

Article

The Unseen Suffering of the Fashion Industry in Juno Dawson's *Meat Market*

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Abstract: The fashion industry is a lively and exciting field that is always coming up with new and exciting styles and trends. Many young girls dream of becoming models. Many young girls put in much effort to maintain a strict diet, regular exercise, and take care of their appearance. In the modelling industry, women are often objectified and treated as sex objects. There have been allegations of sexual misconduct and abuse in the modelling industry. Sexual violence refers to the intentional and harmful use of sexual acts to exert power, control, and dominance over another person, often causing physical and emotional pain as well as humiliation. Many young women are unaware of the darker side of the modelling industry and the challenges they may face. This paper explores the experience of Jana, a young model, as she navigates the darker aspects of the fashion industry, including sexual harassment, and its profound impact on her mental well-being.

Keywords: eating disorders; ideal beauty; media; young adolescent; sexual harassment; inferiority complex; skin care

FULL PAPER

Introduction

Juno Dawson is a British author and journalist known for her work in writing novels and non-fiction books for young adults and teenagers. Her writing often focuses on themes related to identity, mental health, and LGBTQ issues. Dawson has received numerous awards and nominations for her work and has been recognized as one of the

leading voices in contemporary young adult literature. The book *Meat Market* is a dark and gritty exploration of the modelling industry. The themes of the *Meat Market* are objectification, exploitation, and the commodification of the human body. Jana, a young adolescent girl, worked as a salesperson in the Meat Market. She got an opportunity to become a model. She had no idea what modelling was all about. Jana struggled to learn the ropes of modelling. As Jana entered the modelling world, she was struck by the stark differences between herself and the other models. Jana faced unwanted advances and was seduced by many agents in the modelling industry. Through Jana's experiences, the dark underbelly of the modelling industry was revealed, exposing the unseen suffering and exploitation that many models endure.

"Today, the media continually tells women that their bodies have many imperfections and these can only be repaired with the help of cosmetics, plastic surgery, diet, and exercise." (Czerniawski). In *Meat Market*, Jana, a middle-class young girl, gets an unexpected opportunity to enter the modelling field. On Jana's first day of shooting, she was taken aback by the sheer number of models she encountered, all vying for attention and trying to make a name for themselves in the competitive world of fashion. Jana noticed many differences between herself and the other models. Jana first noticed the difference in dress code between herself and the other models. Jana's dress was fully covered and of a lower quality compared to the other models. Everyone looked down on Jana, treating her with disdain and disrespect. The other models ignored Jana and refused to talk to her because of her modest and inexpensive-looking outfit. Jana's agent advised her to change her outfit to something trendier and revealing, like the other models, in order to fit in. Jana was hesitant and shy about changing into a more revealing outfit, as it went against her personal style and comfort level. Despite her reservations, Jana finally mustered up the courage to walk onto the ramp, feeling nervous and self-conscious in her new, more revealing outfit. Jana was too nervous to face the camera. Finally, Jana gathered her courage and confidently faced the camera.

There are certain standard measurements for a fashion model that have evolved. The model should be tall and have a well-toned body. Typically, female models are expected to have a height of at least 5.9, while male models should be at least six feet tall. Ideal body measurements for females are considered to be a bust of 34, waist of 24, and hips of 34. (Abel) After the photo shoot, Jana indulged in a big meal, satisfying her hunger and finding relief after a stressful day. Unlike Jana, the other models in the industry were very strict about their diet, carefully watching what they ate to maintain their slim figures. Jana was clueless about the concept of dieting and did not understand why the other models were so careful about what they ate. Jana had a weakness for carb-heavy foods and did not follow any particular diet, which led to her gaining weight over time. In the modelling industry, maintaining a strict diet is crucial for models to keep their bodies in shape and meet the industry's stringent beauty standards. All the models gathered together to share a meal, but interestingly, they all opted for salads and healthy options, except for Jana, who stuck to her usual carb-heavy foods. Jana did not know basic table manners and ate with her hands, making loud noises while chewing, which caught the attention of the other models, who were taken aback by her behaviour. The other models saw Jana as a girl with no manners, and they started

avoiding her because of her poor table etiquette. Jana eventually learned about the importance of dieting and good table manners from the other models, who took her under their wing and taught her how to behave more elegantly.

Beauty advertisements in women's magazines provide instructions on how a woman can enhance her appearance beyond her natural physical attributes, highlighting flaws such as body fat. Women are told that they need to get rid of their soft, loose, and excess flesh immediately by using many cosmetic and beauty products, since this is the only way that will help them to attain excellence (Bordo). Jana was also clueless about skin care products and had no idea how to take care of her skin, which made her stand out even more among the other models who had flawless complexions. The other models had a strict skin care routine, using various products to cleanse, moisturize, and protect their skin, which left them with glowing and radiant complexions. On her first day of shooting, Jana made a bold statement by wearing much powder on her face, but unfortunately, it looked cakey and overdone, which caught the attention of the other models and the crew. The other models could not help but burst out laughing at Jana's overdone makeup look, and from that moment on, they started seeing her as a bit of a joke, someone who did not quite take the modelling world seriously.

Jana's shyness was so overwhelming that she found it difficult to walk confidently in front of others and would often freeze up or falter from her nervousness, making every step feel like a daunting task. Jana was also extremely hesitant to show off her body in front of the camera, and the thought of posing in revealing outfits or lingerie made her feel anxious and uncomfortable, which was a major challenge for her as a model. Deep down, Jana struggled with feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem, often thinking that she was not beautiful enough to be a successful model and that she did not measure up to the standards of the industry. Unlike other models who come from affluent backgrounds, Jana has a humble upbringing in a rural area. Jana's style is understated, with a wardrobe consisting of only simple dresses. Unlike other models, Jana does not have an extensive wardrobe.

Jana is extremely family-oriented and remains very close to her loved ones. Jana is a highly responsible individual, always putting her family's needs first and taking great care of them. As the sole breadwinner of her family, Jana is extremely frugal and responsible with her finances, never spending a single penny wastefully. Jana successfully sells her products at a fair price. However, instead of keeping the earnings for herself, she selflessly hands over the entire amount to her family, prioritizing their well-being above her own. After a long day of selling at the meat market, Jana returns home and lends a helping hand to her mother, assisting with household chores and ensuring the smooth running of their home. After entering the modelling field, Jana made the difficult decision to leave her home and family, pursuing a new path that took her further away from her loved ones. Jana's family deeply misses her presence, and she, too, feels a strong sense of longing for her loved ones, despite the distance and new opportunities that have taken her away from home. Jana struggled to adjust to the new

food habits required in the modelling industry, finding it challenging to adapt to the strict dietary restrictions and often feeling unwell as a result.

Prior to her modelling career, Jana was accustomed to wearing traditional attire. However, after entering the modelling industry, she transitioned to wearing trendy clothing, reflecting her new professional persona. Before her modelling career, Jana preferred modest and affordable clothing that covered her body. However, as a model, she now wears high-end designer outfits that are more revealing, showcasing her physique and confidence. I have phantom hair syndrome. I keep trying to sweep imaginary hair off my shoulders. After the haircut, we went back to the agency to redo the pictures. There was no point in keeping the ones I had done earlier. I cannot deny that, with the short hair, I look way more like a person who belongs in a modelling agency. I look like a massively pissed off genderless alien. Everyone seemed very impressed with this. Prior to her modelling career, Jana did not own many ornaments. However, after entering the industry, she acquired a stunning collection of jewellery, including chains, bracelets, and earrings. She now carefully selects pieces that perfectly complement her outfits, showcasing her newfound sense of style and glamour. Many women are successful in their jobs, but they still face a big problem: sexual harassment. A fairly comprehensive definition considers sexual harassment as any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offense or humiliation to another. Such harassment may be, but is not necessarily, of a form that interferes with work, is made a condition of employment, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Jana's foray into the modelling world was marred by frequent instances of harassment, which made her journey incredibly challenging. Initially, Jana joined Prestige Models, a reputable agency. However, she soon found herself in an uncomfortable situation when the company's owner began making unwanted advances, attempting to seduce her. Jana kept the incident to herself, choosing not to share the uncomfortable experience with her family members. Following the unsettling encounter, Jana decided to leave Prestige Models and join a different modelling agency, seeking a safer and more respectful work environment. Lucas Bloo, a photographer, attempted to seduce Jana during a photo shoot. When she rejected his advances, he retaliated by taking compromising photos of her without her consent. He then published these photos in the media, causing Jana significant distress and harm. After the compromising photos were published, Jana's family members found out about the incident and were filled with worry and fear. As the news spread, the public became aware of the situation, and Jana became reclusive, avoiding public appearances and hesitant to show her face, fearing recognition and judgment. However, Jana refused to let the incident define her. Summoning her inner strength, she decided to fight back against the injustice and trauma she had faced. Determined to seek justice and ensure that no one else suffered a similar fate, Jana began to speak out against the exploitation and harassment she had endured. The Constitution of India guarantees the prevention of sexual harassment and fundamental rights to its citizens, particularly women, through Articles 14, 15, and 21. These articles protect women from all forms of

discrimination, victimization, and sexual harassment, ensuring a safe and enabling environment for them to pursue their chosen professions, occupations, trades, or businesses without fear or hindrance.

Women and teenage girls have been heavily influenced by Western beauty standards promoted by the media. Teenage girls in particular struggle to distinguish between unrealistic media representations and real life. This can lead to eating disorders, low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy. To prevent this, parents of young girls should take steps to protect them from the negative impact of the media. Young girls should love themselves, no matter their size. They do not need to be super thin like the women they see in the media. Girls with anorexia should get help, not try to be like unrealistic models. Parents can help by giving them love and support and encouraging activities that make them feel good about themselves. With the help and support, these girls can feel happy and peaceful with their bodies.

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