

WHITE ON WHITE

WHY FASHION NEEDS TO EMBRACE COLOUR

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White has been huge this summer - white cheesecloth gypsy tops, white Kardashian bodycon, white minimalistic nails and, surprise surprise, white runways. I'm not talking about the hallowed paths of Avant Garde themselves, but the sea of white faces sashaying down them. Lorde, the world's first non-white modelling agency has proved successful in their very first year of business, with models appearing in publications such as Dazed & Confused and i-D. Yet major fashion houses such as Dior and Louis Vuitton continue to use one token black girl, with 80% white faces every season. Confused? Don't worry, so is the fashion industry.

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Jennifer Starr, casting director for Calvin Klein and Gap, points to a half-hearted attempt to provide a more culturally representative backdrop for fashion after Italian Vogue brought out an all-black issue, around the same time Barack Obama

was elected president, but then states "I feel [like] the next season things kind of went back to the way it was".

No one seems to want to accept responsibility. Leia Ananna, casting director for Burberry and Gucci, told Buzzfeed last year: "we think we need to keep in mind that these are shows. A show needs to make you dream, and it doesn't necessarily need to represent reality." I suspect the reality is more to do with models being chosen to reflect markets. 'Asian' models are more and more prevalent on the runway, conveniently coinciding with the strength of the market for luxury goods in China. Unfortunately, designers choose 'Asian' models, ranging from Korean to Japanese to Filipino girls, to attract Chinese customers, despite these customers being able to tell the difference relatively easily.

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Although this is great news for the huge number of amazing Asian models, the stories of industry racism towards black models are well known. Even successful models such as Jourdan Dunn and Chanel Iman have spoken about being told "we already found one black girl. We don't need you any more," by designers.

It seems incomprehensible that major, successful fashion houses can make these kinds of decisions. Looking at models such as Arlenis Sosa Peña, who is quite possibly one of the most beautiful women in the world, and then implying that non-white models are any less capable or attractive seems crazy. The wider assumption that only white (and some Asian) people have money seems downright stupid.

It appears beautiful, non-white people are not the only minority enjoying the catwalk limelight of late. Smatterings of OAPs have appeared on the runways and gracing magazines. Jacquie Murdock, Angela Lansbury and Daphne Self have all appeared in Vogue, Gentlewoman and Harper's Bazaar, despite the publications' habitual shunning of any model over the age of 25. Over 60s also appear to enjoy token status in 'kitsch' or 'novel' shoots, usually showing them alongside a flawless teen à la Alexis Bittar's spring campaign, featuring 93-year-old Iris Apfel side-by-side with 18-year-old Tavi Gevinson. Although similarly using age to shock, French house Céline made an admirable show of using 80-year-old literary creative Joan Didion as an embodiment of their values in their hyper-raw, warts-and-all campaign earlier this year. Didion appeared tough, formidable and most of

all, real—a world away from the 'graceful', 'elegant' and drastically retouched images we are usually fed.

Surely it would be refreshing to see a mainstream campaign or advertisement using plus-size, or even just "inbetweenie" size 10 models outside of their familiar "token bigger girl" role. Why should it be such a shock to see somebody who represents the nation's average size in a magazine? Google Myla Dalbesio and all you'll find are shoots with names like "Perfect Fit" and "Body Diversity", despite the fact that she is merely a size 10. Is it so abnormal for a size 10 girl to buy a pair of designer jeans? Would it not be a little more interesting to see clothes on a different frame for a change, be it a different shape, age or race?

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It only takes a moment on Lorde Inc's website to see that the models they employ would be a great advertisement for any fashion house, and indeed some designers are creating shows with nearly half of the models being non-white. Others are taking further steps outside the box, using more and more plus size and older models. It looks like the rest of the fashion world might take a little longer to see that fetishizing young girls, glamorising unhealthy bodies and excluding the majority of races is unimaginative, unfair and frankly, unexciting. ♡