

MODA



M05024D19A00050

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We would like to thank Cynthia's Consignments, Penelope's, and Gemini for providing us with the clothing featured in this issue. Thank you to the designers of the MODA Fashion Show for lending us your fabrics. Finally, thank you to Sophy Hyde Park for providing a lovely shoot location for one of our photoshoots.

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

What is fashion? Is it just the sum of its parts; of fabrics, colours, shapes, and style? Or is it something more than that? Of course, as lovers of fashion ourselves, we strongly believe it isn't all just clothes. But is that an act of blind faith? This quarter, we chose to reflect on what fashion without form might look like; to discover what might happen if you took it all apart, if you examined the industry and the ideology in challenging and resistant ways. We wanted to see what lay beneath the surface that connected and differentiated the expansive entity that is fashion.

With that aim in mind, this issue explored the elements of fashion individually in an attempt to understand their significance to the greater whole. We were interested in the nude and how the human body lends itself to being clothed; how the body is transformed through clothing. We question identity, and clothing's role in breaking it down and building it up; can a change in outfit change the soul? We explored the fabrics themselves, and how we view people differently through both the physical and metaphysical lens of textiles. If fashion represents a transformation, we sought to explain how.

As a team, we devised articles and photoshoots that interpreted and iterated our guiding question. Our articles are the most intimate we've ever featured, thoughtfully considering nudity, lingerie, and the experience of being a model. Our opening shoot captures the personal yet familiar act of getting dressed. Another, shot strikingly on film, distorts sheer fabrics that designers are using for this year's show, to reconsider the relationship between fabric and form. With paint and water, our beauty editors painted bare bodies to reveal how color and brushstroke alone can alter form. Shot in a bathtub, the deliberate use of paint begins to wash, blurring the relationship between the nude and the made-up. Our closing shoot, taken on a subway and in the storefronts and streets of Chinatown, is where fashion is built back up again. No longer is the emphasis on the nude and stripped back form, but rather on the capacity of clothes to capture and convey personality and individuality.

This issue breaks fashion down to its elements, and as such there is a certain vulnerability taken on the parts of everyone involved. In examining what lies beyond form, we found our function. We hope you enjoy.

Your editors,
Louis Levin, Cecilia Sheppard, & Stefan Tesliuc

















ode to lingerie

something pretty is something pretty

There are a few things that I like to do when I'm upset. I go to a movie, or scream into a pillow. Sometimes I dance until I'm collapsed on my bed, but almost always the first thing I do when I'm upset is look at lingerie online. I don't know why exactly, but it makes me feel better. Maybe it's because lingerie always feels luxurious to me, whether it's looking at a very fancy La Perla bodysuit I'll never own or an \$8 lace bra from Forever 21, lingerie is fun. 99% of the time I do not buy what I look at online because the majority of lingerie is too pricey for me to justify, but regardless of the price, lingerie makes me feel sexy, which I don't feel like as often as I want to. Sexy means a lot of things to me: confidence, intellect, happiness. "Sexy" is one of those words people love to claim as singular and uncomplicated, when in reality, sexy can mean anything and everything. Of course, there is the normal connotation of it just being something that turns someone on (Celebrities? Porn stars?), but I'm more interested in what the feeling of being sexy means, and why it's so powerful.

We are often told who we are, or what we are meant to be, by the people in our lives. Whether it be a parent, a friend, a significant other or even a professor, people love being able to label themselves and each other. Sometimes I feel like the most important aspects of my personality are made to contradict each other, like I can't be sexy and smart, or loud and thoughtful, or funny and a woman. It is especially difficult for woman-identifying people; it's easy to feel as if the world wants you to be one thing, and one thing only. It sometimes feels like human nature is shooting us in the foot; we have this innate want to categorize, even though nothing in human experience has suggested that things are always the way they look (shoutout Durkheim). In the face of judgement, the only thing left to do is to be unapologetically complicated; everyone is more than one thing. I'm funny,

sexy, intelligent and so much more than just that. So, "sexy" to me is nothing and everything. It is simple and complex all at the same time, and that's okay.

So it may seem small, to buy a nice set in a crazy color and to wear it under my winter sweater, but it changes my day noticeably. Lingerie helps me emphasize aspects of my personality that I love. It makes me feel put together in a different way; something about being able to love what I wear under my clothes, even if it's usually unseen, makes me feel in control.

Recently I've been feeling myself growing up in a way that sometimes can be scary, like if I stop moving forward I'll realize how much things change every week and every quarter. Change is both my favorite thing and the most terrifying thing to me. Grounding yourself is hard, especially when there are readings to be done, tests to be taken, essays to be written. Lingerie helps to ground me in a special way. To me, lingerie is something pretty, and how often are we allowed in our lives to just love something beautiful? To adore something that looks extravagant makes me feel alive. Whether it's delicate or loud, there is an intrinsic beauty to owning pieces of pleasure and integrating them into your daily life. This is not to ignore the patriarchal messages tied into the perception of lingerie, but rather to reframe the conception of lingerie. To me, lingerie is a huge Fuck You to a bad day, it's an exclamation of rebellion, it's a pretty thing in the face of chaos. Lingerie makes me feel complicated.

Lingerie is my own love letter, one that is often long overdue. What is life if we don't try to find something beautiful every day to make it bright for ourselves? So, my dear lingerie, whatever color or material or price you may be, I adore you for helping me be myself. If not for any other reason, I adore you for being something pretty.

/ Priya Gandhi













Adam and Eve's fall from grace is not the straightforward tale we think we know. Basically, God expels them from the Garden of Eden. Humans lose paradise. In traditional readings, this story is intended to fill us with self-loathing. But, Adam and Eve gifted us more than nudity, shame, and misery. We get clothes.

That is, in losing paradise and confronting a pretty grim future of human suffering, Adam and Eve also give us an escape—a way to cope. To create a version of our experience through individualism, style, and grace—through our own lens.

So, let's recap. God creates the world. Six days. A planet. Man, woman, and a magic garden. Sweet. There's only one rule. No apples. Except, Adam and Eve are disobedient and easily influenced by a snake. You guessed it...they take a bite. God finds them. They're ashamed of themselves and hide. Naked.

Why naked? Well, when God finds Adam in the garden, Adam says he was afraid and hid (Genesis 3:11). This may be the first recorded example of body shaming. Thanks, God. After eating an apple, Adam and Eve feel shame for being exposed and their eyes are "open" to the

horrors they have not seen yet. Because, come on, we all know they were already naked. They just hadn't noticed. Nakedness now equals vulnerability and impurity. Adam and Eve see their own powerlessness in the world. Translation? Naked now means shit's about to get real. So, "they sewed fig leaves and made themselves loincloths" to shield their bodies and their souls (Genesis 3:11).

They get dressed. In losing eternal bliss and gaining a parade of horrors, Adam and Eve fashion the first wardrobe. Ever. But, God, flexing his title as The Creator, drapes them in garments he makes instead and casts them out of the Garden in style. Leather, to be precise. "For the man and his wife the Lord God made leather garments, with which he clothed them." (Genesis 3:21) He kicked them out of paradise to face an eternity of inescapable human suffering. The least he could do was ensure they looked good.

Don't forget, after all, the real consequence for Adam and Eve is that one bite dooms every generation that follows them. We all inherit a life riddled with adversity. It is fraught with burden—pain, struggle, poverty, hunger, illness, war, injustice, death. Awareness of our nudity. The



adam and eve: god's first models



bareness of a skin that cannot protect us from unavoidable pain.

But, in dressing Adam and Eve, God clothes us in layers of self-expression, individuality, and creativity in the face of perpetual adversity. The fall from grace wakes us up to some seriously painful realities. So, how do we cope? We rearrange how our world seems by reconstructing ourselves and disguising our vulnerability. We protect ourselves with a cloak of comfort to create a reality that is far more tolerable than the collective human experience. And, we do that through fashion.

Nah. That's too cliché, right? After all, how many of us think about the Bible as we choose our clothes each day? We don't strive to be Yves Saint Laurent's next muse as we stumble into our baggiest jeans and well-worn sweatshirts. And, even battling the harshest Chicago winter does not call up a battle against human suffering. We're just trying to get to class.

Still, each day, as we start our rituals to confront the world in which we live, we all seek our comfort. And, we want to be acknowledged—not for what we wear, but for who we are. What if we saw God instead? No, relax.

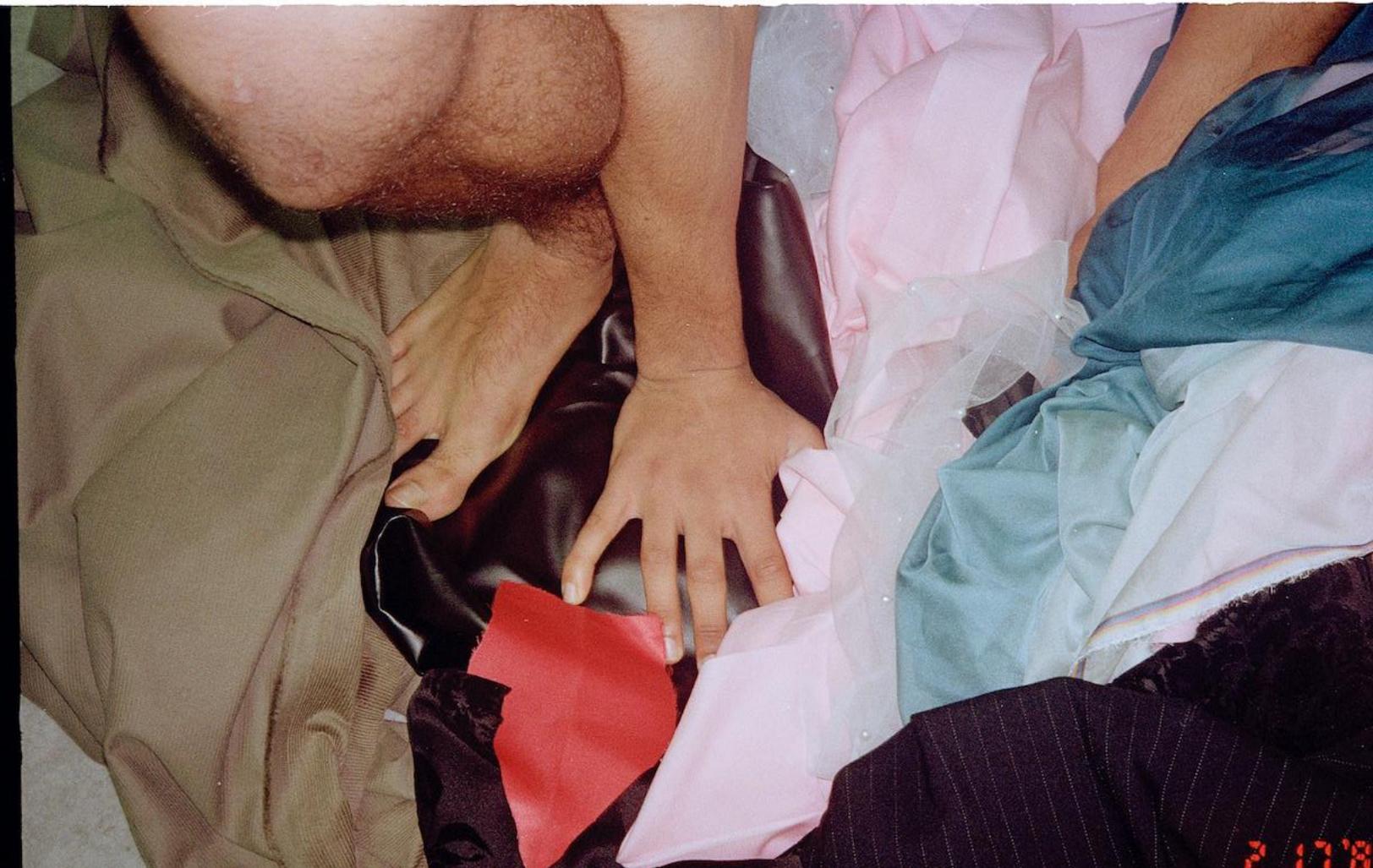
This is not that article. I just mean, what if, each day, we stop to see the actual world around us and the people in it?

What if, instead of using clothes to cover our nudity or shield ourselves from the plagued humanity Adam and Eve left us, we use this seemingly mundane routine as an opportunity to reflect on how we can improve the collective human experience. We pick one thing that we can do to help. Every day. In tiny ways. Notice the server who takes your coffee order not just for the work she does but for her humanity. See her. Ask about her day. Hear her. Venmo \$5 to a reputable charity that you care about. Donate the clothes that haven't escaped the darkest corners of your closet in months. You might just replace a loincloth.

You see, the thing is this. We may have lost paradise, but we don't have to lose each other. Or ourselves. Even through the smallest, simplest acts, we can engage our garden—dark and flawed as it may be—and the people in it. And, in doing so, embrace vulnerability rather than hide from it.

After all, nudity lets us be seen.

Luke Downing



Unconventional Nudity

by Elizabeth Winkler

Each piece in a runway collection is inevitably connected to the body and humanity of the model who wears it. Many designers do not emphasize this connection; instead, they use the model as nothing more than a vehicle for the clothing they wear and magnify the perception of sameness that industry-standard sizing already creates. When every model walking down a runway has the same type of body, those bodies begin to run together in the audience's mind, and the model's individuality is lost—they become a living clothes-hanger, and designers could wheel mannequins down the runway to the same effect. There are, however, increasing numbers of designers who embrace the ways models' individuality can add meaning and depth to the collection. And, interestingly, this acknowledgment often comes in some form of nudity.

The partial nudity that we see on the runway can be small and seemingly insignificant, but even these very specific types of nakedness—bare feet or bare faces, for example—can communicate subversive messages about what we “should” see on a runway.

Bare feet in fashion humanize the models involved, embracing their individuality and pushing back on industry standards of sameness. These barefoot runways can be intentional: in Ralph Lauren's Spring/Summer runway in 2018, Chanel's Fall/Winter 2019 show, and Valentino's Spring/Summer 2016 show at Paris Fashion Week, for example, not a single model wore shoes. This was, in each case, a highly impactful detail for a public used to seeing models walk the runway in almost-too-high heels. It brought the models, quite literally, down to earth.

Seeing bare feet in this context pushes back on an audience's expectations and gives them a new perspective on the rest of the show. This means that even when a designer casts only very industry-standard models, audiences can be shocked into seeing them as individuals instead of as a stream of same-looking clothes-bearers: their naked feet humanize them.

Accidental partial nudity has the same humanizing impact, as shown by Gigi Hadid's walk in Marc Jacobs Spring/Summer 2020 collection. Unplanned and because of a broken heel, Hadid's barefoot strut down the runway was the most talked-about moment of the show. It added unique personality to the look she wore, and audiences responded to the way it emphasized the connection between model and clothing. Intentional or accidental, partial nudity clearly reveals audiences' desire to see models who are people, not just vehicles for a designer's vision.

Other forms of unconventional nudity, especially bare faces, have a similarly individualizing and humanizing effect on the runway, and Marc Jacobs' 2015 Spring/Summer collection at New York Fashion Week is a perfect example. In a collection that reflected on ideas of individuality, Jacobs and his makeup artist, Francois Nars, decided that the models would wear nothing but tinted moisturizer down the runway. The designer stated that he wanted this collection to reflect how humans, despite craving individuality, often flock to the familiarity of sameness. By having his models walk with nude faces, Jacobs acknowledges that they are individuals—his show could not have happened were those models mannequins rather than people. These human faces were the ones he chose to walk his runway, and their humanity added force to the clothing.

Whether it is intentional or unintentional, whether it involves bare feet, bare faces, or any other part of the body that we are not used to seeing exposed, unconventional nakedness pushes back on the way many designers choose their models. This kind of nudity has incredible power: it pushes back on the idea that models should be cast for their sameness, it celebrates designers who embrace individuality, and it challenges the industry's core ideas of what is

“Sexy”

by Yeeqin New

When I typed “how to look good at school dance” into Google in 9th grade, I was bombarded with WikiHow and Cosmopolitan pages warning me that I should aim to look “sexy” rather than “slutty.” 14-year-old me had virtually no conception of what either of those terms entailed, but I did gather that my dress should be revealing—just not overly so; that I shouldn’t look like I “tried too hard.” Above all, I was left with the impression that there is an extremely fine line between the two labels. Add the movement to reclaim the word “slut” in the early 2010’s to this confusion, and it would be years until I developed any real understanding of how society dictates the separation between sexiness and sluttiness.

It’s tempting to believe that the line between the two labels lies in the way a woman carries herself or strictly in how much clothing she wears. People call a woman “slutty” when she wears clothing that reveals sexualized body parts in public, but she is “sexy,” which carries a more positive connotation, if she is more coy with accentuating her body.

The problem is the inherent body-shaming involved in this differentiation between “slutty” and “sexy.” The curvier a woman is, the more overtly her breasts and hips are sexualized. When a curvier woman wears the same revealing clothing as a woman with a smaller frame, the curvier woman will be labeled “slutty” or “trashy” while the less curvy woman will most likely be called “sexy.” The fact that being “sexy” is something many women strive for while sluttiness is socially condemned creates an implicit bias against curviness. The fact that society will judge two identically dressed women differently based on their body types proves that looking “slutty” is not really about how much clothing is being worn.

Other environmental factors also affect how nudity will be received—wealth and social status are especially impactful. Revealing the body in an artistic or “high fashion” sense, usually a privilege of the wealthy, is often considered “sexy,” whereas nudity in a more everyday setting tends to be labeled “slutty.” While women are purposeful and confident in their nudity in both cases, the context of that nudity and of the person involved significantly alters interpretations. Nude photographs in a museum and overt nudity in runway shows that feature sheer clothing are still perceived as more “appropriate” than bikini photos on a girl’s Instagram. Similarly, a celebrity in a revealing garment is viewed more favorably than a scantily clad woman in a club who does not have fame or fabulous wealth. “Sexiness” is societally conflated with a higher degree of status and wealth, while “sluttiness” correlates with the everyday and looking “cheap.” If someone with greater wealth is almost guaranteed positive societal judgement of their nudity, will the everyday woman ever stop having to tiptoe around the possibility of being labeled “slutty”?

On a broader scale, the fact that these are the two main judgements women in the United States face when nudity is involved shows how prevalent the sexualization of the female body is in this country. The female form in the United States rarely is viewed in a non-sexual context, while other parts of the globe do not employ such a view of nudity. Spain’s nude beaches or Japanese hot springs allow for the nude form to be exposed in contexts that are void of any sexualization. In reconsidering the labels that female nudity is subjected to, it may be time to reevaluate why sexualizing the exposed female body is normalized at all.





The Hamman

By Selma Chab

My feet burn against the hot tile. I hop from one foot to the other and giggle as the slapping sounds echo through the hot chamber. A large hand encompasses the small of my back as my mother presses me to her bare leg, urging me to move forward with her. We trudge through thick clouds of steam. Only reaching her mid thigh, I am plastered to her sticky skin. In her other hand swings a bucket of ghassoul, rose water, and an exfoliating kessa glove. Mother is looking for an empty bench among the other women. Naked, they are, delicately performing their weekly ministrations. The air is thick as the scent of clay and rose mingle with the musk of body and heat. The faucets are on high, spitting near-scalding water throughout the hammam and into various plastic buckets. Women chatter over the din of it all. Tbergig, gossipers, let their tongues flow candidly. They talk of the king, of the nosy next door neighbors, of Lalla Latifa's wedding, and of nothing at all as weathered hands run through liberated hair. The hijabis, free from male gaze, can expose all of themselves in this sacred space. Young and old and old and young and all in between are equal.

The rushing river of soapy water gathers about our feet. Other children run past without worrying that they might slip, but they certainly will. They hobble back to the safety of their mother's bosom, letting their bruised egos and limbs heal against her breasts. The older women show uncanny agility as they raise their buckets high above the children's heads. The young ones plug their noses and prepare for the deluge, gasping for air and clumsily wiping their flattened hair from their eyes once it ends.

Some women lay prostrate, pressed flat against stone slabs. They melt under the intense heat of the hammam. They are slathered with black soap and left to soak. Strong-armed workers hike up their sleeves, crack their fingers, and roll their shoulders, preparing to scrub away the dust and wear. Deft hands use coarse mitts to work against pliant fat and blushing skin. This is torture for the younger women, the worst pain imaginable—they wince as best they can with their faces smushed against the stone. The older women sigh, relaxing into the gloves that push firmly against their aged skin and produce grey flecks of dirt. Erased are the signs of daily life, they are reborn.

The women are a crescendo of curves. I watch the girls look down at their own flat forms. Mother is raising my arm above my head. I'm pulling away as she inches closer and closer to my underarm, but I'm not fast enough. It tickles, and I'm making a scene. Teens look over, annoyance evident in the twist of their expressions. Mirth replaces ire in the eyes of other mothers who wrangle their own little ones. My skin pulses angry and raw and bare. Yet this exposure, this nakedness comforts me. In this vibrant microcosm I realize the splendor of artlessness and simplicity. I learn the beauty of nakedness.



Finding Femininity

by Anushka Mukhey

When I was young, I believed with the utmost conviction that I was, in fact, a princess. I descended the staircase of my childhood home every morning for breakfast outfitted in bright pink pajamas, a polished plastic tiara, and a sparkly wand in my hand each day until I was around four years old. I think it's safe to say that my mother was a little bit concerned about the situation and about when I would ultimately retire my Party City bejeweled crown. Looking back, perhaps her concerns were valid, because I had declared that pink was my favorite color--shocker, I know--and that every year for Halloween I was to be dressed in some variation of a princess costume. The end of my obsession with all things pink, sparkly, and royal did not seem to be near.

My regal reign continued until I was around eight years old, when I formally decided that I was going to be a vampire for Halloween. None of the girls at my new middle school were interested in princesses. My mother watched in horror as I twirled around in my black cape with blood dripping down my little chubby cheeks. According to her, I had turned to the dark side.

It was at this age when I abandoned the ultra-feminine presence that had assumed my identity up until this point. No more pink; no more dresses; no more skirts. My closet gradually began to represent the new me as I traded out rosy hues for neutral tones and replaced my ruffled dresses with an array of weathered jeans. My mom and grandmother attempted to convince me to wear dresses to look "nice" at family gatherings, but I remained steadfast in my resolve to leave dresses behind. For the next few years, I adhered strongly to the belief that dresses and skirts were young and immature, and I was a grown woman now at my ripe old age of ten. My uniform consisted of jeans and a sweater or striped shirt in some combination of grey, white, black, and blue.

One day, my mom and I went shopping for a dress I needed for a school event. Of course, each dress she picked out was adorned in more sequins than the one before. I was realizing that my big rebellious plans were going to be ruined by a chevron dress with black and hot pink sparkles. As I scoured through racks of dresses, I found myself gravitating towards ones that were black, striped, or neutral-toned. I tried on dress after dress, but nothing seemed to feel right. Every dress I tried on was either too girly or too boring, until I found it. The dress. To this day, I remember how it felt when I put it on. It was nothing special, just a simple black and white striped dress with a high-low hem, but it changed the way I looked at dresses from that point on.

Growing up, femininity appeared to be defined within the confines of anything pink and girly. I associated feelings of strength and power with clothes and colors I viewed as traditionally more masculine. For me, this simple dress symbolized the merging of two sentiments I had seen as distinctly separate: power and femininity. I was beginning to realize that I could feel mature and "grown" up and feminine in something that was not pink or covered in sparkles and ruffles.

When I was younger, my style seemed to live in extremes, either ultra-feminine or ultra-masculine. For my mom, I needed to strike a delicate balance between too "girly" and too "boyish." I needed to learn that I could draw strength from the feminine side and a feeling of womanliness from the masculine side. Each side needed to inform the other. Over time, I worked on finding that equilibrium and defining femininity for myself.

During my later years in middle school, I enjoyed wearing neutral-toned dresses and brightly colored skinny jeans. I had this pair of purple jeggings I couldn't get enough of in seventh grade. Now, as I reach the end of my teenage years, I like to pair an oversized, structured jacket with a fine knit blouse or a simple heel. In the past, I wouldn't have dared to blend these two seemingly contrasting worlds. I find that the juxtaposition of two entities that appear to be so different actually forces one to notice the similarities in each other, allowing one to see the femininity in my structured jacket and the feeling of power that is imparted by a tailored blouse.





in the nude

rosie albrecht

In the fashion world, “nude” is the shade of simplicity, of invisibility. It is a range of colors meant to blend with the natural skin of the wearer, to appear as if it were simply a part of the wearer’s body. Nude heels are said to lengthen the leg; nude lipstick gives the appearance of a glowing natural face. But what color is nude?

The name of the color suggests that it’s the color of the body itself, and it is...-- if you’re white. For many, many years, nude has been exactly one color: beige. Occasionally there have been variations – peachy pink, light tan, creamy white – but even today, “nude” still evokes one very specific spectrum of beiges..

For people of color, these shades look anything but nude. Band-aids, which are meant to camouflage into the skin, starkly contrast against darker skin tones. The African American ballerina Michaela DePrince remembers her mom having to dye her leotards and ballet shoes brown because they only came in one “universal” shade – light beige. Chyrstyn Fentroy and Eric Underwood, both also professional ballet dancers, have posted pictures on their Instagrams showing them coloring their ballet shoes--one with paint, the other with foundation powder.

The issue of beige--of white--being thought of as the universal skin shade first came to light in the early 1900s, when Anthony Overton, a black man born to slave parents, created the first face powder specifically designed for dark skin, called the High-Brown Face Color. Over the next few decades, the conversation about “nude” tones would slowly develop, although products like Overton’s face powder remained an anomaly for decades. During the civil rights protests of the 60s, black people became harder to ignore, and so did the diversity of skin colors. In

1962, Crayola officially changed the name of their “flesh” crayon to “peach.” Then, in 1969, 10 years after the original Barbie’s release, Mattel debuted Christie, the first black Barbie doll. Slowly, the assumed universality of beige as nude began to falter as society witnessed an increased representation of people of color in popular culture.

1973 saw the debut of Fashion Fair, the first cosmetics line designed for women of color ever to be sold in department stores. In 1994, supermodel Iman started her own cosmetics line after having to mix her own foundation shade at photoshoots for the previous eighteen years. During the 2000s, more cosmetic lines catering to women of color appeared in makeup aisles, like Queen Latifa’s “Queen” collection with CoverGirl. However, nude colors in the clothing world continued to stagnate in the beige range.

In 2013, Christian Louboutin released a groundbreaking capsule collection of heels in five “nude” colors ranging from pale peach to a deep chestnut brown. Eventually he expanded the line, adding two more colors and several other shoe styles. The collection’s advertisements showed a color spectrum of models side by side, all wearing nude colors that perfectly matched their skin tones. These nude shoes were a huge leap for the fashion industry, and an instant success.

Louboutin hasn’t been the only one to embrace a wider range of nude colors. Brands like Nubian Skin and Nude Barre sell lingerie designed to match darker skin tones. Rhianna’s beauty brand Fenty launched a foundation with a colossal range of colors, and the darker half of the spectrum sold out almost instantly. The demand for darker nudes has always been there and it’s only growing.

Still, the fashion industry has a long way to go. Many brands seem to be just jumping onto the diversity bandwagon for five minutes of public appreciation before eventually returning to their monotonous, limited-shade ways. Even the Louboutin collection was limited edition – now, a search for “nude” heels on the Louboutin website yields only dozens of shoes in nearly identical shades of beige. But newer generations of entrepreneurs, particularly women of color, are already paving the way to a new definition of “nude” – one that encapsulates the full spectrum of humanity.



Brands

By Eleanor Rubin

You've seen her around. She hides her elegant figure and her natural curves behind those bland, baggy gray sweatpants from that obscure, over-priced streetwear brand, and pairs them with those awkward, clunky, blindingly colorful gym shoes. Chances are those awkward, clunky sneakers are made by Balenciaga, or at least inspired by them. But Balenciaga wasn't always known for their clumsy sneakers—in fact, they were known for practically the opposite.

The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria, Spain is itself a representation of the Balenciaga brand: a stark contrast between the couture designed for Spanish aristocracy and the street-wear of the company today. Most people probably know Balenciaga as the designer of the exaggerated and gauche \$850 dollar thick-soled “Triple S” sneaker, or the deeply offensive \$1,000 embellished, bubblegum-pink platform cros. I'd say go to Nike, and spend your money instead on more elegant, or at least practical, attire, but the masses seem to disagree. Today Balenciaga is highly successful in the luxury streetwear industry, especially popular among millennials who flock to its stores for the gaudy sneakers and clunky bags. Unfortunately, Balenciaga's original designs, designs that embody artistic innovation and structural elegance, are lost in the new manifestation of the brand.

Cristóbal Balenciaga's beginnings were humble. Born in the quaint Basque fishing town of Getaria, his mother was a dressmaker and his father, a fisherman. He was first exposed to fashion when he accompanied his mother on her business appointments and in 1919, Balenciaga opened a boutique in the nearby port city of San Sebastián. His designs were quickly successful among Spanish aristocracy and the royal family and he soon opened stores in Madrid and Barcelona. The Spanish Civil War, however, forced him in 1937 to move his boutique to Paris, where he opened the House of Balenciaga. You might be familiar with his protégés: Oscar de la Renta and Hubert de Givenchy, to name a few.

His designs reflected his Spanish heritage, while also representing an opposing view of femininity as compared to Christian Dior's wasp-waisted, ultra-feminine New Look. He drew inspiration from the Spanish Renaissance, from old princesses of Spain as depicted by Velásquez, and from the tailored bolero jackets worn by famous Spanish bullfighters. His use of black lace contrasted with bold red fabrics--characteristic of traditional Spanish flamenco dresses--further underscores the influence of his Spanish origins in his work.

Balenciaga's greatest innovations came after WWII. Whereas Christian Dior's “New Look” of femininity featured impossibly small waists, Balenciaga strove to free the female body through contrasts, volume, and symmetry. He used heavy fabrics, embroidery, and bold materials. Balenciaga ignored the waist and rejected





the hour-glass figure, instead designing the cocoon coat, the baby doll dress, and blouses without collars--women were not constricted or restrained in his designs. His silhouettes were fluid and he manipulated the relationship between clothing and women's bodies.

Despite his rejection of Dior's "ideal" feminine figure, Balenciaga was widely popular among world leaders. The House of Balenciaga had a vast aristocratic clientele and designed the wedding gown for Queen Fabiola of Belgium. Worried that the public would disapprove of her lavish spending, JFK would bicker with his wife Jackie about her many purchases from Balenciaga.

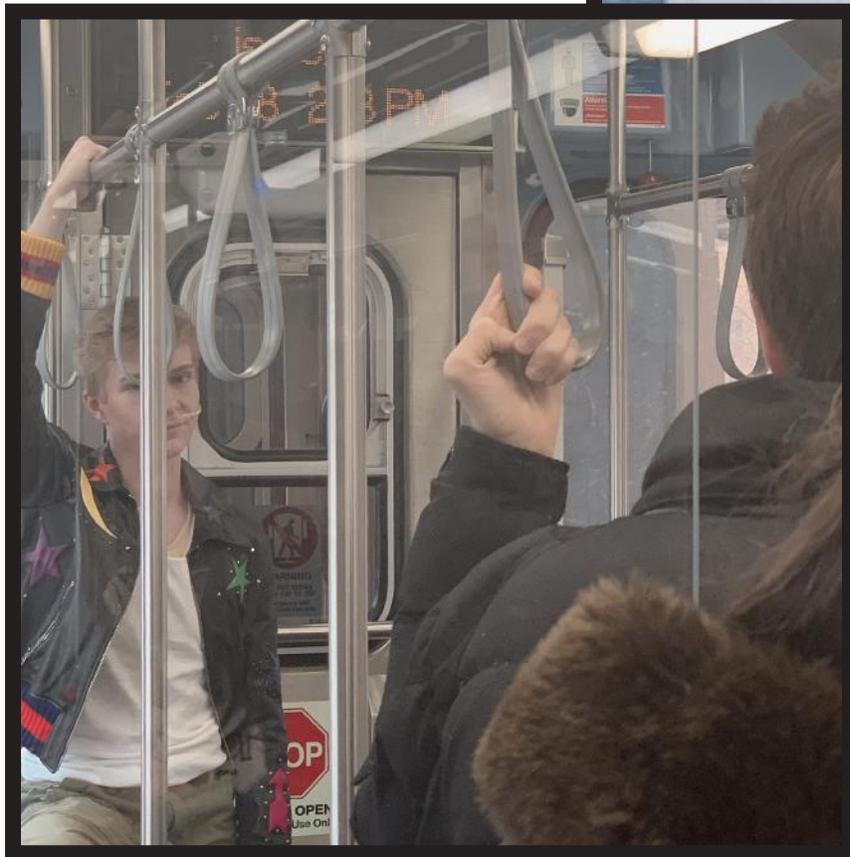
Balenciaga's last Paris collection was in 1968, shortly before he died. The company later dabbled in perfume and various leaders of the company oscillated between ready-to-wear and high fashion lines. In 2001, the Gucci Group, later known as Kering, acquired the company. This acquisition marked the brand's transformation from high fashion to streetwear. Under the creative direction of Demna Gvasalia, a Georgian fashion designer, the brand assumed edgy styles and exaggerated silhouettes. It was Gvasalia who designed the infamous chunky sneakers, the platform crocs, and logo-clad jackets that the brand is now known for.

In an Instagram post later removed, American designer Ralph Rucci ridiculed the exaggerated sneaker, calling the brand under Gvasalia's leadership "mediocre" and "tasteless" and arguing for the removal of the Balenciaga name from "all this garbage." Despite the harsh language, I would have to agree. Cristóbal Balenciaga's class, innovation, and celebration of the female figure is lost in the new street-wear lines of t-shirts, backpacks, and gym shoes. A complete return to his original designs may not be feasible or entirely appealing to current the current market, but the essence of his brand could at least be preserved. And maybe she could stop hiding behind those baggy sweatpants and clunky sneakers once and for all...











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LOST REFLECTION

BY KEGAN WARD

I always saw my mind and my body as separate entities—with the latter contracted away to different agencies and brands throughout my adolescence. My body existed somewhere on paper as a legally binding set of terms and conditions. I was little more than a pre-approved list of features: a required hair color, weight, and promise to undergo “no significant bodily changes during the exercise of this contract.” I was bound to someone else’s idea of what my body should be and how it should be displayed. Agency is not a privilege afforded to many models; agency is something reserved for the higher-ups, for the stylists and photographers and managers of the world. They are the ones who make the real decisions—what to wear, who to work for, what to post online. They set your professional boundaries for you. You exercise their vision, whatever it may be, and take all necessary steps to become that vision—be it extravagant or reserved, clothed or nude.

While modeling, I learned to disassociate from my body. It is a similar process to extricating yourself from the office when you go home for the evening, but there is a very important difference: the body is the job. You can never truly leave it. All you can do is try to forget about it, but then you go back to work and are faced with it anew. You are confronted with “choices” that have already been made for you—who will touch you and how they will dress you and how you will be presented for consumption—because that is your job. Even though you lose your individuality, even though this means that acts traditionally celebrated as empowering, like nudity or self-expression through fashion, become the opposite, you go along with it. You renounce your autonomy and allow your body to be cast to the masses not because it is empowering, but because you have bills to pay.

I remember seeing my body for the first time in an advert, wearing a company’s clothes that my family was



NAVIGATING
DISSOCIATION IN THE
MODELING WORLD

never able to afford. It wasn't me, though. It was something that looked like me, someone who almost resembled me. It was the version that mattered, that was put on display. For years, I learned to evaluate my body through other people's eyes because they mattered. My worth was linked to outside perception, subject to social fads and infatuations.

My body was the vehicle for somebody else's art, an expression of their individuality. Of course, being the thing upon which other people continually hung their individuality only strengthened the disconnect between myself and who I saw in the mirror. Designers and agents refer to the "bodies" in the dressing room; colloquially models are known as "human mannequins" and "hangers." I walked four runway shows in the span of three days with the same company before anyone referred to me by name.

Dehumanization does not always stop at management, though. Models' bodies are expected to do the impossible in pursuit of art—to contort and pose, to be proportioned in unnatural and unattainable ways. Shoots are often designed with models as props, while the lighting, the editing, the makeup and hair, and all the periphery work are the true focus. This setup may not be damaging in and of itself, and there is no doubt those fields are art in their own right, but it does mean that the representations models see of themselves do not allow room for personal identifications—let alone reality.

As a model, I was in the business of taking a body that was not truly my own and making it do the impossible. Doing the impossible and the uncomfortable gave my body worth and set me apart from the "average;" it turned my body into a currency. The body, even outside of the modeling sphere, is a status symbol unmatched by any others. Conventionally attractive features grant you automatic access to an array of social benefits: people assume you are healthier, happier, and wealthier. This elevated position and the privilege it grants you are invaluable; it almost makes the daily three hours in the gym and ten-mile runs worth it. Society's obsession with glamour and thinness and conventional beauty standards skyrockets you to the top of the pyramid. It makes you untouchable. It shows that you have the time and money and willpower to create the body that you have—it shows that you can handle making sacrifices to maintain that body because your other resources keep you comfortable.

Models are expected to be nonchalant about nudity. When your self-worth is derived from the amount companies are willing to pay for you, you figure out how to make them pay. Professional models learn to reveal the most intimate parts of themselves because they sell—nudity and manufactured candor sell. Some parts because they are attractive, others because they tease out people's insecurities; both are equally invasive and lay you bare before a crowd of strangers. Being nude can be a ticket to another job, an opportunity models cannot pass up when the job from four months ago still has not paid you.

Exposing oneself to the world is advertised as a small price to pay for the lifestyle modeling promises, but most of those promises turn out to be empty. Despite all the social benefits and glamour and intrigue surrounding modeling, models' means of living are subject to the graciousness of people who do not always know or care about the physical and mental effort demanded by the job. Models are chronically underpaid, and sometimes that pay is nothing more than the promise of "exposure."

The disconnect between the life and the wage is vast. Working as a model means wearing designer one weekend and struggling to pay the phone bill the next. It is having people think you starve by choice even though you know you starve because you have \$20 in your checking account. Modeling is making it big or burning out; it's putting so much into a job without proportional returns. It drains everything out of people. Models are needed in countless industries, yet routinely treated as if they are not. They are cycled through at expedited rates so the next can take their place—far cheaper than paying a living wage and encouraging healthy habits.

I loved many parts of modeling, but the industry is an unequal playing field on which models never have the advantage. Most models do not have the freedom to choose what happens to their bodies, especially when modeling is their main source of income. When choices about how to present your body are made for you, you are robbed of any sense of self and dissociating becomes a safe space. It allows you to establish some feeling of control over a body that is no longer your own. Nudity and other artistic expressions in fashion are meant to be empowering, but when you are denied control of your physical representation, as commercial models almost always are, that empowerment turns to confinement.



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