Final Master Thesis

A study on femininity ideologies in *Vogue*

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"The so-desirable fashionable woman"

ABSTRACT

This thesis purposefully examined the development of the societal role of women portrayed in US *Vogue* issues from 1945 to 2015. *Vogue* is known for its decades-long influence and authority within the fashion world. Interestingly, *Vogue* was founded as a society tabloid written by the elite of New York for the elite class. Using a feminist and deconstructive approach, this research investigates how *Vogue* constructs ideas of femininity within these elitist realms using both textual content and fashion images. Firstly exploring this notion using theory, it becomes apparent that *Vogue* functions within the fashion language system as a textbook. It aims to explain and educate its readers on all that is trendy, desirable and popular. The theory also reveals that it has underlying ideologies of how women should behave, perform and dress. This has strong ties with the elitist social sphere and the expectations this brings forth. The theoretical framework ultimately presents three central research topics: fashion arenas, embodied femininity, and leisurely life.

A qualitative mixed method approach of discourse and semiotic analyses was taken amongst the sample of 16 US *Vogue* issues selected across seven decades. In total 162 fashion-related articles were taken from these issues, forming the research units. The process of coding and analysing the findings presents four overarching themes: the fashion party, the fashion textbook, desirability & enchantment, and the double/triple life. In short, these themes present that *Vogue* seems to function as a potential fashion party, driven by *Vogue* as its leader who sets ideologies on femininity. To share these ideologies amongst its members/readers, it turns its issues into what *Vogue* calls fashion textbooks. Using almost fantasy-like strategies, it evokes a strong sense of desirability for readers to become the ideal woman *Vogue* constructs. This ideal woman often lives a double or even triple life of being a kept, working and mothering woman. However, the notion of reader agency and reception might contest *Vogue* as all-powerful.

The findings show an evolving representation of womanhood. She develops from a traditional woman to a more assertive, sexual and working woman. How *Vogue* represents her is embedded in a sense of duality and controversy; it blends tradition, domesticity and reality with independence, feminism and fantasy. The discussion does reveal that this reoccurring dualism could reflect *Vogue* balancing the so-desired woman between the ideal and the real. The essence remains that the so-desired woman *Vogue* constructs should be the embodiment of a status symbol – she is portrayed as aligned with elite ideals. She is portrayed to do this with ease, grace, fashion and restraint. In conclusion, this research reveals that *Vogue* functions as an educator and shaper of femininity. It fosters and sustains classed ideologies and gendered hierarchies underlying the shifting trends, whilst strategically allowing room for reader agency and interpretation. This broadens both the academic and societal conversation of fashion media, femininity and gendered hierarchies.

KEYWORDS: *Vogue, fashion magazines, femininity, elite femininity, leisure class*

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PREFACE

My love for fashion magazines began when I was a young teen. 'It is so fashionable to have and read', I always thought. It fostered my love for clothes and sparked a sense of creativity within me. I never did consider that there could be a message behind it all. I simply read the magazines to adore the stunning models, gawk at the make-up products and adore the beautiful clothes and jewels. Thus, writing this thesis excited me more than anything. Reading through pages and pages of *Vogue* issues rekindled my love for editorial fashion as an art.

The research process offered its challenges, but it never took away from the butterflies in my stomach I felt when finding yet another interesting element in the issues. I never thought this topic would be this multifaceted and layered. My findings might only reveal the tip of the iceberg, but that is the beauty of research, it never stops. There is always something new to learn.

I wish to express my gratitude to Laura Braden for her always-inspiring words and incredible guidance through this process. She encouraged me to dig deeper, explore new territories and purposefully create a project I am proud of. I also give my thanks to my family - my haven, my home.

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1. Introduction

During the Gilded Age in the United States, society underwent rapid social, economic and cultural transformations. Amid these developments, fashion emerged as a gateway to individual artistic expression. It became a means through which identity and (inner) beauty could be created and curated (Blanchard, 1995, p. 24). It is therefore no surprise that in this age fashion magazines rose as prominent influencers, especially within the elitist society in the US. They became key agents in depicting taste, beauty, trends and desirability. Among these fashion publications, *Vogue* evolved from an elitist newspaper directed at high society into a highly influential fashion outlet (Lynge-Jorlén, 2017, p. 3; Miralles, 2022, p. 4). As its authority grew, *Vogue* seemed to play a significant role in shaping ideals of elite femininity. It did so by displaying what was common and natural among elite circles. This formed and imposed structures of power upon its readers. These structures created a realm of femininity in which implicit expectations about women's appearance, behaviour, attitude and social role were expressed (Engelstad, 2001, p. 5186; König, 2006, p. 206).

The significance of studying the influential *Vogue* issues may unravel how it possibly functions as an institution that extends beyond fashion. Much scientific research on alike topics extensively examined body- and self-image construction, racial and gender representation and its economic character among lowbrow fashion magazines. These inquiries indicate that fashion magazines have not been free from critique. They are subject to the perpetuation of suppression, restrictive beauty standards and sex roles. Magazines may portray an unrealistic woman to live up to (Budgeon & Currie, 1995, p. 173). However, less attention has been paid to how fashion magazines portray the female social role and which elitist expectations and narratives underlie this portrayal.

This thesis therefore intends to expand the current academic and societal conversation by conducting a qualitative mixed methods approach of discourse and semiotic analyses using sixteen published US *Vogue* issues. This thesis adopts a feminist and deconstructive approach (Olsen, 1997, p. 181&182) to unpick the longstanding authority of *Vogue*. By analysing US *Vogue* issues between 1945 and 2015, this research investigates which societal expectations *Vogue* imposes on its readers using textual content and fashion images. The aim is to reveal the gendered power structures embedded in the fashion content and to expand our insight into how it might construct women's (gender)identity. The research question guiding this inquiry is: "*How does the societal role of women portrayed in Vogue issues develop from the year 1945 to 2015?*". The sub-questions that help answer this question are (1)"*What are the overarching trends in the portrayal of women's societal roles in Vogue between 1945 and 2015?*", and (2) "*How does Vogue utilise textual content and fashion images to construct ideologies about women's roles in society?*".

For the structure of this thesis, the following chapter embeds the research questions in theories and theoretical discussion. It explores how *Vogue* functions in the elite scene, how femininity can be created and which ideologies of elite femininity it is likely to impose. In chapter three, the research

design and mixed methods approach are highlighted. The discourse analysis specifically focused on the textual content found in the issues and the semiotic analysis on the fashion images. The operationalisation of the three topics, fashion arenas, embodied femininity and leisurely life, is also included. Chapter four presents the results of the analysis of 162 articles derived from the sixteen selected issues. The results demonstrate that *Vogue* actively takes on the role of an educator who teaches beyond fashion. It specifically makes use of interesting language and dialectic strategies to frame its fashion information as most desirable and natural. However, *Vogue*'s content also consistently conveys dualistic narratives on how this woman should perform in society. The final chapter presents the conclusion in which the research questions are answered using the interpretations of the collected data.

2. Theoretical framework

With respect to the central research question, this theoretical framework focuses on gaining insight into how *Vogue* functions in the elitist fashion scene. It also aims to understand how the magazine as an influential fashion leader, holds the power to shape social expectations in relation to femininity and female roles.

2.1. *Vogue's fashion language*

To gain an understanding of *Vogue*'s influence, this section explores how fashion can operate as a language. Importantly, this language can be used to express a sense of self and femininity.

2.1.1. *Vogue magazine*

Vogue launched in the US in 1892 as an "authentic journal of society, fashion and the ceremonial side of life" (Miralles, 2022, p. 2). It was directed towards the elite society specifically in New York, acting as a newspaper in which social ideas of elitism were expressed. Even though *Vogue* was a society tabloid, it referred much to women's fashion. From 1910 *Vogue* started to become mostly oriented towards fashion and women (Miralles, 2022, p. 18). In these issues, fashion is presented as status symbols – visible objects that show which social class an individual belongs to. Possessing and wearing clothes, garments, and accessories, also known as fashion products, thus function as status symbols (Goffman, 1951, p. 296; Nazli & Kesken, 2014, p. 42).

The fashion magazine is both a textual and visual medium that can be generally described as fashion information. It serves the purpose of informing their readers of the latest fashions. It does so by showcasing the most desirable, fashionable and acceptable (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p. 9; Moeran, 2006, p. 725). Besides that the fashion magazine is a cultural product, it is also an economic product. It is a utilised instrument in the circulation process of fashion as it demonstrates fashion and sells it to its audience (Lynge-Jorlén, 2017, p. 3).

2.1.2. *Fashion language system*

When addressing fashion, we may understand it as a complex system of dressing rather than a textile garment alone. It namely functions as a language system in which clothing and dressing, often referred to as 'dress' in sociology, are the primary language with which one can converse (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p. 9; Entwistle, 2000, p. 48). Fashion magazines are powerful markers in this system. They tie in with broader societal expectations of femininity. Truly, they hold the power to also produce and organise femininity. Femininity is a process in which women are gendered – they are taught what a woman should be, look and act like (Entwistle, 2000, p. 146; Skeggs, 2002, p. 104).

The fact that dress is so closely related to femininity is no surprise. Dress is an intimate experience of the body, and the body is a public presentation. The dressed body, Entwistle (2000, p. 8) explains, is what partakes in social conventions. Depending on the social order that dominates in this convention, we decide on how we wish to present ourselves. We therefore also decide which form of dress is appropriate for the given convention. This principle demonstrates that dress has strong relations to

(micro) social order and is therefore an embodied activity embedded within social relations (Entwistle, 2000, p. 8-9). This notion is furthermore enhanced by clothing-codes presented by Davis (1992, p. 12). A clothing-code in dress signifies a certain narrative and understanding about an individual. For example, angularity in clothing pieces signifies a masculine spirit, whilst curvilinear shapes signify a feminine spirit. The clothes one wears thus articulate a sense of 'self' to the world (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p. 10; Davis; 1992, p. 12). However, the fashion products presented in *Vogue* also present a self to the world – a desired self.

2.1.3. Fashion textbook

The previous section speaks on how social conventions are physical spaces in which rules and expectations on dress are imposed upon its partakers. *Vogue* may be quite similarly perceived as an intangible, textual space in which rules and expectations on femininity are imposed upon its readers. Buckley and Fawcett (2002, p. 12) as well as Skeggs (2002, p. 98) argue that in this space, representations of women are constantly redefined. To put this simply, *Vogue* creates an intangible space in which its ideas on femininity are taught to its readers. It perpetuates and sustains these ideas, which are often derived from the elite scene. This space is created using what one can understand as 'dialectic elements'. These are textual content, and images and illustrations (together known as fashion images). These elements constitute the fashion language; a concept explained in the previous subsections. In conclusion, *Vogue* crafts a space using language elements to construct rules and expectations on femininity (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p. 12; Morin, 2024, p. 1; Bourdieu, 1989, p. 14&20). An argument that one can draw based on this conclusion is that if dress is a language, *Vogue* may be seen as a textbook through which one can learn this language. This language can be learned by reading the fashion information presented in the textbook. It seems, however, that this textbook does more than share information – it constructs femininity and imposes this social identity upon its readers. The following part of this framework explores how *Vogue* may impose these ideals using its power and authority.

2.2. The power of fashion magazines

Interestingly, Borrelli-Persson (2017) shares that *Vogue* deliberately presents ideas on the 'most desirable woman' (or the desired self as mentioned earlier). When interpreting this statement in the context of the theory discussed above, the conclusion could be drawn that *Vogue* aims at educating women on how the desirable woman should perform in society. It teaches its ideologies on feminine taste, womanhood, behaviour and the female body. *Vogue*'s idea of femininity has strong relations with the social order of the elite classes. Skeggs (2002, p. 99) explains that fashion magazines encapsulate social order by displaying how the elite woman differs from the average working-class woman. The elite woman namely is one who radiates ease, restraint, calmness, luxury and adornment. These are bodily expressions a working woman would never be able to attain, Skeggs (2002, p. 99) shares with irony. This demonstrates that the ideologies of femininity *Vogue* shares are classed.

This mechanism is said to encourage a culture of elite aspiration; becoming the elite woman portrayed in *Vogue* became a female responsibility. This so-desired woman could be (partly) achieved through the consumption of the fashion products presented in the magazine. This is known as promoting education through consumption, as the consumed fashion products come with a social, cultural and economic framework in which women must utilise these (Borrelli-Persson, 2017; Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p. 34; Bourdieu, 1989, p. 14&20; Kusimba, 2020, p. 169; Morin, 2024, p. 1&2; Xiaowei, 2013, p. 186&187).

2.2.1.   Magazine critiques

Fashion magazines and their (mis-)use of power have not been free from critique. They have been subject to the perpetuation of suppression, restrictive beauty standards and sex roles set by patriarchal movements (Budgeon & Currie, 1995, p. 182). With that, it may be argued that magazines use 'enchanting' writing as an almost magical power which exercises control over its readers (Moeran, 2010, p. 507). McRobbie (1997, p. 87) furthermore notes the commodity character of the fashion magazine; she describes it to be foolish. Fashion magazines have a sense of commitment to avoid political and serious issues. The magazines could, and arguably should, include critical pieces in which common fashion practices are contested instead (McRobbie; 1997, p. 87). Whether this is truly followed up remains the question, but it does hint at the influential role the fashion magazine can have within society. Besides these opportunities for magazines to engage in, *Vogue* in particular stands out as a cultural and elitist authority. The upcoming section aims to embed *Vogue* within its inherent social context of the elite class.

2.3.   *Vogue and elite culture*

As mentioned earlier, *Vogue* started as an inherent elitist tabloid. It appears that throughout all *Vogue* issues, it strongly promotes the idea of the woman of leisure, Borrelli-Persson (2017) shares. This ultimately could be the so-desired woman mentioned previously. The leisure class is a differentiated class excluded from any form of non-industrial labour. Women herein are portrayed as a means through which men could showcase their financial achievements. The leisurely woman is the financial possession of gentlemen of leisure. She conspicuously consumes – she presents luxury fashion products as visibly as possible, as she must be a flaneur of fashion to demonstrate wealth (Donnelly et al., 2016, p. 42; Veblen, 1899, p. 122). *Vogue* actively promotes the conspicuous consumption of the fashion products it displays. Nevertheless, *Vogue* also promotes inconspicuous consumption. This refers to explicit promotion of activities such as theatre, arts and book reading. These are often correlated with elite and leisure activities, as only a woman of free time has the time to partake in these activities. *Vogue* therefore also presents elitist ideas of social dimensions (Kusimba, 2020, p. 169; Veblen, 1899, p. 131). So far, the concepts of 'elite' and 'elitist' are often mentioned yet not described. The following subsection provides context on who this group is.

2.3.1.   The development of elites

Elites are known to have grand quantities of wealth and are significantly influential in shaping social and cultural norms. Interestingly, it seems that elites and their labour, domination and influence have merely changed throughout time, especially for the elite woman. Elite women were unable to work for money; the non-elite women were. Even so, they were both responsible for running the household and often had nursing duties, even when possessing a higher education. Elite women remain mostly married and supportive of their husband's career. She still dominates in areas such as parenting rather than the organisational and political. Most important to this thesis, conspicuous and inconspicuous forms of consumption also seem to remain an important part of the elite female life. Consumption often falls under the purview of women, as her labour includes the 'labour of lifestyle'. This includes cultivating habitus, drawing symbolic and real boundaries between elites and nonelites (Amsden, DiCaprio & Robinson, 2012, p. 136-138; Keister, Théboud & Yavorsky, 2022, p. 158&159).

The cultural elites have played an explicit and significant role in shaping the understanding of culture in the US until the 90s. Around this time, the rise of new media took place causing elite culture to decline. In this new media landscape there no longer is one authority depicting social norms and culture. However, it seems that the traditional elites have taken on a more negotiated position in the hierarchy by actually mingling in popular culture. Where power and influence were traditionally centralized, postmodern times suggest that mass and popular culture, along with the decentralization of authority, may now serve as new status signs of elitism. This is related to the idea of omnivorous appropriation and the end of monoculture, resulting in the flattening/broadening of taste as well as the increasing number of cultural elites, also known as 'hip kids' (such as artists, producers and marketers). This still revolves a lot around consumption and lifestyle similar to those of the traditional elites (Bolter, 2019, p. 15; Fodor, Wnuk-Lipinski & Yershova, 1995, p. 786; Heřmanová, 2023, p, 518).

2.4.   *Vogue constructing femininity*

It is increasingly clear that *Vogue* curates ideologies on elite femininity and creates a so-desired elite and leisurely woman. This section aims to understand what this so-desired woman must be like.

2.4.1.   The feminine lifestyle

The leisurely elite woman had a sense of freedom that the working woman did not have. Visiting department stores and strolling in the arcades – these are priorities saved for privileged women. The woman who worked was pushed into the domestic sphere and labelled as robust, healthy and tough. The labour they engaged in was said to prevent them from ever reaching femininity. This confirms that femininity thus encloses classed dispositions, specific forms of conduct, behaviour and cultural capital. These are elements only the elite women of leisure could possess and display (Skeggs, 2002, p. 99; McRobbie, 1997, p. 74&77).

This so-desired woman generally engages in outdoor activities, dinner parties and dances, and supposedly contests the idea of a true woman. The true woman is characterized by domesticity and submissiveness. The leisurely woman is a new, though truly not radically different from the true woman. She is still presented as a man's desire and the perfect spouse in marriage (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2017, p. 1). This new, leisurely woman is depicted in *Vogue* and is presented as the ideal woman all women should desire to be (Borrelli-Persson, 2017).

However, there seems to be an underlying dualistic expectation of how this woman should perform in society (Mason, Czajka, & Arber, 1976, p. 574). She should be progressive, aim for her prominence in the industry by investing in well-groomedness, participate in over extensive time-consuming hobbies, go on foreign holidays, find companionship amongst other women, and cultivate refined manners and sophistication. Nevertheless, she must also retain a domestic and submissive character, add to men's fame, be non-productive and attract the attention of males. Thus, women are responsible for their families whilst accessorising themselves with fashion products to secure appreciation and love (Billings, 1990, p. 62; Daloz, 2007, p. 31-33; Warde, 2011, p. 462&463; Xiaowei, 2013, p. 186&187). It is expected that this contradictory demonstration of the female role will also be portrayed in the *Vogue* issues.

2.4.2.   *Development of female roles*

It is evident that since the ending of WOII the female social role has been subject to change in the US. Predominantly after the dominant wave of feminism in the 60s, the concept of the new woman has been gaining prominence (Mason, Czajka, & Arber, 1976, p. 574; Reger, 2014, p. 45). Nevertheless, women were still inclined to take on submissive roles in society, as it was believed that working women could harm their marriage and family relations by simply working. The general attitude towards female roles in society moderately changed from the 70s onwards (Mason, Czajka, & Arber, 1976, p. 574).

Feminism affecting the content of fashion magazines has been most visible since the 70s, McRobbie (2008, p. 535-537) shares. The pre-70s the content often contained symbolic violence towards its readers. The readers were seen as passive dopes who were willing subjects of the romantic ideology of elitist femininity. In the post-70s there were major editorial shifts taking place due to the influence of feminism. Post-90s fashion magazines are presenting a more independent and individualised woman. This is often accompanied by the image of a sexually active woman who challenges the domination of the patriarchy and the double standards coming with it (McRobbie, 2008, p. 535-537).

2.5.   *Fashionable ceremonies*

The two previous subsections demonstrate that *Vogue*, besides presenting fashion products, also often writes about the lifestyle activities of the elite woman. Besides this, it also shares much on the ceremonial life of the elite woman. This concerns the literal mention of ceremonies, such as glittering

balls, dinner parties and gala's that most often happen at nighttime. At these ceremonies, the women are taught to wear the most expensive, sought-after and prestigious fashion products. However, *Vogue* presenting this ceremonial elite lifestyle has a deeper meaning than just the simple display of fashion products. Spencer (1880, p. 18) describes this idea as ceremonial institutions. Taking the example of the glittering ball; it does not only refer to fashion products, but also to the elitist feminine relations and social dynamics in elite environments. It is the appropriate code of conduct, mannerisms and self-control as bodily expressions in these ceremonies with which one displays that they had the leisurely time to invest in such correct behaviour (Kusimba, 2020, p. 172). This falls under inconspicuously expressing wealth, yet it is very much noticeable by others in the elite sphere. The correct use of codes of conduct could arguably be seen as embodied status symbols. It is not just the physical fashionable symbols that refer to status, but the internalised and embodied demeanour that displays status. Therefore, the mentioned ceremonies showcase *Vogue*'s ideas, rules and expectations on how the ideal and desirable, feminine woman should behave (Buckely & Fawcett, 2002, p. 60; Spencer, 1880, p. 18). These ideologies, however, are not static in character. It depends on fashion cycles and social developments.

2.6.   *Fashion and ideology cycles*

The function of *Vogue* is characterised by what Buckely and Fawcett (2002, p. 60) call "a radical heterogeneity". It presents strictly one authorial voice that decides what femininity is, and how the desirable woman should live and dress like. Interestingly, this voice seems to be quite cyclical. This can be understood in two different ways. *Vogue* seems to present its novel in a cyclical manner by creating a 'feminine time' – the time one takes to read the magazine and flip through its pages. It offers a sense of continuation that real-time, such as daily life and activities, does not offer. It is the way the magazine is structured that allows for this continuation, as you can read the magazine in any order, direction and way you wish to. This allows readers to get ahead of the narrative and to resist closure – it is a cycle they enclose themselves in. Interestingly, when the reader is stuck in this loop, they become subject to *Vogue* imposing any novel and ideology whilst the magazine does retain the agency of the reader (Buckely & Fawcett, 2002, p. 60). More on reader agency shall be discussed later.

Another manner in which *Vogue* is cyclical is that within the fashion industry, the average trend cycle lasts twenty years. This means that every twenty years preceding trends start to reoccur, thus trends tend to last twenty years before fading (or actually returning after the following twenty years). Often times fashion magazines depict what is trending in fashion, which heavily relies on – or possibly constructs – the fashion cycle (Pillai, 2021, p. 177). What appears in the fashion cycle is also very dependent on social developments. For example, during the WOII women were depicted as masculine in fashion magazines as the men went off to war and women became more self-reliant. This suddenly became the new feminine, which contested old femininity ideologies. This demonstrates that fashion cycles, trends and codes in *Vogue* may continually contest previous femininity representation.

However, these developments do not indicate that the core values of the given institution also change. Buckley and Fawcett (2002, p. 60) share that the core values of a magazine in that sense never change. Magazines do use different terms, labels and narratives over time. However, these new terms continue to describe the same femininity rules and expectations over and over again. Buckely & Fawcett (2002, p. 60) argue that this truly is the inherent character of the fashion magazine – it creates the illusion of change while preserving core values.

2.7.   *The magazine reader*

It is assumed that those who read *Vogue*'s issues strongly identify themselves with fashionability. It might therefore also be the assumption that the ideals presented in the issues do strongly impact the reader's idea of the desired woman (Buckely & Fawcett, 2002, p. 61). The question remains, however, where this leaves the agency of the reader. Laing (2018, p. 21) shares that reader agency is most often found within reading fashion images. Where textual content is more explicit and carefully formulated, fashion images leave more room for reader reception. Barthes (1977, p. 15-17) describes that fashion images consist of formal structures made of their composition, the actual imagery (*mise en scène*) and anchor texts (written texts added to the image). These structures are imposed upon the reader and assumably contain underlying ideologies (Barthes, 1977, p. 15-17; Jobling, 1999, p. 6).

However, the magazine reader makes sense of the seen fashion images on their own, which could result in that their response is not as consistent as hoped for. The image gets tangled in a network of (1) displayed fashion products and their new possibilities (e.g., new ways of wearing garments) and (2) the readers' pre-existing patterns of thinking and meaning-making. The reader thus develops, after reading and decoding a fashion image, a mental image of the seen image. This new image informs their understanding of their self and fashion (Laing, 2018, p. 9&11).

Thus, the feminine ideals that underlie the fashion images may have a continuing effect on the reader's being. In this manner of speaking, it could be expected that any ideology expressed through an image will impact the reader, thus leaving them with little agency. However, the fact that the reader does reconfigure the seen image demonstrates great reader agency. When considering how fashion images display signs and codes (that present femininity ideologies) we must mind its significance as well as the freedom of reconfiguration (Laing, 2018, p. 17).

2.7.1.   *The fashion party*

The mention of reader agency might raise questions about the power *Vogue* holds as an educator and key agent in imposing its ideologies of elite femininity. To address this, it is relevant to determine what power in this context is and how it can be imposed upon magazine readers. Weber (2004, p. 182) explains that power is the chances a person or group has to realise their will in a community. Within such a community, or what Weber (2004, p. 193) calls parties, there is a leader and party members. Such a party is unified based on shared principles, consumption patterns and a specific lifestyle. The leader often has an ideology as its goal and has a programme to realise this. Over time, its members

develop the personal goal to fulfil the ideology set by the leader. The members are thus under the influence of the power and dominance of the leader (Weber, 2004, p. 192&193). Arguably, this phenomenon could possibly be translated to the context of this research. *Vogue* and its readers could be perceived as a party with *Vogue* as the leader. *Vogue* shares its strong ideologies on femininity and creates the desire amongst its readers to fulfil this ideology, as the previously discussed theories suggest.

This Weberian approach does depict *Vogue* as all-powerful in which its readers are dopes to its dominance. It is therefore relevant to mention that in this context, this application of Weber's theory to the case of *Vogue* is not to explicitly name *Vogue* as 'a party' and its readers as 'its members'. It does, however, provide an interesting perspective on how *Vogue* potentially functions as such and allows for further interpretation of reader agency. Weber (Fevre, Denney & Borland 1997, p. 566&567) namely draws the distinction between members who partake in the same elite class of the party leader and those who do not. Within *Vogue* as a potential party, the same distinction could be made. Members/readers can be either those who partake in the elitist communities or those who are middle/working class. This is confirmed by Miralles (2022, p. 9&10), saying that *Vogue* was written for the rich by the rich to stroke their ego, but it was also an "aspirational read for the middle classes" (Miralles 2022, p. 10). Weber (Fevre, Denney & Borland 1997, p. 566&567) furthermore describes that active members of a party tend to benefit from the ideals and goals pushed by the party leader. When putting this in the context of Miralles' statements, it could be argued that elite members/readers of *Vogue* are advantaged in the ideologies *Vogue* shares. Especially as these seemingly idealise and possibly idolise the elite class. This could lead to the conclusion that elite-class readers of the *Vogue* issues are potentially active members. These active members may also be more subject to the leadership of Vogue, as 'following' *Vogue* would benefit them and boost their status. Aligned with this speculation, Miralles (2022, p. 9) states that American society is quick with and passionate about distinguishing itself as the aristocracy, as these are marked with "immutable nobility" (2022, p. 9). It could thus be possible that active members could have less reader agency and are more vulnerable to the ideologies of *Vogue*, as they are quick to distinguish themselves as the elite.

Considering this notion, one could arguably reason that middle/working-class readers could be considered passive readers. Miralles (2022, p. 9&10) states that for the middle class, the ideas presented in *Vogue* are 'too big' to actually strive for. It could be read for enjoyment, however. This could point towards the idea that passive readers do not have much common ground or benefits within the *Vogue* party. They thus could have greater reader agency, as they are less affected by the dynamics and ideologies of the potential party. This Weberian approach informs this research on what potentially active and passive readers are, and what constitutes this distinction.

2.8.   Power of the reader

The previously mentioned theories continue to depict *Vogue* as, in the words of Barthes (1986, p, 50), the 'king' of the Authors empire. The Author empire refers to the intellectual paradigm in which the writers of magazines have all the authority to create and impose meaning. In such traditional models of reader reception, the author is fundamentally depicted as the central figure in sharing its taste and passions as the dominating norm (Barthes, 1986, p, 49&50). However, in his work *The death of the Author*, Barthes (1986, p. 50) challenges this assumption. He argues that authors' rule and tyranny diminish in these modern times. He highlights the power of the reader and promotes the absence of the author. He argues that magazine writers make use of linguistics to only make utterances rather than create a novel. That they only create structures one can follow but do not create true meaning. It is truly the reader where meaning is created.

Building on Barthes' decentring of the author, Fiske (1986, p. 394) shares a similar notion. He states that even though media outlets try to discipline their meaningfulness, it is truly out of their control. Readers and audiences namely have different sociocultural and -economic positions, thus different ideological frames in which they position what they consume. Barthes (1986, p. 54) similarly shares that when the fashion information is read, it enters an inner dialogue within the reader between knowledge and the self. Thus, regardless of how much *Vogue* tries to control the narrative and how its contents can be interpreted, it will always be paired with contradictory meanings, resistance and ambiguity from the readers' side. Hall (1980, p. 54) describes this as the result of misunderstandings and distortions within the seemingly simple and linear encoding and decoding processes. Signs and codes presented in *Vogue* are subject to the personal ideological and cultural codes of the reader. Hall (1980, p. 56) uses the example of how the display of a sweater may signify a 'warm garment', but may also connote 'a cold day', and the 'winter that is approaching'. With the sweater displayed in a specific visual setting, it may even connote the idea of taking a walk in the park on an autumnal day. What is presented in *Vogue* is therefore always subject to an extremely wide variety of personal ideologies (Hall, 1980, p. 56). The meaning that is created by the readers and attached to what *Vogue* represents, which Fiske (1986, p. 399) refers to as discursive practices, will therefore always be polysemic.

Nevertheless, Hall (1973, p. 9) argues that polysemy must not be confused with pluralism. The codes presented in magazines namely constitute a dominant social order which can be interpreted in many ways. This stance of polysemy entails that authors encode messages with a certain intention in mind – a meaning they prefer the reader to connect to their code (also known as preferred meaning). This demonstrates that *Vogue* always aims to guide its readers in a specific direction/ideology. However, the previously discussed theories depict readers as anything but cultural dopes, 'helpless before the authority of *Vogue*'. Hall (1993, p. 101-103) herein presents three positions of decoding among readers. In the dominant-hegemonic position, *Vogue* and the reader fall under the same cultural biases and assumptions. There is little miscommunication between the sender (*Vogue*) and the receiver (reader). This position could relate to active members of the fashion party, as previously discussed.

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The negotiated position presents a receiver who understands the sender's message but does not actively engage in the same viewpoint as the sender. The receiver is familiar with dominant cultural and societal ideologies but also holds on to personal messages and their self. The message of the sender herein often mixes with the message of the receiver. In the oppositional position, the receiver is capable of decoding the sender's message. However, due to their strong personal beliefs, they may fully 'misinterpret' the message. They often see unintended meanings, which may oppose the meaning created by the sender (Hall, 1993, p. 101-103). Even though the reader remains subject to the dominating norm *Vogue* sets within its fashion arena, the different reader positions indicate that the reader does hold the power to resist *Vogue*'s messages and its preferred meanings. They may thus challenge *Vogue* as a figure of control.

3. Methods

This theoretical framework explored how *Vogue* operates within the classed and gendered fashion system. These theories inform this research on how *Vogue* as an agent holds the power to construct the societal role of the feminine woman. It is evident *Vogue* presents a set of rules and expectations of the so-desirable woman – she consumes (in)conspicuously, displays both physical and embodied status symbols and partakes in the ceremonial side of the elitist lifestyle. The theory therefore leads to the assumption that *Vogue* as fashion information imposes elitist, femininity ideologies and ideologies on how women should perform in society. Using a qualitative mixed-methods design combining discourse and semiotic analysis, this research aims to deconstruct this theoretical assumption of *Vogue* being an agent. It does so by examining the specific mechanisms and strategies *Vogue* implements to impose elitist ideologies and expectations upon its readers as well as which specific femininity identity and ideologies it constructs across different decades.

As mentioned in the introduction, much research has been conducted on lowbrow fashion magazines. Little research has been conducted, however, on how the most dominant fashion magazines like *Vogue* portray the societal role of women. This thesis therefore aims to expand the view upon how the influential *Vogue* specifically portrays the social role of women, and what underlying and possibly elitist ideologies these portrayals present. This motivated the formulation of the central research question: "*How does the societal role of women portrayed in Vogue issues develop from the year 1945 to 2015?*". The sub-questions that help answer this question are: (1)*"What are the overarching trends in the portrayal of women's societal roles in Vogue between 1945 and 2015?"* aims to map the development of the societal role of women in the magazine, which could lead to larger overarching themes/trends. (2) *"How does Vogue utilise textual content and fashion images to construct ideologies about women's roles in society?"* predominantly focuses on how *Vogue* creates and imposes ideologies by using observable codes and signifiers in its issues.

3.1. Research design: mixed methods

The research questions require the analysis of *Vogue* issues and how its contents can be interpreted by its readers. It is most appropriate to use a qualitative mixed method approach, as the magazine issues are constituted by two dialectic elements that constitute the fashion language: textual content and fashion images (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p. 12). It is thus necessary to analyse both textual and visual data. In order to do so I conducted both a discourse and semiotic analysis, as these two complement each other in this case.

Discourse analysis (DA) offers a meaning-making approach; it aims at capturing text in a specific context and connecting this to larger social structures. Discourses may be seen as models that impose certain social ideas and values upon their readers, holding the potential to (re)produce social order (Hansen & Machin, 2008, p. 780). In the light of this research, DA allows for the exploration of which elitist social frameworks of femininity are posed in *Vogue* issues, and how the text neutralises these narratives. It is therefore an appropriate method to apply when analysing the textual data of the issues.

Semiotics is commonly known as the science of signs. It aims to make sense of an arrangement of signs and what the implicit meaning is of this arrangement. Signs in fashion magazines may e.g., be the back- and foreground of an image, the angle of the fashion images, the garments and their colours, the products presented and the posture of the models. These signs together aim at presenting a narrative, and semiotics aims to recommend a particular way in which these signs can be read (Hall, 1997, p. 16&50). I thus made use of this method for the fashion images found in the magazine issues. Further explanation of the discourse and semiotics protocols will be discussed later on in this chapter.

3.2.   *Sampling and data selection*

To conduct the discourse and semiotic analyses, I used a convenience, non-probable sampling method in which I purposefully select the issues I will analyse. This implies I made use of readily available units (Pavelko & Grabe, 2017, p. 3), which are in this case available through the online archive of *Vogue*. The appointed research population is the US *Vogue* issues and the units of analysis are the issues published from the year 1945 to 2015. Since WOII the social role of women has been contested and subject to change, and more dualistic than ever before (Mason, Czajka, & Arber, 1976, p. 574). It is therefore interesting to the research questions to look into the development of the portrayal of the societal role of women in *Vogue* publications from the end of WOII (thus 1945) until now. To be able to make generalising statements for all these issues, I analysed two *Vogue* issues from every ten years from 1945 on. This forms the research sample.

3.2.1.   *Rubric selection*

Vogue issues are constituted by rubrics such as fashion, book reviews, tabloid/information, beauty, health, travel and food. These rubrics present codes on bodily expressions, appearances and personal interests that correlate with elitist femininity and the idealised lifestyle of the leisurely woman (Kusimba, 2020, p. 172). However, *Vogue* continually changes the names and the in- and exclusion of the rubrics. Generally, the *Vogue* issues are constituted by the following categories: (1) *general fashion trends & products* (including advertisements, images and illustrations), (2) *beauty columns*, and (3) *non-clothing information* ('featured articles/people', 'celebrity news' and 'fashion in living') (Baily & Seock, 2010, p. 49). With respect to the manageability of this research and the central research question, this thesis shall focus only on (1) *general fashion trends and products*. This relates to the focus of this research on dress and the fashion system, as well as the expectation that this rubric presents codes and rules on bodily expressions, personal interests and social activities that correlate with the lifestyle of the so-desired leisurely woman. The analysis of this rubric will assumably present a certain portrayal of the societal role of women, and an underlying ideology. I have thus analysed both dialectic elements of this rubric.

3.2.2.   *Issue sample selection*

I selected and analysed two published US *Vogue* issues from every ten years from 1945 on. I selected two issues from 1945, 1955, 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995, 2005, and 2015. This resulted in sixteen *Vogue*

issues as my sample. I have selected 162 articles in total from these issues, these form the research units. The justification for the sample selection of ten years is that within fashion cycle lasts 20 years (Pillai, 2021, p. 177). Considering this notion, it is appropriate to analyse every ten years (rather than twenty years) from 1945 to ensure that the sample represents *Vogue*'s content. *Vogue* also conducted (brief) analyses per decade to capture the development of the magazine issues (*Vogue*, n.d.). This sample size is also feasible considering the given time for the Master thesis.

With time, *Vogue* has reduced its number of published issues per year. It started in 1893 by publishing weekly, from 1910 until 1973 it published two issues per month. Since then it has been publishing one issue per month. For the selected decades, only the decades 1945, 1955 and 1965 have more than twelve issues per year. The rest of the selected years all have twelve issues per year. It is commonly known within the fashion industry that fashion companies release a new collection every spring and autumn. Every spring it releases its spring/summer collection, and in autumn its autumn/winter collection. Spring and autumn are therefore also known to be significant times for fashion magazines, as new trends and collections must be reported on (Blaazer, 2024). Considering this, I systematically selected one issue from the month of May and August per selected year. This decision is also with respect to the manageability of conducting this research. In Appendix A the table is found with an overview of the selected sample.

3.3.   *Operationalisation*

To explore how *Vogue* portrays the societal role of women and which femininity ideologies underlie this, I specifically looked at how women are expected to behave, move, embody themselves, act in social environments and in which lifestyle and ceremonial activities they must partake in. This focus presents three concepts: 'Fashion information', 'elite femininity' and 'elite lifestyle', which were all presented and discussed in the theoretical framework. To provide a systematic overview of the operationalisation, I have included an operational model in Appendix B. This model forms the foundation of the codebook and topic list found in Appendix C. Hereunder the concepts are operationalised into topics and dimensions.

3.3.1.   *Topic 1: Fashion arenas*

The concept of **fashion information** concerns the fact that *Vogue* is inherently fashion information that is considered fashionable and desirable. It presents status symbols, which are not just physical but also embodied status symbols - the internalised and embodied demeanour that displays status. The magazine has power and educates its readers on what is desirable to look and act like. This concept is operationalised into the topic 'Fashion arenas'.

For the *textual content* in the sample, this relates to the codes of embodied status symbols. This could be observed through the explicit mentions of manners and codes of conduct. It also concerns the code of power systems, which concerns the observed strategies *Vogue* uses to evoke desires and

impose authority, such as using enchanting writing (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 14&20; Goffman, 1951, p. 296; Moeran, 2010, p. 507; Warde, 2011, p. 462&463; Xiaowei, 2013, p. 186&187).

For the *fashion images* in the sample, this relates to the clothing-codes presented by Davis (1992, p. 14). This could be observed through how *Vogue* systematically uses the same codes to describe garments, such as 'softness, fluid, corseted and freeing'. This also concerns the exposure of bodily features, such as amplified chests. These function as signifiers to express different understandings of the female role (Davis 1992, p. 14).

3.3.2.   *Topic 2: Embodied femininity*

The concept of **elite femininity** concerns the power the magazine has to impose the ideology of the desirable woman upon its readers. This ideology of femininity depicts how they should act, dress and look – it sets clear rules on how women should behave in society, specifically in elitist activities. This concept is operationalised into the topic 'Embodied femininity'. For the *textual content* in the sample, this relates to the code of ceremonies and ceremonial institutions. This could be observed through the evening activities as contexts women are placed in by *Vogue*, such as gala's, balls, ballet performances and dinner parties. This also concerns how *Vogue* explicitly writes about how women are expected to dress and adorn themselves for these ceremonies. This displays how femininity should be embodied in the elite class.

For the *fashion images* in the sample, this also relates to the code of ceremonies and ceremonial institutions. It could be observed through the type of ceremonies that are visualised, which garments the female models wear at the ceremonies and which possible trophies/status symbols are included in the images (Buckely & Fawcett, 2002, p. 8; Daloz, 2007, p. 31-33; Kusimba, 2020, p. 172).

3.3.3.   *Topic 3: Leisurely life*

The concept of the **elite lifestyle** concerns that *Vogue* continually displays the leisurely woman as the ideal. This ideal, however, is often loaded with dualistic expectations and rules of the female role in society. This concept is operationalised into the topic 'Leisurely life'. For the *textual content* of the sample, this relates to the code of leisure femininity. This could be observed through which elite activities *Vogue* continually mentions and how the female social position is in these activities. This concerns their career, relationships and marriage to men, and how the new woman (and the Gybson girl) acts in this social context (Kusimba, 2020, p. 172; Rabinovitch-Fox, 2017, p. 1; Veblen, 1899, p. 104; Xiaowei, 2013, p. 186&187).

For the *fashion images* in the sample, this relates to the code of social backgrounds. This could be observed through which social contexts the women are placed in, such as domestic spheres, outdoor spaces or in the city. It also concerns the female position; this specifically relates to how women are situated in social contexts that include men. It is the expectation that women are mostly displayed in domestic spheres. This is a continual reoccurrence throughout the presentation of both the true and new woman (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2017, p. 1). The observations of these three topics directly depict what

the overarching trends are in the portrayal of *Vogue*. It also gives insight into how *Vogue* uses different strategies, signifiers and codes to construct ideologies of femininity. These topics thus directly relate to the sub-questions.

3.4.   *Protocols for analyses*

Based on the operationalisation and the codebook, I formulated protocols for the analyses. These determined how I could select elements from the textual data and fashion images in the research units that are relevant to the concepts and topics. This offers more insight into how I translated the theories and concepts into codes, applied these to the data and transformed it into the findings.

3.4.1.   *Protocols discourse analysis*

Table one presents the set protocols for the discourse analysis. It determined when certain codes could be applied or not. With that, DA is commonly driven by a set of questions that are informed by the theoretical framework (Carvalho, 2008, p. 166). In line with the set protocol, I have developed a set of questions that help carry out the DA: What assumptions about femininity underpin what is being said? What terms, stories and images are used to construct meanings? How is the desired woman ascribed and displayed? What is emphasised as relevant, and what is silenced? What distribution of social power is implied?

Table 1 Overview of definition of codes, including the protocols when the codes apply or do not – for discourse analysis

Topics	Codes	Code description	When to use (protocol)	When not to use (protocol)
Fashion arenas	**Embodied status symbols**	An individuals' 'expensiveness' takes an embodied form. This is measurable through bodily control, which means that certain values are internalized and reflected in behaviour, posture and self-control (Daloz, 2007; Veblen, 1899).	Apply this code to all references emphasizing the importance of manners, bodily/self-control, behaviour, posture and clothing-codes. These all refer to internalized and embodied forms of femininity in relation to behaviour.	Do not use this code with the specific mention of elite/leisure activities and the practicalities of ceremonies.
Embodied femininity	**The elite woman**	The social, physical, affective and intellectual dimensions that fit with the elitist idea of femininity. These expressions reflect that they are at the top of the value hierarchy (Kusimba, 2020).	Apply this code to all references emphasizing ideologies of femininity in relation to ceremonies. These all refer to which ceremonial activities of femininity one must engage in, and how women must adorn themselves in these contexts.	Do not use this code with the specific mention of inherent/embodied behaviour, nor the mention of the social expectation/role of women in these ceremonies (as this relates to fashion arenas).
Leisurely life	**Leisure expectations of femininity**	The elite woman embodies the life of leisure. This leisurely life, however, has underlying expectations which are often dualistic. She must stick to the household as her workplace, but must also aim for a sense of success (Xiaowei, 2013).	Apply this code to all elite activities women are put in and to references emphasizing the social role of women concerning relations, marriage, career and in which spheres she is contextualised.	Do not use this code with the specific mention of the code of conduct she must display (as this relates to fashion arenas), nor rules on dressing (as this relates to embodied femininity).

3.4.2.   Protocol semiotics analysis

As discussed in the theoretical framework, fashion images consist of formal structures: composition, *mise en scène* and anchor texts. It is expected that these three elements imply a certain ideology and expectation of femininity (Barthes, 1977, p. 15-17; Jobling, 1999, p. 6). How these fashion images are decoded happens on two levels: (1) the displayed fashion products and their new possibilities and (2) the readers' pre-existing patterns of thinking and meaning-making (Laing, 2018, p. 17). With respect to the research's aim to deconstruct the assumed authority of *Vogue* as an agent who imposes femininity ideologies upon its readers, the semiotic analysis focuses on deconstructing which ideologies may be underlying the fashion images in the sample. I will thus only focus on level one: the displayed fashion products and ways in which these can be worn, and ultimately what they may connote. I formulated protocols determining how I would code fashion images in the sample, and what they could connote (using the discussed theory).

Table 2 Overview of definition of codes, including the protocols when the codes apply or do not – for semiotic analysis

Topics	Codes	Code description	When to use (protocol)	When not to use (protocol)
Fashion arenas	**Clothing-codes**	Rules on how a woman must dress herself. Specific clothing pieces and shapes convey (or signify) a particular understanding and female identity (Davis, 1992).	Models wearing fashion products such as dresses and skirts, pants and heels are characterized by e.g., tailored waists, covering the skin completely, uncover body parts, have a straight, fluid, freeing or narrow fit.	Do not use this code in relation to accessories and jewellery, nor to the make-up or hair of the model.
Embodied femininity	**Ceremonial activities**	Ceremonies are conventions (such as galas) reserved for the elite class. In these settings women dress extravagantly and display many status symbols (Daloz, 2007).	This concerns the setting in which the model is placed as well as what she wears. It is applicable for evening activities in luxurious setting in which the model wears badges, costumes, extravagant hats, jewellery and accessories.	Do not use this code in other social contexts/compositions other than true ceremonies, such as a town/urban nor country/city settings.
Leisurely life	**True and new women**	Even though the true and new woman do not differ in essence, she does behave differently. The true woman remains modest, covered and humble. The new woman displays playful behaviour and more daring fashion (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2017).	The model is put in daily domestic spheres, and in playful outdoor spheres. This includes day-time activities at locations such as the beach, the countryside, strolling around in town/the city, or moments where she can dress-up.	Do not use this code for ceremonial conventions, nor in editorial shots/fashion images set in editorial/staged environments.

3.5.   Data collection and analysis

From February 23 until May 23, 2025, the data analysis took place using Atlast.TI. I used the codebook presented in Appendix C as my guideline as well as the protocols I have set. These will be discussed in the following subsection. I fully analysed all sixteen issues with a result of 530 in vivo codes and 13 code groups. As *Vogue* indeed makes use of synonyms to describe the same phenomena over the decades, the number of in vivo codes may be seen as remarkably high. However, after the phases of de- and reassembly, ten axial codes and four general themes arose.

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3.5.1. Context of the issues

What is notable, is that meanings of symbols and signifiers can change with time. Thus an observed signifier in an issue of 1945 may mean something different than observing the same signifier in 2015. In the sample, it quickly became evident which norms and values per decade were dominating. E.g., the issues of 1965 revolve around the themes of baring skin, exposing the tummy/midriff and having tanned skin. In the issues of 1945, however, the skin was almost always fully covered up nor was baring of the skin promoted. This demonstrates that the issues effectively demonstrate what was considered the norm of that time. I report on these developments in the results section of the thesis prior to diving into the themes.

The analysis, however, did confirm the cyclical character of magazines as argued for by Buckely & Fawcett (2002, p. 60). *Vogue* interestingly recycles terminology, making use of synonyms of earlier-mentioned ways to describe garments, moods, attitudes and behaviours. For example, in the August issue of 1995 the first mention of 'timeless' is found. In August 2005 *Vogue* replaced it with 'ageless' instead of timeless. It also uses the word 'classic' in the same contextual meaning. These synonyms continue to express the same core values (Buckely & Fawcett, 2002, p. 60), which in this case could be presenting a sense of classic beauty that does not whither and will always be in fashion.

3.5.2. The coding process

Using the codebook and protocols, I started coding using predominantly in vivo codes. These codes use the same words the data presents as the code itself (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 45). Interestingly and to me most surprisingly, these codes mostly matched with the theory discussed in chapter two. The issues explicitly mentioned words such as leisure dressing, status symbols, most feminine, costumes, prosperity dressing, desire, and work is slaving. These all directly tie in with the theoretical framework. *Vogue*, however, shares much more on its ideologies in very explicit manners. This did result in a large number of 530 in vivo and open codes.

Throughout the open coding process, I started to categorise the codes into code groups quite early on. I grouped them based on the theoretical concepts and predetermined topics. I also allowed for new concepts to emerge and the characteristics the open codes shared, as argued for by Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 80). New concepts that emerged from the data were e.g.: trophies, fashion textbook/guide/handbook, clothes in relation to nature, smart and intelligent clothes and the distinction between town and country wear. The categories I formulated are ceremonial institutions, ceremonies, character of clothes, clothing codes, displayed garments, embodied status symbols, fashion education, fashion images, leisure femininity, mention of men, power systems and social context.

After that, I looked into the relationships between the open codes and organised categories. These relationships focused on what the open codes could presumably mean in the context of femininity ideologies. This altogether results in new code groups known as axial codes, representing the relationship between open codes (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 45&48). In this process, I took the

questions formulated for the analysis into consideration, such as: what assumptions about femininity underpin what is being said? How is the desired woman ascribed and displayed? What distribution of social power is implied? This resulted in ten axial codes: the fashion party, the fashion textbook, naturalising, fashion attitude, fashion & status, desirability & enchantment, fashion symbols, prominent male figures, double/triple life and body consciousness.

Consequently, I moved on from the axial codes to cohesive stories. Within qualitative research, this phase of coding is commonly known as the dis- and reassembly of axial codes. The aim herein is to construct cohesive stories the codes can tell and conceptually link the axial codes together to formulate general descriptors, as Ryan & Bernard (2003, p. 88) suggest. This ultimately led to the formulated developed four selective codes or themes that are descriptors of the phenomenon it encompasses, namely: the fashion party, the fashion textbook, desirability & enchantment, and double/triple life. These themes arose from both the theory and the data.

3.5.3. *Interpretation of findings*

The interpretation of the findings presented in the following chapter is based on the discourse and semiotic analyses. Herein I aim to stick closely to the theoretical framework, the codebook and protocols as well as the primary data. How the findings are interpreted, however, may not be perceived as set in stone. The mention of reader agency, freedom and resistance in the theoretical framework clearly displays this. Ytre-Arne (2014, p. 240) wrote in her research on the positioning of the self and women's identities related to magazine reading that magazine contents are interpreted and translated through and to the self. How one interprets what one has read will differ strongly from woman to woman, and thus from reader to reader. This depends on the agency with which one reads *Vogue*, as earlier concluded.

However, she also shifts the perspective concerning agency. She argues that it may not lay within the domain of judging reader agency as 'little' or 'a lot'. Rather, she encourages the idea of a magazine *narrowing* or *widening the women's space for agency*. This puts the focus on how *Vogue* either constrains or liberates the freedom for readers, and on how *Vogue* narrows down the specific ways in which its contents and underlying ideologies can be interpreted **(**Ytre-Arne, 2014, p. 240). It arguably is the assumption that active members/readers of *Vogue* in a dominant-hegemonic position are more prone to femininity ideologies than passive readers, as active readers benefit from *Vogues'* ideologies more (Fevre, Denney & Borland 1997, p. 566&567; Hall, 1993, p. 101-103; Miralles 2022, p. 10). However, this research aims to uncover how *Vogue* functions as an agent and which ideal and desired woman it constructs. Approaching the reader's agency and resistance in the sense of narrowing/widening (done by *Vogue* itself) rather than little/a lot (done by the reader) enables me to objectively interpret the findings without falling into the pitfall of subjectivism and relativism. I will therefore include this phenomenon of narrowing and widening of reader agency by *Vogue* when addressing the results.

4. Results

The results in this chapter are based on the complete analysis of all issues of the selected sample. It aims to provide data to answer the research questions. I will first address the development of femininity across the decades to contextualise the discussion of the themes. This directly relates to the first sub-question: *"What are the overarching trends in the portrayal of women's societal roles in Vogue between 1945 and 2015?"*. After that, the four main themes: the fashion party, the fashion textbook, desirability & enchantment, and double/triple life will be discussed. These themes are related by the following logic: *Vogue* seems to function as a potential fashion party, driven by *Vogue* as its leader who sets ideologies on femininity. To share these ideologies amongst its members/readers, it turns its issues into what *Vogue* calls fashion textbooks. Using almost fantasy-like strategies, it evokes a strong sense of desirability for readers to become the ideal woman *Vogue* constructs. This ideal woman often lives a double or even triple life of being a kept, working and mothering woman. This discussion aims to answer the second sub-question, *"How does Vogue utilise textual content and fashion images to construct ideologies about women's roles in society?",* and which femininity ideologies underlie these.

4.1. *The development of women from 1945-2015*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the research units demonstrate the dominating norm among women in society quite evidently. This subsection aims to discuss how this norm developed throughout the selected decades. In 1945 and 1955 we identify a shy and timid woman. She does not stand out much, rarely shows skin, her hair is almost always covered up and always looks away from the camera. She is never spoken of as a working woman, but rather as a woman who takes time to take care of herself, her appearance and her body. Surprisingly, she is not often put in a domestic environment. The issues do not speak much about males, marriage and children.

A shift took place in 1965 and 1975. *Vogue* displays a more bared woman – her skin is exposed, tanned skin is idealised, chests are amplified and nudity plays a bigger role. It also introduces more tailored, snug, slimming and narrowing clothes. Especially the idea of chic is pushed a lot, which leads to the introduction of the typology of the "Chicerino". The typology seems to represent a dreamy yet assertive woman who may reach for the stars and stand out in fashion. This typology shall be explored more in-depth later on in this chapter.

In 1985 and 1995 the idea of the desired woman changes significantly. In these decades women are described using almost fantasy-like analogies. She is related to art, possibly portraying her as if she is a piece of art herself. This is enhanced by the increasing mention of body-consciousness and the use of extravagant, jewel-like garments. She is portrayed in groups of women, covered in luxury and trophies. The acceptance of the working woman is also introduced; we see female models in offices and working garments (such as suits). Interestingly, she is also always described as a mother and a wife. This evokes a sense of drawing the working woman back to domestic and feminine spheres.

In 2005 and 2015, *Vogue* speaks a lot on social life and the importance of public relations, covering what *Vogue* calls the "social and cultural calendar". This puts the desired woman in a new context, as she now seems to be presented as a social being. This has not often been elicited in the previous decades. However, *Vogue* does not explicitly share rules on how this social being must behave. It rather speaks on working women, such as models and actresses, and how they balance their social lives. *Vogue* continues to always mention the husbands of the working woman and the concept of marriage and motherhood in these issues. Especially the notion of children and their upbringing receives attention. This seems to, again, draw the woman back to the domestic sphere. It is also in this decade the 'double or triple life' is mentioned, based on which the fourth theme is developed.

In contrast, these general developments may also demonstrate a feministic stance of *Vogue* in the evolvement of women. The issues show that the desired woman develops from a timid house wive into a sexual and working being. The display of the female as a sexual being around the 60s happens simultaneously with the second wave of feminism in the US. Earlier understandings of women and sex are characterised by 'innocence' and 'being frail'. Sexuality and expressions of such were often criticised within traditional and patriarchal ideologies. *Vogue* herein thus seems to take on a feminist position in contesting these ideologies by displaying the sexual pleasures of women (Simmons, 2009, p. 4). The same may be concluded for *Vogue* presenting the working woman who is also married and is a mother. This is a newer idea of modern marriage where womanhood is not only found in marriage but also in a career and a social life. The evolvement of women is interconnected with the increasing centralisation of the sexual self, Simmons (2009, p. 5) explains. This also includes the increasing dependency on the self and inner consciousness, rather than continuing to trust on external bodily controls of traditional authorities (Simmons, 2009, p. 7). This may represent a feminist reclaiming of *Vogue* and the empowerment of women in any context (in this instance being the domestic, the working and the sexual woman).

4.2.   The fashion party

This theme discusses the findings that *Vogue* actively shares principles on the world of fashion, how it seems to foster a collective fashion consciousness, and which general ideologies on femininity it expresses. These practices could indicate that *Vogue* might be functioning as a fashion party. In the issue of August 1995, *Vogue* writes on the principles of shopping and purchasing garments. On page 202, it writes: "Come fall, fashion pages and trendy parties alike will be filled with …". It is most interesting that *Vogue* chose the term 'party' (rather than magazines or publications). The use of this term could simply refer to the accumulation of different fashion magazines. However, when considering Weber's theory (Weber, 2004, p. 193), this mention could refer to a group with shared principles and fashion trends. It could thus refer to *Vogue*'s functioning as a party. The potential party, however, may be perceived as much bigger than only *Vogue* itself, the designers it represents and the readers of the magazine. *Vogue* namely refers to the 'world of fashion' many times across the decades.

4.2.1.   World of fashion

The world of fashion seems to be constituted by a number of elements: "fashion cycle, fashion drive, fashion seasons, shifts, views, trends, news" – these are all terms *Vogue* uses to describe how the fashion world at that time looked like. By sharing this information, *Vogue* shares what is "in and out of fashion", what a "new way of looking at fashion" is and what "fashion principles" are. It mostly refers to this "fashion information" at a national level, yet sometimes it does speak on European fashion trends as well. Interestingly, *Vogue* refers to such trends, drivers of fashion and fashion garments as external, independent "shows of force". While *Vogue* presents fashion forces as externally driven, the way *Vogue* curates, frames and describes these forces might be significant. Especially in depicting how desirable a trend and garment may be. Thus, it seems like the lines are getting blurred between reporting on fashion trends and the creation of these. This does match with the description Lynge-Jorlén (2017, p. 3) provides on *Vogue*, namely that it is a key agent in depicting taste, beauty, trends and desirability. The mention of these forces may not explicitly narrow the space for agency Ytre-Arne (2014, p. 240) proposes. Even though fashion trends might be depicted as desirable to follow, the readers do put what they read in the light of their 'self'. Thus, the presentation of a trend does not directly indicate the adoption of the trend. This seems to stimulate a more negotiated decoding position.

4.2.2.   Fashion consciousness

Vogue introduces "our philosophy" and "our collective fashion consciousness" five times throughout the decades when referring to fashion trends. This consciousness seems to refer to an awareness of how its readers can perceive and engage with fashion. When seeing this in the light of the theory of Weber (2004, p. 193), this collective consciousness could be created and fostered among the fashion party. *Vogue* expands this concept with the introduction of terms such as "concept of dressing, fashion dimensions, fashion ideas, fashion principles and fashion thought". This introduces a conceptualisation of fashion products. This indicates that *Vogue* refers to the representation of fashion products and what they may imply rather than solely referring to the garment as a piece of cloth. This fully fits with the idea of dress as a sociological phenomenon. It also displays that dress indeed functions as a language system in which clothing and dressing are the primary language (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p. 9; Entwistle, 2000, p. 48). This is furthermore supported by *Vogue* publishing articles including: "clothes have brains, clothes are intellectual, clothes are anonymous yet familiar, fashion has emotion, imagination and essence". Thus, *Vogue* depicts dress as something that relates to a consciousness, an intellect.

This intellect may not necessarily be embraced and embodied by every reader, however. This notion therefore seems to widen the space for reader agency, especially because this consciousness is such an abstract and implicit phenomenon (even though it is explicitly mentioned by *Vogue*). *Vogue* thus leaves a lot of room for personal interpretation here and may foster an oppositional decoding position. With that, it is possible a reader may read these instances of 'consciousness' and 'intellect'

with irony. Benwell (2007, p. 541) shares that when magazines make use of excessive, playful and almost ludicrous propositions, it may evoke a sense of irony among the readers. Also the use of hyperbolic language (such as 'anonymous yet familiar') generally causes contradictory responses amongst readers. Thus, where one reader may truly perceive *Vogue* as intellectual, one reader might understand this as ironic and not intellectual (Benwell, 2007, p. 541).

4.2.3.   Fashion attitudes and status

The findings furthermore present the concept of attitudes of and towards fashion. I related this to the fashion consciousness, as it is possible that this Vogue-created consciousness nurtures a specific fashion attitude. *Vogue* shares attitudes and behaviours such as "being a fashion hound, letting fashion be unpretentious and dressing leisurely". Leisure dressing here is explicitly mentioned in the issue of May 1985 in the context of wearing undergarments and pyjamas as a daily outfit. This fits with the statement made by Borrelli-Persson (2017), suggesting the idea that the woman of leisure is strongly promoted in Vogue. This is strongly tied to the elite class, or what *Vogue* also referred to as the "dinner life class". The issue of August 2015 *Vogue* also refers to this dinner life class, stating on page 200 that "a lot of business is conducted over dinner and at parties".

This term of the dinner life class might evoke an aspirational lifestyle. It suggests specific social and cultural behaviours that *Vogue* and the theory align with elite femininity. I have previously referred to this as embodied status symbols in this research. This concerns the feminine manners and codes of conduct appropriate for a leisurely elite woman. Especially 'radiating ease, simplicity, grace, serenity and being unconcerned, calm, relaxed, sophisticated and charming' is often promoted. "Refinement, showing manners and correctness" are explicitly mentioned at least 29 times throughout the decades. As Skeggs (2002, p. 99) argues, these mannerisms display status. Only a woman with a lifestyle of free time has the opportunity to learn such specific forms of conduct, behaviour and cultural capital, as Veblen (1899, p. 131) also argues. These findings demonstrate that *Vogue* depicts these embodiments as the norm and what is considered correct. This does seem to narrow down the space for reader agency, as the norms are expressed rather explicitly. This indicates that *Vogue* narrows down the specific ways in which its contents and underlying ideologies can be interpreted (Ytre-Arne, 2014, p. 240). It presents constraints concerning the freedom of readers and their mannerisms. This may speak strongly to those in the dominant-hegemonic decoding position but may also be resisted by those in the opposition position. The embodied status symbols may be misinterpreted when positioned in the personal context of the reader. These notions of bodily constraints are also often associated with patriarchal authorities as Simmons (2009, p. 4) mentioned. It could thus evoke a sense of resistance among the readers, as they might feel forced to do what the authorial agent says.

4.2.4.   Femininity ideologies

These constraints related to femininity *Vogue* presents are explicitly mentioned, yet also indirectly implied. Nonetheless, *Vogue* sets clear boundaries in which women are expected to behave within its

party. Through the decades, it becomes evident that *Vogue* shares the idea that women are supposed to become active around golden hour and dusk. It is most likely that these moments of the day are reserved for entertainment, engagement, socialisation and relaxation. This matches the idea of the leisure class of Veblen (1899, p. 122) well, as the leisure class only concerns themselves with what is unproductive. With that, women are often referred to as "being pretty, enchanting, delicate, dreamy and nourished" – as if women may only concern themselves with such self-expressions. Women are mostly spoken of as "kept, domestic, centred around home and with their children".

In the light of fashion, *Vogue* also creates typologies of fashion lovers who may only concern themselves with dreaming about what life *could* be. In the issues of 1965 and 1975, *Vogue* drops the term "Chicerino" 11 times. This is, after further looking into it, a term *Vogue* has come up with themselves, as all sources trace back to *Vogue*. It might seem insignificant; however, *Vogue* has formulated a very detailed description:

> "She [the Chicerino] is young, swinging, full of zest of doing things, projects vivid personal quality of a girl who likes herself right down to home, expects the best of herself – of everything. [The Chicerino] looks into herself, likes what she sees – cool, young, awed by nothing – the world's natural heiress, ready right now to claim her inheritance… and dreamy, very dreamy. In her dreams, action begins… Nourished by everything in life. Delivered with style… - a touchstone in the new young camaraderie [friendship]. She loves her age - revels, wallows, exults in every moment of it. Don't tell her that youth is a rehearsal for life: she knows better. She's living now… happening all the time. She's it. Youth is her opportunity; … No explanations… she's something special. She knows it. We know it - hence the clothes in this issue of Vogue. Her issue." (*Vogue* August issue, 1965)

This extensive description aligns closely with the true and new woman Rabinovitch-Fox (2017, p. 1) describes. It might offer a perspective of *Vogue* upon femininity – how dreamy yet realistic it can be. It presents a woman who is hyper-busy dreaming of her appearance and all the opportunities that lay there. She, however, should not try too hard. She must radiate ease and do it with the least effort whilst dreaming (for the stars?). While depicted as highly aspirational, this typology could function as a symbolic and stylised idea of a woman.

Although, it is possible that readers from this decade responded differently to this typology. Kleinberg (2006, p. 204) shares that around the 60s, fashion magazines started to acknowledge female aspirations to be outside the home, such as in social life, politics and the workplace. The glorification of only finding feminine fulfilment by being a wife and mother was no longer the dominating norm. Domestic life was therefore no longer the sole aim of a woman's existence (Kleinberg, 2006, p. 204). The typology of the Chicerino may thus be interpreted as the empowerment of women from this decade to dream beyond the home. It decentralises the women's role in society as only wives and mothers (Kleinberg, 2006, p. 207).

4.3.   The fashion textbook

The previous theme uncovers how *Vogue*, possibly functioning as a fashion party, frames its principles, norms and ideologies on femininity as a seemingly aspired and desired collective consciousness. *Vogue* also seems to empower the modernising woman who moves out of sole motherhood into an independent self. Fascinatingly, a tool *Vogue* seemingly uses as a potential fashion party is referring to its issues as "fashion textbooks". This theme therefore discusses how *Vogue* uses its issues as textbooks to teach its readers about this fashion world. This may appear through the use of nature metaphors, historical references and rules related to femininity. In the theoretical framework, it became evident that *Vogue* presents fashion information and that it has an educational role. It supposedly creates objective frameworks of femininity in which women are expected to behave (Buckley & Fawcett, 2002, p. 12). Considering the frequency of the terms *Vogue* uses such as "the fashion handbook, rulebook, guidebook, and textbook" across the decades, it suggests that *Vogue* takes on this educational role. These terms occur at least 20 times in total. Over the decades, the notion of "fashion news" and "new fashion" seems to have replaced the use of the words "fashion textbook" and "fashion guidebooks". The same core values remain, just different language is used as Buckely & Fawcett (2002, p. 60) also argued. The terms "fashion news" and "new fashion" occur at least 130 times in total.

Specifically in the Spring issue of 1955 *Vogue* refers to the words 'the fashion textbook' at least 7 times. It is generally assumed that the information presented in a textbook is deemed instructive and potentially authoritative. However, if the readers accept it as trustworthy and factual remains speculative. *Vogue* does explicitly report on the fashion information it presents as "important principles, instructions, rules, fashion views and thoughts, predominant ideas and reputations". This narrows down the space of reader agency, as *Vogue* specifically writes on how its content should be interpreted (Ytre-Arne, 2014, p. 240). The specific choice of these terms may thus demonstrate that what is presented in the *Vogue* textbook must be considered the norm – the fashion consciousness we all can agree on.

The fashion textbook often promotes the idea of "the smart woman, smart clothing and looking smart". A distinction here is made between good taste and smart taste. In the issue of August 1945, *Vogue* states that "there was a time when to Be Good was good enough… . No more". It continues on, educating the reader on how fur should be worn and how it should be judged in a new way. It seems that by reading the textbook and taking in its information, one can achieve smart-ness. As the idea of smartness is pushed intensely, it might be true indeed that *Vogue* pushes the responsibility of becoming the woman portrayed in the magazine onto the reader, as Buckley & Fawcett (2002, p. 34) argue.

It is relevant to contextualise these findings in the functioning of New York as a cultural icon, as *Vogue* initially was a New York tabloid. The city has been considered a leader in culture and taste for decades. It "had a strutting, catwalk culture, well-suited for display. New York was a place that set trends, and passed judgment upon the trendsetters" (Homberger, 2006, p. 315). It thus was a place

heavily loaded with cultural ambiguities and contradictions, which is reflected in *Vogue*'s content. However, the city was also known for a significant number of cultural gatekeepers – those who excluded others from their institutions and authority to maintain a high status. In this landscape of gatekeepers, *Vogue* seems to present itself as a candid outlet that teaches its readers about all the ins and outs of fashion. This would usually be kept for a select few in New York (Homberger, 2006, p. 315). *Vogue* thus allows its readers to strut along with the trends and partake in the urban catwalk culture and may herein be very generous and liberal.

4.3.1.   References to nature
In the textbooks, *Vogue* often times refers to nature. Clothes, jewels and accessories are often described using nature-like terms. Terms such as "flowers, leaves, wind, mist, sea, sunlight, moonlight, gardens" are all used to paint a picture for the reader. This is found in all issues at least 59 times, which is significantly high. In the fashion images, *Vogue* also often has its models pose in the most exclusive and luxurious outfits in the woods, among the trees, or even in front of paintings depicting forest scenery. This could idealise country life, as opposed to the often praised urban life. It may also promote a sense of escapism in nature. Radway (1983, p. 58) writes on escapism in reading culture, sharing that reading novels draws the reader away from reality and the present. She shares that especially those who live in the city often seek an escape in reading (Radway, 1983, p. 58).

The continual mention and display of nature could also be interpreted as that whatever is deemed nature-like is 'natural'. Whatever is deemed natural may be seen as innately logical. Thus, as the garments and accessories are described as innately logical, they may be perceived as the status quo and something that cannot be contested (as it is simply part of (our) nature). Thus, *Vogue* may use these natural references to naturalise its rules and ideologies on femininity.

4.3.2.   Time & fashion
Another textbook course *Vogue* seems to implement is history. Across the decades, it refers to different ages (even when not evidently significant in the history of fashion): primitive and ancient times, Medieval times, the Arthurian Era, Louis XIV, the Gilded Past, the Golden Age and the Edwardian Era. "[The tunic] is an ancient and still valid piece" *Vogue* claims in the May 1955 issue. At once *Vogue* even referred to a reasoning of male and female behaviour dating back to the Pithecanthropus erectus, a prehistorical human being. In the issues of 1965, 1975 and 2015 *Vogue* also refers to primal and primitive times and beings, and histories it describes as 'unchanged'. Thus, 'Why would it have changed now?' could be a logical reader response to the fashion news and principles they read about. This possible response might seem to narrow down the space of reader agency.

The Arthurian fantasy refers to magic and mysticism and often fantasy creatures inspired by the medieval times. *Vogue* also explicitly refers to medieval times, sites and buildings twice (in the August 1965 and August 1975 issues). King Arthur was known for his adventures, romance and quests. This could tie in with the concept of enchanting writing, as well as the idea of adding a breath of mysticism

and magic to the garments described and displayed (Britannica, 2025 a). These fantasy-like representations shall be discussed later on in this chapter.

Vogue also refers back to the ages in which fashion was at its best, such as during the reign of Louis XIV and the Edwardian age. "[accessories] once linked … to Edwardian elegance, are now fashion again" (May 1955 issue). In May 2005, an entire article was dedicated to Chanel and how Karl Lagerfeld created a signature ball costume inspired by Louis XIV. Both of these eras are known for their grandeur, luxury and elitist tone. These historical references all together may frame presented fashion and femininity ideals as long-standing traditions. This evokes a sense of continuity and legitimacy. This finding may correlate with the fashion magazine functioning as a fashion arena – the arena in which what is normal amongst the elite is imposed upon its readers (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 14&20; Kusimba, 2020, p. 172).

However, whether a reader draws these connections of interpretation and 'innate-ness' might be speculative. They might perceive these references in the light of the dominating aesthetic and style of the concerning eras, not what it might ideologically imply. This would thus indicate that *Vogue* widens the space of reader agency here, as the possible ideology behind these findings is rather implicit and may not be decoded as such. This notion of history does highlight all three decoding positions presented by Hall (1993, p. 101-103). When one falls under the same bias and elite culture as *Vogue*, they are likely to quickly pick up on the ideological meaning beneath it. However, when one is not as familiar with these events and what they are known for in the fashion world, they may connect very different ideas and meanings to these historical references.

4.3.3.   Fashion rules
Apart from the textbooks presenting course-like articles referring to nature and historical events, it also shares courses on the rule of dress. It demonstrates how women should present themselves and which bodily expressions are desirable. This is predominantly implied through the use of fashion images. The analysis of the images shows that only sometimes the models smile, but they mostly look dreamy or serious. The female models also rarely look into the camera. 310 times she looks away, either to the side, up or down. Sometimes her eyes are not visible. This could be connected to the very dreamy personality a woman had to embody according to *Vogue*, as she may only look away and dream, and may not participate and truly engage with her surroundings. Throughout the decades it seems to be more common for the models to look into the camera, from 1945 until 1975 it appeared 91 times. The number of models looking into the camera grew to a total of 175 times when analysing the issues from 1985 until 2015. This increased number may demonstrate that women are allowed to engage more and be more hands-on. This idea is supported by the fact that around 1985 the working and active woman is also more promoted (other than the kept and domestic woman) in *Vogue*. This matches the findings of McRobbie (2008, p. 537), namely that around the 1990s fashion magazines

were presenting a more independent and individualised woman. This again presents a feminist reclaiming of *Vogue*.

The female models in the images mostly stand, sometimes they sit or lie down. Fascinatingly, whenever a man is included in the image, the woman sits or lies whilst the man stands. The female model is also almost always situated on the left side of the male figure. This is commonly related to a gender hierarchy in which women are purposefully positioned in relation to masculine authority. Whether such hierarchies are decoded depends on the perspective and social context of the reader. This interpretation does, however, align with the statements of Warde (2011, p. 462&463), that women must retain domestic and submissive whilst adding to men's fame and positions.

When the models first wore skirts or dresses with heels, which could be associated with traditional lifestyles, we see more revealing clothes and suits with pants from 1965 onwards. The fashion images also become more editorial with time – *Vogue* makes use of interesting backgrounds and the models demonstrate more heavy make-up. The garments they wear also get grander and more 'jewel' like throughout the decade. This depicts that wearing heavier make-up and dressing more extravagantly became more acceptable and desirable. Across the decades, the models also show more bare skin. Especially from 1975 on we see amplified chests, uncovered midriffs, exposed legs and more lingerie. The models also seem to pose more sensually in the fashion image or even fully reveal their chests (found in the May issue of 1995). This change in imagery might depict an evolving portrayal of femininity, from a traditional to a new, more daring, sensual and exposed woman. Especially since 1995 we see women in sensual, bedroom spheres where they are barely covered up. This is also what McRobbie (2008, p. 537) refers to when stating that the fashion images increasingly depict a sexually active woman since the 90s.

Throughout the decades, the models are increasingly posing outside. They are in nature-rich environments, large estates and carefully constructed gardens. They are also increasingly found in the city or in a city-like background since 1985. Herein they often wear office/workwear and are surrounded by male figures in costume. Anytime they pose inside or in a domestic environment, they are (most of the time) surrounded by houseplants. She sometimes is accompanied by her pet (mostly dogs). What continually returns and rarely changes, however, are the mentioned clothing-codes. Codes that are systematically used across the seven decades are "tailored (also snug, narrow, fitted), little (also small, skimp), soft, and light/open (also airy, breezy, loose)".

Even though there are transitions visible from a more conservative and domestic to a feminist and working woman, the question remains if the ideology underlying it truly changes. It is dominant in the fashion images that she must always dress up, look her best, wear the correct and well-proportionate attire at all times, adorn herself with jewellery and accessories, look away and dream. Whether this fits a more traditional and patriarchal, or modern and liberal ideology is difficult to determine. It is highly plausible that the adornment of a woman is promoted to actually allow women to express their self-worth and evolving self. This fits with the phenomenon of the female gaze, which opposes the male

gaze. The female gaze contests the hegemonic authority of looking at women in a singular way and sees the woman in her plurality and diversity. It values and acknowledges alternative assumptions about women (Holm, 2020, p. 3).

In terms of the space of agency, the findings demonstrate that the textbooks are quite explicit and constraining in the rule of dressing. The fashion images convey visual cues and norms, possibly limiting the flexibility with which they can be interpreted. It remains relevant that every reader can still interpret the images differently depending on their self (Ytre-Arne, 2014, p. 240). This points to a more negotiated decoding position.

4.4.   *Desirability & enchantment*

The findings above thus demonstrate how *Vogue* refers to its issues as fashion textbooks utilised to educate its readers about what is innate to the ideal woman, how she should dress and which dressing rules she has to follow. It was also mentioned that a breath of mysticism is added to the textbooks. This theme potentially demonstrates that *Vogue* may have a dreamy character and uses fantasy-like representations when describing the ideal woman and her ceremonial lifestyle.

4.4.1.   *Fantasy representations*

As previously mentioned, *Vogue* has referred to the medieval and Arthurian Era a few times. For example, in May 1995 *Vogue* states: "The medieval focus on the rounded belly, for instance, was functional in a period of high mortality". In May 2005 *Vogue* describes a jewel as something with a "medieval charm". While this phrase may simply refer to an aesthetic, the term 'medieval' also has historical undertones tied to poetic incantations and mystical practices (Academia, n.d.). Whether intentional or not, the choice of terminology does allow for the interpretation that fashion is interwoven with fantasy-like images.

This idea of fantasy and mysticism is explicitly mentioned in the spring issue of 2015. In this issue, *Vogue* describes its contents as "a story of fantasy realism" and "a magical thing". In the same issue, *Vogue* also writes on a theatre play a famous actress stars in, mentioning on page 253: "Working with a contemporary theme [in the play] doesn't mean, however, that Taylor [the director of the play] will be abandoning her fascination with the primitive and the folkloric. … it has an extraordinary mythological-biblical edge to it.". It remains interesting that *Vogue* continually returns to this idea of fantasy. In the same issue, *Vogue* dedicates an entire rubric to that year's Met Gala with the theme 'China: Through the Looking Glass'. It writes that the on-theme garments "embody a mythical … beauty, danger and mystery". In that rubric, *Vogue* also often refers to museums, artists, artworks, garments and jewellery related to nature. It speaks on how Western pop culture perceives Chinese women as "having mysterious powers of sexual mastery", continuing the mysticism theme. It furthermore mentions terms as "fantasy interpretation", "fantasy of living" and refers to the "Grimm's" fairytales throughout the spring issue. Also in the August issue of 2015, *Vogue* writes an

article on "the tooth fairy", the fairy who tells you that teeth can make you look older than wrinkles do.

The idea of fantasy in women's magazines is also something that appears in the work of Ytre-Arne (2014, p. 248&249). She writes that readers often perceive magazines to be a sphere detached from reality, referred to as "fantasy discourse" (Ytre-Arne, 2014, p. 249). It describes magazines as sources of dreams and an escape from reality. She continues arguing that fantasising about a different life is important for identity-forming, as it allows the exploration of a new and possible identity (Ytre-Arne, 2014, p. 248&249). This also again relates to the previously mentioned idea of escapism. The use of words such as "magical, dream-like and fairy-land reality" to describe fashion magazines also occurs in the works of Barthes (1957, p. 78&79). He writes in his book *Mythologies* on ornamental cookery in Elle magazine, how this relates to the petit bourgeoisie and "the very dream of smartness" (Barthes, 1957, p. 78). It thus seems quite common to describe fashion magazines with fantasy representations.

4.4.2.   Enchanting writing

These fantasy representations tie in strongly with the concept of enchanting writing Moeran (2010, p. 507) presents. With the use of almost "delicious"-like terms, *Vogue* depicts fashion products, evening ceremonies and elite activities most desirable (more on ceremonies and activities will follow in this chapter). Labels and adjectives such as "luxurious, delicious, marvellous, very feminine, key (looks, taste etc.), new classics" all drive a sense of desire as well as aspiration. The adjectives *Vogue* also uses, such as "dazzling, sparkling, shimmering, spectacular, irresistible, luminous, gleaming and sensational", are almost fantasy-like. The use of this descriptive language could contribute to a sense of aspiration and desire to possess the presented fashion products (Moeran, 2010, p. 507). Even though Moeran (2010, p. 507) and Ytre-Arne (2014, p. 248&249) highlight both the fantasy-like and aspirational tone in *Vogue*'s content, it is possible that the descriptions and terms simply function as a marketing trick. *Vogue* might be accurately describing a fabulous fashion product rather than trying to enchant the reader. It could thus be a standard advertising tool. This notion does imply a widened space for reader agency, as the readers might not read too much into it and may not feel very strong desires and aspirations. Here the notion of irony can occur again, as *Vogue* makes use of hyperbolic language in its descriptions (Benwell, 2007, p. 541). This could result in reader resistance. It could be, however, that the active (elite) reader is more prone to such descriptions and terms as they idealise and possibly idolise their lifestyles.

4.4.3.   Ceremonies & trophies

When fashion products are explained in the articles, *Vogue* also mentions specific activities in which the products can be worn. "Dinner-dress, gala- and ballgowns, opera heels and glasses" all imply what is appropriate for women to wear in evening activities. These evening activities are what Spencer (1880, p. 18) calls ceremonies. Events such as "galas, dinner, dinner parties, late summer, going dancing, charity balls, theatre and ballet" are all ceremonies happening at nighttime. *Vogue* encourages

the readers to fully adorn themselves for attending these. This matches the concept of ceremonial institutions presented by Daloz (2007, p. 31-33). Using fashion images, *Vogue* encourages women to "dress extravagantly, wear extravagant jewellery, extravagantly accessorize, wear the finest garments, have a drink and wear big hats". These ceremonies are generally unattainable, exclusive and reserved for the elite classes. *Vogue* here thus possibly narrows the space of reader agency for active and elite members of the (potential) fashion party, as they are known to actively engage with the ceremonial lifestyles and institutions as mentioned by Spencer (1880, p. 18). Following these codes of conduct may thus be very relevant for them (the elite) and could be less relevant for the passive, middle/working class readers as discussed in the theoretical framework.

However, it could be argued that *Vogue*'s framing of this ceremonial world may suggest that the fashion products offer more than aesthetic appeal. It could be that *Vogue* aims to sell entry into this world to those who do not yet have access. This aligns with the theory of Xiaowei (2013, p. 186&187) and his view on consuming as something social – it could allow one to attain such a ceremonial lifestyle. It also aligns with the previous explanation of New York's social and cultural scene in which *Vogue* may be a gatebreaker (Homberger, 2006, p. 315). However, from *Vogue*'s point of view, it does seem to widen the space of reader agency. Whether the readers associate the purchase of the presented fashion products as the entry ticket to the ceremonial lifestyle remains highly speculative.

Fascinatingly, *Vogue* also refers to what Daloz (2007, p. 31) calls trophies. *Vogue* does seem to expand our understanding of this term. *Vogue* presents very expensive and luxurious garments (e.g. $5400, $3100 or $2000 for a jacket) as "ornamentation" of the body. Such garments and other expensive fashion products are almost always combined with the words: "impact" and "high impact" as if the garments have a high impact upon those who put their eyes on them. They are described with the explicit and extensive mention of the rare materials the fashion products are made of, such as "crocodile and alligator leather bags and shoes, bronze and alabaster incense burners, and even cremes of $1,200". These fashion products are "only available at the fine stores". This mostly includes Bloomingdales, Saks Fifth Avenue and Barneys New York. These extravagant fashion products may be perceived as trophies. Such notions may also point to consumerism. Where this is often considered a negative development, Wallenberg (2023, p. 190) argues that the consuming woman is actually contesting patriarchal standards. The increasing presence of women in American society entailed that women were becoming much more than status objects, in the words of Veblen (1899, p. 122). Women are working subjects, political subjects, as well as consuming beings with the economic freedom to purchase fashion products (Wallenberg, 2023, p. 190). This does contrast the theory of Keister, Théboud & Yavorsky (2022, p. 158&159). They argue that consuming falls under the purview of elite women and thus is included in the elite and leisurely lifestyle. This highlights yet another interesting contradiction.

Vogue furthermore explicitly mentions the term "status symbol" at least 7 times. "It was the ultimate status symbol" and "the generic status symbol of this decade" are quotes mentioned in the

August issues of 1985 and 1995. Surprisingly, in 1995 *Vogue* states: "Become the invisible status symbol for … the nineties". This could suggest that *Vogue* may shift the 'focus of status' from a product to the body itself. This could align with another citation found in *Vogue*. In the August issue of 1965 *Vogue* states: "Style is her badge, the badge of her generation". Most interestingly, badges are also understood as part of ceremonial institutions. The badge – a true status symbol as Goffman (1951, p. 294&295) and Daloz (2007, p. 31-33) would describe it – could thus be *style itself.* Therefore, the female body clothed in the correct style could inherently be a status symbol. However, this specific interpretation of the finding remains open-ended. Predominantly because it has not appeared often throughout the decades.

4.5.   *Double/triple life*

In summary, *Vogue* uses strategies to evoke a fantasy-like desire for the fashion products it presents, as these products could give consumers access to the elite ceremonial lifestyle. Where the previous theme focused on ceremonial life, this theme of double/triple life focuses on the day-to-day life of the desired woman presented in *Vogue.* This double or triple life concerns that the desired woman can be a working woman but also a kept woman, live life in the rural side or in the urban cityscape and can also be a mother. This presentation demonstrates many dualities and contradictory descriptions. The counter-reading may be that it also reflects the realistic side of life. *Vogue* may try to balance the presentation of the real and the ideal.

4.5.1.   *Rural/informal life vs. urban/formal*

In 1945 and 1955, *Vogue* expresses that most of the activities women partake in take place in the afternoon and evening. However, since 1965 daytime activities are more and more 'allowed'. *Vogue* associates these activities with the rural and countryside. It also describes life in the country as "the informal way of life" and as having a "country mood". "Horseback riding, Sunday park day, tennis, watching or playing polo, lunching, doing exercises, having a garden party, swimming, visiting the terrace, reading books" – these are all referred to as country activities. In this place, women are allowed to wear more playful and sporty garments and show off a bit more skin. This is truly related to the leisurely lifestyle Veblen (Veblen, 1899, p. 104), Daloz (2007, p. 33) and Warde (2011, p. 463) refer to, as the working woman would not have time for these activities.

The working and ceremonial life mostly takes place in the urban and city sites. *Vogue* also describes this part of life as the "formal way of life". Activities that are often associated with this part of life are "weddings, parties, drinks, easy evenings and runway shows". These ceremonial events often require a more serious approach when it comes to presenting (embodied) status symbols and trophies. The urban sites are also more often associated with the fashion world, as this is where the shopping and strolling around town happens. These are opportunities for women to flaneur, as Veblen (1899, p. 122) would say, and are thus still associated with the leisure lifestyle.

4.5.2. Kept vs. working woman

As previously mentioned, the idea of the working woman gained more attention since the 1990s (McRobbie, 2008, p. 537). Around this time, *Vogue* also started to include articles on female fashion designers and models, displaying that the working woman became more common. However, when comparing this to the number of times the leisure side of life (whether formal or informal) is mentioned, the working woman rarely makes an appearance. Even if an "accomplished woman" is displayed, *Vogue* always refers back to how they are also "mothers, take care of their children, stand by their well-accomplished husbands". The repeated return to the domestic context may suggest that *Vogue* displays a still-traditional woman, despite that it does occasionally mention the working woman.

In this context, it does not specifically create a judgement towards the working woman, but it does not connect her to 'elegance, being smart, gracefulness and serenity'. These feminine manners and codes of conduct are only referred to when speaking of a woman who partakes in leisurely activities. Thus, it could indeed be true that those who engage in day labour are prevented from ever reaching femininity, as they are never described with such 'feminine' terms. This aligns with Skeggs (2002, p. 99) and McRobbie (1997, p. 74&77), femininity does seem to enclose classed dispositions, specific forms of conduct, behaviour and cultural capital. These are elements only the elite woman of leisure could possess and display, according to *Vogue*.

4.5.3. Duality/controversy

The findings above display how controversial *Vogue* can be in describing the double/triple life; a woman may work but must remain domestic and take care of the children. She may work but must not slave. She must be an accomplished woman but should not try too hard as she must remain elegant and serene. She must always stand by her husband's side but not overshadow his success. She may be active but remain leisurely. However formal or informal life might be, she must always flaneur and present the correct codes of conduct.

Interestingly, these dualisms have an underlying clash between the fantasy-like ideology *Vogue* presents and the reality *Vogue* also presents. To explain this statement; in the issue of August 1955, *Vogue* introduces the term: "The Realism school". The Realism school is the opposite of fantasy – it focuses on the real things in life. It is intellectual, anti-romantic, positivistic and aims for naturalistic representations (Britannica 2025 b). In the spring issue of 1975 *Vogue* also states: "complete capsule wardrobes for the real lives American women live". Thus, *Vogue* seems to know that however dreamy the female life is portrayed as it is still realistic and naturalistic.

This duality underlies every issue of the selected sample. The red tread herein is that women have to practically "radiate a sense of eloquence, act graceful, must be unconcerned, show extraordinary grace, and be serene". However, she must also be realistic, stay in her place, come alive at night, dress up for the occasion, not dream too big, and support her husband and family. This tension between fantasy and realism is seemingly always present in the expectations of femininity *Vogue* displays.

Vogue actually confirms this finding in the issue of May 2015, where it writes about "a story of fantasy realism" when describing the couture of Prada.

This finding, however, could also reflect the balance *Vogue* tries to maintain between the ideal and the real. Naturalistic depictions could allow for the passive, middle-class reader to still find herself in the magazine. This may present *Vogue* as approachable, and indeed as an enjoyable read. Possibly the ideal depictions are more relevant for the active, elite reader, as it could benefit her greatly (as previously discussed). This may suggest that *Vogue* wants to present the multifaceted being of a woman, regardless of her class. Where the duality and controversy might be perceived as something negative, another perspective could portray *Vogue* as trying to be all-encompassing and relevant for all. The personal relevancy, however, remains dependent on the reader.

5. Conclusion

It is the aim of this thesis to answer the central research question: *"How does the societal role of women portrayed in Vogue issues develop from the year 1945 to 2015?"*. Deconstructing sixteen *Vogue* issues across seven decades using theoretical exploration and a qualitative mixed-method approach, the findings indicate that *Vogue* does not simply perform as a fashion magazine. Its performance might be comparable to that of a party in which *Vogue* uses the issues as textbooks to teach its readers about elite femininity.

The previous chapter demonstrated how *Vogue* utilised the two dialectic elements of the fashion language to foster a fashion consciousness, attitudes, desires and female identities. What strongly emerges from the research units is its cyclical and dualistic character. *Vogue* systematically changes its textual content and fashion images to match societal developments and trends yet it seems to also continually present the same ideals of femininity. These ideals perpetuate a leisurely lifestyle, a dreamy outlook on life, adornment and domesticity whilst promoting the idea of the working, independent woman. It is the fantasy versus reality that seems to drive *Vogue*'s content across all seven decades. In contrast, however, it is also evident that *Vogue* contests patriarchal traditions at times. It takes feministic stances and seems to celebrate femininity in its plurality and women as working and sexual beings. This might highlight the dualistic nature of the magazine once again. It fosters both traditional and modern outlooks on womanhood.

In light of the first sub-question, *"What are the overarching trends in the portrayal of women's societal roles in Vogue between 1945 and 2015?"*, the answer can be formulated that the data and analyses present the development of a traditional woman to a more assertive, active and working yet still traditional woman. It remains the tradition that working women are still mothers and wives. This matches with the statements of Rabinovitch-Fox (2017, p. 1), that the new woman is not radically different from the traditional woman. I would argue, however, that this is not a controversial notion. As discussed in the previous chapter, this reoccurring dualism could reflect *Vogue* balancing the so-desired woman between the ideal and the real. This is also embedded in the idea that womanhood is diverse and plural. It is multifaceted and its meaning is not solely found within the domestic life, as Kleinberg (2006, p. 204) described. *Vogue* presenting women as sexual and working beings from the 60s onwards seemingly contests patriarchal institutions and its ideologies (Simmons, 2009, p. 7). The essence here is that the desired woman should be the embodiment of a status symbol – her garments, trophies, mannerisms and activities must align with what is considered elite at all times.

In light of the second sub-question: *"How does Vogue utilise textual content and fashion images to construct ideologies about women's roles in society?"*, the answer can be formulated that *Vogue* uses both dialectic elements to naturalise and enhance each other. For example, when *Vogue*'s textual content speaks on the leisurely woman who partakes in elite activities, the fashion images present the female model(s) in nature-rich environments. The findings suggest that this refers to that whatever is presented is innate and inherent to the woman, and a sense of escapism for the cityscape. When the

fashion images display trophies, the textual content speaks on the ceremonies the trophies can be worn to and uses writing strategies to create strong feelings of desire. The dialectic elements thus create a nurturing environment for ideologies to be imposed upon the reader. In conclusion, with the use of fashion images, *Vogue* visualises the written text and embeds its models in either an informal or formal way of life.

However, the theory suggests that reader agency is greater when reading fashion images due to the enhanced freedom of reconfiguration (Laing, 2018, p. 17). When relating this to the theory of Ytre-Arne (2014, p. 240) and her idea of narrowing and widening the space of reader agency, the textual content of the issues seems to present that *Vogue* allows for quite some widening of this space. Thus, even though *Vogue* constructs ideologies on elite femininity and uses its issues to educate its readers on these, it does not seem to be (explicitly) violent in its authority. This is supported by the idea that *Vogue* also functions as a gatebreaker in the highly competitive cultural and fashion city that is New York (Homberger, 2006, p. 315). It generously gives access to what is mostly exclusive, allowing for participation rather than exclusion. It also seems to promote the female gaze, acknowledging and appreciating the versatility of the female being. This stimulates women to dream beyond their homes and aim for careers as well as a social life (Holm, 2020, p. 3; Kleinberg, 2006, p. 207). This also leaves more room for a negotiated decoding position, as the readers are given the room to mix their selves with *Vogue*'s message (Hall, 1993, p. 102).

These conclusions lead to the following answer to the central research question; From 1945 to 2015 *Vogue* portrays an evolving yet elite ideal of femininity. In the first few decades of the sample, the so-desired woman was portrayed as domestic and modest, fitting rather traditional ideals. From the 60s *Vogue* idealises a more liberated woman and continues to encourage a focus on appearance. She specifically is dreamy and ever-so stylish. From the 80s onward, the so-desired woman balances her work life, motherhood and her rather elite social life. She is portrayed to do this with ease, grace, fashion and restraint. Regardless of the societal role of women *Vogue* portrays, the desired woman is elegant, pretty, shows correctness and is aspirational. This deconstruction of *Vogue*'s performance reveals that the magazine functions as an educator and shaper of femininity using text and images. It fosters and sustains classed ideologies and gendered hierarchies underlying the reported trends.

5.1.   *Research implications*

5.1.1.   *Cultural and feminist implications*

These findings speak to contemporary feminist debates in a plurality of ways. It presents how *Vogue* as the leading fashion medium displays its idea of women in a narrow manner. It is classed and singular rather than diverse and versatile. This excluding lens is also often found in other fashion media, hence the heavy critique they receive on the perpetuation of suppression, restrictive beauty standards and sex roles. Whether *Vogue*'s content can be described as truly restricting may be speculative, as the power and control of the female reader is not to be underestimated. The findings do demonstrate that *Vogue*

tries to engage with the female gaze. The shifts towards including working, social and sexually active women may display a sense of intersectionality of class, race, sexuality and identity. Nevertheless, a question that arises may be if such intricate networks of intersectionality may be too complex to address in a fashion magazine. This may display the shortcomings of fashion magazines as a media in general, but may also display its expertise, focus and knowledge on fashion alone. Regardless, considering the tabloid nature of *Vogue* and the fact that it is the most prestigious fashion magazine, one could argue that *Vogue* should make room for such societal debates. Just as McRobbie (1997, p. 87), argues, fashion magazines should commit to including critical pieces that contest the norm and discuss serious issues. This does demonstrate the societal, political and feministic power *Vogue* has. The ideologies and expectations *Vogue* expresses through its issues are therefore not to be undermined. I do not aim to portray *Vogue* as all-power, however. Readers continue to be the ones who create and discipline meaning, thus eventually deciding how powerful *Vogue* and its opinion is. The readers are thus everything but cultural dopes, and *Vogue*'s authority as the author is highly contested (Barthes, 1986, p. 54).

Vogue has contributed to a broader system of gendered and classed inequality, nonetheless. Especially in the light of luxury and the aspirational culture, the findings demonstrate that *Vogue* seems to masterfully craft desire as well as the very idea of femininity. The presentation of status symbols and trophies as well as coded behaviours legitimises and even mystifies elite hierarchies. *Vogue* seems to therefore play an important role in idolising the elite feminine culture. This includes the presentation of its elite norms, standards, beliefs, tastes, performances and lifestyle. All these elements are found in the selected issues.

In conclusion, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the power of fashion media. Specifically when considering gender dynamics, the creation of femininity and the fostering of societal norms among women, the sample effectively demonstrates how ideologies of femininity are not just reported on but constructed by agents and media outlets. *Vogue* functions as an ideological educator all whilst allowing for reader agency and freedom of interpretation. This broadens the societal discussion of passive consumption, the agency of media users/readers and the influence of cultural publications on the development of the gendered self.

5.1.2.   Implications for theory and research
In regard to the position of this research in relation to existing theory and research, it aligns with the claims of Buckely & Fawcett (2002) that fashion functions like a language system. It also strongly confirms the idea of the dressed body of Entwistle (2000). It furthermore does tap into the classed femininity concepts presented by Skeggs (2002), and also seems to match with her argument that magazine issues act like spaces in which representations of women are constantly redefined. The findings expand the theory of elite activities and ceremonial institutions found in the works of Billings, 1990), Daloz (2007) and Warde (2011). The leisurely life *Vogue* encompasses seems more

multifaceted than theoretically assumed, and the ceremonies are mentioned a lot more implicitly. Something the findings did not reveal is the reoccurrence of trends every twenty years, as Pillai (2021) argued. It also complicates Weber's (2004) ideas of parties and members and the authority of the leader, as *Vogue* surprisingly leaves much room for reader agency.

Deconstructing Vogue's functioning could at first sight portray *Vogue* as highly authoritative and all-powerful. But *Vogue*'s ideological notions are implicit and more like nudges towards a certain direction. I argue that these nudges are not felt by every reader, as they can be highly abstract and jargonistic. Possibly, the generic *Vogue* reader does not pick up on these signifiers and simply enjoys reading about fashion. I thus do not intend to depict *Vogue* as 'foolish' (in the terms of McRobbie, 1997), but rather as a fashionably read.

5.2.   Opportunities for future research

This thesis is not without limitations, however. I would like to refer to these in the form of recommendations for future research. The notion of reader agency leaves a gap in the idea of reader interpretation and reconfiguration of the contents of *Vogue* issues. This forms a limitation of this study, as the interpretations of the findings presented may (and probably do) differ from how readers would interpret the research units. An opportunity for future research can therefore be to conduct in-depth interviews or focus groups with readers of *Vogue* issues and their interpretations. Concepts like reader agency, meaning-making, and possibly even taste development could be included.

This study hints at gender hierarchies and the development of self. Even though gender is a much-explored topic among fashion magazines, it could be strongly tied to the development of the feminine self. This study did not explore this in depth and thus could form another avenue for future research. Female fashion magazine reader could e.g., be interviewed on the construction of their feminine selves (social, fashion, sexual selves) and how fashion language partakes in this process.

Another limitation is the sample of US *Vogue* issues. Even though this focus allowed for a feasible research project, it does result in the fact that the findings are representative of only US *Vogue* issues. This opens the door to other (possibly comparative) research on *Vogue* issues from different countries. Similarly, this research centred much around elite theories. This is evidently due to the elitist roots of US *Vogue*. This does narrow down the generalisability of the findings, however, as they may only apply to *Vogue* and its elitist character. It does oppose, however, the often-researched low(er)-brow magazines and thus offers a different perspective.

At last, I would like to share my wonderment of whether fashion media can ever break ties with and be liberated from its classed constructions and gendered hierarchies. It could, ultimately, be a construction that it cannot. This could disguise the idea that it truly does not want to break ties with it. I do think it is very interesting to explore what such a fashion medium would look like. It might just focus on the celebration of fashion and the art of it. After all, that is what it is. An art.

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Appendix A

Table 3 *Overview of the sample and research units, 16 US Vogue issues, 162 articles and 773 pages in total*

Issues of the year	Month, date	Rubric name	Number of articles	Number of pages
1945	*May*	Fashion	10	25
	August 1st	Fashion	13	28
1955	*May 1st*	Fashion	16	57
	August 1st	Fashion	17	52
1965	*May*	Fashion	19	45
	August 1st	Fashion	12	63
1975	*May*	Fashion	4*	27
		Fashion and Accessory details		
	August	Fashion	4*	48
		Fashion and Accessory details		
1985	*May*	Fashion	7*	46
		Fashion information		
	August	Fashion	10*	53
		Fashion and illustration information		
1995	*May*	Fashion	9*	56
		Talking Fashion		
	August	Fashion	5*	45
		Talking Fashion		
2005	*May*	Fashion	10*	59
		Talking Fashion		
	August	Fashion	5*	32
		Talking Fashion		
2015	*May*	Fashion & features	10	68
	August	Fashion & features	11	69

* The cumulative number of fashion related articles

Appendix B

Table 4 Operational model based upon the indicators. The indicators were derived from the theoretical framework.

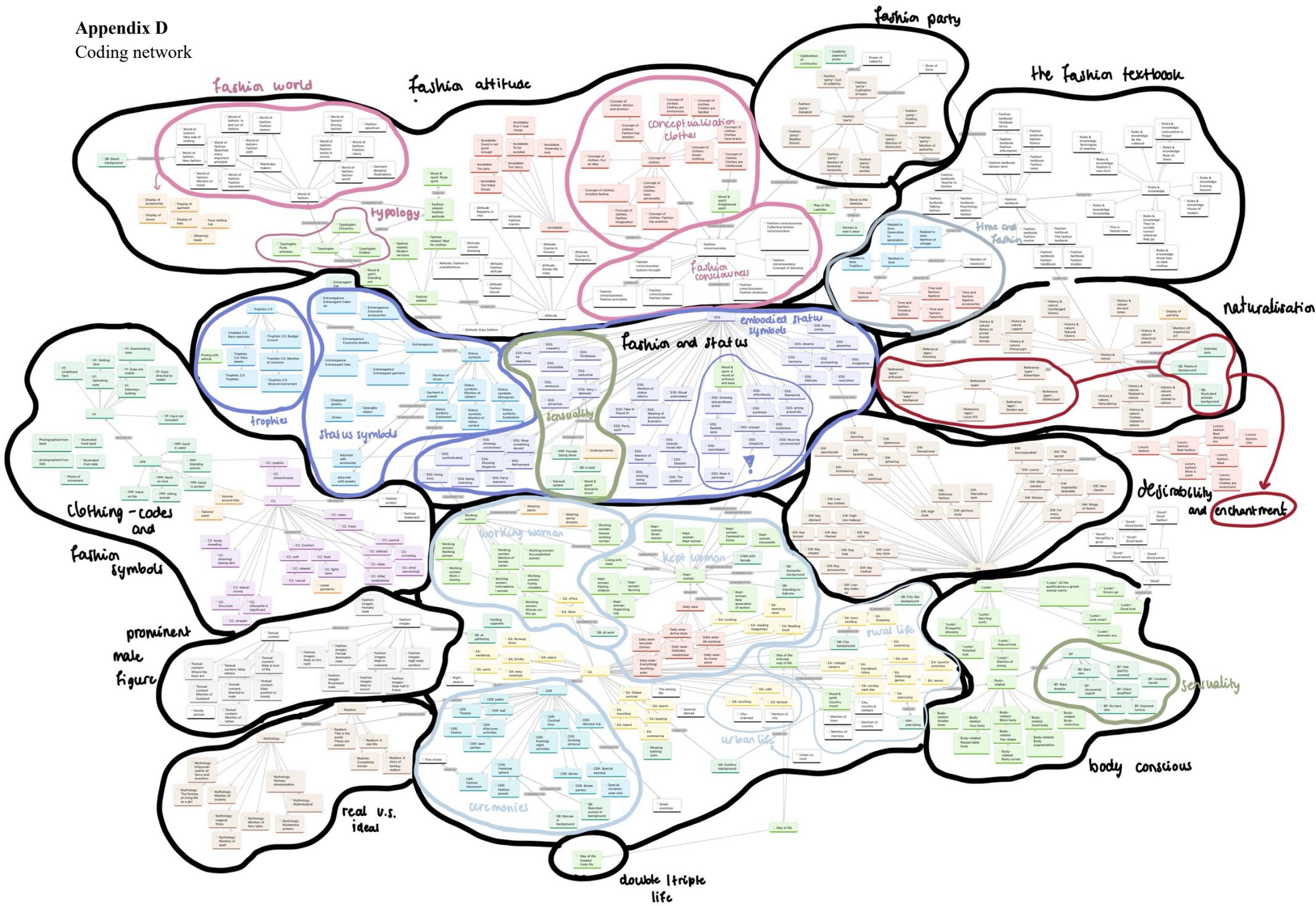| *(Theoretical) Concepts*	*Topics*	*Dimensions*	*Indicators / Operationalisation*
Fashion information	*Fashion arenas*	**Textual data**	
Conceptual definition: Vogue is fashion information who presents what is considered fashionable. It has power and educates its readers on what is most desirable to own as well as embody. It also presents clothing codes – specific visual signifiers in garments that carry underlying narratives.		o Embodied status symbols o Power o Educational agents	o Status symbols (Goffman, 1951) o Education through consumption (Xiaowei, 2013) o Function as 'fashion' arenas (Bourdieu, 1989; Warde, 2011)
		Fashion images	
		o Clothing codes	o Clothing-codes (Davis, 1992).
Elite femininity	*Embodied femininity*	**Textual data**	
Conceptual definition: With the use of power and portraying how the desirable woman should act like, the magazine sets an ideology of femininity. It set clear set rules on how woman should behave in society, specifically in elitist activities.		o Ceremonies o Bodily expressions o Embodied status symbols	o Ceremonial and elitist activities (Daloz, 2007) o Codes of conduct (Kusimba, 2020)
		Fashion images	
		o Ceremonies	o Ceremonial institutions and ceremonies (Daloz, 2007)
Elite lifestyle	*Leisurely life*	**Textual data**	
Conceptual definition: Vogue continually the leisurely woman as the ideal, yet its depiction is often contradictory (e.g., women should be submissive to men but must take control of their own future). This ideology links the leisurely lifestyle to specific femininity expectations and a woman's role in society.		o Leisure class o The new woman o Dualistic expectations	o Leisurely lifestyle (Kusimba, 2020; Veblen, 1899) o True and new woman (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2017). o Social role of woman (Xiaowei, 2013)
		Fashion images	
		o Contextual spheres	o True and new woman (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2017).

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Appendix C

Table 5 codebook based upon theoretical framework

Topic 1	Code name/abbreviation	When to use	Content	Codes relate to these indicators	Observationals
Fashion arenas	*ESS Embodied status symbols*	Apply this code to all references emphasizing the importance of manners, bodily/self-control, behaviour, posture and clothing-codes. These all refer to internalized and embodied forms of femininity in relation to behaviour.	**Textual data**	*Embodied status symbols* This specifically concerns the correctness of applying codes of conduct and courteousness. Thus, it truly refers to bodily expressions that display status (Daloz, 2007; Goffman, 1951; Kusimba, 2020).	Mention of: - Refined manners - Self-control - Eoquence - Manners - Correctness - The display of cultivated dispositions - Achieving sophisticated impressions of natural spontaneity - Mention of posture - Mention of self-command - Radiation of ease, restraint, and calmness
	Code description	**When not to use**			
	An individuals' 'expensiveness' takes an embodied form. This is measurable through bodily control, which means that certain values are internalized and reflected in behaviour, posture and self-control (Daloz, 2007; Veblen, 1899).	Do not use this code with the specific mention of elite/leisure activities and the practicalities of ceremonies.		*Power systems (functioning as 'fashion' arenas)* Different ways in which authority is connoted using enchanting writing. This refers back to symbolic violence and fashion magazines as institutions (Bourdieu, 1989; Moeran, 2010; Warde, 2011)	- Enchanting writing - Naturalising of ideologies - Relating to nature - Referring back to history - Referring back to primitive times/beings
			Fashion images	*Clothing-codes* Rules on how a woman must dress herself. Specific clothing pieces and shapes convey (or signify) a particular understanding and female identity (Davis, 1992)	Display of: - Angularity - Curvilinear - Dark hues - Light hues - Styles of binding (stays and corseting) - Loose-fit garment Also includes bodily features: - Exposed skin - Covered skin - Amplified chest - Hair covered

Topic 2	Code name/abbreviation	When to use	Text or images	Codes relate to these indicators	Observationals
Embodied femininity	**EW The elite woman**	Apply this code to all references emphasizing ideologies of femininity in relation to activities, especially ceremonies. These all refer to external forms and activities of femininity one must engage in.	**Textual data**	Ceremonies and ceremonial institutions The model/woman is put in the context of ceremonies. This includes night-time/evening activities only, as these predominantly have ceremonial intentions (Daloz, 2007; Skeggs, 2002; Warde, 2011).	Woman is put in evening settings: - Cooking dinner - Visiting operas/ballet/theatre - Eating out - Is well-groomed in these ceremonies - Must adorn herself with jewelry and accessories The woman is also often labelled with a term that describes her personality such as: - Chicerino - Odine girl
	Code description	**When not to use**			
	The social, physical, affective and intellectual dimensions that fit with the elitist idea of femininity. These expressions reflect that they are at the top of the value hierarchy (Kusimba, 2020).	Do not use this code with the specific mention of inherent/embodied behaviour, nor the mention of the social expectation/role of women.	**Fashion images**	*Ceremonial institutions* The model wears fashion products that display status in these ceremonies (Daloz, 2007; Skeggs, 2002; Warde, 2011)	Woman is put in evening settings: - Dinner parties - Dances - Dinner - Includes alcohol drinking Fashion products displayed at ceremonies: - Trophies - Titles - Badges - Costumes - Rare jewels She is also often adorned with: - Extravagant make-up - Extravagant hair - Extravagant hats - Extravagant jewels

Topic 3	Code name/abbreviation	When to use	Text or images	Codes relate to these indicators	Observationals
Leisurely life	**Leisure expectations of femininity**	Apply this code to all references emphasizing the social role of women concerning relations, marriage, career and in which spheres she is contextualised.	**Textual data**	*Leisure femininity* This includes all the elitist lifestyle activities women participate in. This concerns day-time activities (not nighttime activities). Here in the social role of women is described, which often either fits in the idea of the true or new woman (Kusimba, 2020; McRobbie, 2008; Rabinovitch-Fox, 2017; Veblen, 1899; Xiaowei, 2013)	In relation to women: - Companionship in groups of women (to pursue cultural interests, like book clubs) (Warde, 2011). - Are non-productive Elite activities: - Learning the mastery of something - Learning a language - Learning a skill - Over extensive time-consuming hobbies - Visiting art galleries - Act of reading - Listening to classical music - Taking foreign holidays/business travel - Watching serious television (Daloz, 2007)
	Code description	**When not to use**			
	The elite woman embodies the life of leisure. This leisurely life, however, has underlying expectations which are often dualistic. She must stick to the household as her workplace, but must also aim for a sense of success (Xiaowei, 2013).	Do not use this code with the specific mention of the code of conduct she must display in her social role and in the context she is placed in.	**Fashion images**	*Social background* The woman is put in settings in specific garments. She dresses differently inside than outside, in public or intimately. Sometimes she acts as the true woman, sometimes as a daring new woman (Rabinovitch-Fox, 2017). *Female position* The woman is put in social contexts that includes man. When a man is included she often sits/lays down, whilst the man (often in a strong suit) remains standing. He does appear 'cut in half' most often (that you only see half of his body/face) (Billings, 1990).	- Woman is put in domestic spheres - Woman is put in playful spheres of leisure (beach, parties, relaxation, or dressing-up) - Remains in a separate feminine sphere In relation to men: - Man is displayed as the prominent figure (Takes subservient role towards husband) - Man stands, woman sits - Man and woman attend ceremonies (in the evening) - Man is of high position at his job (such as sergeant).

Appendix D
Coding network