

Caryn Franklin on the power of one

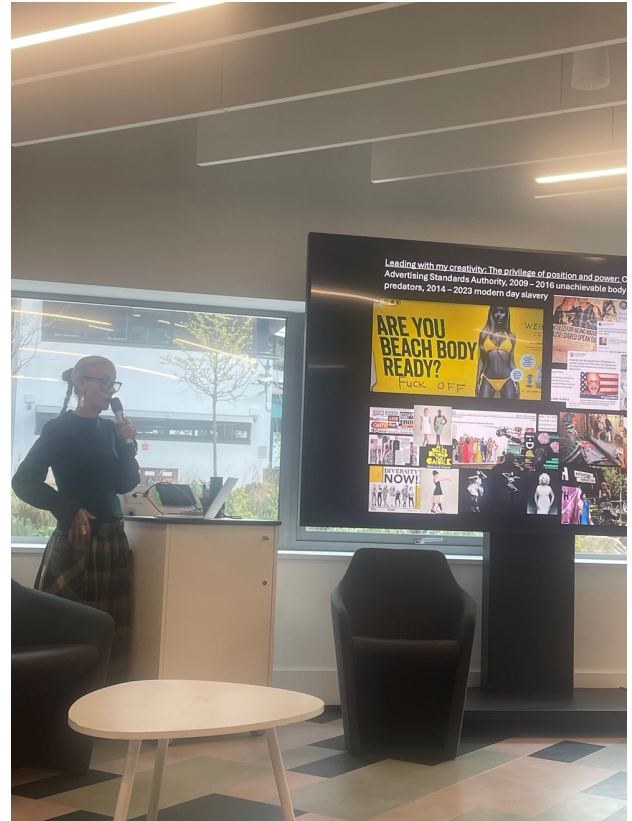
Former i-D magazine editor, BBC presenter and MBE holder Caryn Franklin shares insight into the authenticity of selfhood, gender politics and the “white male gaze”.

“I find I am still the same person, even after 43 years”, Franklin states, her hair up high, styled intricately and Westwood-esque ensemble screaming 1980’s catwalk. Although seeming like she has not aged a day, her career certainly has aged gracefully, having interviewed fashion A-listers, an MBE, various projects and even an MSc in Psychology. “I wanted to study and bring feminism into the rooms of intelligence”, being Franklin’s reasoning for this particular career choice, “I’ve learnt that bias and stereotypes lead to unspoken beliefs for us all”. A significant standpoint in her career, to which she has gone onto leading classes on fashion psychology; specialising in gender bias and even consulting with the Advertising Standards Authority, to create a new policy regarding the objectification of women.

Having read i-D magazine from the start, Franklin knew she wanted to work for them, having managed to slot into the role of editor and co-editor for six years. Throughout her duration, Franklin has acknowledged full self-awareness, a philosophy that has transgressed through to all corners of her career, claiming with no sense of hesitation, “I have been the entitled ignorant”. Not by nurture, but unfortunately by nature, she immediately explains, “I’ve observed how effective my agenda can be”, using power in the right means is a foundation for Franklin, who’s self-criticalness has been apparent as a constant. “This little bit of doubt has always sat with me”, she leans over as if to inspire me immediately, “I always say to myself, is this s**t or is it really s**t?”. As my own self-doubt hit me abruptly, I was hit with “authenticity is your greatest superpower”, something I was left to ponder on about my own selfhood.

Being a pioneer for great change in the fashion industry, Franklin has actively sought to tackle issues on gender and racial bias, being a member of FACE; the Fashion Academics Creating Equality. “Women outperform men in eleven out of twelve social intelligence categories”, Franklin explains, alluding to research conducted in partner with Professor Keon West, “men mistake confidence, for competence”. Particularly in the fashion industry, we are seduced by this confidence, although, women do well to exclude that, she explains. The idea of the “white male gaze” and the differing power dynamic between men and women is something we see consistently in the fashion sphere. “There’s a lack of moral and intellectual agency with this”, Franklin says, justifying with a selection of Tom Ford adverts, “we essentially absorb the ineffectiveness of women in these magazine ads as they are presented as inferior”, the evidence spilling out from her photo gallery. ‘Women without a story’ is almost always the leading undertone in fashion magazines, with men towering over women in uncomfortable positions or even no men at all, just women in confusingly placed positions. “Look at this”,

Franklin urges, showing an advert of a man climbing a mountain, “with men skill is presented, we get this idea of selfhood”, hearing that term now giving me an identity crisis, “he’s a hero, but with women they’re simply passive, we get *nothing*”. Why was the decision even followed through? Is there not a single woman on these sets to stop such objectification? “Anna Wintour drank the Kool-Aid”, Franklin states hilariously, explaining that women in powerful positions within the industry have been conditioned this way. “Whiteness is doing all the damage”, according to Franklin, while coining the phrase “white fashion gaze”. “The industry treats black people as marginalised a lot of the time, she states, “they are rarely presented as the central character, which is something I seek to change”. With Franklin’s drive and forward thinking, there is hope in changing industry standards.



“I still get imposter syndrome at shoots, even now”: Charli Howard on all things body

With London Fashion Week reaching an end, 1664 Blanc host their final panel discussion with model, author and activist Charli Howard; reviewing significant personal battles, body neutrality and career highlights.

Increasingly becoming a household name in the fashion sphere, body activist Charli Howard closes the show for 1664 Blanc, this February's Fashion Week partners, who hosted an array of designers and industry specialist talks across the period. Becoming a known personage is to be expected of Howard, although by her entrance I barely recognised her, her presence resembling a down the earth character, it felt like I was in the same room as a model who truly embodied 'don't let the industry change you'.

“I didn't attend many shows this time, it gets a bit overwhelming”, Howard explains, dressed in a sleek black ensemble by Spanx and Manholo Blahnik heels that immediately caught my eye, “I thought Sinéad O'Dwyer was amazing though”. This came as no surprise considering Howard has been an advocate for diversity and inclusivity since the start of her career, something she feels is constantly fluctuating in the industry. “I'm worried that skinny is back from seeing some of the latest shows... it feels like we are going backwards”, she sighs, going off on a slight tangent from speaking about her latest Spanx shoot, blaming her ADHD, “There's definitely some amnesia with how bad previous times were”.

As Howard was previously dropped from her agency in 2015 for being “too big to model”, she has seen these two conflicting narratives up close and personal consistently, with either being referred to as ‘too fat’ or ‘too skinny’. Howard's issue with the industry lies with narrow views and rigid categorisation which took a significant toll on her self-image since the beginning of her career, “I used to have a black wardrobe to appear thinner for certain brands, and a regular one to see more curve for others”, she says, sighing at a picture of a young, thin Howard in her Peckham bedroom.

With now being labelled as a ‘midsize’ model, she comments on even still rigid industry standards that constantly made her positive body outlook take a step back, “I was put in a box... I never asked to be in the plus-size category”. Jumping from one side to the industry spectrum to the other, Howard was left with a deep desire to be an advocate for positive change in order to change perceptions. “I always tell people body positivity gets it wrong sometimes”, she says, signalling towards her lingerie

shoot for Coco de Mer with supermodel Helena Christensen, “body neutrality is better”. A new maxim to an old industry that is indeed catching on, Howard explains, with body positivity perhaps leaving us with *too much* positivity and dissatisfaction when we don’t feel our best; instead neutrality allows for true acceptance and appreciation for our bodies. “My shoot with Helena opened up my eyes to this”, pointing to an array of (in my personal opinion) flawless images, “there were elements I liked and didn’t like about myself in the pictures, and that’s okay”. With a female model taking on the role of photographer, the power dynamic changed for Howard, who for once felt in control of how she was to be presented, “it’s definitely a power thing at shoots where a man is the photographer... this felt different”. In fact, the entire shoot setup was woman-led, a unique experience for Howard seeing as most shoots are male majorant, her facial expression shifting her eyebrows as if to say ‘scary, I know’. “There was no pressure, I didn’t feel like I had to shave everywhere!”, she says, alongside a witty remark of resembling something from Battersea cats and dogs’ home.

Although shoots like the aforementioned inspire Howard to propel body confidence, she still reminisces about the time of her eating disorder, reverting to a picture of her at the start of her career. “I haven’t seen that photo in a long time”, her eyes drifting away from a dangerously slim Howard, “the thing is with eating disorders, your mind goes back: I felt obese”. Quiet gasps could be heard from all corners of the room, with Howard nodding in agreement to the deep shock that left me empathising with the young model. “I think my period came on for the first time in that photo”, she explains, apologising for the TMI, “it was a reminder for me to be thinner for my next photo”. After the revelation of Howard only eating from 800 to 1000 calories a day for eight years, another healthier Howard appeared next. “I remember taking this photo, where I put on weight”, to which was added to Instagram, where commenters would write about her “looking fat”, as they were used to her looking underweight.

After a massive “F* *k you!” letter was sent to her prior agency, Howard revealed the doubt that resided in her mind. “I remember going to the mirror on the day that it happened”, describing a collection of negative thoughts running through her mind, “I’m taller than most of my friends, I’m way thinner... so why do I feel so obese?”, the result of an eating disorder, she says, that essentially ate away at her. “We appreciate how much you go to the gym, but you’re never going to be a model”, the agency told her hilariously, the irony filling the room as I glance at the great success of an inspiring model, who has been in Forbes under 30, she adds proudly. “I put something on Facebook about it, went for a bath and found it had been shared over 200 times”, although now that figure resembles something of minor virality, at the time it was seen as a huge success, that even attracted the attention of tabloids. “I knew I was going to get a lot of abuse about it”, assumingly from negative commenters, “so I didn’t really wish for anyone to write about it”, although as Howard rightfully states, it will be published anyway. Sifting through comments about the article, after encountering a selection of unrelated statements about trips to Nando’s, Howard found exactly what she had been dreading. “I asked for certain pictures to not go on there as I knew I’d receive comments about them”, although still added to the article by the tabloid, it added even more insecurity for Howard.

Although an initially rocky road in her career, Howard experienced a breakthrough with lingerie brand Agent Provocateur, which was an inspiring step for her. “It was all run by women, the whole entire shoot, I never felt that way in my life!”, she exclaims, displaying an array of red and black images. According to Howard this was the first time the brand had employed a more curved women to headline the shoot, “a definite breakthrough for both parties”, she laughs. After an abrupt exclamation of “I love seeing fleshy women, I just love boobs”, Howard showcases her shoot with Pat McGrath, where she modelled the very first eyeshadow palette for the brand. An

inspiring shoot and the much-needed jumpstart to her excelling career, Howard hasn't looked back since.

Ending the talk with significant advice for the surrounding audience, "don't let trends dictate the way you live your life", she says, the sentiment still sticking to me to this day, "don't ever be afraid to show yourself in your true form."