

## **INDIE MAJOR PODCAST**

**5/2/25 Ahmya McCoy**

### **Individualized Major: Fashion Business Inclusivity Studies**

**Ken:**

This is Indie Major, a show devoted to the wide-ranging stories and visions of individualized majors at the University of Connecticut. I'm your host, Ken Cormier.

**Ahmya:**

My name is Amaya McCoy. My individualized major is called Fashion Business Inclusivity Studies. And the theme is all centered around fashion, the fashion industry and the lack of, you know, having representation for inclusive communities or minoritized communities, such as the disabled, black and brown spaces and gender identities. Just kind of seeing that lack of the space in the fashion industry and wanting to launch my own brand in the future in that entrepreneurial spirit or working in a company that would have that aspect to work and make that happen in the in the company, if that makes sense.

**Ken:**

Totally. So you are obviously doing this major that you created

yourself here because what? Like, were you a different major before this or how did that all happen?

**Ahmya:**

Yeah. So I actually came in my freshman year into the School of Business and I was undecided in the School of Business. Shortly after, in my sophomore year, I declared marketing in the School of Business. But I always, since I was 15, kind of had this idea of where I wanted to go in my career of launching this clothing brand or working in fashion in some way, but in the business realm. So that's what took me to the business school. But the thing was, I didn't feel like marketing was fulfilling enough. And I was like, if I'm going to study something, I want to make sure that I'm doing what's right to me. And I'm not just trying to get a degree and just feel like, hey, OK, I'll work in office or whatever. And, you know, you won't be happy. And that's big for me.

So I remember there was someone, she actually graduated now, but when I was a freshman, her name was actually Amaya as well. She told me about the individualized major program and, you know, always kept it in the back of my head. So then when I was talking to my advisor from the business school at the time, I was like, you know what, why don't I just do the individualized major? It will work, especially with wanting to go abroad. That was a big thing for me in my four years. I wanted to make sure I go abroad as well. And I was like, let's just do it. I know fashion credits were not particularly on the campus, but that was fine because I already knew if I had to go abroad, it would be to go further that learning in that fashion realm.

**Ken:**

Yeah, that's right, because you have to go abroad to do the fashion. It's like the one major we run that you have to do a study abroad. Right. And since you already knew you wanted to do that, that's great that that worked out that way.

How long have you had this kind of vision for this sort of stuff you want to learn and the work you want to do? Does this go way back?

**Ahmya:**

Yeah. Yeah. So, I mean, it went back, I would say, when I was like 15. This is in high school, sophomore year. That's when I really made it a foundation. I was getting more into fashion. I'm from New York City. So it's in my blood, I feel like, with just the artistic realm of it all.

My father he actually was a trendsetter back in the day um in Harlem New York with um a big time guy named dapper dan he actually had transformed the realm of like hip-hop fashion and different things of that nature so it was always in my blood my dad was a seamstress as well my mom worked in the fashion industries so i seen it but i didn't feel connected to at the time my dad tried to teach me how to um so at a very young age but i was kind of like just like i took the one lesson And I'm like, all right, I don't know. It didn't feel right at the time, I guess.

And I also had different dreams. I wanted to be an Olympian because I always could run and do track. And then I also wanted to

be a veterinarian. But it turns out I'm allergic to dogs and cats. I mean, I could have still helped some other animals. But I didn't really want to go down to, like, hospital or doctor-nurse realm.

So anyways, when I was 15, I formed this love for fashion and also went in that moment, I started to understand my identity, being a non-binary person, understanding I'm more androgynous and there's like a spectrum to gender identity. And so I also felt like there was once I was learning that I was seeing that there is a lack in like the clothing and the expression for those that have that connection to their inner selves. That is the main realm of how people are going to express it to the outside world.

So I was just thinking like, you know, let's start sketching this brand. And I seen a lot of people at that time in my high school, they were making like a sweatsuit type of brands. And, you know, it was kind of like making me feel like, hey, I wasn't doing enough, but that's not how I wanted my brand to be. So I was like, I'm not just going to like iron something on a shirt and call it, oh, this is my brand. I actually want to take the time out to research it, go to school for it and understand the aspects to which what can happen. And I'm glad I did because there's so much nuances to it. And what I want to put out is like so much more complex.

**Ken:**

Wow. So you really have this thoughtful approach to that concept of fashion in this major. And then speaking of that, your whole capstone project, you've been working on this whole research project, which also extends some of that deep thinking, right, about not only what fashion means or how it can help people express

themselves, but also the way the industry works and all sorts of things. So why don't you talk for a little bit about what it is that you've been diving into for this research project?

**Ahmya:**

Definitely. So, you know, With that being said, going abroad, I really didn't really have the concept of sustainability quite yet until going abroad. And I think that is what started the idea for this capstone project is realizing that sustainability is becoming something in the fashion industry that they want to start to speak about. Or you see some companies doing certain lines with or using certain fibers that could be potentially more helpful for the environment.

But you know i started to realize that this it could just be all a lie in the fashion industry so the main research that i've been doing is the fast fashion realm particularly um in terms of like the carbon or the greenhouse gases that is producing people wanting to buy a certain bulk amount of clothing and then just get rid of it in the next couple or a year it's maximum well it's just like i've started to realize hey what are we really doing when it comes to clothes what does the meaning behind it.

But, you know, I also am talking about the back end of the industry and those people that are actually producing the bulkage of these clothing. What treatment are they getting? The labor exploitation behind it.

**Ken:**

Wow. So fast fashion, is that a term that's been around for a long time?

**Ahmya:**

Yes. So that's actually a good question because I kind of delved into it little bit i realize now so fast fashion was coined in 1990 so it was coined in a new york times article actually when zara the spanish-owned brand they started to take over a little bit more people were starting to like zara as a brand and they were trying to realize how can they make a big bulk bulkage of clothing from warehouse to um in store on the racks within two weeks and that's really when it became coined i believe 1990.

But when i delved a little bit more back it's like fast fashion actually was a thing technically starting from the industrial revolution from these inventions just from the sewing machine and just that's even when labor exploitation started or became more of a problem to people's eyes but it wasn't you know being looked at as an issue at the time. But I think now it's like, what are we doing? Like, you know, why are people still being treated this way? Or the demographics in which people are being treated, women not getting paid as much. And this is just in different industries. But particularly in this industry, it's just really degrading and dehumanizing.

**Ken:**

Another part of the Your Capstone Project too covers that other element of your major as well as looking at that industry in terms of how it is either addressing or not addressing different audiences right different um audiences who want fashion to express themselves in one way or another right

**Ahmya:**

Yes correct um but that's where it gets a little bit more complex as well because i mean i was even thinking about like if we really take uh you know gendered fashion out of the mix like take out women's section and men's section i think honestly i don't i really don't even know what the shape of the fashion industry would be because that's kind of what they rely on i think that like online shopping is a little bit different um there's some unisex clothes or you know they actually categorize it such as that but when you go inside a store directly there's like you know you ask somebody oh here this is this is the women's section this is the men's section.

I think that when it comes to fast fashion it's very hard for for it to be addressed in that way and i i feel like i'm trying to still find an answer but it's like hard to research.

**Ken:**

Right but could you almost imagine a company that does want to do something different that does want to look more closely at people's individual or different groups needs or desires for gender expression or whatever happens to be um but then still produces clothing that is problematic in other ways for the environment labor practices right

**Ahmya:**

You make a good point and this is what stumbles me it's like even if we're addressing one part of the problem we're still leaving all of these other issues here uh and it's just that's that's what gets complicated i feel like i i mean even in my sustainability of fashion class we kind of talked about that it's like i don't know if we can win all around the the these aspects but something has to give to a certain extent i think that it is possible to achieve that in some in some way i think that But when I decide to really launch my brand, that's what I would look to achieve, you know, using repurposed materials, using, you know, vegan fibers.

But it's like you're still using a lot of the, you know, well, you're going to be using greenhouse gases. It's going to still be, you know, emissions. But it's like you got to cut back. It's about cutting back. You still have to use the resources that's here, but you have to cut back and you have to give good treatment to your workers you have to make sure that the workers that are you know you maybe if you're you're having the manufacturers that they are getting the right treatment but it's like how can you ensure all this I get the question I get it.

**Ken:**

Yeah well it sounds like what you're saying is that the solution has to do with like say starting your own brand right a little bit more kind of local, individualized, right, smaller companies, right, that can actually produce things of a certain quality that aren't necessarily tasked with trying to just roll out as much stuff as you can to just throw into the world. And in some ways, that's probably the solution



in almost any realm that people are talking about, whether it's education or health care or whatever. Or this idea of like bringing things back to the communities, the smaller real communities of people that you're face to face with, you know, the food industry, all that kind of stuff.

So, yeah, I mean, I will say that in this particular moment, you must feel like as you do this project, watching the entire kind of international economic order.

**Ahmya:**

Yes.

**Ken:**

Things like, you know, this this real thrust against corporate regulation.

**Ahmya:**

Yes.

**Ken:**

Rather than progressing toward more sensible regulations. I don't know that. How does that how has that been jibing with with the stuff that you've been thinking about?

**Ahmya:**

It's really it's I mean, it's giving me more to discuss in the paper, but

it's it's really troubling because, I mean, like for those that want to to make a change in the industry and the business side of it, it's really hard to see the like not longevity, but in the immediate amount of years that we have right now within the next three years or so.

If you want to make a change it's really hard to see something happening that's different how could you even like i don't i don't know how we're going to discuss it when it comes to like the tariffs and different things like that are in place if you really want to make a change it's really hard.

**Ken:**

Right so do you see um do you see more traveling in your future or more international work or what's next for you

**Ahmya:**

Yeah I do, I really did love Europe um a lot so I really I want to I want to delve a little bit more into Europe. I want to I want to delve into Africa as well. I want to see Asia. I think Asia is actually next. I might go to Japan soon um the fashion industry there is really big, but I think that that's actually Asia is like where a lot of the manufacturing is actually also happening for a lot of brands as well. So I would need to see like the like really the back end of everything. That would be really interesting for me to see. And it will actually like further the research that I'm not able to do until I'm there firsthand to see.

**Ken:**

Well, that sounds exciting. It was great to talk to you.

**Ahmya:**

Great to talk to you as well.

**Ken:**

Thanks for listening to Indie Major. If you'd like more information about individualized and interdisciplinary studies at the University of Connecticut, please visit our website at [iisp.uconn.edu](http://iisp.uconn.edu). That's [iisp.uconn.edu](http://iisp.uconn.edu). We'd also like to thank UConn Enrichment Programs and WHUS UConn Radio for their support of this show.