

Fashion Etiquette: The Elegance of Good Behavior



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Webster's defines etiquette as the conduct or procedure required by good breeding or prescribed by authority to be observed in social or official life.

As photographers during NY Fashion week we see it all. We sit on our turtles, stand on our ladders and wait for venues to begin. We see a lot and hear a lot. We say nothing and just wait for the shows to begin.

This season marked some significant changes to NYFW, some good some not so good. There was a tweet from Christina Binkley (who I love and respect) that really struck a nerve with me. This tweet caused me to write this article.

In my opinion, poor fashion show etiquette threatens the class and respect of the industry and must be addressed. What is proper etiquette at a fashion show? It can come from anywhere. It can come from the models, the attendees, the designers, the production teams, the photographers, etc. As I sat on my turtle waiting for a venue to start I listened to an emerging designer say, "I will do everything in my power, and I am very powerful, to screw the shit out of so and so." I said to myself, "Why does this emerging designer feel they have license in an open area to speak that way, yet alone feel entitled to display such arrogance. I am not sure any emerging or non emerging designer should have this kind of attitude. The, "I am the all mighty and powerful and will screw the shit out of anyone" attitude does nothing but bring bad karma. What ever happened to humility is it extinct? As photographers, we are (most of us, not all) are honored to be there photographing the shows. It's a privilege.

The emerging designers should be focused on developing relationships that help and guide them along the way. Their mentors should be teaching them how to behave. I ask myself, where does this sense of entitlement and arrogance come from? Is there a class they are all taking in school to learn this bad behavior? Of course, I mean this sarcastically. I would however suggest basic civility be added to curricula in fashion schools. It's needed. They are bringing it into the grammar schools and high schools, why not the colleges and incubators. Humility is a great thing to learn. Why do we make room for these bad behaviors and accept it? We keep our mouths shut because we do not want to lose our front row seat or our credentials. Let me mention this, this emerging designer I mention above, was given their venue for free. This designer was evidently on a list as an emerging designer to get special privileges at Fashion Week. Where was this designer's humility and gratefulness in being awarded such a gift?

This same designer also went on to say, "These models are such assholes for showing up late, I have my key girls but the rest are just useless, they are just idiots, F' them." I do not agree with his statement on models, however, there are models that show up habitually late for castings, for shows and they feel entitled. Some have demonstrated attitudes when you change what garment they are wearing in a show because they are an hour late. They are lucky they are still walking in the venue. These girls are not models for long. As an emerging designer myself, it has been quite the experience dealing with modeling agencies. I had an agency say to me once when I shared

my budget with them for models for a show, "Well you will not get attractive models for that price."
This statement will resonate with me forever in my mind.

What ever happened to taking the issues to a private room? There were several new venues that were working through issues this season on the fly. They did it on the floor, in front of clients, photographers, buyers, bloggers, etc. This should not be happening. If a new venue is trying to make a name for themselves doing this discredits them. Have we become the Allen/Farrow family and need to use the NY Times to air our dirty laundry for everything in life? Every fashion show has drama, no matter how long a designer has been doing shows. There is always unexpected craziness that unfolds. It's the true leaders that shine and never let anyone see them sweat.

What are the shows about? Are the shows about women/men anymore or just designers egos? Where are all the buyers? Many shows had zero buyers at them. This seems crazy. Designers spending \$25,000 on a venue better have buyers at it. What is PR defined as today? Filling a room, not necessarily with the correct influencers and buyers?

No doubt there are amazing designers who remain true to the beatification of the female/male form. Our camera lenses demonstrate this runway after runway. Too many designers are not focused on the beautification of women/men but on their own ego. Beauty is always in the eye of the beholder. Maybe these designers do not see what the lenses see. They do not know what they do not know. They need to be taught. Who is going to teach them?

I think Christina Binkley said it best with her review of Alexander Wang's show, "Still, fashion followers are unusually forgiving if the clothes are good. These were. The fabric research that Mr. Wang has been doing for his Parisian Balenciaga gig is reflecting well on his eponymous brand. I particularly liked a textile that looked like a bubbly digital boucle. It was futuristic—and while there were space-age-athletic-chic nods to Mr. Wang's predecessor at Balenciaga, Nicolas Ghesquiere, there was no copying going on in Alexander Wang. Mr. Wang's future is original and wearable, vivid with fluorescent color played against drab gray. He may be the first to develop the boot-mule, which is anon to a shin guard attached to a high heeled mule. His laser cut leather is unforgettable, in a good way. I liked the torn-hemline shearling. *What's more, there was a pocket thing going on—and what woman doesn't need more pockets?*"

Christina Binkley knows her fashion. Cathy Horyn knows her fashion as well. We will all miss Cathy Horyn and our hearts go out to her on her beloved loss. As said best by a fellow photographer, "There is a great difference between "informed and uninformed" criticism. Anyone can go to a show and talk about it, say nothing intelligent but still with a clever phrase, snarky commentary make it entertaining and pass it off as "informed". I don't think there are more than a few writers who ever reached beyond the lowest common denominator. Cathy Horyn was one of the few and the BEST!" Christina is my hero as well.

Those fortunate enough to attend a show at NYFW and sit in the front row should consider this....before coming to the show consider having your phone, ipad, electronic media surgically detached from your body. We live in a very digital world and that will not change. As designers we love getting the instant attention for our shows. Discretion is a must. Show respect to the designer and the press. If you are in the front row, do not lean forward every time a new look comes down the runway and extend your arms to full extent to take a photo of a look, placing your ipad, iphone, electronic device in the middle of the runway to take a photo. (BTW when you do this you block the press in the riser from getting photos for the designers, forever ruining the shot for the photographer and designer). I watched people in the front row during the red dress show this year jump up onto the runway at the end of the show and block the photo of the entire group of lovely red dressed women. Always remember the press on the riser. Be considerate for all involved.

Those fortunate enough to get invited should show enthusiasm and appreciation for the designer's hard work and investment by admiring every look, fabrication, stitch and embellishment. You will NEVER see Anna, Hamish or Grace whip out their phones to photograph

the show from the front row. It's time to have elegance. I never understand why those fortunate enough to be invited would feel this kind of behavior is appropriate? If you just want something new to do on a Friday night with friends go to another event where it's more appropriate to snap shots of everything you see.

It is an interesting examination of human behavior and social acceptability in this digital age we live in. I'm sure my academic side is getting the better of me right now, but I'm curious to know the opinions of others out there regarding this topic. I can't help but to think that the star of the evening is the designers, the garments, the production and the models. Not the people in the front row. All I want to do is pay attention. Perhaps I have an antiquated viewpoint on proper fashion show etiquette as I sit on the risers or in the audience. Or perhaps I just need to let loose and give that intricately designed garment the loud whistle it deserves. I remember last season at DVF's venue and when Naomi Campbell walked into my lens from the top of the riser. The photographers on the riser squealed in delight at the sight of Naomi. Naomi did not blink at the added attention. The ultimate, classic supermodel. What a treat.

No doubt, I will be giving Zang Toi another standing ovation on the 12th. Zang Toi is amazing. His clothing and etiquette are impeccable. His shows are beautiful. He loves the press. He even feeds us on the riser at his show every year. The emerging designer I mention above in this article could learn a lot from him. That emerging designer needs a good spanking.

As a photographer, we are observers, editors and collectors of information. There is a level of bullshit has always been just above the neckline. You have this in any industry. But, the sense of entitlement and arrogance has risen to new heights in the world. What ever happened to the elegance of just being well behaved? Being well behaved also is defined as being respectful of other people's time. Maybe most of the new industry designers and models are learning how they should behave by watching incredibly bad movies made of the industry in the past. Maybe the designers and models could perchance realize just how lucky they are to be doing what they like, making money at it and just be pleasant and grateful.

I read a tweet by Christina Binkley the other day that said, "15 minutes to go two blocks getting to the Brooklyn Navy yard for Alexander Wang. Inconsiderate planning." This tweet struck a nerve with me. It made me want to write this article.

We all need to be more considerate of each other. I challenge all the venues that are yet to show this NY fashion week to dial up their etiquette. Dial up their consideration and take that into next season and into the future. Let's have a behavioral overhaul. Let's make NYFW something Paris; Milan and London Fashion weeks are jealous of, something they all want to be a part of. Take the drama to the back rooms, not the runways and grand halls.

I am dreaming of a future NYFW that is more localized and back in the place it belongs, Bryant Park. As a marathon runner and triathlete I appreciate the workout of going to venues all over the city, great way to get my daily mileage in. However, I normally do not run with 45 pounds of gear on my back, a ladder, huge lenses and tripods. Take the photographers into consideration with your choices as well. We love you. We want to be everywhere for you, and we can't get everywhere. Let's make Eleanor Lambert proud, the true queen, angel and goddess of fashion week.