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The Intersection of Fashion and Politics: A
Semiotic Analysis of Vogue Magazine
Covers Surrounding Election Seasons

Megan M. Vincent

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Intersection of Fashion and Politics: A Semiotic Analysis of Vogue Magazine Covers Surrounding Election Seasons

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This study explores the political messages framed within the cover of *Vogue* magazines by reviewing the published issues that surround election season. By focusing on the intersection of politics and fashion through the visual representation provided by a prestigious, globally known fashion magazine, the research will observe the potential increase and growth of political involvement within influence of the fashion industry. This study will begin with the October, November, and December covers from the 2016 and 2020 presidential election. These will be accompanied by the January, February, and March covers of the following years. Guided by semiotic analysis and visual rhetoric theories, this study will focus on developing this upcoming avenue of research by exploring how fashion is utilizing its power to bring attention to current events within a political atmosphere. While typically seen as feminine, *Vogue* magazine has been able to tap into a variety of audiences including previously politically charged groups such as feminists. As such, this research will allow for new insight regarding the overarching effects of visual media as seen through magazines, as well as their potential impact with targeted audiences.

Keywords: fashion, Vogue, feminism, women in politics, semiotic analysis, rhetoric

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Introduction

During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Anna Wintour, head editor for *Vogue* magazine, published her letter from the editor with a request for voters to select Hillary Clinton when casting their ballots (Wintour, 2016). This direct call-to-action firmly established *Vogue*'s political standing and openly encouraged its audience to follow suit. Previously, such a blatant political endorsement had never before been made in the magazine itself; rather, *Vogue* was known to have simply highlighted the elected leader after his win and potentially run a spread about the First Lady later on (Wintour, 2016). The direct statement in 2016, however, presented *Vogue* magazine in a new light—repositioning its influence within the fashion industry as well as throwing its hat into the ring of politics.

Political commentary in media content is nothing new; however, with the advancement of communication methods, the mediums in which messages are transported have drastically evolved. From YouTube channels to Twitter battles, technology has enabled many individuals to express their opinions freely across a variety of global platforms. This digital distribution has also created an interesting power dynamic as differentiating issues and trends circulate worldwide based on current circumstances. Each of these are then disseminated in rounds of debate both in person, as well as through a variety of social media platforms; all based on their importance and overarching effect on the individuals involved. It is no surprise then, that one of the most highly debated topics both online and in person is politics.

Before its statement during the 2016 election, *Vogue* magazine, and by extension, the fashion industry, had not often been recognized as a viable power player—especially within the political field. Likewise, magazines themselves have seemed almost obsolete due to modern technology (Abrahamson, 2015). However, the unique relationship between *Vogue* and its

readers maintains a strength that perseveres through technological advances. According to author Abrahamson, “magazine practitioners and publishers who can meet the demands of [their audience] are likely to not just survive but flourish” (2015, p. 4). This is something in which *Vogue* has successfully incorporated for years. Landing at number 5 on the A-list for magazines, as well as having a 6.1% increase, *Vogue* is steadily increasing their influence and outreach through traditional means regardless of the advances in technology (Ives, 2007).

In the past, much of the fashion industry’s influence was overlooked due to its contemporary-styled editorials and more theatrical runway shows. In recent years, fashion has become a highly visible platform utilized by many individuals to express opinions about current society, including controversial topics such as politics. A vast majority of the political opinion within the industry has evolved alongside significant social events and political movements. This evolution has provided a powerful voice to historically oppressed groups—particularly women—by utilizing a visual showcase of mediums to command attention and present previously repressed voices with new volume.

The study that will follow explores the political messages visually represented across the cover of *Vogue* magazines by reviewing the published issues that surround election season, starting in 2016 and ending in 2021. By focusing on the intersection of politics and fashion through the visual representation provided by a prestigious, globally known fashion magazine, the research will observe the potential increase and growth of political involvement within the fashion industry. To better understand this political involvement, a brief highlight of key historical intersections between both politics and fashion will be addressed. This will also include the important involvement of the feminist movement, its origins, and how it came to be woven within the current society’s political narrative. As such, this study will utilize semiotic

and rhetorical methods to explore how fashion has, and is, using its influence to bring attention to current events within a political atmosphere.

Literature Review

A Political Timeline

Within the United States, political opinion can be considered a staple part of being an American. Since America itself was born out of differing political opinions back in 1776 (Ramsay & Cohen, 1990), politics themselves have become an integral part of American society. Likewise, much of the political dialogue perpetuated throughout America is reflected in the key attitudes of society—especially through visual means. Fashion itself is a heavily visual medium, using strong imagery to convey a variety of themes, ideology, and storytelling. Andrew Bolton, Wendy Yu Curator in Charge of The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art stated that “fashion functions as a mirror to our times, so it is inherently political” (qtd. in Singer, 2020, para. 3). Similarly, fashion has a unique ability to parallel the political feelings of a community by maintaining a touch on the pulse of trending issues. Bolton continued saying, “It’s [fashion] been used to express patriotic, nationalistic, and propagandistic tendencies as well as complex issues related to class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality” (qtd. in Singer, 2020, para. 3). As such, the history of fashion and politics has continually been interwoven with one another, bouncing back and forth between both influence and influencer.

The Suffragettes

To better understand this conjoined narrative, it is important to showcase key moments where these two topics have crossed on the timeline of history. To begin, one of the most noteworthy intersections occurred in the late 1800s with the suffragette movement. The Women’s Rights Convention, which was held in New York City in 1848, provided a foundation

for change regarding current gender roles by starting public dialogue concerning women, politics, and representation on voting ballots (Browne, 2014). This convention and its premise to fight for women's voting rights sparked waves of political controversy, with many individuals debating back and forth regarding its acceptability and necessity (Rolley, 1990). Likewise, this feminist 'first wave' was strongly connected with "an egalitarian consciousness and a reformist approach," that was directed at the political powers of the time (Titton, 2019, p. 6). Due to the strong controversy this issue presented, many individuals utilized whatever means they had available to showcase either their support or disapproval—a large part of which was presented through style and dress.

Using fashion as a means of personal expression is not new, and the suffragettes of the time took the ideals of individual image and reputation into account during their pursuit for women's rights. In her book titled *Life Errant*, journalist and suffragette Cicely Hamilton wrote that "...the militant suffragette movement was...attached to dress and appearance, [with] its insistence on the feminine note" (1935, p. 75). This insight helps to showcase the fact that the suffragettes established a particular image early on during their campaign for women's rights. In doing so, they were able to better present themselves—and their party's reputation—to outsiders and opposers (Rolley, 1990). By selecting a more feminine fashion look, suffragettes ensured that their message would not be tarnished by a lack of visual appeal, playing forward into their strength of femininity. This feminine preference would continue onward with the next generation of suffragettes as the struggle for women's rights continued during the 1900s.

This political stance, and its controversy, did not disappear when it first lost momentum during the 1800s (Rolley, 1990). Instead, the Members of the Women's Social and Political Union group (WSPU) was formed as a result (Rolley, 1990). According to author Rolley, the

“WSPU was soon the largest and most notorious of the individual suffrage societies” (1990, p. 48). In order to maintain their standing and further their success, the WSPU followed many of the same steps of their predecessors, building off the foundation of their previous experience (Rolley, 1990). This was clearly showcased when it came to carefully recultivating their image to coincide with popular opinion.

At the time, the members of the WSPU were critically aware of their visual presence, and the negative commentary surrounding their political appeals. In fact, many rumors labeled suffragettes as an “extremely unpleasant person, a frump” (qtd. in Rolley 1990, p. 51). These negative comments seemed to heavily connect suffragettes with a more masculine and unladylike persona. As such, the women involved mindfully created a subtle wardrobe that contradicted those opinions. Hamilton similarly stated that “in the WSPU...all suggestion of the masculine was carefully avoided” (1935, p. 75). By shunning a more masculine genre, the members of the WSPU strove to diligently represent themselves and their suffrage ideology in the best light by aligning themselves with current fashion trends. However, this would change with the upcoming generation.

The Contrast of Second Wave Feminism

As time progresses, feminism has taken on the values of each new generation, signifying a transition to new ideas and adapted interpretation of feminism (Finneman & Volz, 2020). During the second wave movement, many feminists strongly opposed the female image that was presented by the fashion industry through *Vogue* magazine during the 1950s and 1960s (Groeneveld, 2009). Likewise, *The Feminine Mystique* accused fashion magazines of exploiting women and creating a false image of women in general; one that was solely focused on the pursuit of a man without any outside or original thought (Lebovic, 2019b). This heavy critique of

women's fashion magazines continued throughout the second wave feminist movement, and many feminist individuals sought to distance themselves from the 'fashion approved' standard of feminine dress (Lebovic, 2019b). Fashion editor Debbie Stroller wrote that the "traditional feminist approach to fashion [was] criticize it as tyrannical" (Groeneveld, 2009, p. 6). Many feminists chose to wear clothing that directly contrasted with the standards of fashion as a visual protest (Groeneveld, 2009, p. 7). This opposing way of dress emphasized the distance between feminism and fashion, fueling a relationship that was tense, judgmental, and negative for nearly two decades.

Contrastingly, modern society has found a way to bridge the gap between feminism and the fashion industry. This alliance centered on the ideology of embracing femininity as a part of feminism, triggering feminist theory to undergo a significant alteration in order to accept make-up, personal styling, and fashion as methods of self-expression and individual liberation (Titton, 2019). Thus, reconciliation was a deliberate choice made by third wave feminists as a result of changing attitudes (Lebovic, 2019b).

Embracing Third Wave Feminism

Originated during the late 1900s and has continued into the mid 2000s, third wave feminism was initiated with sexual harassment testimony of Anita Hill in 1991 (Finneman & Volz, 2020). This wave of feminism emphasized a "women's status in American life and, in particular, their exclusion from the halls of power" (Witt et al., 1995, p. 10). As time progressed, a large portion of third wave feminism focused on the breakthrough of female aptitudes, highlighting their ability to succeed in the field of politics (Finneman & Volz, 2020). Similarly, it promoted a more inclusive outreach that worked to "expand the ideological parameters of feminism [through]...identity-centered politics, queer theory, intersectionality, ecofeminism, and

cyberfeminism” (Titton, 2019, p. 6). This ideology and pressure to include women in political dialogue was further perpetuated with assistance of the internet, as many “third-wavers used the internet, to spread music, videos, blogs, zines, and art, breaking the conventional gendered relationship between (male) production and (female) consumption” (qtd. in Finneman & Volz, 2020, para. 10). By showcasing the current divide and outdated pressures of previously conceived gender norms, this new wave of feminism was able to bolster female representation and participation in formerly excluded areas. An emphasis that was further cemented with the influence of *Vogue* fashion magazine.

A Woman’s Magazine

First published in 1892, *Vogue* magazine was originally marketed for all the upper classes of America including men and women; however, within a few years the demographic changed to focus solely on women (Lebovic, 2019b). During the early stages of this demographic, *Vogue* structured their magazine in a particular way that allowed them to appeal to a variety of women regardless of their political stance (Lebovic, 2019b). This eventually led to a political inclusion within *Vogue* magazine overtime, enabling all women to participate in fashion consumption regardless of their partisan affiliation.

To stay marketable for their entire audience, *Vogue* was able to brand itself as the sole ‘fashion Bible’ that every woman needed to not only be fashionable, but to be received well in society (Lebovic, 2019a). During the 1940s especially, *Vogue* highlighted a specific designer and featured a variety of their designs modeled and styled throughout the magazine; creating an easier way for the modern woman to know and incorporate fashion-forward dress into her own wardrobe. Readers began to easily recognize not only the designer, but also the trends that were set by the newly created fashion pieces. According to Church, a professor at the London College

of Fashion, “Dior’s ‘New Look’ of 1947...influenced high street fashions for the next decade” (2018, p. 482). Church also noted that many of the following designs featured similar attributes of the original collection including “overly-feminized, physically restricting” clothing (2018, p. 482). The perceived physical limitations of these new styles began to provoke questioning of *Vogue*’s honest intent regarding their audience’s wellbeing, as well as the potential motive behind the fashion industry itself.

A Change of Opinion

During the 1930s and 1940s, American fashion was balanced upon foreign design influences that stemmed from Europe (Strassel, 2013). Many of the editorial choices made by *Vogue* magazine replicated the fashion trends of France, Italy, and England. The creation of Dior’s hyperfeminine ‘New Look’ was particularly popular in America, since it focused on the traditional female figure, and further emphasized the trends of European fashion in current society (Church, 2018). However, American women recognized that *Vogue*, and the fashion industry, needed to be changed in order to better reflect their individual ideas on the fashion world as a whole (Strassel, 2013).

As such, America soon produced a revolutionary style of clothing that helped reshaped the content of *Vogue* by influencing and altering the fashion precedent of the magazine in later years. This clothing revolution pivoted on the removal of boned underclothes (waist-cinching garments that were built with whalebone or stiff rods to contour the waist to an unnatural shape) as a foundation for fashion, since such garments hyper-idolized an unrealistic ‘hourglass’ silhouette and prevented freedom of movement (Strassel, 2013). In order to combat this prevalent fashion trend, American designers created a variety of new fashion options including power suits, lounge wear, and a brand-new sportswear aesthetic; all of which focused on

maneuverability and comfort for the everyday woman (Strassel, 2013). This new style creation came to be known objectively as ‘American Style’ and provided women with an alternative to previously restrictive fashion trends (Sternadori & Hagseth, 2014).

Over time, *Vogue* was able to attune itself to the needs of its demographic and provide audience members with the means necessary to be successful in their fashion pursuits. This was done by altering fashion trends to better reflect current American opinion, enabling *Vogue* magazine to show that it sought progressive, fashion-based ideas and representation for its readers (Lebovic, 2019a). As such, the conscious decisions to change fashion in the face of global influence and current politics helped solidify *Vogue* as a viable, trustworthy medium that was attune to the needs of its demographic. Building on this trust would establish *Vogue* as a reliable source to carry the message of shifting opinions by providing their audience with accurate information—especially during the politically charged atmosphere of the 2016 presidential election.

2016 Challenges Female Leadership

The presidential election in 2016 was drastically different from previous election seasons for a variety of reasons. One of the most prevalent causes included the rise of incivility and the perpetuating idea of ‘fake news’ that surrounded both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton (Rossini et al., 2021). In fact, recorded research studying the news and social media dialogue shows that this election was one of the most negative at the time due to extreme hostility between candidates (Fowler et al., 2016). A large majority of this negativity was fueled by Donald Trump—and his Twitter account—in which he “made personal attacks and name-calling a common occurrence” (Rossini et al., 2021). As stated by authors Rossini, Stromer-Galley, Zhang, and Feifei, “Trump’s vulgar rhetoric provoked a public perception of negativity around

the campaign” (2021, p. 90). In large part, the negative dialogue of Trump’s personal attacks focused on Hillary Clinton being a woman in politics; which was a position Trump felt she did not qualify for (Stromer-Galley, 2020). Similarly, this social media activity also led to many news sources, like *The New York Times*, to further amplify Trump’s attacks by giving him additional media attention when they covered his posts during their news stories (Stromer-Galley, 2020). As such, this posting and news coverage converged into a continuous cycle that fueled ideas of ‘fake news’ and rumors regarding both candidates. Thus, the 2016 election campaign evolved to a political race that was heavily charged with personal motive and value defense, including the place of women in politics.

During this time, the value of women’s rights came under intense scrutiny, as many—including Trump—questioned whether they belonged in politics. This doubt was heavily insinuated by Trump and his campaign, as he pursued every means to diminish and undervalue his opponent Clinton (Stromer-Galley, 2020). An example of this clear sexism towards women, especially those in politics, was referenced with the release of the *Access Hollywood* Tape (AHT) a month before the 2016 election (Rhodes et al., 2020). Containing a conversation between Trump and Billy Bush (co-host of *Access Hollywood*), “...the release of the AHT featured, in his own voice, Trump’s unambiguously predatory, stereotypical, and misogynistic attitudes toward women in general” (Rhodes et al., 2020, para. 4). This type of material seemed to stem from the fact that Trump’s opponent was female (Sides, et al., 2018). As such, “the electoral competition between Trump and Clinton, the first woman major party nominee in American history, elicited gendered (and racialized, and classed) reactions” (Rhodes et al., 2020, para 4). Thus, Trump’s commentary helped spark a subtext questioning women’s rights and their position within the field of politics (Rhodes et al., 2020).

Although Clinton was a highly qualified candidate for the presidential election, Trump was able to diminish her abilities through his misogynistic rhetoric (Sides et al., 2018). At the time Clinton “had extraordinary experience herself—as a first lady, where she was involved not only in the ceremonial aspects of the job but also in policy making and strategy, as a senator from New York, and as secretary of state” (Sides et al., 2018, p. 102). However, much of Trump’s campaign appealed to the demographic of Caucasian men, especially those that believed more fully in the “political hierarchy” of men ruling women “because it was the hierarchy of [their] home” (Beinart, 2019, para. 5). Political scientist Valerie M. Hudson further explained this ideology by stating that “leaders and their male subjects forged a social contract: men agreed to be ruled by other men in return for all men ruling over women” (qtd. in Beinart, 2019, para. 5). As such, this pressure to return to a more ‘traditional’ home setting—one in which men ruled over women—sparked fear and outrage amongst many American women. The rights that their forebearers had fought so diligently for, and the progression that had taken place, seemed to be on the brink of reversal with Trump’s presidential candidacy.

This building pressure, and Trump’s subsequent win, emboldened women, and other supportive individuals to gather as a combined unit under the cause of feminism to protest such remarks, and their underlying meaning (Strolovitch et al., 2017). By unifying under the banner of feminism, these individuals were able to protest what might happen to women in the future, by standing their ground on the rights they had obtained from years past (Titton, 2019). Though Trump succeeded in winning the presidential election, this group continued to amplify their voices and protest his sexist statements. With a variety of slogans including “Our Minds Our Bodies Our Power,” “The Future Is Female,” “Nevertheless She Persisted,” “We Should All Be Feminists,” “Nasty Woman,” “Pussy Grabs Back”— these groups marched in response to Trump

and his contrasting values; showcasing their determination to be heard and not be dismissed (Titton, 2019, p. 784). As such, these messages—bolstered with the support and unity of feminist ideology—established a new brand of female empowerment for the modern era. In doing so, they also created the framework for the newest trend of political fashion.

Now Trending: Political Fashion

As feminism became fashionable, it created a unique prism of consumerism that enabled the fashion industry to sell feminist ideology as ‘trendy’ to a younger demographic audience (Lebovic, 2019a). This modernized feminism focused on a woman’s choice to express herself as a celebrated individual (Riley & Scharff Gibson, 2013). It emphasized using contemporary beauty, such as make up routines and mirroring fashion trends, as a way for women to showcase their individuality and unique attributes without diminishing their belief in feminism overall (Titton, 2019). As such, third wave feminism reached a level of acceptance and understanding with the fashion industry that differed greatly from previous generations (Riley & Scharff Gibson, 2013). Thus, a new generation of feminists began to accept and implement fashion as a way to express both their feminist beliefs as well as showcase how they experienced living within a patriarchal society as women.

Similarly, the deliberate reconciliation between fashion and feminism—heightened by *Vogue* magazine’s refined publications and third wave feminist approval of feminine routines—enabled the fashion industry to create a powerful springboard with which to launch their political activism (Butterwick, 2017). It is important to understand how merging and supporting the feminist ideology enabled the fashion industry to increase their audience while also gaining a persuasive political agenda; thus, setting the stage for the newest fashion trend. One possible name for this trend is “political fashion,” which features bold, political statements made openly

by designers and fashion-lovers alike. According to Titton, “we are witnessing...an uncommon politicization of fashion as an expression of protest and dissent” (2019, p. 1). Political fashion began trending and gaining momentum during 2016, and has since erupted across the world, (Titton, 2019). From magazine publications to runway shows, fashion has created a new, highly visual platform on which to project its political stance within society at large.

The Power of Support

One powerful example of political fashion was seen with Maria Grazia Chiuri’s February 2020 fashion show for Dior. This show contrasted greatly with the norm of most fashion shows due to its heavy feminist overtures. In this case, the clothing was less on show than the artwork encompassing the entire runway. During the entire runway progression, neon-colored signs flashed the messages “consent,” “Women Raise the Uprising,” and “Patriarchy Kills Love” (Penrose, 2020, pp. 4). These signs, designed in collaboration with noted feminist artist Clair Fontaine, paid homage to past feminist activists from around the world and their previous battle cries against misogyny and societal oppression (Penrose, 2020). However, this homage was not the only significant aspect of the show.

Dior’s show also had a uniquely timed undercurrent that greatly enhanced the message of feminism. This show occurred nearly 24 hours after the conviction of entertainment executive Harvey Weinstein for multiple accounts of sexual assault and rape (Penrose, 2020). As such, the message of female strength and validity in usurping a patriarchally enforced ‘rape culture’ was highly prevalent. This was further visualized by designer Chiuri as she placed heavy emphasis on the word ‘consent’ which was given three separate signs that flagged the runway. Each “consent” sign was larger than the other messages and hung directly over the model’s entrance portal as well as at each ‘pose point’ down the runway; notably directing the eye towards it at every

opportunity (Penrose, 2020). Not only did this show reinforce the message of the #metoo movement that had been building momentum months earlier, it also provided a widely broadcasted platform with which to showcase the feminist outrage and voice against patriarchal oppression.

Another major example of political activism can be seen with the radical transformation of *Teen Vogue*. Although *Teen Vogue* is not as popular as its older sister, this magazine still has an impressive audience in North America (Keller, 2020). Its “March for Our Lives” cover story had significant impact by presenting a politically charged statement across all their platforms, including both print and digital publishing (Keller, 2020). This story covered a singular political position regarding gun control by highlighting the damage and violence of school shootings in America (Keller, 2020). Utilizing strong visuals in both print and website publications, *Teen Vogue* sharply critiqued the repeatability of mass shooting occurring in the United States, holding not only the shooters responsible, but the politicians and accepting societal norms as well (Keller, 2020). The accusations of this magazine were highlighted by young women, with shocking imagery that explicitly features these women standing together with signs that read “You’re Killing Us” and torn target symbols (Keller, 2020). By using only women in the imagery, this cover story showed the bold power of an all-female stance; further emphasizing the impact of the feminist agenda and the influence of American female.

These examples have showcased the changing tides of power within the fashion industry, detailing the methods that many individuals have used to present their political fashion statements. Although their methods are significant, it is important to note that their coverage and support was cataloged by *Vogue* (Singer, 2020). Thus, *Vogue* magazine helped provide the weight behind each of these individuals statements. This backing not only establishes *Vogue*

even more firmly as a source of influence, but it also makes it a prime authority on the up-and-coming political fashion trend (Singer, 2020). As such, *Vogue* magazine has helped solidify and support these political statements by backing it with full support.

Although political fashion has created impressive impact within society—one that resonates with the younger generation—it is still quite juvenile in terms of social movement progression (Bremner, 2020). Political fashion has just begun to showcase its prowess in stimulating dialogue between societal and political figureheads (Titton, 2019). Likewise, some of the new imagery utilized can be complicated for new viewers to understand. The steps taken by *Vogue* magazine have helped further the outreach of political fashion by providing additional support and influence (Bremner, 2020). However, there is still room for visual literacy when it comes to fully understanding the messages presented. Thus, there is space for an adaptation of visual message comprehension.

Theoretical Application

The Theory of Semiotics

Due to the rapid advancements of modern technology, visual messaging has dramatically increased throughout society (Stacks, Salwen, & Eichhorn, 2019). With the help of smart phones, tablets, and social media, individuals can view, save, and share their favorite content instantly. Fashion itself is heavily visual, using strong imagery to convey themes, ideology, and storytelling. Due to this, fashion neatly falls within the analysis category of semiotics since it incorporates such high levels of visuals to present its messaging. Similarly, semiotics is uniquely suited to visual analysis as it is a vast field that specializes in complex analysis of visual mediums and their underlying motifs, specifically focusing on the relationship between items like the signifier and the signified (Connolly, 2002).

Semiotics was first established by researchers Saussure and Peirce, who developed two various theories regarding the study of images (Berger, 2017). To begin, Ferdinand de Saussure's book *A Course in General Linguistics* focused on the relationships that were applied between concepts, dividing them into the category of sign and signified (Berger, 2017). According to Saussure, semiology focused on the language of signs with "language [being] a system of signs that express ideas," which could be studied scientifically (Berger, 2017, p. 7). This terminology provided "the most influential gift" by allowing individuals to finally be able to create distinction between images and establish a solidified connection between the image and its effect on society (Starwarska, 2014 pp. 23).

Additionally, this foundation created a better understanding for researchers "by tying a graphic and/or acoustic sign to the signified idea...[so] the signifier/signified distinction establishes the autonomy of language with respect to reality" (Starwarska, 2014, pp. 23). This helped create realistic ties within the messaging presented alongside the influence of the current societal trends (Starwarska, 2014). According to Berger, this merger was critical in furthering the development of semiotics as a valid research avenue (2017). Likewise, Saussure's lectures provided clarification since signs were able to be "differentiated from any other sign within the system or code to which it belong[ed]" (Maasik & Solomon, 2012, p.9). However, Saussure's original theory lacked flexibility since it only dealt with the two variables of the sign and its respective signifier (Starwarska, 2014). Starwarska argued that "the essential feature of Saussure's [theory] is that...it can be identified only by contrast with co-existing signs" (2014, pp. 23). As such, Saussure's theory failed to maintain currency with the upcoming trends of modern society (Starwarska, 2014).

Contrastingly, the second influence of the theory of semiotics incorporated a larger tier of variation (Berger, 2017). The idea of dividing signs into three categorical aspects was introduced with Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher (Berger, 2017). His theory's foundation focused on breaking a sign down into "their iconic, indexical, and symbolic dimensions" (Berger, 2017, p. 4). According to Berger, icon relates to the resemblance of visual connection made by an audience, while index refers to the more casual connection that takes insight by the audience, and symbol is tied to society's convention and what each member must learn during the observation process (2017, p. 4). Similarly, Peirce was able to create a tying connection between signs and history, enabling a more dynamic understanding (Maasik & Solomon, 2012, p. 10). In this sense, Berger argues that Peirce's semiotics has more impact within research and society as it effects three various circles of commonplace communication rather than just the dual components of Saussure's signifier and signified (2017).

Peirce's semiotics also connects to the semiotic theories presented by Roland Barthes. According to the *Sign Systems Studies* publication, Barthes preferred semiotic method focused on "concepts...[and] tools for the exploration of differences in signification...[leading] to an active work of interpretation" (Veivo, 2008, p. 2). This method helped to establish potential meanings from the viewed signs by "expose[ing] different possibilities of interpretation" (Veivo, 2008, p. 2). This was particularly valuable as it provided a way to define a "second-order semiological system" or its "metalanguage" enabling a signifier to develop secondary levels of meaning according to its context (Howells & Negreiros, 2019, p. 129) In doing so, Barthes was able to broaden the idea of semiotics by attaching cultural value and personal significance to the semiotic meaning through this additional level; enhancing what could be understood by the grouped message. In doing so, he established the "concept of semiotic layering" enabling a better

understanding of how sign systems are combined to make not only “a tune, but...a whole semiotic symphony” (Howells & Negreiros, 2019, p. 137). As such, Barthes was able to remove the stricter hierarchization that had been previously established with semiotic research (Veivo, 2008). Rather, he was able to build off foundations of semiotic studies and expand the ideology to comprehend how semiotics were able to work together as a combined whole.

To better understand the underlying messaging of the signs and signifiers presented in *Vogue* magazine covers, this study incorporates aspects from Saussure, Barthes, and Peirce’s semiotic studies. Each researcher contributed valuable aspects that will be modified to better fit my personal research study. As such, this process will involve four steps: beginning analysis of the subject (including identifying the key signs presented in the cover image), identifying how the sign and signifier are expressed (including which coded region their relationship belongs in), noting the three categorical aspects of both the sign and the signifier (iconic, indexical, and symbolic dimensions), and an analysis of the cultural and personal significance attached to the semiotic meaning. Finally, the entire semiotic structure will be analyzed as a grouped whole to better understand the message overtone presented when combined. By incorporating this structure, the research will be able to create a solid foundation regarding each sign and its attributed meanings, which will help increase the depth of analysis due to the increase of information and context. Thus, combining these together will help broaden the insight available when viewing *Vogue* magazine covers, providing better understanding of the whole image.

Adding Rhetorical Schema

Although semiotics provides a foundation for understanding the meaning of signs, it still lacks in its ability to understand the entire rhetoric of the visual piece (Berger, 2017). According to Malcolm Sillars (2017), semiotics focuses entirely on the meaning of the signs themselves

rather than the potential meanings available when viewed with other images. Thus, only using a semiotic analysis with this study would result in a lack of accuracy since the sole focus would be on the individual signs rather than how they work in tandem to create a whole image (Sillars, 1991). This then opens the discussion to theoretical foundations of multimedia and the benefits of combining the theory of semiotics with a rhetorical schema.

According to authors Connolly and Phillips, multimedia can be defined as “the coherent combination of at least two different media of communication in the conveying of messages” (2002, p. 169). Both authors establish that multimedia is interwoven with the study of semiotics; however, by introducing the foundations of multimedia culture, semiotic analysis is able to be further broken down in six categories according to subcategories without losing the value of each aspect (Connolly, 2002). These categories include the levels of: “social world, pragmatics, semantics, syntactics, empirics, and the physical world” (Connolly, 2002, p.171). These researchers believe that each of these levels offer “a tool for identifying and focusing upon particular aspects of multimedia communication...and [compares] how they may be similar or different from one another at given levels of abstraction” (Connolly, 2002, p. 173). Thus, this hierarchy of break down enables researchers to better recognize and understand individual components of the media’s message by singling it out from its other parts without stripping the other aspects of value (Connolly, 2002). In doing so, Connolly and Phillip establish that semiotics provide an adequate foundation for multimedia study; however, additionally subcategorizations are needed to fully encompass the overarching message.

Presented by Sonja Foss, rhetorical schema builds off the foundation of semiotics to create a better method for evaluating visual imagery (Foss, 2009). Foss states that using rhetoric to study “visual imagery...may contribute to the formulation or reconceptualization of aesthetic

notions that unnecessarily restrict... visual phenomena” (2009, p. 213). Within her research, Foss disseminates the wide variety of theories and methods used to evaluate visual media. She even addresses the potential that semiotics provides; however, she also notes the flaw within the theory when it comes to visual message interpretation. Foss argues that “semiotics provides no means for judging or evaluating meanings that are identified” (2009, p.214). Thus, Foss identifies a gap within the theory of semiotics, and presents her own alternative in order to satisfy this need.

Foss’s alternative schema follows three steps to fully assess the medium and its messaging. First, the primary concepts are identified including their communication function, which is then assessed in accordance with the selected artifacts before ending with its suggested contributions in both aesthetic and rhetoric (Foss, 2009). This process, according to Foss, would enable researchers to provide a more thorough analysis of the entire message by including the effect of its surrounding objects or features—thus leading to a better understanding of the message’s meaning overall (2009). Following this theory and application, Foss states that this process would provide more space for critical judgments regarding visual messaging, enabling researchers to have more depth within their analysis, as they would be able to surpass any basic hierarchy that might restrict the message due to simplified categories (2009).

Methodology

Research Questions

Combining these two theories allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the cover content published on the *Vogue* magazine. It is assumed that *Vogue* intentionally uses their authority to create a direct intersection into politics during the election season—enabling them to influence their audience regarding party affiliation and support. Therefore, an examination of the semiotics

used to visually convey these messages is crucial to understand how *Vogue* magazine attempts to insert their opinion in both a subtle and non-subtle way with their readers. As such, this study posed the following research questions:

RQ1: How are political ideologies visually depicted in both images and text on *Vogue* magazine covers?

RQ2: Does *Vogue* try to appear non-partisan with their political representation? If so, what attempts are made?

RQ3: How successful are these covers at fulfilling their rhetorical objectives by presenting comprehensible political information to their audience?

Magazine Content Selection

To maintain an unbiased analysis of *Vogue* magazine, and its intersection with politics, this study proposes a review of the various publications that surround the United States Presidential election season. For this study, the unit of analysis will be *Vogue* magazine covers. Since political fashion trend started during the 2016 election, the study began with its magazine selection in that same year. Likewise, the magazine selection also included the covers from the subsequent election season of 2020. Additionally, *Vogue* has been known to cover the winning individual following their successful election campaign. As such, this study proposed using the October, November, and December publications of the presidential election year of 2016 and 2020, as well as the following January, February, and March issues to accurately assess the political influence and narrative told by *Vogue* and the fashion industry. Ultimately, using these criteria for selection, a semiotic analysis covering 12 *Vogue* cover images total was conducted.

Conducting the Analysis

For the initial assessment of *Vogue* magazine covers, basic information about the publication was noted. The overall format of this analysis structure was built on the foundation of Keren's semiotic analysis of the Charlie Hebdo magazine cover (2018). However, this study modified the recorded traits to better fit the research questions. As such, this adapted framework included: the cover star, their gender, the posing and position of the model, the color palate used for both the model and the font, the style, size, and placement of the font, the stories or content highlighted, as well as the positive and negative space utilized. The month and year of publication was also noted. For research records, the date and week that the coding was conducted was also recorded.

To create a better foundation for this research, it is vital to utilize the structure that past studies have incorporated. As previously stated, the beginning groundwork for this study was based on Keren's semiotic analysis of the Charlie Hebdo magazine cover (2018). Similarly, this study will also include two additional aspects: the content selection from Goodnow's *Visual Bias in Time's "The Great Divide": A Semiotic Analysis of Clinton and Obama Photographs* (2010) and the three metafunctions of communications designed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). To begin, Goodnow reviews *Time's* photo essay "The Great Divide" which features eight photos of both Barrack Obama and Hillary Clinton during the 2008 election (2010). Published between pages 20-27 of the magazine, these alternating prints potentially showcase the bias that visual media can inspire because of framing and semiotic understanding. Likewise, Goodnow's analysis centers on the image analysis; breaking down each into categories of color (black and white), shapes (triangles, primary shapes), individuals compared to groups, point of view (vision, line of sight of model), angle of shot, photographic composition (lighting, exposure, aperture),

subject, focus, included prop objects (office, chairs, notes, props), etc (2010, p. 410). As such, these aspects will be included in analyzing the cover pages of *Vogue* magazine. Both the content categories and image amount help to provide a solidified base to justify my own research selection.

Similarly, the semiotic process of Kress and Van Leeuwen provide additional structure in which to build my own research method. Authors Kress and Van Leeuwen established a semiotic approach that sorted visual imagery—like magazine content—into three categories titled as ‘metafunctions’ (1996). These three metafunctions include ideational (the way in which signs represent the real world), interpersonal (which explores the relationship among the sign, the producer of the sign, and the receiver of the sign), and textual (which focuses on the complex signs that form a whole, both within and for the context in which they are found) (1996). In doing so, Kress and Van Leeuwen were able provide additional context and understanding of imagery, since they processed each aspect of the symbology and how it pertained to its surrounding environment. As such, adding this portion to the study provided for a more systematic analysis; building on both societal influence and the overall meaning of the signs and symbols when grouped together on the cover page. Thus, elevating the incorporation of this imagery categorization alongside the aspects of the previously stated studies.

Images and Text Content

Body Shots. Both the images and text published on the magazine covers were examined to determine the overall message of the combined content. As previously stated, a large majority of these subcategories are adapted from Keren’s semiotic analysis of Charlie Hebdo’s cover. Due to the variety of magazine cover organization, the recorded aspects of the posing category were adjusted by creating the following sections: head shots (a photo taken close up of the individual

showing only their head and part of their neck), bust shots (images that feature the head, neck, and shoulders of the model), half shots (a photo taken from enough distance to show at least half of the model's body whether it is from the head to the waist or the waist to the feet), and full body shots (where the model's entire body is within the photo frame). Since posing is critical in establishing the foundation of movement within imagery, it is crucial that they are one of the leading categories within this coding structure.

Model Poses. Additionally, the variety of posed positions can further be altered with camera angling. Thus, angles used will also be incorporated into coding as a subcategory since it is important to recognize if the camera has been tilted or modified to create a more creative image. These will be classified as wide angles (where the image is stretched either horizontally or vertically with the latter being shortened to create a drawn out effect), angle up (the image is shot from a lower position to enlarge anything placed higher than the lens), angle down (the image is shot from a higher position to shrink anything placed below the lens), head on (the model is shot directly in line with the lens of the camera to create a parallel image to the lens), and side angles (the model is placed perpendicular to the camera in order to create a profile rather than a forward facing image).

Text Placement. Likewise, the area that the model encompasses on the cover page can directly reflect on the level of negative space as well as the text placement. Thus, including the potential for text shape, size, and placement is a significant subcategory to implemented as well. As stated previously, text will be marked based size, shape, color, and placement on the cover page. These features will be directly tied to the aforementioned categories and subcategories of model positioning and camera angles. However, this subcategory will also include page location descriptions. To provide clarity, the magazine cover will be split into nine separate quadrants

making it easier to identify text placement in locations such as top right, top middle, top left, and so on. These quadrants will be included in the subcategories for the font selection as well.

Featured Topics. Though font positioning correlates with the images placed on the cover, it is worthwhile to make a subcategory for the story topics featured. Keren's study also incorporates a similar feature to provide adequate context for the signs and signifiers within the semiotic analysis (2018). Based on the history of *Vogue* as covered above, these text content subcategories will focus on their main published points including beauty (anything involving makeup or skincare products), fashion (including both clothing, styling, and showcase through runways shows), celebrity (information or updates regarding a celebrity and their life), entertainment and media (features both movies and television information as well as any crossover into social media representation), and news (relating to current events within modern society).

To clarify, the content of the text is not being recorded for semantic analysis; however, it is being leveraged to inform the researchers on the context of the cover image. Since visual rhetoric is a major focus of this study, the content of the text will be used to provide context for the cover message itself. Thus, text content (beauty, fashion, celebrity, entertainment and media, and news) will be noted. As such, text will not be examined for its tone and rhetoric, although this could help to further comprehend the overall meaning and presentation of the cover message.

Visual Rhetoric: Categories and Patterns

To determine how *Vogue* is able to frame its political opinion within the pretext of its covers, the coding sheet will include modified elements of Pierce and Saussure (Berger, 2017) foundational semiotics as well as Foss's (2009) visual rhetoric three-step model. Pierce's idea of

dividing signs into three categorical aspects (iconic, indexical, and symbolic dimensions) will be used to establish a base for labeling the various signs present on the *Vogue* magazine covers (Berger, 2017). Likewise, the semiotics presented by Saussure will also be incorporated to provide additional reference by adding attachment to the imagery utilized, since it stabilizes the idea of an image and its societal meaning (Starwarska, 2014). However, these will only be the base aspect of the study as only using semiotics limits the overall understanding of the cover image due to a lack of flexibility and rhetoric comprehension. Thus, it is vital to bolster these findings with the information that can be provided through Foss's visual rhetoric analysis.

As noted in the literature review, Foss (2009) identified a three-step pattern on how visual media can be further understood by fully assessing the message within societal context. As such, this research will include her proposed methodology by including rhetoric as part of the research and coding process. In doing so, this study will be able to better comprehend the meaning of *Vogue's* cover images by tying the semiotic features to actual societal meaning within the context of the modern era. This will provide a reliable comprehension of the cover image since it will be incorporating all aspects of visual significance and understanding. Thus, by incorporating foundational theories of semiotics, while also building out the overall message comprehension available through the three-step model of visual rhetoric, this study will find reliable answers as a result of the message motifs.

Alongside this, it is important to note that the following semiotic reading might have some limitation due to both the methodology and the selected theories. Based on personal lived experience, the understanding of the presented material might differ according to other individuals as certain aspects are pulled from environmental context. In addition, the selected covers present previously chosen imagery that is agreed upon by the involved parties including

Vogue and their featured models. Although the featured individual has some influence on the design and styling, the final decisions are made by the magazine's head editor—Anna Wintour. As such, there is a subjectivity about this semiotic reading of the *Vogue* cover images, especially since this research is solely focused on the intersection of fashion and politics and those messages are the ones being explored and potentially persuaded throughout the analysis.

***Vogue* Cover Analysis**

October 2016 Issue

To begin the analysis of this issue, it is important to note the basic information about the publication. The cover star features Lupita Nyong'o (see Figure 1), who recently starred in the successful Black Panther movie—a movie that was critically acclaimed for its representation of the African community.

Body Shots. The actress is focused in a three-quarter pose, with her face turned towards the light source. Her arms and chin create a visual line that directs the eyesight in a slanting angle across the image. The eyes of the actress are placed in the center third of the image. This forms an illusion of focus on the actress herself rather than the bright clothing she is wearing. Although her expression seems natural, almost softly caught off guard, the rest of her posture feels stiffer, as her arms are extended to be straight in the image frame. There is no leaning or tilting of her body beyond her sitting position. Similarly, she is centered directly on the magazine cover. Likewise, her arms cradle the main text of the magazine page, emphasizing their content both with the position and with the color contrast between the selected clothing and font.

This bust portrait is displayed across a landscape background that has been muted and blurred to create a stronger pull focus on the highlighted actress. Half of the image is the sky, with the other half showing land. This blurred line helps establish an additional linear direction

that draws the viewer to the center of the page, and the model itself. Featuring a more muted color palette, this directly contrasts with the vibrancy of the clothing selected for the actress. Her bright floral-patterned dress creates movement and texture, especially as the clothing itself features 2D and 3D fabric applique elements. There is an undercurrent of orange color which shines through a majority of the selected clothing and the toning of the photograph as a whole. Even the light source shining on the actress's face holds an orange cast. This contrasts the rich, jewel tones that add depth to the overall image.

The brightness of the color palette used in this magazine cover also helps divide the space of the magazine image. The color and placement of the model divide the magazine to create a second linear contrast across the center of the cover. This helps provide weight to the contrast of both the muted colors and a more vibrant palette that is included in the image. Thus, there is a strong sense of positive space that is fully occupied by the actress herself. A large majority of this can be seen with the darker head wrap worn by the actress. It blends seamlessly into her natural skin tone and hair color, while also mirroring the magazine title's font colors. These darker browns are directly contrasted by the softer blue shades of the blurred background; filling the space from end to end within the top third of the magazine cover. Additionally, the prevalent use of positive space leads to an intense focus point that coaxes the viewer's eye toward the highlighted text as a result of its placement and sizing.

Capturing this under glow and matching tone is unique in its rarity, as *Vogue* has traditionally struggled to adequately light and photograph models with darker skin. Examples of this can be seen with Gabby Douglas's cover shoot, as well as Vice President, Kamala Harris. Their images somewhat blur and are poorly lit, reflecting in a subpar portrait of the featured individual. Likewise, these portraits tend to lose their vibrancy even when printed in a full gloss

cover, with the colors appearing dull and lackluster rather than something of prestige that should be represented in a high fashion magazine. As such, Nyong'o seems to contain a reserved expression as she looks towards the camera, almost as if she is waiting to see the audience's reaction and gauge her response accordingly. She isn't quite smiling in her photo, but rather her lips are barely parted as if she has taken a breath. Additionally, her pose feels more formal—with her back straight and her arms held out towards her front as she sits balanced. Part of this reserved expression might be the result of her styling. Nyong'o is wearing a turban rather than showcasing her natural hair. There might be some hesitation to open up emotionally to a vast audience and be vulnerable in a more intimate way by showcasing this. Similarly, headwraps are more traditional and provide a grounding foundation in her African heritage—which was on full display as part of her role in the *Black Panther* film.

Text Placement. Another aspect of this material that was analyzed was the text. This included both the placement of the text, how it was grouped structurally, and the various sizes and coloring of each cluster. The boldest text is featured in the bottom third of the magazine cover. Although this font is slimmer than the rest, it is bright white, which directly contrasts with the vibrant florals of the dress worn on the model. Likewise, the word 'love' is the largest on the picture beside the actual magazine title. This collection of fonts is staggered as smaller text encompasses both the top and bottom of the image. As stated above, this text also falls in line with the posed position of the model, filling the outlined negative space.

Another significant portion of text is found in the negative space on the far-left side of the magazine cover. It is the only cluster of text in its place and directly contrasts the white font with its dark brown color. This text features the name of the actress modeling—Lupita Nyong'o—with her first name being directly in line with her eyes. Similarly, she is looking in the left

direction, which potentially connects her vision to the text itself. This font is also larger than the rest of the fonts on the page, leading it to be a secondary category to the first, main text cluster. Additionally, this font features a direct quote from the actress and her interview, rather than a simple excerpt or buzz line. It is also interesting to note that the title is pulled in front of the model's head, leading the text to be written across her forehead and hair. This is the only version where the title is not placed behind the head of the selected model.

The rest of the font is crowded into the far-right side of the image. It has been left-faced when the rest of the font was centered. Each header is bolded, and their subsections are not. It is also valuable to recognize the content that each font highlights. Lupita's quote discusses the process of creating new opportunities for people of color. Similarly, a few of the other texts focus on more intense topics such as the Paris attacks, which were considered current events of that year. More light-hearted topics include upcoming fashion trends (focus on prints, lace, and shearling) and the movie industry (director's cut of the popular film).

November 2016 Issue

This issue features actress Emma Stone (see Figure 2), who was recently a lead in the movie *La La Land*.

Body Shots. Stone is featured in a lengthened three-fourths shot, with the frame ending just before her navel. Her body is centered on the page and spread accordingly throughout the rest of the cover. Her head and eyes are located in the top third of the image, obeying a traditional rule of thirds with the focus point. Unlike other poses within this semiotic analysis, Stone's hands are fisted and placed in front of her mouth to hide it from view, leaving only her eyes and nose visible to the audience. Similarly, her midriff is bare, which creates a sandwich of skin tone between the cover when the image is divided into thirds both horizontally and

vertically. Her body takes up a large portion of the cover itself, leaving little room for negative space. Her elbows are centimeters from the bottom frame, and her shoulders reach each edge of the magazine horizontally. Likewise, her head touches the top line of the image frame, consistently filling the cover with her body and presence.

There is almost a fearful timidity shining through Stone's eye which is further amplified by her body positioning. By clasping her hands together and holding them in front of her face, she gives off a withdrawn and almost fearful appearance. Her mouth is covered, and her eyes are wide, both of which are typical reactions to being startled or frightened. Likewise, her styling adds to this potential fear by making her seem younger and more childlike. Although she has not yet reached the age to be considered a mature actress, Stone is also not in her early twenties. However, this image reduces the look of her age drastically. With a short pixie cut and very light, natural-looking makeup, she feels nearly like a teenager. This is further enhanced by her eyebrows being styled bushy and without much of an arch. Typically, a softer and more rounded eyebrow denotes youthfulness and innocence whereas sharper, more angular brows are seen as intelligent and even cruel. A good example of this can be seen in Disney movies, with the princesses having soft, rounded brows and the villains having comically arched ones in contrast.

One of the potential reasons for somewhat 'aging her down' could be to help create resonance with a younger target audience. As previously stated, this particular issue of *Vogue* is emphasizing voting for Clinton—who was endorsed by Head Editor, Anna Wintour—during the 2016 presidential election. Thus, the magazine editors might have seen fit to make their cover model feel more like the upcoming voting generation of 18-year-olds. In doing so, the magazine could be trying to appeal to this target audience of young, probably female voters who will be taking to the voting ballots. This analysis is very hypothetical; however, it does have the

potential to be increasingly significant as *Vogue* holds a large amount of consumer appeal, and this strategy would continue to supply their audience base by engaging the upcoming generation. Likewise, if this generation was able to adopt a similar mindset, it would make magazine selling easier since loyalty has been constructed on a foundation from their teenage years.

To help create some negative space, the cover features more muted colors that contrast the bold striped sweater that Stone wears. Due to the business of Stone's clothing choice, the backdrop of this image is a simple, muted grey with an undertone of blue. It consists of a solid gradient with no additional colors added. However, this helps the rest of the colors used to stand out more boldly. To begin, Stone wears a navy and white striped crop top, with a thin banded, repetitive pattern. The majority of the font used around her is also white, continuing the potential theme of blue on white with the blue-grey background. The font that is focused on the lower center of the page is a vibrant red, with thicker typography to help it stand out from the striped sweater. Likewise, the title of the magazine is also red except for the first letter.

This is where the magazine cover differs from all other covers that have been used for this semiotic analysis. Where all the covers have the same color used throughout the title, this magazine emphasizes the first letter. The 'V' of *Vogue* is a rich blue, rather than the striking red of the rest of the name. To add to this, the word 'vote' is spelled out using this 'V', with the font being white. Put together, this again creates a motif that emphasizes the blue and white colors. In doing so, it helps set this new word apart from the magazine title, creating a strong pull for the eye of the viewer. The title itself is the same size that is used across all the selected magazine covers. It also maintains the same font case and typography.

Text Placement. As stated previously, this magazine has a limited amount of negative space. The actress takes up a large majority of the image itself, and the alterations to the

magazine title also consume the top third of the cover. As such, much of the font is minimized to ensure it fits snugly within its allotted spaces. The word ‘vote’ is placed just above the eyes of the actress, allowing the eye of the audience to naturally track it when they are drawn to her face. The next prominent piece of text features the numbers 114’ and are nearly the same size as the title. They feature a slimmer font type and are colored white. The text that adds context to them is much smaller and in an all-caps case.

This leads the eye to look at the centered red font which states two words ‘pretty chic’. Without any additional context, this simply focuses on the typical fashion magazine content. However, at the bottom of the magazine image, there are two font clusters. These clusters are the smallest of all the fonts on the page and fit into the triangle made with the edge of the page and the arm of the actress. Due to the placement of this font, there is a heavier weight to the right side of the image. Additionally, the rest of the font balances on the shoulders of Stone, creating a strong linear line that is drawn across the top of the cover image. Due to this font positioning, as well as the way that the model is posed, the image forms an inverted triangle. As mentioned previously, it’s important to note the content of the text clusters. Surprisingly, there is not a lot of political content featured in the text clusters. Beyond the word vote, and the blue lettering, the rest of the topics are focused on more current events and cultural phenomena. The larger texts that are placed on the shoulders of Stone feature her name and her new movie, as well as fashion looks. In the small clusters, there is information regarding mental health crises and a focus on supporting interracial relationships.

December 2016 Issue

This cover image features the First Lady (at the time), Michelle Obama (see Figure 3). This was the last month of her husband’s presidency.

Body Shots. With a top light source, this image illuminates the full-body portrait of the First Lady. Her entire body is nearly visible in this cover image, with only her feet cut off in the quarter image. She is leaning on the ground with her weight supported on her elbow. Her arms are crossed in front of her, and her legs are bent and tucked under her to support the weight positioned on her hip. Her head is tilted towards the right; however, her eyes are directly connected to the camera and as such look directly at the audience. She is also giving a soft smile with her head tilted towards the light source as well. A unique facet of this styling is the fact that the First Lady's hair is blown out in a more traditional 'white' hairstyle rather than wearing her hair naturally. There is interesting discussion surrounding African American hairstyles and the pressure to conform to more acceptable styles of hair. However, the First Lady has worn these more 'acceptable' hairstyles throughout her husband's presidency.

The First Lady is dressed in an off-white, sleeveless dress. She is also wearing minimal jewelry which includes her wedding bands and earrings. The way her body is located in the image creates an 's' curve line which begins from the top right corner leading to the bottom left. This also helps separate the image into two triangles of negative space. The color of her dress directly contrasts with the intensity of the vibrancy of the background. Her dress is a pale white without any print; however, the background is completely floral and filled with greenery. The First Lady is resting on what appears to be grass but is also surrounded by a variety of greenery including leaves and daisies. She is resting on a brick edge that seems to keep the plant box in line.

This background also creates a direct linear contrast to the way the First Lady is positioned. Her placement is focused on three different planes when the image is split into thirds both horizontally and vertically. While her body is positioned in a soft 's' curve, the lawn forms

a straight line which also is strengthened by the brick box liner. The First Lady's upper torso intersects this line. The greenery also creates a contrast with shapes and sizes. In the upper left corner of the magazine, the foliage features larger, rounder leaves. Similarly, in the opposite top corner, there are small, tall flowers that bring a bit of color to follow the light source. In the bottom, a right corner there are small green plants that look similar to the foliage found in vegetable gardens. This would also help support the brick plant box outline.

This cover sparks a deep resonance due to the fact it's the last portrait of the First Lady before the Presidency was handed off to Trump. As such, there are some more complicated emotions woven into the image contrasting the emphasis on joy within the text content. In this image, the First Lady looks more defensive than her normal open and welcome expression that she has worn throughout her husband's presidency. Instead, she looks withdrawn and protective of her inner thoughts; both of which borderline on a feeling of sorrow that is set behind her eyes. This is further emphasized by the way her arms wrap around her torso as if shielding it in a protective embrace. There is a defensiveness to her gaze and upper torso positioning that is contrasted with the openness of the natural foliage presented in the background. She seems to be holding tension in her neck and shoulders, which might be part of the pose itself, but also as a result of the tumultuous feelings that could be arising as a result of Obama leaving his presidency.

Contrastingly, the foliage and greenery seem to directly oppose her tight expression and reserved body language. Green has typically been a color that encourages calmness and serenity; with nature providing the ultimate balm to soothe the soul (Sharpe, 1974). Some design research suggests that simply looking at plants helps to boost mental function and emotional stability. As such, the vastness of greenery present in this cover image seem to push against the sorrow that is

presented by Mrs. Obama. Following along the lines of color theory, white has also significant value. As previously stated, the First Lady is completely clothed in an off-white gown that features a simple structure and is cut without any detailing. White as a color has had connotations of purity, peacefulness, and surrender—all of which seem somewhat applicable to the current situation as the US presidency is handed off from one party to another (Sharpe, 1974). Thus, this cover feels particularly political as it almost embodies the struggle that the First Lady—and by extension—the President might be facing with the transition of power. Likewise, this transition came at quite a brutal cost, with intense political dishonesty* from both candidates. As a result, there is inherent sorrow built into the body language of the first lady even as the text contradicts her non-verbal cues.

Text Placement. The text of this magazine image directly correlates with the negative space that is created as a result of the First Lady's body position. To begin, the title of the magazine is placed in its usual place and same font style. The color is a warm taupe that mirrors the highlights of the First Lady's skin tones. This color is used in one other position, the font that is directly located on the lower half of the First Lady. However, this font is very slim and in all caps case. The subheading of this text cluster features a different color and font type, with the typography being closer together and stockier than its header. These two font clusters are the largest on the cover image, however, there are three more on the page as a whole.

The next largest font directly features the name of the First Lady, as well as sub-context regarding both her and her husband's success for both America and the world. This font also features all caps case and thin font typography. Diagonally across from this font cluster are two smaller font clusters. This features both uppercase and lowercase headers, with the subheadings being in all caps case. All of these clusters are in a bright white font color that helps them to

stand out against the greenery. This placement also creates a visual line that connects the left top corner to the bottom right corner. With the direct contrast of the First Lady's body positioning, this font establishes an 'x' formation that leads the audience's viewpoint directly towards the center of the image.

These different text clusters feature a variety of information even though the image directly references American politics by featuring the First Lady. The largest text directly highlights her, and her impact as President Obama's wife. However, the rest of the text pulls a more joyful tone when it discusses topics such as marriage, mood-boosting fashion, and upcoming films. As is becoming the norm with these magazine covers, these text clusters seem to touch on a few different topics to maintain interest regarding the inner content.

January 2017 Issue

This magazine occurs right after the 2016 Presidential election. It features the actress Ruth Negga (see Figure 4) who was a recent break-out star in the popular, interracial TV series *Loving*.

Body Shots. The actress posing for this specific cover is featured in a 3/4th body shot, with her head, shoulders, and torso exposed in the image. Most of her body is centered in the middle third of the page; however, she is at a slight tilt beginning from the left and leaning right. Although her head and shoulders are centered within the middle third of the image, her torso takes up the left and middle portions at the bottom of the page. Due to this, there is very little negative space left in the bottom half of the cover image. The rest of Negga's pose is very simplistic as well. Her head is tilted down with her eyes looking directly forward at the camera and thus the audience. Her shoulders are turned to the side as a result of her body leaning, which creates a slight linear slant for the eye to follow. Her arms are placed directly down on either side

of her body, somewhat concealing the twisting movement of her torso. As a result, the pose feels very stagnant without much motion being pulled throughout it. To help simplify her silhouette, Negga's hair is slicked back to her head in a low bun, with only the side part being visible. This is another interesting choice with the way hair is styled due to Negga's mixed heritage and more ethnic hair. However, it has been styled to fit with more common hairstyles that are predominantly showcased in mainstream media.

Another aspect that is worth noting is the mirrored color palate that is used throughout the image. Actress Negga is wearing a floral crop top with a black background. It features bold red flowers with bright green vines as its main print. Not only is the pattern very busy, but the shape and cut of the clothing also accentuate this factor. There are two cutouts on the shoulders and one near the clavicle, but the sleeves are ruffled with additional ties. This creates an additional layering of the fabric which multiplies the print itself. Negga also features very intense makeup with a dark, smoky eye and a bright, red lip to match the color palate of the top she is wearing.

Negga herself is wearing a very bold and playful expression that could hint towards secretiveness usually reserved for a close friend. Her posture also mirrors this idea that she's waiting to tell the audience something important as she leans to the side and cocks her head just enough that the camera catches the subtlety of her smirk. Similarly, her positioning and expression directly contrast the previous issue featuring the First Lady. It is interesting to note the boldness of color and print utilized in the magazine cover, which is strongly opposite of the soft, muted palate used for Mrs. Obama. Likewise, Negga is dressed and styled in boldness, with a flair of outgoing colors and flashed skin. It's almost as if the magazine is trying to uplift the audience with promises of fun and play due to the playfulness of both the featured actress and clothing. Where Mrs. Obama was expected to be reserved and serene, Negga is bursting at the

edges of the page with flirtatious fun and bright colors. Even her background, which also includes green, features a splash of additional color and is blurred to help her remain in focus.

As mentioned briefly, the background provides a mirror reversal of the color palette used in both the clothing and the makeup. Rather than having a dark black background, the magazine cover uses a pale green. In the top left-hand corner, there is a blurred image that could potentially be a painting or photograph. This image includes similar red and black colors that are featured in Negga's clothing choice. It helps pull additional weight to the image itself as it directly contrasts both the color choice and the body positioning of the showcased actress. However, it also creates a narrow triangle of negative space on the left side that is not easily filled. This creates a tilted sense of off-balance that draws the audience in, almost as if they are leaning towards her due to the opening she has created with the negative space.

Text Placement. With the narrow space of negative space available on the left side, the font that is placed there is very small and spaced with a single word per line. Unlike other word clusters—which feature a header text and then a short subheader paragraph—this text is forced to only have a single word on each line to better fit the space provided. This cluster also does not have a specific header line, rather the full name of the actress is twice the size of the rest of the font used in this section. Negga's name also rests just an inch above her shoulder, directly connecting her eyeline with her name. This creates another strong linear path for the audience's viewpoint.

Contrastingly, the placement of the text on the right side of the magazine cover is exceptionally dense and blocked out in multiple paragraphs. The font slowly decreases in size as it drops from the top right to the bottom right, with the smallest font overlapping Negga's shoulder and arm since they are closest to the side frame of the image. The positioning of this

text, along with the small cluster mentioned above creates an inverted triangle. Between the title of the magazine, and these three font clusters, the actress is perfectly positioned in the center of the subtly drawn triangle. Likewise, the small font placements on the bottom half of the image help to create their own triangle base that is mirrored in the top half of the image.

One particular point of interest when analyzing the font is the fact that all text on the page is white, including the title of the magazine. The only place where there is a color change is in the bottom, right-hand corner. Above the two lines of text, there is a red plus sign. This is perfectly positioned between the image edge, the arm of the actress, and the top line of text. It does not match the typography of the font used, and potentially is an added detail of the background rather than an inserted image or font type.

The categories of content featured in this magazine cover are again of a wide variety; however, they do touch on a more political side than previous cover pages. These topics include discussion of the entertainment industry as seen through a lens of interracial couplings, political implications as a result of activists, and a heavy emphasis on the word ‘optimism’ including its ability to build a path for a new age.

February 2017 Issue

This issue features actress Dakota Johnson (see Figure 5), who is well known, American actress and fashion model.

Body Shots. This cover image features a two-third body pose with the head, shoulders, torso, and knees of the model visible in the selected frame. Johnson’s body is positioned in a strong ‘s’ curve with her arms angled in towards her hips and her thighs leaning towards the opposite side she faces. Based on this tucked arm position, Johnson creates a strong linear movement that draws the eye of the audience towards the bottom center of the page. Her entire

body fits within the center third of the page when it is split horizontally; however, her thighs and knees cross over into the left third of the image. Although her body is posed very dynamically, the clothing choice also helps to cement the linear patterns that are visible.

The clothing itself is very busy, showcasing strong black and white contrast alongside blue and red colors. All the clothing selected is very linear based with lines focusing on the body shape and perpendicular contrast they provide. The top has a white line that is placed on a black background that follows the natural curvature of Johnson's shoulders, arms, and neck. Her dress features a repetitive pattern of horizontal, red lines that are woven throughout vertical blue stripes. By selecting a bold outfit—both in color and pattern—the magazine has created a central figure for the audience to focus on. Thus, the background must compliment the chosen color palate to avoid conflicting viewpoints. As such, the background is a soft compilation of grey and white, with some linear texture. This helps offset the boldness of the rest of the selected color palette, which is also replicated throughout the text, with the title and featured font sections highlighted in the same red color. Likewise, the rest of the font is simply black.

Due to the business of the selected fashion ensemble, there is a strong weight near the bottom of the image. In doing so, it creates the side of a tall triangle, neatly fitting into the bend of Johnson's hip as part of her 's' curve and arm posing. As such, it creates a sharp, arrowlike shape using the negative space that directs the audience's eye to the main text cluster of the image. This type of linear view strategy is also reflected at the top of the image with the magazine title. The negative space that is created on the sides helps to draw the viewer's eye to the center, following the same linear path that is formed by Johnson's arm positioning; resulting in another visual guide to the main text cluster.

Text Placement. The text in question features regular casing rather than the caps case that is more common for the header of text clusters. This does include a punctuation mark; however, which is very different from the rest of the magazine covers that have been analyzed. Additionally, this is the only section of text that is white. To differentiate it from the more muted background, this font is also outlined in black to create dimension and separation from the background color. Part of this font section overlaps with the 's' curve of Johnson, helping it separate itself from the background as well since the bright colors and patterns of her chosen dress contrast the white color exceptionally well.

As mentioned previously, this is the only section that features white font. The rest of the font used on the cover image incorporates black and red coloring. On the top, left side, the text cluster features the actress and a personal quote. Most of this cluster is black, with normal caps casing. However, the name of the actress is printed in red to separate it from the rest of the cluster. Additionally, this cluster has a tiered font, with each line increasing in size till the last two words are the largest on the page. Doing this helps to better fill the negative space that surrounds Johnson, as the text starts up over her shoulder and moves below it.

Since Johnson is leaning in her posed position, her right shoulder is very close to the edge of the cover page. As such, the text that is placed here is much smaller than any other font used. Three different font clusters start above her shoulder and then move down to her elbow. Only the first one has a traditionally stacked cluster. The rest follow a single line formation, where there is only one word on a line. However, the headers of these clusters are bigger than their subheading parts; and all clusters feature caps casing. Due to the overall placement of this text, the negative space forms an hourglass figure that centers around the featured actress. The two triangles directly reflect one another and lead the audience's eye towards the center of the page.

The content of these individual text clusters cover a variety of topics; however, they do seem to touch on a few political matters. A few of the subheadings discuss topics such as intersectionality and gender, African American heritage, and beauty standards, as well as traditional roles with fashion and entertainment news. It is worthwhile to note that this magazine cover does not reference any current news events like ones prior.

March 2017 Issue

This issue is unique to the rest of the covers being analyzed in this study because it features seven different people on the cover together. Each of the women shown are famous supermodels, and many of them have had a strong influence on fashion and diversifying its overall representation. The models showcased on this cover page include (from left to right): Liu Wen, Ashley Graham, Kendall Jenner, Gigi Hadid, Imaan Hammam, Adwoa Aboah, and Vittoria Ceretti (see Figure 6).

Body Shots. For this image, all the models are posed similarly, with three standing on the left—turning towards the center—and four on the right doing the same. This image features a full body shot, where the models are seen from head to toe. Their arms are wrapped around one another, and their front leg is popped in a bend that leans towards the center and focal point of the camera. The only one with variation is model Graham, whose arm is placed down on her thigh rather than wrapped around the model in front of her. Each of the models has their head tilted towards the centerline, with some facing the camera head-on, and others from more of a 3/4th angle.

Each of the models are wearing a black, quarter sleeve top with cropped, printed pants. The pants are in the same cut and style; however, each features a different type of print and color palate. There are two that incorporate a repetitive blue pattern, two that have the same pattern but

in colors (white and salmon pink), one black, one green, and one red. It is also interesting to note that the only plus-sized model (Ashley Graham) showcased is the one dressed in both the black top and black shorts. It is common fashion knowledge that black is a slimming color, whereas white seems to enlarge the area. As such, it potentially makes a statement as to why the plus-sized model was dressed this way, and if it was intentional in trying to slim her figure to fit with the rest of the models. Following this train of thought, Graham is the only individual with her arm down, and it covers a portion of her thigh, making her leg seem thinner than it is due to the camera positioning. Although *Vogue* tries to be inclusive of different body types, the actuality of this styling and posing could suggest otherwise.

This image is set on a beach backdrop, with the ocean line cutting diagonally across the page starting in the center and moving to the top, left corner. Although the landscape is not blurred out, a wide expanse of the space features the neutral tans of the beach sand. Similarly, the horizon has a simple orange and yellow glow from the setting sun, allowing a simple color to be blocked out on the top half. This horizon line cuts directly across the top of the cover image, perfectly lining the model's mouths and chins together. Together, this horizon line and ocean line create a sharp triangle point that leads the viewer's eye to the top, left corner, and the start of the magazine title. Additionally, much of the title is obscured by the heads of the models. Only the 'V' is completely visible, with the rest of the letters only showing their top portions above the models' heads. It is unique, as this is the only cover in this study that obscures so much of the magazine's name.

Text Placement. The text featured on this cover image is very sparse, which might be due to the increase of models present. As stated previously, there are seven different supermodels portrayed on the cover, which leads to a reduction of negative space. The models are well-

positioned within the cover image, with only the bare slivers of space visible on the edges of the cover. As such, the font is clustered in the center forming a tier of six lines. Three of these six lines of text are the headers, with their counterparts featuring the subheading content. The largest font is found at the top, and the smallest at the bottom, creating an inverted triangle that directly follows the linear path created by the models' legs.

The top text cluster is the largest, nearly quadrupling the size of the rest of the font showcased. Similarly, its subheading is as large as the other headings, leading its size to garner the most attention. This top-line also includes the only shown punctuation mark, which is unique on the page. Each line of font is styled in caps case, with the typography being small, thin, and closely placed together. This density helps to create a stronger shape within the space provided, as it appears more concrete and solid even with a thinner font. Along with this tiered hierarchy of font, there is also a continued centered theme. The models are centered around a vertical line, and the font follows this same suite. The spacing of both the font and the models creates a sharp linear separation between each aspect of the image. Everything is cut across horizontally; from the line of the heads to the black tops (which blur the body silhouettes together), to the colorful shorts, bare legs, and finally the tiered status of the font. These distinct sections develop multiple lines on the page that center and ground the viewpoint as a whole.

The content of these six lines of text is heavily focused on women's roles within fashion and the world, as well as the potential beauty revolution that is headed by the upcoming generation. These top lines—and their topics—are significantly larger than the bottom font, leading the tier to also include value alongside its sizing. As such, the last line briefly states a history of *Vogue* rather than trying to compete with the other text showcased.

Traditionally, *Vogue* has often showcased very narrow forms of beauty that are seen as traditionally acceptable. For this, most of the models chosen for the cover are what's considered conventionally attractive. This includes shooting with thin, Caucasian models that are seen in mainstream media. As such, selecting a group of models that showcase a wide variety of ethnically diverse cultures demonstrates a sense of intentionality by the creator. As such, it could be argued that *Vogue* is purposefully trying to break down those traditional aspects of beauty. By showcasing a wider diversity of what beauty could look like, especially in such a prominent magazine, they are making a statement on where they believe the fashion industry should turn towards for future progression. However, some underlying biases are visible with this cover image.

Although the models all have different features and ethnic heritage, they all fit the traditional beauty standard of being slim. There has been a history of more 'fatphobic' ideology that is integrated within the fashion industry itself. In the past, models have been pressured to slim down and fit a nearly impossible beauty standard by being thinner and leaner to achieve higher levels of fashion success. Part of the reason for this is that there is a constant assurance that the clothing displayed will look good, similar to how clothing draped on a mannequin or hanger looks appealing and enticing. By ensuring that the models are attractive, there is an inherent connection that the clothing will also look its best because it has a stunning canvas on which to be displayed. Likewise, many designers create their clothing pieces to fit these idealized body types, somewhat forcing consumers—as well as their models—to mirror the standards of the fashion industry if they want to look fashionable.

One of the ways that this pressure can be seen is in the posed position of Graham. Out of all seven models, she is the only one that is positioned differently, and her pose directly covers a

part of her body. As stated above, her arm is lowered down to follow the natural slant of her thigh. However, when seen through the lens of the camera, her arm dramatically reshapes the actual size of her thigh, slimming it through the framing to seem the same size as the rest of the models. This type of visual manipulation is also used by having the models dress the same, including having a solid, dark color as one of the base pieces. By wearing the same black, three quarter's length sleeve tops, the models and their body lines seem to blend together. Since they are pressed so closely together in their pose, it eliminates negative space between their torsos, creating a solid block of black rather than seven different posed bodies. As such, this also slims down Graham's figure since her top half is blended into the mass of other models. This alongside the placement of her arm visually cutting her thigh across one side results in a much smaller silhouette. As a result, she appears much thinner and more similar to the models that fit the traditional beauty standard of slenderness.

October 2020 Issue

This issue features the famous singer Lizzo (see Figure 7). Additionally, this cover is the first one of its kind, for *Vogue* magazine, which features a plus-size, African American woman.

Body Shots. This is a full-body pose of singer Lizzo, which shows everything from her head to her feet. Her body is slightly off-center, as her weight is distributed to her back leg which causes her to tilt to the left of the image. Her body straddles the line between the left and center thirds. She has one foot placed in front of the other, giving her a more streamlined appearance. Her arms are raised slightly so that her hands can be splayed on either side of her face. Her body is shot straight on without any angling of the camera, resulting in her looking downward rather than directly in front to maintain eye contact with the camera lens. The light source of this image

also comes from the left side of the frame; however, it is placed at an angle to illuminate a diagonal slant of Lizzo's face and body.

Lizzo wears a traditionally feminine dress silhouette in the form of a wrap dress. It has a ruffled edge that follows the entire seam of the dress. The top creates a slanted V-neck because of the wrapped motion of the dress which is also mirrored in the hem. The waist is tied back with a bow that matches the whole color of the dress. This entire piece of clothing is a vibrant red which matches the rest of the color used around Lizzo for her nails and makeup. She also is wearing stockings and black, pointed heels. She has a variety of silver rings on each hand and large hoop earrings. She also is wearing a single bracelet on her right hand. Her makeup is more intense, including a smoky eye, full face contour, and a red lip. Additionally, her hair is twisted back in a slick knot at the top of her head. It is worthwhile to note that this is a more traditional hairstyle for those of African American descent.

This bold, red color is the focal point of the magazine since the rest of the image features neutral tones like grey and white. The background is a gradient of black, grey, and white. This slow transition from the darker shades into the lighter tones helps to create an additional movement for the audience as it moves from the top of the cover to the bottom. This also emphasizes the shadows of the singer, since the grey and white on the bottom half of the page better show the darker contrast. Similarly, Lizzo's dress is also shown in motion within the magazine cover as the edge is fanned out as if it has been tossed, thus capturing its movement. Since Lizzo and her vibrant dress are the center point of the magazine, there is a vast amount of negative space to fill with text.

An interesting aspect about Lizzo's posing is that she is in a forward motion. With how her weight is dispersed throughout her pose, she seems to be walking forward towards the

camera, and by extension, the audience. This stance could be attributed to her trailblazing ways as a celebrity musician. Lizzo has been known to push boundaries both within the fashion industry and the realm of professional music. Due to her body size and comfortability within her skin, she has been seen as a leading role model for both the body positivity movement and women of color within male-dominated industries. Lizzo has always been nearly unapologetic for taking up space in the industry, and this magazine cover mirrors that tone. This is also represented by the sternness of her face. She is not smiling, nor is she scowling. Rather she stares determinedly ahead at the camera as if daring them to move while she powers forward towards them. Thus, she is completely comfortable being herself and that includes her heritage as a woman of color in America.

This can be seen, in large part, with the styling choices that she is wearing. Her hair is in a braided top knot which has been attributed to African American hairstyles as it helps protect their unique hair type. Additionally, she is wearing almost stereotypical accessories for a black woman. These include large hoop earrings and long, decorative fingernails. In the past, these have been deeply rooted in black culture. However, a majority of black culture has been appropriated by non-black individuals, leading to them adopting traits they see fit without recognizing or appreciating the history behind the trend. One prominent example of this can be seen in Caucasian women mirroring black female fashion without giving credit to the original creators. In the past, celebrities like Kim Kardashian, Gwen Stefani, and Adele have appropriated traditional black hairstyles including boxer braids and bandu knots. Similarly, much of the Kardashian family has had cosmetic surgery to alter their faces and bodies, mirroring attractive black features such as exceptionally full lips, and hourglass figures that emphasize their hips and derrière.

This type of cultural appropriation can have significant ramifications because it allows others to adopt the culture without any regard for the issues that arise around the culture itself. As such, Lizzo's magazine cover also is presented at a critical time when black culture came to a head within society. During the summer of 2020, there was an intense rise within the Black Lives Matter movement as a result of police brutality and the death of George Floyd. This magazine was published just following and could be making a potential statement concerning the summer protests and the Black Lives Matter movement as a whole. A probable piece of evidence of this can be seen with the text content, which mentions things like 'protest' 'justice' 'hope', and the upcoming election.

Text Placement. There is minimal text shown on this magazine cover; however, it adequately fills the negative space that has been created by the model. To begin, all the font that is featured is colored a bright white. Doing so helps it to stand out from the black/grey gradient of the background. The title is even colored in the same white. On the left side of Lizzo, there is a small quote by the singer herself. It is in all caps case and fits directly into the small triangle of her side that is created with her hourglass shape. This quote is all the same size and typography style, drawing attention due to the lack of hierarchy within it.

Contrastingly, the main text portion has a drastic hierarchy. The header is one word, which is several times larger than its subheading font size. This header features the name of the singer only with additional context provided by the subheading. Similarly, the two text clusters on the right side also feature a strong hierarchy within their sections. The top cluster has its header as the largest piece of text, and the subheading follows suit as a smaller font. However, the second cluster inverts this, with the header being smaller than its sub-header text. The aforementioned text clusters are all in a centered style rather than being left-faced or right-faced

respectively. Additionally, this text placement helps to continue the movement that Lizzo creates with her dynamic pose, following the naturally formed linear path as a result.

This cover image is one of the most political in the context of text content. Political aspects, including current events, are mentioned three different times in different text sections. Similarly, the 2020 Presidential election is also mentioned alongside ballots, voting, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Likewise, Kamala Harris is named on the cover. At the time, she was known as the selected secondary for the Biden presidential campaign; leading to *Vogue* directly referencing the democratic party for a second time. Only one of the text clusters focuses on fashion, and it is the secondary text found on the right-hand side of the image.

November 2020 Issue

The November issue features famous fashion model Naomi Campbell (see Figure 8), who is well known for being a part of the elite group that coined the term the ‘supermodel’ status trope, as well as being a trailblazer for black models in the fashion industry.

Body Shots. The model pose of Campbell is very structured and almost statuesque in appearance. It also is a full-body image, featuring her entire figure. This pose in particular is very symmetrical, creating a strong linear presence through both the position itself and through the dress Campbell is wearing. Campbell faces the camera head-on, with her eyes closed. This makes her look very surreal as if she has been frozen in time. The angle of light also pans down directly above her, haloing her within its glow. The way that this is positioned, along with her expression gives her a saint-like aesthetic as if she could be carved into the walls of a cathedral. She also has a soft smile on her face and her hands are gently clasped together in front of her. The pose itself feels pious as if she is praying for the good fortune of those viewing her.

However, the angling of her arms suggests a balancing point held at her center. It almost looks as if she is waiting to pass judgment, communing with some higher power before doing so. She is standing straight without any tilt to her posture; placing her dead center in the middle third of the page. Her dress is an off-white color, that features unique pleating around the neck and bodice. This folding technique establishes a linear movement along her torso before reaching the peplum hem of the top. The bottom of the dress is slim and falls straight to the ground without adding volume. This hem continues the linear pattern of the top of the dress, as each fold falls parallel to the sides of the cover itself. In doing so, these lines create linear patterns that resonate with the feeling of being carved from marble.

Likewise, the color of the image reflects a variety of neutrals. Campbell's clothing is off-white, and the magazine incorporates a wide expanse of greys and blacks. The only other white is found in the title's coloring. Everything else is black or grey. The background itself features a grey and black gradient. Unlike the gradual gradient transition of the October 2020 cover, this gradient is randomized, with spots of lighter and darker hues placed sporadically throughout the image. As such, it creates a streamlined effect with Campbell being the highlight at the center. She also isn't wearing any jewelry, her shoes are not visible, and her hair is straightened, and brushed back to continue showing the front of the dress. Thus, the emphasis of this cover image is focused on the model and her attire. Due to this symmetrical pose and clothing choice, Campbell creates a wide expanse of negative space on each side of her; evenly spaced between the magazine cover's edges.

Text Placement. There are only a few pieces of text that are featured on this cover image. The main font is placed at the bottom third of the page when it is split into thirds horizontally. This header of this text is just the first and last name of the featured model.

Additionally, the font is in all caps case and doesn't is sans serif. The subheadings are also in caps case; however, these are four words that describe the actress above. It is interesting to note the use of adjectives rather than creating an actual sentence to provide context for the text cluster itself. Similarly, both the header and the subheading are centered on the page and are bolded for additional weight and prominence. Thus, it continues the heavy emphasis of the middle of the image that is seen with Campbell's positioning.

On the right side of Campbell is the second-largest text cluster. This is a quote, presumably spoken by the model, that is split into two separate statements. This quote features the same type of font as the centered text; however, it is not bolded, and it is smaller in size. The font in question begins below Campbell's shoulder and continues past her hip. As a result, it creates additional weight on the right side of the cover page, somewhat overbalancing the previously symmetrical image. Additionally, this quote is placed in the light source, which draws increased notice since it is also highlighted.

Contrastingly, the third and final text cluster is placed in a darker section of the page. Found on the left side, this cluster showcases smaller text to mirror the size and shape of its opposite counterpart (the first part of Campbell's quote on the right side). The header of this text cluster is bigger and bolded to create more significance. Likewise, the subheading also is bolded but features smaller font. By bolding this one cluster, the weight is somewhat better distributed between the image; as the thinner font on the right counteracts against the density of the left side. As stated previously, the font is all colored black except for the title of the magazine. Due to this, there seems to be a direct line drawn across the image after the title page since it starts light and immediately cuts to the darker font. Not only is Campbell's head perfectly encompassed by the

‘G’ of the title, but it also almost gives her an angelic effect since it correlates with her white outfit and frames the crown of her head.

The content of the featured text follows the similar structure set by past magazines. There are discussions of politics, and fashion; however, there is a lack of entertainment news mentioned on the page. Due to the simple, striking lines of this cover, it is probably that the text is designed to mirror the image and reflect a unified front as the cover image. Thus, the emphasis has been placed on Campbell, including her past, present, and potential future accomplishments.

December 2020 Issue

This cover features celebrity musician and actor Harry Styles (see Figure 9). Known for his musical roots in the band One Direction, Styles has since branched out as a solo artist and starred in a few different movies including *Dunkirk*. It is worthwhile to note that this cover in particular drew a massive amount of attention for two reasons. First, Styles was the first solo male to be featured on a *Vogue* cover, and second, he is wearing a dress that pleased and upset a large number of individuals. This style choice sparked a variety of conversations across social media platforms like Twitter while also inspiring trends on TikTok and Instagram Reels.

Body Shots. Styles is posed in a three-fourth body shot that cuts off at the top of his thighs. His body is standing straight, but his arms are lifted towards his mouth, and he is turned slightly at the hips. His head is tilted down, and his eyes are looking off towards the distance on the left, rather than making direct contact with the audience. His body is centered on the middle third of the page vertically, however, his right shoulder leans into the far-right third, causing the overall balance of the image to be offset. It is also worthwhile to note that Styles has a prop he is using as part of his pose. He is in the process of blowing up a balloon, and it is somewhat inflated in his hands. Additionally, this prop covers his mouth and part of his neck, leaving his

face from the nose up and his chest from the collar bone down visible. As part of this balloon inflation motion, Style's fingers are splayed on his right hand and close-fisted on his left. He is wearing his signature collection of rings; many of which are large statement pieces including his two initials and brightly colored stones.

Styles is dressed in a black blazer with a satin finish on the lapel. He wears this over a soft blue dress that features patterned ruching across the torso. The dress also has black lace and ruffle detailing alongside a floral lace print that overlays the skirt portion of the dress. By pairing these two pieces, Styles brings together a contrast of traditionally masculine (a blazer) and feminine (a lace dress) clothing. It's as if Styles is speaking to the gender neutrality that clothing provides. Although there are pieces that lean more towards masculine energy or feminine energy, they are still able to be worn by any gender. Rather than being assigned to one or the other, Styles can combine these and make a statement on his beliefs of clothing as gender-neutral. In the past, blazers and padded shoulders have been used to represent a masculine presence as they reflect the attractive attributes of masculinity such as broad, strong shoulders which taper into a slim waist. Contrastingly, dresses, especially adorned with florals and lace have been seen as feminine and dainty. Thus, pairing the two together creates a literal collision of both aspects, almost forming their version of yin and yang.

This idea of complementary masculinity and femininity is continued throughout the use of color and lines. Blue and black are quite striking opposites, especially since the shade of blue is light enough to pull a whiter hue. The way that the blazer is draped over the dress creates a direct line of contrast as it visually separates the two through color and silhouette structure. These lines are also repeated in the background along with the aforementioned colors. The background is split horizontally, distinctly separating the blue sky from the green land. This

horizon line crosses directly with the intersection of the black blazer and blue dress, effectively emphasizing the linear pattern. Likewise, the black color is carried with the piece by being set in the title and lower subcategories of the font.

The background features a blurred landscape which includes tall grass and yellow floral details. The sky is a muted blue-grey which mirrors the same color of the dress worn by Styles. As previously stated, this landscape nearly splits the cover image in an exact horizontal line, separating the blue and green across the page. There is a slight uplift towards the right with the horizon line; however, it still creates a strong linear structure for the eye to follow. Likewise, this horizon line cuts across Styles' upper torso, pushing his head and shoulders into the top half of the cover image. In doing so, it creates a contrast as the two blue colors slightly overlap. To prevent any blurring of the subject with the background, the stylist has chosen to outline Styles with the aforementioned blazer. This created a black block around the blue dress which maintains its distinction from the similar shaded background.

Following this color palette, the title also pulls this black color. When placed against the light blue background, it creates a weighted structure that mirrors the fashion construction placed on Styles. As such, the magazine cover is more evenly balanced between the top frame and bottom frame. This balance is further established by the location and pose of Styles himself. Due to the shape of his dress contrasted with the structure of the blazer, Styles creates an hourglass figure that is positioned at the center of the page. The natural linear pattern that is formed as a result, brings the audience viewpoint towards the lower center of the magazine, which is where the main text is located. Additionally, his elbows stick out just enough to fill the negative space on the sides, enabling the cover image to look full even when it is lacking a large amount of text.

Instead, the majority of the text is stacked in a tiered formation below Style's waist; which follows the natural line created by his pose.

Text Placement. As mentioned above, the main text is located at the top of Style's waist and features a slim font type and the name of the singer and actor. This font is also in all caps casing, like its subheading, and is a white color. This is the only white on the page and makes the font stand out as a result. Below this text cluster, there are two additional groupings. The headers for these are the same size as the subheading for the main font. Contrastingly, these feature bolded headings to create an additional distinction between them and the background on which they are placed. Their subheadings are much smaller as well. Like before, all these text groups are formatted in caps casing. There is only one other place where the font is grouped, as the majority is placed in the tiered space created by Styles' dress silhouette.

This font features a direct quote from Styles and is formatted in a unique font type. It is placed directly above his shoulder on the right, fitting in the more compact negative space. Due to this placement, the image creates an asymmetrical weight that leans more towards the top right corner. Likewise, Styles' head covers both the 'O' and 'G' of the title, leaving the latter two letters visible. With their black font coloring, they also add weight to the top right corner. As such, this text group placement offsets the tilt that is incorporated as a result of Styles' pose, helping establish additional balance when viewing the overall image.

The content of this magazine cover is the least political so far. There is not a mention of political ideology unless you read further into the styling and dress choice of Styles. The different text groups feature more mainstream magazine topics such as the music industry, supermodel lifestyles, fashion, and shopping. There is also an undercurrent of Christmas or

seasonal holiday gift-giving that is tied into the shopping content. As such, the magazine is more focused on the celebrations and current entertainment events that surround the end of the year.

January 2021 Issue

This cover image features the famous tennis star Naomi Osaka (see Figure 10). She has won four Grand Slam tournaments in the singles category, as well as been a champion of both the 2020 US Open and 2021 Australia Open.

Body Shots. This image features nearly a full-body image of the tennis star, with the top of her head visible down to her knees in a two-thirds body shot. Her body is twisted in an upward motion with her head looking towards the upper corner of the image. Additionally, her legs are crossed in front of her, with the weight balancing on her back foot. Her arms are lifted and placed on her hips, with her elbows jutting out to create symmetrical triangles of enclosed space around her body. This pose inspires a sense of freedom as she seems to be spinning in motion. Her arms help give her stability and support even as she arches her head and neck towards the sky; embracing the glow of the sunlight. This sense of lightness and freedom is further emphasized by the background style of the cover image.

Osaka is placed directly in the cloudy sky, without any clear horizon line. The camera angle nearly pans upwards towards Osaka and her face—forcing the eye to follow its direction. Additionally, she seems to be floating within the sky as the frame cuts off right below her knees, removing any foundation that she might be standing on from view. Likewise, the cloudy background emphasizes the movement of flight—and by extension freedom—since the clouds themselves seem to be moving into the background as Osaka flies forward and upward. With her elbows spread out toward either end of the image, Osaka almost looks like she has wings bracing

out from her back. Paired with the cloud-streaked sky behind her, she looks like a bird taking flight for a new destination.

It is worthwhile to note that this mentality of freedom and peace is very applicable to Osaka as an individual. During the most recent tennis open, Osaka withdrew to prevent a mental breakdown and restore her mind's health (Wamsley, 2021). Having suffered some intense critiques during her first Grand Slam win—which was against famous tennis star Serena Williams—Osaka has been faced with intense pressure to perform and excel within her selected sport. There was some bias and outrage that came as a result of Williams' loss, which unfortunately created a backlash against Osaka. This, in turn, affected her mental health and further propelled her into a depression—which resulted in her withdrawing from the 2021 French Open. Thus, crafting a cover image that emphasizes freedom without boundaries or a negative foundation is quite compelling as it propels Osaka into an uplifted positive image.

This linear image is further solidified by the motion and pattern of Osaka's dress. She is wearing a loose, wrap dress with thin straps. It has a plunging v-neckline and alternating striped pattern split down the center of the dress. The soft fabric seems to be made of silk or satin, that drapes gently down Osaka's body and envelopes her in a formfitting embrace. To add to the movement of her modeling position, the dress also twists and flows towards the upper corner of her waist. Additionally, there is a gathered movement around her knees that feels fluid, as if she is stepping forward and the dress is mirroring the motion itself. This also mirrors the background of the image, as the dress features its own white, blue, and black color palate. However, it is worth noting that this dress provides a stronger linear structure that directly contrasts the softness of the cloudy background. One half of the dress provides thin, straight lines that cut diagonally across Osaka's torso, but when they meet the center, they change to thicker, blocked lines that

stack on top of each other in squares of both positive and negative space. In doing so, this dress both enhances and contrasts the background; creating an image that seems continually in motion as a result.

Due to Osaka's positioning, there is a strong focal point in the center third of the cover image. Although her elbows protrude across the sides, her body is placed directly in the center which draws the viewer's gaze directly down from the title itself. Osaka's head overlaps the magazine title, pushing her forward directly into the eyeline of the viewer and making her presence feel like she is coming forward out of the cover itself. Thus, Osaka becomes a triangular fixture that leads directly to the title and top of the magazine. Similarly, there is a vast amount of negative space surrounding her, with each tapering away to a narrower point as it descends toward the edge of the page. There is a slight off balance; however, as a result of her leaning to the left of the page. As mentioned previously, her weight is placed on her back leg, which tilts her to the side. In doing so, it creates a larger gap of negative space on the left side which provides a better space for text.

Text Placement. This magazine cover presents a unique positioning of text as a result of the negative space provided by Osaka's posing. All of the text except for the main group and magazine title are neatly stacked on the left side of the image. They also overlap with Osaka's hair and arm, as they attempt to help balance her pose to create more in-line symmetry. Likewise, all the font except for the magazine title is white, which allows it to pop from the page with its muted blues, greys, and whites. The largest text cluster is placed in the middle, lower third of the cover image. It has very thin typography and is in all caps case. The subheading is much smaller than the heading and is bolded, creating a contrast of both size and shape. This grouping only features five simple words 'Vogue Values 2021, New Year, New World'. As the

opening magazine for the 2021 year, this text helps encapsulate the overall essence that *Vogue* is aspiring to emulate with the New Year; similar to a resolution. Additionally, it is vague enough to allow the audience to interpret its meaning, enabling them to engage with the cover on their terms and experiences.

The rest of the font is grouped in small clusters that mirror the subheading of the main text. These are also all in caps casing, with the variation seen as a result of sizing rather than typography styling. The top text group is the name of the featured model, with its subheading providing a brief detail about her and her experience with athletics. This message of reinvention is further emphasized by the following text group. This secondary cluster showcases the highest content of detail, with it measuring around six lines of text; directly contrasting the usual two to three. Below it, the font is somewhat larger, creating a sandwich of topics that encase this secondary text. In doing so, there is a more even balance as the text fills in the hourglass shape provided by Osaka's body and elbow positioning. These are stacked in line with Osaka's shoulders and torso, helping stabilize her leaning position while also encouraging the idea of her being weightless since they draw the eyeline up towards the top sky of the magazine cover.

It is worth noting that all the text features a futuristic tone. The main portion discusses the New Year and the values that should be incorporated. The smaller clusters all discuss themes like reinvention, driving change, and preparing for the future. Additionally, all of these have a tone that resonates with importance, as if the magazine is wanting their topics to matter to their audience. It seems as if *Vogue* is striving for a way to help embolden its audience and provide them with hope. This, of course, would make sense since 2021 followed directly after a year filled with the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest, and a continual feeling of hopelessness as weeks stretched into months and even a year of uncertainty and fear. There is also the possibility

that *Vogue* is trying to inspire its audience as a result of the positive presidential election that occurred. Since they endorsed Clinton back in 2016, it would make sense to believe that they also supported the Biden administration—especially since he had added Kamala Harris as his VP. Regardless, this issue speaks to hope and continues to inspire the readers for the future year.

February 2021 Issue

This magazine cover features the newly elected Vice President Kamala Harris (see Figure 11). She is noteworthy for the fact that she is the first female VP ever elected within the US.

Body Shots. This image features a full body shot of Harris, with additional spacing cushioning both her head and her feet. Her body is centered in the middle third of the image, with her stance spread wide to touch on either side. This wide stance takes on a masculine perspective since she is braced with her center of gravity lowered in her core. This type of pose has been commonly associated with masculinity as a power stance that showcases both dominance and intimidation. Additionally, taking up more space has been attributed to male-dominated instances; think for example of ‘manspreading’ which is defined as “the practice whereby a man, especially one traveling on public transportation, adopts a sitting position with his legs wide apart, in such a way as to encroach on an adjacent seat or seats”. As such, her wide stance along with her clasped hands supports her commanding presence and more masculine energy.

Harris is also wearing a full pantsuit rather than a skirt or dress. She has also paired this outfit with black converse; traditionally associated with American street fashion (Woodward, 2009). Due to her African American heritage, Harris has connections to streetwear fashion as most of the upcoming trends showcased in typical street fashion are started by influential African Americans. As such, wearing a pair of converse creates a unique connection to her heritage.

Additionally, these shoes also create a sense of casualness that directly contrasts the formality of Harris's pantsuit. Typically, pantsuits are worn with a pair of heels, and the tapered leg of Harris's trouser is usually paired with the style of a stiletto shoe rather than a flat, laced converse. As such, this also establishes a misbalance between her fashion choices, as Harris seems to want to present a more grounded, down-to-earth persona which is demonstrated by her converse-clad feet.

Although this image is leading toward progression and showcasing the amazing feat of Harris becoming the first female VP, there are some complications in the overall presentation of the image. To begin with, there is a conflict of color and life within the cover image itself. The background features contrasting colors and patterns that create strong visual discord. The background is a mossy green with a floral and paisley pattern. It is heavily muted and drapes into the floor like a dropped curtain. This green is overlaid with a hot pink, satin drape that pools down and covers the entire floor. This pink is quite vibrant and dominates the far right third and center third. Contrastingly, this drape doesn't feature any specific pattern; however, it does have an intense shine due to the type of fabric. In doing so, it creates a striped motif that alternates between the hot pink and the luminescent highlight of the drape. Together, these colors form a strangely contorted background that overpowers the featured individuals.

Alongside this interesting background choice, the chosen lighting reflects poorly on Madam Vice President. Due to her mixed heritage, Harris has a darker skin tone than most of the Caucasian models frequently featured on *Vogue*. As such, potentially lighting her face, as well as the rest of her figure, seems to be more challenging and done almost incorrectly with this magazine cover. Harris's face seems waxy and washed out with the lighting. The source of the light is directly atop Harris's head, shining down and creating darker contrasted shadows along

her cheekbones and jawline. Additionally, the chosen color palette for the background almost overpowers Harris as an individual. The colors are not flattering for her complexion, and help further the waxy, yellow overcast of her skin tone. Similarly, they directly contrast the muted black of her suit, dragging the attention past her as the main model and directing it to the background. Likewise, the pale undershirt that is worn by Harris fades out and seems nearly white rather than the soft pink that it should be. This also disagrees with her complexion and leads to a portrait that is not flattering in its overall cumulation.

Text Placement. There is very minimal text used on this cover image. The potential for this might be due to the emphasis placed on Kamala Harris and her newly elected position. Since she is making history with her new election position, there is great benefit with highlighting this achievement on the magazine cover. As such, the main font section is placed in the bottom third of the magazine image. This font is also centered on the page. The largest portion of text features Kamala Harris's name and is sandwiched by her new political title and emphasis for supporting a new type of America. All the font features caps casing, and the two subheadings are bolded. These contrast the thin typography that was selected to represent Harris's name.

The only other font visible on this magazine cover is placed on the top, left-hand side of the magazine. Although there is a wide rectangle of negative space surrounding Harris, this is the only place that text is grouped. As such, there is a slight off-balance to the image since everything else is centered and reflected down the middle line of symmetry. This group of fonts is left-facing and falls into the space located between Harris's shoulder and elbow. It is interesting to note that this text group features highly politicized and features a spin on the wording of the foundational Declaration of Independence document. In doing so, *Vogue* is inserting themselves and their fashion narrative into the American story. They seem to be almost

superimposing their ideology into the political significance of the past Presidential Election and sending the message of their approval as a result.

March 2021 Issue

This last magazine issue features supermodel Gigi Hadid (see Figure 12), who recently gave birth to her daughter. Married, but separated from former One Direction star Zayn Malik, Hadid has rocked the runway since her introduction to modeling in 2013.

Body Shots. This image features a three-fourths body shot of model Hadid. Though she is leaning forward to create an ‘s’ curve, her arm placement seems almost forced and unnatural. One arm is placed back on her hip, with the other grasping the twist of the dress in front of her. This placement helps to accentuate the wideness of the top and bottom curves of the ‘s’ as well as slim the center part of the twist. In doing so, it also creates a strong hourglass figure with her shape. This shape helps to create a sense of movement within the stillness of the image. Her hair furthers this motion by drifting towards the front as if it has just fallen over her shoulder. Thus, it looks as if Hadid is nearly frozen, with her body turning on the spot as a result of her positioning.

Hadid is also wearing a bold red and white dress with a dramatic twist of fabric running down the center. It features a strong baby doll-like collar that elongates her neck and drifts just off her shoulders. The twist pulls in the majority of the fabric, rousing it in the center around Hadid’s torso. This dress also features a soft cream fabric that looks to be satin or silk. It is brushed through with blots of red, all of which are feathered out to a softer plum to blend into the fabric. This dress is exceptionally strong with its brightly colored pattern. The red is especially vibrant and nearly looks like splashes of blood on the paleness of the cream background. Traditionally, red has been used to represent a variety of emotions within color theory, including

feelings of passion, anger, and love. Contrastingly, white has been known to signify purity, life, and newness. By combining these two colors, there is an underlying theme of vibrancy that focuses on life, and the give and take it might possess. This can be further supported by Hadid recently becoming a mother, and the adjoining emotions that are tied to the creation and support of a new human being. This white and red is directly contrasted by the background of the image itself.

The background features a diagonal gradient that cuts across the top right of the magazine cover. Although it's a soft grey hue, there is an undertone of plum within the color palette, which is reflected on the edges of Hadid's dress and her eye makeup choice. This gradient also creates a line of separation that divides the eyeline of the audience, cutting across Hadid and leading towards the center of the image. Throughout the background, there are two strong eye lines. As stated previously, the first is created with the gradient of the background. The second is formed from the tight rouging of Hadid's dress, drawing the view down to both the centered text at the bottom of the magazine and the upper corner of the title. Additionally, the title of the magazine mirrors this gradient color palate; however, instead of being a solid color, it features a marbled floral pattern that incorporates plum and cream. Thus, the tone is reflected throughout the entirety of the cover image itself.

As stated previously, this cover image reflects a palate of purple and creams, with a bit of red thrown in to add contrast. However, these do lead to a more somber mood that is promoted through the image. This is also promoted by the model's expression and body positioning. At first glance, Hadid has a very neutral expression, as if she is shielding her thoughts from the viewer. When combined with this darker color palate though, there is a sorrowful aspect to her gaze. This is further expressed with the tightness of her fist that is wrapped around the rouged

curve of her dress. It almost looks as if she is guarding her core with her hand wrapped around it in the front. Typically, this type of position has been typified as defensive, since it protects the softer tissues of the stomach and internal organs. Hadid's hair also drapes down across her shoulder, creating a shield-like presence across her chest. Together, these aspects could further the idea that there is sorrow and protection rooted in her pose. It might make sense as a result of her separating from her husband—which is rumored to have been as a result of physical violence. Contrastingly, the text of this cover directly opposes the somber mood of the visual imagery. Instead, it focuses on building creativity and the glorious aspects of motherhood.

Text Placement. There is a large amount of text utilized in this magazine cover. To begin, the largest text is clustered in the bottom third of the image. It has one word as its header, with two subheadings that differentiate in size. These subheadings are also bolded which contrasts the typography of the heading. All of this text is also styled in caps casing. The placement of this text helps to balance out the image by providing a foundation for the lower half of the cover. With the magazine title at the top, these two pieces of text form grounding lines that further emphasize the hourglass shape presented with Hadid's positioning. This hourglass shape helps create significant negative space on either side of Hadid, allowing for text to fill in the gaps and balance out the tilt of her pose and the image as a whole.

The second-largest portion of text is placed just above Hadid's shoulder and continues past it towards her elbow. It seems as if Hadid is leaning against this text cluster. This is the specific group of text that highlights Hadid's name and her progression into motherhood; with an emphasis on the wonderful journey she is taking and the progression she is making past modeling. It is interesting to note that this text almost seems to be weighing Hadid down in some respect. Though she is leaning on it, its central position and tapered triangle of words create a

visual allusion that it is dropping down due to weight. This type of content could also solicit a similar response, as it is discussing a life transition. Although not much is known about Hadid and her relationship with her new motherhood status, there could be feelings of regret or sorrow for losing out on a previous chapter of her life. Thus, it could also be pulling Hadid down towards the corner as a result.

The last two text clusters are featured on the right-hand side of the cover image and are much smaller than the text discussing Hadid. These are tucked just above Hadid's elbow and follow the natural curve of her arm to fill in the negative space formed as a result. Again, both font clusters feature all caps casing and have their headers bolded to stand out against the subheadings. However, while the previous text groupings have content that falls under entertainment and fashion, these two focus much more on science and the current events of the pandemic. The top cluster makes a definitive claim for "science without politics" regarding COVID-19 and how it is being handled by leaders. Interestingly, the magazine would print a line like this as there it is making note of public opinion and the influence that politics have had within the medical community during the current pandemic.

One would think that blatantly showcasing the hand of politics—and potentially the negative effect it has had—would be similar to betraying the capitalist function of the magazine itself; which has been seen to support a certain political affiliation in the past with its publications. However, there is also the idea that *Vogue* could be trying to find common ground with a variety of their readers—encouraging them to seek proper medical practices, such as the vaccine, outside of their political affiliations. In doing so, they might be trying to sway their readers by pointing out that the current pandemic has been highly politicized and that the only way to circumnavigate this is to remove the politics entirely. Thus, they are directing their readers to

focus entirely on the scientific aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic rather than the outlandish claims made by both parties. Whatever the case, this line is saturated with political themes and presents an underlying motif that shows how ingrained politics is within normal society.

Discussion

This study has been focused on determining how the planes of fashion and politics have intersected across different variations as are discernable on a visible spectrum. To begin, these fashion magazine covers present a very simplistic overture when viewed from a surface level. Their styling mirrors other fashion magazine brands with the typical placement of title, text, and featured model. In fact, to the unobserving eye, there is almost a step-by-step framework that is used to maintain consistency with the cover formation. Components such as flashy text, bright colors, and featured celebrities are among the foundational building blocks for a successfully engaging magazine cover. However, once these images are analyzed through the various lenses of visual rhetoric and semiotics, there is more depth to their overall construction.

Magazine Similarities

When performing this analysis, there were a few aspects that stood out as repeated motifs. First, there is a strong linear direction that is incorporated into each aspect of the magazine cover. This helps create a strong direction for the audience to follow visually, leading their eyesight throughout the predestined path tracked by the cover creators. By creating this visual pathway, *Vogue* can highlight the important features of their cover—including the different stories and potential image spacing—that they feel are valuable for their audience. In doing so, they're also able to establish a hierarchy within the cover image and structure it in a visual language that is understandable by their readers. Over time, this builds into further comprehension that solidifies their standing with their audience as the magazine cover is adapted

almost like a visual language. Thus, it provides *Vogue* with the means to communicate important topics without spelling everything out verbally.

The second feature that is maintained consistently throughout the magazine is its selection of celebrities which are displayed on the cover. For the majority of this study, each celebrity figure has matched up to a current event that they are predominantly involved in. As such, their placement on the magazine cover more firmly establishes *Vogue* as a source for current events; as well as a platform that showcases the important perspective needed by audiences. In doing so, this partnership between magazine and celebrity builds a continuing cycle of attention and exposure. The celebrities can gain additional attention regarding their standing within a certain issue, and *Vogue* can make profits off the sales of their magazine which feature in-depth, personal opinions from the aforementioned celebrity. Additionally, this dual rotation helps enable deeper cultural significance as it saturates the visual material with context clues regarding community and societal norms. Thus, attention around the movement is further propelled by the popular magazine while being spearheaded by a celebrity figurehead; spreading its two-pronged approach out towards listening audiences.

This type of information dissemination is important to take notice of as it provides additional comprehension regarding *Vogue*'s use of its platform in sharing stories with its audience base. As stated previously, many culturally significant issues are promoted through *Vogue* magazine; including politics. During this study, the majority of the issues viewed always had some political message established within the cover—whether through the text or by the images chosen. Contrastingly, there wasn't a sudden surge in political information following the 2016 Presidential Election as was previously predicted. Rather, there was a wide range of political messaging utilized, flowing back and forth on a scale of subtle to non-subtle materials

depending on the issue. A large majority of this range was reflected with the current issue being represented in the magazine itself. For example, the October 2020 issue featuring Lizzo had a much higher political content overall, both in text and imagery. This might be due to the importance and high status of the Black Lives Matter movement that was occurring during that month. As a result, *Vogue* tapped into social outrage and community involvement; mirroring their messages to reflect the current standing of society. Thus, the saturation of political material featured correlates with the surrounding current events; helping the magazine stay present on the touchpoint of social involvement.

As stated previously, *Vogue* uses celebrity influence to connect with its audiences. This is another similarity that is noted throughout this study. However, within all these selected magazines, there is only one that features a male celebrity: Harry Styles. In the past, *Vogue* has traditionally been cultivated for these roots by showcasing female celebrity figures.

Occasionally, there has been a male star, but until Style's cover, he was always accompanied by a woman costar. It may seem like *Vogue* is breaking through these traditions by featuring Styles alone; however, they have not broadened their target audience. As mentioned in the analysis, Styles is a very popular musician who established his roots while being a part of One Direction. This boy band was exceptionally popular with teenage girls, many of which have grown alongside Styles and continue to appreciate his musical prowess. Thus, Styles fits within the realm of the *Vogue* target audience as he already has the approval of the female audience. This, paired with his strong feminist ideals and support for nonbinary dressing, leads him to fit quite comfortably within the standards that *Vogue* presents.

Additionally, *Vogue* does not seem to be measuring up to their professions of stepping forward and setting a course for better female representation. They seem to still be following the

same status quo that fashion has set for the past few generations. There is still a strong preference for young, thin, attractive females to grace the magazine covers. This is further supported by the issues studied in this research. As mentioned previously, *Vogue* has one issue—the March 2017 issue—featuring a plus-sized model, but she is posed specifically enough to hide her body amongst six slender models. Although this specific cover features a wider diversity, the majority of the models fit this predetermined standard. Thus, *Vogue* is sending somewhat mixed messaging towards their audience regarding this standard as they both play it safe while also claiming to trailblaze forward with the beauty standards.

Magazine Differences

Alongside these similarities, there are a handful of differences that help separate each issue and define it in its individuality. As previously stated, there is a unique type of coding that is established within the magazine cover that enables readers to understand the deeper context of the image. However, this also leads to additional layers of context and societal cues that are easily misunderstood or not even noticed by some audiences. As such, it may appear as if the magazine cover itself is filled with superficial material; burying its more important themes behind the glamour of fashion, makeup, and entertainment. This is seen with the blatant political narrative presented in the November 2016 issue in which Clinton's public endorsement was stated. Out of all the magazine covers viewed in this analysis, this 2016 issue was the most obvious in its statement of political favor. Contrastingly, the rest of the magazines had a more subtle political context—which was hidden within the layering of the magazine structure.

Along these lines, there was also the potential for favoritism from *Vogue* regarding the celebrities featured on the covers. Throughout this study, there has been a strong democratic presence with the portrayal of politics. There was the November 2016 issue that featured support

for Clinton. Following this, there was the December 2016 issue which showcased the First Lady at the time, Michelle Obama. Last, the February 2021 issue features the current VP, Kamala Harris. These three issues have strong ties to the democratic party with each featured individual being a part of this particular party. Contrastingly, there is no mention of the republican party. The previous First Lady, Melania Trump was never featured on a *Vogue* magazine cover. This could be seen as a potential slight to former President Trump, or by extension, the republican party. It could also denote some partisanship on *Vogue's* behalf concerning the democratic party. Whatever the actual reasoning for this celebrity selection, it is something worth noting within this study as potentially significant.

Along with these same ideas, there were a couple of topics that continued throughout the magazine covers, regardless of their political preferences. Though the subtlety of political messaging varied based on current events and celebrity personnel, there was always the promotion of mental health awareness and support for minority issues. This was surprising and greatly contrasted the supposed material that was expected as a part of this study. However, it was also refreshing to see that a platform as large and involved as *Vogue* magazine would be willing to put their weight and influence behind topics that, in the past, have not been considered as important by traditional media.

Limitations

Though this study has been outlined above accordingly, there are some limitations to acknowledge because of the selected methodology and theory usage. The reading of the selected material can be considered subjective based on the lived experience of the researcher. Thus, there might be inherent biases and assumptions included with the semiotic analysis of the material due to these personal touch points and ingrained ideologies. As such, another reader might interpret

the material presented slightly differently leading to a somewhat altered message based on their personal understanding.

Similarly, the material presented by the magazine followed the final decisions made by head editor, Anna Wintour. Though there may have been some input from the people featured on the cover, the published image was finalized and approved by the aforementioned individual; giving Wintour complete control over the end publication result.

Future Avenues of Research

This research study has touched on a handful of valuable points regarding the understanding and comprehension of *Vogue* magazine and the fashion industry. However, there is a wide avenue available for future research. As stated in the literature review, political fashion is a recent phenomenon that has just started gaining traction within academic research. By expanding on this research, academics could further develop their understanding of the different types of individuals who consume fashion journalism and by extension political fashion. In doing so, they would be able to break down the various values and opinions of such audience members; discovering what pieces resonated with them as individuals. Likewise, there could be some connection between groups or disconnect that would highlight how important issues were received and incorporated by each person. In doing so, this could broaden how fashion research is performed; analyzing its process from creation to distribution and determining what pieces are dismissed or passed by. As such, there is a large area for growth and improvement with fashion research overall and this just touches on the surface.

For example, within this particular study, extending the included magazines to incorporate future presidential elections or even going back further into past publications could provide useful for further analysis. It would allow the progression of political fashion, and *Vogue's*

involvement, to be assessed over a linear timeline—giving insight into the longevity of this type of trend and the influence that the magazine holds within the field of fashion and politics over the years. Contrastingly, narrowing the content and directly comparing it with mirrored magazine types would help to define some of the predisposed patterns of fashion journalism. In doing so, it would add clarification to certain motifs or visual styling that have been used by highlighting similarities, differences, and gaps within the cross-examination. As a result, there would be a deeper comprehension of how these magazine covers are designed and set up to provide enticing information while also promoting a certain framework or mindset.

These repetitive themes could also be analyzed over a broader media type. Rather than just viewing magazine covers, it would be worthwhile to incorporate the social media aspect of *Vogue* to see if they are maintaining their underlying belief system throughout their brand. In recent years, social media has become the norm of communication within society, and many brands have adopted a presence across a multitude of platforms. By delving deeper into the presence of one singular entity—such as *Vogue* magazine—researchers could further their data collection and discover more about the structural patterns and coding used to convey fashion information. Overall, there are a vast number of ways to build upon this study, all of which would help provide additional comprehension to the realm of political fashion and the fashion industry.

Conclusion

This study has been focused on understanding the semiotics and visual rhetoric presented within a select amount of *Vogue* magazine covers. By focusing on the intersection of politics and fashion through the visual representation provided by a prestigious, globally known fashion magazine, this research has been able to observe the potential increase and growth of political

involvement within the influence of the fashion industry. Throughout twelve different cover analyses, this study has been able to perceive the visual patterns and promoted material in context to the current political fashion trends. In doing so, it has recognized a few key traits and attributes that help provide foundational significance as a whole.

First, this study has showcased that there are predetermined patterns visible within the visual display of the magazine cover. These range from the linear assembly of the photo to the selected celebrity showcased on the cover. Alongside this, the cultural context has been found to play an important role in the choice of the cover star; as their involvement with society and current events is pivotal to the journalism aspect of this fashion magazine franchise. Similarly, the majority of these individuals fit a certain framework that has been previously approved by the magazine and, by extension, the fashion industry. By doing so, *Vogue* seems to be able to continue its standing as an authority within the fashion world, while also selectively promoting approved trends and causes which fall into this realm of approval. Thus, these visual patterns create a hierarchy of language within the cover image; furthering the understanding of their audience while also remaining, possibly intentionally misunderstood by those outside their circle.

This certain circle of approval is further supported by their bipartisanship with the democratic party. Although not confirmed, there are a variety of factors that imply *Vogue* more fully supports the left side of the political spectrum. As a result, their constructed material better reflects the themes and ideologies promoted by this political faction; leading their audiences to receive material cultivated to this particular opinion. However, these political messages are rather subtle in their construction. Often, the messages themselves are presented similar to suggestions; encouraging the audience to view the provided material with an open mind rather

than blind belief. That being said, there are a few instances that further promote one political party—the democratic party—over the other; tipping *Vogue* as being a slightly biased media source. With this, it is worthwhile to note that fashion journalism often contains more opinions than not due to the intensity and ‘trend-setting’ abilities of the content which is not found in traditional journalism reporting. As such, fashion journalism, and *Vogue*, create a new niche in which audiences seek expert opinion alongside factual statements.

Overall, this study has found new ways in which to view and analyze fashion journalism and the trend of political fashion. Through the lenses of semiotics and visual rhetoric, there has been growth regarding its comprehension; enabling research to break down the creative process and separate it from the final, visual result. In doing so, this research provides a solidified methodology for understanding the creative process as well as the notable patterns utilized within the visual image. Thus, it helps future audiences to recognize the significance of what they are reading in a visual context while also promoting a better understanding of the fashion industry; including its motive for framework and presentation.

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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



VOGUE

DEC

"ANYTIME YOU'RE
PUTTING BARRIERS UP
IN YOUR LIFE, YOU'RE
LIMITING YOURSELF"

HARRY STYLES

MAKES HIS OWN RULES

BABY LOVE

EMILY RATAJKOWSKI ON THE MAGIC
AND MYSTERY OF PREGNANCY

FINDING JOY NOW

FASHION (AND GIFTS!) FOR EVERYONE

Figure 9



Figure 10

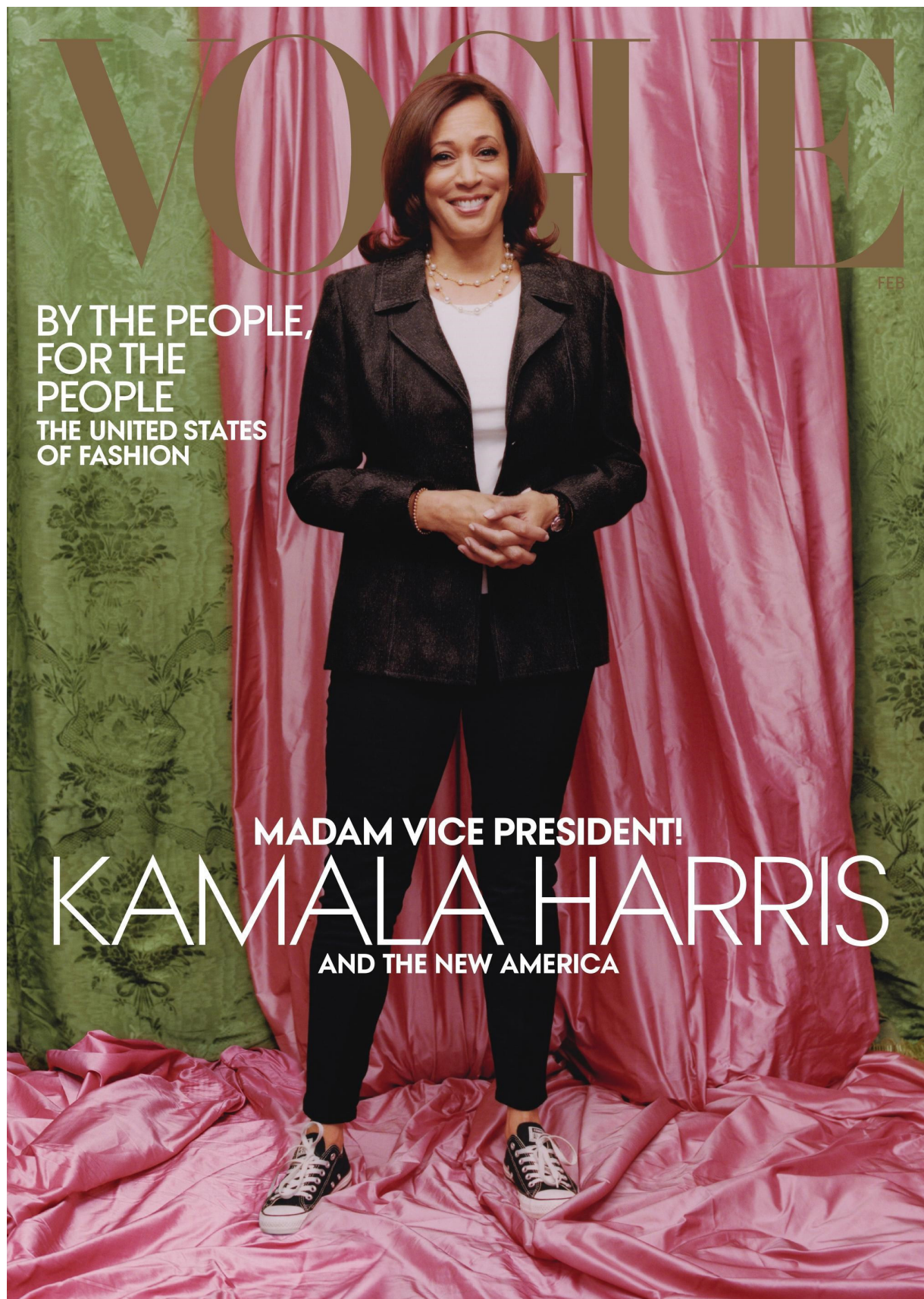


Figure 11



Figure 12