social whole.” Scholars Hardt and Negri coin a new term “multitude” which Capeheart and Milovanovic describe as “internal differences not being reduced to a single identity”. This new discourse by Hardt and Negri suggests that active resistance, direct confrontation and revolution are the three main driving forces of justice in a “multitudian” society. Multitude paves way to a new form of justice which can be actively applied to the clothing trade practices.

**Directing Desire towards a “Just Fashion System”**

The Rana Plaza incident made the sustainable clothing brand People Tree’s voice stronger. Started by Safia Miney twenty five years ago in Japan and then London, the brand integrates the ten core values of fair trade. Having
said that People Tree is also one of the first clothing companies to receive the WTFO product mark in 2013. This was a significant step in ensuring that their supply chain is audited with farmers, artisans, and consumers benefitting from all around the world. Justice studies scholar Caperheart (2007) argues that while individuals identify themselves within national boundaries, nations themselves like to affiliate themselves with International Organizations like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization (WTO). WTO is established on a global platform and their ten principles of justice have to be sensitive about diversity and cross-cultural consumption. While consumer culture symbolizes the subtle indicators that state whether or not an object belongs to a culture, cross-cultural consumption is when these signs collaborate within different cultures at a global level.

Many designers, brands, and filmmakers in the fashion industry have attempted to implement Hardt and Negri’s “active resistance, direct confrontation and revolution” to influence cross-cultural consumption. The brand, People Tree started campaigns like Fashion Takes Action (awareness in sustainable education) and Rag Rage in 2014. Books like Slow Fashion: Aesthetics Meets Ethics (2016) featured projects including those by Livia Firth (Eco Age Ltd), Eileen Fisher, Zandra Rhodes and Dana Geffen (Fair World Project). Fashion Revolution Day started in 2014 urging people to “be curious, find out and do something.” In the month of April, every year people post pictures of their clothing labels with “#Whomademyclothes” on social media platforms asking fashion businesses to be more transparent. Filmmaker Andrew Morgan launched a documentary in 2015 called The True Cost bringing unethical trade practices to the foreground. Slow fashion brands like Thinx and Slow Factory which effectively juxtapose technology and ethical trade practices. Slow Factory™ is an online brand and fashion tech lab that manufactures clothing which tells a story of human activism whereas Thinx collaborates with Afripads to develop reusable period-proof underwear for women in Africa.

Although designers and brands have taken steps towards social justice in their own way by giving human rights and profit equal importance, Scholar Kate Fletcher insists that fashion appears anachronistic to sustainable values. In spite of the contradictory implications of ethical fashion, perhaps the answer might lie in Fletcher’s challenge to create alternate fashion systems which reduce poverty, appreciate material culture and work within the limitations of the industrial structures. However, accepting that a patriarchical capitalist system is constant and inflexible in the future can pose problems especially in the fashion system which is known for its ephemeral qualities. Additionally, assuming that consumers contribute very little to the fashion system can also prove disadvantageous. Instead, looking at researchers like Buckley and Clark who investigate everyday dress practices of con-
sumers can be useful. The authors maintain that the characteristic of self-

fashioning and refashioning, this articulation of the everyday also recognizes

the possibility of reinvention and resistance as the fashion system is refused,

recycled, and redefined from within the realm of the everyday. Ultimately, no

matter how complicated the process of justice, there is still hope that internal
desire can be manipulated to reshape the existing fashion system (Buckley &
Clark 2012).
I think that what I often see is that people are frightened of fashion and that because they’re scared of it, or it makes them feel insecure they put it down. On the whole, people that say demeaning things about our world. I think that’s usually because they feel in some ways excluded or not part of the cool group. So as a result they just mock it. […] There is something about fashion that can make people really nervous.

(Anna Wintour, opening credits to The September Issue, 2009)
Remember the first time you opened a fashion magazine. The glamorous photos, the beautiful faces of stars and celebrities, expensive clothes and perfect bodies, the exquisite type and sophisticated layout. The very paper, with its glossy shine, made the light from the lamp reflect as if the pages were themselves made of some luminous and magical substance. You were drawn into its allure, into the aesthetic nectar of glamour, drinking its opium. Fashion is such world, a world of magic. But like any magic, it casts a shadow, a bastard sibling, a darkness, perhaps unwanted as much as needed as a contrast. Just like the master needs a slave, and the beautiful needs the ugly, so fashion needs the unfashionable. Yes, just like pleasure needs pain. Sometimes they appear as opposites, repelling each other to appear as antithetical poles. Other times they seek each other, drawn together into a messy knot of status, passion and addiction: as desire and its violence.

We usually only hear and think about the positive sides of fashion, the seductive, beautiful and expressive parts which help individuals “be themselves,” to communicate with peers and find attractive partners. Fear seems to belong to other social realms. Most of us instinctively moralize about fear. Fear is something bad, it limits life and oppress the fearful. Fear is a power relation between the mighty and their victims, the weak. But to understand fear, just as to understand violence, it may be important to analyze it as a constitutive component of most social relations, and especially to fashion.

But as argued by Fiske and Rai (2014), violence is habitually moralized as we analyze it; it is seen as evil, an expression of our animal nature breaking through as cultural norms collapse. But violence is almost always morally motivated, and their thesis is worth citing at length,

When people hurt of kill someone, they usually do so because they feel they ought to: they feel it is morally right or even obligatory to be violent. Moreover, the motives for violence generally grow out of a relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, or their relationships with third parties. The perpetrator is violent to make the relationship right—to make the relationship what it ought to be according to his or her cultural implementations of universal relational moral principles. That is, most violence is morally motivated. Morality is about regulating social relationships, and violence is one way to regulate relationships. (Fiske & Rai 2014: xxii)
The trouble with violence is that the perpetuator feels like they should do it, or even must do it, even almost all people are inherently against using violence to others. “People do not simply justify or excuse their violent actions after the fact; at the moment they act, people intend to cause harm or death to someone they feel should suffer or die.” (Fiske & Rai 2014: 1)

This is also the enigma of violence and fear in the realm of fashion. The fashion bully or his or her audience are not simply evil, but they act out of what they consider a “right” to act that way, even if this right is not fully articulated or explicitly accepted. When Miranda Pristly, the diabolical editor and famously oppressive character in The Devil Wears Prada (2006) acts like a bully, it is seen as a central part of the fashion narrative, an aesthetic rite of passage. Fear spurs the distinctions within fashion, making some “worth it,” while others are not. While some aesthetic categories, which pick the “in” from the “out,” may seem arbitrary, the consequences of these decisions and their chains-of-action are not, but instead become the motivational foundations for exclusion and violence. Thus the fear in fashion must be understood as an essential part of fashion, even if the official actors within the fashion system do not officially support it. Violence and fear form the bedrock of social relationships that propel the Machiavellian virtue of fashion; a seduction, allure and adoration grown from beauty as well as fear. Thus the values propelled by fashion produce the context in which the violence and fear flourishes, indeed, this force may be part of the very constitution of fashion.

Fear is an individual experience, yet it is most often produced socially. Like anxiety, it escalates through social dynamics. This may also explain why we have a hard time connecting fashion to fear. Paradoxically we often speak of fashion in connection to “having your own style”, and if I should have such style, I would be safe from fear as it can hardly be taken away from me. But having an “own fashion” would be an oxymoron. Not only because we don’t make our own garments, but the very category of the “individual” seems to be at stake as fashion needs to be a shared and public phenomenon. For something to be “fashion” we usually consider it as something imitating or at least connected to others. Fashion cannot be private. Yet we habitually speak of fashion as an individual style, a kind of mind-trick that also reinforces the idea of the fashion subject who can forge their own luck. Yet, this is not only typical to fashion, but the cult of the individual is part of the narrative of our time, and social atomization is celebrated as a proof of our freedom and independence.

The war of every man against every man – competition and individualism, in other words – is the religion of our time, justified by a mythology of lone rangers, sole traders, self-starters, self-made men and women, going it alone. For the most social of creatures, who cannot prosper without love, there is no such
thing as society, only heroic individualism. What counts is to win. The rest is collateral damage. (Monbiot 2014)

In a time where reality and fiction is hardly distinguishable, reality soaps and “fake news” saturate our feeds and every social media update is a cutthroat move in the attention economy, the prime insult of our time is “loser,” revealing how central competition has become to our culture. As we present an idealized version of ourselves online, we build on expectations that our social lives should be more like those portrayed by others, thus building an arms race in loneliness veiled under aestheticized community.

The struggles of the individual to escape being a “loser” may seem remote from the daily life of fashion. But as argued by Bourdieu, “Fashion is the latest fashion, the latest difference” (1993: 135) something also supported by Barthes (1983) – it is the latest distinction between the winner and the loser. Nevertheless, one may think that these days, with the high proliferation of images and accessible or “fast” and accessible goods, fashion would automatically become more inclusive, invite more people to become winners, but rather the opposite may be taking place. The saturation intensifies the politics of judgment as the arenas multiply and stakes are raised. As Vanessa Friedman, chief fashion critic for the International New York Times argues, the proliferation of images has today also tuned our judgement of others towards dress;

a picture […] can go round the world almost instantaneously. Before words are read and digested, judgments are made, and they are made based on how someone looks, which in part is based on what they wear. This is human nature. As a result, image has become incredibly important as a communication tool for anyone in the public eye. (Friedman 2014)

Friedman’s instantaneous judgment connects to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s ideas of our contemporary culture of “liquid fear” (Bauman 2006). In the neoliberal settings of our economy, and its infusion into the cultural fabric of liberal individualism, we all struggle to keep up with each other, which in turn produces dynamics of exclusion where “people [are] trying to exclude other people to avoid being excluded by them.” (Bauman 2006: 19) As part of this struggle, Bauman suggests, the current culture of the individual is “a contraption adjusted to the servicing of ‘the order of egoism’ and that the main principle of that order is the ‘wager of the strong’ - ‘a wager of the rich’“ (Bauman 2006: 19) You are only worth as much as you seem to be worth, and we do not share a common trajectory towards a better future. Instead, “Progress […] has moved from the discourse of shared improvement to that of individual survival. […] ‘Progress’ appears in the context of the avoidance of being excluded.” (Bauman 2010: 59) As we hunt for new fashion, in order to keep up with the rest, we are drawn into a hedonist cycle of continuous hunting for the new, never satisfied with what we acquire,
as it is already on its way to lose its significance, “once started, tasted and savoured, the hunt (like all other drugs) becomes an addiction, compulsion and obsession.” (Bauman 2010: 61) As Bauman would have it, hunter and hunted merge into one fearful and perpetually chasing endeavor for the next thing, and a “passion for fashion” is a drive propelled by the aesthetics of continuous anxiety, a fear of being excluded, ignored, forgotten: of becoming a “loser.”

But does being a loser really have social consequences? Are we not all individuals, worthy of equal attention and being treated fairly? Even if the law would recognize us as equals (which is a utopian wish perhaps) losers have a tendency to disappear not only from the eye of media and celebrity shows, but from our very mechanisms of perception. A recent study from New York University found that those who considered themselves in higher classes looked less at, or even ignored, people who walked past them than those who said they were in a lower class did (Dietze & Knowles 2016). In relation to fashion, this may explain why it can feel as though you’re invisible to those we look up to. As Dietze and Knowles argues, part of the explanation could be that people from higher classes do not have the same dependencies on others as those in lower classes, but the study confirms the experiences that many share, especially in the realm of dress: we see those we look up to, but those above us hardly recognize those below. The raised catwalk with the arrogant looking models walking above, looking into the distant ether, may not only be a choreography, as much as an incarnation of fashion as a social reality. In resonance with this, other studies have found that upper-class individuals seems to have more narcissistic personality tendencies (Piff 2014), which may similarly confirm the aesthetic echo-chamber of the celebrity ecology. Cultivating a self-image of being “worth it” in a competitive culture, which tells itself to be meritocratic, makes losers not only unattractive, but also emotionally unappealing. In the kingdom of the beautiful the ugly are a form of unwanted pollution.

For losers like the most of us, the fear of being rejected or ignored comes to perpetuate our goals and desires, and as much as we would like to be virtuous and good, also reproducing fear may be a safer game to play. A little gossip and a few anonymous comments may indeed help feed our ego, and the number of “likes” and “retweets” boost our self-esteem. The Swedish author Hjalmar Söderberg captures this striving, the desperate quest to be recognized, in his novel Doktor Glas;

Nothing so reduces and drags down a human being as the consciousness of not being loved. […] We want to be loved; failing that, admired; failing that, feared; failing that, hated and despised. At all costs we want to stir up some sort of feeling in others. Our soul abhors a vacuum. (Söderberg 1905/2002: 70)
Dynamics of Fear

We do not only fear to be ignored. We fear the wrong kind of attention, the skepticism and rejection that also entails shame and the undermining of self-esteem. When we recognize in others the courage to “be themselves,” we often think of it as having “character.” At least in the realm of dress practices, what we call character often entails the courage to stand up to the judgment of others, a social thick skin against the sidelong and cunning wit of our peers.

Yet, as proposed by psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, character also demands what he calls an “emotional armor” (character armor or Charakterpanzer), a rigidity in the subject’s psychosomatic configuration which also affects the relationship to others and the surrounding world (Reich 1949). Character makes the subject defensive; it is a patterns of behavior and body posture that serves as defense mechanisms, which also makes the wearer inflexible and dull to emotional contact. Character is built as a result of social processes and confrontations with the world, not from an inner strength or self-knowledge, which we often associate the word. The armoring is shaped during the subject’s youth, through a surrounding hostile environment, competitive affirmation from loved ones, or childhood abuse to become unconscious resistant character traits, what is also known as “ego defenses.” A rigid emotional armor is defensive and limits the spontaneously life affirmation which distinguishes a healthy life. It has incorporated the fear of others into the subject’s very constitution of self, also on a somatic level – and it keeps reproducing a fear of life.

A Reichian perspective on fashion would seek to understand the forces that make us fear the freedom clothing opens for us, to instead willingly submit to be led. No, not only submit, but seeking subjugation. A key component in fashion is to strive to be led, to devote oneself to the taste of others, and seek a designer and a community which to obey. From a Reichian approach to fashion, we seek out leaders in our quest to be adored ourselves, in the hope for a transference between self and the “in-crowd.” As in fashion journalist Susanne Pagold’s definition of fashion, “to look like everyone else, but before everyone else” (Pagold 2000: 8), that is, we fear what others fear and we seek the same desire that others seek.

This makes the dynamics of desire in fashion resonate well Rene Girard’s theory of mimetic desire (Girard 1977). To Girard, desire is formed in a system of relationships, a form of vitalist psychological law of tensions between subject, a mediator and an object of desire. The psychology of mimesis is unconscious, as opposed to imitation, thus Girard expounds on the idea that we are constituted as human beings by a corrupted form of imitation, and this is the mimetic form of desire.
All human desire is mimetic, that is, it is desire in imitation of the desire of someone (or some group) else. And all mimesis is desirous: that is, all imitation is part of a movement between people relating to the very constitution of their being. (Alison 1998: 14)

From Girard’s perspective, desires are not emanating from an autonomous ego, neither do we simply desire others to desire us, but we borrow our desires from others and enact this dynamic as a form of aggression upon others. Desire is provoked by the desires from those surrounding us, that is, desire is always part of a triangular relationship, between two subjects and an object. This relation is structuring, but also structured by, violence, as we are taught to desire in the zero-sum social game of desire and the prestige won by its acquisition. Desire and aggression acts in this triangular shape, much like the classic love triangle in many forms of historical and popular narratives: it is always competitive, violent, and in the end, sacrificial.

In Girard’s triangular model, desire acts as a process of mediation between subjects; through the object, the subject is pulled towards the mediator/model, and a competitive imitation takes place that in turn is a quest for attention and appreciation. We think we seek the object, but it is in fact the attention of the mediator/model who is sought.
As Girard puts forward, the genesis of ritual sacrifice, organized through religion, is a process for handling the larger social forces of accumulated mimetic desire. Taboos and limitation of access towards rivalry objects only work to a certain extent as the desire is just walled up within the social body (in a curious resonance with Reich’s armoring processes). As a mimetic crisis can only bring a temporary peace, a stigmatization through violence is necessary: to find a scapegoat.

The scapegoat is an essential component of Girard’s mimetic desire. After a competitive struggle to claim the desired object, the social conflict escalates to a degree that threatens to undermine the social contract of the original group (the two parts desiring). The growing formation of this unanimity diverts towards an arbitrary victim who is to be expelled or excluded, and in this act of unifying expulsion the original group is healed. In the modern process of collapsing social prohibitions and taboos, as public rituals for resolution of mimetic conflicts produces an intensification of dominance and violence, ubiquitous competition leads to bullying and scapegoating in every social arena, not least social media. As Shullenberger suggests,

abuse, harassment, and bullying – the various forms of scapegoating that have become depressing constants of online behavior – are features, not bugs: the platforms’ basic social architecture, by concentrating mimetic behavior, also stokes the tendencies toward envy, rivalry, and hatred of the Other that feed online violence. (Shullenberger 2016)

Anthropologist David Graeber highlights a special dynamic also of bullying. When we think of bullying and self-aggrandizing aggression as a natural phenomena, and seek connections to our primate ancestors, “the cowards are those who lack a fundamental biological impulse, and it’s hardly surprising that we would hold them in contempt.” (Graeber 2015) That is, as we seek an evolutionary answer to aggression, we also start to blame the victims for their lack of self-preservation and strength. However, aggression and warfare, in Graeber’s view, are highly unnatural, or if we examine human populations, we must see that “the vast majority of human males have refused to spend their time training for war, even when it was in their immediate practical interest to do so.” So instead of seeking the answer to aggression in the depths of man, Graeber asks us to examine the social dynamics which tend to produce violence, or “how we have come to create institutions that encourage such [cruel] behavior and that suggest cruel people are in some ways admirable” (Graeber 2015). Graeber posits that bullying represents an elementary structure of human domination and that many of our institutional arrangements serve as techniques designed to create a certain sort of cold-blooded, calculating adult male authority where cruel domination is to become the everyday form of organization. Indeed, the schoolyard, which
may be the epitome of the bullying arena, is arranged in a way to strengthen
the school’s institutional authority and the bullying taking place there is part
of the experience of a subject being schooled into painful submission. Bul-lying is a refraction of the school’s authority, and as Graeber points out, it is
dependent on stifling the most natural instinct when a child is encountering
violence: “children in school can’t leave.”

Yet the schoolyard also exhibits a key component in the art of domi-
nation and successful humiliation: the entertainment and reproduction of
a complicit audience. They are there not only to tacitly support the bully,
but also make sure the victim experiences a situation where the victim feels
“she got what she deserved.” Indeed, “bullies do not, in fact, suffer from low
self-esteem, as psychologists so often have repeated, no, instead “most bullies
act like self-satisfied little pricks not because they are tortured by self-doubt,
but because they actually are self-satisfied little pricks.” The bully is an en-
tertainer of domination, and the audience comes to watch a moral drama
evolve, where whatever the victim does to defend herself, becomes an excuse
for what Graeber calls the deep structure of bullying, where “bullying cre-
ates a moral drama in which the manner of the victim’s reaction to an act of aggression can be used as retrospective justification for the original act of aggression itself.” (Graeber 2015) The bully makes the situation appear as if both are to blame, which tacitly consents the aggression of the bully and becomes a way to blame the victim.

Fashion provides a perfect alibi for the bully, as the perception of fashion being frivolous rejects any serious analysis of its use in deep structure violence. The ironic tone of the bully also veils the violence, just like the “shallowness” of fashion acts as an excuse to also helpfully “correct” the style of the victim (von Busch & Bjereld 2016). Using a tone that is still open to challenge, they make it look like a game, as they are amusing both themselves and their audience. Bullying and shaming is a game, yet the bully, by his very power and his skillful use of the context, is always both rule-maker and rule-breaker. Bullying is entertaining, and the participants often think it is “fun,” just look at the cheerful glee happening across social media platforms as the chase for the scapegoat sets in. This dynamic of entertainment also makes it harder for the intervener to stop, as this person has to use words responsibly and makes the words count. The bully will ridicule any intervention, and question their sincerity. His strategy is to appear flimsy and spontaneous, even when methodic and structured, an ironic form of domination and humiliation always leaves the door open for bully to retreat if the plan backfires. The bully never seeks to persuade, but to intimidate and discredit any resistance. If the bully is somehow overpowered there is no victory, only the vacuum of a temporary withdrawal, leaving the audience hungry for the entertainment to start over.

With social media, the bullying has moved into a realm where the audience is ever present but stays anonymous, triggering a dynamic where the bullying becomes quantifiable and gameified. Online, “violence and chaos and aggressive wording is what people are attracted to.” (McCoy 2016) The first call is the signal, the supporting comments, “likes” and feeding hate is fanning the flames. No reasonable comment can stop it. It is up to the victim to defend herself: otherwise she stands guilt as accused. As Oscar Wilde famously said in his essay “The Critic as Artist”; “give a man a mask and he will tell you the truth.” (Wilde 2002) Anonymity is a currency of hate online, but people will still say anything on Facebook; for every courageous audience member who withdraws, more will join as they hear the cheers from the crowd. Online, self-esteem is counted on “likes” and “retweets,” the numbers are cash in the attention economy and a great play is a jackpot. And anyway, nobody likes a loner, the embodiment of a “loser.”

Not only style, but communication is now a competition. The statistics rate the popularity of your behavior. The dynamic keeps feeding itself in a vicious and endless feedback loop: under the reign of social media, you
are never cooler than your last posting. And the reward is always better when playing an aggressive hand. Like it or not, this is the measure of your self-worth.

The connection between aggression and fear is more apparent if we take to examine fear in relation to hate, and we may examine some of the mechanism that produce such a high intensity of animosity. To Sternberg and Sternberg (2008), hate, like love, can be characterized by a triangular structure. In love, the three components are intimacy, passion, and commitment, which correspond to the triangular structure of hate: negation of intimacy, passion, and commitment (2008: 53ff). Just like love, hate is originating in the stories we tell others, as well as ourselves, of love and hate. And similarly, intimacy is no requirement for love, and hate is no requirement for violence.

As the Sternbergs have it, the negation of intimacy is a crucial component of the distancing from another, to project disgust and repulsion, devaluing the victim in order to produce disengagement from the other. (2008: 59ff) The second component is the mobilization of passions, of anger and fear, meaning both projecting aversion towards the other as well as painting the other as a threat, either physically towards something one holds dear, or as a form of “pollution.” The third part, commitment, is the continuous contempt of the victim, viewing the target as barely human, and

Figure: Sternberg & Sternberg’s model of hate
mobilizing a supporting community or corresponding stories to support the contempt over time and through continuous action and perpetuation of stereotypes.

Hate is a strong emotion and propels intense actions, and even if there are examples of fashion propelling hate-crimes, yet also the everyday fear of fashion may be understood from low-intensity hate. The Sternbergs suggests a taxonomy of several levels of hate (2008: 73ff). In this taxonomy, each component of hate has different “temperature,” from the cool hate of disgust (negation of intimacy), a hot hate (passionate), a simmering hate (disgust + commitment), to a burning hate mobilizing all components into a deadly intensity.

A model of hate that connects passion and commitment also resonates with what we usually think of as key features of keen fashion consumers, “a passion for fashion,” but it also points towards how the zero-sum game of positions spill into more extensive rivalry with more serious consequences. We must recognize that the social pain of exclusion takes a heavy toll on victims, a physical suffering we usually connect to much more severe violence than mere rejection: suicide. Whereas physical pain does not stay long in memory, social pain etches itself into our emotions and sense of self-worth, and we are stuck with it the rest of our lives. As a 1999 study in Finland exposed, those who had been bullied at age eight were more than six times as likely to have taken their own lives by the age of twenty-five (Lieberman 2013: 69).

What Sternbergs’ taxonomy may help reveal is how antagonism also in the realm of fashion is mobilized through a dynamic between different components; from the distancing of the other (“not my style”), with a passionate response (“such bad taste!”) and needs a commitment over time, often stereotyping the other (“Emos are such losers”). The pain is real, and if in doubt, always blame the victim.

**Dynamic Death Rays**

Perhaps it is possible to think of fashion both as a drive towards life as well as death. Using the terminology of Freud, we could say fashion seems to be a merger of Eros and Thanatos (Freud 1922). It propels us to seek the pleasures of life, seduction and arousal, but simultaneously also contains a deadly necessity of the passing seasons as well as social stratification. It is as if the very metabolism of fashion amplifies a vast range of desires and pleasures, but also fears and forms of violence. This also suggests a problem of non-violence or sustainability within fashion: can fashion be nonviolent and still signify difference and produce powerful affects, and similarly, if we keep the
same clothes longer, keeping them on life-support, do we also reduce the suggestive dynamics which makes fashion so lively? Perhaps it is the metabolism between life and death, being and nothingness, that makes fashion into fashion in the first place. Philosopher Hans Jonas suggests that,

Metabolism is a continued reclaiming of life, ever reasserting the value of being against its lapse into nothingness. The possibility of death is the burden with which life struggles, yet death's necessity is life's blessing, for without it we go on as strangers in the world. (Jonas 1992: 34)

Immortality would limit the possibilities of acting morally, as the very threat of death and nothingness would disappear. There would be no fear of loss or death.

If we think of fashion as chains of imitation, that we are all connected through our social networks and consciously and (mainly) unconsciously imitate and mime the behaviors and desires of our peers, perhaps these repetitions, that Gabriel Tarde called “rays of imitation,” are also death rays. As Tarde suggests, we “tend to follow (and imitate) those we love, those in whom we put faith and hope, and those whom we idolize and take glory in their fame as much as those whom we fear.” (Trade 1903: 202)

So the different dynamic of fear we have examined above must not be seen in isolation, nor as distinct from fashion, but as essential parts of the very metabolism of fashion. The passing seasons and heroic deeds of the fashion heroes, the ritualistic “drop” of the new collection and its mimetics and exclusivity, the rejections and fears, and final sacrifice of the sales, all point towards the inevitable “death of fashion.” (Gruendl 2007) Yet in its molecular virality, this is not a process orchestrated from above, but all enacted horizontally, between peers, through what Sampson calls the “unconscious topologies of social relations.” (Sampson 2012: 6) Building on Sampson's argument, we could imagine fashion being a viral form of biopower, aesthetic competition boosted by cultural amplification, and

eexercised through the exploitation of the entire valence of human emotion—not just through fear, panic, terror, and fright but via the positive affects that spread through a population when it encounters, for instance, the intoxication of hope, belief, joy, and even love. (Sampson 2012: 5)

Fads and fashions carry the fear and violence as symbiotic passengers across the social waves. As we are struck by the affect and energy of the new, the life-affirming energy of social status, we also are drawn onto the death rays. You're only as good as your last collection, fashion designer John Galliano has famously argued, which perhaps reveals the pressure of the death ray as a significant part of fashion itself.
Signification of Fear

So how does fear come to reflect onto the everyday life of fashion? Some garments are by their references part of producing anxiety and fear. The mask of murderers in horror movies may be an explicit example, and an accessory popular in Halloween costumes. But also everyday wear may be part of such communicative games of posturing, the threat of potential violence as much as actual violence (von Busch 2015). This relates to how our experience of physical pain triggers the same neural circuitry as that of social pain (Lieberman 2013). Just like we are afraid and avoid physical pain, we take great precaution to avoid social pain, the pain that cuts through social connections, of being abandoned or dumped, or being publicly humiliated. Just like many of us get anxious speaking in public, we in a similar way get anxious to be awkwardly dressed in public.

Some kinds of outfits are programmed through events and media to act provocations or signifiers of violence and fear, yet these connotations shift over time. A garment that primarily represented a professional group, like aviator glasses or motorcycle jackets, becomes a symbol for a certain attitude, which over time loses its signification. An example may be the shift of connotations of the bomber jacket which moved from being connotated across British subcultures to become associated with skinhead and white power, most often matched with jeans and combat boots or Dr Martens. However, the bomber became domesticated and over the last decade moved to become everyday wear in many shapes and prints, from the cute pink and flower-printed version to the classic green or black, yet somehow dropping its violent history.

On the other hand, everyday wear can move the opposite direction. An example of this can be the embrace of New Balance sneakers amongst neo-nazis and alt-rights in the US after the election of Trump as president. As the New Balance leadership celebrated the scrapping of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement in November 2016, a move which supported New Balance’s production in the US, consumers interpreted it as a direct support of some of president-elect Donald Trump’s highly hostile rhetoric. Opponents of Trump quickly turned on New Balance to accuse the company of formally endorsing not just the scrapping of TPP, but the entire platform of Trump and his supporters. Overnight, videos appeared online of people burning their New Balance sneakers. As a counter-move, neo-Nazi blogger Andrew Anglin came out on his popular website the Daily Stormer (named after the Nazi newspaper “Der Stürmer”) to declare New Balance the “Official Shoes of White People […] Their brave act has just made them the official brand of the Trump Revolution.” New Balance sneakers turned to become, in Anglin’s words, “a gesture to support White people and to support US manufacturing.” (Mettler 2016)
In such times, will it better if we start wearing yet another form of activist clothing, from the Che Guevara t-shirt, a hoodie or a safety-pin signifying some abstract solidarity with this-or-that group or cause? Perhaps its symbolic gesture makes you a friend or two, or an enemy. On a similar note, the trick may neither be to deal with your breathing (a classic to deal with anxiety), but the essential part must be to start addressing the social dynamics that build fear and heightens anxiety.

Perhaps a greater strategy must be to change the culture of fear in fashion, to intervene into competitive and hostile dynamics that are propelled by fashion. In the larger scheme of things, we will need to tune fashion towards acknowledgement of others and a sense of gratefulness. In the most simple sense we can compare fashion to the anxiety of speaking in public, how we need to support the shy speaker with extra care, and also shift the way we show appreciation for how fashion allows those with bad self-esteem the opportunity to communicate with people in our shared surrounding. Perhaps this may sound quite absurd in the realm of fashion, thus glorious phenomenon of anxious uniformity. But a central issue for fashion may be to highlight how it, at its best, is a special sensibility for social relations. We cannot let it work as a tool for humiliation and domination, but we must care for it as a genuine form of mutual attention.


Fiske, Alan Page & Tage Shakti Rai (2014) Virtuous violence: hurting and killing to create, sustain, end, and honor social relationships, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press


Freud, Sigmund (1922) Beyond the pleasure principle. International Psycho-Analytical Press


Fashion is always mimetic, a desire conditioned by competition, fear, exclusion and violence.

This book examines fashion as a phenomenon driven by fear as much as desire. It presents a collection of cases written during the course “Critical Fashion and Social Justice” at Parsons School of Design, which investigate the dynamics that propels aesthetic competition, anxiety, and bullying.

edited by Otto von Busch