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# The Scotsman

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<http://www.scotsman.com/news/mal-burkinshaw-clothes-should-make-you-feel-good-not-bad-1-1692451#>

## Mal Burkinshaw: Clothes should make you feel good, not bad

**What Mal Burkinshaw experienced first hand at a top fashion house inspired him to campaign for change in the industry**

This week I attended a [fashion show](#) where a model could not walk on her appallingly inadequate shoes. Her feet buckled underneath her fragile frame, and I feared she might break her ankle.

She crouched, unable to sit because of the height of the shoes, and eventually she managed to wobble her way precariously off the catwalk. Subsequently, all the models walked on, their terror palpable in their faces. I left this show not just in protest, but I could not watch these poor girls (and I mean girls . . .) suffer for the sake of fashion.

Fashion should make the wearer feel good; this is surely its primary function. I remain angry with the show producer, the head of the course and the student for supporting what is clearly not what I would call Emotionally Considerate Design.

A year ago, I attended the first All Walks Beyond the Catwalk education forum in London with founders Caryn Franklin, Erin O'Connor and Debra Bourne. It proved to be a momentous turning point, both personally and professionally. One year later, All Walks and Government Equalities Minister and Body Confidence Campaign founder Lynne Featherstone have announced I will be the director of the first Centre of Excellence for Diversity, based at Edinburgh College of Art.

So what happened at that forum and in the year between? It is no exaggeration to say I was emotionally affected by the event last year. Caryn and Debra have created a pivotal change of thinking. Caryn is no fluffy fashion reporter. Unlike the fanatical makeover TV "experts", she is not out to denigrate women with poor self-esteem solely for audience figures, she has genuine integrity underpinned by a lifetime's interest and knowledge of the fashion industry. Caryn represents the All Walks philosophy: real women, real feelings, and no apologies.

Our concept of Emotionally Considerate Design asks designers to be more considerate to a diverse range of body sizes, age, race and perceptions of beauty. Emotions are central to designers' working processes, but it is their design products that must communicate emotionally to the consumer, and the consumer needs to benefit emotionally from the product too!

From an educational viewpoint, we want our students to understand that a woman is not a faceless mannequin, or something to be objectified. We aspire to teach our designers of the future that women have feelings, will react emotionally to clothing, and use clothing to improve their mental and physical wellbeing.

At Edinburgh College of Art, we created the Icon project where we targeted students at the start of their fashion education and paired them with a diverse selection of women. The students worked closely with their Icon, and were asked to become emotionally considerate to her needs. These stunning women demonstrated to the students that the context for their work is ultimately a real woman.

Magazines demand that we buy into this hyper perfect world, where images are distorted and we end up living our lives feeling inadequate, unable to match the "perfect" skin, "perfect" symmetry and "perfect" bodies of computer-enhanced images.

By showing our students Emotionally Considerate Design we look forward to a future fashion industry where the key influencers are empathic towards women, who understand how diverse beauty ideals can be.

Why am I so committed to this initiative? I used to design for a well-known international brand - think diverse and happy models in campaigns wearing diverse colours and you might work it out. This label was not all it seemed behind the scenes. An Asian knitwear designer was mocked for her appearance and the way she spoke; the lack of respect for diversity and racial equality was perfectly masked by the high profile ad campaigns! I was once told I would go far in that team because I had blue eyes and a "nice face". The branding of that label back then was clearly not part of the design philosophy.

I do not find beauty only in [fashion models](#). Beauty is almost indefinable; a real person, a person who feels the world, and a person who respects people emotionally. Non-beauty is surely found in bullies, in closed-minded people who treat others badly yet never perceive this flaw objectively.

I will say that this is not a particularly beautiful industry. The fashion messaging you see is so often artificial, and this artifice is making you feel bad about yourself. This is a modern-day reality and a problem, and through this initiative we aim to change what you as the consumer accept as real.

I am proud to lead the change in acceptance of diverse beauty ideals, a change now firmly rooted in our present and future.

&#149 Mal Burkinshaw is head of fashion at Edinburgh College of Art

College sizes up models

EDINBURGH College of Art is blazing a trail by becoming the first fashion school in the UK to introduce size 18 mannequins to train the designers of the future.

While 40 per cent of the UK's female population is a size 16, the [fashion world](#) has suffered a wave of negative publicity in recent years for its use of "size zero" models - the American equivalent of a UK size 4 - on catwalks and in magazines.

The trend for underweight models has been criticised for encouraging eating disorders and poor body images among young women. In the UK around 1.6 million people, mainly aged 12 to 20, suffer from eating disorders. Of that number, 1.4 million are female.