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Research Paper

Ten Cents Made the Modern Woman: An Analysis of How *Vogue* Magazine Transformed Feminism in the 1960s and 70s

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Dior. Chanel. Vivian Westwood. Each in its own entity: a mid-60s feminist novelty. Each illuminated by the rise in fashion and consumerism. But what was consumerism in a decade unfamiliar to our aging youth? And what did it mean for the legacy of women in America? During the post-World War, I era, around 1918, consumerism became the norm. More and more individuals craved the look of Gatsby's "American dream" as industrialization grew exponentially in an ever-strengthening capitalist economy. As a result, women's fashion flourished. In an endeavor to achieve the glitz and glamor that defined the 1920s, women adorned themselves in the latest trends: conspicuous makeup, bobbed haircuts, and drop-waist dresses with short hemlines.[1]Yet, this lavish fashion liberation for women was also giving rise to something more: the emergence of female elitism and feminism. Enter *Vogue*. Founded by Arthur Baldwin Turnure in 1892, the weekly journal pledged to "[cover] news of the local social scene, traditions of high society, and social etiquette."[2]Tapping into the rapid boom of American consumerism and the influential upper class, Turnure catered to the prevailing desire for political equality shared between women of all economic levels.Indeed, who would have guessed that Turnure's business savvy would transform a ten-cent magazine into an instrument that would aid in laying the framework towards equality in a patriarchal society? Ultimately capitalizing on the rise of consumerism and elitism, *Vogue* became an intrinsic component of the burgeoning fashion society in the 60s and 70s, propelling second wave feminists into an era of increased political and social equality.

The close of the 19th century ended with the abandonment of century-old stereotypes and ideals while the 20th century brought fundamental change to all facets of life. Americans, especially American women, were searching to define *their* contribution to society amid a mass manufacturing revolution that spanned from small factories to large-scale corporations.[3]No doubt, in 1890, in most every city across the United States, the founding fathers of financial empires, including J.P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie, dominated American industry. At the time, lower- and middle-class women began working in factories, leaving the higher-class women to dominate the domestic, entertainment, and fashion industries.[4] With more time and money to spend on luxuries and entertainment, upper-class women were pivotal in defining the next century of fashion and high society.[5]Thus, during the 1890s in New York, a city of 3.5 million, most of whom were Protestant, wealthy elite, the attention to fashion trends and who was wearing what was inevitable.[6] Nonetheless, if it were not for the rise in corporate capitalism, which was dominated by males,the already impassioned 19th century women, and the ever-growing sector of elites, the opportunity for the emergence of *Vogue* may never have come to fruition.

Vogue's mission was to fulfill high society's desire of having a place in which women could share their recreational interests. In realizing this vision, Turnure created a weekly journal and, fittingly, named it *Vogue.*[7]The magazine debuted to Manhattan society, detailing the news of the local social sphere, customs of high society, and social codes and etiquette.[8]While Turnure's original goal was to coddle wealthy women, thefirst article published on December 17, 1892, embraced just the opposite.[7]The issue featured an article entitled "As Seen by Him," illuminating the rise of men's fashion and how a "woman no longer [has] it her own way in the matter of costume."[9]The magazine followed this 19th century patriarchal stance until 1909 when Condé Nast of Condé Nast Publications purchased the company.[10]

Under Nast's management *Vogue* became the paradigm for cultural and feminist platforms for the next centuries. The difference in leadership between Arthur Turnure and Condé Nast significantly impacted readership. After purchasing *Vogue,* Nast quickly went to workchanging the cover design. Under Turnure, the magazine covers were dominated by intricate tapestry-like motifs. Referencing Figure 1 (1908) and Figure 2,

(1908) *Vogue* covers maintained the same repetitious and sinuous designs for years; however, a year later, under Nast's direction, the covers assumed a more female-centered approach.[11]The primary imagesbecame colorful, featuring single drawings of females and more empty space (reference figures 3 and 4).[12]In turn, these images appealed to a wider audience of women. Circulation grew. From catering to the elite class in Manhattan, *Vogue* ultimately transitioned into a magazine which reflected a female audience that was working, middle-class, and had a mind of its own.[13]

Figure 1

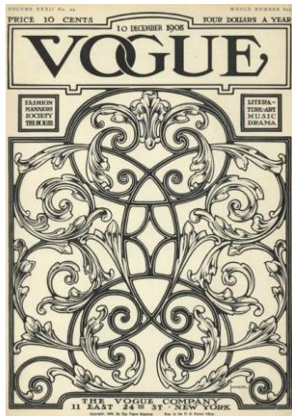
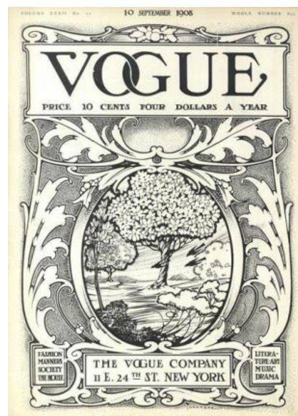


Figure 2



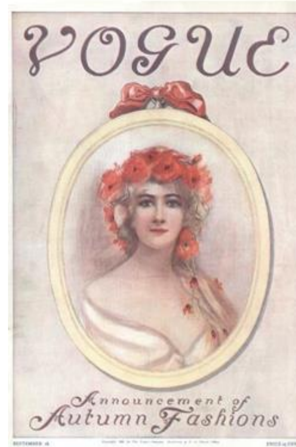


Figure 3

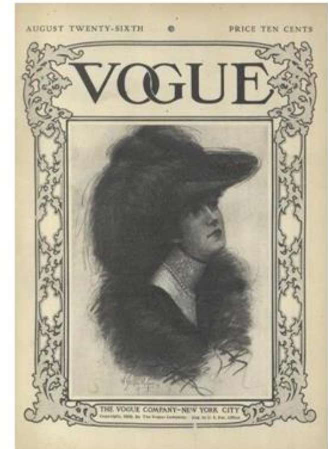


Figure 4

As the pursuit for more modern idealsarose in the 20th century, *Vogue* not only focused on the rise of feminism but lead the pursuit. Articles and editorials became more women-centric and relatable to the middle classes, addressingcultural and political issues that immediately affected women of all classes. Even in the 1909 version of the issue "As Seen by Him," the article, in contrast to the male-centered 1892 version, focused on how "New York in Midsummer [was] enjoyable, even though the socially elite [were] absent."[14] Detailing how society in New York–the home of the elites–remained independent from othersocial circles, *Vogue*evolved from a readership catered to upper-class viewers to one that included middle class women. This appeal to the middle-class female proved to be highly beneficial to the feminist movement as the development of the magazine paralleled the emergence of the first wave of feminism.[15] During this time period, from 1837-1920, American women had been primarily fighting for equal rights in education, employment, marriage, as well as the legalization of access to birth control.[16] The emergence of these profoundly bold ideals played a critical role in the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920 and throughout the decade as equality for women continued to gain support.[17] Ultimately, *Vogue,* too, was pivotal in fostering pride and support for all women in society. In 1925, the magazine represented an increased number of women in the workforce with "an active life, [as opposed to] the former [women] of leisure," through designer gloves.[18] The gloved look embodied the image of hard-working women who worked with their hands in contrast to the look of the conventional domestic woman," while simultaneously retaining an image of beauty intrinsic to females at the time.[19] Thus, the unfolding of a more feminist version of *Vogue* set the stage for substantial change by serving as a relatable platform in which women of all classes were represented equally among social and political issues.

While Vogue had not grown at their desired rate until the 1960s,the magazine's impact among women had not yet flourished until they brought in the first female editor in chief: Diana Vreeland.[20]In 1962, fashion columnist Diana Vreeland became the editor in chief and ushered*Vogue* into an era symbolized by her spontaneity and shamelessness.[21]At the time, American women valued radicalism, personal and political issues, and their image in the media. [22] Therefore, *Vogue's* feminist agenda as a media outlet in society was immeasurable. Under Vreeland's guidance, the magazine was able to speak for women who werechallenging conventional modes of self-expression. In other words, *Vogue* mirrored Vreeland's attitudes and lifestyle.[23] Unique and often eccentric, Vreeland disregarded the most rigid codes in fashion. [24]As seen in her revival of The World of Balenciaga exhibition in 1972, the unruly yet intricate shape of the added mesh chiffon opposed the conventional fashion standards of symmetrical and proper dresses.[25] Yet, even a decade before this exhibition, Vreeland'sprogressive style changed the role of females in society. As she immersed herself insurfing, ballet dancing, horseback-riding, and the love of fashion, Vreeland also brought her striking passion for beauty in everyday life to *Vogue*.[26]

During the 1960s, Vreeland and the glossy pages of *Vogue* were ready and waiting as turbulent times erupted. Vietnam War protests dominated the evening news; Civil Rights came to a head as black Americans marched against inequality; the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of war; and the assassination of both John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King created a country of weary Americans, afraid of what would happen next.[27] All the while, females were making their voices heard. As they joined the workforce, women rallied for equal pay. They demanded an end to sexual harassment and cheered the passing of a birth control pill by the federal government in 1960.[28]Clearly, as Bob Dylan's famous lyrics pointed out, "The Times They Are a Changin'."[29]Indeed, although *Vogue* was considered a wealthy woman's magazine, the focus began to shift to the everyday working woman and her fashion needs.

Without a doubt, as editor in chief, Vreeland had her hands full. The same women who were effecting change in political and social realms all over the country wanted a magazine that was fit for the masses. No more couture, instead, there emerged real women and real clothes. Vreeland had a keen sense of the cultural changes that were driving the fashion world, and she reacted swiftly. She coined the term "youthquake," which described the "significant political, cultural, or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people."[30]There were over 90,000,000 young people under the age of 24 in 1965, and Vreeland was quick to realize their voice and their value.[31] Peace, sexual freedom, Woodstock, and originality were the buzzwords of the day. No doubt, the youthquake generation was crucial to *Vogue's* success. Women no longer wanted to be bound in tight fitting, conservative dress and were, instead, opting for fashion freedom: mini-skirts, bold colors and designs, and fringe. *Vogue* took notice and acknowledged the new trends with magazine layouts that featured fashion icons and celebrities such as Catherine Deneuve, Twiggy, Jane Birkin, and Brigitte Bardot.[32] This new wave of feminism spawned a groundswell of change in American culture. Women were speaking and *Vogue* was listening.

Along with the 60s and the youthquake generation came even more change. In 1961, Project Gemini, launched under President Kennedy's administration, was funded with the goal of putting a man on the moon.[33] Americans were energized and applauded the program as it ventured into the space frontier. And just as this new era in space exploration exploded, so did women's fashion. *Vogue* devoted a magazine issue to the trends that embraced the clean lines and modular styles that were inspired by space-age travel, and theMarch 1965 cover celebrated with a "pair of bespectacled models" donned in "fashionable intergalactic" apparel from "planet earth."[34] Indeed, women wanted to be relevant, choosing to dress in styles that were a reflection of the times. Feminist views had catapulted fashion into an industry that empowered all women, and *Vogue* was there to support and emancipate them.

As the 1960s came to a close, more turmoil ensued. The 70s were plagued with political scandals, antiwar protests, and a backlash against the counterculture of the 60s. Americans, tired of the rebellious youth and their radical ideas, espoused a social conservatism that would be referred to as the "silent majority" or the "New Right."[35] While Richard Nixon was voted into office on this conservative platform, the Watergate scandal abruptly ended his administration.[36] Yet, while the 70s were fraught with government upheaval, the 60s agenda continued to linger. In 1972, after years of intense struggle by feminists, the Equal Rights Amendment was passed in Congress; however, the Amendment failed to pass in state elections and, ultimately, would not be ratified until 1977.[37]

While the conservative movement in the United States stymied the passing of the ERA, *Vogue* was in the feminists' corner. In fact, in 1972, the magazine described their typical reader as a "modern liberated woman."[38] The women's movement was going forward; feminists just had to contend with obstacles along the way. *Vogue* continued to showcase women's fashion trends as the magazine highlighted casual separates, including pants, that were made to wear from morning to night.[39] Actress Mary Tyler Moore, who starred in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, was touted by *Vogue* as a "Charlie" type woman who wore flared trousers to work.[40] Indeed, in the sitcom, Mary was a professional career woman who was fiercely independent and didn't need to lean on a man for support. The show, which aired in 1970, thrust the conventional boundaries for women to the edge, and Moore became a role model for an entire generation.[41]

As the feminist movement gained momentum, *Vogue* was relentless in its avant-garde approach in pushing the envelope for all women. Magazine articles included profiles and published works by nationally known feminists such as Gloria Steinem, Erica Jong, and Anne Roiphe.[42] Moreover, Richard Avedon, an American fashion photographer, captured the force and conviction of the women's movement in his photographs: Models contorted their bodies, leaped across pages, and playfully tousled with one another.[43] With a reinforced sense of freedom and unconventionality reflected in their photographs and publications, *Vogue* not only became an emblem of progressivism but became a platform that effused feminist patriotism. Furthermore, in the year that Richard Avedon began working for *Vogue* in 1973, the Supreme Court challenged a Texas law banning abortions in a 7-2 decision, Roe v. Wade.[44] That same year, *Vogue* celebrated the increased freedom women had gained by detailing in an article how females could feel their best, even amid a time of political inequality and turmoil. Notably, in a June 1st issue in 1973, entitled "The American Woman Today," *Vogue*

celebrated the narrative of Lauren Hutton, a model who climbed the hierarchy in the modeling industry amid the many hardships she experienced; furthermore, in another article, the magazine commemorated how Hutton ultimately impacted "The Look of the American Woman Today."[45] Hutton's story was published to inspire a new female generation whose amplified voices empowered all socioeconomic classes of women. Throughout her career, Hutton was turned down by all but one modeling agency that requested she "[have] [her] nose fixed and [her] teeth capped."[46] Applauding Hutton's authenticity, *Vogue* noted that her appearance "gave her an immediate, fresh place in the model market."[47] Ultimately, *Vogue's* increased coverage of high-profile women like Hutton fueled the magazine's agenda to normalize the flaws that redefined American female beauty.

Not only did *Vogue* push the envelope for all women and redefine social conventions, but the magazine also paved the way for minorities, who experienced even further oppression in the 70s. *Vogue* made history in 1974 when the magazine put Beverly Johnson, a black model, on the cover of American *Vogue*(see appendix A).[48] Writer and critic Clive Barnes wrote about Johnson's cover issue, "We all knew that Black was beautiful, but it took fashion to show us how beautiful."[49]Although Beverly Johnson was preceded by Naomi Williams on the cover of *Vogue* UK, Johnson's influence on American society was unmatched.[50]Johnson's potential debut on the cover was originally met with intense scrutiny from legendary model Eileen Ford.[51]The magazine was challenging long-held stereotypes of minority models and fighting the discrimination that was apparent in society during the 70s as well.[52] Simultaneously, second wave feminists were also fighting racial discrimination aimed at minority women, *Vogue's* publication of Beverly Johnson on their cover in America served to empower feminists and echo their demand for more awareness.[53]Through their increasingly diverse readership, *Vogue* encouraged inclusivity among all women as the magazine forged a path for women's rights.

Although some argue that *Vogue's* efforts in the late 70s were too little too late, themagazine–in comparison to other fashion magazines at the time–had the largest and most diverse readership, leaving its impact upon minority women and paving the way for Beverly Johnson and thousands of other black models to enter the modeling industry.[54] Ultimately, because of *Vogue's* increased efforts to foster inclusivity to the Second-wave feminist movement in the 70s, morale was boosted as women sought to change the standards of female beauty and inequality. Clearly, *Vogue* uprooted conventional expectations for women across the class divide and among diverse racial backgrounds.

Inarguably, *Vogue* has fostered a progressive female readership, reimagining the future and freedom, yet, arguably, the magazine's most important contribution to society is the legacy it leaves behind. As the 70s came to a close, the second-wave feminist movement was slowing down as well, yet *Vogue* continued to empower its readers in every monthly issue by revealing the latest social trends.[55] The 80s saw an increased modernistic reflection in the magazine, with covers of women adorned in metallic or bright colors, truly vivifying the word "vogue"[56](see appendixB). From a cultural aspect, the magazine focused its attention on self-care, exercise, self-confidence, and the redefinition of beauty in an effort to debunk decades of conventional female stereotypes.[57] Politically, *Vogue* continued to highlight women who redefined the societal landscape. The magazine championed women such as Sally Ride, the first female astronaut to join NASA, and Mary Decker, a female world-champion runner.[58]Specifically, in a 1984 article written by Janice Kaplan titled "What's Modern? Breaking Away," Kaplan relayed that society was "proving women are strong, fast" and that "[women] are breaking away from [their] physical limitations, breaking the records set by men".[59]By highlighting how women were resisting the influence of the patriarchy and paving the way for their own success, Kaplan displayed the emboldening effect that *Vogue* had on its audience. Through continuing to celebrate the accomplishments of tradition-defying women, empowering society in their pursuit towards social equality, and detailing the female advances across several different industries, *Vogue* magazine strengthened its bond with feminist readers, leaving the gift of empowerment to women for decades to come.

Today, in 2022, it is evident that *Vogue* has accomplished its mission. Since its publicization in 1892, the magazine has amassed a global credibility that can be attributed to its rich history and dedication in marketing to a distinct female readership. This has made it the most iconic magazine in the world, being featured daily across major metropolitancenters of global fashion including New York, Paris, and Milan.[60] With an growingsocial media following of over fifty-seven million, a print readership of eleven million, and a digital user base of twelve million, *Vogue* has become *the* revolutionist in the fashion industry with a global influence unsurpassed by any other publication.[61]What's more, with each new issue, Vogue seemingly crafts an ultra-modern view of women unseen by society by celebrating the power that females hold today not only in the fashion industry, but in politics and the fight towards global human rights. *Vogue* magazine has indisputably evolved from a trivialten-cent black and white, weekly magazine to a global empire, with magazines lining every grocery store check-out line and with limited - editions of its magazines being resold for thousands of dollars onlinetoday.[62]And so, Vogue has not only left its eccentric mark on America's history, but has flung the door of success open for millions of women today, providing them with a platform that represents them and empowers them daily.[63] They have not just molded *our* modern-day woman, but have usurped the future of global female empowerment for *our* future kids and leaders. And so, what will be our next 10-cent contribution?

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Appendix A

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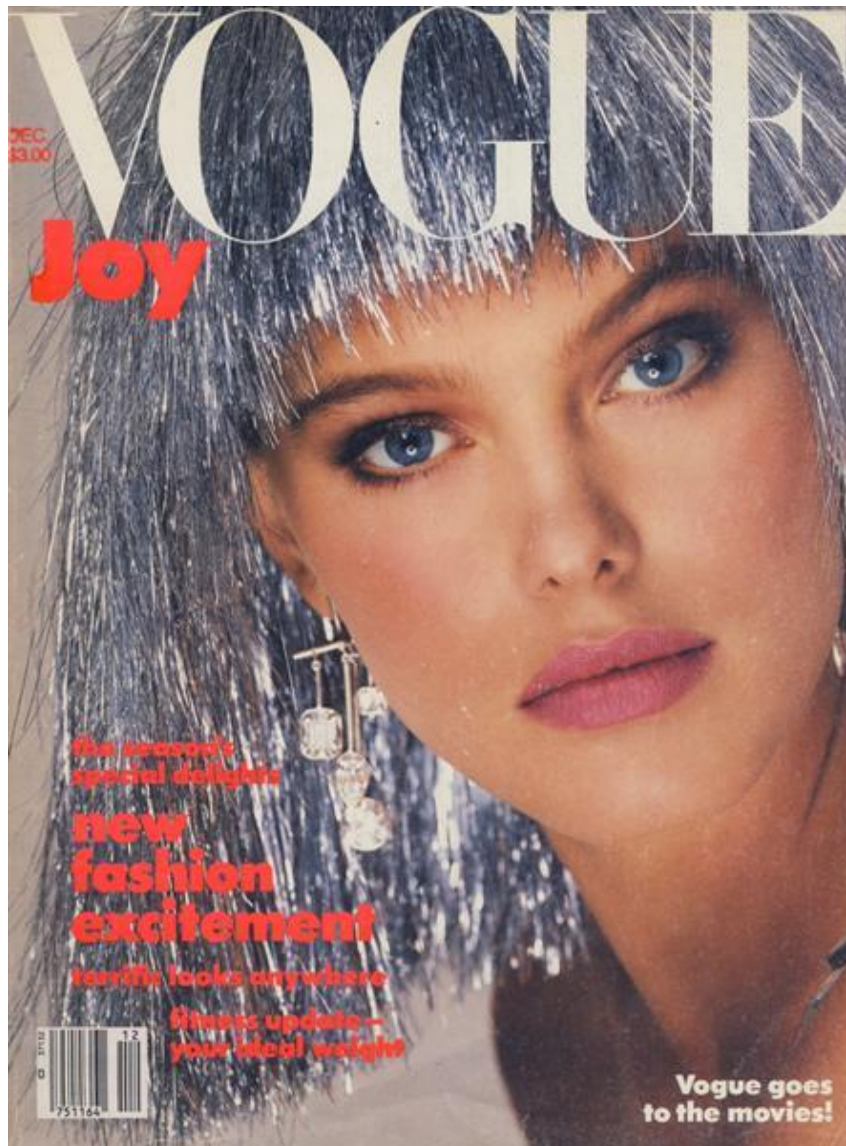
Appendix B



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