




The Power of Changing Your *Hair*



I have known women who have never touched their hair — a mere haircut makes them nervous — and I have known women that are severely unhappy unless their hair is a bright fuschia.

I tend to fall somewhere between these two extremes. I get bored with my hair every six weeks and have to do something new to it. I will grab kitchen shears and cut until I'm satisfied, then two weeks later, I want it long. I will bleach, tone, and darken my hair as quickly as the wind changes directions. But why do I feel an almost compulsive need to change such a defining feature?

Humans have always defined others by their physical features. For women, hair is a big one. We associate certain hair lengths and colors with certain attributes. We see this depicted in the art world, with long hair on young women as a sign

of fertility and youth. In recent media, short hair is typically shown on older female characters. And think of all the obnoxious sayings we have for blondes. So much of a woman's identity seems wrapped up in what's sitting on top of her head.

I grew up with very long, very blonde hair. I did not get a haircut until sixth grade, and by then it was such a thick sheet of hair that even I acknowledged the need for a cut. About a foot was cut off, and I was so horrified by this that I waited until freshman year to change it again. Completely self-aggrandizing my own maturity, I bought a box of bright red hair dye and colored the underlayer of my (still) long blonde hair. To be honest, it did not look great, but I loved it. I loved how stunned people were that a 15-year-old girl from a well-to-do private school in the South did something to her hair other than bleach it white.

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By the time I was 16, I too wanted that elusive bleach-white hair. I had always struggled with my weight as a child, and at this point I had just begun running which caused me to lose weight. I started to look like my peers and I wanted hair to match. I no longer wanted to stand out but to assimilate. I wanted to be like the other 'hot girls' in my school, and I thought if I changed my hair I would become one.

So I went to a hairdresser who bleached the hell out of my hair, and she ruined it. But I kept this unflattering brassy blonde shade that gave me so much confidence. I believed that it made me something. The belief was reinforced by how vastly differently men started to treat me — they noticed me. I now understand that it wasn't my hair but the fact that I was done with puberty by 16, and I looked like a woman. In fact, my constantly grown-out roots and two-toned zebra hair did not highlight my face at all. At a hair appointment at the beginning of junior year, where I was supposed to go even lighter, I went brown.

I hated that color more than life itself. I purposely only have three pictures of my hair from that summer. I had asked for a true brown, and it looked like I had rubbed mud into my blonde hair and left it out to dry. I finally got fed up with it and went to the store, bought a box of dye, and went to town. I loved the final product — a rich mahogany that left my hair shiny for what felt like the first time in years.

It was the brown I loved, the brown I enjoyed so much. It was the brown that I became truly confident in. Brown isn't showy; I garnered attention because of myself and not my hair. I grew into myself with that color, because I allowed myself to be less concerned about what was on my head. It was the hair that I finished out my senior year with, the hair that I took to my first semester of college. It was my dark and sexy bedroom hair that traveled with me everywhere.

But the man I was fucking preferred blondes, so I bleached my hair again. I did it aggressively one afternoon, and I killed it. Murdered it. I quickly dyed the ruined mass of orange back and had to cut



off seven inches, leaving my hair right above my shoulders. I played right back into my 16-year-old self — I wanted to be validated and I searched for it in a bottle of bleach.

I had never hated my hair more. It was short and so dark, it was almost black. To make myself feel better, I gradually lightened it, throwing highlights in at random. Over quarantine, still with the same man and the same desire for control in a time when I had none, I kept bleaching my hair. So for a while, I had orange hair that just brushed my shoulders. After literal months of working at it, I remembered that toner exists, and overnight my brassy blonde became a slinky, cool-toned color.

Yet, I still miss the natural curl I once had, the curl that months of bleaching and trimming my hair have removed. I miss bedroom curls. Now when I wake up in the morning, I have a frizzy, messy helmet that is only tamed with an embarrassing amount of leave-in conditioner. But with the help of styling tools and my roommate's expertise, I have learned to reclaim my natural hair texture.

I have changed, and will continue to change, my hair as I become bored with it. My journey with my hair is the closest thing I have to a wardrobe staple. I could not be more grateful for my parents' latitude when it came to changing my hair — it allowed me my freedom of expression, and it is my favorite sign of freedom.

From Colonialism to *Fast* Fashion

An exploration of Khadi, the fabric of India's resistance



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Like a massive hangover that won't go away, the fashion industry has yet to recover from the remnant effects of colonialism. Although society is becoming more and more aware of the industry's reliance on overconsumption and fast fashion practices, many people, consumers and creators alike, are unaware that these issues are actually rooted in an older and bigger problem, colonialism. Thankfully, criticism of the industry and demand for its reform reached an unprecedented peak this past year, giving fashion the rude awakening it sorely needed. Through movements like the #PayUp social media campaign, society is sobering the fashion industry up, forcing in a new era of accountability and responsibility. That being said, many people still don't fully understand the dark past that has led the industry to this critical turning point.

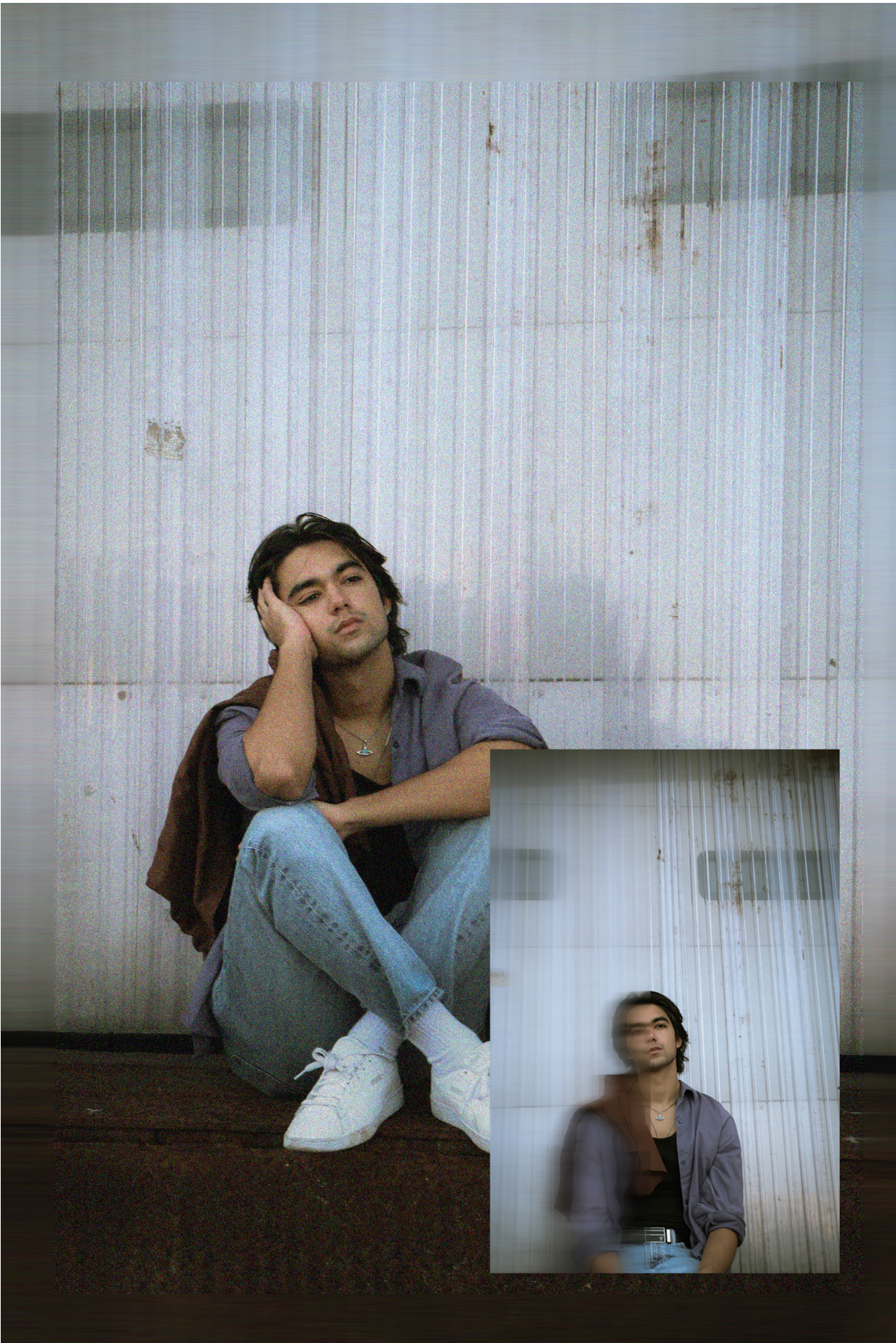
It's easy to think of "colonialism" as a complicated phenomenon, separated from us by hundreds of years and thousands of miles. Sadly, this isn't the case; the effects of colonialism are very much alive today, rooted so deeply in the fashion industry that its presence is all but undetectable. My mother,

who immigrated to the United States from India, is living proof of this. Ever since I was old enough to pick out my own clothes, she made it very clear to me that I should avoid synthetic fabrics in favor of garments that were 100% cotton, wool, silk, or her personal favorite, linen. This is no easy feat; I've learned to scour stores and investigate labels before falling in love with that perfectly fitting pair of jeans or that super pretty sundress. My mom also taught me to alter my clothes, to reinvent a dress into a blouse rather than always buying new. The thing about my mom is that she's the most stylish person I know. Some of my favorite pieces in my closet actually got there by way of the hallway between our bedrooms. Most recently I've been hijacking her clothes from the '90s, which look as good now as they did when she first bought them. I've been committing closet theft and following my mom's consumption habits for as long as I can remember, but I'd never really asked when or why she picked them up. I always assumed it had to do with sustainability and quality, but recently I've started piecing together the real reason these rules and traditions are so important for her. As I was surprised to find out, conscious consumerism was only a small part of the story.

One of the first examples of fast fashion — and sentiment against it — actually occurred in India during the 1920s. Famous for its colorful handloom fabrics, prints, and designs, India's garments and textiles had become popular all over the world, only to take a huge hit when the Western power loom was created in 1904. Unlike their artisan counterparts, power loom fabrics were inexpensive and quick to make, needing hardly any craftsmanship. In villages across India, people who had spent their life weaving for manufacturers lost their jobs and were forced to leave their homes in search of factory work in cities. Fast forwarding a decade or so, the British, who had since colonized India, saw an opportunity for great wealth in the country's textile trade now that the process had sped up. They saw India's capacity to create rich fabrics and in order to control the means of production and keep profits in British hands, seized all of the raw materials from the country and exported them back to England. From there, textiles were mass produced in mills across the UK, just to be imported back to India to be designed into clothes, bags, or other entities by

people who had to work for all but nothing. This process of exporting, importing, and milling drove prices through the roof in India and simultaneously put both local handlooms and power looms out of business. To make matters worse, the British bought cotton and other raw materials for far cheaper than Indian textilers paid for them. It didn't take long for this process to cost hundreds of thousands of Indians their livelihoods, which soon inspired them to rise up against the British. Thus, the Swadeshi, or "Khadi," Movement, was born.

The Khadi movement was a decision made across India to boycott foreign cloth in an effort to show the British they would not, could not, stand for the continued theft of their culture and means to live. "Khadi" refers to a handwoven cloth that is typically made of cotton and is produced on a charkha, or a small spinning wheel, making the cloth a little thicker than other textiles. Mahatma Gandhi himself encouraged people to spin their own fabrics and refrain from purchasing the expensive British fabrics, which most were unable to do anyway. While a type of textile might seem like a trivial



matter in comparison to the other atrocities being committed at the time, India's ongoing struggle for independence is reflected so heavily in the Khadi movement that it carried, and continues to carry, enormous cultural significance. Khadi brought employment and self-sustainability back to India with the jobs it provided to the people that grew and harvested the raw materials, wove them into textiles, washed and dyed them, and even delivered them. But even beyond that, the fabric became a symbol of resistance, resilience, and revolution. It was one of the first times that rural weavers were self-employed and financially independent, the first reason anyone had in a long time to hope for a life without British influence. A sense of pride in Indian tradition and craft came back to the country with this movement, reviving the villages. Khadi was akin to the great equalizer in India, and its legacy has not left.

Today, Khadi is still woven carefully by hand, work that is testament to the importance it continues to hold in Indian culture. Khadi is easily available to villages in rural India for use and many big designers, like Rohit Bahl, frequently feature it in their collections, making certain its popularity does not decline. India is no longer under Britain's colonial rule, but the model for fast fashion persists throughout the world, especially in places





where textile industries were westernized. World trade routes for clothing manufacturing are the same today as they were in the colonial era — eerie evidence that, beneath the surface, not much has changed. The fashion industry rests precariously atop a mountain of exploitation for financial gain, but as transparency and ethics are becoming more valued in society, the industry is facing a whole new Khadi movement.

Knowing more about the history of fast fashion, it's easy for me to understand the importance my mom places on ethical and sustainable, slow-fashion garments. Although she didn't live through colonized India herself, the values that arose in Indian society during that most difficult time have lived on through generations and generations of Indian nationals as well as diaspora. As a society, we must unlearn the fast fashion and over-consumptive practices that have become normalized over the past century. Decolonizing the fashion industry would mean the death of fast fashion, and that thought alone is powerful enough to cure any hangover you're nursing today.