Emotional Engagement in Fashion Design: Way towards Eliminating Discrimination

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Abstract

Racism and discrimination about complexion, silhouette, appearance, gender and age group are common phenomena in fashion industry. In this century while people are focused in emotional aspects, many are still strongly biased and practicing judgemental mentality. An individuals' dignity and grace are being negatively impacted when they are being judged with discriminatory and negative comments about their style. These all have driven to approach the project.

Through this project we will try to dig out how emotional parameters in fashion design affects the fashion graduation students of Bangladesh. The study also aims to convert the continuing biasness about clothing consumption, acceptance, and negative criticism into positivity, flexibility and consideration.

The authors are the fashion educators and have taken this matter as a responsibility to aware about the emotional impacts of psychological issues among the fashion design graduation students as they are future fashion makers and influencers of Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Psychology, Fashion, Racism, Discrimination, Silhouette, Appearance.*

1. Introduction

Over the course of history, fashion has been the subject of a lot of criticism and attacks. Fashion has been the center of intersecting perspectives and different views that have caused diverse scandals across the years. [1] Unhealthy practice of fashion can lead to misunderstanding the concept of fashion in one's daily life choices. Fashion is supposed to acknowledge the potentials one may have and define those potentials through garments and accessories. But in recent years, discrimination has been defining those potentials and destroying the value of fashion.

Discrimination builds wall among communities, people and creates a massive disruption in daily life. Discrimination brings shame, insult and obstacles which are based on false statements and self-made judgments. Fashion has become a weapon to spread hate, insult and obstacles among people and creating boundaries which are again built on false beliefs and statement. Fashion is nothing but new ideas and ways to express oneself through garments and accessories, "Fashion is always at its best when it looks outside of itself for inspiration and holds up a mirror to society. Sometimes we do that on the runway and sometimes when we come together as an industry and take up important causes." [3] These days' social media is one of the core platforms of spreading racism through fashion. People are commenting on others social media account and defaming others or expressing hate speech. Comment regarding one's skin colour, or body shape is nothing but easiest form of racism created.

People are feeling immense pressure to look accepted, to wear things that will help them getting accepted by others. This pressure is nothing but the fear of facing hate and negative criticism. Nobody wants to face such hate and hidden racism yet either expressing hate or receiving hate. Societal status, body shape, skin colour, race, economic status is the very basic form of factors used against people to express discrimination and to destroy one's confidence and self-satisfaction.

This paper will try to point out the key factors behind the growth of such racism and how rapidly it spreads. This paper will also discuss on the effect of this discrimination and will showcase real life example. This paper aims to provide factors and ways to tackle discrimination and racism and possible ways to solve the issue from its roots.

Table 1: Consequences of Emotional Engagement of Fashion Design
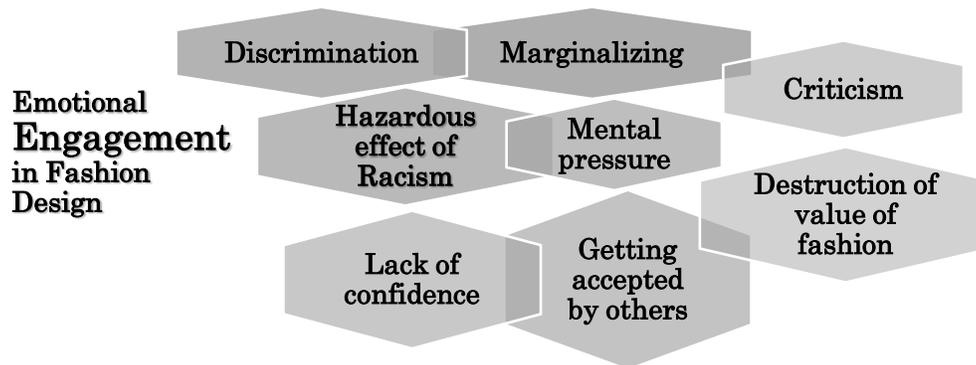
2. Aim of the Study

The aim of this project is to detect the cause of racism and discrimination present in fashion industry and emotional status of fashion design students (graduation) of Bangladesh regarding the issue. Figuring out the key points that promotes racism and discrimination based on complexion, body shape, silhouette and appearance will lead us to the possible solutions of this issue. This project also aims to study psychological effects that are caused by racism and discrimination and also to provide feasible ways to manage such emotional factors.

We also aim to find out factors or mediums that promotes racism and discrimination and provide better methods of using such factors or medium without promoting racism and discrimination. The study will try to express that the young fashion design students have a huge power to promote and show the fashion industry the route to build up a world above complexion, appearance and silhouette.

3. Brutality of Discrimination in Fashion Industry

For decades fashion industry has a strong tendency of demoting black designers, photographers, models, and business leaders which is a clear evidence of discrimination. Over the years, there have been prominent examples of racially insensitive, or sometimes outright offensive, themes and imagery in fashion, filtering all the way through to final collections. In 2018, H&M's campaign showcasing a Black boy wearing its 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' jumper caused controversy, while Gucci was forced to apologise last year for releasing a balaclava design that resembled blackface. [5]

"We've already got a black girl," "It's not our creative vision," "Our customer isn't ready yet." These are the excuses we hear time and time again to explain the lack of models of color in the fashion industry. In fact, the more you talk to people in our profession about this, the more you realize that these statements are tired, unimaginative and backwards; things this industry supposedly detests. [3] This scarcity of miscellany at the higher level, encouraging many phases of the fashion industry. Fair skin, Light eyes, skinny figure, straight hair etc. are the major focal points for choosing a model because years after years these parameters are influencing the famous fashion brands to promote a product attractively. 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. [2] Whether it is fashion magazine, TVC, billboard, runway or window display the appearance of the model has been being constantly pure white where no consideration exists for diversity; on stage or back stage. The consequences represent there is no space for diversity in fashion industry and this clearly point out the discrimination beyond ideologies. "The discrimination and unfair treatment of Black models has always existed and in the past Black models were used as a token," says Angel Sinclair, founder of Models of Diversity, a charity that campaigns for inclusivity and diversity in fashion. "If Black models do get through casting stage, they then have to deal with make-up artists and stylists who aren't trained to work with black hair or darker skin tones." [5]
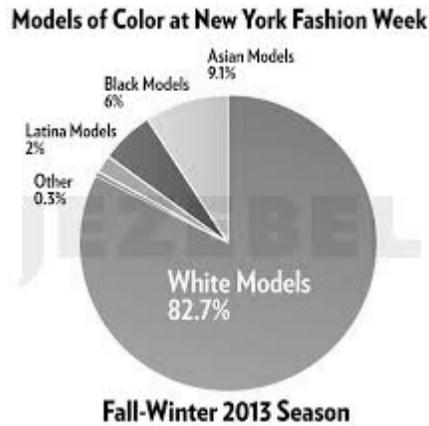
Fig. 1: Prioritization of white models at New York Fashion Week [2]

Social media platform has been used as an approach to openly discuss people's opinion about different aspects. So many designers, experts, groups and individuals burst out in different times against the lack of diversity in the fashion industry via social media platform and blogs.

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 New York Fashion Week continue to be majority white (Sauers, 2013).[3] 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.[2] 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). 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. [2] 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). While there are so many girls are waiting for building up their career in modeling, this discrimination is ruining up their dreams, career and hampering their socio-economic status.

Table 2: Racial Diversity Among New York Fashion Week Models Since 2008 [2]

Season/Year	Models				
	White Models	Black Models	Asian Models	Non-white Latina Models	Models of other races
Fall 2008	87%	4.9%	5.4%	2.7%	0
Fall 2009	82%	7.4%	6.5%	3.9%	0.3%
Fall 2010	83.9%	7.9%	6.4%	1.5%	0.3%
Spring 2011	81.8%	8.4%	7.1%	2.3%	0.4%
Fall 2011	84.8%	7.3%	6.2%	1.5%	0.2%
Spring 2012	82.4%	8.5%	6.8%	2%	0.3%
Fall 2012	79.9%	8.0%	8.8%	2.4%	0.9%
Spring 2013	79.4%	8.1%	10.1%	1.9%	0.5%
Fall 2013	82.7%	6%	9.1%	2%	0.3%

4. Role of fashion design students

There is a saying we all heard since our childhood that education is the backbone of the nation. So, all changes should start from our schooling. A person gets his first education from his home but he gets the fulfilment of his education from his educational organization. After getting the higher education he has the opportunity to work for the society, nation as well as world. From this aspect we believe that students are the future pioneer.

Consumers are now not only beginning to question the industry's standards, but are also demanding change by simply boycotting companies with unethical practices. That being said, it is extremely important to note the fashion industry's deep-rooted relationship with racism so we can best address ways to move forward.[4] So to eliminate the running brutality of racism and discrimination in the fashion industry as well as society the fashion design students can be the change maker. In our society we often face the criticism regarding our attire according to appearance, body shape, weight and complexion. Moreover, our fashion industry promotes this kind of activities for decades. Today's fashion design students are the future designers who will get the opportunity to introduce a movement against those practices throughout their designs. Besides they can appoint diversified models for presenting their collections on different fashion shows. This change should start first with proper education and the experts should share their knowledgeable thoughts regarding this issue. Experts can run some campaigns or workshops with the participation of fashion design students and educate them how to create more opportunities for marginalized models. Moreover, this will help to reduce the bad criticisms among the young generation about attire regarding race and appearance. Fashion design students can also share their opinion through social media platforms regarding this which can play a vital role as change maker.

5. Negative criticism on attire

From sociological and psychological context, people like to pass criticism in various matters including on someone's attire or clothing. This has been practiced for centuries to give someone criticism based on their clothing openly or behind their back. Criticism can be either constructive or destructive. It can either help someone to improve their clothing item or can simply destroy their confidence and self-assessment on clothing items. Usually, people pass on negative criticism and it genuinely can hurt someone psychologically and emotionally. The source of someone passing negative comments is usually their own experience in receiving negative comments and while passing such negative comments they feel empowered. This empowerment is certainly destructive and hurtful to bear.
Negative criticism can affect someone's emotion deeply and that person can easily feel insulted and vulnerable. This vulnerability destroys one's confidence and social skills rapidly. From then that person can also make an unorganized decision to change their clothing items and get out of their comfort zone which also affects them like a slow poison.

Table 2: Impacts of negative criticism on attire
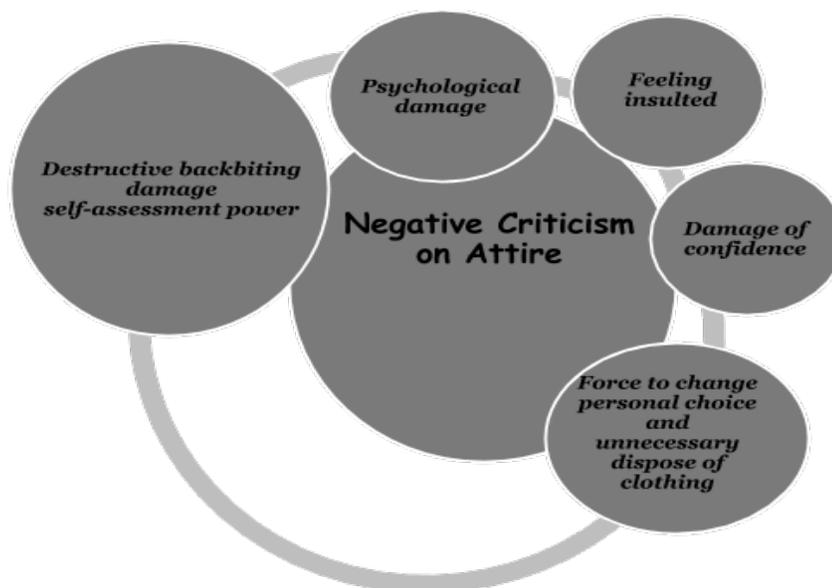
6. Methodology

Overall, the analysis done in this study is qualitative, where focus is more on interpreting the findings than trying to present numerical data and statistics. As a reminder, the main aim of this thesis is to study show the existing racism and discrimination promoting in fashion industry and how it affects the emotional status of fashion design students of Bangladesh. A structured questionnaire is made to identify the consequences and the Sample consisted of fashion design graduation students of Bangladesh, age group is 18-27 university going students graduating on fashion design and apparel studies with access to fashion education and a certain level of psychological literacy that is believed to provide them with much more knowledge about emotional engagement in fashion design and its consequences, root cause and solutions. The authors have targeted this group of participants as they are having their education on the respective area and as young generation, they have to face the racism, criticism, discrimination more often than others. Besides they are the pioneer of the fashion industry so they have the opportunity and responsibility to eradicate the burning issue. The online survey was open for forty days from the 3rd of December until the 12th of January 2021. In order to promote the survey and attract the participants the authors primarily emailed the survey link to friends that belong to the specific target audiences of the research asking them to forward the survey and at the same time participate themselves. Secondary the authors are working as a lecturer in a reputed fashion university so they have well connection with the other reputed fashion universities and the fashion faculties who were asked to promote the survey link to their students as well. Afterwards, the author posted the online survey link with a participation request on the universities facebook pages and emailed to the university authorities and on the wall of the facebook groups that the students of the faculty created. No extra help or financing was provided to these participants except from reading the introductory note of the questionnaire. The online survey was conducted in 2020-2021 among the students of four reputed fashion design universities of Bangladesh where 236 students were participated; 138 females and 98 males. The questionnaire consists of 25 questions. The questions were about-

➢ The emotional effects of negative commenting about attires, body shape, weight, appearance, personal style in real life and in the social media platform,
➢ Racism and discrimination in the fashion industry
➢ Their thinking about this discrimination and racism in the fashion industry

The total survey is conducted via Google form and analyzed through the statistical data generated automatically.

7. Samples

This paper analyzed the psychological facts and emotional engagement of fashion design students in the fashion industry of Bangladesh. By conducting this qualitative research, the authors tried to discover the factors behind the frequent criticism of clothing of the young generation in Bangladesh as they are the largest number of followers of fast fashion. Moreover, this study can contribute to the compact framework for subsequent research correlated to the matter.

Among the 236 participants who completed the online survey, concerning the age groups, 108 participants are between 18-22 years old, 108 are between 23-27 years old. As it deals with the educational level, all of the participants are in graduation level from four reputed fashion universities of Bangladesh;

i. BGMEA University of Fashion & Technology
ii. Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology
iii. Bangladesh University of Textiles
iv. National Institute of Design

The participation in the survey was deliberate.

8. Findings

This survey is all about the racism and discrimination in the fashion industry and society of Bangladesh and its hazardous effects. The aim of this survey is to ascertain our fashion design student's impression about the fact, how they react about it and how do they think about the elimination or reduction of this racism from the fashion industry. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, one is Background information of the participants and the other is study related survey questions. For background information we used multiple choice questions and open-ended questions or short answer question type and for main survey questions we used multiple choice question type. Among the total 236 participants answered the questions all of them were fashion design students.

In the next segments, the findings of the survey will be introduced and investigated.

Among the participants **95.7%** participants agreed that they understand what racism is. **83.2%** agreed that they are emotionally affected by this racism and **16.8%** are not.

67.7% agreed that they don't feel insecurity regarding their complexion; on the other hand, **32.3%** participants admitted that they feel insecurity regarding their complexion. **55.4%** participants stated that they didn't feel any insecurity regarding their body silhouette and **44.6%** admitted they are in insecurity regarding their body silhouette.

65% participants stated and agreed that the fashion industry promotes discrimination against body shape, weight. **68.4%** participants agreed that they had witnessed discrimination in fashion industry

Analyzing the above statements we can say that youngsters of Bangladesh noticed about the racism, discrimination and criticism in fashion industry and they don't support it.

Among the participants about **71.1%** participants agreed that they had been criticized regarding their clothing and **45.1%** participants stated they had received criticism regarding their complexion. **73.5%** participant had received negative comments regarding their body weight even **69.2%** participant stated that they had received criticism about their body shape. **81%** participants received criticism regarding their appearance from their relatives and friends. **70.4%** participant even admitted that they criticized someone regarding their body shape or silhouette and **31.5%** criticized about someone's appearance. **74%** participants agreed that they received negative comments regarding their fashion or personal style and **54.3%** participants agreed that they had commented on someone's fashion or personal style. **73.5%** participants saw someone receiving criticism about their fashion or personal style in social media platform. **31.1%** participants faced discrimination against body shape or body weight in social media platform. **37.4%** participants admitted that they even rejected usable clothing before being disposable due to negative comments. **54.8%** participants said that it happened to them for 1-3 times**, 17.5%** did for 4-6 times, **4.8%** stated for 7-10 times and **23%** agreed that it happened with them more than 10 times.

After analyzing the responses consequently, it can be clearly identified that negative criticism about complexion, body shape, weight, appearance clothing and personal style is anonymously existing in our society and hampering the emotional status of people as they are facing and doing the same and as a result some of them changed their fashion and style accordingly.

After all these statements, **75.2%** participants think that people should protest and boycott this discrimination and **24.8%** participants think that people should support and encourage this discrimination. **76%** participants feel that choosing attire for someone should depend on whatever they like and want to wear and **24%** participants feel that choosing attire for someone should depend on complexion, body silhouette, weight and height. **54.6%** participants don't support these criticisms in fashion industry, **25.8%** participants feel that they are not bothered about these criticisms and **19.7%** participants support these criticisms in fashion industry.
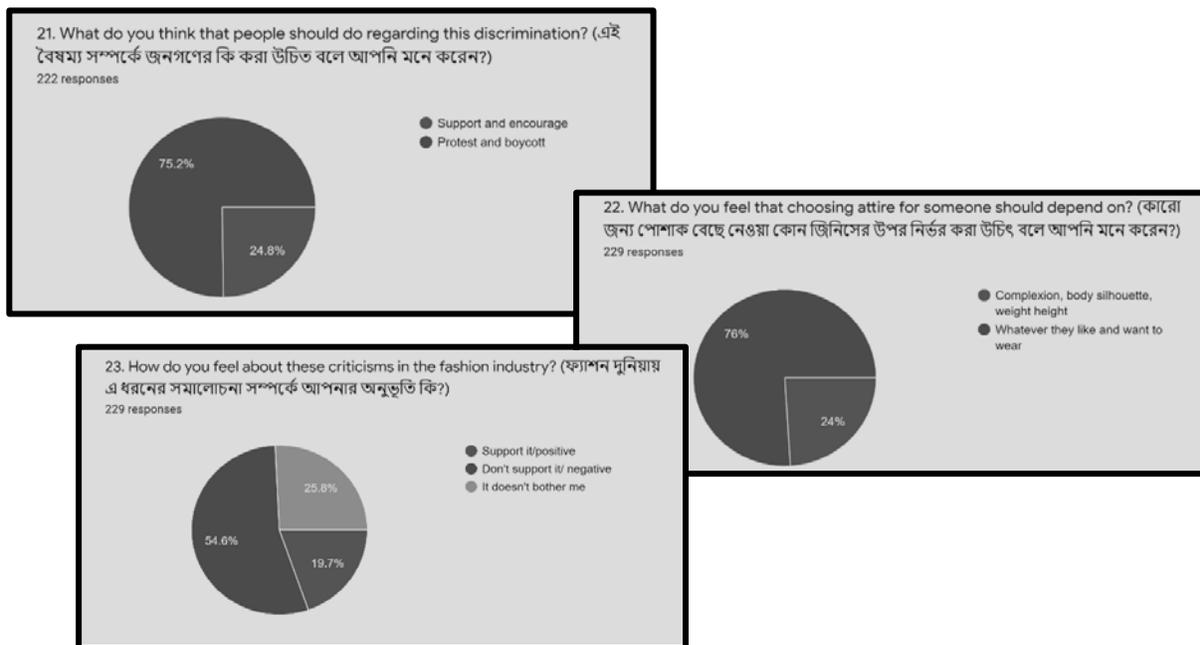

Fig. 2: Psychological aspects about discrimination in fashion among the fashion design students of Bangladesh

Therefore, the participants don't support this discrimination, they think that everyone should have the freedom to choose their clothing and appearance for themselves. And the respondents also want to eliminate the discrimination or racism accordingly.

To summarize the overall survey, students individually and combined from fashion design have acknowledged that they faced and felt huge racism or discrimination for their fashion, style, body shape or body silhouette and appearance as well. On the other hand, they discouraged the discrimination throughout the industry. They want to improve the current situation positively by protesting and boycotting the racism from the industry. As they are the future of this fashion industry, they have the opportunity to spread awareness via their profession as well.

8. Conclusions

What we feel clothes should be criticized for is the fact that at often times, they create a hierarchy. Rich people many times don't like to talk about money, but they let the clothes do the talking. We make decisions regarding one's skills and personality based on their clothes and we judge people according to the way they dress. We are the first ones to say that clothes do play an important role in our contemporary culture, but often we give them roles they should not have, and that's the issue we should be commenting on.[1] There is much clear evidence that the fashion industry and the society is being promoted this unhealthy practice years after years. This study tried to show the students the importance of creating social awareness and eliminate mental blocking from the fashion industry as well as society and spread out the thoughts about the importance of developing emotional consideration about the independence of choosing one's own attires according to their own likes or dislikes. The authors hope that this research will encourage the students to convey the awareness to the people through their creative designs and through their profession as designs are one of the weapons of delivering message to the society.

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