

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Models are the most visible people in fashion, but their problems are often overlooked

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Models are often victim to nonexistent labor laws and sexual harassments. Image credit: Louis Vuitton

By DANNY PARISI

BRUSSELS The luxury industry is built on the work of women in modeling and manufacturing, but too often their problems are waylaid by the men who hold all the power.

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With the flurry of stories of sexual harassment and assault from powerful men that have emerged in the weeks since the allegations against Harvey Weinstein, the luxury world is thinking about the ways that its own vulnerable members are treated. Speaking at The New York Times' International Luxury Conference Nov. 14, Sara Ziff, former model and founder of [Model Alliance](#), spoke about the ways in which models are overlooked now and what the #MeToo campaign means for luxury.

"I think that, with regards to #MeToo, obviously speaking out is a powerful step, but it doesn't solve the problem," Ms. Ziff said. "The news cycle will move onto the next exciting thing.

"We need to take a hard look at our workplace policies and cultures and demand a change."

Invisible women

When people think of fashion and luxury, one of the immediate images that comes to mind is glamorous models, wearing the latest collections at the most exclusive parties.

And yet despite being the most visible members of the fashion world, models have relatively little power or protection in an industry that can be incredibly hard on them.

For instance, until recently, models were not technically protected by child labor laws in New York City. Ms. Ziff's organization worked to correct that, yet similar problems persist.



Models in New York City are not protected against sexual harassment. Image credit: Louis Vuitton

Models are still not protected against sexual harassment in the work place due to their status as freelancers.

"The fashion industry is built on the backs of women and girls," Ms. Ziff said. "When you look at the people in power, CEOs and photographers, many are men.

"Although the models are highly visible, often we don't get much power in the system," she said. "When you look at the other end of the supply chain, the garment industry is 80 percent women who also need a voice in their work."

Ms. Ziff asserts that these problems run far deeper than just models and that women throughout the fashion industry are routinely discriminated against and face unique challenges from an industry that is dominated mostly by men.

"My broad vision is to look at the whole supply chain and think about how we in the modeling industry can leverage our platform to improve our working conditions and amplify the voices of women who are less visible," Ms. Ziff said.

Worker control

Some brands have done more than others to treat models better.

French fashion label Louis Vuitton highlighted the global nature of its recent spring/summer 2017 runway show with help from a handful of international models.

"Six Girls Six Minutes" gives some of the catwalk strutters a voice, showing footage of the women modeling the collection underscored with their words. Showing these individual perspectives gives more depth to the participants in the runway show, allowing consumers to connect with the stories of these models ([see story](#)).

LVMH and Kering joined forces to create a common charter that determines how the groups will work with fashion models in the future.

THE CHARTER ON THE WORKING RELATIONS WITH FASHION MODELS AND THEIR WELL-BEING



LVMH and Kering's joint charter on model relations. Image credit: Kering

The goal is ostensibly to ensure the well being of the models and reflect the values of the luxury brands under their umbrellas. The statement came a day after The New York Times ran an article that spelled out several concerns expressed by models, including objectification, sexism, racism and loss of dignity ([see story](#)).

Ms. Ziff praised this move, but stressed that ultimately, protections for models and garment workers should come from and be dictated by the workers themselves.

"Who has the best information on working conditions and who has the best incentive to make sure workers are treated correctly?" Ms. Ziff said. "It's the workers themselves.

"It's not some outside force," she said. "It's the models and garment workers who have the best view of whether models and garment workers are being treated well."

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