Why Are Most Couture Designers Men?
Heather Levinson, TMD Major
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Summary by Lauren MacDougall

Heather Levinson researched the phenomenon of men dominating the fashion industry as lead creative designers. Historically, women were taught how to sew and make clothing and furthermore, 99% of seamstresses are still women, so why aren’t women in charge? The idea that men are meant to dress women can go back to the father of couture, Charles Frederick Worth, who once stated, “One must be a man to know how to dress a woman.” This is still an issue that is present in the industry. Levinson found that Style.com only featured four out of fifteen labels from the Spring 2015 fashion show that were run by women.

She also noted that the fashion industry illustrates a “glass elevator” for men, meaning that men rise higher and faster in the fashion industry than women. The fashion industry is statistically a male dominated profession. Levinson questioned why this was happening and found that even in the definition of what haute couture is, women are targeted as the primary consumers: “the houses or designers that create exclusive and often trend setting fashion for women…”. If women are the consumers for haute couture, then why are men in charge? Levinson noted that the way women are portrayed in the business world might be part of the reason. From a previous seminar on stock photography, the fashion industry depicts this industry as staffed mainly by young, happy women, when in reality that is far from the truth. Levinson showed a picture of Karl Lagerfeld who is depicted as serious and a picture of Phoebe Philo who is depicted as playful and relaxed to emphasize the unparallel assessment of assertiveness between men and women in the workplace. Throughout Levinson’s research, she realized that many questions were left unanswered due to lack of research within the industry on this topic. She ended the presentation with discussion of some of the lingering questions such as “Are women wired to be nicer?” These are important topics in the fashion industry that need to be discussed more frequently.