

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Fashion is universal. It is one of the key ways through which we communicate with others about our sexuality, wealth, professions, subcultural and political affiliations, social position, and even our emotions. The fashion industry is distinct from other production industries in that the same aim mainly governs it as its ultimate product: shift. Many feminist media researchers believe that women's fashion magazines are harmful to women (Lebovic 2019). During the second wave of feminism, sociologist Marjorie Ferguson analyzed women's magazines as an oppressive "cult of femininity." They praise women who are rail thin and white with long, straight hair. According to Naomi Wolf (2002), a woman's ideal beauty is someone who has a tall, thin, white body, blonde hair, a flawless face without pores, and an asymmetrical face. The fashion industry has become a way for white people to be more potent because beauty and style rules are based on western standards.

Western beauty plays an essential part in influencing women's relationships with their appearance by presenting an unreachable beauty that excludes cultural and individual diversity. There is a lot of pressure on women to achieve the Western "ideal" beauty. It takes away from the wide range of human bodies and beauty (Rossini 2015). The white beauty myth

has dominated the fashion industry. Yan and Bissel (2014) stated that certain publications prefer using models from the United States and the United Kingdom for their magazine covers. White beauty myth has always been dominant throughout the fashion industry and even human history, and it continues to have a significant impact in everyday interaction, in the media, and in the financial world.

In contrast, sometimes, people are unaware of paying more attention to portraying black women's beauty. The beauty industry has significantly grown in the last decade regarding diversity and inclusion, which is related to post structuralism. It has challenged the notion that women's magazines try to force an oppressive archetype of the woman as a passive readership. Therefore, it becomes clear that second-wave feminism is crucial to the magazine's evolution (Lebovic 2019). The beauty myth is destructive because it separates women of color from discussions about body image and its impact on society.

The black beauty myth holds that all black women are comfortable with their bodies. According to Arogundade (2011), 'Black Beauty' is more than just a 'black story.' It is also a pop-culture collection that features some of the most influential black figures from movies, television, music, sports, politics, and fashion through words and images. Beverly Johnson was the first Black figure to reach the cover of American *Vogue* approximately 46 years ago. In *The Washington Post*, she said, "*My debut was designed to usher in a current shift in the fashion industry.*" Johnson

also stated that racism and discrimination are still prevalent in the industry, and she proposed steps to change the system. The black beauty myth has also recently colored the fashion industry. After a challenging year for Black and ethnic minorities in the second wave of feminism, *Vogue* is the only women's magazine in postwar America to assert that fashion and feminism are fully compliant (Lebovic 2019). Nevertheless, the transition to post feminism continues to pursue an editorial philosophy that wanted to combine women's equality with fashion.

The fashion industry can affect how beauty is regarded and has promoted the myth of women's beauty. This industry is the prevailing beauty standard. Naomi Wolf's book "*The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*" asserts that women are subjected to psychological and physical oppression due to these industries founded for economic and political profit. There are a million reasons why people find particular individuals beautiful. However, there is a debate that many contemporary beauty standards focus on a specific form of beauty that relies on a type of white femininity that is only available to a few.

Although black skin has begun to be accepted, the beauty industry still fails black women. The fashion industry is so black and white. Black women are exposed to dominant beauty standards through a range of sources, including but not limited to friends, family, personal relationships, and media sources such as television, publications, and films.

Given the history of oppression, racism, and racial inequality in the United States, this exposure may impact Black women's body image and beauty standards. White beauty standards are centered on idealized images of White women's physical characteristics (e.g., light complexion, long straight hair, thin lips, and a tiny nose), which many Black women find difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Fashion has a significant impact on the spread of beauty myths in the field of popular culture. The writer believes that fashion has a significant role in providing whatever messages or cultural myths that the manufacturers aim to offer. Beauty and fashion are, without question, intimately connected. Myths about beauty is explicitly and covertly portrayed in the fashion industry, which uses pictures and words to transfer visible and implicit ideas. Visuals and words are indicators that convey cultural perceptions of women's beauty and are crucial in shaping their viewer's opinions about beauty representations.

The beauty myth comes from Western industry domination, which has produced standardization based on the Western standards (Wolf 1990). The qualities of physical beauty considered in the beauty myth are skin color, hair, and fashion. When it comes to skin color, light skin is seen as more attractive and feminine (Mark 2014). The portrayal of the Western ideal of beauty, defines features such as straight or wavy hair and a preference for blonde hair color (Banks 2000). Fashion is one of the tools that women use to express themselves and reveal their identity (Twigg 2017). The fashion industry is dominated by white representation, with

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western women's fashionable clothes setting trends over many centuries (Yao Zeng 2011). African-American figures have been expected to follow the beauty standard promoted by slim white females with straight blonde hair for decades as minorities in the fashion beauty industry.

Society and media frequently underestimate African-American's physical characteristics (Banks 2000). There are several factors that make Western more dominant over African-Americans. The two most important factors are the historical context and the physical characteristics. The first factor is that the history of slavery in America is strongly associated with African Americans' reality. As slaves, they were subjected to appalling conditions and were forced to fight for their freedom (Feagin 2006). The second factor is that when African Americans first arrived in Western countries, they were considered nonhumans due to their striking physical differences from Western people (Arogundade 2011). Whiteness has long been regarded as one of the most attractive features of the human body (Arogundade 2011). This makes a physical appearance-based racial hierarchy in Western civilization, which undervalues the superiority of African-Americans.

Mass media, such as fashion magazines, often depict attractive individuals as more desirable, believable, and inspiring (Solomon, Ashmore and Longo 1992). The significant effect of mass media in the appearance norms shows that emerging exposure to mediated beauty increases women's internalization and speculates about achieving the

media-promoted body form and facial attractiveness (Polivy and Herman 2004). The cover is the crucial component of a magazine outside its content. A magazine's cover plays a significant part in its image or branding factor. The magazine cover is important, and it seeks to attract the reader's attention with its fascinating content within (Spiker 2015). Therefore, a representative image on the cover magazine's content reflects the issue.

Vogue magazine is one of the most influential fashion industry magazines globally, showcasing fashion trends and disseminating information on how to dress up. It began as a weekly newspaper in 1892 and was later transformed into a fashion magazine. Throughout the 1960s and into the first half of the 1970s, *Vogue* struggled to engage in the second-wave feminism (Lebovic 2019). However, by the late 1970s, the magazine had incorporated fashion and feminism into its distinct editorial ideology (Lebovic 2019). Sensing that the feminist ground was shifting, *Vogue* began publishing the magazine in the mid-1970s, reflecting the more flexible, interpretive feminism to appeal to the free and liberated women.

As one of the leading magazines in the world, *Vogue* publishes an issue every month, primarily targeting young adults. The magazine is always the first to provide a comprehensive evaluation of current beauty and fashion trends, and it occasionally even establishes new trends, identifies promising names, and establishes the highest standards (Condé






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Nast, n.d.). *Vogue* is commonly referred to as "the fashion Bible."




Vogue has an annual fashion season edition. There are two primary seasons of *Vogue* magazine each year. These seasons are SS (Spring/Summer) and FW (Fall/Winter). In the annual fashion season, they appear a maximum of two times, if not SS, then FW. However, not all of them appears. Spring/Summer starts in March and runs until around July, and Fall/Winter goes from September to December.

| FW | SS |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p data-bbox="555 1270 792 1297">2011 SEPTEMBER</p> |  <p data-bbox="1081 1270 1253 1297">2011 MARCH</p> |
|  <p data-bbox="560 1736 792 1764">2012 SEPTEMBER</p> |  <p data-bbox="1083 1736 1255 1764">2012 MARCH</p> |

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| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>2013 SEPTEMBER</p> | <p>-</p> |
|  <p>2014 SEPTEMBER</p> |  <p>2014 MARCH</p> |
|  <p>2015 SEPTEMBER</p> |  <p>2015 JUNE</p> |

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| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| - |  <p>2015 JULY</p> |
|  <p>2016 SEPTEMBER</p> | - |
|  <p>2017 SEPTEMBER</p> | - |

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| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
|  <p>2017 OCTOBER</p> | <p>-</p> |
|  <p>2018 SEPTEMBER</p> | <p>-</p> |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>VOGUE TAYLOR SWIFT "THIS FEELS LIKE A NEW BEGINNING" RADICAL CHIC FASHION INVESTS IN VALUE AND SUSTAINABILITY HAIL TO THE CHIEF TOM FORD TAKES OFFICE IT'S THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE! COME ON IN 2019 SEPTEMBER</p> |  <p>VOGUE Justin & Hailey's WHIRLWIND ROMANCE "She's the eccentric I always wanted" SPRING FASHION'S FEARLESS FASE GIGI'S BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY KENDALL'S ALL-RED CARPET DENIM'S NEW SHADES OF CHIC True West HOW THE GOLDEN STATE BECAME THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING THE NEW FERTILITY MEDICAL LIFE AFTER THE FIRES 2019 MARCH</p> |
|  <p>VOGUE YOUTH IN REVOLT THE ACTIVISTS BEHIND THE CLIMATE DEBATE MR. AMERICA INSIDE THE PRIVATE WORLD OF RALPH LAUREN GAME OF THRONES OLIVIA COLMAN FROM OSCAR GLORY TO THE CROWN FALL FASHION "COZY WEEKENDS, ROMANTIC NIGHTS STARRING HALEY BEEBES & TIA TOWNS" 2019 OCTOBER</p> | <p>-</p> |
|  <p>VOGUE "TAKE YOUR PROTEST TO THE BALLOT BOX" LIZZO ON HOPE, JUSTICE, AND ELECTION 2020 MVP WHY KAMALA HARRIS IS HISTORY IN THE MAKING CITY STREETS, COUNTRY LIFE, ZOOM SCREENS FALL FASHION FOR HOW WE LIVE NOW 2020 OCTOBER</p> | <p>-</p> |



From the table, representation of blacks appears not as dominant as whites but has grown year after year. The repetitions keep appearing from 2011 to 2021 (2014, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2021). The rest of them totaled 14 covers showing the figure's dominance with white skin. As a result, it can be said that the emergence of blacks in *Vogue* is significant, appearing more often than in previous years.

Other magazines that follow the same theme as *Vogue* are *Elle* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Unlike *Vogue*, the two similar magazines do not carry the new representation of women of color as much as *Vogue* does. They only discuss deeper issues of beauty, fashion, and entertainment aspects. Another reason for selecting *Vogue* over other comparable magazines is that it discusses specific and deeper social themes, such as racial and political difficulties. *Vogue* has also shown an ability to adjust to an ever-changing reality. Examples of the establishment are *Teen Vogue*, the

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Vogue channel (through its website), and *Voguepedia*, which has covered the history of fashion and more since the late 1980s. *Vogue* publishes around 20 editions worldwide, implying that it is read by women and men from all ethnic backgrounds, making it a genuinely global brand and global influence. For its readers, the magazine has a more extensive reach.

There are few previous studies related to the beauty myth and fashion. First, a study of *the representation of African-American models on the cover of Teen Vogue magazine* conducted by Larasati in 2018, using beauty myth theory with semiotics, reveals that African-Americans can still represent their natural self-beauty and be acceptable enough to be on the cover of a magazine. The second related study was conducted by Amal Mohamed Abdi in 2019, entitled *Representation of Black Women in Beauty Commercials*, using representation and colorism theory, and it reveals that women with darker skin tones are rising to the top of every industry, including entertainment and fashion, challenging beauty and social standards. The third related study was conducted by Maryam, Muzna, Asna Khalid, Nilam Khunti, and Meera Mohan with the title, *Media, Fashion and Beauty: Influence on Women Empowerment in 2021*, using empowerment theory, and it reveals that fashion and beauty are two industries that are associated with women, empowering them to be more independent and discover their hidden talents. The fourth related study conducted by Tiffany Thomas in 2013 under the title "*Hair" They Are: The Ideologies of Black Hair*", using culture theory, reveals that the

hair of an African woman is a sign of glory and representation of femininity, as well as a significant measure of a woman's health and beauty. The last related study was conducted by LaPorchia C. Davis in 2013 with the title *African American women's use of cosmetics products about their attitudes and self-identity; using social comparison, self-objectification*, and symbolic self-completion theories, and it reveals that African American women use cosmetics products related to their self-identity and cosmetics plays a role in their lives to present an idealized appearance and enjoy wearing them.

Therefore, based on the previous explanation, it can be concluded that it is always related to beauty when talking about fashion. The fashion industry both directly and indirectly promotes beauty myth. The writers feel that fashion plays an essential role in offering whatever messages or cultural myths manufacturers wish to provide. Without a doubt, beauty and fashion are intimately connected. For example, offering women the way they look is expected in the fashion industry. Understanding clothing, hairstyling, and cosmetics application are the three most significant parts of the fashion industry to comprehend (Banks 2000). Fashion is distinguished by three aspects that will always be associated with beauty.

As a result, this study aims to reveal how beauty is represented by African-American figures in the annual fashion edition on digital *Vogue* magazine covers from 2011-2021. This study employs a qualitative technique and Roland Barthes' semiotics analysis approach as it is

explanatory research to obtain a more profound knowledge and explain the phenomena of society. The beauty myth influences the media's portrayal of beauty. The development of beauty myth follows the standardization of beauty according to western standards, and it has been used for years worldwide as a result of the west domination and industrialization revolution (Yan and Bissel 2014). The media has a significant influence on the dissemination of beauty myths.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

After conducting some research, as described in the background of the study, the writer has chosen the issue to be analyzed further in this research. The issue would include:

How is beauty represented by African-American figures in the annual fashion edition on digital *Vogue* magazine covers from 2011-2021?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the context-dependency of the statement of the problem, the purpose of this research is:

To discover the beauty representation of African-American figures in the annual fashion edition on digital *Vogue* magazine covers from 2011-2021.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is to investigate new phenomena, determine how magazines represent the development of African-American figure's beauty, and discover new perspectives on how African-American beauty is presented. The writer will get new knowledge and insights regarding how African-American beauty is portrayed in the media due to doing this research. The benefits of this study for readers are that it may serve as a reference for future relevant studies and give a new perspective on how skin color continues to define beauty, not only for African-Americans but also for Indonesians. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the cultural studies field benefits from the expectation that this study will advance research on African-American representation in the media.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- African-American: People who have "African ancestral origins" are referred to as "African American" (Agyemang, Bhopal and Bruijnzeels 2005).
- Beauty Myth: The ideal imagery of a woman (Wolf 2002).
- Fashion: Clothing in which the main feature is the rapid and continuous changing of styles (Svendson 2010).
- Post feminism: Post feminism is a critique of that second-wave feminism that relies on the hegemonic assumptions that patriarchy

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and imperialism are universal (Brooks 2002).

- Semiotics: The study of signs, regardless of their constituents. Additionally, there are constraints such as visuals, motions, musical sounds, and objects (Barthes 1968).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This chapter is discussed to describe the theories utilized to examine the object of the study. The Beauty Myth theory by Naomi Wolf is the leading theory used to show the beauty-representation of African-American figures on the digital cover of *Vogue* magazine in the white-dominated fashion industry. However, in order to get a more in-depth understanding, the writer uses a few supporting theories.

2.1.1 *Beauty Myth*

Naomi Wolf, a prominent feminist, is known for establishing the "beauty myth." Naomi Wolf emerged as one of the feminist figures that fought alongside other feminist figures, such as Ann Brocks and Susan Falludi. The criticism of these figures focuses on how to view women and men as human beings with equal rights. These figures fought for the elimination of discrimination against women.

The Beauty Myth is one of the works and a phenomenal critique from Naomi Wolf. In the book *Beauty Myth* (1990) that she wrote, Wolf describes how the beauty that many women desires used to harm themselves. Wolf stated that there is a connection between women's freedom and women's beauty. Women reinforce the notion of beauty through various media, such as advertising. Many women prefer to be able