

Disabling The Disability: An Analysis Of Disability Fashion Shows With Reference To Jack Eyers And Thasveer Muhammed

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Abstract

“It’s not our disabilities, it’s our abilities that count”- Chris Burke.

Fashion industry is one of the most important globally acclaimed fields in commerce. Rather than a commercial industry, fashion is a distinctive way in which individuals present themselves. Since fashion trends are influenced by factors like cinema, celebrities, technology, creative explorations, etc it is a huge industry that provides a great exposure to the people involved. Thus, it is a platform that focuses on fashion sense, beauty and fitness. Physical disabilities don’t even matter there.

This paper on disability fashion, tries to bring out how fashion industry is used as a medium to overcome the physical disabilities by looking into disability fashion shows conducted all over the world. The life and success story of the amputee fashion models Thasveer Muhammed and Jack Eyers are referred to show how they overcome their disabilities through fashion. The two models fought back their disability by their own will power through the platform of fashion. In the modern world, fashion industry is growing tremendously focusing on aesthetic sense and beauty, regardless of any so called “disabilities” but accepting the abilities in people. The paper is an analysis of how fashion is used as a tool to overcome the physical disabilities through fashion shows and modelling, throughout the world.

Key words: Fashion, disability fashion shows, disability aesthetics, ability over disability

Fashion refers to the latest style in clothing, footwear, hairstyle, accessories, make up and a lot more. The term Fashion cannot be given an exact definition as it differs from person to person. It is all about creativity, attitude and “latest” trend. Thus, the only thing constant in the field of fashion is change. Fashion is not always about wearing something that is comfortable, but it is about how we present ourselves in front of others. Fashion industry is one of the largest commercial industries in the world. It keeps on changing and leaping out to wider horizons, taking all the fashion lovers along. This industry in the modern times is moving to greater heights as it provides a space for every fashion lovers regardless of any biases like that of class, colour, gender and so on, challenging the standards of beauty. Challenging the notion that “fair is beautiful” is the greatest example for this.

As the industry grows, it accommodates people based on their attitudes, beauty and creativity, proving that even physical disability doesn't hinder the notion of beauty and fashion. According to the International Fashion Editor Cynthia Durcanin, “Fashion is a state of mind. A spirit, an extension of one's self. Fashion talks, it can be an understated whisper, a high-energy scream or an all knowing wink and a smile. Most of all fashion is about being comfortable with yourself, translating self-esteem into a personal style.” Self-esteem and attitude is the major criteria for being a good fashion model, but not physical beauty alone. This is what disability fashion shows conducted all over the world tells us. Disability fashion is not something new. Way back in 1993, the fashion model Matushka appeared in the cover page of *New York Times Magazine*, exposing her mastectomy scarred body. Its caption “You can't look away anymore”, contained her pride in her beauty and debunked the conventional notion of beauty. Lately, in February 2016 during New York Fashion Week, the Italian fashion company Fondazione Vertical recruited disabled models like Shaholly Ayers, a congenital amputee, and Madeline Stuart, an 18-year-old Australian model with Down's Syndrome, and Jillian Mercado, a model with spastic muscular dystrophy. Also, brands like ABL Denim, Alleles, Chairmelotte and IZ Collection came up with adaptive clothing patterns that suits people in wheel chair and those who have different body patterns.

Karin Hitselberger, a freelance writer with cerebral palsy, talks about life and fashion, “The whole idea behind choice in fashion comes from an emotional need to express yourself in a way that is authentic. We can act like fashion is an exclusive club, but clothes are a standard of our society. Everybody wears them. So the idea of living somewhere

where you have clothes that fit you and your body, and you have a choice that allows you to fit into an aesthetic that makes you feel confident, beautiful and fierce. That's what I want to see." People like her show path to more, those who wish to come to the field of fashion without holding themselves back due to their disabilities. Jack Eyers and Thasveer Muhammed are two such people who achieved their aims, crushing all the barriers that their disability laid in front of them.

Jack Eyers, the title winner of Mr.England 2017-19, is an amputee who lost his leg at the age of 16 due to the degenerative condition Proximal Femoral Focal Deficiency (PFFD). Eventhough this made him struggle a lot, he managed to achieve his dream despite all the obstacles in his life. He says that he was a tough kid and stood up for himself, which gave him a sense of achievement. But, his teenage was a dark part of his past. He was in the verge of depression when all of his friends joined army, but he couldn't. However, this fire in him kept growing and took him to his current position. He decided to ampute his leg, inspired by an amputee Hollywood actor whom he met at the hospital once. Amputation, he believes, is the best decision that he took in his life. His career began from the New York fashion week, where he got much media attention as the first amputee model in the fashion week ramp walk. Eyers believes in coming out of the comfort zone, where you face struggles, strike them out and grow stronger out of it. He says that his major strength is that he is body-confident. Body-confidence is being confident in ourselves so that it reflects on others as well. Fashion and fitness are the two essential components of his success. He associates fitness with keeping ourselves healthy and thus loving ourselves; and fashion as a superpower that made him feel like a hero and forget all his "disabilities." Fitness and fashion thus helped him to get out of his disfiguration and made him love himself, increasing his self-esteem. He believes in setting up high goals and working hard to achieve them. He has done that in his life and his next aim is to be a part of Mr. World competition. Through his own life, he tries to tell the world that "having a disability doesn't need to hold you back."

Thasveer Muhammed, a fashion model from Kochi (Kerala), is also an amputee. He lost his leg in 2013 when he met with a bike accident. Instead of breaking down, Thasveer rose up to face this challenge and became an inspiration for a lot of people. Under the Instagram handle @thasvy, he became a famous figure who inspired many, through his motivational Instagram pictures. He has 65k followers and the feature in the FWD magazine

kick started his career as a more successful fashion model. His multi talent achieved him more fame. He does everything that a man with a leg would do and makes himself happy. He says, “When every heartbeat is stronger than the storm, who needs legs to perform.” The positive vibes in him took him a long way ahead in his career, without being stuck in the ambiguities and struggles that the amputation would normally cause. He has no interest for sympathy, instead fight backs to his struggles with his pair of power crutches and good attitude. “One of the toughest challenges is when society eyes you with pity. I decided that my positive attitude and putting a brave face was the way to say I am fine. So I got myself customized Superman and Batman crutches to lighten things up.”

The *BBC* show “Britain’s Missing Top Model” is a huge platform for the people who have physical disabilities. The aim of the show is to challenge the standard of beauty in fashion industry. Marie O’Riordon, one among the judges of the show, says that she “do believe the program could help challenge our attitudes to disability. I want to see the winner shake up the fashion industry. These young women shouldn't be invisible to the fashion world just because they are disabled.” There are a lot of such shows happening all around the world. In India, the disability fashion show conducted by Narayan Seva Sansthan in Udaipur, Rajasthan is one example. The show had ramp based on different categories like callipers, crutches, wheel chair and artificial limbs.

The disability fashion shows are thus trying to challenge our attitudes towards disability. The success story of Thasveer Muhammed and Eyers tell us that they could disable their disability through their own willpower and hard work. They could express themselves in front of the world, overpowering their disability. They showed us that fashion has got nothing to do with physical disability, unless your mind doesn’t get affected by any deformities. So, a strong mind, self-esteem and good attitude can take anyone of us to our dream destinations, where these “disabilities” doesn’t count at all. As Chris Burke once said, “It’s not our disabilities, it’s our abilities that count”.

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