VICTIMS OF STYLE

Critical Cases on the Violence of Fashion
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The essence of oppression is that one is defined from the outside by those who define themselves as superior by criteria of their own choice.

(Dworkin 1981: 149)
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A dominant paradigm in the exegesis of fashion has been the perspective of desire and sexuality, seeing clothing as a symbolic interface for attraction and communication. However, within the realm of nature as well as culture, sexuality is only one real motivation for action, the other predominant force would be the establishment of territories and rivalry between peers. Social life may be about seduction, but it is also closely intertwined with dominion, power and popularity. From such perspective, fashion is no longer merely a matter of attraction and sexual selection, instead it becomes a matter of violent natural competition: fashion as the rule of the strong, the law of beauty as a matter of power, exploitation and popularity. Adoration is indeed a powerful social instrument for power, and to be fashionable means to be a ruler in the realm of appearances.

This perspective on fashion would mean we have to look more closely at the mechanisms of aesthetic stratification, examining fashion from the perspective of violent social competition, and how it intersects with domination, rather than peaceful communication. Here, fashion is a matter of Realpolitik rather than idealism. To be fashionable means to be attractive at the cost of someone else. Fashion is not a realm of peace and attraction, but a violent force of systemic and individual rivalry. A game, red in tooth and claw.

This reader is an attempt to frame an introduction to fashion and violence. It is the outcome of the course “Critical Fashion and Social Justice” at Parsons School of Design in the fall 2015. The short studies are meant to map out a wide array of examples of how fashion is entangled into various forms of violence.

However, as the reader will notice, the cases are focusing on the violence of fashion at the consumer end, and primarily in a western context, not the well documented violence in sweatshops or under repressive governments. Instead, we have focused on the violence amongst us, in a city like New York. We hope this may spark future discussions, and not least make fashion designers start thinking about how conflict resolution and nonviolence could be manifested within the domain of dress.
ABUSE

[Chat message]
you guys better not be ordering stuff on my amazon account!
What is this?? Who ordered the Kardashians video??
The action takes place in a psychologist office in Manhattan, NY. The room is lit by a declining autumn sun whose rays ricochet off the trees of Central Park - where the leaves are turning red and yellow – onto the large window.

M.G.: Hi A.! What brings you here?

A.B.: I’ve been feeling down… I want to sit around all day, do nothing, sleep… I’m doing a pretty intense internship, it is time-demanding and extremely draining. I only work three days a week, but it wears me out.

M.G.: Tell me more about this internship…?

A.B.: I’m M.L.’s assistant. I found the position through my university’s career services and started working two months ago. M.L. is an established stylist who works for Vogue and other publications of that kind. I should consider myself lucky to work for her. She’s a pretty big player in the industry, she knows a lot of people, she’s invited to all the fashion shows and sits front row, you know… Working in fashion had always been a dream of mine, since I was a little girl… But now I’m not so sure anymore…

M.G.: Oh that’s sad. Why is that?

A.G.: It’s a tough microcosm. People are mean. My boss can be very cruel - with me, at least. She’s very nice to the rest of the world. Well… now that I think about it, she’s nice to the people who are at her level in the fashion hierarchy, you know, but she treats people below her as nobodies, underlings, good for executing orders. And that’s when she deigns to notice their existence. Most of the time, she acts like I don’t exist. I’m free labor and she’s the boss, so she can abuse me, nobody’s going to say anything.

M.G.: What’s your relationship with your colleagues? Do they feel the same way as you?

A.G.: I don’t really see them that much. M.L. makes us work on different days, probably so we don’t conspire against us. For the longest time, I thought that I was her scapegoat, but I recently got in touch with a fellow intern, who confirmed that she’s was being treated just as poorly. Apparently, M.L. criticized
MVM RECEIPT

PANYNJ AIRTRAIN
JFK01 HOWARD BEACH
NEW YORK CITY NY

MVM #: 8002(JFK01 0500)

Mon 21 Sept 15 12:25

Trans: Add Value OK
Payment Mode: Credit

Amount: $ 5.00
Initial Value: $ 2.77
Value Added: $ 2.00
Card Value: $ 7.77
Total Paid: $ 5.00

MASTERCARD
Card #: ********5113
Auth#: 326312
Ref #: 073511700711

Serial #: 2693694171
Type: 093
AIRTRAIN FULL FARE

Questions?
Call (212) METROCARD
her hand-writing, saying she had to be stupid to write like that. Everybody is scared of her, it’s not just me.

**M.G.:** You used a very strong and powerful word earlier: “abuse.” Can you tell me more about that? How is she abusive?

**A.G.:** Well first of all, she abuses me economically: she doesn’t pay me yet makes me work long hours and go on all sorts of missions that weren’t included in the description of the job I applied for. She’ll ask me to go to the airport’s Lost and found to pick up a personal item she forgot on the plane. She’ll ask me to clean up her desk full of dirty used tissues, or carry heavy racks by myself, while she’s walking next to me, on the phone, laughing. Sometimes I feel like she even perversely enjoys asking me to take the trash out. And of course, no please, no thank you – I don’t deserve that level of consideration.

I go to a good school, I actually know something about fashion, and my boss knows that. I think she doesn’t like it because she hasn’t gone to university herself. She threatens to fire me every so often, when she’s in a bad mood, or when I don’t do things correctly – and I never seem to do things correctly! I always buy the wrong type of clothes hangers, or order the wrong kind of milk for her latte… That’s because she always gives me very vague, confusing indications, or not enough information, which makes it hard for me to perform the task correctly. Sometimes she even gets pissed at me when I haven’t done something she didn’t even ask me to do… Thank god I only work for her three days a week.

And you know what, she still harasses me by texts on my days off… And of course, she gets pissed at me if I don’t answer right away. It’s a vicious circle: now, when her name appears on my phone screen, I feel anxious. I’m scared to open the text right away, as I know it will be full of reproaches. I think to myself: “what did I do wrong this time? What does she want me to do now?”

**M.G.:** Why do you think M.L. treats you like in such a degrading manner?

**A.B:** It’s actually funny: back in the days, she was the personal assistant of a very famous journalist who has a reputation for being a difficult person. I’m sure it wasn’t easy for her then and but I don’t understand why she perpetuates the pattern. It’s a sort of revenge against life I guess…

**M.G.:** How much are you willing to accept to keep this job?

**A.G.:** At this point, I feel like I have already accepted everything.

**M.G.:** What you’ve just described to me closely resembles the structure of emotional abuse. Have you heard of it?
FYI: u left my apartment open and unlocked yesterday... Anyone could have just walked in... Watch out for that!

What do you mean?
I closed the door

You need to LOCK the door
Not just close it

The trash and packaging hasn't been taken out

U need to make my life easier
A.B: No, what is that?

M.G.: According to my colleague Marie-France Hirigoyen (2005), emotional abuse happens when someone engages in an abusive conduct toward you, infringing upon your personality, dignity or physical integrity. It often takes place in a couple, but it can also happen in the workplace. That’s precisely what Dr. Hirigoyen works on - emotional abuse in the workplace.

The context for the abuse isn’t set up in one day: the aggressor starts by depreciating the work of the victim, and ultimately the person herself. In reaction, the victim, who is under a great deal of pressure, starts feeling anxious, acts erratically, making mistakes in her work, handling poorly the situation – which is sanctioned by more and more reproaches on the part of the aggressor. A vicious circle, as you said yourself.

A.B.: I’m not sure she’s abusive. She can be nice to me sometimes. She’ll give me a designer dress or something she got for free and didn’t want. But to be honest, I’m always walking on eggshells: in the blink of an eye, she can start accusing me of stealing or doing things wrong on purpose… So I’m trying as much as I can to be the perfect employee, and hopefully, she will recognize my value and start paying me, or maybe write me a nice recommendation letter…

M.G.: What you’re describing is actually characteristic of manipulative abusers: they constantly alternate between nice and mean, up and down, black and white, so as to blur your critical judgment until you no longer know what’s right and what’s wrong. In many regards, emotional abuse is no less destructive than physical abuse, but you seem to be well aware of what’s going on… So why don’t you quit?

A.B.: It is how it is. That’s how the industry works: you get abused as an intern, but it’s a necessary step to climb the fashion social ladder, so you suck it up. Almost all the interns I know live pretty much the same kind of experience, although my boss is at another level… There is a very static hierarchy in the fashion industry, and my boss seems to find pleasure enforcing it everyday.

I’m aware, or rather M.L. made me aware that I wasn’t worth much at this stage of my career. I’m young, I have no experience of the fashion world and she knows better. If we’re in presence of a model for example, she will establish the hierarchy right away: she’s above the model, but the model retains a little bit of fame (she has her pictures in the magazines you know), so M.L. is nice to her. However, I’m way below the model, I’m nobody, so she’ll have the model understand that she too is entitled to treat me poorly.

M.G.: This abuse that you are experiencing feeds into a larger scheme of violence.
A.G.: Violence? She never assaulted me, nor insulted me…

M.G.: The fact that there is no direct or immediate aggression doesn’t mean that there is no violence. The violence you’re experiencing is more insidious than that. You seem to be grappling with an instance of structural violence. While “direct violence is an event” – that’s blows, or insults –, structural violence is a “process with ups and downs.” Exactly what you described to me earlier.

In your case, the violence developed itself over the course of your internship: an addition of small things that, adding up, trapped you in a system harmful for your mental health. In general, structural violence is made acceptable by what Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung called cultural violence. In your case, cultural violence would be the need for belonging to the highly exclusive fashion world.

The abuse is individually accepted first because the burden is shared with other fellow interns, and because you unpaid students see degrading internships as a necessary step to access more rewarding jobs in the industry. In a nutshell, generalized cultural violence in the fashion industry makes individual abuse of interns acceptable.

A.B.: But what can I do? The system is rotten, but I won’t change it…

M.G.: The best you can do right now is to record all the conversations you had with your boss, keep all the receipts, texts, emails, correspondence of any sort that could establish the abuse before a court of law, and ultimately, sue her. If you succeed, it’ll set a precedent that could actually make interns’ situation better in the fashion industry and elsewhere!
The fictional therapy session above is inspired by the author’s real life experience as the personal assistant of a rather prominent figure of the New York fashion scene. This story isn’t one-of-a-kind. Not too long ago, two Condé Nast interns sued the company claiming that they weren’t fairly compensated for their work at the magazines. In reaction, Condé Nast decided to shut down their entire internship program a few months later.

Generalized cultural violence in the fashion industry makes individual abuse of interns acceptable. As peace researcher Johan Galtung emphasizes: “cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong.” (Galtung 1990: 391) The abuse is individually accepted because those stultifying internships are seen as a necessary step to access better jobs in the industry. In addition, the burden is shared with other fellow interns, which means that if you can’t handle the job, another needy intern will. The fact that interns are generally unpaid makes it psychologically worse for them: it gives them an acute sense of being at the very bottom of the economic ladder, which can prompt feelings of worthlessness – even though they often get through more work than their paid counterparts.

What strikes me the most however is that the abusers once were the abused. Abuse has become some sort of appalling long-term ‘tradition’ in the fashion industry, as if violence, its memory and subsequent trauma, were passed down generations of fashion professionals. Violence begets violence… How can we break the “vicious violence cycle”? (Galtung 1990: 295)
BEFORE & AFTER
“Remake me” and “Before & After” columns exposes the pleasures of transformation and shape-shifting. Like the story of the ugly duckling the metamorphosis is a story of “rags to riches.” Here, anything is possible, and we are taught to think that anyone can make it, and I have as good chance of making it as anyone else. Also aesthetically, “the winner takes it all.”

This is particularly true for fashion. Just take a movie like The Devil Wears Prada, where the main character transforms from an ignored intern to a star of the fashion world, if she just submits to its rules, loses some weight and takes care of her appearance.

But not only does the movie already from the start star a famous actress who goes through the transformation. Like the foundation of the American Dream, the narrative also disqualifies those who are left unattractive: if you do not make it you haven’t tried hard enough. In this myth of aesthetic meritocracy, opportunity is not offered to everyone, but the playing field is inherently uneven. Also fashion is rigged from the start, however “democratic” it may seem.

Inherent in the American Dream is the belief that movement up the economic ladder is possible for anyone—that the opportunity to achieve success in this country is equal for any hard-working citizen from any social starting point. The other side of this coin, of course, is the unspoken assumption that a working-class identity is something from which one should attempt to escape and that people living in poverty are there because they have not pulled sufficiently hard on their own bootstraps, which paves the way for discrimination towards them. (Smith & Redington 2010: 282)

If you are not fashionable, with the incrowd, you have simply not tried hard enough. If you still look like the stars in the “before” column, you have failed to keep up.
BULLYING

fashionpolice Kate Bosworth doesn't look confused over her dress choice but we sure are!
#FashionPolice
fashionpolice #BitchStoleMyLook! Who pulled off her @CSiriano look best: @MaggieGrace or @JLo? #FashionPolice
Not even the most talented stars are immune to a fashion miss every now and again. Click ahead to see the worst offenders on the Emmy red carpet. Heidi Klum took a beating on Twitter for this Big Bird meets figure skating costume ensemble. Dan MacMedan, USA TODAY
Women in the public sphere are daily scrutinized - appreciated or critiqued - in the media. Fashion magazines are pioneers in this field and have developed a wide range of surveillance mechanisms. Sections such as “Do/Don’t,” “The worst dressed stars of [name of the event]” or “Who wore it best?” are meant to review, judge, evaluate, grade, classify (mostly female) celebrities based on their outfit choices, hairstyles, makeup or general look. The ultimate bullying instrument was created in 2010, in the form of a television series called “Fashion Police.” The program’s so-called “fashion police” is composed of actors/actresses/singers/ socialites, sons and daughters of rich and famous music stars or media magnates, who have been vested with ‘fashion policing’ powers by… media corporations owned by their parents. They are thus entitled to punish “style offenders” based on what is in and what is out of fashion, what constitutes a fashion faux pas, and what fits whatever figure or silhouette.

Although their original intent was to be funny, these magazine sections and TV programs can cause much harm among the young readership and spectatorship they target - way more than among celebrities, who, I’m sure, couldn’t care less about any of this. Indeed, those mechanisms are likely to induce feelings of shame and inappropriateness based on appearance among their readers and viewers, who increasingly find that their self-image (and eventually self itself) is never good or satisfying enough. Their nose or thighs should be thinner, they should get those new it shoes, this top is too slutty, this skirt is not sexy enough, … so on and so forth. Such a system also tends to hinder self-expression through dress and inhibit creativity at large: instead of wanting to be ourselves, we’re putting all our efforts in trying to pass the scrutiny of the normalizing and policing gaze. In that it jeopardizes people’s well-being and identity construction, fashion bullying (and the constant scrutiny that it provokes) can be analyzed as an instance of structural violence. As coined by John Galtung, structural violence designates forms of continuous violence produced by a social structure or institution which prevents people from meeting their basic needs. As applied to the fashion system, structural violence could be the manifestation of fashion ideals that end up directly affecting the body of the ‘fashion victim’.

More recently, online magazines have started calling for readers’ contribution to these sections: “Write a snippy one-line for this photo of
[celebrity’s name]. If you want your joke to appear in a copy of [name of the journal], please leave your full name in comment.” By doing so, media are effectively modernizing the policing system by prompting the surveillance to come from within, from the readers/victims themselves, now the authors of a violence that is eventually returned against them. The modernization of the surveillance mechanisms turned it into a ultra-efficient auto-generated system that corresponds in almost every respect to the modern discipline described a few decades ago by French philosopher Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish (1977). According to Foucault, our modern society produces a new and unprecedented form of discipline, directed against the body. This discipline is the result of the internalization of the normalizing gaze by the ‘victims’ themselves.

Fashion bullying in the media participates in creating a ubiquitous sense of surveillance, which is internalized to some degree. Even when out of sight, we feel the power of the normalizing gaze of the “fashion police” upon us. We thus police our own body in order to comply with those hegemonic cultural norms produced (or reproduced) by the fashion police - in our case fashion and beauty standards.

These policing mechanisms are largely accepted - or at least not questioned - because they are part of bigger framework of increased identification of what we are with what we look like and, by extension what we are with what we wear. This framework was set up in the early 2000s by the social media, which have been encouraging us since them to promote and advertise a self-curated version of ourselves.

The fashion police was a joke; it is now an increasingly powerful system, carried out by almighty media corporations, with us running their errands.
Edie Falco sadly swathed her standout figure in an ill-fitting dress that screamed nightgown. Dan MacMedan,
USA TODAY
CAPITAL/WASTE
In April 2013, workers of a garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh, complained to their foremen about the deplorable condition of the building they were working in, complaints which fell on deaf ears. Just a few hours later, that very building came crumbling down, killing more than 1,100 people were killed, and injuring 2,500 more (Ayers 2014). The victims were the underpaid and marginalized workers, mainly women, in the manufacturing unit. The reason for the collapse was the poor structure of the building itself. However, taking a step back, the blame falls on the employers and contractors of the major fashion houses who did not care about the factory’s safety. So who is the perpetrator of this incident, where does the blame fall and how can we begin steps towards changing the conditions that allow such incident to occur? This case exposes the massive cultural and structural violence that is being inflicted throughout the globalized fashion industry, but which falls into the blind spots of our perception and remains unrecognized. Legitimising the death of the workers though excuses such as “that’s not our problem” or “we do not produce in this specific factory”. Why do so few care?

Why do we look away from violence? Are we selfish and selective in the choice of with whom we sympathize with in the fashion system? The act of caring seems interestingly divided in the world. When violent situation occurs, it is broken down into fragments or sections - the victim, the perpetrator, the location and the time. After these come the reasons, why was it done? And then, was this something that could have been avoided?

The variation in these sections lead to a increased or decreased amount of sympathies that are attached to each. The variations being- 1) The classification of the victim and the perpetrator according to their race, gender and sexuality, 2) The location where the incident occurs, 3) and the timeline of the incident, when it occurred and in a relative time to what other events happening at that time. For example in the case of the Ebola crises John D. Sutter from CNN writes,’International community’s relative inaction emerged in a recent BBC interview with Kofi Annan, the former U.N. secretary general, who is from Ghana, “If the crisis had hit some other region,” he’s quoted as telling that news organization, “it probably would have been handled very differently.”In fact when you look at the evolution of the crisis, the international community really woke up when the disease got to America and Europe.” (Sutter, 2014)

Anushikha Rentala
It took the terrible collapse of this building, in a country which is cited to be the number two garment exporter in the world, for the whole world to point a finger at the corporations and fashion brands that required its services. The structural violence of oppression and exploitation turned into violence in its most concrete form: literal death.

‘Working conditions’, are conditions that need to be taken care of by those in charge or companies that acquire the help of such spaces. In regions where the cost of living is much lower, relative to the consumer market that is actually consuming the products being produced, the conditions are not going be the advanced structure that would have been in the same region that consumption takes place. the question here though is not of the accessibility to such advancement but to the maintenance of standards and the lack of safety. Companies that export the production of garments to “underdeveloped countries”, do so in full aware of the lower standards of working conditions which allows from the working wages to be low and the consequent cost of production to be low. you need to look after the people that work for you, their life and safety is dependent in your place of work, no matter the proximity/location of the proximity of the location to the people in charge.

When the cause of death is the poor working conditions of the place of work, responsibility has to be taken. When it is ignored and excused there is direct violence, in this case the literal death of the workers, manifesting the true meaning of the allegory of being “worked to death”. In the globalized fashion system the accident was no exception, as the system is structured with a calculated proximity to death.

Fast fashion brands have been associated with increased requirement for outsourcing to countries where the cost of production is much lower than the same amount for production locally. And the profit that is gained by the companies is not transitioned to the wages of the production workers. What is ignored is the reason that the consumer is able to buy fashion garments that are so cheap, is because they are being made by underpaid labour. As journalist Lucy Siegel argues in the True Cost movie, “We need to acknowledge particularly in the fashion industry that human capital is part of this miraculous formula, without human capital, without cheap labour… it would not be generating the profits that it is” (True Cost 2015). It is easy to ignore those people who are not visibly a part of what the first world considers to be the fast fashion system.

What matters is the recognition that everyone involved in this process must also be made aware of the process. The labour law amendments that were passed in 2013 allowed for Bangladesh to join the International Labor Organization-International Finance Corporation (ILO-IFC) program “Better Work”. And supposedly many European and American organizations
have come together to ensure intensive quality inspections (Ayers 2014). But now two years from the collapse of Rana Plaza, the fight between the workers for better wages and conditions against the companies and the local manufacturers is still ongoing. Also in Bangladesh, the rich involved with the growth of the garment industry are getting richer, at the explicit cost of human lives. On the other side to the world, the fashion boutiques are now on sale season and the prices of articles have dropped further for the consumer’s benefit.

In True Cost, what is showcased is not just the unbalanced fashion system of fashion production by the corporations but also the process of consumption and the consumer’s. We have become a part of a system that churns out fashion so rapidly that most of us have at least a few garments that have gone into disuse over the past month. Subliminal messages are propagated everywhere that buying something is going to make you happier, ‘Retail Therapy’ is used as a happy and positive term. Tim Kasser, professor in psychology at Knox College, puts it in the following way: “Think of all the shampoo commercials you’ve seen where the person now has beautiful flowing hair and is loved and appreciated by the people around them, with the basic message is the same… the way to solve the problems in your life, is through consumption…owning stuff is going to make us happy” (True Cost 2015).

The fashion advertisements posits that happiness can be attained through the consumption of material goods, the more you consume the happier you’ll be. Fast fashion thrives on this idea. What used to be a stable three month production cycle has collapsed into two weeks (Moon 2014). Shoppers consumption has increased at such a rate that the rate of disposal has increased as well. There is an enormous amount of wastage when it comes to clothes, and “between 1999 and 2009, the volume of textile trash rose by 40 percent” in the United States alone. This is 11 million tons of non-biodegradable waste (Desbarats 2010). There quantity of clothes being produced are being consumed with their equation to disposability. The shoppers today are consumers of products and services which lead to wastage of clothing and lives, both of which are considered expendable.

The next time you buy a garment, think about what you are doing. Do you really want it? What is making you buy the clothing and who are you buying it from? It is extremely hard to point a finger at a critical point in the system and say this is how we can change it. If we are made aware and thought to think twice, perhaps that garment that you though you really needed can remain unsought by you. A simple thought such as this can help us in rethinking our method of involving ourselves in this capitalistically driven consumer market.
MOST IMPORTANT AND INFLUENTIAL

CONSUMER OF ALL

BUYER

STORES / BRANDS

FASHION HOUSE / CORPORATION

DESIGNER

WAREHOUSE

MANUFACTURER

LABOUR FORCE

LEAST IMPORTANT AND INFLUENTIAL

FASHION MAGAZINES/
MEDIA

CHOOSE WHAT
PEOPLE CAN SEE
AND Dictate WHAT
IS CURRENT

FASHION ICONS

ARE FOLLOWED
AND Displayed THE
MOST BY MEDIA.

ADVERTISERS/
MARKETERS

SELECTIVE Showcase
OF PRODUCTS
AND SUBLIMINAL
MESSAGING

TREND FORECASTERS

FORECAST FUTURE
TRENDS

IN CHARGE AND
OWNERS OF
PRODUCED FASHION

DECIDE ALL
MATERIALITY AND
DESIGNS

MOST POWERFUL?
By ignoring incidences like Rana Plaza, and not acknowledging the reasons, are we falling into a unitary trap, where for the benefit of the ‘group’ (the western fashion system) we are okay with the idea of another person dying? (Demmers 2012) The quintessential first world consumer and the hierarchically higher ups of the fashion system are ignoring the significant impact he or she has on the lives of the workers of the third world countries. The ethnicity is playing a role in deterring the sympathy received by thesis locations and people, as even though their hands made the garments we now where, they are not considered to be a part of the fashion that is consumed are thus being subjected to structural violence.

The clear classist nature of this situation is obvious, the oppression though visible is not accepted to be present (Bullock 1995: 119). Do we even realize there is a violence being committed here? Maybe because there is so much violence shoved in our faces every day we become immune to it, almost dead ourselves. Are we also emphatical numb because of the way we perceive the fashion industry, or fail to see its inner workings? It is almost always portrayed as a fantastical world where happiness and pleasure prevails. The production system and the workers involved in it are not considered to be what fashion is about, fashion is seen as a product rather than the process of production.

The news we hear of incidents such as Rana Plaza is viewed as an abstract and somewhat unrelated event. We would much rather watch The September Issue than True Cost. We do not want to face the truth. The truth that there are lives being spent on clothes, not just money.
CLASH
OF
CULTURES
On November 13th 2015 Tasneem Kabir was brutally attacked on the street of East London. A graphic video was released of the sixteen-year-old girl wearing the hijab while walking down the street. She was hit on the head and neck area from behind by a stranger, leaving her unconscious on an East London street. “Tasneem Kabir was punched in the head and suffered a smashed lip and broken teeth as she headed to college in Plaistow, Newham.” (Stewart 2015) The attacker was sentenced to four years in jail.

AlJazeera has published an article on Islamophobia in London with staggering statistics. Philippa Stewart, the author of the article, mentions how “women in the UK who wear the hijab or other forms of veiling are still the most frequent victims of Islamophobic attacks.” (Stewart 2015) This September The London police stated that anti-Islam assaults have raised by seventy percent from “478 to 816. Of the victims about 60 percent were female, according to TellMAMA, an NGO that monitors Islamophobia in the UK.” (Stewart 2015)

The Huffington Post had an article written recently by Eve Hartley mentioning that the “number of attacks against Muslims have almost doubled in the past twelve months, from 406 to 800” and Richmond has seen an increase in 800% from 1 attack to 9. (Hartley 2015)

The attack in London is very strong form of violence, yet there are many others. The violence and conflict surrounding religious dress seem to be connected to a misunderstanding of the culture. Let’s not forget 9/11 and the start of when racism and Islamaphobia were intertwined. Steve Rose
wrote an article in the Huffington Post in 2013 stating “Islamophobic attacks increase by 1,700% in 2001. Prior to 9/11, the FBI recorded just 28 hate crimes against Muslims. The following year it increased to 481.” (Rose 2013)

The Westerners with minimum knowledge on the topic may think men force Muslim women to wear the hijab. I believe this is why the garment causes such commotion: because it is entangled in relations of force, either by the religion or government, or the force of ignorance.

Iran is well-known for its enforcement of religious dress code, and has signs in the streets re-enforcing a religious dress code. Over a decade ago in the streets of Tehran there was a street sign that translated to: “Women who are not properly veiled are free slaves to the Americas.” Today, Iran’s government street signs have gotten more relaxed simply re-enforcing the chador over the hijab, no longer devaluing the women to “slaves”. Yet the capital still showcases a dress laws.

Even though some women may not want to wear it because the hijab represents such an old mindset, others do have pride in wearing it. Many Muslim women love their religion and simply want to incorporate their love for fashion within the requirement of their dress. Emma Tarlo in her book Visibly Muslim talks about all the women she has interviewed and how it is a challenge to fit their identity through dress with the restrictions from their faith (Tarlo 2010). This touches on conflict within identity, a “silent” form of violence. Wearing the hijab in a country that accepts it (not by all) but in a world that does not always welcome it creates conflict. This is a fight that happens within the Muslim woman’s Identity.

According to the Oxford Dictionary ‘Identity’ is defined as: “The fact of being who or what a person or thing is.” If you lose yourself in your religion you can lose yourself in your identity. There is a constant tug and pull when it comes to dressing your body according to your Muslim beliefs while wanting to dress for yourself. In the United States, even though some of us dress without the religious restrictions of dress, we still have many other exterior pressures we have to take into account, like dressing for work. An example would be deciding not to wear a shirt with a low cleavage or a short skirt because you consider it inappropriate: a clash of different cultures of dress.

This affects the identity process of the women by being restricted by a dress code imposed by men and having to always abide by those rules while trying to show individuality in their choice of dress.

The reason why a garment like the hijab creates such controversy in the western world is because it produces a lot of misunderstandings, and many of these turn violent. Indeed, the garment is engraved in gender because Muslim women are the wearers, but we need to acknowledge that men, who often hold power, are just as involved in the garment. The fact that there
is no change in the rules of veiling is a direct reflection of the men’s opinion in those countries.

Some women can decide to wear the hijab in a bun-style where the garment is tightly wrapped around the head and then around the bun. This style of wearing the hijab is controversial for some Muslims because the more conservatives in the Muslim community do not view it as an appropriate way of wearing the garment.

Advertisements in the United States have gotten some attention over the years when it comes to the sexualization of the models; often showing too much skin. But on the other hand, H&M recently released a new ad with a hijabi-woman as the model. This created some controversy within both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. The model, Mariah Idrissi, is a twenty two year old Muslim woman that grew up in London. Her roots are in Pakistan and she clearly has been raised according to her their traditions. A lot of press was interested in Mariah when she was featured in this advertisement, not because of her lack of covering, but the very opposite.

H&M treated Mariah with nothing but respect, offering her own dressing area and personal assistant. They also consulted with her with what she was comfortable wearing on the shoot, taking into account her religious views. This is different from a regular photo-shoot where the model simply wears the garments chosen for them.

H&M could have decided to go the “simple route” with the regular models they hire but decided to change course. The company is not known for having sex-centered campaigns but more of a simplistic approach to commercial advertising, or in other words, they take a “non-controversial” approach by showcasing their new designs in a friendly atmosphere. Except this time, the press was all over the campaign.

The reason behind H&M’s decision was driven by strategic and consumer report research. In an NBC article a senior strategist from Siegel and Gale, a New York based strategy firm, said that H&M views itself as a progressive company and is marketing to a mindset of inclusion and individuality. (Itzhak and Medina, 2015)

*The International Business Times* had a recent article stating: “There are more than 1.6 billion Muslim consumers worldwide, with a buying power large enough to be attractive to both luxury and affordable fashion brands. The Muslim consumer base is expected to increase to nearly 3 billion by 2050. Muslims are also projected to spend $484 billion on clothing and footwear by 2019, an increase from $266 billion in 2013.” (Morrison 2015) When reading these statistics it only makes sense to have Mariah Idrissi on the H&M campaigns.

This shows that H&M is progressive and supports its clientele regardless of religion; a rare and powerful approach. By showing modernity
and embracement of the culture H&M has placed itself above other brands when it comes to cultural acknowledgement. Mariah has stated in various interviews that she wants the hijab to be a “normal” garment and no longer have such controversy over what a woman decides to wear, telling NBC: “all I’m doing is bringing it mainstream, because it should be seen as something normal.” (Itzhak and Medina 2015) Mariah’s has commented in a recent CNN article that she looks forward to the day where the hijab will not make headlines and be part of the world as a regular topic. (Sarkar 2015)

Violence is present in different forms when it comes to Hijab and dress. The case of Mariah Idrissi shows us verbal violence in forms of the controversy it created here in the U.S and abroad and bullying via social media platforms. The case of Tsaneem Kabir we are seeing direct physical violence. Despite both incidents, Muslim women still wear the hijab. Mariah goal is to normalize the hijab by pursuing her modeling career.

Faegheh Shirazi is a researcher holding her PhD from the University of Texas at Austin with the hijab and Iran as main interests. In her The Veil: Unveiled, she addresses her personal experience with the veil in her home country of Iran. Her book starts with a personal connection to the garment. She mentions how, on her way home to Iran the pilot announces not only the approaching to the country’s border, but all also the requirement for all women onboard to wear their religious garments. Shirazi states that she wears hers “to avoid harassment and likely imprisonment”. In 2001 Iran had street signs stating that women without the proper covered dress need to be “eliminated” (Shirazi 2001), which is a strong form of verbal violence, with the threat of real implementation.

Yet, we must think this is an extreme. More prevalent violence may be more “silent” or less visible forms. This is where the term silent violence plays a role. This can be the pressure of your family’s views on religion, forcing you to wear a chaddor rather than the hijab. There are also the looks and pressure of your environmental surroundings that can alter your choices of dress.

Fear, caused by events such as the example of Tasneem Kabir, can be playing a role in your decision of dress. I will be further researching the hijab and dress in my studies at Parsons the New School and have decided to wear the hijab for a period of time, yet I must admit I will not be walking alone while wearing the garment. A choice has to be made between following your personal choice of religious dress and your safety, according to where you are in the world.

Deciding on how to wear the hijab can cause stir. If one’s family is extremely conservative, showing some hair around the face will be reprimanded. The wear of the garment is a balance between the religion and the woman in it itself. The violence within one’s identity is influenced by many
factors: family, neighborhood, self-identification with religion and more. This conflict within the identity is a life long journey.

In Iran there is a movement within the Muslim community where young women not only embrace the hijab but also are looking for change. There is a progressive mindset being established among young Muslim women today, and therefore, much more to come on this subject.
CYBER-AGGRESSION

"LOOKS LIKE SHE HAD A SKIN DISEASE"

"YOU'VE GOT SOME SKIN ON YOUR PIZZA FACE"

"THAT'S A LOT OF SHITSPRAY"

"YUK, THIS IS GROSS"

"FRECKLES FREAK ME OUT IT LOOKS LIKE THEY HAVE A SKIN DISEASE OR MELANOMA"
“Looks like she had a skin disease” - A strong comment on a simple image of a person with freckles. The images chosen here are from the popular social media platform, 9gag.com. All the images have been uploaded by the people who participate in the group. These specific set of images are uploaded onto a section called “Girl”. If there was a free for all platform for people to upload images that objectify women, this is it. The general idea of this website, in the various other sections it has, is to provide people with some humor for the day.

As we see in the examples the insults are directed towards the images. Hannah Arendt talk of strength as that with which “even the strongest individual can always be overpowered by many” (Arendt 1970). We consider people who are popular or influential to be strong and self assured but even they can be torn down. So let us discuss, Why is it that when acts of violence are propagated in public domain, it acquires a tendency to multiply in number rather than be thwarted. Why is it that there is collective pleasure derived from the insulting of another?

“The almost intrinsic hostility of the many towards the one has always, from Plato to Nietzsche, been ascribed to resentment, to the envy of the weak for the strong” (Arendt 1970: 44). In her discussion, Arendt continues to say that the nature of the group is such that it almost automatically turns against the strength of a singular individual. So how is it online that the “haters”, who are individuals themselves who have no relation to another, impulsively turn against one victim whom they have no relations to. It would be more logical to say that one individual’s disdain is shared by many, and this shared hate is what makes them get together, not the other way around. They for some reason have the need to verbalize their clear contempt of the image of the person seen.

Almost 80 percent of the comments made on most images are negative. The other 10 percent are sexually explicit and the remaining are acknowledgements of the “beauty” that the person (most often woman) possesses. If one were to take a peek at the people who do make these comments, what is initially noticed is that they choose to be anonymous. Though we can often derive the gender of the user. The sexually explicit comment are most often from the male population. The negative comments are from both genders.
"Stop making talentless people famous"

"Uglies Bond girl ever in my opinion"

"She's a loner"

"She looks bored all the time"

"She sucks"

"She isn't that hot"

"Not that impressive"

(Lea Seydoux)
If there was a website that posted images of women in an empowered state (whatever that would look like), with a bit of a push for positive commentary, would that work in the interest of the people? Would everyone go “yes, this is very positive, job well done”, or would it bore them? Doesn’t human nature just gravitate towards taking pleasure in the hardship of another because that would imply that everyone is in the same insecure position that you yourself are in?

This violence that is proliferating online isn’t even seen as a violence because of that very reason: it seems “natural” to the online environment. The ideals of human interests are at such a distorted place that people find the need to lash out at everything that they considered to cater to those ideals. They believe that their comments are legitimate and deserved. Perhaps they argue that if this image of a celebrity is out there, there has already been a violence on their self esteem, and hence the celebrity deserves to be violated?
“Ugly AF”

“She looks like a cartoon character”

“Look at that face...how the f*** is she so famous???”

“Oh look a mole rat”

“Nice body but the face, no not attractive”

(Natalie Dormer)
“SORRY BUT NO, I'M NOT INTO "BONE" GIRLS.... DISGUSTING YUKI!”

“FEED HER”

“HER FACE IS HOT BUT SHE IS NOT”

“ANOREXIC, YEP GET HER SOME FOOD”

“SHE LOOKS LIKE A BUNCH OF STICKS”

“WHY IS THERE A PICTURE OF A BROOM HERE”

(ROMEE STRIJD)
DEBT & DEATH
In the novel *Madame Bovary*, written by Gustave Flaubert in 1856, Bovary, the main protagonist, craves luxury and a dream-like life. She is enticed into the world of luxury and clothing by Monsieur Lheureux, as she fails to see meaning in her own life anymore. Through a slow but hefty line of credit which she used to buy herself a prestigious life, Madame Bovary slowly but surely enters into a world of economic debt. At the end the ones who she thought loved her, abandon her. The shame of not being able to live the elite lifestyle that involved luxuries anymore, falling into enormous amounts of debt she couldn’t repay, and her betrayal towards her family, ultimately drive her to an agonizing suicide.

The portrayal of a character so deeply in debt and in sorrow provides if not a real, but a momentary look into the life and death by indebtedness. Through the course of the narrative Emma, Madame Bovary, begins to lose sight of who she is, and her transition from a cheerful young lady to a painful loss is poetically captured.

Power is a dangerous thing, it exercises itself through various instruments. In vicious forms of power that an individual imposes on another it takes a tragic toll on human psyche. The need to escape this power persists but the extent of the power over one, determine the ways in which one tries to get out of it, what are the escape routes? how does one resist the control of power over them or run away from it. Power has the ability to enslave a subject through invisible and disguised methods. When the story of Madame Bovary is decoded one can see instances of what cultural sociologist Orlando Patterson would describe as social, psychological and cultural power facets (Patterson 1982: 1) and dominations by being forced to conform to social enslavement, blackmail and debt that lead to death. This death can be seen as a form of escape from the total control and enslavement that would have occurred. From what cultural instances, if at all, can we decipher and draw out such elements of power, slavery and social death? This text is an attempt to draw a parallel between fictitious literature and the theories of Patterson on slavery and social death, to see if violence on individuals by other individuals can be drawn out in a unsuspecting location.

On the onset of the story Monsieur Lheureux, a well known provider of drapes and all things required for an elite lifestyle, who begins his introductions with Emma (Madame Bovary) in a friendly manner. He rec-
ognizes Emma’s disdain in her own life and uses this as an opportunity to exploit her for his own benefit. He presents himself as a person belonging to her social circle, as a constant occurrence in her life and in the lives of the woman who could be considered of the same stature-

‘It was Monsieur Lheureux, the shopkeeper, who had undertaken the order; this provided him with an excuse for visiting Emma. He chatted with her about the new goods from Paris, about a thousand feminine trifles, made himself very obliging, and never asked for his money. Emma yielded to this lazy mode of satisfying all her caprices.’ (Flaubert 2012: 309)

Monsieur Lhereux gets Emma accustomed to the life of luxury with no mention of the monetary value of the goods that he provides for her. There are only promises without the consequence of them being verbalized, she blindly trusts him to have her best intentions at heart. There is a faint sense of awareness of the ongoing process in the back of Emma’s mind but it takes a back seat-

‘And,’ said Madame Bovary, taking her watch from her belt, ‘take this; you can pay yourself out of it.’ But the tradesman cried out that she was wrong; they knew one another; did he doubt her? What childishness!’ (Flaubert 2012: 322)

There is a psychological facet of power that is practiced here. Emma is in the sedated process of becoming enslaved by Monsieur Lhereux’s power over her. By posing himself as a friend and a well wisher, he persuades her to change her perception of interest and created a circumstance that was not really her own, Analogous to Orlando Patterson’s discussion on the psychological facet of influence in power. She was not really rich, only a borrower, though he made her believe she was one with disposable income. He drove her further into debt by imposing objects onto her without her request when she succumbs to illness (of the body),

‘In fact, at the height of Emma’s illness, the latter, taking advantage of the circumstances to make his bill larger, had hurriedly brought the cloak, the travelling bag, two trunks instead of one, and a number of other things.’ (Flaubert 2012: 345)

At a sad turn of events, he catches her with her lover, Leon, with whom she was having an affair. He uses this information to impose on her her debts and hasten the collection of the same. There is practice of the social facet of power here, a threat and a piece of information has been transformed into a metaphorical ‘whip’ an instrument of control, much like the master’s authority that is derived from symbolic instruments as described by Patterson (Patterson 1982: 7), with which he blackmails her, the information that would lead to her social death if let known becomes a symbolic instrument of control. Due to the fear of losing face Emma is only now faced with two
options, either she moves deeper in debt by borrowing and buying more from Monsieur Lhereux or she paid off the bills, with money she does not posses. She of course chose to continue with the former.

‘She could no longer do without his services. Twenty times a day she sent for him, and he at once put by his business without a murmur.’ (Flaubert 2012: 423)

She is powerless in relation to Monsieur Lhereux. When the time does come for her to finally pay up her cost of living there is nothing left for her to give. A man who started of as a friend ended up as a fiend. Finally he had complete control over her property, her things what made her- her. To get away from her mundane life of marriage, she had chosen to build a world of fantasy and luxury around her, consuming more than she could afford, now that the experience had ended so had that version of her which she had come to admire and need. she could no longer consume, she could no longer exist. And he even had control of her family by extension. He has the power to strip away her social identity and he intends to do so.

‘My good lady, did you think I should go on to all eternity being your purveyor and banker, for the love of God? Now be just. I must get back what I’ve laid out. Now be just.’ She cried out against the debt.

‘Whose fault is that?’ said Lheureux, bowing ironically.

‘While I’m slaving like a nigger, you go gallivanting about.’

‘I implore you, Monsieur Lheureux, just a few days more!’ She was sobbing.

‘There! tears now!’

‘You are driving me to despair!’

‘What do I care?’ said he, shutting the door. (Flaubert 2012: 480)

According to Patterson’s study, an essential element of slavery is the extended death sentence, and though slavery is in no way a commutation, the death is postponed as long as the slavery remains in the state of enslavement, for death is lingering in the periphery. “Perhaps the most distinctive attribute of the slave’s powerlessness was that it originated as a substitute for death, usually a violent death” (Patterson 1982: 5). Death is the path that Madame Bovary finally chooses, to rather accept what she thought was inevitable than to live a life under the control of another.

With no money, no love and the identity of herself lost, her honor was taken away from her along with her public (social) and private (self) worth. Her only way out of poverty was through her own death. Not just her but her family by extension was made to face a life of poverty after her death, so in a sense this incident in her life caused their social death as well. Her debt was passed onto her husband after whose death, it was passed onto
YOU COULD WEAR THE SAME THING TONIGHT...

DARLING, I'D RATHER DIE.
her daughter. As she has no claim to any of the property, she had no sense of identity after.

Like any creditor, Monsieur Lhereux here clearly got the upper hand. There are characters throughout the story who through subtle comments mention distrust in him. This would suggest that it is something that his character does, and would continue to do after the demise of the protagonist. Monsieur Lhereux who has taken on the role of the Brand, Distributor, Marketer and Debt Collector has showcased how easy it is to entrap the consumer into a world of goods that they cannot afford. Making it an essential part of living a fulfilling high societal life. The fashion he distributed allowed for Bovary, the consumer, to gain temporary satisfaction but leaving her in permanent debt. He encouraged her, with the use of fine silks and opulent products, into a world which she assumed she could maneuver through but which ended up controlling her entirely instead.

He personifies the world of fashion which seeps its way into the lives of the susceptible and forces them conform to a world that keeps wanting.
Figure 1. Illustration made to resemble image that appeared in vogue.com, April, 2014.
Two international brands, *Vogue* and CrossFit, have come together in a collaboration that intends to merge fashion, the female body, and fitness. Rather than featuring the emblematic thin, rawboned, yoga-aerobic woman, *Vogue* took on CrossFit, an intense strength and conditioning program that delivers fitness through continuous practical movements executed at high intensity levels, that will make a woman sweat, gain muscle and push her past her limits. CrossFit is rooted in the enhancement of an individual’s potential through diverse forms of physical conditioning, thus its objective is to produce the best form of fitness for the body. So, what then does a visibly strong female in *Vogue* mean? What impact is *Vogue* aiming for with this unconventional collaboration?

I would argue that this collaboration exposes a case of structural violence: a systematic operation where *Vogue* employs its status as an elite social structure to harm and disadvantage the visibly fit woman. For instance, take Figure 1, an image of two-time “Fittest Woman on Earth” and Reebok CrossFit Games champion (2011-2012), Annie Thorisdottir, who appeared in US *Vogue* in April 2014. The body and face of the Iceland native graced *Vogue*’s editorial as a returning champion, after being sidelined by a back injury that kicked her out of the 2013 CrossFit Open. In Figure 1 Thorisdottir is lifting a barbell with 190 to 195 lbs., smoothly, at the pinnacle of her physical capacity, or, as her boyfriend, Frederik Aegidius (Europe’s former top ranked male CrossFit athlete) once said, “Annie never makes a face.” (Green 2014) From the position she is holding Thorisdottir is preparing, I assume, for an overhead squat, yet she can also move into a push press, a push jerk, a thruster or a clean and jerk – it all depends on the WOD (i.e., workout of the day). Thorisdottir’s body is not a traditional *Vogue* body. She is fabulously ripped! Her body standard, like most CrossFit athletes, is incompatible to the fashion industry’s delicate and graceful feminine ideal. Dressed for action in a Reebok CrossFit bra and a pair of Rag & Bone track pants, Thorisdottir’s abs are so conspicuous and reinforced that they seem of steel, as do all her bodily features.

The problem that we face here is the direct aggression that *Vogue* is inscribing to Thorisdottir’s body, not unlike how The Fashion Praxis Collective says it is a “manifestation of fashion ideals into sizes, patterns and social or racial sorting mechanisms, directly affecting the body, if we can wear it or
Figure 2. Illustration made to resemble vogue.com, Paleo Power, April, 2014.
not, if it reveals the body in a “good” way or not.” (The Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 51) In other words, considering sociocultural norms and the disciplinary practices that preserve gender roles, a female body is faced with defined options when exerting her identity (e.g. gender and body shaping practices). Thus under standardized norms, the role fitness movements’ play in further attributing discourse between beauty and feminine ideals among the collective consciousness of society are here preserved by Vogue, which fails to dress Thorisdottir in a fashionable manner.

Taking into account the above commentary, what stands out the most from Figure 1 is Thorisdottir’s posture and facial expression. Her stand is firm, sealed into the floor. Her arms and shoulders are locked, owning the density of the barbell. Her gaze is straight, direct into the spectator. Yet all the physical power that this image connotes is concealed in one simple characteristic, her joyous smile.

Moreover, if we look at Thorisdottir through the lens of Vogue – standardized norms – her position is not classified within the acceptable criterion of patriarchal heterosexuality. In contrast, Thorisdottir is employing Vogue as a platform to transgress foundational ideology, as her position is not intended to attract an approving feminine portrayal. She is taking control and she is exerting her legitimate right of choice.

Other aspects that I find problematic in this editorial are: firstly, why is Figure 1 in sepia tone? It doesn’t strike an impression. It makes the image appear antiquated and it debilitates its significance. But what is more interesting is, that it reminds me of an old comic, Popeye the Sailor Man, which Thorisdottir playfully depicts in Paleo Power (Figure 2), so it seems. Secondly, Figure 2 is distasteful, a mockery in many ways; for instance, the essence of Vogue’s leadership and guidance is in the brand’s distinct role as a sociocultural model that targets a global audience. Why then is Thorisdottir dressed in a fictional costume? Again, why is she not fashionably dressed? When referring to her eating habits, Thorisdottir states, “I eat very little processed food. A lot of meat, a lot of chicken, a lot of vegetables.” (Green 2014) Vogue uses this quote to caption the image (Figure 2), which is a microinsult because having Thorisdottir in costume while holding a can of spinach fails to send out a positive message. Rather than enlightening the femininity vs. muscle debate, Vogue employs structural violence by gambling with power through the visual codes of masculinity that are depicted in Thorisdottir’s pose, which is the epitome of male virility.

In addition, Thorisdottir can also be seen smirking while chewing on a spinach leaf, which again, discredits Vogue’s effort to tackle female fitness. In this manner, I argue that Figure 2 is nothing but a satiric aggression to femininity. For it is more than obvious to dress a female athlete in a fictional costume that is globally recognized for its strength peculiarity.
As Nixon argues when discussing male masculinity in images, “the selection and styling of garments, which draw upon naval apparel, helps to produce a strongly masculine ‘look’ through codes of dress.” (Nixon 1997: 310) In other words, structural violence is reflected in this editorial as an understated aggression that is inconspicuous, invisible. A violence that is masked by an aesthetic sense of perfection that allures the masses into trusting Vogue’s judgment, a judgment that gives power to all those whose social status denies them the access to the benefits of social prestige.

According to the Fashion Praxis Collective, “Fashion Authority [is] the reciprocity of respect perceived as legitimate by the community, the ability to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, virtue, together with others.” (The Fashion Praxis Collective, 2014: 49) This translates to: what Vogue dictates the readers will follow. But what is there to follow? For what is manifested here is nothing but institutional authority that neglects the progression of feminine representations of the body. The notion that by keeping Thorisdottir out of fashionable dress, Vogue cements violence throughout the public realm, discharging microaggressions that serve as an umbrella for the unparalleled division of the masses based on power, privilege and the everyday life. As Arendt once said, power is “never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and it remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.” (Arendt 1970: 44) That is, that by utilizing its social power Vogue neglects Thorisdottir’s gender-bending femininity and instead elects to display her in a parodic editorial that fails to acknowledge the different canons of beauty. A revealing act that unmasksthe mechanics of violence that Vogue operates under, mechanics that survive solely on the basis of elitism and judgment.

In general, I feel Vogue could have done something more pronounced with this exceptional athlete. For example, Thorisdottir wants to be seen as a symbol of change, she wants to inspire women to make healthier decisions for themselves, as she says, “I’m not preaching that everyone should try to become a CrossFit champion . . . but I want to show them that training can give them more confidence – and that being strong is beautiful.” (Green 2014) Rather than enduring regulated expectation, females who take charge of their identity, such as Thorisdottir, embody an alternate standard of beauty. And truly, there is nothing shameful about variant femininity - it’s a gendered expression that rejects conformism, so as such Vogue should celebrate it. Because transformative body techniques are revolutionizing the spectrum of femininity and, in such way, how femininity is defined through ambivalence.
ELITISM
This past September 11, the French fashion house Givenchy, for the first-time ever, moved its Spring/Summer 2016 ready-to-wear show from Paris to New York. And to honor the affair, the French house opened its doors, making 1200 places available to members of the public, thus overriding decades of privileged established practice. So what does this event mean? What is this contrast in audience demographic all about? Is it the rise of a new democracy within the fashion industry? The answer must be no.

I would argue that this is nothing but an act of fashion realism. An act of politics that reflects how the `exclusive populace' experience the world they inhabit with all of its subjective implications, and expresses that experience in a highly staged manner. It is the breakdown and understanding of “socioeconomic status and class-related inequalities,” (Smith and Redington 2010: 270) Or, as the Fashion Praxis Collective states, “fashion adds a layer of representation or social use, it also inscribes itself into the order of fashion and submits to the ruling of the peer-executed violent regime.” (The Fashion Praxis Collective, 2014: 51) That is to say, that fashion is an ideal representation of status, an inscription that surrenders to the governing of the dominant sociocultural establishment.

There exists a mixture of ways of categorizing people and institutions in our society. We give value to talent, honesty and principle, efficiency and virtue, but most importantly in today’s consumer society, we give value to social status. That is, that we exist in a current state where visibility depends on human perspective, on the necessity to hold a position, to be acknowledged and to be seen. A state where all that is cared for is expressed by the will and need to fit in. People increasingly appear to be instigated by a desire to be worthy and of an elevated status – the compulsory longing of being and feeling socially elite. This has an implication of wealth and power, yet it also implies additional forms of access and privilege among society; for instance, being able to have the access to the most exclusive clubs and organizations in New York, or, simply, having access to what the general public just does not have access to. So how does the notion of elitism apply to fashion politics and violence?

To begin with, the notion of “elite” is nothing but a socially constructed characteristic that is given meaning to and by individuals. As Jolle Demmers states, when she discusses social identity, it “is about the relation-
ship between the individual and the social environment. It is about categories and relationships.” (Demmers 2012: 21) Drawing from Demmers observation, it can be said that elite is the product of a specifically defined social behavior that is determined by the impact of an individual’s sense of self to institutional measures. However, it is important to note that elitism does not rest – as it used to – in specific groups or families that possess power and wealth. Rather, elitism rests in the characteristics that are divulged by members of such wealthy groups and families that employ status as a tool to target the public in ways that will bring recognition and admiration to them. Elitism is embedded in the idea that the power of hierarchy must be proliferated.

Moreover, when looked through the lens of specific practices, the fashion industry is an explicit form of elitism as it is a global spectacle that feeds on the onlookers’ desire, with a limited amount of positions available at the top. Thus the fashion industry is a restricted club that is separate from the rest of the population by a red velvet rope that symbolizes elitism, exclusivity and this presumption is nothing new. Considering that most high-profile fashion houses and/or brands are, by their very nature and sense of status, privileged institutions that are detached from the mainstream realm by value, availability and aesthetic distinctiveness. It is this sense of exclusionary appeal, precisely, that gives them their sense of exclusivity.

Take, for instance, the case of the “accessible” Givenchy show, where the act of opening the doors to the public is commendable, yes. But perhaps unconsciously, Givenchy perpetuated the structural violence of fashion by cementing the sociocultural capital of the elite, that is, that in the midst of everything it still elevated the rank of the elite to a higher standard, even by inviting a general public to witness the event. Thus by making the Spring/Summer 2016 catwalk presentation accessible, yet still reserving special places for the real elite, Givenchy disseminated a series of microinsults, which are “characterized by verbal or nonverbal communication that demean a person’s heritage or identity.” (Wing, 2010: 275) In other words, Givenchy, with its openness, perhaps unwarily, insulted and dismissed a series of micro effects that when evaluated as one illustrates the power of the elite, furthering the control through the value that is invested in a symbolic violence (i.e., the social segregation of the space, between the real elite and the masses).

Givenchy was praised for the access, and a lot had to do with the set design, which was directed by performance artist Marina Abramovic – a beautiful commemoration that honored the anniversary of 9/11 and Ricardo Tisci’s love for New York – where a refreshing element of change is obvious by the social diversity of the people in attendance. Additionally, an aspect that must be analyzed here is the ways in which the general public was systematized, which was via a ticket, behind a velvet rope and seated separate
from the “elite”, as one could have expected in terms of elitist violence - the instrumental use of the socially underprivileged to make the event more enjoyable for the elite. That said, things are much more complex than they appear to be because the group separation here clearly speaks to defined categories of people who engage in social contention with each other, which, in this case, is the “outgroup” desiring the position and status of the elite, the “ingroup”.

According to the Fashion Praxis Collective, fashion authority is “the reciprocity of respect perceived as legitimate by the community, the ability to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, virtue, together with others.” (The Fashion Praxis Collective, 2014: 49) In Givenchy’s most recent S/S 2016 presentation, fashion authority was evident throughout, and it was translated in the visible neglect of interaction between the ingroup and the outgroup - the elite vs. the masses. Additionally, fashion authority was also echoed in Givenchy’s FROW, the front row of seats closest to the catwalk at a fashion show, considered to be the most prestigious and desirable place to be. In this case, the occasion saw the presence of Givenchy FROW regulars like Kim Kardashian and Kanye West (who arrived an hour late and got a nonstop entrance into the fashion show, furthering the aura of exclusivity), but most notably Julia Roberts, who came out to the show after years of absence from fashion week.

Yet in contrast, the local fans were instructed to make a line along Pier 26, illustrating, once more, the dissonance in social status. Here Givenchy applied a systematic control that “automatically leads . . . into the realm of power.” (Demmers 2012: 21) As it is clear that only A-list figures and personalities have the power to occupy a coveted seat in the FROW, which showcases the invitation of the socially underprivileged to experience the reason why they are normally excluded. In this manner, the notion of the ‘attainable’ comes into play here due to the fact that even though the show was for the ‘masses’ the tickets sold out within minutes, making it even harder to be a part of the Givenchy elite group.

The mechanics that produce fashion violence work in many ways, but for the most part they manifest group dynamics similar to that of ethnocentrism, which is the concept of “thing’s in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it . . . Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders.” (Demmers 2012: 40) In other words, by dividing each group, inviting the masses, yet distinguishing an elite, Givenchy intensified the natural state of the elite, the aesthetic and economic meritocracy (i.e., the governance of the elite, who hold a higher power due to their ability or status), delivering a break-up between the possible mobility of social interaction.
PLEASE FILL OUT YOUR INFORMATION BELOW AND THE FIRST 400 CORRECTLY COMPLETED REGISTRATIONS WILL BE INVITED TO ATTEND THE GIVENCHY BY RICCARDO Tisci SPRING SUMMER 2016 SHOW ON SEPTEMBER 18TH IN NYC TOGETHER WITH A GUEST. TERMS AND CONDITIONS ARE INCLUDED—AND NOTIFICATION OF YOUR INVITATION WILL BE SENT OUT ON OR BEFORE SEPTEMBER 9TH. WE DO NOT REQUIRE THE NAME OF YOUR GUEST UNTIL YOU RSVP FOLLOWING NOTIFICATION YOU WERE SUCCESSFULLY INVITED. YOUR PERSONALIZED INVITE WILL THEN BE PREPARED READY FOR COLLECTION ON SEPTEMBER 18TH OR 19TH AT A LOCATION CLOSE TO THE SHOW VENUE WHICH WILL BE REVEALED VERY SOON.

GIVENCHY
PARIS

TITLE
FIRST NAME
LAST NAME
EMAIL ADDRESS
ADDRESS 1
ADDRESS 2
CITY
STATE/PROVINCE/REGION
ZIP/POSTAL CODE
What makes us accept this form of violence as “natural” to the fashion system is, as how Demmers discusses the dynamics of interaction, as she says, “agency is only placed at the level of (often ill defined) predatory elites. They are the ones who, through careful calculation, manipulation and intimidation, aim at acquiring as much power as possible.” (Demmers 2012: 29) The elites are inherently seen as an influence to compete with others – the in-group vs the out-group – yet the masses are for the most part seen as the faithful followers, as submissive instruments that are governed by the manipulation and indoctrination of the elites and the overall dictators of fashion. By “democratizing” fashion, Tisci gave in into the elitism game, a game where no matter what side you take, equality between the groups will never take form.

Fashion that does not signify a social elite status is nothing other than clothing, however exclusive the material may be. The key feature to the fashion industry is its restricting nature. In today’s visual society, the fashion industry functions as a network of communication, a form of creative expression that everybody makes use of, one way or another. And truly, when analyzing the structure of the fashion industry, it is difficult to argue against elitism – a section of society that safeguards its territories as sociocultural meccas. As Demmers says, “Each society is characterized by explicit and implicit rules and narratives about right and wrong, normal and abnormal. Some of these rules are firmly established and institutionalized, others are more subtle and negotiable.” (Demmers, 2012: 21) In this context, it can be said that fashion is nothing other than a cultural phenomena that preserves principles that are strongly entrenched and standardized based on ideal notions of social status.

Tisci’s S/S 2016 show for Givenchy is a pretentious act of what seems like democracy. Yet, it is elitist both in the best and the worst sense of the word, and while it plays by the politics of fashion, it is important to acknowledge the efforts towards accessibility. For there is still an extended path to cover. That said, let us not forget that the effect that fashion has on the masses is all based on perspective – the notion of how we perceive our identity, social status and emotions. It is an extension of class, education, privilege, ambition, merit and passion. A reflection of our aspirations and desires.
FAKE OR FORTUNE?
It’s a simple equation. Iconic fashion houses sell bags emblematic of the brand. These are bought and worn by those wealthy enough to afford them. The bags are then copied by others, and cheaper versions are then sold on the streets or in “secret locations” out of a trunk. People with lesser means are attracted and buy them. One is likely to think “can I really finally own a Chanel bag without its expensive price tag?”

But the more imitations are produced, the more the fashion houses start to protest. Not only are their bags fakes, and not sold by the original fashion houses, but they are being made in cheaper fabrics, without the approval of the brands. And even worse, these copies are being worn by a “clientele” the brand would probably prefer not to be associated with.

As early as 1899, sociologist Thorstein Veblen introduced the notion of dress as a form of “conspicuous consumption”, used as a marker for class and status. In his study of “Dress as an expression of the pecuniary culture”, he underlines the advantage “expenditure on dress [has] over most other methods”, that is that “our apparel is always in evidence and affords an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at the first glance.” (Veblen 1899: 126). Not much has changed since, dress, and this includes accessories such as bags, continue to be a marker of class, as well as of “taste” and “reputability”.

In his study, Veblen speaks of the “cheap”, which is deemed by the upper echelon of the society as “unworthy” and even “nasty” (Veblen 1899: 127). Interestingly, he also speaks of “imitation”:

With few and inconsequential exceptions, we all find a costly hand-wrought article of apparel much preferable, in point of beauty and of serviceability, to a less expensive imitation of it, however cleverly the spurious article may imitate the costly original; and what offends our sensibilities in the spurious article is not that it falls short in form or colour, or, indeed, in visual effect in any way. The offensive object may be so close an imitation as to defy any but the closest scrutiny; and yet so soon as the counterfeit is detected, its aesthetic value, and its commercial value as well, declines precipitately. Not only that, but it may be asserted with but small risk of contradiction that the aesthetic value of a detected counterfeit in dress declines somewhat in the same proportion as the counterfeit is cheaper than its original. It loses caste aesthetically because it falls to a lower pecuniary grade. (Veblen 1899: 128).
Spot the difference!
What was the case in the nineteenth-century, is still very much true today. In many ways, this derogatory form of distinction, between expensive “original” and cheap “unworthy” copy, is a type of fashion violence. The example of the counterfeit bags illustrates that in today’s society, it is still legitimate to criticize, judge and mock someone for wanting to own something they cannot afford. Some may jump in and try defend the lower classes, asking: “Why do you want to afford something that symbolizes your oppressors?” But as explained by The Fashion Praxis Collective, throughout the phenomenon of fashion there exists a “form of social control, driven through our common desire to replicate the reality of the powerful.” (The Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 53). Fashion sells dreams, but these dreams are not attainable to all. That is their point. But the paradox of this system is that those with power sell dreams with no real desire to have these dreams fulfilled by simply anybody. In his study, Veblen illustrates his point with the character of Gatsby in The Great Gatsby; even after having achieved it all; the mansion, the parties, the cars, the wardrobe, he still could not buy his way to being accepted as an equal to the one he loved. (Trigg, 2001, 104)

Veblen’s study is perhaps somewhat dated now, and despite many irrelevance to our modern society, it is interesting to notice how part of the violence existing then is still being reproduced today. What I would like to focus on is the ways in which the elite makes clear to those below of the cultural, social and pecuniary divide between them.

Veblen was one of the first to study the “speed of fashion”, as he had noticed that the reason for the constant change of fashion was the need for novelty. If the lower classes starts copying the upper classes, the affluent need to find new ways to stay ahead of the curve and to differentiate themselves from those below. Once a trend has “trickled-down”, the affluent simply rejects it to try and find another fashion. But as studied by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the “trickle-down” effect studied by Veblen is more complex, in particular in our modern society. (Trigg, 2001, 106) For Bourdieu the effect is “round”, and is a combination of both a “trickle-down” and “trickle-up” effect. In order to stay on trend, the fashion elite adopts any fashions to make it their own, even if this means taking from the lowest forms of fashion.

In today’s society, the “affluent” are still those working at the top of the industry: stylists, bloggers, designers. They wear something innovative and creative, which is then photographed by “streetstyle” bloggers and photographers, and these photos end up in magazines to be read by those below. They are told how to imitate them in order to become “on trend”. Just as studied by Bourdieu, these “affluent” often adopt styles from lower levels, which is in itself a form of violence, as there is never any recognition or accreditation for those at the bottom. Yet, recently there has been a trend to
make “stylish” the idea of wearing a “fake” garment or accessory of a brand. I observed several cases where wearing “obvious” fakes was adopted by the “affluent” and was therefore deemed “cool” and “trendy”. Only the “affluent” can pull it off and make it “stylish” because they have the power to do so. They are not doing it out of pecuniary need, but more as a statement. It is a “trickle-up” effect with a completely new layer; one of mockery and judgment. But who are they making fun of? Themselves? The system? Or actually those having to purchase cheaper replicas because of lesser means, but also because the system is feeds off from this vicious cycle of Fashion.

“Fashion judgment”, writes The Fashion Praxis Collective, “is an activity of social sorting”. (The Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 63). The collective continues by explaining that “this sorting also operates in microsegments, compartmentalizing the wearer into subculture, profession, race, morality, and all such stereotypes carry with them”. (2014: 64). In many ways, the example above is not simply a form of fashion judgement but is more generally a form of microaggression, which Sue defines as “everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages” towards the marginalized. (Sue 2013: 3)

I am not defending “fakes”. But it needs to be said that wearing “obvious” fakes for fashionable purposes carries stronger meanings than perhaps is intended by the wearer. They could be a parody, worn “ironically”, but who is to say? I was not able to trace back the source of this image, let alone interview the person who wore it, but I am speculating she was a photographed for her “style” and featured on a streetstyle blog. For me this example highlights the violence and hypocrisy of the system. To let people believe they can have it all, but judge and mock them when they try and get only a step closer to the dream they have been sold.

In his study, Veblen states that “the need of dress is eminently a ‘higher’ or spiritual need.” (Veblen 1899). Wearing fashionable dress does not equal wearing just any clothes. They are marker of status, class, or position in the fashion hierarchy. We accept it because in this hierarchy, those at the top believe to have legitimate power to educate the ones below by judging and mocking them. It is what The Fashion Praxis Collective calls “violence of illusion”. As long as the system stays hierarchized in this way, the violence will endure. Thus much of the violence of fashion is directly linked to the inequalities of our society.
So where are the “democratic” fashion stores located, and what does it say about their true target groups? Fast Fashion locations are centralized in midtown and downtown of Manhattan, such as around Times Square which is much frequented by tourists, but also easy for much people to shop after work.

The fashion stores on the Upper West Side and Upper East Side target more the residents of those areas. The stores in the upper section of Manhattan are also more luxury boutiques: such as the famous Madison avenue. Another reason as to why the fast fashion conglomerates seem to target midtown is the NYC transportation system. Times square, Grand Central and Port Authority are all located in midtown making the foot traffic extremely high.

But could we think that stores which pride themselves in being “democratic” should also be located where people live, more evenly distributed in town? Or is the idea of consumer “democracy” only applicable to those who can afford it?
STORES:
H&M
TOPSHOP
ZARA
AMERICAN EAGLE
UNIQLO
FOREVER 21
AMERICAN EAGLE

LOCATION:
- 599 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.
- 19 Union Square W, New York, NY 10003.
- 40 W 34th St, New York, NY 10001.
- 1551-1555 Broadway, New York, NY 10036.
FOREVER21

LOCATION:
- 568 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.
- 40 E 14th St, New York, NY 10003.
- 50 West 34th Street, 160, New York, NY 10001.
- 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036.
- 640 5th Ave, New York, NY 10019.
LOCATION:
- 558 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.
- 111 5th Ave, New York, NY 10003.
- 47 W 34th St #3, New York, NY 10001.
- 435 7th Ave, New York, NY 10018.
- 1472 Broadway, New York, NY 10036.
- 589 5th Ave, New York, NY 10017.
- 731 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10022.
- 10 Columbus Cir, New York, NY 10019.
- 150 E 86th St #2, New York, NY 10028
TOPSHOP

LOCATION:
- 478 Broadway, New York, NY 10013.
- 608 5th Ave, New York, NY 10020.
UNIQLO

LOCATION:
- 546 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.
- 31 W 34th St, New York, NY 10001.
- 666 5th Ave, New York, NY 10103.
ZARA

LOCATION:
- 580 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.
- 101 5th Ave, New York, NY 10003.
- 39 W 34th St, New York, NY 10001.
- 500 5th Ave, New York, NY 10110.
- 666 5th Ave, New York, NY 10103.
- 750 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10022.
- 1963 Broadway, New York, NY 10023
FEAR
Fashion fear =

- physical and chronic occupation, as well as mental preoccupation, of status anxiety and social fear based on peer judgment. (case 2)
- the “guiding principle of fashion, as one of the guiding emotions of fashion is the fear of social consequences as the very mortality of style pushes fashion “forward”” (Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 54) (case 1)

Fashion fear is the fear and anxiety provoked by the fashion system.

Report issued by the FCBI (Fashion Crime Bureau of Investigation)
Case 1:

Detectives’ report:

one single pink suede kitten heel found on Troutman street in Bushwick at 11am, on May 4th 2015. Condition: slightly damaged, still wearable.

Victim testimony:

my owner, Miss L., acquired me in the first days of Spring, sometime in in April. I had been waiting on a shelf for so long, I felt blessed when I got picked up by this boyish girl in Doc Martens. Everybody had told her she should be more feminine, that’s why she picked me up. I’m a pink kitten heel, I’m very lovable and I was designed to bring femininity to my owner. The first few times she wore me, she loved me very much. I was a good compromise, I made her feel attractive and comfortable. Things started changing when the guy she was dating made a negative comment on me, saying I was not sexy enough. He liked high heels better. My owner started feeling insecure about me, and about her identity in general. Did she really want to be feminine, or was it just trying to satisfy her family’s desire and boyfriend’s fantasy? Didn’t she feel good as a tomboy? She didn’t know anymore. I was suddenly too shockingly pink, too low, old-fashioned. She would miss her old beat up Doc Martens. In any case, I couldn’t live up to her expectations and couldn’t fulfill her hopes for a glorification and feminization. I’m just an object after all, but she started blaming me as she thought I was the source of her identity problems. She started seeing me as inappropriate, she pushed me into the back of her closet. I yelled: “Ista quidem vis est!” (“why, this is violence” which is what Julius Caesar said right before he got murdered). Soon after, she got a pair of sky high pumps and decided to throw me away - a month only after my purchase. I live in the streets now, I’m damaged, I undesirable - and nobody will pick me up.
Case 2:

Detective report:

one single black leathered high heel sandals. Found on Elizabeth Street on September 12th 2015. Condition: Strap has been ripped off. Terribly damaged. Unwearable.

Victim Testimony:

I was in all the magazines last year, I was the season’s hit shoe. Everybody wanted a piece of me. I’m fast fashion but boy I’m classy! I am the accessible version of a very expensive Italian shoe. I was in the window when she found me, all straps exposed. She had seen me in the March 2015 issue of Glamour. She had just found a job as a stylist’s assistant in a fashion magazine a few days earlier. She decided to go shopping and get some fashionable clothes to celebrate and live up to her new position’s expectations. She wanted to gain the respect and approval of her colleagues, who are all established trendsetters. She wanted, above all, to fit in and be a part of this stylish world she had just entered. She wanted to be noticed. She had decided to wear me for her first day of work. I felt so proud when that day came. I thought I was making quite a strong impression, until one of the editors at the office contemptuously looked at my owner head-to-toe and told her: “Open-toe strap heels are so 2014, honey.” She felt like she had made a terrible, terrible faux pas. She felt ashamed, she felt cheap. She felt bullied and the thought of quitting her job grew into her. She started having nightmares of being simply not good enough. She hated me. One day, she grabbed one of my straps and violently threw me against the wall of her tiny West Village room. She wanted to punish me for being such a disappointment. That’s how I ended up on the pavement.
Possible motives for the violence:
In both cases, the victims are exposed to a certain type of fear produced by fashion. Items produced by the fashion system are increasingly associated with deception and become the object of hatred, disgust, contempt. We notice a growing fear of commodification among all strata of society. The aggressors refuse that their identity comes to be solely determined by what they buy and what they wear. In addition, it seems that they refuse to be controlled by the oppressive forces of the fashion system, which make them behave in a aggressive manner.

If we throw fashion products away in such a violent and dramatic manner, abandoning them in the streets, up for grabs, rejected, torn apart, ripped off - does it mean that we’re starting to see the current fashion system as unnatural?

Map of fashion crime scenes:
We noticed that commodification of human beings, turned into fashion commodities, and subsequent fashion violence, are phenomenon amongst thrown away shoes that don’t have any specific geographical location. Fashion crime scenes were spotted all over the city.
In 2014, a French blog called “The Woman Tax” caught fire on the web for its criticism of drug stores charging women greater prices for “feminized” products with the exact same ingredients as men’s products with the exact same ingredient ratios. The creators of the Tumblr and blog, are a group that goes by the moniker Georgette Sand, illustrates both the “genderized” marketing ploys and the further extent to services that women generally pay more for throughout life- such as the dry cleaners and hairdressers to name a few. The “Woman Tax” also dubbed “The Pink Tax” online has become a socially acceptable entity as part of our consumer culture but has rarely been questioned until social media caught the term and started spreading mass photos of price tags and various store windows depicting the images of blatant price discrimination.

Despite the obvious monetary harm these practices engender in women, I beg the question of what kinds of psychological harm is created and fostered in a society where women are paid less for the same occupations yet pay more for the same products. I illustrate the key term “monetary slavery” where pricing is different for similar items due to the market favoring a certain demographic fiscally. Discrimination can be reserved for any gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation; however, the “Woman or Girl Tax” profoundly favors men for products specially dedicated to hygiene, clothing, and bodily services. Within the French blog, women’s and men’s specific products, which are delineated by blue and pink coloring are showcased as having vastly different price ranges despite having the same ingredient ratios.

In the article “Why we could not compute the Woman Tax“, by Anne-Lise Bouyer and Nicolas Kayser-Bril (2015) further discusses the implications of the The Girl Tax venturing into the unspoken arenas of unfair price inflation for women through quotidian processes like buying a car, and simultaneously low balling women for working opportunities. In addition to the monetary burdens of The Girl Tax, the prices of cosmetics, hygienic products, and hair dressing also influence the whispered tax of beauty preparation women also bear for capital translation. Though this is a topic hotly debated by women of all social strata, the unspoken transitional qualities of beauty translating into gains of cultural, monetary, and social capital act as a means to perhaps justify the extra costs women bear for looking pristine.
Therefore, solidifying the natural ease within the beauty sphere our society has so easily succumbed to. With the rise of the digital age, beauty practices in addition to a common yet ever evolving standard of beauty. YouTube, Instagram, and especially Facebook play an immense role in ensuring that the flow of propagated images continues to cultivate shifting beauty standards.

Digital media image influx has created a surge of information on how to cultivate beauty almost to an extent that naturalness is no longer considered beautiful, but now is considered lazy. In fact “naturalness” how now been commoditized into another version of beauty that must be bought, taught, and created versus born with. In a modern world where women are commended for having perfect eyebrows, the mass scrutiny of beauty minutiae is clearly identified through being immaculate in addition to beautiful. In order to earn the lifestyle one wishes to attain, beauty is now not only a boon but a necessity in addition to seemingly secondary characteristics such as intelligence and integrity.

The Girl Tax illustrates an encompassing measure of capitalistic energy to ensure monetary enslavement of a specific group. The pursuit of intangible objects such as beauty and connotations of class are viewed as transferable elements of cultural capital and amassed the business of beauty and ultimately “The Girl Tax” The mechanics of the continued production of “The Girl Tax” obviously reside in the tentacles of capitalism, however that is too simplistic of an answer. The rise of the digital age is a significant symptom in how our societies project ideals of femininity and idealization of womanhood. However, I argue that the most heinous of the particles that create the continued consumption of “The Girl Tax” is the main culprit of its manifestation. The continued prevalence of hegemonic practices and beliefs of a streamlined rather than a spectrum of idealized representations of femininity and righteous womanhood act as the greatest barrier to the continuation of “The Girl Tax” in both fiscal and psychological forms, a structural price women have to pay for a culturally motivated submission, in resonance with Galtung’s perspective on violence (1990).

In Slavery and Social Death (1982), Orlando Patterson analyzes the master/slave relationship based on religious and racial hierarchies to justify and naturalize the institution. This could also be interpreted from a gender rather than a racial point of view. Patterson emphasizes that the connotation of black as bestial, having subhuman qualities with a tendency towards sexual promiscuity, and how violence needs taming, is used as justification for injustice (Patterson 1982).

With a skewed viewpoint this African slave perspective could indicate that women's savagery and base level humanity needs to be harnessed and controlled through capitalistic means of manipulation both monetarily and psychologically. Thus “The Woman Tax” can be viewed as another
means of containment and control of imagined female savagery into a competitive and quantifiable entity. Another aspect of control exhibited by “The Woman Tax” and the pull of monetary slavery is the destruction of one’s identity for non-conformance within the institution. Patterson illustrates that, “Perhaps the most distinctive attribute of the slave’s powerlessness was that it always originated (or was conceived of as having originated) as a substitute for death, usually violent death.” (1982: 5)

Patterson’s statement outlines a construction that anyone wishing to live beyond the bounds of the naturalized “Woman Tax” or institutionalized beauty culture is considered invisible or will endure rejection, invalidation, or “social death.”

The consequences of not conforming and literally not buying into the mass beauty culture of hygienic and product consumption, is considered a personal affront to one’s moral conscientiousness. The “Woman Tax” ensures enslavement of the ritualistic practices of attaining a perfect countenance in constant negotiation for social capital gains.
There once was a lake, with clear blue water that glistened in the sun. It was unequalled in all the land for its beauty and purity of water. To preserve its clarity, it was visited only twice a year, and was then left to regenerate itself. Some believed its ancient waters were infused with mystical powers. The legend differed from one to the next; some claimed it brought eternal beauty to whoever touched even just a drop of it, others believed it offered majestic supremacy. But there was a rub. The transparent waters also exuded fear. According to the legend, the lake was surrounded by a protective halo, and only those worthy enough of its purity were allowed to enter its threshold. On the other hand, the unworthy were banned and immediately punished if they ever dared to break the barrier. Many wondered if the spell was indeed a reality and if so, what made one worthy of its powers. This always remained a mystery. The punishment, it was believed, was the worst to be received in all the Kingdom: social shaming.

It would first result in the impossibility to participate in any social activities, which would then lead to total isolation and eventually to self-destruction. But the question remained: who were those “worthy” enough to have access to the clear and sparkling azure waters?

Twice a year an amazing carnival occurs; where all Birds of Paradise fly from across the kingdom to gather around and bathe in the mystical waters. A rainbow of feathers and shapes forms around the lake; from the majestic peacocks, to the family of parrots, all exuding elegance and grace. They flaunt and parade their feathers, bowing to each others with hidden smirks.

While this bi-annual rendez-vous use to be a secret affair, primarily attended by the black crows there to absorb the powers from the mystical source, it has now turned into a circus where the most exotic birds flaunt around their elegant and flamboyant wings. There are the peacocks deploying their iridescent tails to seduce their opponent, the black rifle performing his dance to impress, and the elegant swans swimming gracefully across the lake. In this procession of birds, each is here to show off their rare physique and impress one another. Whether it be the Astrapia with the longest tail of all the land, the crowned crane with its intricate hairdo, or the toucan displaying proudly his shiny black plumage and bright beak, all participate in this colorful festival.
The beach has been turned into an arena to perform flamboyance and grace, yet it must be noted that it is vital for all the High Birds to swim in the mystical waters at least once a year. For the spring is cursed and upon touching the waters a pact is sealed: the more you bathe in these waters, the closer you get to eternal beauty and superiority. Yet, rupture of this oath will result in a gradual loss of colors, plumage and ability to fly. This fall from grace is at the fear of every bird of Paradise.\[^2\]

Far from the lake, but close enough to be able to see its glistening and blue waters, is a small farm. There lives an array of farm birds, all hoping to one day break free from the fences that keep them imprisoned, in order to go marvel at the exotic spectacle described above. All desire more than anything to approach the ancient spring and transform into one of these beautiful creatures. They all believe its mystical powers to be true but also fear the repercussions.

But one day, the pheasant decided it was time for the farm birds to get closer. “After all”, said the courageous bird, “the legend clearly stipulates that the waters are to be accessed only by the worthy, but who is to say the beach around is not free to be accessed by whomever. Is it not finally time for us to prove that we exist? And who knows, perhaps the other birds would be thrilled to meet us”. And so they went, fearful but excited into this fowl arena.

All the farm birds had now landed on the warm sand and were to found themselves among colors brighter and feathers longer, than they had had ever imagined. At this moment, the flaunting flock suddenly stopped, and all the exotic birds synchronously turned to the newcomers with disgust and annoyance.\[^3\] The two clans were now face to face, and tension slowly made its way into the space. No part of this flamboyance dared to approach them, as no one wished to be seen next to these domesticated creatures.\[^4\] They started looking at each other with an air of confusion, and from a common consensus, decided to ignore them and keep on with their parade.\[^5\]

Whispers and condescending laughs started to be heard. The Peacock turned to her flock: “What are these poor looking creatures?” she rhetorically asked with an air that was anything but arrogant, “I have never seen colors quite so dull before… and these clown feet, so unchic…”. All her sisters agreed, and all turned their gaze to the small group of hens hiding behind a tree. “What are even these feathers? They look like they can barely lift themselves up!” uttered snobbishly one of the sisters. “Have they never heard of Detox” mockingly continued another. All irrupted in a volcano of laughers, quickly interrupted by the plucky approach of the pheasant. “Why do you laugh at us?” asked the pheasant, “We know we do not have the luck to have your lashing long feathers and elegant allure, but we mean well and would love to learn from you”, he continued. “Allure is not something you learn, it is something you are born with. And luck has nothing to do with anything. We are
simply from different worlds. Look at our colors, our feathers, our grace… How can you even compare yourself to us?” condescendingly replied The Peacock. The pheasant looked confused but not wishing to agree to these absurd remarks, boldly continued “But I have a tail as long as some of you. My colors are bright and my flying skills are impressive.” But The Peacock ignoring his valid point continued, “You are not from here. You live in the forest, and are hunted for your meat. We are protected and are venerated for our aesthetic qualities. Look around you! You are surrounded by flamboyant Flamingos, graceful cranes, and rainbow parrots. We are simply not from the same family, and this beach is reserved for the rare birds.” “Go back to your farm!” cried out another.

Suddenly silence took over the entire beach. A large shadow flew over the bright sand and gracefully landed between the two opponents. All the exotic birds suddenly bow down. Their Queen, the Eagle, had arrived. “What is all this unnecessary cacophony?” protested the majestic creature. “This is a ridiculous circus! Come now, we have more important things to be doing in the lake, where these unpleasant creatures are not welcome. Why stay on the beach and quarrel childishly?” The Eagle was followed by her crew of loyal parrots, “They are too well-fed, they would drown in those waters!”, declared the Toucan. Turning his gaze to the group of graceful cranes and egrets posing in a corner silently, looking with a vacant gaze the scene that was unfolding, he delivered an eulogy to his muses: “Ah my beauties. Now, you are elegant creatures. You march with such poise and elegance.” Looking at the group of turkeys and geese, he continued arrogantly: “Our glamorous world is not for the ugly or the fat. You should go back where you truly belong; in a cage waiting to be eaten.” The black and white band of egrets bursted in laughter: “The only way they would look nice, would be on a Christmas plate, covered in gravy!” snobbishly mocked one.

Hearing this, a friendly Flamingo moved closer to the scene, “Is this not a bit harsh? Look at this one” pointing at the ducks, “the green of his plumage is stunning. I have never seen anything quite like it. And this one”, pointing to the quail, “he has an interesting head plume. Maybe we are part of the same world after all?” The Eagle whose annoyance at this circus was growing stronger, opened her wings and pushed the Flamingo back, in a manner to make clear her superiority. “Nonsense”, said the Eagle, “they are not like us. They are domesticated farm birds, raised to be eaten. None of them have true style, or the right to be here. After all the lake is reserved for those who know its true powers.” This is our territory, they have nothing to do here.” She turned around and with a movement of wings asked all the Exotic birds to follow her into the lake.

Suddenly, a little hesitant white hen detached herself from the group of farm birds and asked The Eagle to wait. “But we admire your splendor and
wisdom”, said the bird, “We want to learn from you and we are ready to follow your directions. Please tell us how we could become more graceful and elegant. Is it possible for us to grow some long colorful feathers?” To this comment, the Egret replied with a smirk, “You may want to start by eating less corn!”. “And stop talking when you have not been given permission.”, said another. The Hen agreed immediately and turned to her flock asking them if they too understood? “Yes! We will do anything to be part of your world!” cried the duck, “you are all so elegant and stunning birds. I do not wish to have these clown feet. I would much rather have your elegant long legs.”

The Eagle suddenly realized the opportunity that was unfolding in front of her. “I suppose we could use some followers. They will never become like us, but let them believe what they will.”, she whispered to herself. Turning her attention back to the farm birds she declared: “Alright, you can stay here on the beach and if you prove yourself worthy enough perhaps one day you will be allowed to enter these spiritual waters.” The farm birds all jumped with joy and gratefulness. “Thank you my Queen. You are so grateful to accept us low birds among yours” said the hen. The farm birds started to examine their new role-models to better replicate their manners.

While, the spectacle was coming to a close and many of the Exotic birds had already started to fly away, the pheasant decided to intervene, he had not agreed with the rest of his fellow friends. “We are much more numerous than you!” bravely affirmed the bird, raising his head up high, “surely it should be up to the consensus to make the decisions in this Kingdom! Who has made you in charge?” The Eagle, who did not want to waste more of her precious time with what she deemed a silly affair replied “We are the privileged ones. We display the most beautiful and brightest colors of all the land. It has been decided since the birth of this mystical spring.” And with a movement of wings, she asked her court to follow her. But the pheasant was not finished with his protestation. “You are only privileged because you have chosen to oppress us!” he cried out angrier than before, “You have chosen that having a colorful and shiny plumage, and having long elegant feathers was the way to the top.” This is the system that has been established for years. Better to accept it than try to fight it”, said the Eagle as she was gathering her troops, ready to take off. Turning to the farm birds she asked them if she could count on their loyalty and welcomed them to this world, “It is a world of exoticisms and exclusivity” said the Toucan to the farm birds, “everyone wants to be part of it so consider yourselves very lucky to have been approved by her Majesty.” With nothing more than a quick nod, all the Birds understood the signal that it was time to leave.

The majestic birds suddenly all took off together, and a rainbow of wings and feathers appeared in the sky. The farm birds looking at the big
finale in awe, started numbly until the rainbow had turned into a mere dot in the blue sky. All excited and full of hope they started marching back to the farm, leaving the pheasant alone on the beach paralyzed with revolt. “Is there any solution to their system? My poor comrades do not see the violence but it is there. They are too blinded by the elegance and beauty of this world, they do not realize they are being exploited. This hierarchy of “high” and “low” birds needs to be taken down.” He took a pause and wisely finished: “As much as you need the lake to survive, the lake also needs you to stay pure and luminous. You can break the spell, and we could all live together in harmony.” The darkness of the night started to set on the beach and it had become clear to the pheasant that if the violence was to stop, the entire kingdom of birds would have to be rethought and it was going to take more than a brave soul to start the process.

**DISCUSSION**

In *What is Liberation Sociology?* Joe R. Feagin and Hernán Vera explain how “groups are privileged because others are oppressed”. (Feagin & Vera 2001: 15) This is very much the case in the fashion industry, which is built on a system of hierarchy and exclusion. Those at the top hold the power and make the decisions. They decide what is on trend and who has access to it. In this way, they oppress those who are not at the top, even if those wish to become part of this world.

In her book *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt differentiates power and violence. Power, she says “is the human ability not just to act but to act in concert.” (Arendt 1970: 44) Violence on the other hand “stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues” (Arendt 1970: 51). Even though the two are antithetical concepts, Fashion is both powerful and violent. Violence exists in different forms and on different levels.

Here I would like to underline a particular type of violence: the Fashion Hierarchy. I would like to illustrate this violence through a short story in the style of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945). In this story I oppose two clans; The Exotic birds who represent the top of the hierarchy. I have created different protagonists: the Eagle represents the Queen of the Kingdom (it is with not much difficult that one will recognize the powerful Anna Wintour as the Eagle), the colorful Peacocks represent the stylish bloggers and famous fashionistas, the parrots represent the Fashion designers, and the group of egrets and cranes represent the top models. While the peacocks are praised for their colorful feathers, the cranes and egrets are praised for their long legs and elegant walk. I also include the friendly flamingo, who despite his place in the Fashion industry, is more tolerant and accepting of the “low” birds.
On the other side are the farm birds, ones who are hunted for their meat and not protected for their rarity. As “low birds”, they represent the outsiders from the fashion industry, but as stated by The Fashion Praxis Collective, in fashion exists a “form of social control, driven through our common desire to replicate the reality of the powerful.” (The Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 53). The farm birds come to meet the Exotic birds hoping to be able to enter this world, but they immediately discover that their presence on the beautiful white sand is not welcome.

In The Fashion Condition, The Fashion Praxis Collective writes that “Fashion judgement not only sorts dress, and the wearer, in categories such as “in” or “out”, into confinements, as adversaries or opponents; this sorting also operates in micro segments, compartmentalizing the wearer into subculture, profession, race, morality, and all that such stereotypes carry with them.” (The Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 64). In my story, those at the top legitimate their power by mocking the low birds. They do not wish to accept them so they decide to oppress them instead. This is a type of abuse similar to the “emotional abuse in the workplace” described by Marie-Anne Hirigoyen in Stalking the Soul, where she writes that “by emotional abuse in the workplace, we mean any abusive conduct – whether by words, looks, gestures, or in writing – that infringes upon the personality the dignity, or physical or psychical integrity of a person.” (Hirigoyen 2005: 52).

This abuse creates exclusion. Indeed, as remarked by the Fashion Praxis Collective, “it is a style judgement which does not dodge the exploitative exclusion which is such a vital part of the social tyranny of fashion.” (The Fashion Praxis 2014: 50). The Fashion world attracts, and everyone wants to conform. They choose not to see this violence, which becomes one of “illusion”. And indeed, “for Leo Strauss, we often fail to recognize tyranny even when we see it” (Strauss cited in The Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 58). This leads to what Feagin and Vera call “the prevention of self-realization” (Feagin and Vera 2001: 15), and is further illustrates the power of Fashion.

In my story I have chosen to add one character, the courageous pheasant. This wise creature is not oblivious to all this violence and tries to reason with both his comrades and the Fashion Queen, but fails to open anyone’s eyes (except hopefully the reader). The violence exercised by fashion is difficult to stop because it is a form of what Feagin and Vera define as a contemporary form oppression, which is “embedded, structural, well-institutionalized, and more or less hidden – in social norms and beliefs extending over long periods of time.” (Feagin and Vera 2001: 15). The story ends on Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s note that the struggle to recover humanity is a struggle of the oppressed “to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (Feagin and Vera 2001: 17).
References:
[5] Ignorance is an example of “invalidation”, which Marie-Anne Hirigoyen describes as “non-verbal” form of abuse. (Hirigoyen 2005: 62).
[12] Here is an example of the prevention “from self-realization” developed through oppression, which Feagin and Vera speak of in their text, (2001: 15). It also illustrates the “self-blame” Hirigoyen describes as part of the abuse, (2005: 62).
[13] Hannah Arendt makes a distinction between power and violence by stating that “power stands in need of number”. The more followers (or slaves) Fashion has the more powerful it becomes. See Arendt (1970: 41f).
[16] “Groups are privileged because others are oppressed”. Feagin & Vera (2001: 15).
[17] “For Freire, the struggle to recover humanity is a struggle of the oppressed “to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well”, Feagin & Vera (2001: 17).
INSTITUTIONAL CLASSISM
Parsons School of Design at the New School is the number one Art & Design School in the United States, It’s ranked number two globally. (QS ranking 2015) Parsons is globally known for it’s Fashion Design program, a highly competitive program where many student’s success depends not only on hard work, but especially on their economic standing. It’s not like the school is going to fail you if you don’t have a Gucci jacket, but what a student can afford definitely affects how many hours a week you can sleep, the quality of the work you present, and how seriously you are taken as a design student.

Fashion and class have historically gone hand in hand. The creation of fine garments and use of high-end materials has made fashion exclusively available to people with higher socioeconomic status. The fashion education system is no different. The fact that one is able to have enough money to pay for education to a four year private college is already a reflection of your social standing. Similarly, that one was given the opportunity to access education and infused in setting where one can make the most of it, is mostly occurring in developed countries.

According to QS university ranking study, 1/3 of degree seeking students are international, which means that many of them have the economic means to be in a private institution overseas. Since international students receive barely any economic help or subsidies from the college, most of them are from affluent families from their respective countries. Students from low-income, or working class families, are generally from the United States or are American citizens. US students receive the most financial aid, the average financial aid received by undergraduate students that qualify for Federal aid is $20,318 and only 10% of students have all their financial needs met (Collegedata 2015). I for one receive almost full aid, where my family only has to pay $2,000, which is still an astronomical amount of money for my family. I support myself as I work two jobs and live off campus to be able to afford materials and the cost of living in New York.

Class is an issue at a school such as Parsons. The tuition at Parsons is $43,560 and the overall cost of attendance is $61,546 for a full time off campus student per year (New School 2015). According to the financial services at the college, this cost is divided into:
Books and Supplies  $2,050.00
Fees  $926.00
Food  $3,000.00
Housing  $10,000.00
Personal Expenses  $1,550.00
Transportation  $460.00
Tuition  $43,560.00
Total:  $61,546.00

According to the table above, $2,050.00 is for books and supplies, which barely covers the cost of basic materials for a fashion student. A fashion student is also required to constant reinvest in hardware, fabrics and tools. Not long ago, a Parsons student spoke to New York Magazine about the cost of her thesis collection, the most important collection in a fashion student’s college career: “Over the summer I worked 40 hours a week to save up money for it, but that money is getting eaten away quickly, and I still haven’t even figured out what my final fabrics are yet. I ended saving about $1,500 from working, but I know one student spent $20,000 on their thesis, and that includes having things sent out, the fabric, or having things done to the fabric, either dyeing or washing or embellishing, and then having samples made.” (Van Syckle 2014)

As part of this study, I interviewed two fashion students from two different socioeconomic backgrounds. First I interviewed Sohee Park, a junior in the fashion program. She comes from a working class Korean family from Maryland. She has a job and is a full time student in menswear. She regularly struggles with keeping up with school and being able to provide for herself. In the interview she said, “so I have to pay for my own bills and on top of that I have to pay for school supplies, which is including fabric, hardware, zippers, and those things are expensive”. I asked Sohee if professors expected students to use these high end materials? According to Sohee, “professors usually expect students to buy high end fabrics just to experiment.” Many students struggle with funding their materials for school, a vital part of good design, because many have barely any experience with sewing and construction and spending $2,000 dollars just to experiment and learn is very challenging when, you don’t know if you can eat later in the day.

In the text “Class Dismissed: Making the Case for the Study of Classist Microaggressions” (2010) researchers Laura Smith and Rebecca Redington conceptualizes classism in three perspectives: materialistic approaches, gradient approaches and reproduction of power and privilege. The most evident of these approaches within the fashion program is the materialist approach, which correlates differences in socioeconomic status with differential access to resources, goods and services. Lower income students are
expected to equally compete with students from a higher social standing without having equal variables like resources or subsidized spending, or administrating and supporting student’s work.

Like Sohee says, “it’s hard to compete with other students, because those with higher means in the school do get their work outsourced, although they’re not supposed to do that. They hire people to help with pattern making and construction and I don’t think it’s really fair because they get to have a collection sourced and they don’t put in the work that students are supposed to.” The problem of sourcing and outside help is a very big problem, and highlights the classist differences between students. Many students in the program think it’s an unfair advantage that high-income students get to have time in their life to do other things when they don’t have to do the work to earn enough to support their studies.

Even some students from a higher social standing reflect on this issue, such as Ada Malik, a senior in Evening Wear, who says it puts her up to an unfair advantage: “I don’t understand why would you come all the way to New York and spend all this money being here, just so someone else can do your work? It’s unfair because I do have the money to do it but it’s not mine it’s my parents money and I don’t want to spend it on paying people for something I’m supposed to be doing myself and I don’t even like sewing!”

Institutional classism happens when social institutions function to perpetuate the deprivation and low status of poor people. (Smith & Redington 2010) Fashion school is one of the institutions that promote this type of classist behavior. By letting students have unfair advantages over others and creating an environment that you can only fully thrive in if you are of a wealthy background. If the fashion program had a set limit of spending for a project, all students would have a fair economic playing field. Also, the school could give out recycled materials for experimenting and prototyping, thus supporting the strained budgets of students with less means. The school could also subsidize materials for low income students so they can dedicate more time to school work and their personal work, so they can also be able to make the most out of their opportunity of being part of the best fashion program in the United States. Instead, most students from poor backgrounds have to spend their time working various part-time jobs to support themselves and the materials for school.
INVALIDATION
What Chuck Collins and Felice Yeskel calls “economic apartheid” (2000) can be witnessed in the cruel demarcation between the prestigious life of the elite and the everyday life of the destitute. But it also shines through in the ironic gestures of the elite, when they ironize and invalidate the lived experience of the poor.

Objects affordable to the poor, are considered “down-market”, “white-trash” or simply as irrelevant “copies” of the belongings of the elite. The fashionable goods, on the other hand, are “classy”, “high-class” and “class acts” (Smith & Redington 2010: 276)

This becomes especially apparent and troublesome when contrasting images and comments from the blog “People of Wal-Mart” with an article about Chanel’s show 2014 which took place in a fake shopping mall.
Who would have thought we would be able to see boobies and pussy just by looking at your back. Almost seems like you’re an answer to a riddle.
The models didn't walk the runway, instead they shopped the runway in what can only be described as an amped-up uniform of uber-chic, cool, multi-tasking moms.
Ladies love their outfits, that's a fact. I haven't seen better matching pants-tops combos since the Adidas track suit of the late 80's. Which fly gear do you prefer? That all camo everything or that terrible kids doodle come to life?
Post-yoga-inspired leggings and crop tops or glam sweatsuits were paired with the most exquisite tweed coats, high-fashion sneakers, glittering jewelry and functional chain bags.
MOP TOP

You see a crazy haircut. I see someone creatively stealing a mop. I'm a glass half-full kinda guy.
What was so brilliant about the show, and another nod to Karl's innate ability to capture the fashion zeitgeist, is that this is exactly how women want to dress now.
SMOTHERED & COVERED

If you look very, very closely you’ll notice this dude is rocking some camo yoga pants that are so tight he probably won’t be able to father any children even if he found a mate.
We are better now ever and our unresolved luck is working out clothes and cool kicks
passed with a flash as big and favorite jewelry—all dropped off with (or better copy)

...
Belly bumps are obviously the "in" thing right now, even though ironically the further out it is the more "in" it is. So which trendsetter pulls it off best?
Some [models] pretended to read nutrition labels, but luckily there are no calories in fashion.
NARCISSISM

You Asked. We Found It!
You’ll never find five pieces better suited for playing dress-up. Bank on guaranteed chic, no matter your mood. I read this quote in the November 2015 issue of the American fashion magazine InStyle. It was the tagline of one of their trend pages. With a very assertive tone, accentuated by a language of elitism and success (“bank, “guarantee”), InStyle insists on the fact that it has selected the best pieces for you. Even if you look elsewhere, you will not find a better match.

Fashion magazines correct your style and taste. They reassure the readers the magazines’ tastes and preferences are special and they are the best. They ultimately will make the reader stand out. There is a latent sense of arrogance mixed with one of greatness that can be find in the fashion magazines’ language.. More than arrogance, the fashion magazines employ an excluding tones, emphasizing exclusivity and uniqueness.

We usually associate the world of fashion with vanity and self-centeredness. A fashion magazine is devoted to fashion, displaying the latest style of clothes, accessories, etc. Simply defined, a fashion magazine sells you a stylish and cool lifestyle: they answer the what/why/where/how to wear/mix/match/blend clothes according to their taste, to their definition of cool and fashionable kids.

Magazines educate the readers, by cultivating and training their eyes. They make sure to transmit to the reader what is valuable according to their notion of important. However, the messages fashion magazines are communicating are not as transparent and innocent as they seem to be. Where is the abuse?

I argue that the fashion magazines act as instruments of propaganda that engage with and produce instances of narcissism in order to regulate the taste and style of their readers. Psychiatrist Marie-France Hirigoyen states five main criteria/symptoms related to narcissistic personality disorder including a grandiose sense of his/her importance, fantasies of unlimited success/power, belief that everything is owed to him/her, thoughts of being unique and special, exploitation of others in relationships, and lack of empathy (2005: 125). Drawing from this definition, how does the fashion magazine use the abusive and excluding tone to address itself and its readers? Is it narcissistic? Or does it help the narcissist? Or both? What is the role of the editor-in-chief?

Joelle Firzli
I have decided to look at the November issue of a couple of the most sold fashion magazines in the United States (*Vogue* and *InStyle*). My technique is straightforward: I am decoding those magazines in order to discover instances of narcissism. I discovered there are two approaches in which fashion magazines may apply narcissism: the first one is using non-verbal signs such as visuals and fashion photography (fashion shoots), and the second one is a verbal approach, applying a specific language and terminology.

In the first case, the fashion magazine showcases itself through the medium of photography. Narcissism is considerably graphic, it depends on the mirror, using images or others as reflectors for the self-affirming gaze (Hirigoyen 2005: 125). Accordingly, the magazine reflects itself in their own pages. The images published are not random images. The editor-in-chief as well as the editorial team have pre-selected, selected and re-selected them carefully. They have been orchestrated and staged by the editors for clear purposes: they expose the high level of importance fashion magazines give to the narrative, to the storytelling, to aesthetics and of course to style and clothes. The resulting photographs are fascinating not because of any reality they reveal but because of the fantasy they unleash. The narcissistic narrative is deeply aware of itself as fiction and as illusion.

Thus, *Vogue* and *InStyle*, for example, push the individual to believe in a certain type of fashion that is preoccupied with its own status as creator of illusion. Hirigoyen states that one criterion of narcissism is the fantasy of unlimited success/power. The editorial and advertorial fashion photography belongs to the realm of dreams, of a fantasy lifestyle that is unattainable by most of its readers. Those readers can only imagine him/herself, reproducing an action from the image. So the editorial team puts together fashion shoot to illustrate (in general) aesthetics perfection, physical power (through the model’s body), and a fantasy lifestyle, where beauty and wealth prevail.

For the sake of this argument, I would like to elaborate on the use of language and the abusive tone to decipher how narcissism is prevalent in fashion magazines. The fashion magazines contain some of the most critical, threatening and yet elaborated techniques of communicating narcissism. They translate into pages and pages of appealing stories, editorials, advertising and writings. I have divided the analysis into three sections, each describing how the magazine expresses narcissism: The voice of the magazine as a narcissist, the content of the magazine pushing the readers toward narcissism, and the editor-in-chief as the initiator of narcissism. Moreover, microinvalidations are external form of microaggressions which in the case of the fashion magazine, are verbal interpersonal interactions that communicate group identity and heritage and they deny the experiential realities of socially devalued groups. (Sue 2010: 10). Relying on Sue explanation of microinvalidations how does the fashion magazine corrects taste and style in each of the three sections?
The voice of the magazine as narcissism

Narcissistic personality traits such as egocentricity and flamboyance are very common. Hirigoyen explain that what distinguish the narcissist is the lack of regret and remorse (Hirigoyen 2005: 123), which can be seen through a lack of empathy. The narcissist can destroy an individual, or an idea without any guilt. Vogue states that if the resort collections showed us anything, it’s that the anonymous skinny jeans has been pushed aside in favor of a multitude of denim options that can both anchor and elevate your look. They are telling the readers to abandon (to push aside) a trend, the skinny jeans trend, in favor of a new denim trend. With total apathy, they killed a style, and indirectly invalidated all people who follow this style. Indirectly, they are denigrating the skinny jeans wearer. They accomplish this goal through interpersonal cues that exclude, negate and nullify, the experience of the target group (Sue 2010: 10). The sense of grandiose can be read between the condescending lines. They attended the shows as makers of style. They are insiders, a position, which gives them the authority to dictate what is in and what is out. to “correct”. The Vogue editor is telling you, clumsy reader, how and why you can look stylish and be validated by Vogue and other fashion peers.

Fashion magazines have a specific way of transmitting information. They use a specific tone, somewhere between patronizing and condescending, but mostly imperative and excluding. Best Dress (InStyle). The form is usually made of short and concise sentences such as Find your perfect pair, and it includes subtle snubs usually concealed as a compliment and positive statement (Sue2010: 11) such as Show a softer side of thigh-high boots with gray suede, You can do: It’s really simple to take in a trend. Just follow this smart advice from InStyle (InStyle). All phrasing emphasizes the uniqueness and singularity and even smartness of the fashion magazines. Besides, it is all happening outside of the level of awareness of the readers, who does not recognize any violence. These examples of phrasing aim to reveal to the public the tricks of the trade, the best dress, the right hat that you can keep warm and cool (Vogue), above all they aim at producing an admiration from the readers, the admiration all narcissist is craving for in order to survive (Hirigoyen 2005: 125).

Moreover, when describing the latest Proenza Schouler bag, the editor in Vogue wrote call it the new monogram of the high-end hashtag […] in any case, it’s nothing at all like your preppy grandmother’s floral-ciphered hand towels. This translate into: this bag is a symbol of validation, it is the perfect bag so why are still wearing this old waspy rubbish thing. There is a sense of degradation and snub is this quote. There is also a sense of classism when speaking about the grandmother: if you want to be like us, you better have a rich, classy, and preppy grandmother. Vogue articulates aristocracy and bourgeois signals, excluding new money. If the reader owns something like
your LOOK FIND YOUR PERFECT PAIR

BEST DRESS

It Couple
If the resort collections showed us anything, it's that the anonymous skinny jean has been pushed aside in favor of a multitude of denim options that can both anchor and elevate your look.

50 Best Dressed
Which style sensations made our list & why
what they call your preppy grandmother’s floral-ciphered hand towels, he might even feel humiliated and stop wearing this piece, he might even throw it away. The illusions of uniqueness, superiority and grandiose that Vogue and other fashion magazines express take over at the expense of feelings of resentment and of not being good enough, the reader might experiment. Furthermore, it seems the fashion magazines like rhetorical questions. Obviously they are not expecting an answer from the readers, how to take faux leather into the office?, how to pull it off? (InStyle).

The Fashion magazines use this language form as self-evidence of their rightness, as a persuasive and influential skill to reiterate their position of power. Arntzen explains fashion indicates what people should buy, as well as how they should dress and look (Arntzen 2015: 55), thus, she continues, there is an unspoken clause there stating that fashion is always right. Fashion magazines might be distributed in markets that targets mainstream consumers, however they are not for everyone. They are for the few, and their exercise doesn’t allow for too many questions (Arntzen 2015: 55). The fashion magazines prefer the rhetorical questions to emphasize their significance and their authority.

Skillfully, the fashion magazines over-evaluate themselves, praising and celebrating their leading positions asking rhetorical questions such as Do you follow Vogue?, and highlighting that if you do not follow Vogue and you want to be part of the Vogue community, well, make sure you click on Follow Us. It might be the closest thing, readers can get to “Fashions Insiders”. In my opinion, they naturalize narcissism by using attractive and positive words such as cool, trendy, hip, amazing, words as well as rhetorical questions, you would want to associate with your personae.

The content of the magazine is helping the narcissist

In addition to being itself narcissistic, I would argue that fashion magazines are also designed to help narcissistic readers to celebrate their own personae. They proliferate the desire for individuals to think of themselves as unique, as part of an exclusive community. They sanctify the readers with their magical words, you can do. And once they managed to captivate your attention, they trapped you. Look no further, they have the solution to your closet struggle, your fashion queries and anxieties, your daily effort in looking effortlessly cool. It could be another case of microinvalidations and contradictory communication as defined by Sue. The fashion magazine used a statement that appears to be positive but in reality it is undermined with a negative metacommunication (Sue 2010: 9)

Why? Well it is simple, because they know how to manipulate the readers into their world and in return, if the readers are diligent and discri-
pled, they get the stamp of approval. The fashion magazines represent a combination of things that many women secretly want but are unwilling to admit to because they think they would be criticized as too egocentric, or too politically incorrect, too shallow or too frivolous. *Vogue* validates the modern careerist’s fantasy that she can run the world and look fabulous doing it.

The fashion magazines make you think that it is all about you, whereas in reality, it is mainly about them, it’s about them controlling you. I do not know if they expect you to follow every rule they have designed but they strongly believe they possess something that is unique, that is exclusive, that will elevate your fashion status and they have the means to do it. Fashion magazines, in an indirect way, pressure the readers. They produce the desire to have, to acquire more of everything: more glamour, more beauty, more fashion, more power, and more success. All these notions related to the grandiose sense which Hirigoyen speaks about, generate the need for comparison, competition and ultimately approval.

Let us observe only *Vogue* for a moment. There is no other American fashion magazine that conveys such an unapologetic, bright, beautiful, cool-girl, gloriously elitist attitude about style. It does not explain fashion or gently lead its readers into the next season. It is a monthly fix for insiders and people of the industry.

For insiders, it is a way to showcase their success and power, and for common readers it is an escape through fantasy of success and power. The fashion magazine is helping the narcissists become more narcissistic. Marc Jacob illustrates this point perfectly when in the pages of *Vogue* November, he states, *when were you last given a cover of Vogue?* (i.e. I got it! did you?). The designer’s quotes is filled with a sense of pride, uniqueness and insensitivity: To be in ‘Vogue’ has to mean something. It’s an endorsement. It’s a validation.

On the other side, *Vogue* acts as portal for outsiders, who want to look, want to talk, want to dress like their fellow *Vogue* editors. They want what *Vogue* is selling, the latest IT bag or the shoes that all celebrities are wearing, despite the fact that they know they can’t have those items. Still they can dream about them.

Then, the fashion magazines delegate some authority to the readers. They use phrasing such as *readers show us how our page have motivated them to try something new, What I tried* (*InStyle*) and *People are talking about* (*Vogue*) to make the readers feel part of the group, they gave them some validity, they are listening to them (notice how one has used the term readers and the other people). Moreover, the magazines quotes the readers in section like *You Tweeted*. They are reproducing the sense of importance in their readers. *InStyle* dedicates a couple of pages to its readers, publishing photos of them, quotes and advices. *Vogue* also does it but only on a single page
Maggie Rizer looks exquisite, Please feature her more in future issues. They are empowering their readers, and by doing that they are ultimately gaining more followers.

The editor as the supreme narcissist

Finally, the third way fashion magazines engage with narcissism is through its editors. *Vogue* has a competitive advantage in the world of fashion publishing. It undeniably holds a place of authority because of many reasons, the main being their editor-in-chief Anna Wintour. Arntzen describes her as the editor-in-chief with the most power, *she can slaughter the world’s leading designers if they offer her a private preview of their next collection* (Arntzen 2015: 52). She is the ultimate decision-maker. Anna Wintour personifies the sort of woman who is celebrated in the pages of *Vogue*. The magazine highlights her achievements, influence and always, always her trendy preppy style.

*Vogue* doesn’t play the role of best girlfriend in the manner of *InStyle* or even *Glamour*. It has never implied that celebrities are the same as everyone else. They may talk about their insecurities in the pages of the magazine but they are always pictured as glorious, rarefied creatures (99% chance that a celebrity makes it to the cover of *Vogue*, there are no random fashion models). Anna Wintour and *Vogue* have the final say on how fashion should look like. In her editorial letter she validates *My Congratulations*, she reaffirm her authority *Vogue’s editors and I* and most importantly she reaffirms her position as decision maker, her importance.

The choice of adjectives describing the people who contributed to the magazine, in the editorial letter reflect a sense of admiration for first choosing to publish their images, special characteristic in their personae which makes them stand out, but also privileged connections and cultural capital (she speaks about the son of Pierce Brosnan). When Anna Wintour speaks of her celebrities she uses words like handsome, wonderful, simply gorgeous, adorable, rich in charm and humor, enormously brave and honest, authentic, real, maverick. They all convey certain nobleness in character.

Finally the editorial is an ode of magnificence, *if you are seeking a holiday gift that gives back, we’ve got you covered, or sites we rounded up for your search ends Here and a place of self-veneration buy a MK watch your money is going to children in need* (*InStyle*).

What makes us accept it as “natural” to the system?

I understand that violence studies are about two problems: the use of violence and the legitimation of that use. The first notion that makes us accept violence as “natural”. What kind of violence does this paper explore? Fashion
magazines exercise a type of cultural violence. Galtung defines it as violence that “preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal, and natural, or into not seeing the, at all” (Galtung 1990: 295). We do not see the roots that produce the violence. And when we cannot see the origins, we cannot understand the core of the issue. We cannot determine exactly when words or actions turn into violence.

Reading *Vogue* or any fashion magazines, you get a sense of what’s cool now (*InStyle*), because they manufacture “cool”. Or at least, it is what they aspire to. In reality, they want you to boost your self-esteem by creating an illusion of uniqueness, whereas what they are really doing it attacking your identity and creating a boring conformity. They are abusive devices of control. They mediate narcissism: by producing and divulging it in their pages, by making the reader dream of unlimited success and power.

The fashion magazines position themselves as fashion authority. They are proud, powerful and ambitious. They have no mercy, and will not hesitate to attack, or demean a trend, a designer, a practice, if it is not up to their standard (such as in the text of the skinny jeans). The reader, very naturally, is lured into this fantastic world. It is a matter of being accepted, an insider and be part of the gang.

**What is the bigger picture?**

*Vogue, InStyle* and other fashion magazines are all part of a bigger system of fashion power. They are toys and elements of propaganda of the fashion system, which has more important motives than just educating the common people. Fashion magazines are looking to grow and expand their network, to get more support, because, in resonance with the definition of “power” of Hannah Arendt, the higher the number of followers the magazine can dominate, the stronger it becomes, and the more readers who submit their obedience to the commands of the magazine the more power the editors can exercise. When *Vogue* asks you *do you follow Vogue?* and then disclose the number of followers on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, they are pushing you to become a follower in order to be part of the family they are claiming to support.

In a way fashion uses its own tools to fashion itself and the fashion word/system around it. Fashion is created by the elite for the elite. It appoints an elite as the leader. So the elite uses the magazines as their weapon to recreate power and as a reflection of their power. The fashion magazines become the instruments for the elite to reproduce their own power (Arntzen 2015: 63). They are an essential instrument to the creation of their microcosm. And by doing so they are neglecting the others, the ones who decide to resist the hype, not even acknowledging them. They have added a new stratum to
our society: the refugees of fashion, those who are running from the daily oppression that fashion is perpetuating.

Conclusion

The fashion magazines act as an agent of narcissism, which produces a type of cultural violence, thus legitimizing the aesthetic supremacy of the elite, excluding the rest. This violence, usually subtle, can be found in the magazine pages. Violence produced by fashion magazines can be defined as a manifestation of power that happens at a particularly defined moment in time, during the time you read articles or when you buy the magazine. It lacks the emotional factors, as it does not have any feelings toward you even if it says it does. It embodies instrumental practices and ideas that reduce a person to the condition of a trend (Sense of What’s Cool Now) or style that internally or externally violates someone’s being and that perpetuate social relation based on inequalities. They dictate their intentions with no compassion. Now, to exercise power, they need another party? One that is weaker, that they can manipulate. The more people believe in the system and surrender their own taste and actions to those pulling the strings on the top, the more powerful the system grows (Arendt 1970: 41). The more people believe in the system, the more they delegate their individual power to the system. In addition, the system needs the reader to believe that his/her dependence on them (the people) is sought desperately and is irreplaceable (Hirigoyen: 125). So, if there were no readers, would the magazine be able to be narcissist, to produce and exercise narcissism? Will the fashion magazine survive at all?
what's NOW!

In any case, it's nothing at all like your preppy grandmother's floral-ciphered hand towels.
One day, a little girl was walking down the streets of Los Angeles with her mom hand in hand until she came to a sudden stop. She pointed to a huge advertisement and asked her mom, “Mommy, how come there is only one girl that is dark and four girls that are light?”

Eleven years later, the same girl was shopping online in her apartment in New York City. She was browsing through multiple websites like H&M and J.Crew when she stopped for a second to ask herself, “Why are the majority of the models white and thin like walking chopsticks?”

Under the candy coated layer America has made for itself on the constitution, which was based on Christian belief that “all men are created equal”, racism has yet to be terminated from our society. America is the most diverse country regarding race, religion or other subcultures. Look around, observe carefully: the billboards, catalogs, magazines, the internet. The little girl who had no knowledge of race pointed out a simple ratio on an advertisement. The same girl who went through American education eleven years later in college realized the same ratio but in a larger scale.

So I went ahead and visited over twenty fast fashion or ready to wear clothing stores online, and found most stores based in the USA have online homepages with a striking ration of 1:4 colored to white models. A simple fact out in plain sight but has been swept under the rugs for ages since America has terminated slavery and passed more equal rights to minorities and women. Racial microaggression is all over our media, favorite clothing store’s website and quite apparent in the infamous fashion industry.

What is microaggression, or racial microaggression to be more exact? Derald Wing Sue begins his book *Microaggressions and Marginality* (2010) with the answer:

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.”(Sue 2010)

Going through a single webpage of H&M or Forever 21 and other popular websites and social media platforms, I found microaggression to be particularly common. Not only regarding race but also for beauty ideals, fitness and religion. Victims of subliminal messaging are not aware they are being mi-
cro- insulted or targets of microaggression when violence is not acted upon. For every online fast fashion website I visited at least 80% of the sites, one out of four models were of color and if not of a very ambiguous background (mixed or different minority). The other sites didn’t even have colored models on their home page.

Then we had the matter about social medias and cookies that also followed the similar pattern of home pages. Having technology track all your shopping habits and sites you visit, the ads appearing on facebook or instagram sometimes have a lot to do with advertising from sites you’ve been on. The popular hashtags on instagram and trending news on facebook also have this subliminal messaging.

What is very accurate to me is that microinvalidations exist amongst minorities as well. There might be a Kanye hashtag blowing up the media and at the same time the news is trending on a police brutality against an innocent colored young man. This right here is how people have shifted the focus of real life violence to sitting behind screens letting all microinvalidations that rule our lives today continuously happen. If there’s a star as big as Kanye then there is no more stereotypes towards colored men because of course we now are assured that they’re safe...until one night we happen to cross the street at the sight of a colored man headed in the opposite direction.

The media rules technology and its audience. Aside from microinvalidations, technology has been an aid to certain communities and has brought people together. But the poison lies in the subtle click of a button from online shopping to news websites, the microaggression will exist and persists to as long as people are ignorant to the issue.

The little girl was not smart to point out what was on the billboard but rather she was honest and very much acknowledging the microinvalidations that most grown adults overlook on a daily basis. That’s to say, as a minority myself, the fact that online shopping brought me back to the issue of racism is to clearly identify the microinvalidations we all allow ourselves to live with. The issue is like a mosquito quietly sitting at the corner of the room waiting to suck the awareness dry out of society, secretly yet with great power. Then only those who spot the mosquito bites to be microinvalidations and existing racism will see that we need to yet take another step towards equality.
A day after the recent Paris attacks of November 13, a video was uploaded to popular video streaming site, YouTube of a young woman being denied entry into one of the city’s Zara stores for wearing a hijab – a veil worn by Muslim women. The young woman remained firm, but was told she couldn’t walk in because of the store’s strict policy of no headgear or coverings. “If things change, they’ll change, but I don’t make the rules,” a security guard can be seen telling the young woman in the video. But why do such incidents still prevail?

This is a case of direct fashion violence. Its an act of public shaming and discrimination. A “one to one violation of [personal] integrity and . . . explicit [and] ambiguous microaggressions.” The mechanisms that produce this direct violence are rooted, I believe, in the unawareness of some individuals, as France’s government has since 2010 banned face coverings among its public. And the ban, however, does not apply to the hijab. As a result, what makes us accept this as normal is “the process of organization which makes the desires of fashion act in concert, tapping into the force of fashion to produce conformity with consumer order.” In other words, Zara, as an employer, is guilty of not providing proper training to its employees. Considering the company’s formula for the ‘democratization’ of fashion, it’s quite ironic that such violence within it stores persist.

In spite of the fact that the Spanish retailer released a public apology after the incident stating that both the employees who refused entry to the young Muslim customer as well as the store’s manager were fired. “Zara is a diverse and multicultural company that has employees and customers of many different nationalities, orientations, cultures, languages and beliefs. We do not tolerate any form of discrimination,” read the statement. This apology is too late. The fashion aggression cannot be forgiven, and it shouldn’t be forgiven.

This shouldn’t be happening. It’s unacceptable. So…#ShameNoMore, Zara! #ShameNoMore!
Microaggressions are by nature oppressing because they force those on the receiving end of the aggression to internalize that violence (Sue 2010). As opposed to confronting the violent source the victim turns to themselves while remaining obedient to their master. Their master being an authority appointed by various social constructions like class, culture, and race. Microaggressions tend to be enacted by these figures because they are subtle and require a blind eye to the privilege their social status has granted them. Microaggressions are insidious, as an aggressor can speak non-discrimination but still act discriminatory. This discriminatory act can be referred to as silent violence. In society we tend to view violence only as a physical act, what Johan Galting would refer to as “direct violence” (Galtung 1990), however truly destructive violence is silent because it can very easily thrive undetected. Racial microaggressions are difficult to prove because as a culture we tend to only point out blatant racism.

There are obvious cultural tropes that are deemed racist like foul language or racial slurs. However microaggressions escape this conversation because they are polite. Like I didn’t call her the “n” word but what does that mean if you treated her like one. I find that what allows these aggressions to live are the societal norms that surround it.

In Sigmund Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930/1962) he points to the act of civilizing as a social process which forces the modern man to suppress his natural human aggression in order to function in a modern civilized environment. He believed that civilizing pushed natural human aggression into behaviors that society deems appropriate, which are inherently a product of the hierarchical social structure that exist within all western societies. What strikes me about this theory is that it acknowledges that the aggression is still present, it just looks different. Like being sexist is still possible if you hire women. Freud states,

> Life, as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings us too many pains, disappointments, and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures. ... There are perhaps three such measures: powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it. (Freud 1930/1962)
Even if Freud does not use the concept, a microaggression would fall into his substitutive satisfaction category because passive aggression substitutes visceral aggression. In place of overt racism, subtle yet deadly racism emerges. Microaggressions exist in all forms of society.

It’s the victim’s internalization of these aggressions that makes these sorts of interactions especially violent. They are violent in the sense that the victim begins to blame themselves while the aggressor escapes with no consequences. There is a guilt associated with acknowledging unfair treatment because to acknowledge that violence, is to identify with it. Therefore to be offended is to acknowledge that you are in a position to be discriminated against, which is oppressing in and of itself.

For instance shopping. Imagine walking into a store to shop, but being restricted to shop in a specific section of a specific floor of a store that occupies multiple levels. As a shopper only in that specific section do you encounter people who look like you and posters with models that look similar to you. The violence occurs when you venture outside of that section where everyone looks different from you and the cloths on the rack hold value to you but have no actual use value for you. At that moment your purpose in that store can no longer be validated, and your value as a customer has depreciated because you only have value in a fraction of that store.

So do you still shop there? Of course, and you slowly browse the aisles as you make your way through to where you “belong”, touching a few things, but never actually picking anything up. When you go to the dressing room you wonder if your clothes belong on the same rack as the others, and then think of how much easier it would be if there was a designated dressing room for your section.

Microaggressions are so subtle that those under attack take on the consciousness of their oppressors. To acknowledge the woes of shopping as a plus sized person is to acknowledge that plus sized people have been ostracized in society and denied access into the exclusive realm of fashion. There are many places in society where seclusion is chosen over inclusion. Like the “don’t ask don’t tell” policy in the U.S. military or the separate entrances for the higher paying renters in mixed affordable housing complexes in New York City. I’ve noticed that anytime I show passion about a subject I am met with resistance and told to ask myself “what it is within me that is causing my anger,” as opposed to acknowledging my discomfortable as valid without proof or reason.

The result is “I am angry because I find fault in something I’ve caused and I am mad at others because I cannot see myself,” or in fashion where “we don’t find fault in magazines with excessive photo editing and unrealistic beauty standards, so we buy things to compensate for our inadequacies. We don’t find fault in sizing practices and fit models because we simply
need to lose weight. We don’t find fault in elitism, because we need to work hard to make our way to the “top”. These are all a result of social conditioning which places us as socialized people in a position to continuously find fault with in ourselves and not the true source of violence.
SUICIDE
Anushikha Rentala

Isabella Blow started her career in fashion as a magazine editor. Throughout her career she worked under the likes of Anna Wintour, Andre Leon Talley, Michael Roberts, Steven Meisel and also worked as the fashion editor of Tatler. She was also known for her fashion “discoveries” namely, Philip Treacy, Alexander McQueen, Sophie Dahl, and Hussein Chalayan (Somerset House 2013) ‘Isabella blow: Fashion galore!, para. 6). Known to be a supporter of fashion and the arts, she was involved in many other projects before succumbing to suicide in 2007. As an individual she was from an aristocratic family and socially she was well known for being being highly influential and clearly an essential part of the fashion system.

“Love clothes because they mean something to them—the day you met the man you love, the day you got married, what you did before you made love to somebody. It’s psychological and tied to the spirit of a woman.”, Isabella Blow, (Helmer 2007)

Building relationships is a natural process of being a part of a societal structure. Though people in the ‘group’ that you are in, you form social identities, outside of what you consider your own identity to be. The idea of being socially alive or present in varied societal structures or “groups” is a conscious choice made by people everyday. We have a desire within ourselves to be recognized by the world outside of our bodies. This helps the individual spread the message, that “I am important”, “I am alive”. But what happens when certain systems have the capability of stripping one’s ability to say so and informing you instead that, “you are alive, only if I say you are”.

“Identity” in the fashion system can in one way be your standing in the social hierarchy. As argued by Jolle Demmers, “people have a universal and fundamental need to categorize, they have a need to belong and they have a basic need to a secure sense of self” (Demmers 2012: 38). As soon as the identification of self is made through the associations with the group, they start to act as a part of that collective. Group attachments of individuals within the group is then made possible. We see ourselves in the people who also belong to the same group.
We will proceed with looking into the interpersonal relationships he formed within a group that she was a part of, and how the change in the social group dynamic lead to her loss of social identity within that group and eventual social death and suicide.

Blow promoted originality and unique thought in fashion not just through her writing and words but also through her visual appearance of wearing what she wanted to promote. She built relationships in fashion the system group with many of the designers and artist she helped find. Her inability to have children can be seen as one of first reasons for her unhappiness. The second being her separation with her husband. And the third, probably the one that affected her the most, her slow separation from the world of fashion and the people within in (Helmore 2007). One of the key relationships she formed within this group was with Alexander McQueen. Isabella blow is know to form very close relationships with people she works with, and so she did with McQueen, and considered him, for all intents and purposes, one whose talents she discovered, loved and nurtured (From the Vault Video, 2011). In an interview, Blow mentioned how “I work very, very closely with the people I’m with” (Crowe 2010).

Alexander McQueen started to climb the ladder of success. Blow herself it seems, felt a dissociation with the system that was moving forward leaving her behind. In 1994, she was ‘sidelined’ from British Vogue, she had hoped that while McQueen succeed, she would also be ‘paid back’ for everything she considered to have done for him, which did not happen, his slow departure from her life felt like an ostracism (Callahan 2014) (Crowe 2010). Her depression began to grow more and more whistle her career dropped, Tatler, for whom she was a fashion director, dropped her. The clothes she was getting from designer weren’t being sent anymore, She was also refused at the last minute for a job that she finally though she could redeem herself with, the creative director and stylist for a book, Arabian Beauty (Helmore 2007). Her identity as a pioneer was no longer relevant, and her influence has diminished.

“Mostly, identity is used in a normative sense: it is good and desirable to ‘have identity’: without it one is considered lost and weak” (Demmers 2012). The fashion system has the ability of stripping one of that identity. Seeing oneself through another’s eyes is what becomes the identity. One cannot exist in this system without being a part of its chain of totalitarian command (The Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 59) either as a perpetrator or a victim. One among the people who fell prey to this system and the consequences of its alienation was Isabella blow.
Imagine a world inclusive of the other, a world that you have believed to placed your footing in, walk by you without an acknowledgment. There is a lot of social and mental training that one consciously or unconsciously goes through to be a part of anything. When your presence is converted into non-presence what does that mean to your existence?

The act of direct violence here is propagated through the act of alienation, excommunication, shunning, and ostracism by the very people who make up the system. Isabella Blow was being de-socialised, from her own group and resocialized in into the group of the “other”. Her identity needs were un-fulfilled/stripped away (Galtung 1990). To not even “see” a person as a part of the world or the group, to completely disregard their presence as relevant to the social structure, can have devastating results. Isabella could see herself becoming a fashion “other”. Her social identity from the perspective of the fashion system dwindled, she became a ‘nobody’.

The threat of being ostracised looms when one does not follow the codes of conduct to be “fashionable” and considered relevant in its world. There is a clear sense of conformity in this system, it coerces you to follow be it a trend, diet, makeup or way of physically being through social oppressions that prevent people from participating in determining their actions. The Fashion System produces a sense of fear. The fear of alienation or being ousted, or not being in the ingroup anymore. “In the end, it seemed, Isabella Blow loved fashion more than the fashion world loved her back” (Helmore 2007).
VICTIM / VICTORY
Diary of a Modern Corset

Day 1
My waist trainer arrived today. Amazon, the omnipotent force of retail satisfaction, sends messages when your package is due to deliver, accurate to within the space of a few hours. I’ve been checking the door all day in anticipation. In a weird way, I’m excited. I am fully aware of how archaic this concept is; in 2015, women still find ways to control and discipline their bodies in ways that are harmful, almost brutal. I blame the media. Actually, Kim Kardashian. It’s thanks to her this contraption even appeared on my radar in the first place, and I’m even ashamed of the intrigue it bore. As someone who enjoys working out, I always wondered how particular body shapes are achieved; training can only get you so far, and I’m sure God had nothing to do with the proportions we’re being fed as reality. How did we get here? Well, tightlacing, also called corset or waist training, is the practice of wearing a tightly-laced corset, or most popularly in contemporary youth culture, a latex hook and eye waist trainer. It is done to achieve cosmetic modifications to the female figure and posture, or to experience the sensation of bodily restriction and control.

Corsets were first worn by male and female Minoans of Crete, but did not become popular again until during the 16th century and remained a feature of fashionable dress until the French Revolution. (Varrin 2003) These corsets were mainly designed to turn the torso into the then fashionable cylindrical shape although they narrowed the waist dramatically as well. They had shoulder straps and ended at the waist, a shorter version of what later developed into a garment that cinched the entire mid section. They flattened the bust and in doing so, pushed the breasts up, elongating the frame and altering the visual proportions of the body. The emphasis of the corset was less on the smallness of the waist than on the contrast between the rigid flatness of the bodice front and the curving tops of the breasts peeking over the top.

The corset then went into eclipse. Fashion then embraced the Empire Silhouette, a Greco-Roman style, with the high-waisted dress that was unique to this style gathered under the bosom. The waist was de-emphasised, and dresses were sewn from thin muslins rather than the heavy brocades and satins of aristocratic high fashion. (Steele 2001)
The reign of the Empire Waist style in fashion was short, 1795-1820. In the 1830s, shoulders widened with puffy gigot sleeves or flounces, skirts widened with layers of stiffened petticoats, and the waist narrowed and migrated towards its ‘natural’ position. By the 1850’s exaggerated shoulders were out of fashion and waistlines were cinched at the natural waist above a wide skirt. Fashion had achieved what is now known as the Victorian Silhouette. (Steele 2001)

In the 1830s, the artificially inflated shoulders and skirts made the intervening waist look narrow, even with the corset laced only moderately. When the exaggerated shoulders disappeared, the waist itself had to be cinched tightly in order to achieve the same effect. It is in the 1840s and 1850s that tightlacing is first recorded. It was ordinary fashion taken to an extreme. (Steele 2001)

Extreme is my middle name. I’ve been warring with my weight since my teens, and have in the process become somewhat of an expert on all the pills potions and chemical remedies for achieving control over my physical form, it almost seems normal to me. Thinking about it now though, I guess there’s a problem there too.

Anyway. It arrived at my door coincidently at the same time I was arriving back from a 2 hour gym session. I was feeling pretty accomplished anyway, but when I saw the box through the glass of my front door, it felt like I had achieved something I wanted to smile about. Honestly, as if just having the thing in my possession somehow made me sexy. I definitely shook my butt climbing the six flights of stairs to my apartment. Take that Kim K.

So, I took the box upstairs and stared at it while I undressed to take a shower. I was strangely gleeful, but a little anxious. Will it fit? Will I be skinny? Are my organs going to move? Will I be a mutant Barbie doll? I underestimated the power of hot steam…I’m calm now.

Hop out the shower and dry myself off. I couldn’t tear the box apart fast enough, you’d think it were Christmas. I stood there naked in front of my mirror taking mental pictures of myself and wondering where this madness had come from. ‘You’re so smart’, I told myself, ‘this really isn’t necessary.’ But, that soothing voice of reason in my head lost dismally to the shrill jeers of my crazy. I unwrapped the package and acquainted myself tentatively with the latex. It’s soft, but firm. The boning is intimidating, I’m nervous now. Naked still, I wrap the piece around my waist and attempt to fasten the hooks. It. Won’t. Close. I bounced up and down, inhaled, and sucked in. I lay flat, I rolled over, I used all my strength, and it wouldn’t budge. I ordered a small, because in real life, I’m a small. Not a very small small, but still a small, at least according to every high street retailer on Broadway. So how in this version of reality does this thing not fit? I start to panic. Am I fat? I’m fat.

Without thinking I immediately open my laptop and order a size
up, with much heaviness. I’m anxious. ‘I’ll return this one tomorrow.’ The anxiety of this experience is already starting to plague me. I text my roommate and she laughed in that universal emoji slang of our generation. ‘I’ll be home soon, we’ll squeeze you in.’ I lay there waiting. When she got home we bounced up and down, we inhaled, we sucked in, we lay flat, we rolled over, used all our strength, and it still. Wouldn’t. Budge.

I give up.

Corset/ waist training expert, and author of Waist Training 101: A Guide to Using Corsets to Slim Your Waistline, Vanna B., tells me that the first two weeks in which you break in the corset (yes, it’s stiffer than Grandma’s wooden clogs) are called ‘seasoning’, just like you are a prime piece of meat (I don’t even eat meat) stuffed inside a sausage casing and being primed for cooking. Charming.

It’s weird I find this oddly comforting, knowing it’s not supposed to be easy.

Take some ‘Before’ photos (why am I volunteering myself up for pain? First corset training, now stomach selfies? Is this what my parents had in mind when they said to push myself, challenge the norm?), make sure to have myself a proper going away dinner for my midsection, a kind of a biblical Last Supper (a vegan Chipotle bowl with both types of beans because this is serious) and go to bed two parts excited, one part pissed off I’m wearing my corset tomorrow.

Here goes.

Day 1 – Take 2

Fit is a generous term. I’m in it.

I make the mistake of eating right before putting it on and have the slight feeling that I’m either going to throw up or sh*t my pants. Should probably stop smoking as this reduces lung capacity for oxygen intake quite a bit (great, more suffering, thumbs down emoji)

It doesn’t hurt, but it is definitely uncomfortable. Less than comfortable. It actually sucks. I’ve never sat this straight before in my life. My posture is terrible so I’m definitely excited for this corset to help my spinal alignment, it might even make me taller, or at least allude to it. But apparently sitting in it is the hardest part. Make a mental note to keep upright and mobile.

After five minutes of feeling simultaneously bored and hyper observant of my body, I call my mother to whine. She’s less than impressed and tells me I won’t change the world in a corset. Thanks mom.

It’s the weekend and all I want to do is lie on my back and binge watch a Netflix original, but lying down is pretty much a sisyphean task. Your back doesn’t bend in this thing, so I have to prop myself up on my
elbows and fidget to keep from screaming. ‘Chilling’ is next to impossible as the contraption pulled tightly around my torso constantly reminds me that I am strapped into something other than my favourite sweater. Make a mental note to google how to sleep in it. Can I take it there?

Reminding myself this is in the name of research makes me mildly panicked. Cannot get panicked because I cannot take deep breaths. This is not going to be as fun as I thought.

My goal for today is four hours (Vanna tells me you are supposed to work up from six to eighteen, hahaha) and I’m highly aware that I’m still 45 minutes shy of halfway. Haha, remember when I thought I’d try for eight this morning? I crack myself up sometimes. Stretching my arms up feels nice; converting oxygen to carbon dioxide does not.

Two hours: My upper rib cage is slightly uncomfortable, but I kind of like it. Unless it bruises? It’s working! Do a very stiff little jig up and down the corridor to some very loud Beyonce. I’m pretty much ‘flawless’ at this point.

Two hours, five minutes: The thought of eating in this is appealing. Maybe I won’t consume as much! No actually, I’m pretty sure I won’t consume as much. Score 1 for skinny, 0 for foodie.

Three hours: Now it hurts. I think I’ll call it a day now. I’m such a quitter.

I took it off while streaming ‘Fashion Police’ online as some sort of Pavlovian negative reinforcement punishment (Foucault is that you?). I can breathe. I feel liberated. I can lounge in peace. I also feel my stomach expanding again… should I put it back on? Here’s the anxiety we talked about. Let me explain.

*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*, is a book published 1975 by French philosopher Michel Foucault. In it, he analyses the social and theoretical mechanisms behind the massive changes that occurred in Western penal systems during the modern age, focusing on historical documents from France at the time. He argues against the notion that the prison became a regulation form of punishment due mainly to the humanitarian concerns, tracing the cultural shifts that led to the dominance of ‘the prison’ in the penal system, focusing on the body and questions of power. Prison, is a system used by what he calls ‘the disciplines’, a new technological power, which he argues can also be found in places like schools, hospitals and military barracks. I argue further, through demonstration of his ideas around surveillance, the body, control and power, that the fashion system is one such place, where this structure can be found.

The emergence of prison as the form of punishment for every crime grew out of the development of discipline in the 18th and 19th centuries, according to Foucault. He looks at the development of highly refined forms
of discipline, of discipline concerned with the smallest and most precise aspects of a person's body. Discipline, he suggests, developed a new economy and politics for bodies. Modern institutions required that bodies must be individuated according to their tasks, as well as for training, observation, and control. Therefore, he argues, discipline created a whole new form of individuality for bodies, which enabled them to perform their duty within the new forms of economic, political, and military organizations emerging in the modern age and continuing to today.

The individuality that discipline constructs (for the bodies it controls) has four characteristics, namely it makes individuality which is:

- Cellular - determining the spatial distribution of the bodies
- Organic - ensuring that the activities required of the bodies are “natural” for them
- Genetic - controlling the evolution over time of the activities of the bodies
- Combinatory - allowing for the combination of the force of many bodies into a single massive force

Foucault suggests this individuality can be implemented in systems that are officially egalitarian, but use discipline to construct non-egalitarian power relations:

Historically, the process by which the bourgeoisie became in the course of the eighteenth century the politically dominant class was masked by the establishment of an explicit, coded and formally egalitarian juridical framework, made possible by the organization of a parliamentary, representative regime. But the development and generalization of disciplinary mechanisms constituted the other, dark side of these processes. The general juridical form that guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle was supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines. (Foucault 1977: 222)

Foucault’s argument is that discipline creates ‘docile bodies’, ideal for the new economics, politics and warfare of the modern industrial age, bodies that function in factories, ordered military regiments, and school classrooms. But, to construct docile bodies the disciplinary institutions must be able to (a) constantly observe and record the bodies they control and (b) ensure the internalization of the disciplinary individuality within the bodies being controlled. That is, discipline must come about without excessive force through careful observation, and molding of the bodies into the correct form through this observation; conditioning. This requires a particular form of institution, exemplified, Foucault argues, by Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. This architectural model, though it was never adopted by architects according
to Bentham’s exact blueprint, becomes an important conceptualization of power relations for prison reformers of the 19th Century, and its general principle is a recurring theme in modern prison construction. The prison is built cylindrically as a series of inward facing 3 walled cells, looking out onto an open space watched over by guards in a central tower. (Foucault 1975)

The Panopticon was the ultimate realization of a modern disciplinary institution. It allowed for constant observation characterized by an ‘unequal gaze’; the constant possibility of observation. Perhaps the most important feature of the panopticon was that it was specifically designed so that the prisoner could never be sure whether they were being observed at any moment. The unequal gaze caused the internalization of disciplinary individuality, and the docile body required of its inmates. This means one is less likely to break rules or laws if they believe they are being watched, even if they are not. Thus, prisons, and specifically those that follow the model of the Panopticon, provide the ideal form of modern punishment. (Foucault 1977)

If we compare this theory to the fashion system, constructing it as an imagined panopticon in which it’s prisoners, or ‘slaves to fashion’ have internalised the possibility of observation, or ‘the gaze’, what would be the equivalent of the ‘docile body’? The fashion media created the physical ideal of beauty, the waif model, and mediated that image as the model of docile conformity to the system. This is the image we are conditioned by daily, through advertising and popular culture, and as dedicated followers of fashion, are in constant movement towards attaining.

Most recently, a hyper feminine body, equipped with curves natural to women of colour, but popularized by Kim Kardashian and the like, and the cosmetic surgeons they employ on retainer. An impossible standard to achieve for those not naturally born with the shape, or bank balance to acquire it. What the system does, is supply mechanisms through which we are supposed to be able to attain this standard, dieting, working out, yoga, and most recently, or in actual fact, once again, the waist trainer/corset. Internalising the gaze means we internalise the need to self-regulate, to self-discipline. To participate in the system, is to anticipate being watched. Fashion is a spectator sport. For me, this experiment has heightened my awareness of how severely these mechanisms affect us, how easily we are made docile in submission to the fashion system.

Day 2
I’ve kind of got the hang of the hook and eye fastening. It wasn’t as tough to do up today, but the rubber kinda irritates my finger while I’m doing it. I imagine this is something reminiscent of a BDSM burn. I mention this to my long distance partner and he’s annoyingly more interested in that than in
the visible loss of inches I’m more than ecstatic about, even if it is only temporary. Because I’m feeling just sooo meta, I tried eating a pasta and wine dinner in it and can’t tell if this was a genius move or a terrible one.

I couldn’t finish my bowl (never happens) and I couldn’t finish my second glass of wine (never happens) because there was simply no room in my squashed tummy for the rest to go. This has me mildly gleeful. ‘I’m basically Kate Moss model status’ I say to myself out loud in the presence of my roommate. She laughs. I laugh, but secretly I’m chuffed. I vaguely remember Vanna B. noting how eating meals in it will make you eat less. No lies here, and I am a happy camper, I’ll eat the rest for breakfast. My rib cage doesn’t hurt nearly as much, and I look suuuuuper womanly in my clothes; it’s still uncomfortable though, on both counts. I am acutely aware of the fact that I have curves, shape, and am very obviously a woman, which is a drastic change from my very square athletic frame. On the one hand, I am loving how anything high waisted makes me feel like a femme fatale, but on the other hand, I can’t breathe because my breasts are hiked up so high up my nose, and I can’t see my toes over the mountains. I am actively working on trying to forget I have a torso-sized-band-aid sucking in my body, which is probably not helping my conditioning strategy. I hope that if I can forget I’m wearing it, I’ll be able to wear it for longer periods of time. Alas, the only thing that makes the time pass faster is walking in it, and right now, I just don’t feel like it.

**Day 3**

I’m a professional. I am Dita Von Teese. I am legend.

The mission should I choose to accept it. The gym.

I get ambitious and cut a hole in a garbage bag and wear it under my latex waist trainer for extra sweat potential. Needless to say, I dripped an entire Indian Ocean of sweat by the end of my session. I definitely feel a difference, maybe tomorrow I’ll see it.

The psychological effect of this thing is starting to worry me. I can’t stop thinking about it. It consumes my thoughts. I can’t relax because I’m so acutely aware of it. I wonder if I’ll ever get to the smaller hook, or even down to the smaller size I never got around to returning. I worry that I have to lose more weight because my legs don’t look as small as they did when my hips were the same width as my waist. Now I have new goals. Make a mental note to lose more weight. I’m pretty sure I can feel my organs moving, so now is a good time to take a break and wash it.

In the late years of the Victorian era, medical reports and rumors claimed that tightlacing was fatally detrimental to health. (Steele 2001) Women who suffered through the practice to achieve small waists were also condemned for their vanity and excoriated from the pulpit as slaves to fash-
ion. Despite the efforts of dress reformers to eliminate the corset, and despite medical and clerical warnings, women persisted in tightlacing. In the early 1900s, the small corseted waist began to fall out of fashion. The feminist and dress reform movements had made practical clothing acceptable for work or exercise. The rise of the Artistic Dress movement made loose clothing and the natural waist fashionable even for evening wear. (Kunzle 1982)

Couturiers like Fortuny and Poiret designed exotic, alluring costumes in pleated or draped silks, calculated to reveal slim, youthful bodies. If one didn’t have such a body, new undergarments, the brassiere and the girdle, promised to give the illusion of one. Corsets were no longer fashionable, but they entered the underworld of the fetish, along with items such as bondage gear and vinyl catsuits. From the 1960s to the 1990s, fetish wear became a fashion trend and corsets made something of a recovery. They are often worn as top garments rather than underwear. However, most corset wearers own a few bustiers or fashionable ‘authentic’ corsets for evening wear; they do not tightlace. (Steele 2001)

**Day 14**

I’m down to the smaller hook. I’ve been training in it every day, and washing and quick drying it to be able to wear it under my clothes after sweating in it. I feel almost naked without it, like it’s become part of my skeleton. Is that normal? I read somewhere in a tabloid that women have felt empowered by their corsets and waist trainers, that there is something empirically sexy about the bondage like under garment, and the feminist in me let out a little whimper. I’m one of THEM now. I am actually starting to enjoy this oppression. I am enjoying being able to control my body, discipline it, train it, and the daily photo taking means I am able to survey myself in scrutiny through the reflected eye. I’ve been snapchatting the experience for my social media followers. A couple have expressed great interest in this little experiment, a few of them even considering getting one themselves. I think ‘oh no, what have I done?’. The response from the men in my audience is obviously more than positive, a little creepy actually, but I guess that comes with the territory of total transparency on social media...or does it? Have I internalised the male gaze as a normative part of my embodied experience? Make a mental note to think more about this over my third cup of coffee.

Getting dressed is both painful and new at the same time. I am starting to enjoy exploring my new shape. A whole new world of women’s fashion has opened up to me, and I’m not sure if I am comfortable with my new image. I’m wearing much tighter clothing to show off my tiny waist, also out of a deep fear that people will think I am as wide as my cup size extends from my chest all the way down, and that would be devastating. This thing, this parasite, has given my control issues a pet to play with, and my crazy is
having a field day. I’m self regulating. I walk different, stand different, eat different, dress different, but have not as yet decided if I like it or not.

**Day 17**

So smoking has become a very difficult thing to do. I get extremely light headed and my breathing is already short because of my compressed lung capacity. I guess it’s score 1 for health, what’s the tally at this point? I lost track. I’m definitely smaller. The combination of ab workouts, the trusty plastic sweat bag, and Gertrude (my friends have named it), I can totally see a difference, but now I’m so hooked on it, I can’t fathom taking it off for longer than it takes to sleep, which lately has only been a few hours at a time. Make a mental note to youtube once again how to sleep in it. Tomorrow I attempt the impossible.

**Day 18**

I tossed and turned all night. It was miserable. I am miserable. My back hurts, my ribs hurt, I’m light headed and I woke up with marks and grooves in my skin. Not cute.

I can’t concentrate in class. I shift in my seat trying to find a comfortable way to sit, and there isn’t one. It’s gotten easier to wear, but sitting still means bolt rigid posture and shoulders up by my ears so as not to rest too much weight on the boning that digs a sharp reminder into my side every time I slouch. Today is not a good day.

**Day 30**

I have officially moved onto the smaller size. I use the ‘seasoned’ one that I broke in purely for working out in or sleeping in, and the tighter one for daily wear. It’s much harder to sit, so I avoid it. I walk to school to avoid the glares on the subway as I sit like I have a stick up my butt. I guess the excuse for more exercise makes me feel like a very accomplished human being. I love this thing; the monster. I am pretty much acclimatized to wearing it all day and all night, except when I eat, I feel like the food never makes it down to the right place when I try eat with it on, so I eat (very little lately since the whole arrangement of my insides has shifted), and then put it back on. I think it helps with digestion, but this could be a lie I tell myself to assuage the guilt of the fact that I’m starting to love this portable torture chamber. Beyonce would be proud, but would Gloria Steinem?

Sip champagne later on in the day for a work celebration and it actually hurts, there are way too many bubbles causing me pain. Yes, bubbles can cause pain. On the bright side, this designer dress fits like it was made for me and I feel f***ing fabulous in it. My posture is unbelievable, but the whole DD illusion is frustrating. I made an appointment this afternoon for
a consultation to see a cosmetic surgeon, and instantly realised how crazy I had become. One of my professors thinks I’m developing an eating disorder, but I keep trying to reassure her that I’m fine (I’m totally fine, right?). In Gertrude’s defense, I think the craziness is all me.

I think I used the experiment as a way to feed my OCD, and desperate need for control. It gave me a way to self-regulate every aspect of my life, but in other ways, made me feel very empowered. I think it’s a great tool to improve your posture and smooth out any unwanted unevenness in your midsection as a temporary fix, but coupled with a strict workout regime and my already vegan lifestyle, it has had some very positive lasting effects on my shape and posture. I think what it does is help the muscles develop in a new shape, strengthening your core while it does it.

I’m not mad at this experience at all, in fact, I think I might continue wearing it. (Don’t tell my professor…or my mom for that matter.) Foucault was definitely onto something.
POST-SCRIPT
Fashion and the Violence of Aesthetic Supremacy

There seems to be an inherent paradox in our everyday relationship to clothes. The same person who might at one occasion claim that he or she does not care about clothes, and just wears “anything”, may the next second blurt out that “I would never wear that!” Likewise, these days there seems to be a multitude of parallel styles and fashions existing side-by-side, and a wide variety of cheap and accessible clothing is saturating the streetscapes. Not only can we find jeans for ten dollars, but on online retailers like Dresslink, sell pages after pages of garments for 1 cent, the main expense being the shipping from overseas. With our online presence being all the more visual through social media with endless selfies and visual self-promotion, we seem to care more and more about our appearance, while the basic tools for visual identity modulation seems all the more accessible. We seem to put more importance to appearance, but nevertheless we treat clothes as disposable, like trash. As fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto laments: “People waste clothing. They buy and buy, sometimes without even wearing it, and ultimately end up swinging it in the trash. It is pollution.” (Yamamoto in Lochanski 2015)

Perhaps the average consumer has changed perspective on fashion. Yet the rules of the game seem to stay they same. Even if the rigid division of the year into two seasonal collections has dissolved into a steady stream of trends, garments and fashion weeks, there still seems to be some fundamental rules intact. There are positions to seek, claim and defend. There are elites to aspire for, club to seek admission to. As our cities get all the more segregated so does also the realm of dress with bouncers and pickers at the entrance to all the more parties and nightclubs, admitting only those deemed worthy.

The L’Oreal advert famously acclaims “Because I’m worth it!” So what is it that I am worth? And what makes me worth it, while others are not? To most of us, being considered unattractive can be a subjective or individual experience, and we may accept this as fate, or at least a part of any human life. But being unattractive can also be part of a subjugation process, under a structural regime of domination, where ideals of beauty and hier-
Archives of values are tools of repression and where exclusive ideals reinforce submission. This systemic experience I have earlier called fashion supremacy, an aesthetic, political and ontological category, which has become an intrinsic part of consumer society’s categories of social value (von Busch 2014). Not only do we treat our clothes like trash, but also those people we do not considered attractive and fashionable are met with the same standard of value: they are superfluous, a residue. In a culture directed through fashion supremacy, the unattractive are considered people with less value, or even redundant, with no values at all.

Fashion supremacy is enacted through various levels of violence. It is a value system which judges others, legitimizes aesthetic segregation, and celebrates an imaginary meritocracy within the realm of dress: that those with better means are simply worth a higher status, effectively hiding an unjust distribution of assets behind the perfect façade. As a parallel to Chuck Collin and Felice Yëskel’s (2000) argument of an economic apartheid, with the inequality and insecurity of the poor through social and institutional discrimination, I would suggest fashion supports an aesthetic apartheid of a similar structure, even if this wording is strong. What makes the institutional apartheid of fashion so devious is how it is covered under a soft regime of “democratic” fast fashion. The fashion system effectively veils how the industry is structurally discriminatory and exploitative, totally based on outsourcing of labor, oppressive sweatshops, unpaid interns, unattainable body ideals and outright ableism, ageism, classism, and racism: systems of exploitation and social stratifications that take the form of direct forms of violence. As we see in the cases in this volume, fashion offers a well-masked excuse for separation, exclusion, devaluation, discounting and designation of those deemed unfashionable as “other” and a waste to the system.

But fashion supremacy also plays an important role in producing direct and personal forms of violence. Clothes act as the perfect screen onto which to project stereotyping and acts of aesthetic apartheid. Clothes, by being “shallow” by popular definition, allow them to be the excuse for various forms of micro-violence. When the bouncer stops a person of color to enter a nightclub because of some vague rule of “no sneakers tonight”, while simultaneously letting the rich kids in with similar shoes, the realm of dress has become an absolvernt for segregation. Likewise, when the cool kids in school ironizes about a bully victim’s clothes, these garments not only enact the violence, but they also mask it as a comment “only” about the surface of things, while the comment strikes at the victims soul. The same interface that may be an armor in some occasions, is also a window of vulnerability in others.
A window to the soul

Many of us have experienced an occasion where we have felt vulnerable in our clothes. The context for a certain garment was wrong, some detail flawed, a stain at a revealing place. Even though we know our clothes is just a shallow surface, we have felt almost naked, as if a crack has opened like a wound in our social interface. Sometimes that may be a hurtful experience, leaving us utterly alone and isolated, other times friends have quickly rushed to our help, as if they immediately understood the gravity of the situation. In some instances a rival have used the occasion to manifest their power, strategically advancing an attack to our social standing, or directly at our exposed soul. Such attack, at a moment when a chink has appeared in our armor, can shatter the strongest character in pieces.

We are taught that clothes do not matter, it is only a shallow surface, and has nothing to do with our “real self”. As the fox comforts the Little Prince in Antoine de Saint Exupéry’s book with the same name: “Here is my secret. It is very simple. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; What is essential is invisible to the eye.” (Saint Exupéry 2000: 63) So it may not be uncommon to speculate why it seems so hurtful to get bad comment about one’s clothes. Indeed, if one looks around, at how most people seems to dress in the most acceptable and least challenging common style, such as jeans and t-shirt, we may speculate that either most of us have the most amazing inner lives and pay no attention to the shallow world of appearances, or so many of us have been painfully coerced into a frictionless social uniform of aesthetic invisibility.

To the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, the look is one of the most powerful tools for understanding human existence and Being. In our loneliness we may existence the inner life of our thoughts, but as human beings are social animals, we are heavily dependent on others in the shaping of our own experiences and identity, as the perception of others, or “being-seen-by-others” is an essential part of the relations which form our Being. (Sartre 1966: 341). At the foundation of our experience of existence lies the incident of consciously feeling how the self is formed by oneself being looked at: “The look which the eyes manifest, no matter what kind of eyes they are, is a pure reference to myself. “ (Sartre 1966: 347) Being seen can be an experience of being defenseless, that an “intermediary refers from me to myself.” As Sartre posits, the essential experience of being-looked-at is the feeling of pride or shame before the perception from another. For example, the experience of shame, of being revealed, unveiled as a form of harassment, touches on the very formation of my Being, the cogito of the self: I do not only know shame, I am the shame (Sartre 1966: 248f).

From Sartre’s perspective pride and shame are thus two foundational experiences that touch and form the very soul of Being. As clothing
is such a powerful interface for interpreting, judging and assess our peers, it may not be surprising many of us have been culturally schooled not to judge others by their looks, perhaps exactly in a civic effort to limit the existential damage the social conditioning of the look may cause. However, this cultural tradition of damage control may be dissolving. As cultural theorist Gilles Lipovetsky notices, the contemporary rule of “total fashion” seeps into all our relationships, as “the consummate reign of fashion pacifies social conflict, but it deepens subjective and intersubjective conflict; it allows more individual freedom, but it generates greater malice in living.” (241)

Under a current regime of fashion supremacy, we would better try to understand these mechanisms better rather than ignoring them, or hoping the violence will simply go away with a little bit more “democracy” or cheap access to acceptable style. In the study of dress, we must take the violence projected through fashion as a social interface more seriously. And not least, if we may take it for granted we seek positive recognition through clothes, aspiring for attention, seduction and of impressing others, we must likewise see how the judgment of others may serve as an existential weapon. A serious study of dress must also encompass how we use fashion as a tool to disqualify, invalidate and hurt others: that fashion may be used as an interface for violence.

However, within the study of dress, it is easy to highlight fashion’s role in facilitating social mobility and desire, for example examining how icons and subcultures produce individual empowerment, even if fashion as phenomenon draws heavily on hierarchical mechanisms (cf. Barthes 1983) Such success stories, of the subversion of codes and countercultural liberation struggles, may however also effectively hide the structural violence programmed into the hierarchies themselves, or in the coded interactions facilitated by cultures of dress, and especially that of fashion in consumer culture. One such phenomenon, highlighted by Mari Grinde Arntzen, is how fashion is “always right”, and thus grants the “right” for the more adorable to be nasty to those who are deemed to be dressed “wrong” (Arntzen 2015: 52ff). As Arntzen posits: “Where fashion points, people follow.” (Arntzen 2015: 55)

Like the meritocratic ideal in fashion, this mechanism of aesthetic righteousness in fashion resonates with what social psychologist Melvin Lerner has called “the just world phenomenon”, a common human trait in perceiving the world and attribute to it an inherent level of justice: people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Lerner 1980). From such perspective, the conqueror or winner is automatically “worth it” while the victim or loser has herself to blame. In fashion, the demarcation between “in” and “out” is a line is drawn between victim and perpetrator and it marks that there is no common humanity between them, thus sidestepping any
moral judgment: in the “just world” of fashion the beautiful are worth their beauty, the victims deserve to be a victims.

A typical example of this thinking can be recognized in the opening of The September Issue, a documentary movie on the inner workings of Vogue magazine. Here, Anna Wintour, the famous editor, advances her standpoint that “On the whole, people who say demeaning things about [fashion], I think it’s because they feel in some way excluded, or not part of the ‘cool group’. So as a result they just mock it.” (Wintour cited in Arntzen 2015: 53) Effectively blaming the victims of exclusion for not being part of the cool group, she not only elevates the cool, but also explicitly reinforces the dichotomy between the “in” and the “out”, while, as the movie exposes, dictates the symbolic currencies of that which is “in” on very vague premises, and with a workplace culture conditioned by fear.

Violence and posing
To better see how direct violence, and the fear of violence, plays out in fashion it can be illuminating to take a short detour to the most extreme form of direct violence; to actual killing in hostile situations. Military psychologist Dave Grossman is an authority in the subject of “killology”, the study of killing, and he draws connections between the modern urge to suppress some of our human instincts: both the realm of reproduction, or sex, as well as the realm of death, or killing. As Grossman argues, “every society has a blind spot, an area into which it has great difficulty looking. Today that blind spot is killing. A century ago it was sex.” (Grossman 2009: xxvi). To Grossman, we must come up to face the “dark beauty of violence”, to “look at it squarely and try to understand and control it”, rather than condemn and repress it. (Grossman 2009: xxxv)

However, a central part of Grossman study does not concern the use of deadly force. Instead, he points out that human warfare has throughout the history of our species primarily been about posing, striking on the attitude of aggression rather than actually implement deadly force in rivalry. Social combat is a pattern of aggression, orchestrated, ritualized, with “patterns of posturing, mock battle, and submission” (Grossman 2009: 6). As Grossman posits, posturing is the main part of combat, aiming to make the opponent flee or surrender, thus the ultimate aim is very seldom death; “Aggression, yes. Competitiveness, yes. But only a very tine, tine level of actual violence.” (Grossman 2009: 6) From Grossman’s perspective, much of human competitive interaction and rivalry is infused by violence in the form of posturing, between clashes of interests, peer or territorial rivalry, or various forms of games which determine social ranking and prestige. The real aim of most combat is status, display, profit, but also damage limitation: “In
war, as in gang war, posturing is the name of the game.” (Grossman 2009: 7) However, it is the fear of that tiny chance of actual violence spilling out that makes posturing so effective: it is not merely a charade, the threat has to be real.

Analogous to Grossman’s idea, fashion is most often a mode of posing, and very few instances of dressed interaction are actually discharged into direct violence or social aggression, such as genuine instances of hurtful comments, rejection or the use of force. As Grossman states,

> We want desperately to be liked, loved, and in control of our lives; and intentional, overt, human hostility and aggression—more than anything else in life—assaults our self-image, our sense of control, our sense of the world as a meaningful and comprehensible place, and ultimately, our mental and physical health. (Grossman 2009: 76)

Our fear is to be “degraded in front of our loved ones”, and it is the “personal deprecation and domination by our fellow human beings that strike terror and loathing in our hearts.” (Grossman 2009: 76) It is the threat and potential of interpersonal aggression that we fear, of loosing face and social worth, more than the actuality of horror or death (Grossman 2009: 80). The undefined threat of having a nasty comment made about our social skin may be a good enough reason to upgrade the wardrobe. The mere thought of exclusion may be enough to coerce a peer into submission to the latest trend.

Thus we must see that even if there are instances of actual killing in the world of dress, the fashion “kill” is primarily that of social degradation. Aggression in the realm of dress is an act of transgression or humiliation, or even the threat of humiliation. Even if it may involve real acts of violence or even death, as infamous murders for popular garments, such as colorful athletic wear in the 90s (Schmidt 1990), or trendy fisherman jackets in more recent times (Hermann 2012), the fashion “kill” this paper is concerned with is the microaggression or microinvalidation (Sue 2010) of another, using clothing as a social excuse and weapon in the act of violent domination. Microaggressions are the means of discrete aggression and bullying, the “everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages” towards the other (Sue 2010: 3).

Even a flattering compliment, put in an ironic tone, can still reflect oppression as it both confirms the position of the powerful who is allowed to judge, and it allows the perpetrator to cling to his or her belief in the victim’s inferiority (Sue 2010: 13) A seemingly well-intentioned comment creates an “attributional ambiguity”, a “motivational uncertainty in that the motives and meanings of a person’s actions are unclear and hazy”, to which the victim have trouble responding, or end up in a double bind (Sue 2010: 17).
Likewise, in the realm of dress, a debasing comment on a clothing detail may be referencing a “shallow” piece of fabric, but aims to annihilate the social standing of the opponent, if not his or her self-esteem, or even soul. If a third part intervenes and try to defuse the situation or defend the victim, the aggressor can easily hide behind the proposed shallowness of dress, and argue the victim should “not be so sensitive,” as fashion is “merely a game.” On another note, bystander may reinforce the effect of aggression by executing a “conspiracy of silence” where the perpetrators keeps their oppression from being acknowledged, maintain their innocence, and leave inequities from being challenged. If the victim calls attention to the aggression, it is often bypassed with a comment like “don’t be so oversensitive.”

But whereas microaggressions may not always be explicitly intended to do harm, bullying is a systemic and repeated use of psychological and physical violence to harass another. It is a well-known method for manifesting social pecking order, but it may also have evolutionary effects, where intra-species violence not only sorts “selfish genes”, but also biologically affects the lives within groups. In the last years, a much-discussed study found that not only do victims of bullying suffer from negative physical health effects throughout their life, but also that the bullies, the perpetuators, got improved health by bullying (Copeland et al 2014). The study showed that “there is evidence that those who perpetrate only, pure bullies, gain benefits from bullying others without incurring costs and may be healthier than their peers, emotionally and physically.” (Copeland et al 2014) According to the lead author of the study, William Copeland, the effects “serve as a lesson for how social status can have lasting positive effects on health” and to be a bully is good for your health, as “the enhanced social status that came along with being a bully did seem to advantage them over time” (Park 2014). There thus seems to exist physical benefits to being the top dog socially, to use one’s popularity to execute force over the weak, and that these effects prove to have long-lasting medical effects on not only our mental but also our physical health, beneficial for perpetuators and detrimental for victims.

**Violent seductions**

A comparison between fashion and sexual/natural selection is not as far fetched as may be seen, as already underlined by psychologist Nancy Ectoff in *The Survival of the Prettiest* (1999). However, in fashion, which indeed can be seen as a form of lighter gang war, posturing is the name of the game. The enactment of superiority, through posturing and sometimes manifested through bullying, is rewarded. The lived experience of popularity and domination may even be the force that keeps fashion so attractive. Fashion, as an evolutionary force of seduction and peer rivalry, pushes the individual
towards posturing and eventually picking on the competitors in the name of social status. So just like sexual selection is a vital evolutionary force, so is the rivalry between mates, with bullying and social violence as an evolutionary law of tooth and claw.

The melding of sexual and violent forces of selection also leaves traces in the symbolic realm of fashion. In many studies of fashion, seduction, mating and sex are seen as the undercurrent of most symbolic human interaction, not least in the sexuality-driven analysis of the sociology of fashion by Rene König (1973), a perspective also echoing in Ectoff’s biological analysis of beauty (Ectoff 1999). In a similar vein, Rebecca Arnold suggests that the “erotic allure” of the sexualized body is “enhanced by a series of masking feints” that is fashion. (Arnold 2001: 85) Arnold continues,

In the late twentieth century, this pre-packaged sexuality was constantly hovering on the brink of brutality, caught between a celebration of eroticism reclaimed and a spiteful rebuke of the belief placed in its power.” (Arnold 2001: 85)

Examining the designs of Alexander McQueen, Arnold draws on to show the mix of violence and eroticism in fashion, not least in the explicit connotations of the “Highland Rape” collection of autumn/winter 1995–96. On a desolate note, McQueen’s tragic suicide in 2010 may seem a sorrowful affirmation of her analysis.

Cultural theorist Wolfgang Fritz Haug places sexuality at the center stage of capitalist fashion and consumer culture (Haug 1986), as does Valerie Steele’s famous study of fashion (Steele 1996), as she points to how sexuality is one of the main driving forces of fashion, if not the cardinal one. At the merger of fashion and popular culture, to have a “passion for fashion” is to indulge in the sexualized consumer pleasures of Sex and the City, and as suggested by Feona Attwood, there may even be a “pornographication” of mainstream fashion media within a more heavily sexualized culture, and where women are increasingly targeted as sexual consumers. (Attwood 2005: 395)

In her famous study on sexuality and violence, political theorist Nancy Hartsock suggests a hegemonic “phallocratic culture” within the cultural domain of western sexuality, where white male masculinity takes a dominant and often violent position (Hartsock 1999). As Hartsock suggests, “what is sexually exciting in modern Western culture is hostility, violence, and domination, especially—but not necessarily—directed against women.” (Hartsock 1999: 96) Hartsock especially highlights the research of psychiatrist Robert Stoller, which she does not however fully agree with, but she extends Stoller’s perspective on how various forms of masculine violence often are components of seduction, eroticism and sexual excitement. In Stoller’s distinctions between various forms of excitement, eroticism is only one
component; others are “triumph, rage, revenge, fear, anxiety, risk.” (Stoller 1979:26)

As Hartsock underlines, in much of contemporary Western sexualization of women, humiliation, harm and suffering seems to be a vital part of the process of male excitement, also on a symbolic plane. Drawing from French cultural theorist George Bataille, Hartsock exposes how the terms “lover” and “assailant” acts as synonyms presenting the female as victim of acts of physical despoilment and impersonal violence, stripping the victim of its humanity: “desire as domination, sexuality as hostility, then must be recognized as the culturally hegemonic forms in which sexuality is constructed.” (Hartsock 1999: 99)

While not all seduction in fashion is related to violence, we must recognize the amalgamation of seduction and humiliation, or at least that they are perhaps opposing sides of fashion. The nasty comments on about dress on Internet forums or the outright acts of cyber bullying or “shaming” of dressed popular icons are elements of hostile inflections of seduction. On a similar note, Hartsock draws on how “the gratification in sexual conquest derives from the experience of defilement—of reducing the elevated woman to the ‘dirty’ sexual level, of polluting that which is seen as pure, sexualizing that which is seen as unisexual, animalizing that which is seen as ‘spiritual’.” (Hartsock 1999: 98) Whereas some forms of eroticized dress may derive some of its seductive qualities from symbolic risk, also the bullies derive their excitement from the enactment of triumph, revenge, humiliation and despoilment.

From this perspective, phenomena such as paparazzi photography, public shaming, and bullying are the dark underside of the overall dissemination of fashion itself. The very latter popularity of fashion, its everydayness, thus becomes the impetus for its desacralization and the spread of social savagery. The quotidian use of fashion for affirmation of identity, clothes worn with an intention to please, seduce or “fit in”, becomes the perfect surface to spoil and defile, symbolically ravaging the idol or rival by inverting and sullying the victim’s desire to suit the on-looker. Like Hartsock emphasizes, much excitement find its root in control, in mastery, and also, in the desire to humiliate that what one cannot fully control (Hartsock 1999: 105ff). With dark pleasure, the bully can reverse the victim’s desire to please, refusing to satisfy it, yet as the mastery cannot be total, the bully can instead attack the target through the vulnerable interface the victim opened up in the attempt to please. If the case of resistance or complaints, the perpetuator can easily blame the victim: how can one violate something by using it for what it is? The standard evasion from the bully is to claim the victim “asked for it.”

Psychiatrist Marie-France Hirigoyen discusses moral harassment and abuse as a form of perverted or reversed narcissism, where the abuser
is not only self-centered, but also seeks acknowledgement and takes pleasure through the assault of others (Hirigoyen 2005). Hirigoyen focuses her studies on organizational abuse, where hierarchies and workplace cultures affirm abuse and violence, and she argues that this type of personal exploitation has risen over the last decades with the proliferation of a competitive economic system through so many layers of everyday life, dissolving moral guidelines with passion, as also workaholics become all the more dependent on their work for their identity (Hirigoyen 2005: 82ff). Hirigoyen’s studies offer several parallels to the production as well as undermining of the individual’s sense of self through the means of fashion. To undermine a victim’s self, the abuse goes through escalating cycles of isolation, rejection, invalidation, discreditation, in order to destroy someone who is weaker, producing a culture of fear. Three processes are central set the stage for abuse: dehumanization, all-powerfulness of the culture, and tolerance or complicity with abuse (Hirigoyen 2005: 86) These three mechanisms also resonate throughout fashion: valuing a person only for qualities set by the system, the culture of fashion being “always right”, and finally the culture of fashion not only tolerates abuse, abuse is the very theme and power of the value system itself, especially if one looks as popular movies such as *The September Issue* or *The Devil Wears Prada*.

Like bullying, fashion is a public phenomenon, and both require an audience to work effectively. This type of public defilement, with nasty comments on on-line forums, or special platforms and media assigned for exactly this type of dark gratification perfectly coincides with the “democratization” of fashion. In consumerism, “democracy” has come to mean general and affordable access, for example through “voting with your dollars” with cheap clothes, or the ability to become “internet-famous” through blogs and social media. With media formats popularized in TV shows, such as *Survivor*, also another common implication of voting has emerged which could be called inverted elections. Here, the participants of the show, fully immersed into the format of entertainment, are encouraged to bully and act cruelly to peers, and the viewers play the important role of voters and imaginary co-directors. But as opposed to parliamentary democracy, where the promise of politics is to be able to vote in representatives that represent the general public, here viewers are supposed to lustfully vote out those that do not fit in or aesthetically please the appetite of the audience. The idea that voting could be about possibly changing the rules, supporting civic virtue or electing positive values is something easily forgotten. Instead the last act of political influence for the general public is itself used for entertaining the desire to debase the one who tries to please.
A typology of fashion violence

Fashion is a social phenomenon, and even though there are many forms of hierarchies in our social environment, it is our peers who are the “judges” of our fashionability, referencing our dressed expressions to the latest shared trends (Blumer 1969). The social comments, of approval or condemnation, are the verdicts of the jury. And no law is upheld without systems of judgement, execution and punishment. In the case of fashion, it is our peers who are the “fashion police”.

Social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner frames how a foundational function in building social identity is through intergroup conflict, the processes of differentiation between the “ingroup” and various “outgroups” (Tajfel & Turner 1979). Establishing “shared value dimensions” best produces optimal differentiation between groups, and by overcoming the rival group through comparative results in the competition over these values establishes a dynamic of superiority. (Tajfel & Turner 1979: 41f) This establishes a shared idea of merit, that the winner is “worth it”, while if successful it also makes the losing group accept their inferiority. From this perspective, status is always a conflict, the result of, often violent, processes of comparison and competition, Thus the mechanisms of identity production does not happen in a vacuum, or a place of mere signification and aesthetic play, but within an environment of hostility, rivalry and through means of violence. This resonates all too well with Arntzen’s claim that “quite literally, some are counted in and others out […] By its nature, fashion is only designed for some.” (Arntzen 2015: 58)

The definition and boundaries of violence are greatly contested, also since it is a concept that, even if not always used in a moral sense, always draws distinct connotations towards illegitimacy. And whereas not all forms of injustice may be a form of violence, a lot of injustices are caused by violence. Philosophy scholar Steven Lee argues that most acts of violence are “acts of commission rather than omission.” (Lee 2009: 325) On a similar note, Newton Garver allows for a wide concept of violence, but also that it allows for a more nuanced debate on violations and their social cost, it is important to recognize that the concept of violence is a moral concept, and that the moral elements come in through the fact that an act of violence is a violation of a person. I think that it is also important to recognize that the normal pattern of moral discourse allows for excuses and rationalizations. […] When a person commits an act of violence he is not necessarily to be condemned, though he does have some explaining to do. The fact that we would require an excuse from him, or some justification of his behaviour, indicates that a person’s doing an act of violence puts the burden of proof on him, but it doesn’t suffice to show that the case has gone against him yet. (Garver 2009: 181)
Sociologist Johan Galtung has a very wide definition of violence: it is the opposite of peace, and peace is the absence of violence. Not only is it the opposite of peace, but “violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.” (Galtung 2009: 80, italics in original) It is thus the difference between the potential and the actual, or the suppression of the actual from its potential to grow to full realization. As Galtung proposes, this violence is not necessarily enacted brutally or personally, but can also include the threat of violence (Galtung 2009: 82), it may not be manifested, but latent, thus not appearing as an unstable equilibrium, but instead be enacted structurally (Galtung 2009: 85ff). Thus violence does not need to be forceful, active, personal, physical, intended, but it may instead be a withdrawal or a denial, of for example water, air, food, recognition, the tranquil violence Galtung famously calls “structural violence”. To Galtung violence is everything that attacks physical integrity and dignity, thus also cohesion, however mild, is a form of violence.

Galtung’s typology is heavily debated as it widens the concept of violence so radically. Scholars such as Robert Audi (1971), argues that discrimination and exclusion cannot be seen as violence as they can be peacefully maintained. Robert Miller (1971), on the other hand, argues that neglecting someone in need cannot be violence, since it does not require the use of force. However, just like the concept of injustice can include both what is formally illegal, as well as ethical transgressions which stay within the law, it could be argued that a wider concept of violence makes us better see transgressions and situations of coercion, which also includes neglect, indifference and systemic omission.

In Galtung’s typology of violence there are three levels which may help us decipher various forms of violence in the support of fashion supremacy: direct, structural and cultural violence (1990):

*Direct violence* is the acts of violence, usually between human actors, such as acts of repression, detention, maiming and killing. They are usually identifiable as a violent personal relation, between a clear perpetrator and victim.

*Structural violence* is the more abstract and systemic layer of exploitative social arrangements, which still often take physical form. This may be fragmentation, marginalization, segmentation, the creation of “underdogs” through the structural impairment of human needs, which leaves marks not only on the human body but also on the mind and spirit. “The underdogs may in fact be so disadvantaged that the die (starve, waste away from diseases) from it” (Galtung 1990: 293). In some events, no direct perpetrator can be found, yet “all of this happens within complex structures and at the end of long, highly ramified causal chains and cycles.” (Galtung 1990: 294)
Cultural violence is “the way in which the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society.” (Galtung 1990: 291) Galtung continues,

By ‘cultural violence’ we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence - exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) - that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. (Galtung 1990: 291)

Cultural violence is the soft power which legitimizes an order that supports the fact of structural violence and the acts of direct violence. “Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong.” (Galtung 1990: 291) This means cultural violence makes discrimination seem “natural” and endorses individual acts of direct violence with the help of mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion, social hierarchies and norms

The culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them (particularly not exploitation) at all. (Galtung 1990: 295)

Galtung visualizes this typology as a violence strata image, a triangle with cultural violence at the bottom, a “substratum from which the other two cab derive their nutrients” (Galtung 1990: 294). The second layer is the structural violence, and at the top, “visible to the unguided eye and to barefoot empiricism, is the stratum if direct violence” (Galtung 1990: 294f). Like the tip of an iceberg, it is the direct violence, often forceful and personal, we usually recognize and can put our finger at, whereas the two submerged forms are silently hiding in the tranquil waters systemic oppression.

Applying Galtung’s typology to the violent mechanisms of fashion supremacy, we could start examining it from the bottom of the model. At the basis, cultural fashion violence may make the slim Caucasian model body an explicit standard of beauty, discriminating other bodies both implicitly and explicitly. It may perpetuate unreachable ideals of beauty and wealth with one hand, while the other “helps” poor people to access these ideals at the mercy of a “democratic” and accessible fashion. The cultural sphere of fashion produces purist ideals of the feminine or masculine, often as clear opposites, and sorts aesthetic categories accordingly. Veiled as it is, this seemingly “natural” violence may even play with the ideal of beauty in an “ironic” way in media, while still perpetuating and legitimizing its power over consumers. It sets the standard of those who are “worth it” and those who are not. Similarly, the culture also produces ideas how some deserve to be bullied, such as specific online forums for shaming and bullying, or special media sections on “who wore it best”, or the opposite, “fashion disasters”, where the ideal is to shame celebrities in organized ways.
**Structural fashion violence** may manifest these fashion ideals into sizes and patterns, the shape of mannequins and measurement standards. It may also produce social or racial sorting mechanisms in the layout of stores or names of sizes. It may produce manuals for shop attendants of “ideal customers” and how to approach them, while implicitly framing “unwanted customers” that may tarnish the brand image. Similarly, through “limited editions” the brand can keep products at a reasonable price point, while still making sure only the loyal customers get access to the goods. The structural violence can also be traced to media networks and the material mechanisms that reproduce violence and bullying, for example how comments section and voting procedures are curated online to maximize exaltation and nastiness, producing ecologies of online shaming and even hate.

**Direct fashion violence**, the tip of the iceberg of violence, may happen in forms of blunt harassment or bullying, using clothes as a screen by veiling the aggression in a “shallow” comment. It may be that cautious, yet excluding comment from a shop attendant when you browse pieces of expensive attire, a bouncer at a restaurant denying entry to a person of colour, or from a lower class, because of a detail of clothing, the degrading comments and exclusion by fellow pupils at school, or in its most excessive form, the actual killing in order to attain a popular piece of clothing or the direct death of factories collapsing in the wake of globalization of the fashion industry. Online violence is direct, aimed at a specific human, but the perpetrators are striking out of the shadows, almost producing a mythical presence, where the victim is identified but where anonymous swarms of locusts or trolls sweep down to annihilate the victim’s social standing.

So should we say that fashion is inherently violent? Is the very nature of fashion, with the necessity to wear clothes, producing types of social stratifications and demarcations that are themselves weaponized? But what about the freedom and experience of empowerment that we may feel through clothing? If fashion was all about violence we wouldn’t embrace it on such massive scale, would we?

**Dilemmas of violence**

Consumer society is a paradoxical space. It offers a concrete freedom to acquire stuff and assemble almost any identity through the purchase of symbolic goods. As Philosopher Jean Baudrillard has famously argued, through the system of consumer objects we can come to represent almost anything and anyone, but we are also doomed to only touch the surface of things, live among simulations of life and become copies of copies; simulacra (Baudrillard 1994). Yet, even if we are free to use various forms of copies to build a sense of authenticity, and the copies are cheap and accessible, there is still
room for exclusion and commissioned violence. Cultural critic Henry Giroux argues how consumer society has merged with the warfare state, and limited the agency of the citizen to that of a, seemingly free, consumer, yet this consumer is more of an object or billboard (Giroux 2009: 14). As argued by Giroux, the position of consumer is never a position of authority, even if it may appear so from the perspective of, for example, a self-proclaimed fashion blogger. As with other consumers, the status of a fashion blogger is still achieved by excessive consumption, even if much of it is sponsored and one gets to sit at front-row. In the era of cheap fashion consumption this perspective of selfhood still amplifies an individualist subjectivity based on commodity competitiveness where “it becomes difficult for young people to imagine a future in which the self becomes more than a self-promoting commodity and a symbol of commodification. (Giroux 2009: 17)

Similarly, even if successfully navigating the construction of identity through cheap consumer goods, the continuous waste production in the economy narrows the schemes of valuation between people and goods: we are all in the waste stream, waiting to become superfluous. However much we consume, we are continuously at the mercy of the an aesthetically supremacist system. Cultural critic Zygmunt Bauman frames the commodity marketplace as the main arena today for a formation of the self, where citizens are “simultaneously, promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote.” (Bauman 2007: 6) We are consuming life itself.

In the society of consumers, no one can become a subject without first turning into a commodity, and no one can keep his or her subjectness secure without perpetually resuscitating, resurrecting and replenishing the capacities expected and required of a sellable commodity (Bauman 2007: 12)

Yet, we love fashion. We love the transformations, the adoration and mastery, the acknowledgement and the feeling of being seen. But we also cannot deny the excitement of exclusivity, rejection and humiliation. Fashion is not violent only because of omission, because some designers and consumers didn’t think too much about it. Fashion is violent by design, because we want it to be.

In the book The Value of Violence, political scholar Benjamin Ginsberg reasons for the instrumental use of violence: “whether or not violence is the answer probably depends on the question being asked.” (Ginsberg 2013: 20) Not only does Ginsberg see violence as the driving force of politics, how its form of dominance usually triumphs other forms of political action, but the bureaucratization of violence also allows for sustaining regimes of control and predictability, such as the state’s monopoly of force. Violence allows for distinctions, and it may take the form of both carrot and stick in order to produce rewards beyond coercion, yet still limit the everyday use of force, as well as securing social tranquility (Ginsberg 2013: 103ff).
Ginsberg draws up four factors for the political importance of violence: “First is the dominance usually manifested by violence over other forms of political action. Second is the agenda-setting power of violence. Third is the destructive and politically transformative power of violence. Fourth is the capacity of violence to serve as a catalyst for political mobilization.” (Ginsberg 2013: 24) These four factors could also be traced to the powerful and passionate desire produced through the violence of fashion supremacy, which may indeed be essential components of most successful trends.

1. The dominance produced by the passion of exclusion, to feel chosen, the individual (as part of a group) being seen as uniquely attractive, rather than a clone of others: it gives the fashionable a position of aesthetic dominance.
2. The arrival of the “new” as the latest distinction, the latest exclusive category: a person carrying the latest attractive fashion sets the aesthetic agenda of all followers.
3. The distinction between “in” and “out” excites destruction and humiliation, the powerful passion of desacralization and defilement: it attracts the “pure” while it pushes something (and someone) out as waste.
4. The powerful mobilization of the latest trend, of feeling part of something larger than the individual’s self, mobilizes followers into aesthetic hostility, ingroups and outgroups, and the very dynamics of this force facilitates waves of shaming, or turning silent bystanders into co-bullies.

Sartre was indeed right, we can feel the look, the attention of others, it heightens the very experience of Being. No wonder it is so addictive, the feedback so powerful, the feeling of attraction, attention, adoration and seduction. But also the thrill of the risk, of wearing something dangerous, and getting acknowledgement from that, the reward for the challenge in the high stake game.

But also the thrill of exclusion, that feeling of getting entrance to that VIP backroom at the club, that experience of being chosen, picked for the pedestal, is that not the addictive rush of adrenaline or dopamine? No wonder we also love the pleasure of humiliation, of exclusion, that they favor me instead of that other loser next to me in the queue.

As the character Harry Lime (Orson Wells) declares in the 1949 film The Third Man, “In Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed—but they also produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did they produce? The cuckoo clock.”
I think most of us can acknowledge the power of fashion, yet also recognize the violence caused by its saturation of our everyday. As designers we may feel at loss, quite in the way most do when facing the immense challenges on turning fashion to become more environmentally sustainable.

Yet, if we put hope into anything, we should better put it in the future. Thus, as a practice that prides itself in its progressive ephemerality and continuous reinvention, fashion may find ways to mitigate and broker with its inherent violence, and as designers we may take the first steps in experimenting with nonviolent fashion. As Jonathan Larson sings in the musical Rent, “the opposite of war is not peace – it’s creation!”
DICTIONARY
Aesthetic meritocracy: The hegemonic ideals of youth, beauty, and wealth as transferable capital that is also viewed as earned and deserved, rather than bestowed upon the individual or group.

Anxiety: a state of inner turmoil, of unpleasant nervousness with feelings of dread over anticipated events, such as the feeling of imminent death. Anxiety is not the same as fear, which is a response to a real or perceived immediate threat, whereas anxiety is the expectation of future threat.

Appropriation: “the definition of appropriation arises in its inversion, cultural autonomy. Cultural autonomy signifies a right to one's origins and histories as told from within the culture and not as mediated from without. Appropriation occurs when someone else speaks for, tells, defines, describes, represents, uses, or recruits the images, stories, experience, dreams of others for their own. Appropriation also occurs when someone else becomes the expert on your experience” (Coombe 1998)

Authority: “A source of power vested in persons by virtue of their offices or knowledge, but also depends on a willingness on the part others to grant respect and legitimacy” (The Fashion Praxis Collective, 2014: 48)

Fashion Authority: “The reciprocity of respect perceived as legitimate by the community, the ability to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, virtue, together with others” (The Fashion Praxis Collective, 2014: 49)

Capital: Capital is derived from the Latin word “caput” meaning head, as in “head of cattle”.

Cultural capital: Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, etc. that one acquires through being part of a particular social class.

Human Capital: Can be defined the contribution to the economy through human labour. This collection of people can been seen as tangible resources.


Counterfeits: “The offensive object may be so close an imitation as to defy any but the closest scrutiny; and yet so soon as the counterfeit is detected, its aesthetic value, and its commercial value as well, declines precipitately. Not only that, but it may be asserted with but small risk of contradiction that the
aesthetic value of a detected counterfeit in dress declines somewhat in the same proportion as the counterfeit is cheaper than its original. It loses caste aesthetically because it falls to a lower pecuniary grade.” (Veblen 1899, 128).

Elitism: the belief that society should be governed by a select group of gifted and highly educated individuals. In the realm of fashion elitism takes the form of exclusion of those who are not deemed worthy, using vague aesthetic standards set by those with power and wealth, thus merging the ideals of wealth and beauty.

Emotional abuse: “any abusive conduct - whether by words, looks, gestures, or in writing - that infringes upon the personality, the dignity, or the physical or psychical integrity of a person.” (Hirigoyen 2005: 52)

Ethnocentrism: the concept of “thing’s in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it . . . Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders.” (Demmers 2012: 40)

Fashion Fear: “physical and chronic occupation, as well as mental preoccupation, of status anxiety and social fear based on peer judgment.” The “guiding principle of fashion, as one of the guiding emotions of fashion is the fear of social consequences as the very mortality of style pushes fashion “forward.”” (The Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 54)

Fashion Judgement: Fashion judgement not only sorts dress, and the wearer, in categories such as “in” or “out”, into confinements, as adversaries or opponents; this sorting also operates in micro segments, compartmentalizing the wearer into subculture, profession, race, morality, and all that such stereotypes carry with them.” (The Fashion Praxis Collective 2014: 64)

Meme: is a unit of cultural transmission, imitation and replication, a “virus of the mind”, such as an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person. The concept is meant to be the cultural version of a gene, that is, self-replicating, mutating, and responsive to selective pressures. Coined by British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in The Selfish Gene (1976), the concept is a shortened version of a mimeme, a viral or imitative ray of cultural reproduction, and Dawkins gives examples such as melodies, catch-phrases, fashion, and the technology of building arches.
**Microaggression/Microinsults/Microassaults:** Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership (Sue 2007:3).

**Molar/Molecular:** Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, uses the distinction between Molar and Molecular to distinguish between two types of organizations or systems. Molarity is a form of stratification, hierarchization, where ever part of an assemblage is striving towards becoming a part of a coded whole, to naturally sediment and form into molar compounds. Every relationship between components reproduces sameness to make the whole a stable equilibrium, or a state of stable Being. Molecularity, on the other hand, is in a series of outbursting events, of continuous becoming. It is rhizomatic, a multiplicity or a pack, striving to break free and stay free from molar stratifications.

   In the realm of fashion the molar can take the shape of individuals seeking to be integrated into hierarchies in the search for a “career”, while sustaining or reproducing forms of bullying in order to preserve the hierarchy.

**Narcissism:** Egocentricity, need for admiration, intolerance of criticism are all common personality traits of a narcissist. Those feelings are usually lacking any remorse and regret.

   The main characteristics of a narcissistic personality are a grandiose sense of his/her importance, fantasies of unlimited success/power, thoughts of being unique and “special”, belief that everything is owed to him/her, exploitation of others in relationships and lack of empathy. (Hirigoyen 2005:125)

   **Abusive narcissism:** “Asymptomatic psychotics who find their equilibrium by discharging onto another person the pain they can’t feel and the internal conflicts they refuse to acknowledge. They do wrong, because they can’t exist any other way.” (Hirigoyen 2005: 143)

   Abusive narcissism is used as a weapon for survival and defense by individuals who suffered an abuse during their childhood. Self-confidence and self-esteem is obtained by transfer their pain into other individuals.

**Oppression:** “embedded, structural, well-institutionalized, and more or less hidden – in social norms and beliefs extending over long periods of time.” (Feagin and Vera 2001: 15).
**Power:** According to Max Weber power is “that opportunity existing within a social relationship with permits one to carry out one’s will even against resistance and regardless of the basis on which this opportunity rests.”

**Shaming:** the painful feeling arising from the consciousness of something dishonorable, improper, or ridiculous, done by oneself or another.

**Slavery:** Patterson defines slavery as “one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave.” (Patterson 1982: 5)

**Social Death:** Patterson explains Social Death to be 1) a form of social rejection by the society or the group and 2) No Social bonds are legitimate unless ‘okayed’ by the master.

**Stereotypes:** Perceptions of groups, that have shared characteristics, circumstances, values and beliefs around which the group is structured or ordered. (McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears 2002)

**Territory:** To philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, a territory is not necessarily framed by a border, or being in a given stable state. Instead a territory is constructed through series of behaviors and rhythms of doings, repetitive postures or signals, markings, signs, bird songs, smells, gestures, and sounds. “Every milieu is vibratory, in other words, a block of spacetime constituted by the periodic repetition of the component [e.i. territorial refrain].” (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 313) Thus a territory is a constituted milieu, where the constitution organizes how the individuals are ordered and how they act within the territory. Identity is closely linked to territories, as identities are formed in and through the interaction with territories.

**Total/totalitarian:** Totalitarianism (or totalitarian rule) is a political system where the state recognizes no limits to its authority and strives to regulate every aspect of public and private life wherever feasible.

**Victim:** A person harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident, or other event or action including being duped and tricked. fashion victim* When fashion or clothing is the cause of the victimization.

**Violence**

**violence, direct:** Galtung defines direct violence to be the one to one violation of integrity and one-to-one exploitation, explicit or am-
biguous microaggressions, for example a bouncer refusing entrance to a club because of dress, a police officer harassing a hoodie-wearing youngster, a sneer about a new haircut, or a teenager being bullied in school because of dress; (The Fashion Praxis 2014: 51)

violence, structural: Galtung defines Structural violence to be the manifestation of fashion ideals into sizes, patterns and social or racial sorting mechanisms, directly affecting the body, if we can wear it or not, if it reveals the body in a “good” way or not; (The Fashion Praxis 2014: 51)

violence, cultural: Cultural violence makes structural discrimination seem “natural” and endorses individual acts of direct violence with the help of mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion, social hierarchies and norms, “The culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them(particularly not exploitation) at all.” (Galtung 1990: 295)

violence, silent: A form of violence that is not visible but felt.
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Violent forms of harassment and exclusion seem inherent to fashion. How come we accept them?

This book is a collection of cases that engage with the violence of fashion, from the course “Critical Fashion and Social Justice” at Parsons School of Design. The cases explore some of the intrinsic violence perpetrated throughout the fashion system as a form of fashion supremacy, which manifests and legitimizes aesthetic segregation, stigmatization, exclusion, and bullying.

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