THE FASHION RUNWAY THROUGH A CRITICAL RACE THEORY LENS

A thesis submitted to the College of the Arts of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

by

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March, 2016
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I will extend a thank you to my Thesis Committee which consists of Dr. Tameka Ellington, Dr. Kim Hahn, and Dr. Amoba Gooden, for their guidance and support throughout this whole process. I would also like to thank George and Hope Adodo for teaching me about the importance of education and giving me the courage to reach for the stars. Thank you to my siblings: George and Vivian Adodo, CJ and Crystal Oramadike, Blessing Adodo and Faith Adodo. Thanks to the Ike family for your love and prayers all the way from Nigeria. I would like to send a huge thanks to Faith Jibuike who challenged me when things were difficult, and encouraged me when I needed it the most. Lastly I would like to thank Jesus Christ for the greatest gift of salvation, and for the grace that led me to Kent State University for this amazing journey.
CHAPTER I

I. INTRODUCTION

The Fashion Show

Fashion trends change from one season to the next, and each season begins with coverage of the most anticipated fashion shows of the season. The coveted front row seats of many fashion shows are occupied by industry insiders, company representatives, bloggers, social-media leaders and celebrities. For most fashion designers, these shows are an opportunity to both present new collections to buyers as well as to all the media outlets. These designers also hope that their creations are featured on the covers of popular fashion publications as well as in editorials internationally (Mau, 2014). Most fashion shows have not always been as accessible to the public as they are now and the improvements on the availability of fashion shows can be attributed to advances in technology that have ultimately amplified the voice of the consumer.

While most fashion shows take place in various locations and different cities, technology has created an avenue for the customer to view new collections and experience exactly what happens in real-time during a fashion show (Indvik, 2014). Millions of dollars are spent creating the perfect backdrop and countless hours of preparation are needed in order to execute runway shows year after year. Designers also use this opportunity to reach beyond their current audience in hopes of attracting new consumers. The fashion runway gives the audience information that pertains to the direction a fashion house is heading towards based on the garments shown within a season. While fashions are still revealed to the world through magazine advertisements, catalogs and television commercials, the runway has been an arena where designers are free to express themselves with little to no interference.

Definition of terms
The definitions for this study include the following terms: *Mercedes-Benz's New York Fashion Week* (NYFW) is New York City’s largest media event and it draws millions of viewers’ from all over the world. Home to top influential designers and the next generation of emerging design talent; Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week creates regional and global platforms for brands to take their businesses to the next level (IMG, 2015). NYFW is not only New York City’s largest media event, it’s also a 7-9 day event that features fashion shows from new designers and veterans, while creating opportunities for designers to connect with the industry (IMG, 2015). NYFW has been declared the industry’s biggest focus for fashion designers, models, and everyone that has a hand in these elaborate shows. Models are selected, styled, and dressed according to a particular theme and aesthetic based on the vision the designer has. The designer uses personal inspiration and color trends to produce unique fashion shows.

A *Critical Race Theory lens* (CRTL) was used to evaluate each fashion show with the intention of focusing on the models of color that walked down the runway. CRTL is a lens or way of knowing extending from Critical Race Theory (CRT) which is based on the belief that racism is so institutionalized that it looks “normal” in the mainstream. This study takes a detailed look at the fashion runway in order to focus on the fashion runway of American designers. For the purpose of this research, the researcher references NYFW to focus on the fashion runway in terms of the race of each model and the patterns that may show up based on season and race of the fashion designer.

The term models of color (MOC) refer to the models of color that are categorized as Black, Asian, or Latino. These models are defined as models of color based on the physical characteristics that they have. These physical characteristics include skin tone, facial features, and hair texture. The label Black model refers to the models that fall into the African or African-
American category. The term White refers to the models that are categorized as being of
European descent and the term Latino refers to the MOC that are categorized as being Latino,
Hispanic, or South American. The runway is the fashion runway that models walk on during
fashion shows, and consist of a space, stage, or location with specific markers for models to
follow. The fall season refers to the runway shows that happen during NYFW during the month
of February, and the spring season shows occur in the month of September.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this content analysis study is to explore the diversity of runway models in
the fashion industry at NYFW. By examining the runways of designers of color and White
designers, solutions can be put in place to create more job opportunities for MOC. The outcomes
of this study can further diversify the runway in regards to race during NYFW and provide
opportunities for the fashion industry to create a more realistic reflection of the society that
purchases these fashions.

**Research Questions**

The questions that guided the study are: (1) how is race featured on the runway by
White designers vs. non-white designers in regard to ethnicity of the female models selected?
And (2) has there been an increase in non-white model representation and if so, how are they
featured? The aim of this study is to apply a critical race theory lens when evaluating the model
selection in attempts to analyze the level of diversity on the runway. The data collected will
answer both research questions and reveal themes that are found among the MOC.

**Statement of the Problem**

It is rare to see MOC on the covers of fashion magazines or in fashion advertisements.
There has also been an issue with the case of the “paint chip” idea that explains that certain
models can be reduced to a color alone, and this color may work better with a certain season than
others (Bozzone, 2015). The results of the "paint chip" idea is that MOC continue to be placed in the same garments and colors which limit the model's ability to work during certain seasons. The notion that race can be pulled to the forefront and moved to the background for certain themes and ideas within fashion have created an environment where race and ethnicity exists only to the benefit of the designer and the collection. The commodification of race benefits the designer monetarily, and leaders within the industry continue to appropriate while MOC are seen as items for gain instead of equal to White models.
CHAPTER II

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Black Model’s Impact

Venue, production, and models are only a portion of the categories that companies budget for when it comes to a fashion show at NYFW (Mau, 2014). While the budget varies from designer to designer, most designers share a common necessity: Models. Runway models are the individuals that wear the garments or pieces from a collection down the fashion runway.

According to a few designers and agents, models are usually picked because they are “blank slates” suitable to be built into a look that works with a designer’s clothing (Holland, 2008). Despite the term, the truth of the matter is that just as all humans are made up of much subjectivity, these models and their subjectivities are as important as the fashions that they are displaying. In the 1970’s American fashion designers struggled to gain respect in the fashion world, and be considered an influence in worldwide styles or trends. France had been seen as the fashion capital of the world, and many looked to the trends that originated there for inspiration. French Designers like Givenchy and Pierre Cardin were known for having the most sought-after pieces of the time, and many Americans bought knock-offs of these garments that were produced by American retailers (Givhan, 2015). Fashion journalist and Pulitzer prize-winning writer Robin Givhan recounts the history of the night American designers gained respect worldwide in her book The Battle of Versailles, that explains how unique fashions and highlighting diversity on the runway had a positive effect on the American fashion industry.
On November 28, 1973 five American fashion designers competed against five of the top French designers in a fashion show that was held in Paris (Givhan, 2015). The American Team: Bill Blass, Oscar De la Renta, Anne Klein, Stephen Burrows, and Halston went up against the French: Pierre Cardin, Emanuel Ungaro, Marc Bohan of Christian Dior, and Yves Saint Laurent. While the competition was suspected to be a landslide in France’s favor, America’s combination of style, attitude and display of models made the night unforgettable in fashion history. The aspect that created a spectacle that night in the American’s favor, was the fact that out of 36 models, ten were African-American. The diversity of the models was said to have enhanced the show because the boldness of the African-American models enthralled the French audience (Givhan, 2015). Models were not separated from their race when the show was planned; there was an awareness of race and the positive contribution it made to the success of the fashion show.

Figure 1 Battle of Versailles fashion show
Today fashion designers still have a preference for a certain model, and while most state that race does not have an impact on their choice, undeniably the models that walk the majority of NYFW continue to be majority white (Sauers, 2013). This lack of diversity causes economic implications for the women wanting to pursue a career in modeling. It also suggest/displays within media the lack of value in models outside of the majority. These media representations trickle-down into the communities of consumers and leaves an impression of what “beauty” is supposed to look like. By not featuring women of color, it implies that beauty is exclusive to White models.

**Model Selection and Preference**

Within fashion, there is an expected amount of judgment that will be passed on clothing but at times it goes deeper than the external layer of fashion. Givhan agrees that fashion judges “your weight, your hair and your clothes, but it judges everyone…” (2015, 3).” Knowing that there is an allowance for the judgments; many designers face no questions about the “why” behind their collections, music selections, lighting and models. Even a set backdrop adds to the character of the collection and is rarely questioned. Casting directors work closely with designers in order to ensure that the right models are selected for the runway show (Wilson, 2013). Most models are selected through agencies that have worked tirelessly to groom their fashion hopefuls into models that line up with the designer’s taste. Most casting agents recruit for models that can be groomed to fit into various looks.

For example, terms such as “heroin chic” and “grunge” were used to describe a certain look that scouts had in mind while looking for potential models during the 1990’s (Entwistle, The aesthetic economy, 2002). This can vary from the many categories within fashion and also from what most designers have selected in the past. From the perspective of someone who works in the fashion industry, models may be sought after based on their appearance and how
well they fit into certain ideals deemed fashionable at the time. Models who do not fit into this trend will most likely not be selected to walk the fashion runway. Across the globe, fashion models have graced the cover of magazines, been featured in ad campaigns, and have walked countless runways for years. Once these models hit the runway, they are transformed into blank canvases that can be painted upon. However, in reality models are human beings that are made up of many subjectivities, and do not come exactly blank. The ethnicities of the models are visual markers that cannot be separated from the overall concept that the designer wishes to portray.

*Fashion Models and Hegemony*

Fashion can be identified by individuals within a certain culture or social group, and then interpretations can be made by those who consider themselves a part of the clothing portrayed. This can happen regardless of gender, age group, class, and more (Barnard, 2014). Non-verbal communication through clothing can be described by the semiotic or ‘structuralist’ models that are defined by Malcolm Barnard in *Fashion Theory: An Introduction*, which explain the non-verbal communications through clothing due the belief of fashion as signs. Hegemony exists in societies all around the world and differs from country to country. Hegemony is defined in full detail by Susan Kaiser (2012) in *Fashion and Cultural Studies*, stating that hegemony within a given society can promote interests that have nothing to do with the general public, yet they still dominate. This means that while a society may be made up of individuals of color, there still might be White models used to advertise items within the media.

The “Ford Supermodel of the world” competition has been around for 30 years, and each year a supermodel wins a $250,000 contract with Ford Models along with other prizes (Lui, 2008). A competition that represent the supermodel of the world should definitely take into account all of the diverse women that make up the many countries of the world. But it was in
2008 that the first Asian winner, Hyoni won the competition and shocked the world. China is known as one of the most populous countries on the world with 1,333 million people and in relation to representing the world, it’s surprising that the first Asian supermodel that was chosen as a winner happened long after the competition was created (Population Reference Bureau, 2008). Many countries have started to take a look at who they have been choosing to represent their consumer, and why. The notion that a type of model represents fashion within a location has been challenged by few companies. But where does all the decision making happen? While the responsibility is still in question, some parts of the world are taking steps to ensure that the population can recognize themselves in the media aimed at their wallet. Shanghai Tang, a luxury clothing company inspired by traditional Chinese culture had made the decision in the past to keep the balance between Asian models and Caucasian models, but recently creative director Ooi made the decision to use mainly Asian models, she states, “Asian women’s confidence has risen astronomically in the last 10 years…We’re looking at a huge cultural shift” (Lui, 2008). In this case, there was a realization that the general public couldn’t really see themselves being represented in the fashions that they purchase and wear. By questioning the certain hegemonies put into place in fashion and on the runway, there can be changes towards a more realistic representation of people in all areas of the world.

Colorism and Fashion

Diversity on the runway is a topic that is discussed in various forms from time to time within the fashion industry, but the treatment of MOC based on skin tone is also a topic that is drawing attention within the fashion industry. Terms like “light-skinned” and “dark-skinned” reveal stereotypes of individuals that are perpetuated within different racial groups. Magazine covers and ads continue to lighten the skin, referred to as “white-washing”, of actresses and celebrities to create a more “beautiful” appearance that promotes the belief that the individual
wasn’t perfect enough in their true hue (Phoenix, 2016). The selection of MOC are a positive step in the right direction for the fashion industry, but upon further review there are still certain tones of skin color that are labeled as better than the darkest shade.

The 2015 Victoria’s Secret show included Leomie Anderson, one of the eight Black models that walked the runway out of a 44 girl line-up. While this number was an improvement for the Victoria’s Secret runway, Anderson shared her ideas about colorism: “I definitely feel that there has been a lot of improvement in the industry with [the] use of Black models, but I would definitely say that it has a long way to go especially with regards to shade (Avila, 2015).” The idea of lighter skinned models being more popular on the fashion runway usually leaves darker models being rejected for many runway jobs due to discrimination. In order for the designers to present a variety of skin tones on their fashion runways, diversity must be explored much deeper than just a percentage or a headcount of the total number of models shown.

**Visual Markers based on Race during Fashion Shows**

On the runway, models have sometimes dressed or styled in garments that may have limited their participation within a cohesive collection based on their race. The spring-summer 2011 Lanvin show featured beautiful pieces designed by the very talented Alber Elbaz. His runway show was a display of flowing dresses, elaborate pieces of jewelry and plenty of color-blocking. The moment in his show that garnered the most attention was the finale. A group of five Black models closed the show all walking very closely together, and wearing similar prints that seems to be set apart from the rest of the cohesive designs that had been shown earlier (see Figure 2). When Elbaz was questioned about his finale and why he had five African-American models close the show, he responded to Givhan by saying “I was trained by Geoffrey Beene and Yves Saint Laurent, they both worked with African girls, Black girls. Not because it was a political statement, but because they were beautiful girls” (Givhan, 2011).
But Givhan thinks otherwise, she stated “In short, Elbaz’s decision had nothing to do with race. And yet, it had everything to do with it.” Andre Leon Talley had a different take on the finale. “As soon as you put five girls together as a group—African-American or Asian—it does make a statement: a political statement. We’re supposed to be living in a post racial, nonracial world. We’re just not there” (Rho, 2011). It surprised Givhan to see Jourdan Dunn walking the runway in a 2008 show because Dunn was the first Black model in a Prada show for the first time in more than a decade (Givhan, 2011). The hegemonic ideals on the runway continue because race is rarely addressed among reviews of these fashion shows. While Elbaz was giving an answer to many for his choice of models and how he organized them, he was looking from a fashion perspective. His decisions were solely based on his personal aesthetics.
and how he wanted to present a group of prints that he felt matched nothing else in his collection (Givhan, Why fashion keeps trippin over race, 2011).

“According to Elbaz, the decision was purely aesthetic—a solution to a creative conundrum. He adored the prints but knew they posed a jarring juxtaposition with the rest of the collection. A more disciplined designer, he said, would simply have edited them out. So, in his search for a way to display them that would make sense, he hit upon the idea of using the Black models. They would form a visual addendum to the main collection. They would be separate. But equal” (Givhan, 2011, p. 68).

The reactions from Elbaz, Talley, and Givhan reveal that there are differences about the appropriate way to feature MOC on the runway.

*Model of Color Report*

Many groups and individuals use social media and blogs to speak out against the lack of diversity during NYFW shows in order to raise awareness. Jezebel.com is a site that provides the public with exact numbers of MOC who walked during NYFW. Their site distributes a MOC report that lists each model of color that walked in the shows for each season (Sauers, 2013). The report includes the designers that presented a runway show that utilized MOC that season, and the designers that did not have any MOC. Not only is the progress of diversity charted, but the brands that did not make progress towards a more diverse runway are presented
to the public.

**Figure 3 Racial diversity NYFW**

![Racial Diversity Among New York Fashion Week Models Since 2008](image1)

**Models of Color at New York Fashion Week**

*Fall-Winter 2013 Season*

- **White Models**: 82.7%
- **Asian Models**: 9.1%
- **Black Models**: 6%
- **Latina Models**: 2%
- **Other**: 0.3%

*Figure 4 Models of color*

This process revealed what was taking place season after season across the whole spectrum of Fall-Winter Fashion week in New York. “…we do this census every season because
we believe it's helpful to put anecdote and reportage in the context of actual numbers. If we acknowledge that the overwhelming whiteness of fashion's imagery is a problem, then trying to measure that problem can be the first step towards solving it” (Sauers, 2013).

A Demand for Diversity on the Runway: via Social Media

Social media has been used as a way to publicly hold individuals accountable within a variety of arenas. Social media is a huge platform for individuals to recruit members of their cause and inform the masses about their concerns. The more fashion bloggers, activists, and journalists that attend these fashion shows can spread information about the fashion runway to consumers all over the world.

Bethann Hardinson, a former model, has worked the Diversity Coalition to question the lack of Black models on the fashion runway. The Diversity Coalition helps bring awareness to the lack of diversity in the fashion industry by exposing racism that takes place on the fashion runway. Hardinson’s aim is to bring awareness to the fact that the number of Black models on the runway are decreasing since the late 90’s (Sauers, 2013). Iman who is an African model, has stated that social media is where many of these companies can be effectively confronted. “It feels to me like the times need a real hard line drawn like in the 1960s, by saying if you don’t use Black models, then we boycott,” Iman said. “If you engage the social media, trust me, it will hurt them in their pockets (Wilson, 2013)”. By boycotting brands, designers will be forced to pay attention to the impact that their choices have on their consumers

Hardinson was the recipient of the 2014 CFDA Founder’s Award due to her successful campaigns aimed at promoting diversity on the runway. This process revealed what was taking place season after season across the whole spectrum of Fall-Winter Fashion week in New York. “…we do this census every season because we believe it's helpful to put anecdote and reportage in the context of actual numbers. If we acknowledge that the overwhelming whiteness of
fashion's imagery is a problem, then trying to measure that problem can be the first step towards solving it” (Sauers, 2013). Hardison has seen firsthand the treatment of MOC within the fashion industry while she modeled for various designers over the years.

**Theoretical Framework**

*Critical Race Theory*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged “…as a critical response to the ‘problem of the color line’, informing it with transformative politics, first in the area of legal studies and soon thereafter permeating and invigorating the margins of other fields including sociology, justice studies, and education” (Treviño, Harris, & Wallace, 2008). All Critical Race Theorists have a common objective: to see the law as a way to enforce racial equality (Brown, 2003). Since CRT was presented as a means of identifying the issues, it can contribute to formulating solutions in many different areas. Within the legal arena, two methodologies are used to bring about the main goal of CRT, “(1) whether the rule of law or legal doctrine, practice, or custom subordinates important interest and concerns of racial minorities, and (2) if so, how is this problem best remedied? The subordination question seeks to deconstruct the existing legal order to reveal the ways in which it invalidates or handicaps the claims of people of color (Brown, 2003).” Although CRT began in law, it has found its way into other disciplines and has provided many with the tools to promote equality. In 1994, CRT was first used as an analytical framework to assess inequity in education (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). The article explored the challenges that children who were minorities’ faced in educational systems. The use of CRT focused on the challenges of only the children of color so that specific solutions could be applied to the existing educational system. Adrienne D. Dixson’s (2007) ‘What is critical race theory in education’ also touched on the education system and race and her belief is that desegregation efforts benefited White students more than students of color and communities of color.
Dixson acknowledged that racism is permanent in American public schooling, and revealed that high quality education intersects with race and property rights (Whiteness as property).

In 2009, Urban Review published an article with a CRT focus entitled Smiling Faces and Colored Spaces: The Experiences of Faculty of Color Pursuing tenure in the Academy, which discussed the hardships that faculty face while pursuing tenure and the barriers to retaining faculty of color within primarily White institutions (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009). The article focused on the numbers of minorities that made up full time faculty members in the United States and concluded that only 12.9% of faculty members in the US were Asian-American, African-American, Hispanic and American Indian (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009).

The four basic tenets of CRT include: (1) the fact that racism is so institutionalized that it looks ‘‘normal’’ in the mainstream. (2) The regulatory ideal of rules and laws are constructed as colorblind and thus are best suited only to handle racism that appears to be extreme. This belief considers that certain cases, including segregation were not primarily based on the motive to help African-Americans receive a proper education. (3) Race is a man-made social construct that White elites use to their advantage, for example, slavery and lynching, the trail of tears, and relocation of groups of people because of their race. (4) Storytelling is a component that allows experiences of individuals within certain races to express their views to people who might not have similar experiences in their racial category (Delgado & Stefmac, 2000).
This study will apply a CRTL (see Figure 5) to the fashion runway to not only evaluate race, but also to view various themes and patterns that may exist among the MOC. The foundation of CRT is based on the examination of the marginalization of individuals of color. A CRTL will be applied to the fashion runway in a similar fashion. A CRTL will allow the researcher to view how MOC are positioned within a fashion setting in comparison to the White models that walk the same runway show.
CHAPTER III
III. METHODOLOGY

Sample

For this study, a qualitative deductive content analysis method was employed to record race on the runway shows of 10 different American designers between fall 2011 and spring 2015. The data results are comprised of 100 runway shows. The designers were chosen based on their popularity, the fact that they were an American, as well as the category of race that each designer fit into. In order to create a study that was diverse in race and gender, these designers were selected so that there could be a spectrum of results collected from the fashion shows. This study will be focused on exploring diversity on the fashion runway during NYFW as well as displaying in which capacity race is displayed.

Figure 6 Designers selected for the study

Research Design

In order to create a study that focused on ready-to-wear fashions that have shown from 2011 to 2015, each designer must have met the criteria for the study, which includes showing
consistently at NYFW for fall and spring (see figure 6). The five White designers selected for this study were Calvin Klein, Diane Von Furstenberg, Donna Karen, Badgley Mischka and Zac Posen. The five Non-white designers selected for this study were Tracy Reese, Carolina Herrera, Alexander Wang, Anna Sui, and Narciso Rodriguez. This study evaluated the relationship of the race of the designer and the MOC shown on the runway. This study also explored possible relationships between season and diversity on the runway as well as the ways race may affect the runway show as a whole. Additional themes which may emerge will be based observations made during the study.

Data Analysis

Content Analysis

Coding Data

This content analysis was completed by live coding, which focused on recording the race of each model of color while watching each fashion show. While viewing the fashion show, the researcher focused on the total number of female models within the show and calculated the percentage of MOC after placing each model in their respective category (see Figure 7). The fashion shows that were viewed for this study were available on the websites of the designers selected for the study as well as YouTube channels, making the information secondary data. The specific audience for each show included fashion industry leaders, consumers, and the general public of all ages. There were four categories within the coding frame for the study and each model fit into one of the following categories: (1) White, (2) Back, (3) Asian, and (4) Latino.

Models of color and the fashion show line up

Fashion shows are segmented into various part based on the direction of the designer. The first model to walk the runway during a season is usually a model that is considered a
favorite of the designer and may even be the muse of the collection. This coveted opening and closing spots of a fashion show are filled by designers “and they usually go to the biggest model or models in the show” (Mannin, 2014). The close of a fashion show is also a time where the designers tries to attract the audience one last time. Designers create a story with their collections and these models are handpicked according to the vision a designer has. The finale of each fashion show will be analyzed separately from the full collection in order to present how MOC are used in the sections that are considered focal points of a fashion show.

The themes that were selected before the data collection process include: (1) Types of clothing (TC) worn by the MOC during fall and spring (2) First-Face Opening (FFO) will be used to record the number of MOC that open a designer’s runway show (3) Last Face/Finale (LFF) will represent the category that shows if a model of color closed a runway show during the specific season (4) Grouped/Non Grouped (G/NG) will be a category that displays whether or not MOC were grouped in during the final runway walk. The findings of the study will be displayed on two separate charts that will display two sets of data (see Figure 7 and Figure 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White Designers</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<td>Badgley Mischka</td>
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<td>Narciso Rodriguez</td>
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Figure 7 Models of color percentages chart

The chart shown in figure 7 will display the percentage of non-white models that have walked the runways of the fashion brands selected. The chart shown in figure 8 is where the information gathered from the opening and closing of each show will be recorded. After the initial viewing of the fashion shows, the fashion shows were watched 2-6 times in order to confirm that the data gathered was correct. Further research was conducted if identifying the model proved to be a challenge. The fashion shows selected for this study were covered on Vogue’s website and many of the models are listed by name. Researching the model by name revealed the race of the model and any model’s race that is not divulged during the research was hypothesized based on skin color and physical characteristics.

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<tr>
<th>White Designers</th>
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<td>5 Anna Sui</td>
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*Note: TC = Types of Clothing ML = Model Line-up GN = Grouped or Non-grouped

Figure 8 Capacity of Models of Color Chart
CHAPTER IV
IV. RESULTS

Models of Color

(1) How is race featured on the runway by White designers vs. non-white designers in regard to ethnicity of the female models selected?

Of the American Designers that were selected for this study, the designer with the highest percentage of MOC on the runway for the fall and spring seasons was Tracy Reese. Tracy Reese presented collections with the most MOC on the runway with 51% of MOC during fall 2011, 50% during fall 2012, 29% during fall 2013, 55% during fall 2014 and 55% during fall 2015. Tracy Reese also had the overall highest percentage during the spring seasons as well with 49% in 2011, 49% in 2012, 56% in 2013, 55% in 2014 and 63% in 2015. Concerning diversity, Tracy Reese’s number of MOC were greater than or equal to the number of White models each year. There were other designers that presented diverse runways, but no percentage was as high as Tracy Reese. From 2011 to 2015, The designers MOC percentages within the white category (see Figure 11) with the highest percentage was Zac Posen with 24% in fall 2011, 29% in fall 2012, 27% in fall 2013, 44% in fall 2014, and 67% in fall 2015. His spring percentages (see Figure 10) were 31% in 2011, 29% in 2012, 35% in 2013, 32 in 2014 and 50% in 2015. (5) Calvin Klein had the overall lowest percentages in both seasons with his fall percentages at 5% in 2011, 13% in 2012, 0% in 2013, 7% in 2014 and 8% in 2015. His spring percentages were 3% in 2011, 3% in 2012, 0% in 2013, 11% in 2014 and 11% in 2015.

Percentages of models of color

The percentage of models on the runway differed from the fall and spring seasons as well. During the fall season there were lower numbers of models on the runway for the majority
of the designers than the spring season. This concludes that more MOC are on the runway during the spring seasons for the designers selected for this study.

**Figure 9** White designers’ fall percentages

**Figure 10** Non-white designers’ fall percentages
Figure 11 White designers’ spring percentages

Figure 12 Non-white designer’s spring percentages

Patterns and Themes Present
(2) Has there been an increase in non-white model representation and if so, how are they featured?

While there has been an overall increase in the non-white model representation, the themes present revealed how MOC are presented on the runways of the designers selected for this study. Themes that emerged in the data included: (1) Darker colors on MOC, (2) Lighter colors on MOC with lighter skin tones, (3) Hair and Makeup differences among MOC, (4) missing accessories for MOC and (5) the exoticism of the Black model.

Darker colors on models of color

![Figure 13 Narciso Rodriguez Fall 2015](image)

One theme that was present on the runways of both non-white and White designers was that MOC were seen on the runway wearing darker color garments than the White models that walked that same show. Shades of black, grey and deeper hues of colors can be seen on MOC during the fall and spring seasons. One particular instance is the Narciso Rodriguez 2015 fall show. Luping Wang, Kai Newman, and Dylan Xue (see Figure 13) are three MOC that wore
predominantly black outfits on the runway while White models like Waleska Gorczewski, Irina Liss, and Julia van Os (see Figure 14) wore peach and bright yellow garments.

**Figure 14 Narciso Rodriguez Fall 2015**

*Lighter colors on models of color with lighter skin tones*

Lighter color garments on MOC that were lighter in complexion was another theme that could be seen during the fall and spring seasons of the runway shows selected for this study.
One example can be seen during the 2014 spring Diane von Furstenberg fashion show.

Figure 15 Diane von Furstenberg spring 2014

Fei Fei Sun and Liu Wen are lighter MOC that are Asian, and Anais Mali is a darker model of color that is black (see Figure 15). Fei Fei Sun is wearing a crème colored dress, Liu Wen is wearing a white dress and Anais Mali is wearing a black dress with grey panels. Even though all three MOC are walking the runway, there is a separation between MOC with lighters kin tones and MOC with darker skin tones.

Hair and Makeup differences for models of color

The hair and makeup themes seen among the MOC included different shades makeup on MOC, differences within hairstyles, missing accessories and exoticism among black MOC. During the Zac Posen spring 2011 fashion show there was an instance of different shades of lipstick on the black MOC that walked the runway. Melodie Monrose, Jourdan Dunn, and Kinee Diouf were shown on the runway wearing a dark brown lipstick (see Figure 16) while
every other model wore a bright crimson red lipstick shade.

Figure 16 Zac Posen spring 2011

This color was not seen on any white models on the runway, and even MOC that were not black were not seen wearing this shade either. This deliberate difference in makeup was seen on the Zac Posen runway for other seasons as well. MOC that were Asian like Fei Fei Sun, or Latino like Daiane Contero were shown with the same makeup was the White models, making
the exclusion of the black models even more evident (see Figure 17).

**Figure 17 Zac Posen spring 2011**

*Different Hairstyles for Models of Color*

Hairstyles were also different in many shows for the MOC on the runway.

During the Badgley Mischka spring 2013 show, Melodie Monrose (see Figure 18) was the only model of color with a different hairstyle than the other models in the show. Every model wore their hair in a low pulled back style that was decorated with floral hair pins. Monrose was the only black model on the runway that did not have the floral hairpins or the hairstyle. Her hair
was down around her shoulders with no apparent styling.

**Figure 18 Badgley Mischka spring 2013**

*Exoticism of Black models of color*

Black models were the models that had the highest number of hairstyle differences on the runway, with most of the black models with differences wearing their natural hair in a short haircut close to the scalp. The exoticism of the black model on the runway was seen on the runway of designers throughout this study. Models like Herieth Paul (see Figure 19) wore her hair the exact same way in every single runway show that she walked during this study. Season after season, she wore her natural hair in a short style that was close to her scalp regardless of
what every other model wore on the runway.

Figure 19 Zac Posen fall 2012

On the runway of the Zac Posen fall 2012 show, the three themes seen included lighter colors on MOC that were lighter in complexion, darker garments on MOC that have darker skin tones, as well as makeup differences for MOC. Tao Okamoto was shown wearing a bright canary colored garment, while Nyasha Matonhodze and Herieth Paul wore darker navy garments. There was also a difference in lipstick shade for Nyasha and Herieth while Tao and the rest of the models received a bright red lipstick shade. There was also the absence of the hair accessory that every girl wore down the runway from Herieth Paul’s hair. She wore her hair in her natural style which was different from every model on the runway, but it seems possible for her to still have the hair accessory that each model wore.

Grouping and Model Lineup
There was only one instance of grouping of MOC and that occurred on the runway of Tracy Reese’s spring 2014 fashion show. Two black models walked down the runway arm in arm wearing garments that coordinated (see Figure 20). One of the models was styled wearing pants, a top hat, and a scarf around her neck while the model she walked with did not wear these accessories.

Figure 20 Tracy Reese spring 2014 runway show
Models of color opening and closing the fashion show

The Models on the runway that opened and closed the runway show for each designer in this study were MOC only 30 instances. There were 14 MOC that opened a runway show from the years 2011 to 2015, and 16 MOD that closed fashion shows within the same time period. The designer that had the most MOC open a show was Tracy Reese who had a total of 4 models open her fall shows from 2011 to 2015, and 4 models close her fall shows from 2011 to 2015. Zac Posen had 3 MOC open his runways shows from fall 2011 to fall 2015, and 1 MOC close his runway show. During the five years in spring 2 MOC opened and 2 MOC that closed his runway shows. Anna Sui had a total of 2 models open and close her runway during fall and no MOC open or close during her spring season. Diane von Furstenberg selected 2 MOC to close her runway shows during fall, and no MOC opened or closed her runway during spring. Badgley Mischka and Alexander Wang chose one MOD to close their runway show during fall, and there were no MOC that opened or closed their runway show during spring. The designers that did not use any MOC to open or close their runway shows were: Calvin Klein, Donna Karen, Narciso Rodriguez, and Carolina Herrera.
CHAPTER V

V. DISCUSSIONS

Summary

This study revealed that from the years 2011 to 2015 there has been an increase in the percentage of MOC that are on the runways of the ten designers during NYFW. While there has been an overall increase, the way MOC are styled, dressed and adorned on the runway reveal that there are cases of discrimination present. Patterns and themes that were present on the runway reflect the issues of colorism that exist within the fashion industry.

More models of Color during spring

One of the hypotheses why non-white models numbers are lower in fall is that idea of fashion for certain seasons. Spring seasons are full of bright colors and clothing suited for warmer climates. Stereotypically warmer climates and vacation locations have been suitable for “exotic” looking models which designers place on the runway in order to grab the attention of the consumer. Another proposed rationale for lower numbers of MOC in fall than spring may have to do with the economics; White models are the “money makers” and MOC are not. Fall seasons are more popular and profitable than spring seasons so the faces and models that are well recognized and more popular are shown on the runway (Diamond & Diamond, 2013). Since the percentage of models on the runway are lower during the fall season for the White category, the data shows that MOC have a certain value during a certain time. This idea expresses that bodies of color are used to promote fashions but only during an “exotic” or “warm” times of the year.

For Tracy Reese, the designers with the highest percentage of MOC overall, her runway presented a higher percentage of MOC during the fall season. While the increase from the spring was minimal, there was still enough of an increase to acknowledge that her runway was much more diverse than other designers. Overall the remaining designers in the non-white category
had a higher percentage of MOC on the runway during the fall season than the spring. The rationale for this could be that designers may believe that warmer colors look better on MOC with darker skin tones has been within fashion from the beginning of fashion shows and advertisements (Bozzone, 2015). These ideas could have influenced the designer’s decisions of models and how they plan a show.

*Darkener colors on models of color*

The idea behind this phenomenon is the thought that MOC are better suited for darker colors and the lighter the skin tone the better for vibrant pops of color (Bozzone, 2015). This idea could possibly come for the lack of exploration on darker skin tones by fashion designers. Sketching concepts for various seasons usually start with training from instructors of fashion sketching classes. While most art classes study the human body, most of these bodies are White bodies and there are not many institutions that introduce using fashion figure drawings of MOC within the curriculum (see Figure 21). While many designers begin their creative exploration with a quick sketch of an idea for a collection, eventually they must render a sketch of a female model in a creation (Yau, n.d.).

![Figure 21 University of Fashion Croquis for Sketching](image-url)
When the designs are fine-tuned and selected to be a part of a collection, the garment must then be created and placed on a model for the runway show. White bodies in the fashion industry have been seen wearing every color in each collection and many designers may gravitate to continuing to use the White body because they are conditioned to the overall look. In order for designers to get accustomed to considering all skin tones suitable for each and every color it will take a conscious effort to illustrate MOC while creating a collection and present those ideas on the runway.

*Lighter colors on models of color with a lighter skin tone*

The theme of lighter colors worn by MOC with a lighter skin tone can be seen in the runway shows of designers that are both white and non-white. Usually the darkest models on the runway were usually the black models and the lighter MOC were mostly Asian and Latina. The treatment of lighter skin tones among the MOC reflect that colorism that exists within the fashion industry. Colorism is the belief that “light-skinned- and sometimes dark-skinned- people attribute higher status and grant more power and wealth to one group, typically those designated as white…” (Hochschild, 2008). These ideas of skin tone have presented themselves on the runways of the American designers selected for this study and it exposes the issues of colorism that is rooted in the institution of slavery. These ideas of skin tone preference can be seen clearly within the fashion industry as well.

*Hair and Makeup Differences for black models*

During the Badgley Mischka spring 2013 show, Melodie Monrose (see figure 19) was the only model of color that did not fit into the styling for the entire show and even though she was counted as one of the MOC that walked the runway, she was still separate from the rest of the MOC because she did not receive the same hairstyling treatment as the other women. Her hair appears to be long enough to be styled as the other women on the runway but for one reason or
another, she walked down the runway several times without the style. Time and consideration was passed on this model, which reflects the value placed on her as a model of color. Hair and makeup can be altered at times in between changes backstage, and a hairstyle may not be the same when a model walks down the runway, but it seems that her hair was not styled from the beginning of the runway show.

*Different shades of lipstick for black models*

The idea of a bright red lip against white skin has been widely accepted in the fashion industry and there have been modifications for dark skin because of the idea that bright red does not look good on a black model. By presenting an alternative lipstick for the black women on the runway, they are seen as not equal as the other models on the runway. While Zac Posen had the highest percentage of MOC on the runway for the category of White designers, there are still areas of his runway that are segregated. These black models are seen as different as soon as they walk down the runway, which spreads this message to those walking in the show as well as his consumers. This also implies that the makeup artist could not accommodate the Black model with a shade of red that would complement her skin tone. Most Black models complain about having to bring their own make-up for runway shows and this points to the lack of consideration that happens while planning a show (Thompson, 2015).

*Exoticism of black models*

This specific theme was noticed on the runways of most designers that had black models in their model lineup. There was an “exotic” styling that some black models received on the runway, and most times it included a short hairstyle very close to the scalp, and an absence of any hair accessories. These women were showcased as the exotic black model of the show and it seems that every season these women would appear in the same styling for each show they were in. Other MOC were able to move between the different trends each designer had for their
season, but these women who were “exotic” were confined to the one look that they were given for each show. This treatment in styling happened mostly to the black models that were darker in complexion as well. It appeared that this was the only option for MOC that were black on the runway.

**Grouping and Model Lineup**

Regarding the only instance of MOC being grouped on the runway during the Tracy Reese fashion show, it appears that these models were styled to resemble a romantic couple. The two Black models are hypothesized to suggest that Tracy Reese was promoting marriage equality for same-sex couples. This was the only time that two MOC walked in a group on the runway during all of the fashion shows during this study.

**Implications for Research and Academe**

The implications for this research confirm what CRT theorists believe about racism being acknowledged when the cases are extreme within society. This study brought to light the treatment of MOC on the fashion runway in order to address the cases that are not so easily noticed in an industry that is predominately white. Also the tenant of CRT that states that race is a social construct that is manipulated and retired when convenient can also be confirmed based on the findings of this study.

Also a CRTL can provide avenues of research in fashion academia. Fashion History, World Fashion, and Cultural studies are only a few research focuses that can benefit by applying a CRTL to curriculum that is already offered in that way of race. Trend forecasting could also benefit from a CRTL, trends such as “pale skin”, and “exotic skin tones” only apply to a few races and exclude groups of people unknowingly. The curriculum within fashion design programs can benefit from the results from this study and further research can apply a CRTL to the bodies that students must render for projects. Rubrics and class demonstrations consciously
expose students to various skin tones. Courses that present acceptable colors for fall and spring can identify the problems with presenting most of these colors only against white bodies.

**Implications for industry**

Within the industry, a CRTL can help in the understanding of the importance for hairstylists, makeup artists, and clothing stylists to be trained in working with a wide variety of skin tones and hair textures. Identifying gaps in the beauty product and makeup market can also inspire these artists to invest in products and makeup that appeal to MOC. While some MOC must bring their own foundation makeup to runways shows, White models can still show up to a runway show and be certain that their foundation will be supplied by the makeup artist (Oliver, 2015). These moments of inequality in the fashion industry will continue to happen if these problems are not addressed to the fashion industry as a whole. Modeling agents and casting directors could benefit from the results from this study since it is their job to scout, train and promote models for runway shows. Stereotypical labels like the “exotic-looking” black model on the fashion runway promote ideas that limit black models everywhere to a certain look.

**Limitations**

One of the limitations for the study included the challenge of recording the race of each model on the runway. Since race is also an issue of identity, every model of color that walked the runway did not have the opportunity to specifically choose the category that they were assigned on the runway. In the future interviews with MOC that walked the runway of designers would shed more light on their preferred race. There were also limitations based on the sample size for this study, however with qualitative research the goal is not generalizability. The goal was to delve deep into the phenomenon of racial discrimination on the runway and this study has
attempted to do just that in order to help bring about positive change and equality in the fashion industry. Future research could include a study conducted on male MOC. Storytelling can also be a method that is used to present the realities of working as a model of color in the fashion industry. Interviews with the designers that are a part of this study would also provide an in-depth view of the thought process behind the selection of MOC. The reasons behind missing accessories, differences in styling, and differences in hair and makeup could be addressed more appropriately if interviews were also conducted with the designers within this study.
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