Walking Mannequins
How Race and Gender Inequalities Shape Retail Clothing Work
JOYA MISRA, KYLA WALTERS

“This is a major contribution to the research on work, consumption, and aesthetic labor in the modern economy. It’s a compelling read that will have a significant impact on how we think about the racial and gendered dynamics of workplace inequality.”—Adia Harvey Wingfield, Mary Tileston Hemenway Professor of Arts and Sciences, Washington University in St. Louis

“Joya Misra and Kyla Walters offer important, unprecedented insights into work and inequality in an often overlooked sector: fashion retail. The book casts a bright light on how status-infused workplaces thoroughly discipline low-wage workers to promote sales and maintain the image of the brand, paying consistent attention to race. Walking Mannequins updates our knowledge of how technology and accelerated product cycles affect work processes in fast-fashion.”—Eileen Otis, author of Markets and Bodies: Women, Service Work, and the Making of Inequality in China

“This outstanding book is essential reading for anyone interested in interactive service work. It offers new theoretical insights and rich empirical data in an accessible and engaging text, highlighting how gender, race, class, and sexuality intersect to illuminate the stark reality of working in clothing retail.”—Dennis Nickson, coauthor of Aesthetic Labour

In malls across the United States, clothing retail workers navigate low wages and unpredictable schedules. Despite these problems, they devote time and money to mirror the sleek mannequins stylishly adorned with the latest merchandise. Bringing workers’ voices to the fore, sociologists Joya Misra and Kyla Walters demonstrate how employers reproduce gendered and racist “beauty” standards by regulating workers’ size and look. Interactions with customers, coworkers, and managers further reinforce racial hierarchies. New surveillance technologies also lead to ineffective corporate decision-making based on flawed data. By focusing on the interaction of race, gender, and surveillance, Walking Mannequins sheds important new light on the dynamics of retail work in the twenty-first century.

Joya Misra is Professor of Sociology and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She studies inequality from an intersectional perspective, including within workplace organizations. She has published in an array of journals and had coedited three books.

Kyla Walters is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Sonoma State University. She studies race, gender, labor, and education politics using qualitative methods. She has published in journals such as Sociology of Race and Ethnicity and in several edited volumes.

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