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Proposal

This assignment continues with my exploration into the exploitation of women in the fashion industry throughout the world. The words chosen are **Feminism, Fast fashion, Exploitation** these all relate to my practice and the industry I want to enter. Whilst researching I have been greatly influenced by the work of Florence Given, Caroline Criado Perez, Simone De Beauvoir, Kira Cochran, Rebecca Solnit and Aloïs Guniu. They bring to light issues people refuse to talk about, making us face these problems instead of ignoring them. I will explore how the industry takes advantage of women and will highlight the differences in the ways companies treat their workforce.

Feminism-

The following quote is a brief overview of what I believe feminism is

‘the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state’ (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d)

For most women there is a turning point a moment they notice life is not as easy for women as it is for men. The internalised misogyny and sexism that is still very much ingrained into everyday life and society. According to both Given (2020) and Perez (2015) society has a

way of ranking us within ourselves a hierarchy based on the way we look against modern ideals. It gives us more privilege based on how we conform to these values and how we fit in the box. Unfortunately, no matter how close society is to modern ideals it does not stop or help with the risk of being underpaid because of your sex or being viewed as inferior to your male counterpart, being rich, being poor, pretty or not they are still at risk of these things plus sexual harassment. Given (2020) continues to strengthen this idea with her comparison of both living costs and wages for men and women. Given (2020) is particularly vocal about the extra cost women incur due to women's sanitary products and the idea that to fix sexism women should just always pay their share for things when we are not earning the same. According to Solnit (2014) growing up a lot of young girls and women will experience not getting recognised for achievements and belittling, we need to let them know it is not them its gender inequality and a war that has been going on for thousands of years.



Fig 1. 1970 women's liberation protest

Some women manage to overcome all adversity and obtain a high position in business, but many experience 'imposter syndrome' Perez (2015) talks about how many women are put down and never understand how much they have achieved in their position even though they worked hard for their achievements. This is another issue because even when these women have worked insanely hard it is difficult for them to recognise their own brilliance. In Currey's (2019) book about women at work he talks about his own downfall when writing his original book 'Daily rituals: how great minds make time, find inspiration, and get to work.' In the total 161 people of influence, he covered only 27 were women, he talks about how this was a grave error and went on to correct himself by writing a book about solely women who have worked extremely hard. Many of the women he talks about are said to have worked themselves to the bone or are seen as workaholics. "Like so many self-made women she was a workaholic" (Currey,2019). Whilst reading this it occurred to me of course women must

become workaholics we are not just fighting to do our work we continue to fight to be able to work. According to Solnit (2014) and Perez (2015) feminism is not about just making things uncomfortable for men it is about protecting women and paying attention to all the things that have been ignored, hate crimes, rape of all different means, for example marital rape and sexual harassment. Until women started fighting for recognition these things were never addressed. Beauvoir (1972) wants is for women to be thought of as human and given the same rights and men to be equal in all senses. Whilst reading Given's (2020) book I came across two quotes, "Feminism is going to ruin your life but in the best way." and "We are never done learning". I do not think I understood these quotes until I continued researching into feminism. I started finding faults and issues in my everyday life things that I had overlooked, the more I read the more I was learning, the more problems I found. The word feminism itself has been given bad connotations over the years with many people taking to extreme methods, but when I look at this keyword, I am looking at achieving true equality.

Fast Fashion-

The following definition of fast fashion sums up rapid unethical mass manufacturing.

"Fast fashion is 'fast' in a number of senses: the rate of production is fast; the customer's decision to purchase is fast; delivery is fast; and garments are worn fast, usually only a few times before being discarded. It is a model that is entirely unsustainable."(Ethical Consumer,2019)

The fashion industry as a whole is a huge industry that employs a large range of jobs ranging from designers, garment workers to the models wearing the clothing and more, Corner (2014) in explains how fashion is a multi-billion-dollar industry. With the industry gaining so much

profit there is a lot of pressure to keep making new collections and keeping the price low. Bravo's (2020) investigation into the production of fast fashion highlights how many manufactures are under extreme pressure from retailers to keep slashing the prices of the production or risk losing their contracts whilst retailers continue to increase profit margins. The fast fashion industry has recently taken off, this is explained by Bravo, (2020) when she talks about how in the UK alone most clothing that was worn here in the 1990's was also made here. A major change that came out of the industrial revolution was that we started making and manufacturing our own textiles and clothing this is explained by the Business of Fashion (2016). Whereas in the past decade most clothing is now mainly made in other countries as a cheaper alternative. In the article 'Fast and ultra-fast fashion supply chain management' written by Carmargo, Panera and Scarpin, (2020 pp. 546) it explains that "due to its high focus on achieving economies of scale, fast fashion has been outsourcing its production to countries where the labour cost is low." fast fashion was quickly accepted as a new normal without customers or producers really understanding the cost to the world or earth, Bravo (2020) talks about how we acquire new clothes without realising the resources used to make the garment. Minnie (2016) further expands on this idea with "we have a huge power to change things for the better, through the way we shop and how we spend our working lives". The blank canvases we see in front of us now tells the story how they got there, for many people it was cheap, fun and disposable. People are now becoming more educated to the damage that is being caused by the production of fast fashion both to the earth and to the people who manufacture these items. Both Bravo (2020) and Guniu (2020) explain how they came to the realisation of the impact that their buying habit were having on the world. Guniu (2020) goes on to write about how difficult it was to breakaway from these habits when many companies use 'greenwashing' to make their companies seem more ethical. Most recently H&M have been accused because of their new statement "So our aim is

for all our products to be made from recycled or other sustainably sourced materials by 2023” (H&M, 2020). Unfortunately, by H&M taking one small step to helping the issue and making it seem like what the clothing is made from is the only issue consumers believe the problem is solved, when it is not just what the clothing is made from but also the sheer volume of the clothing that is being made this is backed up by The Independent (2020) where they illustrate about the new fabrics H&M will be to be making.



Fig 2: *hands making shoes.*

When talking about fast fashion I think it is hard to get a grasp on quite how quickly the clothing is made. Most fast fashion brands use the runways or social media to identify trends and have a 10 day turn around, Bravo (2020) speaks about how with the pressure manufactures are already under to continue cutting the prices of production they also have to deal with short turn around times from design to finished product. It is no wonder that clothing that takes as little as 10 day to designer and make is only made to last a few wears.

Fast fashion in short is the mass production of clothing, further research identifies the consequences of fast fashion. Fast fashion is bad for the environment, bad for the people making it and bad for the consumers in the end.

Exploitation

This simple definition clearly clarifies the exploitation as whole; I will explore exploitation within the garment industry

“To exploit someone is to take unfair advantage of them. It is to use another person’s vulnerability for one’s own benefit.” (Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy, 2016)

For my keyword exploitation I will focus on exploitation of workers and laborers. In many different industry’s workers are exploited for their inexpensive labour I will specifically look at garment workers and their exploitation. In Mehta’s (2020) article in ‘human rights pulse’ she talks about reports from Bangladesh of workers being underpaid what the government set minimum wage. Bravo (2020) exposes how much money garment workers earn from the clothing they make typically it is about 1-3% of the retail price which is nothing compared to the amount of work and hours they put into it. Some manufacturers even pay per garments made instead of per hour leaving workers earning below minimum wage, but many workers also are at risk of not getting paid at all. In an article Siddiqi (2015) follows the unpaid garment workers from Bangladesh who were fighting to be paid for the 3 months’ work they had done and not received any payment. They protested with many going on hunger strike

and few occupied the upper floors protesting the back payment and demanding extra overtime cost and festival bonuses. In the factories a total of 1,600 people had received no payment at all, at one point in the protest the police kicked all medical professionals out who were helping the people fasting and stopped all medical supplies this was very dangerous for all workers who had then been locked inside the building by authorities. Eventually the workers were promised their pay.



Fig 3: Rana Plaza collapse

This happened only a year after the fatal Rana Plaza disaster, where a building collapsed and killed 1,134 people. Both Minney (2016) Prentice (2017) comment about this being a huge eye opener around the world. Many campaigns began to have better pay and better living conditions. Along with poor wages these garment workers are working in horrible conditions,

conditions that are so dangerous there have been many instances of building collapses and fatality. According to Choo, Lee and Yoon (2020) many employees are at great risk for their health as they are working with dangerous chemicals and often suffer abuse from the higher ranked. Most garment workers are women, Muthu (2018) talks about how already dangerous conditions are intensified if women fall pregnant. A lot of women are dismissed because of their pregnancy or have their wages cut. This is a really difficult situation as their surroundings at work are already unsafe environment becomes worse in the time, they need their job the most. Garment workers are at risk, but female workers face the most discrimination and oppression due to their sex. 'Labour behind the Label' (n.d.) explores this when they looked into the women who make our clothing, they found there had been many unreported sexual harassment and major violent assault instances, which these women are too afraid to report. Looking into the exploitation of garment workers created by the means of fast fashion has made me think about why people do not consider the human cost of the things they are buying. Corner (2014) believes that we should care more about the people who first touch the clothing we are going to wear, saying that "fashion should not come at any cost". I think that we should be educating more people about what it takes to make the clothing they wear, who suffered, was it worth the price paid; and pain suffered?

When analysing the meaning behind my key words I found that whilst I wanted answers to the complexity of the issues, all I found was more questions. The words all interlinked and became one larger issue. A relationship formed in the subject of adversity of the people behind the words. I found recurring problems and themes in each area. How could we still treat people so badly? In a world full of continuing changes and evolution why are some people still left fighting for the right to live? Research has helped me learn that there are

people fighting these issues. The work of Lauren Bravo (2020), Frances Corner (2014) and Florence Given (2020) have been specifically helpful when understanding the problems. In all the questions I asked myself whilst both researching and writing this proposal the one that stuck with me the most was why are these linked? Leading me to the proposed question of '*Is exploitation by fast fashion a feminist issue?*' over the course of the next year I want to investigate this question.

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Figure 1: Getty Images

Women's liberation protest in 1970.

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Figure 2: Labour Behind The Label

A photo of workers hands sewing shoes.

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Figure 3: Our Good Brands

The Rana Plaza building collapse.

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