



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies

Master's Program in Asian Studies

China Track

Spring semester, 2010

# **THE MAKING OF THE WOMAN**

- Stereotypical representations of gender on the covers of Vogue China

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# Abstract

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**Key words:** Fashion, Magazine Cover, Representation, Gender, Vogue, China

**Aim:** The aim was to create a nuanced description and understanding of cover model representations by describing, analysing and interpreting stereotypical gender portrayals on the cover of *Vogue China*.

**Methodology:** The thesis has a qualitative research design inspired by practices within hermeneutics and case study research. The empirical material was analysed by semiotic analysis and a complementary basic statistical analysis.

**Theoretical framework:** The theoretical framework consists of theory on representation, focused on stereotypical representations of gender, race and celebrity.

**Conclusions:** The stereotypical gender representation of the cover model on *Vogue China* is a supermodel or film star. She is also Asian, Caucasian or Black. Furthermore, the representation of the model is constructed as seductive, sexy and independent. Her pose is straight and confident, the gaze is indifferent and her touch constructs a sexy body. Her seductive day-dreaming face triggers desire. The supermodel and film star constructs the model as a sophisticated or photoshopped beauty, while the race of the model, the Asian or black model, sometimes is played up and constructs an 'erotic' and 'exotic' woman. Besides, the Asian model is, compared to the Caucasian and black model, constructed as seductive, sexy and independent.

## Foreword

~ "This morning I took out a comma, and this afternoon I put it back again." ~

~ Oscar Wilde

Writing a thesis is a journey that is full of painful as well as exhilarating and joyous moments. The road has been long but now it has come to an end and I would like to thank the many people who have made the hard times less so and the best parts so much better!

~ A special thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Barbara Schulte at Lund University. I am grateful for her guidance, constructive suggestions, directness, encouragement and patience.

~ I am thankful to my fieldwork advisor Dr. Tianshu Pan at Fudan University in Shanghai for providing me with relevant information as well as sharing his expertise and insights with me.

~ I would also like to express my gratitude to Salka Hallström Bornold, fashion editor at Plaza Magazine and Martina Bonnier fashion director at Damernas Värld, who believed in my idea and encouraged me to pursue it.

~ I am thankful to Anna Vaughan Kett at University of Brighton and Katherine Baird, Manager of Archives and Special Collections at London College of Fashion, for their help and suggestions on how to access back issues of *Vogue China*.

~ Many thanks to all my friends and classmates in the fieldwork course in Shanghai with whom I shared some great days and nice dinners! I am thankful to Edaan Getzel for providing insights into the difference of American and Swedish feminism. Furthermore, I am indebted to those who helped me in my search for *Vogue China* magazines. In particular I am grateful to my dear friend Ji Weiwei for all her help, enthusiasm and persistence. I could not have done it without her!

~ Thanks a million to Maria Mikkelsen for being 'my partner in crime'. Thanks for the blueberries, chocolate and candy - but most of all thanks for your encouragement and company during our endless days in the Asia library. Vi är bäst!

~ A big thank you to all my friends for the great joys they have brought to me. Thanks for all the good times and for necessary distraction that took my mind off thesis writing. I am also grateful to my sister Helena Samsioe and my friend Frida Friberg for proofreading.

~ Finally, a heartfelt thank you to my family who have shared my happiness and frustration along the road. Thanks for all the love and support.

Lund, May 2010

Emma Samsioe

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# 1. Introduction

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*This introductory chapter describes and introduces the fashion magazine cover. It also presents the background to the research problem, which concludes into the aim and the research questions. Lastly the disposition text provides an overview of the remaining chapters of this thesis.*

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It is hard to think of another form of communication that inhabits and interconnects both the public and the private realms in quite the same way, demanding our attention in the social context of newsstand, newsagent and supermarket; in the private confines of coffee table, bedside and bathroom; and comfortably inhabiting those liminal spaces in between – when we are travelling, relaxing, waiting for someone or for something to happen.

(Taylor, 2006:5)

The form of communication, referred to by Taylor above, is the magazine cover. This statement shows how powerful a magazine cover is. The medium carries such power since it is constantly present and therefore difficult to escape. Our lives are greatly influenced by this constant presence. Furthermore, the importance of the magazine cover is illustrated in the documentary film *The September Issue: Anna Wintour and the Making of Vogue*, produced and directed by R. J. Cutler in 2009. The film shows on the one hand how a cover image is created in order to maximize sales and on the other hand how the quality of the cover image is expected to have a lasting impression as a cultural artefact. Thus, the film draws on *Vogue's* reputation for creating covers that catches the interest, and sometimes dismay, of the audience by constructing provocative, amusing and non-conformist covers with a touch of luxury (Rachline, 2009:9). The launch of *Vogue China* in 2005 linked China to the international scene of fashion and set new conventions in cover photography and photographic poses. For example the first cover portrayed enticing, young and fashionable women (Hartley and Montgomery, 2009:61).

Thus, the magazine cover is an important and specific type of medium and the section above has put it into an everyday social context. It has also highlighted the specific characteristics of a fashion magazine cover and touched upon the portrayal of women by using *Vogue/Vogue China* as examples. The next section emphasizes the importance of the medium and its relation to gender displays in an academic context. Furthermore, it examines prior research and draws attention to the lack of research on the topic.

## 1.1 Statement of problem

According to Johnson (2002), Kitch (2001) and McCracken (1993) the image and design of a fashion magazine cover reveals important insights into how the image of femininity is constructed in contemporary society. For example, McCracken points out how the cover of a fashion magazine is a powerful tool in representing and communicating norms and ideals of women (McCracken, 1993:22). Besides, Johnson also believes that the cover is a powerful medium and she argues that gender portrayals on magazine covers display simplified and imagined stereotypes. She informs the reader that these stereotypes originate from history as well as from contemporary cultural, political and economic trends in society. Based on this Johnson was surprised to find that most media scholars have not paid much attention to either the medium of magazine covers or the cultural aspect of gender stereotyping on magazine covers. Hence, she encourages researchers to analyse magazine covers in order to establish an account of the magazine cover as a specific type of medium and to enhance knowledge of gender stereotypification on magazine covers. (Johnson, 2002)

Existing research on magazine covers has mostly focused on how the cover reinforces the brand of a magazine and how the cover is used as a marketing tool or identification factor in the buying decision process. Thus, marketing aspects and advice on how to create a cover that sells is stressed. (Johnson and Prijatel, 2007:283) When it comes to prior research on gender portrayals in commercial media, such as women's magazines, research tends to focus on advertisement in fashion magazines (see for example: Friedan, 1963; Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Shields, 2002). Moreover, it appears that the bulk of this research, for the last thirty years, has been produced in the United States and Europe. As a result, the research has traditionally concentrated on western fashion magazines and models. (Frith and Karan, 2008:1) Today, however, this research has become increasingly inclusive; including research not only produced in the United States and Europe but also in Asia. In addition the subject of research has become more diverse - focusing on fashion advertisement from different countries, such as China, Japan and South Korea, as well as focusing on models of different races, such as Asian or black models. (Frith, 2006:150) Furthermore, along with increased global integration and the global expansion of women's magazines, a comparative cross cultural perspective on gender advertisement has emerged. However, there is a paucity of comparative literature on how women are portrayed in global fashion magazines across cultures. For example how the global fashion magazines choose to portray women differently

depending on the regional edition as well as how the different editions display women of different races. (Frith et al, 2004:53,54)

To date, a cross cultural and comparative perspective has been applied by a number of scholars working on media portrayals of women in advertisements in global fashion magazines. They have mostly focused on comparing either how women have been portrayed in different countries editions of global fashion magazines or how women of different races have been portrayed in these magazines. Besides, this research is conducted within sex-roles research and the models are analysed by using content analysis. Hence, the results tend to show and compare the frequency of, for example, sexy and seductive poses. When comparing the Japanese and North American edition of *Seventeen* magazine, Maynard and Taylor showed that there was a higher frequency of girlish images of young females in the Japanese issue. (Maynard and Taylor, 1999) In another study Frith et al. compare how women are portrayed in women's magazines from the U.S.A., Taiwan and Singapore. They found that models in the American advertisements more frequently were posed in a seductive way and showed in a seductive dress than models in fashion magazines from Taiwan and Singapore. (Frith et al, 2004) When comparing how different races are portrayed in fashion magazines, Frith compares how Chinese and Caucasian models are portrayed in global fashion magazines, such as *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan*, in China. She found that the Caucasian model mainly was portrayed as independent, seductive and sexually attractive, while the Chinese model mostly was depicted as demure and sophisticated. (Frith, 2006) Another example is the comparative analysis of advertisements in South Korean fashion magazines by Kim. She found that Caucasian models expressed a sexual look, while South Korean models mainly had a modest and feminine look. (Kim, 2008)

When it comes to cover images of the Chinese and American *Vogue*, my findings suggest that the representation of the model on both covers is, for example, independent/confident, sexy and seductive - but in slightly different ways. Hence, independence, sexiness and seductiveness are cultural/social constructions that can manifest themselves in different ways. Thus, previous research presents a simplified one-sided picture of how models are portrayed in global fashion magazines in Asia and how Asian models are portrayed in these magazines, as the comparison tends to create a binary stereotypical explanation: the model in a global fashion magazine in Asia and the Asian model is pictured as sophisticated, demure and



modest while the Caucasian model is portrayed as independent, seductive and sexually attractive.

Based on the above, the thesis mainly draws attention to, on the one hand, gender stereotypification on magazine covers across cultures, and on the other hand to the magazine cover as an important medium. In particular, it intends to create a nuanced understanding of how the model is portrayed on the cover of *Vogue China*. To sum up, the study aims at contributing to the understanding of magazine covers as powerful spaces when it comes to the construction of simplified and mythical gender stereotypes in society. The aim will be further explained in the following section.

## 1.2 Aim and research questions

Based on the research problem presented above the aim of this study is to create a nuanced description and understanding of the cover model, by describing, analysing and interpreting representations of the cover model on *Vogue China*. To do this, the aim of the thesis is threefold. First it aims at describing how the model has been portrayed on the cover of *Vogue China* from 2005 to 2009. Second the aim is to, from a cross-cultural perspective, compare, identify, analyse and interpret the stereotypical images of the cover models of *Vogue China* and the American *Vogue*. Third, the aim is to compare the symbols used in the simplified and mythical gender stereotypification of the Asian model, the Caucasian and Black model on the cover of *Vogue China*. The following questions will guide the study:

- How is the model portrayed on the covers of *Vogue China* from 2005 to 2009?
- What similarities and differences can be identified between the stereotypical representations of the cover models on the Chinese and American *Vogue*? How do the identified similarities and differences construct the mythical representation of the sexy, seductive and independent/confident woman/model on the cover of *Vogue China*? And how can this representation of the Chinese cover model be understood in relation to the American cover model?
- Which symbols are used in the stereotypical representation of the Asian cover model compared to the Caucasian and Black cover model on *Vogue China*? In what way do the combinations of symbols in the stereotypical representation of the Asian model compared to the Caucasian and Black cover model construct a sexy, seductive and independent/confident woman?

### 1.3 Disposition

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part is the introduction and it consists of two chapters, a general introduction and a chapter on method and material.

The second part, the main part, consists of three chapters. The first of these, the third chapter, presents the contemporary context of the fashion magazine by considering the role of the fashion magazine within Shanghai's fashion system. It also elaborates on the relationship between Chinese women and modernity. Lastly, it introduces *Vogue* by giving a brief description of the history of the magazine and its covers. It also introduces *Vogue China*. This backdrop serves as a point of contemporary contextual and historical reference when conducting the analysis.

The fourth chapter deals with the representation of women as signifying practice by introducing and defining three different stereotypical representations of women. This text also considers beauty ideals, as stereotypes often are rooted in these standards. The chapter intends to provide a basic theoretical understanding that will guide the reader through the analysis.

The fifth chapter, the analysis, is divided into two parts. The first part presents the results from a statistical analysis in order to shed a first light on what is going on and what is important when it comes to how the model has been portrayed on the cover of *Vogue China* from 2005 to 2009. The second part is a detailed semiotic analysis, which deals with the second and third research questions, analysing and comparing the representation of the model on the cover of *Vogue China* and the American *Vogue* cover as well as the representation of the Asian, Caucasian and Black model on the cover of *Vogue China*. This is done by analysing and comparing the models according to their coded "identity". The coded "identities" will be further explained in section 2.3.

The third and last part is the conclusion and it consists of two parts. The first part is a summary and discussion of the result from the analytical chapter. The second part reflects upon the findings and the contribution as well as provides suggestions for future research.

## 2. Method and material

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*In this chapter the methodological considerations and reflections are presented. It begins with a motivation of the research approach in relation to the aim of the thesis. Furthermore it outlines and explains the interpretative approach and the constructivist perspective, which are applied when making sense of the representations of the model on the cover. This is followed by a presentation of the choice of Vogue, data collection methods and how the magazine covers were accessed. The chapter ends with a reflection on the research process.*

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The aim of the thesis is, as stated above, to create a nuanced description and understanding of the cover model, by describing, analysing and interpreting the representation of the model on the cover of *Vogue China*. To do this a qualitative research strategy is applied (Bryman, 2008:21). The first step in the process of gathering empirical material and making sense of the covers was mainly inductive as I wanted to capture and discover unique features of the cover. The empirical material was then interpreted through relevant theoretical concepts within feminist media studies, such as stereotypes (cf. Goffman, 1976; Williamson, 1978; Cortese, 2004). These theories were later revised and refined, as the theory was adapted to new magazine covers that were collected. However, these theoretical concepts have mainly been developed within feminist advertising research. As fashion magazine covers resemble advertisements and have a similar area of problematique, that is the stereotypical representation of women in media, I believe these theories are applicable to my research. Hence, the process of gathering and making sense of this empirical material has been abductive. (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2008:55)

The abductive approach has been inspired by practices within case study research and hermeneutics. The combination of abduction, case study research and hermeneutics is common in social research and it stresses the importance of a ‘deeper’ understanding (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2008:55; Yin, 2003:13). Hence, the combination of abduction, hermeneutics and case study research intends to establish a ‘deeper’ understanding of the magazine cover as a powerful space when it comes to gender stereotypification. The research developed in this thesis attempts to offer new insights from a new area of study, in order to increase understanding and to expand existing theory on gender stereotypification on magazine covers, by relating the findings to the broader theory on representations of women in media (women’s magazines) (cf. Yin, 2003:10). The next paragraphs will guide the reader through this research process. First, I will present my hermeneutic approach and constructivist

perspective that I have applied in order to make sense of the cover images. Moreover, I will describe and motivate the choice of *Vogue*. I will also explain how the empirical material was accessed, gathered and analysed. Lastly I will reflect on the research process.

## 2.1 An interpretative approach to the cover images of Vogue China

This thesis has, as mentioned above, a qualitative research design and as such it is shaped by the assumption that reality is understood through interpretation and as socially constructed. Hence, the world is not seen as essential, but rather as continually changing. (Bryman, 2008:19) Therefore the cover image is not seen as either a true or false reflection of society, but as a construction that is given meaning, which can be interpreted in various ways. Denzin and Lincoln write that interpretation is essential in qualitative research and there is usually an intimate relationship between the researcher and the case that is studied as well as between the case and its surroundings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:8). Besides, Yin also points out that it is common within case study research that there exists a close relationship between the case and its context (Cf. Yin, 2003:87). Hence, the cover image will be analysed and interpreted in relation to the context of the fashion system in Shanghai. In this study, there also exists a close relationship between me, as a researcher, and the cover images. To be able to elucidate this relationship as well as to explain how it has been used in order to make sense of the phenomena under study, a hermeneutic approach is applied.

Within hermeneutics the researcher's ability to make sense of the study object is central. Alvesson and Sköldbberg mention that the sense making process is guided by two different circles; the circle of 'the whole and the individual' and the circle of 'understanding and pre-understanding'. The first circle refers to how the researcher understands each individual part by relating it to the whole and how the whole is made sense of in relation to the individual parts. (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2008:211) Hence, I will relate individual cover representations of *Vogue China* to the broader phenomena of the representation of the woman on a *Vogue China* cover, at the same time as this phenomenon will be made sense of in relation to its individual parts.

When it comes to the second circle, Alvesson and Sköldbberg write that understanding requires pre-understanding but at the same time does pre-understanding also pose a barrier to understanding. Hence, when interpreting the cover images I, on the one hand need to set aside my pre-understanding but on the other hand I need to use it, as a lens, in order to make sense

of the study object. (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2008:211) For example, my previous experience as a consumer of women's fashion magazines might pose as a barrier for me to make sense of the cover images, since it might be difficult for me to put aside my consumer perspective. Besides, I am also a Swedish woman who is used to European and American fashion magazine covers. However, both my consumer and Swedish perspectives may also be used as a lens in order to make sense of the cover. For example, these perspectives may enable me to discover aspects of the cover images of *Vogue China* that a person who is used to the images may not find particularly interesting. Furthermore I also believe that the perspectives may be used as a lens when comparing the American *Vogue* and *Vogue China*, as the more familiar American cover may help bring forward specific characteristics of the *Vogue China* cover.

## 2.2 The case of Vogue, data collection methods and access

When interpreting the cover image of *Vogue China*, I have, as stated above considered the intimate relationship between the researcher and the case that is studied and between the case and its context. Yin and Stake write that one of the most important parts of case study research is the consideration of the context and the understanding of the contextual conditions (Yin, 2003:13; Stake, 1995:8). I identified early on in the research process that the context of *Vogue China* is highly important to the understanding of the case. Therefore, I will analyse and interpret the cover images in relation to the context of the fashion system in Shanghai. For example, as the fashion magazine and the cover image is part of the modernization project in China, it will be analysed in relation to the discourse on progress, development and creativity. Besides, the cover image will be analysed in relation to the relationship between Chinese women and modernity, by linking it to how images of women in history have symbolized the current political and economic situation in China. Yin also mentions that another important part of case study research is that it benefits from having a comparative dimension, as the contrasting situation might bring a 'deeper' understanding of the case. As was mentioned above, the comparative dimension may help bring forward specific characteristics of the *Vogue China* cover. Hence, *Vogue China* covers will be compared with the covers of the American edition of *Vogue*. However, *Vogue China* is the main case, making covers of American *Vogue* a point of reference. (Yin, 2003:13,54;)

The selection of *Vogue* was based on a criteria sampling (Patton, 2002:238). The basic requirement the magazine had to fulfill is that of a transnational high fashion magazine for

women (not a lifestyle magazine) with a Chinese edition. Moreover, the criteria the magazine cover should fulfill are based on the cover's ability to maximize the understanding of the cover as a powerful space when it comes to gender stereotypification. The criteria are as follows:

- Long history and tradition
- Ability to break with convention and create illusions
- Artistic aspirations and avant-garde
- Embrace style and elegance
- Play with tradition and catch the spirit of now

*Vogue* was chosen as it fits well with the above mentioned criteria. Moreover, *Vogue* is considered the most concise, consistent and complete documented history of constructed femininity compared to other fashion magazines, as it has been defining and redefining femininity since 1909 (Tolmach Lakoff and Scherr, 1984;76).

The magazine covers are considered documents, and in this study they are media outputs, and as such they are usually collected from relevant media archives (cf. Bryman, 2008:523). When collecting *Vogue* covers, both Chinese and American, I first tried to contact Condé Nast in order to find out if they had an archive that I could access. However, this did not prove fruitful as Condé Nast did not respond. Hence, I have collected the covers from a number of different places in Shanghai: Shanghai library archive, secondhand bookstores, street vendors and book markets, but also from eBay and Taobao on the Internet. The American magazines were bought from a Swedish bookstore. I have collected all issues of *Vogue China* from the year of 2005 to the year of 2009 and all issues of the American *Vogue* from the year of 2009.

### 2.3 Analytical approaches for the analysis of Vogue China covers

The analysis of the magazine covers is twofold. It consists of a basic statistical analysis and a semiotic analysis. The statistical analysis of *Vogue China* covers from 2005 to 2009 serves as a pre-study to the latter and more detailed semiotic analysis of Chinese and American covers from 2009. Van Zoonen points out that the combination of a statistical analysis, for inventory purposes, and a 'deeper' semiotic analysis of the underlying meaning is common within feminist media studies.(1994:86) However, the quantitative part is of subordinate significance in relation to the constructivist semiotic approach. Hence, the aim of the statistical analysis is to shed a first light on the covers in order to establish an understanding and description of what is going on and what is important in the representation of women. (cf. Van Zoonen, 1994:73) The statistical analysis resembles the basics of a simplified content analysis, in that

the analysis involves creating categories on how women are represented on the cover, and then counting how many times the different categories appear (Van Zoonen, 1994:69).

Gillian Rose suggests four steps in conducting a statistical analysis, finding images, devising categories for coding, coding the images and finally analysing the results (2007:61 ff.). As mentioned above, I have included all covers of *Vogue China* that had been published at the time I began my research in December 2009. When devising coding categories I first made a brief examination of the covers and then related the result to the theoretical concept of stereotypes. My findings were then related to corresponding categories on the checklist on representation of women in media developed by Gillian Dyer (1982:96-104). Her list on categories is helpful as it specifies in detail how women are represented however, I have added the category ‘celebrity’, as it was specific to my findings on covers. (cf. Rose, 2007:82). The coding categories are: body language, self-touching, facial expression, gaze, race, and celebrity. More information on the coding categories can be found in the coding manual in appendix one and an example of the coding schedule is found in appendix two. If there is more than one model on the cover, I have coded the most dominant model (cf. Van Zoonen, 1994:71). The results from the coding procedures will be presented in frequency tables and discussed.

The next step is the comparative analysis, firstly of Chinese and American covers of *Vogue*, and secondly the comparison of how the Asian model is represented compared to the Caucasian and Black model on the cover of *Vogue China*. To be able to find and analyse the latent meaning of the covers I have decided to use a semiotic approach (Bignell, 2002). Van Zoonen mentions that the ability to capture the underlying meaning of images has made the use of semiotics popular within feminist media studies (Van Zoonen, 1994:74). Hence, I intend to make use of semiotic procedures when analysing the representation of the model on the cover of *Vogue China*, as the aim is to study the symbolic dimension of the content in order to develop a detailed understanding of how images produce and signify meaning.

When conducting comparative analysis, keeping the theoretical concepts in mind, the first step was to search for themes in the empirical material of the Chinese and American *Vogue* covers of 2009. The themes are constructed as specific imaginary representations of “types” or “identities” of women on the cover. These “identities” are found on both Chinese and American covers, however, sometimes they differ in the way they express the different imaginary representation of “identities”. I have labeled these “identities” as; ‘Miss Sexy

Magic’, ‘Miss Fairytale’, ‘Miss Beautiful Stranger’ and ‘Miss Superstar’. These “identities” will be analysed one by one going through the procedures and terminology developed by Saussure and Barthes, such as the sign (signifier and signified), *denotation*, *connotation* and lastly the *myth*. These concepts will be further explained in the next section.

Semiology means the study of *signs* or more specifically the study of *systems of signs*. For Saussure, according to Bignell, a sign consist of two key parts; the *signifier*, which is the sole physical appearance of the sign, for example the word rain, and the *signified*, which is the idea/concept it indicates/refers to, for example a specific type of weather. Hence, the signifier constructs the signified through the meaning it triggers. Besides, signs do not gain their meaning solely from what they are, but also from what they are not. For example, the meaning of rain is established by the signs that we have chosen not to use, for example, snow and hail. Hence, what defines rain as rain is the fact that rain is not snow or hail. (Bignell, 2002:8,11) Furthermore, when it comes to images, signs usually need to appear in relation to other signs to make sense besides, the combination of certain signs into sign systems constructs particular meanings (Jhally, 1987:130). The first step of the analysis is therefore to identify the two parts of the sign, in order to describe the general impression/appearance which an “identity” makes and then relate it to the meaning it triggers.

The analysis then moves on to consider how signs and sign systems are culturally specific, for example specific to the fashion culture of a fashion system (cf. Hall, 1997a:38). In order to make sense of signs in a given culture, Barthes distinguishes between two levels of signification. The first level concentrates on *what* the image shows and the second level concerns *how* images show something. The first level, *denotation*, concerns the two parts, the signifier and the signified, following Saussure’s explanation of the sign. (Barthes, 1967:89) Hence, the section on denotation (in the analysis section) concerns the above mentioned first step in the analysis. The next step is the second level, *connotation*. Here, I will try to recognize, understand and interpret the more abstract underlying meaning of the sign or sign system that constructs the representations of models within the different types of “identities”. Sometimes these latent meanings can take on the form of narratives. Barthes refers to them as *myths*. The *myth* can, through its dominance in a society, define what is natural and common-sense. This definition constructs attitudes and beliefs about what is ‘true’ and ‘the way things are’. (Barthes, 1977:45) When a narrative is discovered, I will, in order to create a comprehensive analysis, relate the narrative to the cultural and social context of the cover: the fashion system in Shanghai.



## 2.4 Reflections on the research process

When reflecting on the research process one may for example ask: why are *Vogue* covers such a fascinating source for finding out about stereotypical images of women? For example, *Vogue* covers are a fruitful source as they set new standards and establish conventions on how cover models are represented. *Vogue* is able to set new standards and establish conventions, as the magazine is a well-established fashion magazine, often regarded as ‘the leader’ within the industry, that has throughout history created a position in the magazine industry as ‘the grand old lady’ by playing on its experience, image and know-how when constructing for example provocative or non-conformist covers. (Rachline, 2009:9) Thus, an analysis of the established conventions may give a sense of the ‘general agreement’ on certain attitudes or practices in the construction of the cover image. Furthermore, the setting of new standards allows me to find and analyse new tendencies and trends in how models are represented on the cover. When it comes to *Vogue China*, Hartley and Montgomery argue that *Vogue* has a significant impact on fashion publishing and the representation of women on the cover of fashion magazines. For example they mention that *Vogue China*, since the launch in 2005, has set new standards on fashion photography and photographic poses for cover models. *Vogue* is also considered ‘the fashion bible’ and an ‘institution of learning’ about fashion and style in China. (Hartley and Montgomery, 2009:61,64)

Another reflection considers how the use of semiotics may be challenged by advocates of sex-roles research and content analysis. Researchers within this tradition argue that women are showed in unequal ways that reflects twisted and false visions of society. However, the understanding of gender images as either false or true reflections of society is dated and contested. Since the ‘cultural turn’, sex-roles research is conducted to a lesser extent and it has been subjected to criticism. (Shields, 2002:14; Hall, 1997a:2; Jhally, 1987:135) For example, Sut Jhally argues that representations rather should be understood as a part of social reality and as such it should be treated as a social construction (1987:135).

Since interpretivism is central in this study it is of importance to emphasize that there does not exist a single or correct answer to the question, “what does this image mean?” (Hall, 1997a:9) An image can be interpreted differently by different people, and there is no interpretation that is either ‘wrong’ or ‘right’. (Hall, 1997a:9) However, an interpretation still has to be evaluated and tested, since the quality of an interpretation may vary. Anna Johansson suggests

that we need other criteria than validity and reliability to judge the quality of an interpretation. First an interpretation needs to be possible as well as convincing. I have tried to demonstrate this by including the images in appendixes, present alternative interpretations, and finally by illustrating my line of thought in the analysis. Second, I have tried to create a comprehensive account of *Vogue* covers. In other words I have tried to show how each one of the covers is part of a 'bigger picture' and the 'story' on fashion magazine covers. Lastly, one has to consider whether the study might have an influence on future studies on magazine covers. (cf. Johansson, 2005:315)

### **3.The fashion system: The fashion magazine and images of femininity**

*This chapter describes the emerging fashion system in Shanghai and the role of the fashion magazine. It explains how the fashion system, the fashion magazine and the cover image are part of the modernization project in China that emphasizes progress, development and creativity. Furthermore it elaborates on the relationship between Chinese women and modernity, and gives examples of how images of women in history have symbolized the current political and economic situation in China. Lastly, it introduces Vogue by giving a brief description of the history of the magazine and its covers. It also introduces Vogue China.*

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There exist many perspectives on how to approach and understand fashion and its determining forces. For example it could be understood in terms of the concept of imitation and class differentiation. Simmel explains imitation by using the 'trickle-down phenomena' whereas Bourdieu emphasizes the role of taste and distinction (for further explanation of these theories see: Simmel, 1904 and Bourdieu, 1984). The perspective of imitation and class differentiation has influenced fashion studies for many decades. However, lately it has been complemented but also challenged by Kawamura and the concept of fashionology. Kawamura builds her argument upon the understanding of fashion as an idea constructed by a system of institutions. The central idea of the argument is the differentiation between fashion and clothing; clothing is material production, tangible and a necessity while fashion is symbolic production, intangible and excess. The idea of fashion is constructed by for example designers, photographers and fashion magazines that through notions, narratives and discourse hold the power to define fashion. Hence, fashion is constructed, maintained and communicated by the institutions in a fashion system. However, the idea of fashion is not fully established until the consumer is influenced by the new fashion and uses it. (Kawamura, 2005:44) The next sections aim at briefly explaining the global fashion system and then to develop an understanding of the emerging fashion system in Shanghai by concentrating on the role of the fashion magazine.

### 3.1 The fashion system in Shanghai and the role of a fashion magazine

Breward explains that the global fashion system consists of a number of global fashion capitals such as Paris, London and New York, who all have their own fashion system integrated into the global system of fashion. However, the global fashion system, which for a long time has been Eurocentric, has according to Breward expanded to include Asian fashion capitals and systems such as Tokyo. Today Shanghai is aspiring to join the network of global fashion cities by establishing a fashion system of its own. (Breward, 2004:4)

The establishment of a fashion system and the construction of fashion as an idea is, according to Li, part of the modernization project in China that emphasizes progress, development and creativity. Li argues that the development of a fashion system is part of the national economic plan and it is important to China and Shanghai. It is important because it is identified with change and high lifestyles and as such it might link China and Shanghai to other Western fashion capitals at the same time as it contributes to setting Shanghai apart from other Chinese cities. (Li, 1998:87)

Shanghai is described by Bergère as a cosmopolitan modern society in contrast to other parts of China, and it was elected by the Chinese leadership to become the financial and modern metropolis of the reform era. (Bergère, 2009:409,432) In Shanghai the idea of fashion is constructed and communicated by institutions such as the international fashion magazines that through narratives or discourse hold the power to define fashion. (cf. Kawamura, 2005:44) The international fashion magazine is part of a global network. Karan and Feng describe how global forces have turned the media industry into a centralized industry with few transnational conglomerates. China joined this global system in the late 1980s, as international fashion and women's magazines entered the country. Today a number of international titles originating from the U.S., France or Japan, such as *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Rayli*, are present in China. (Karan and Feng, 2009:348) In China, *Vogue* is co-published by the American magazine group Condé Nast and the state-owned publishing house China Pictorial Press (Li, 2008:60).

The co-publishing of fashion magazines may be specific to the fashion system of Shanghai and it sets Shanghai apart from other fashion systems in the world. Frith and Feng point out that even if the control of international magazines by the Chinese government is not as strict as on other foreign media, they still have the opportunity to influence the construction of fashion and femininity, if they wish to do so. However, the content of international commercial fashion magazines today seems to fit well into the modernization project of

progress and creativity, and the current national economic plan of China. Hence, the gender ideology of the Chinese government seems to be consistent with the commercialized image of the modern woman as a young happy consumer. (Frith and Feng, 2009:164,170) Consequently, the fashion magazine holds the power to define, communicate and construct global, commercial and official ideals of femininity and ideas of fashion. These ideals of femininity and ideas of fashion are for example constructed in the images of Chinese women on the cover of international fashion magazines (cf. Li, 1998:80). The next section will elaborate on the relationship between Chinese women and modernity. It will exemplify this by showing how images of women in history have symbolized the political and economic situation in China.

### 3.2 Modernisation, femininity and images of Chinese women

The construction of femininity on the covers of international fashion magazines may be part of the *suzhi* (quality) discourse that, according to Jacka, emphasize the ‘construction’ of ‘ideal’ women by, for example, encourage women to consume fashion. Jacka explains that raising women’s *suzhi* is listed as a key goal by the state and it is strongly linked to the discourse on modernity. (Jacka, 2009: 523,524) According to Robinson, this norm of femininity is part of the larger discourse on how women are related to modernity and nation-building. However, the relationship between women and Chinese modernity is not new; rather women have throughout decades symbolized modernity, progress and nation building in China. (Robinson, 1985:33) However, Rosen mentions that commercialization and the norm of beauty and femininity in images of women is something new to this relationship. (Rosen, 1994:283) Furthermore Evans notes how this is illustrated by images in media of fashionable, happy, beautiful, young urban female consumers. This romanticized image has become a metaphor for market economy and the economic and social success it brings. Hence, this image of women may aim at communicating the opportunities that are offered by a reforming China. For example, women may enjoy the pleasure of sophisticated and colorful fashion images, which may result in dreams and desire for modern femininity. (Evans, 2002:217) However, these images may be the product of the male gaze, as the fashion industry often are managed and influenced by the male point of view. (Kuhn, 1985:10) Hence, the image of the woman is produced through a symbiosis of state policy and male policy. Hooper is critical as to how these images may impact women’s life and self-representation. She emphasizes the pressure it brings, in terms of standards of beauty, career and personal aspirations. (Hooper, 1999:254)

Li mentions that, in history, different role models of the “modern woman” often have symbolized the then current political and economic situation in China. Hence, the understanding and construction of the “modern” woman icon has been redefined over time. In the 1920s and the 1930s, Barlow writes that the images showed a woman who was energetic, healthy, beautiful, lively and cheerful in line with the preferred westernized appearance and behavior. (Li, 1998:80; Barlow, 2008: 288) According to Evans and Finnane, between the 1940s and late 1970s, women appeared as farmers, parachutists, steelworkers or militant Red Guards, often in contexts that promoted production for the good of Chinese society. At this time women and men dressed in almost the same way and the image of a woman mirrored that of a man. The jacket – often called the ‘Mao jacket’ - and trousers were mainly blue, grey or green. Fancy clothes were a symbol of ideological impurity and moral degradation. (Evans, 1997:134; Finnane, 1999:5; Finnane, 2007:229) Evans writes that, since the 1980s, women have, on the one hand, been portrayed in a romanticized and erotized way, and on the other hand as pretty, harmonious and healthy wives. (Evans, 2000:219)

However, Croll stresses that it is important to remember that the above iconic images of women are a part of both a commercial and an official rhetoric’s (discourse) and that they are constructions. Hence, the icon symbolizes an ideal that might not resemble reality. (Croll, 1995:2) Evans confirms this when she writes about the enormous contrast between these images of Chinese women and ordinary women’s lives in China. Nevertheless, as Evans point out, the images are important as they are stereotypes and set standards of femininity. Besides, the gendered meanings inscribed in the image might help to uphold similar assumptions about being a woman in other parts of society. (Evans, 2000:221)

The sections above have presented the contemporary context of the fashion magazine by considering the role of the fashion magazine within Shanghai’s fashion system. It has also elaborated on the relationship between Chinese women and modernity in images. The next section introduces the fashion magazine *Vogue* by giving a brief description of the history of the magazine and its covers. It also introduces *Vogue China*.

### 3.3 The history of *Vogue* and its covers

In 1909 the failing upmarket American magazine *Vogue* was bought by Condé Nast. The magazine was turned around by a strategic approach that involved an integrated strategy of editorial, photographic and creative commercial innovation. One important thing in this strategy was the recognition of the power and importance of the cover image. Since then,

*Vogue* has had a bold and iconoclastic approach to covers that has put sophisticated women on the cover and reflected major artistic currents, styles and lifestyles of society throughout decades. (Rachline, 2009:12,148; Taylor, 2006:206)

Apart from being published in the United States, *Vogue* is today published in a number of countries, including France, Italy, Japan and China. After following the strategy of only entering countries which have a developed consumer market and sophisticated trendy consumers, *Vogue* entered China in August 2005. The first cover was a gatefold cover that showed six famous super models, including Gemma Ward, Du Juan and Wang Wenqin. (Hartley and Montgomery, 2009:61,72)

#### **4. Representation of women as signifying practice**

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*In this chapter the theoretical concepts of representation, stereotype and beauty ideals are introduced. In particular the chapter concentrates on stereotypical representations of women in fashion magazines by describing gender, racial and celebrity stereotypes.*

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The concept of representation has always been important within feminist media studies. According to Van Zoonen, the representation of gender and sexuality is often used in a condensed way in advertising since advertisement has to communicate meaning within limited space and time; therefore it needs to exploit symbols/signs which are of significance to society. (Van Zoonen, 1994:67) Representation is defined by Hall as the construction of meaning through images. He emphasizes the central idea of representation of how it connects image and meaning. (Hall, 1997b:15) To understand this connection, Hall argues, one has to be familiar with the basic assumption that meaning is not something that inheres in things, but rather it is constructed. Thus, meaning is not conveyed by material things instead meaning is conveyed by the symbols/signs that are used in the construction of the image. Hence, meaning is connected to the image by the use of certain symbols/signs that are organized and arranged in a specific manner. (Ibid., 1997b:25) For example, according to Williamson, the symbols/signs might be organized by the principles of difference and similarity. She suggests that we may know the meaning of something by knowing what it is and what it is not. Hence, an image gain meaning as much as from what it is not, as from what it is. (Williamson, 1978:24)

Furthermore, Hall argues, what kind of meaning is communicated depends on the associations people have with the symbols/signs that are applied in the image. However, even if people

interpret the image in a personal and unique way, they will, due to the shared associations of the culture of fashion, interpret the image roughly in the same way (Hall, 1997b:18). These shared associations are often used by the fashion advertising industry, because, as was mentioned above, a fashion advertisement has limited space and time to convey meaning, hence the advertisers apply exaggerated versions of these shared associations. For example, an exaggerated version might be the specific combination of symbols/signs that constitutes a stereotypical representation. This stereotype is powerful, since it is easily recognized and it triggers meaning fast. (cf. Van Zoonen, 1994:67) Hence, the concept of stereotyping is central to this thesis.

In order to understand why the practice of stereotyping is central in this study, it is important to define what is meant by a stereotype. According to O'Sullivan et al., a stereotype is a highly simplified classification of a particular group of people, which represents, implicitly or explicitly, assumptions and values concerning the group's history, characteristics and behavior (O'Sullivan et al., 1994:299 ff.). Besides, Hall states that a stereotype is a conception that naturalizes and fixes 'difference'. Furthermore, Hall mentions that stereotyping often occurs when it exists great inequalities of power. (Hall, 1997c:258) The next paragraphs will develop the understanding of stereotyping in relation to gender, race and celebrity in order to create a theoretical foundation, which relates to the stereotypical depictions of women on the cover of *Vogue*. The last part of this chapter aims at describing ideals of beauty, as stereotypes often are rooted in and created from these ideals (cf. Brand, 2000).

#### 4.1 Stereotypical representations of women in fashion magazines

Media images of women have, according to Van Zoonen, for a long time been criticized by feminist scholars, for example by the American women's movement, who has published much of the early critique on women's magazines and the stereotypical representation of women (Van Zoonen, 1994:11). For example, Friedan was one of the first who raised awareness of stereotypes in her book, *The Feminine Mystique*. She showed how advertisements pictured women as the ideal mother and wife, and how these images constituted women's opportunities in society. (Friedan, 1963) Another example is the study *A Woman's Place* by Courtney and Lockeretz, who found four stereotypes of women in advertising: women's place is in the home, women are dependent on men's protection, women do not do important things or make important decisions and lastly women are

regarded as sex objects by men (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971:94). However, this critique has developed throughout the years, and has come to include a number of different topics and areas - for example, the stereotypical representations of gender, race and celebrity in fashion advertisements. These will be further discussed in the next sections.

#### 4.1.1 Symbolic representations of gender stereotypes

In this thesis a gender stereotype is defined as a simplified, exaggerated, imagined and mythical construction of women in advertisement (O'Sullivan et al., 1994:299 ff). Goffman argues that these images show a familiar conventionalized image of how the construction wants us to believe women behave - not the way women actually do behave. In order to make sense of these representations, Goffman stresses the importance of the symbolic dimensions of the image. (Goffman, 1976:26,27) In his book *Gender Advertisements*, Goffman investigates the symbolic dimensions of gender displays in advertisement and distinguishes between five different categories that signify different meaning. Three of these categories are applicable in this study of magazine covers, *feminine touch*, *ritualization of subordination* and *licensed withdrawal*. (Ibid., 1976) Besides, in order to adapt Goffman's framework to fit my study of magazine covers I have added two categories; they are both developed by Cortese and named *body-clowning* and *sexual attraction* (Cortese, 2004:28,41). However, these categories operate at different levels. The four categories: *feminine touch*, *ritualization of subordination*, *licensed withdrawal* and *body-clowning* show how a woman is represented and constructed as, for example delicate or submissive, whereas the category on *sexual attraction* intersect with the previous categories, and operate on a 'higher' level, as it can enhance, for example, a woman's delicateness.

The first category, titled *feminine touch*, concerns how women tenderly touch different parts of their body, as to show how delicate or sexy one's body is. The second category is named *ritualization of subordination* and describes how women are shown in deferent ways. For example the bending of the body or the head cant convey submissiveness, which symbolizes acceptance of subordination. The third, *licensed withdrawal*, relates to how women are portrayed as psychologically removed from the scene - she is not part of it, but rather drifting away with far-off gazes, symbolizing her disorientation or vulnerability. (Goffman, 1976: 29-56) *Body-clowning* describes how women are pictured as playful clowns with silly head, leg or arm gestures. These images symbolize and suggest that women are childish and should not be taken seriously. (Cortese, 2004:41) The category, *sexual attraction*, relates to a number of



sexually appealing characteristics that are prominent in stereotypical images of women. For example, the red coloring of the lips symbolizes sexual arousal and a smile symbolizes attraction and approval. Furthermore, a blush, symbolized by red cheeks, conveys innocence, and bare skin, especially the cleavage area, symbolizes the (ultimate) sexual appeal. (Cortese, 2004:28)

#### 4.1.2 Conventionalized representations of racial stereotypes

A racial stereotype is defined as a highly simplified classification of any racial group made by the dominant group in a society/culture. This classification includes the trivialization of any racial group, based on assumptions concerning the group's history, characteristics and behavior, which fixes 'difference'. (cf. O'Sullivan et al., 1994:299 ff.; Hall, 1997c:258) When it comes to representations of racial minorities in advertisements, Cortese mentions how these constructed images create conventions that tend to shape attitudes and values about these racial groups. Moreover, advertising conveys contemporary relations and power structures as well as serves as an indicator of the dominant group's willingness to accept racial minorities. (Cortese, 2004:83) When women of racial minorities are represented in fashion advertisements, Cortese argues that the models on the one hand often are conformed into a generic white ideal and portrayed with straight hair and light skin, and on the other hand the portrayals of the model are constructed by exaggerated strategies that play up the 'uniqueness' and 'difference' of the model. For example, black women are depicted as sexual predators or as seductresses, whereas Asian women either are portrayed as demure and submissive, or as exotic and passionate. (Ibid., 2004:95,97,104)

According to Cortese, we live in a society where the fashion culture for a long time has been preoccupied with the white ideal: blond hair and white skin define what is attractive. For example, fashion magazines, especially *Vogue*, are famous for favoring white models. (Cortese, 2004:85,106) However, Cortese has discovered tendencies that may suggest that a change is coming. For example, models of other races have lately become visible in fashion advertisement. Furthermore, Cortese points out that the popularity of multicultural advertising might be a reflection of social reality and that this 'global-village' look might be here to stay. (Cortese, 2004:113,114) In the case of China, Johansson shows how the white ideal and western (Caucasian) models dominate magazine covers of transnational magazines in China (Johansson, 1998:140). However, he analysed images from 1985-1995, hence there might have been some changes since then.

In China racial stereotypes and a racial discourse have been present for a long time. Dikötter writes that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century there existed ideas and perceptions about other groups than the Chinese. He points out how the Chinese was seen as the pure race compared to other groups. The racial discourse included, for example, skin color and black groups of people. For example, blackness symbolized until the 1920s 'slave' - a slave that could be bought and sold, for example female slaves were bought and sold, they were also raped and exploited. (Dikötter, 1992:13,27,36) In 1949, the discourse of race was abolished along with the communist takeover. However, Dikötter argues that regardless of the communist imaginary of racial unity and harmony, racial prejudice still exists and reappears. (Ibid., 1992:191,194)

#### 4.1.3 The representation and stereotypification of celebrity appearance

A star is a constructed image, not an actual person. Thus, the stereotypification of celebrity appearance is a simplified physically perfected representation of a high-profile female role model, such as a film star. (cf. O'Sullivan et al., 1994:299 ff.; Hall, 1997c:258) In the construction of celebrity appearance, such as the stereotypical representation of a film star, Turner, Bonner and Marshall emphasize the importance of the choice of celebrity woman (Turner, Bonner and Marshall, 2000:137). Blomberg explains that the choice of celebrity is important as the stereotypical representation of the celebrity is created from the image of the celebrity that already exists in the media. In turn, the media image is constructed based on simplified assumptions concerning, for example, the star's life-story and looks. (Blomberg, 2006:32) Hence, when it comes to the choice of celebrity the meaning that her media image signifies is of importance. Williamson argues that the stereotypical representation of a celebrity gains its meaning from what her image signifies to us, that is what the image signifies as well as what it does not signify. For example, the image of the film star Catherine Deneuve signifies sophisticated flawless French beauty, whereas an image of actress Margaux Hemingway signifies youth and 'tomboy' style. Hence, Catherine Deneuve gains meaning and significance in that she is a constructed flawless French beauty and in that she is not, for example, Margaux Hemingway. (Williamson, 1978:25)

#### 4.2 Beauty ideals and the representation of provocateurs

As is well known beauty is an elusive concept and it is often said to be in the eye of the beholder (Lakoff and Scherr, 1984:19). In her book, *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf writes that despite its vague nature, beauty has always mattered to women - both on a personal and an abstract sociopolitical level - as it controls how women operate in the world. She describes

how women are expected to fulfill unrealistic ideals of beauty and emphasizes that these ideals are not real, but rather a beauty myth created by society. She concludes that the beauty myth is spread by, for example, representations of women in fashion magazines. (Wolf 1991) The representation of beauty ideals in fashion magazines can, according to Cortese, be captured by using the concept of the provocateur. The provocateur is an image that represents unattainable ideal female beauty – hence it does not resemble the way women actually do look. (Cortese, 2004:53) When discussing beauty ideals in China, Man for example mentions the paintings of the Courtesan in late imperial China. Man writes about how the Courtesan provocateur is constructed in the paintings of late imperial China and that the ideals of beauty for example included: apricot lips, pearly white teeth, small feet, bound and flat breasts, and lastly covered bodies, as nudity was taboo. (Man, 2000:180)

## **5. Analysing representations of the cover model on Vogue China**

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*This chapter analyses the representation of the model on the cover of Vogue China. The first part maps the representation of the model, across time, and intends to show trends and changes in cover model portrayals. The second part is a semiotic analysis that aims at creating a nuanced description and understanding of the cover model, by describing, analysing and interpreting the representation.*

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### **5.1 Trends and changes in cover model portrayals**

As was mentioned above, this first analysis is statistical and maps the representation of the model on the cover of *Vogue China* from 2005 to 2009 (the cover images of *Vogue China* from 2005 to 2009 can be found in appendix three). The following sections will summarize the findings from the statistical analysis (the findings are also presented in frequency tables, which can be found in appendix four). When summarizing the findings, the coding categories from the coding manual have been divided into four different groups, based on their main characteristics. The first group consists of the coding categories *body language* and *self-touching*. *Facial expression* and *gaze* constitute the second group, while *race* and *celebrity* form the third group. The findings from each group are summarized separately and have been given a line (a quote) from the song *Vogue* by Madonna as headline (Link one; see appendix five for lyrics). The song is about voguing, a way of dancing that copies the poses, body positions and looks of famous cover models on the cover of *Vogue* (link two). The lines correspond to the content of each group, capture the main characteristics regarding cover

representations of models and create an analytical frame for the representation of the cover models.

### 5.1.1 'Strike a pose – there's nothing to it'

The pose, the *body language* and *self-touching*, of the cover model on *Vogue China* exemplifies the gendered stereotype that O'Sullivan et al. mentions, as the pose is a simplified, exaggerated and mythical construction that trivializes the representation of the model (O'Sullivan et al., 1994:299 ff). Furthermore, the pose is easy to construct ("strike a pose – there is nothing to it") as it simplifies a complex reality by exploiting stereotypical representations. However, these stereotypical representations can/will change over time and set new trends in stereotypification of gender. The trend in stereotyping *body language* and *self-touching* on the cover of *Vogue China*, from 2005 to 2009, will be outlined in the next section.

The coding category *body language* consists of different body postures. The result of the category is presented in appendix four, table A. In summary, the models have throughout the years mostly been stereotyped as seductive or sexy (2005, 2008, 2009) and as composed, mannered or static (2006, 2007, 2008). Hence, this shows firstly that there exist two strong trends and secondly that what is important in the stereotypification of body language and the construction of gender varies between the years.

The coding category *self-touching* is about representation of how models touch different body parts of their bodies in order to show how delicate and sexy it is (Goffman, 1976:29) The result of the category self-touching is presented in appendix four, table B. To sum up, the strongest trend, until 2008, showed how the models touched their hips or legs. Thus it seems important to show how delicate and sexy the legs and hips are. However, in 2009, this trend decreased, and the representations of self-touching showed a wider spectrum, including touching of face or neck and hair. This change may indicate that the whole body is stereotyped into being delicate and sexy.

### 5.1.2 'They had style, they had grace – Rita Hayworth gave good face'

To give good face means that someone that has style and grace, usually cover models like Rita Hayworth, projects attitudes or emotions through their countenance, that is through their facial expressions or their gaze. The countenance is part of a gender stereotype, as it is a simplified, exaggerated and imagined construction (Cf O'Sullivan et al., 1994:299 ff). This

countenance projects attitudes and emotions that construct the model as, for example, sexy, naïve or confident. The *facial expressions* and *gazes* of the cover models on *Vogue China* that constructs emotions and attitudes are mapped in the coming sections.

The result of the category *facial expression* is presented in appendix four, table C. In summary, the strongest trend in facial expression, throughout 2005 to 2009, is a confident or haughty face. Hence, it may be important to construct women as giving a confident or haughty impression. It is only in 2009 that the trend is challenged by other facial expressions, such as a half or full smile. Hence, it seems central that the countenance of the model project attitudes of confidence/haughtiness or emotions, which are projected by a half or full smile.

The results of the category *gaze* can be found in appendix four, table D. In summary, the strongest trends: the model have throughout the years mostly had direct eye contact with the camera/audience (2006, 2007) or had alluring or partly closed eyes (2005, 2008). Hence, what is important in the stereotypification of the cover models gaze varies between years, however, in 2009, the trend of an alluring gaze and direct eye contact was almost equally strong. All together, this suggests that the stereotypification of the models gaze either projects emotions associated with alluring or partly closed eyes or attitudes connected to a direct eye contact.

### 5.1.3 'Beauty's where you find it'

As is well known, "beauty is where you find it", or as Lakoff and Scherr put it, beauty is in the eye of the beholder (Lakoff and Scherr, 1984:19). Even if beauty is a subjective and elusive concept, there exist certain ideals of beauty that Wolf refers to as the beauty myth (Wolf, 1991), which, for example, is communicated by stereotypical representations of women on the cover of *Vogue China*. Hence, when it comes to representations of models on the cover of *Vogue China*, beauty has been 'found' in and constructed by using different celebrities and models of different races, coming from North America, Australia, Europe and Asia. The next sections map the trend of different races and celebrities in the choice of cover models on *Vogue China* from 2005 to 2009.

The result of the coding category *race* is found in appendix four, table E. To sum up, the early covers of 2005 and 2006 mostly featured 'white' models, however, this changed in 2007 as 'Asian' models became most common on the cover. This trend lasted throughout 2008 and 2009. Besides, the cover portrayals were limited to 'Asian' and 'white' models, until 2009, when eight percent of the covers represented 'black' models. Hence, the trend shows that the

cover portrayals have become increasingly inclusive throughout the years. The result from the coding category *celebrity* is found in appendix four, table F. To summarise, models on *Vogue China* covers have throughout the years either been supermodels or film stars. Until 2007, supermodels dominated the covers, however, in 2008 the trend of portraying film stars increased and by 2009 film stars and supermodels were represented equally.

## 5.2 Comparative analysis of cover model representations

The analysis above has mapped, described and discussed trends and changes in the representation of the cover model. It has showed that the cover model is represented as sexy, seductive, confident and independent. Hence, it has showed nuances in how the model is portrayed on the cover of *Vogue China*. These nuances will be further analysed in this comparative analysis, as it aims at interpreting the latent meaning of the cover representations in order to develop a detailed understanding of how these representations signifies meaning. As was mentioned above, the comparative analysis will be conducted by using the different imaginary representation of “identities”. These “identities” reflect the findings above and deal mainly with how the model is sexy, seductive and independent. The representation of the model in the different “identities” will be analysed one by one, going through the procedures developed by Saussure and Barthes (Bignell, 2002:8; Barthes, 1967;1977). This analysis first compares the “identity” on covers from *Vogue China* and the American *Vogue*, and second relates the representation of the model on *Vogue China* to the fashion system of Shanghai. The last part of the analysis is based on the result from the first part of this analysis and compares the representation of different races on the cover of *Vogue China*.

### 5.2.1 Exaggerated and imagined representations of ‘Miss Sexy Magic’

‘Miss Sexy Magic’ is portrayed in a sexy but awkward, mannered or composed way. Her appearance is ‘magic’, since she, in relation to other cover models, is constructed in an exaggerated way, which shows how she is not ‘real’- rather she is a fantasy figure (see appendix six).

#### 5.2.1.1 Comparative analysis of cover representations on the Chinese and American Vogue

This first section considers the representation of ‘Miss Sexy Magic’ and how it shows/denotes her sexy-magic appearance, by concentrating on the signifier and the signified. The *signifier* of ‘Miss Sexy Magic’ on *Vogue China* is: hollow gaze, detached aura, ‘frozen’ face, erect body, ‘warrior’ pose or statue-like pose, head cant, hands on hip and touching of neck or arm.

The *signifiers* of a hollow gaze and detached aura may construct the model as indifferent, distant and disoriented (the *signified*), while the ‘frozen’ face, erect body, ‘warrior’ pose or statue-like pose and hands on hip and touching of neck or arm, suggests that she is statuesque, ‘aggressive’ and a confident ‘conqueror’, who may take pride in her own body (the *signified*). Hence, the combination of the specific signs above, the *sign system*, may construct the representation of the model as indifferent, distant, confident and proud.

The meaning of the chosen signs in the representation of ‘Miss Sexy Magic’, and the combination of those sign into a sign system, gain its meaning from other signs, which are *not* used in this representation. Hence, ‘Miss Sexy Magic’ gains her meaning from being indifferent, distant, confident and proud, but also from *not* being or having the characteristics of the other “identities” of, for example, the alluring and seductive ‘Miss Fairytale’. Furthermore, she gains her meaning from being compared to the representation of the American ‘Miss Sexy Magic’. The *signifier* of ‘Miss Sexy Magic’ on the cover of American *Vogue* is direct eye contact, pursing lips, soft shallow aura, straight body posture, mannequin look or fancy Oscar statue-like pose and touching of hips or legs. The signifiers of eye contact, pursing lips, soft shallow aura construct the model as a confident and snobbish lady. Besides the straight body posture, mannequin look or fancy Oscar statue-like pose and touching legs, indicates how she is a statuesque, confident ‘superior lady’ who treasure her elegant legs. Hence, this combination constructs the model as a confident and glamorous lady.

This section, *connotation*, aims at interpreting the *gaze*, *touch* and *pose* as they are central to the construction of this “identity”. The representation of the gaze of the model on *Vogue China* is hollow and she has a distant aura. Her empty eyes and distant aura may indicate that she is not part of the scene, as her mind seems to be elsewhere. This appearance suggest, in the terms of Goffman that she may be disoriented (Goffman, 1976:57). However, the meaning of the representation disorientation may take on many forms and symbolize a number of different things. For example, it may symbolize how the model is removed from the scene (Goffman, 1976:57). In this case, the representation of hollow eyes and distant aura, may be an indication of how the model is lost in the world of fashion and a ‘fashion victim’ that need guidance by the fashion system (often controlled by the man and his gaze (cf. Kuhn, 1985.10). The representation of disorientation may however be interpreted in another way, suggesting that the model’s hollow eyes and distant aura rather projects feelings of being ‘cool’, blasé or indifferent. She seems to be a bit nonchalant and maybe not care about the

dictated trends of the fashion system, but rather use it to construct her personal style/appearance. Compared to the gaze of the cover model on the American cover, the American model has direct eye contact with the audience. The representation of direct eye contact may symbolize confidence and, hence, that she, in contrast to the cover model on *Vogue China*, may be content with her appearance, comfortable in the fashion world and in the clothes she is wearing.

The cover model on *Vogue China* touches her hips, neck and arm. The touching of different body parts can be related to Goffman's thoughts on gender stereotypes and feminine touch and how models tenderly touch different parts of their body in order to show how delicate it is (Goffman, 1976:29). By following the ideas of Goffman, the representation of the model constructs her body as sexy and delicate. However, the construction of the touch of the cover model on *Vogue China* is not tender. Rather the touch is constructed as firm and almost 'aggressive' and passionate, as to show how the body might be considered as a source of desire and passion. Hence, the reference to the body as a source of desire and passion may symbolize how the body is sexy, while the firm touch may suggest that the model has a confident body language. When it comes to 'Miss Sexy Magic' on the cover of American *Vogue* the touching is in comparison to the touch of the cover model on *Vogue China*, more 'passive' and may be interpreted as romantic and tender, showing a delicate body (Cf. Goffman, 1976:29). Thus, there exists a difference in the representation of feminine touch and the construction of the body as sexy or delicate.

The pose of 'Miss Sexy Magic' on the cover of *Vogue China* is straight: a 'warrior' pose/statue-like pose. The awkward and mannered pose may illustrate what Cortese has called body clowning. He argues that a silly pose constructs women as childish. (Cortese, 2004:41) The poses of 'Miss Sexy Magic' may be considered as ridiculous, however, the representation of these firm gestures may rather construct the woman as confident or assertive than childish. The meaning of a confident and assertive woman is constructed by a pose that resembles a fantasy 'warrior' figure, which belongs in the fantasy world. This figure is symbolized by, for example, 'broad' shoulders, hands on hips (confident body language) and uniform styled clothes/leopard dress. The American cover model is also constructed by ridiculous body gestures and the counterpart of the 'warrior' is the graceful elegant glamour 'queen'. This 'queen' is constructed by, for example, the Oscar statue-like pose and an elegant dress. Hence,



there is a difference in how the representation of the pose constructs the cover model, as assertive or confident on the cover of *Vogue China*, and as elegant on the American cover.

The analysis above has showed that there exist patterns concerning the construction of the cover model as confident and independent. These patterns may take the form of a narrative, a *myth*, about the character of the cover model and as such it can be seen as a part of the modernization project on change, creativity and high lifestyles (Li, 1998:87). For example, the *myth* about the independent and confident woman on the cover of *Vogue China* may construct and define the ‘new’ independent fashion consumer of Shanghai. Thus, the *myth* about the ‘new’ consumer may define new consumption practices and shape new attitudes towards fashion. Moreover, this ‘new’ consumer has new opportunities and new ways of consuming fashion, compared to women who, between 1940’s and late 1970’s, did not consume fashion, as the times were different and women mostly wore blue trousers and jackets - the ‘Mao jacket’- and fashionable clothes were a symbol of ideological impurity. (Evans, 1997:134). The new consumer may be a symbol for economic and social success: she can consume the same fashion as other consumers in global fashion cities, and hence she may be a member of the global consumer culture and high lifestyles.

#### 5.2.1.2 A comparison of race and gender representations on the cover of *Vogue China*

This section focus, based on the above analysis, on the symbols of the gaze, touch and pose, used in the representation of the Asian and Caucasian model on the cover of *Vogue China*. The gaze of the Asian model is compared to the Caucasian similar, it is distant and hollow. This suggests that there is no significant difference in the representation, rather both models are constructed as disoriented. The self-touch of the Asian model is, compared to the ‘aggressive’ or ‘passionate’ self-touch of the Caucasian model, tender but with a firm hand. This may indicate that the representation of the Asian model is constructed as having a delicate body, even if the firm hand may suggest confidence in her body language. (Cf. Goffman, 1976:29). Lastly, the pose of the Asian model is straight, almost statue like. Compared to the Caucasian model, that slightly bends her back, the gestures of the Asian model are firm and there is no bending of the back. Hence, this may suggest that the representation of the touch and pose constructs the Asian model as confident.

## 5.2.2 Mythical and imagined representations of 'Miss Fairytale'

'Miss Fairytale' is portrayed in a sexy and seductive way. Her appearance is soft and fairy-like, and it constructs a character that lives in a fairy tale world (see appendix seven).

### 5.2.2.1 Comparative analysis of cover representations on the Chinese and American Vogue

This first section concentrates on the signifier and the signified of 'Miss Fairytale'. The *signifier* of 'Miss Fairytale' on *Vogue China* is: big lashed eyes, soft eyes (doe eyes), pouting red lips, pink cheeks, day-dreaming face and canting head. These signifiers may construct the model into an alluring, attractive and seductive woman (the *signified*). The *signifier* of 'Miss Fairytale' on American *Vogue* is similar to the signifiers of 'Miss Fairytale' on *Vogue China*, even if some of them differ: big lashed doe eyes, a smile, bare skin, cleavage and a head cant. These *signifiers* construct this model into an alluring, attractive and seductive woman (the *signified*).

The next section focuses on *connotation*, and aims at interpreting *poses* and *symbols for sexual attraction* as they are central to the representation of this gender stereotype. The model on the cover of *Vogue China* cants her head and bends her body. Both of these signs construct 'Miss Fairytale' as deferent, according to Goffman, who writes that head canting and bending of the body conveys submissiveness, which symbolizes acceptance of subordination (Goffman, 1976:40). Thus these signs may convey the meaning of a submissive woman, which in turn may signify acceptance of subordination. Furthermore, submissiveness is a crucial part in the stereotypical representation of 'Miss Fairytale' as alluring and seductive, since the construction of an alluring and seductive woman may, for example, be based on the head cant in combination with big lashed eyes and pouting red lips. Hence, submissiveness may not only be interpreted as acceptance of subordination, but rather in this case, submissiveness also has an impact on the construction of women as alluring and seductive.

Hence, the representation of 'Miss Fairytale' is made into an alluring, attractive and seductive woman by combining head canting and the bending of the body with *symbols for sexual attraction*, for example, pouting red lips, bare skin and pink cheeks. According to Cortese, the representation of the symbol red lips symbolizes sexual arousal and bare skin symbolizes sexual appeal (2004:28). Hence, the red lips in the representation of the cover model on *Vogue China* may symbolize sexual excitement, which in turn may trigger meanings of 'Miss Fairytale' as for example being a teaser or being 'provocative', thus the image of the model may provoke alluring and seductive feelings. Moreover, the representation of bare skin may

generate emotions of temptation and desire that, in turn, triggers the meaning of an attractive and alluring woman. However, the representation of the model is also constructed by pink cheeks, and according to Cortese, the representation and construction of pink cheeks, a blush, conveys innocence (Cortese, 2004:28). The pink cheeks on 'Miss Fairytale's' day-dreaming face may construct her as innocent, and innocence may trigger fascination for the woman. Based on the assumption that if something/someone is fascinating, then it is automatically alluring, the fascination for the woman constructs her as alluring.

The representation of 'Miss Fairytale' on the American cover is also a combination of the *pose* and *symbols for sexual attraction*. For example the construction of red lips symbolizes sexual arousal (Cortese, 2004:28). The representation of red lips may trigger similar meaning as the representation of red lips on the cover of *Vogue China*. Hence, red lips may provoke alluring and seductive feelings. However, the American 'Miss Fairytale' is portrayed with a cleavage and more bare skin than 'Miss Fairytale' on the cover of *Vogue China*. The representation of bare skin, especially the cleavage area, symbolizes the ultimate sex appeal (Cortese, 2004:28). Hence, this representation may construct the model as sexy, which may trigger a storm of emotions that in turn may result in the meaning of the model as a sexually attractive woman. Furthermore, 'Miss Fairytale' is represented with a hint of a smile. The smile is a symbol for attraction and approval (Cortese, 2004:28), however, the smile of 'Miss Fairytale' may be interpreted as a hesitant - but a flirty, luring and inviting smile. Hence, this type of smile may construct a flirting woman, which may trigger the meaning of an alluring woman.

Hence, there exist similarities in the representations of 'Miss Fairytale' on the Chinese and American covers of *Vogue*. Both representations show an attractive and seductive woman. However, the construction of this differs. For example, the representation of the alluring and seductive 'Miss Fairytale' on the cover of *Vogue China*, is a combination of at the one hand a provocative woman that trigger desire, and on the other hand an innocent day-dreaming woman. The representation on the American covers shows a construction of a provocative, sexually attractive woman with a luring and inviting smile.

The analysis above has showed that there exist patterns, a narrative, in the representation of 'Miss Fairytale' as an alluring, attractive and seductive woman on the cover of *Vogue China*. This narrative or *myth*, represent ideal femininity and construct a stereotypical representation that holds the power to seduce and lure women into fashion consumption. Hence, the *myth*

may have the power to define the fashionable woman and this definition constructs beliefs and attitudes about what a fashionable woman look like. For example, the image/*myth* may convey the message that, if one consumes the colorful and sophisticated fashion of the alluring and seductive ‘Miss Fairytale’ one may fulfill her dreams and desire for modern femininity. Hence, it may also communicate the opportunities, economic and social success that is offered by a reforming China. Moreover, this image may also be a part of the *suzhi* discourse, which according to Jacka, emphasizes the ‘creation’ of ‘ideal’ women, by encouraging women to consume (Jacka, 2009:523), for example fashion. Besides, the image may be a part of the fashion industry, which often is managed and influenced by the male point of view. Hence, this stereotypical representation of women may be the product of both male policy and state policy, as the representation of the alluring and seductive woman, is influenced by the male gaze of the fashion industry at the same time as it seem to be consistent with the current gender ideology of the Chinese government (Kuhn, 1985:10; Frith and Feng, 2009:164).

#### 5.2.2.2 A comparison of race and gender representations on the cover of *Vogue China*

Based on the above analysis this section compares the symbols/signs used in the representation of the Asian and Caucasian cover model. Both models are represented in a deferent way, referring to their body poses (Goffman, 1976:40), however the representation of symbols of sexual attraction differ. The representation of the Asian cover model has red lips and pink cheeks, but not bare skin, while the Caucasian model has pink cheeks and bare skin, but not red lips. Based on these symbols and the analysis above, the representation of the Asian model may convey an innocent day-dreaming woman, whose red lips evokes sexual excitement. Hence, the combination of red lips and pink cheeks construct the Asian model as seductive, whereas the Caucasian model also is represented as an innocent day-dreaming woman, but her seductiveness is rather constructed by her bare skin.

#### 5.2.3 Simplified and trivialized representations of ‘Miss Beautiful Stranger’

‘Miss Beautiful Stranger’ is an unusual stereotypical representation on the cover of *Vogue China*. She is unusual since, as Cortese writes, the fashion culture has for a long time been preoccupied with the white ideal: blond hair and white skin define what is attractive (Cortese, 2004:85, 106). Hence, this beautiful stranger does not represent this white ideal, rather, she is a stereotypical representation of another race. (See appendix eight)

#### 5.2.3.1 Comparative analysis of cover representations on the Chinese and American Vogue

The *signifier* of ‘Miss Beautiful Stranger’ on the cover of *Vogue China* is straight black hair, almond shaped eyes, light shimmering black skin, white powdered skin, deep red lips, elongated body, muscular legs, athletic body, gentle pose and short leather skirt. The signifiers of straight black hair, light shimmering black skin, elongated body, strong long legs, athletic body and short leather skirt may stereotype the black model into a ‘wild, athletic, sexual, exotic African woman in a leather skirt’ (the *signified*). The signifiers of black hair, almond shaped eyes, white powdered skin, deep red lips and a gentle pose might construct the Asian model as a feminine and alluring woman (the *signified*). Hence both stereotypes may construct the women as a ‘femme fatale’ character. The *signifier* of ‘Miss Beautiful Stranger’ on the cover of American *Vogue* is straight black hair, big brown eyes, light black skin, bare skin, athletic body and simple classy dress. These signifiers stereotype the black woman as an elegant, exotic and seductive female.

This section focuses on *connotation*, and aims at interpreting the meaning constructed by strategies in the stereotypical representations of the black and Asian cover model. Cortese mention how models of racial minorities often are conformed into a generic white ideal and portrayed with straight hair and light skin (Cortese, 2004:95). The representation of the black cover model on *Vogue China* shows a black woman with long black straight hair and light brown skin. This suggests that the stereotypical representation tries to imitate the white ideal and to construct the woman as ‘white’, and as such project the meaning of ‘white’, for example, cleanliness, innocence and purity, to the woman. However, the representation of the black cover model do also play up the ‘uniqueness’ and ‘difference’ of the model. For example, the representation of the model can be interpreted as a ‘sexual predator’ (Cortese, 2004:97). This interpretation is based on her appearance as a ‘wild, athletic, sexual erotic and exotic African woman in a leather skirt’, which construct her as a ‘sexual predator’, ‘femme fatale’, who is erotic and dangerous and holds the power to catch, bewitch and entrance others. Thus, the meaning of this ‘femme fatale’ character may be projected to the cover model. In comparison, the representation of the black model on the American cover, also conform and construct the model as the white ideal, with straight hair and light skin( Cf. Cortese, 2004:97). Besides, her big brown eyes, bare skin, athletic body and simple classy dress may construct her as elegant and sexy. Furthermore, the construction of her appearance may not exaggerate her ‘uniqueness’, but rather the construction of her as conformed to the white ideals prevails. Hence, both representations conform the black model to the white

ideals, besides the representation of the black cover model on *Vogue China* play up her difference.

The section above has showed how the stereotypical representation of the black woman on the cover of *Vogue China* is influenced by the racial discourse in the fashion culture, however, it may also be influenced by the racial discourse in Chinese society. Dikötter writes that the racial discourse in China concerns for example, black groups of people and their skin color. The color of the skin symbolized for a long time 'slave', and as is well known black women were bought and sold as slaves. They were also raped and exploited. (Dikötter, 1992:13,27, 36) Hence, the representation and exploitation of the sexual exotic African woman may be crucial in the understanding of how she is stereotyped and the meaning the representation conveys. For example, her appearance as a 'wild, athletic, sexual, exotic African woman in a leather skirt' may construct her as a 'sexual predator', a 'femme fatale', who is sexual and dangerous, and holds the power to catch, bewitch and entrance others. Hence, this representation may suggest that she is constructed as someone who are 'out of control' and a treat to the power of the dominant group and as such she need to be controlled. Thus, the stereotypical cover image may convey, as Cortese writes, power structures in society and shape attitudes and values about racial minorities (Cortese, 2004:83).

When it comes to the stereotypical representation of the Asian woman on the cover of *Vogue China*, she may, based on her almond shaped eyes, white powdered skin and deep red lips, be stereotyped as exotic and passionate (Cf. Cortese, 2004:104) as her characteristics may indicate the an alluring, exotic and seductive woman. Furthermore, the construction of an exotic and passionate woman may then construct her as enchanting and captivating. Thus, her appearance may resemble a 'femme fatale' character. Moreover, this stereotype is a beautiful stranger for two reasons. First, her appearance is not representative of the other Asian cover models of *Vogue China*, she is rather an exception. Second, she, as an Asian model is an unusual representation on the cover of an international fashion magazine, just like the black model. For example, until the mid 1990's Caucasian models were the only type of model who had been portrayed on the cover of transnational fashion magazines in China (Cf. Johansson, 1998:140). However, 'Miss Beautiful Stranger' may be an example of the tendencies of change Cortese have in mind when he writes about how the 'global-village' look is influencing the fashion industry with portrayals of other races than the Caucasian. (Cf. Cortese, 2004:113).

The above analysis has showed that there exists a narrative or a *myth* on the white ideal in the fashion industry. The *myth* emphasizes that blond hair and white skin define what is attractive and natural. Thus, this definition constructs attitudes and beliefs about ‘the way things are’ in the world of fashion. However, the institutions in the fashion system of Shanghai construct and communicate the idea of fashion a bit differently. For example, the narrative of the fashion magazine *Vogue* has begun to define and communicate the idea of fashion and femininity, not only in terms of the white ideal, but also in form of Asian and black cover models (Kawamura, 2005:44). Hence, a change may be coming. This change may be grounded in the forces that have the power to influence the fashion magazine, for example the magazine publishers and the symbioses of state and male policy. Moreover, this change may also be reflected in the expansion of the global fashion system and the inclusion of Asian fashion capitals.

#### 5.2.3.2 A comparison of race and gender representations on the cover of *Vogue* China

The stereotypical representation of the Asian model and the black model on the cover of *Vogue China* differs in the choice and combination of signifiers and the meaning they trigger. For example, the representation of the Asian model combines almond shaped eyes and white powdered skin, while the representation of the black model combines light shimmering black skin, athletic body and short leather skirt. The difference in combination of signs may not be surprising, and can be understood by considering how the stereotypical representations, as showed above, are based on general assumptions regarding the race of the model, which exist within the (global/local) fashion system and also, when it comes to the black model, within the racial discourse of China. Moreover, the played up representation of model, mentioned above, is an example of how these assumptions are expressed. However, the black model is also represented as conformed into the ‘white ideal’, as was stated above, which may show how the representation tries to control the ‘wild’ seductive black woman. In comparison, the representation of the Asian model is played up, but not conformed into the ‘white ideal’. This may suggest that the representation aims at constructing a stereotypical sexy Asian woman, based on the ‘exotic’ and ‘passionate’ stereotype presented by Cortese (2004:104) and thus not using the white ideal to conform her into a ‘standardized’ ‘white ideal’ of how to be sexy.

#### 5.2.4 Physically perfected representations of ‘Miss Superstar’

The representation of sexy ‘Miss Superstar’ considers the stereotypical representation of a celebrity. It is a physically perfected representation of a sexy high-profile role model, such as

a supermodel, and as such it constructs beauty ideals. Furthermore, the representation of 'Miss Superstar' is about the choice of model and her image. (cf. O'Sullivan et al., 1994:299 ff.; Turner, Bonner and Marshall, 2000:137) (See appendix nine)

#### 5.2.4.1 Comparative analysis of cover representations on the Chinese and American Vogue

As was mentioned above, the representation of the sexy 'Miss Superstar' is about the choice of model and her image. Her image may for example be based on her life-story and looks. (Blomberg, 2006:32) The first section of this analysis identifies the *signifier* and *signified* in the choice of model. It then focuses on the connotation of the image of the chosen celebrity.

The signifier in the representation of 'Miss Superstar' on the cover of *Vogue China* is either supermodels or American Hollywood actresses, hence she may be exemplified by Du Juan and Anne Hathaway. The signified of Du Juan is a young Chinese supermodel. She has walked the catwalks of Paris, Milan and New York and appeared in haute couture fashion advertisement for Armani. She began her career as a ballerina, signed with an international model agency in 2005 and today, she is "the face of modern Chinese fashion". (Zhu, 2009:49) This image of the celebrity may construct the role model as an urban cosmopolitan citizen, who is popular among fashion designers, as shown on the catwalk and advertisement. This may trigger the meaning of her as representing the ideal face of high fashion. Besides, the representation may be based on the celebrity's former career as a ballerina, hence this may result in the (role) model having a simple but elegant pose, which may trigger the meaning of a sophisticated lady. Lastly, the contract with the model agency and the description of her as "the face of modern Chinese fashion" (Zhu, 2009:49), may set the role model apart from other 'ordinary' females and trigger the meaning of her as impossibly beautiful.

The signified of Anne Hathaway is an American Hollywood actress. She has starred in numerous Hollywood films, among them *the Devil Wears Prada*, in which she stars as the assistant of the editor-in-chief of a glossy fashion magazine in New York. In 2005 she was listed as one of the 50 most beautiful people in the world. (Link 3) The image of the celebrity may construct the role model as an American actress who has made it in Hollywood. This in turn may trigger the meaning of the role model as a successful woman who lives 'the American dream'. Besides, the projections of her character in the film, *the Devils Wears Prada*, may enhance this impression, as she stars as the clueless assistant who in the end becomes a fashionable woman. Lastly, she was in 2005 listed as one of the most beautiful people in the world, which may trigger the meaning of her beauty as being exceptional and



rare. However, her beauty is constructed in the pictures of her in gossip magazines, and as such it may be photoshopped and ‘Hollywood touched up’.

The signifier in the representation of ‘Miss Superstar’ on the cover of American *Vogue* is either American Hollywood actresses or the wife of a famous politician, hence she may be exemplified by Anne Hathaway and Michelle Obama. The representation of Anne Hathaway was analysed above and the representation of her on the American cover is similar to the representation of her on *Vogue China*. The signified of Michelle Obama is the First Lady of the United States. She is the wife of President Barack Obama and mother of two daughters. She is also a lawyer, who grew up at the South Side of Chicago and went to public schools, before moving on to study at Princeton and finally graduating from Harvard Law School. (Link 4) The image of the celebrity may construct the role model as a successful American woman, living ‘the American dream’, who has had a successful career at home and at work. Hence, the representation of the celebrity may trigger the meaning of an indestructible woman who can manage both work and family. Furthermore it may show how power (her position in society) may intersect with fashion and beauty and how this may trigger the meaning of how power may be beauty. Besides, her image as mother and wife may trigger the meaning of ‘authentic’ beauty and it shows a ‘real’ woman with curves.

In comparison, the stereotypical representation of the celebrity on the cover of *Vogue China* shows how the role model takes on the identity of either a Chinese supermodel or an American Hollywood actress. While the representation of the celebrity on the American cover show the role models of an American Hollywood actress and the wife, the First Lady, of the President of the United States. Hence, the construction of a physically perfected and sexy high-profile role model may trigger different meanings. For example, in the case of *Vogue China*, the representation of the supermodel trigger the meaning of a woman who is a cosmopolitan citizen, dressed in haute couture, which projects a sophisticated ladylike attitude. Whereas the representation of the Hollywood actress shows an exceptional beautiful woman who live ‘the American dream’ in Hollywood, and this may convey the meaning of ‘anything is possible’. Moreover, the representation of the different role models may gain their significance in that they do not resemble each other: for example the representation of a sophisticated beauty gains its meaning from not being a photoshopped beauty in a gossip magazine and vice versa. (Cf. Williamson, 1978:25) Besides, the American cover of *Vogue* portrays the First Lady of the United States. Hence, this representation triggers another kind of meaning. For example, it may trigger the meaning of how power can be beauty and how

beauty also can be 'real', by showing a woman with curves. To sum up, the representation of the sexy 'Miss Superstar' on the Chinese cover is about sophisticated and photoshopped beauty, while the American cover model shows photoshopped and 'real' beauty.

Furthermore, this stereotypical representation of celebrity may construct beauty ideals. For example, these may be constructed from the representation of Du Juan. It may be based on her image and looks presented above. Her appearance show a slender woman with red lips who is dressed in a red haute couture dress, which leaves one shoulder bare, and she is posed in a simple but elegant pose (see appendix nine). Hence, this representation may construct a sexy and physically perfected representation of a high-profile role model. Moreover, this representation of the supermodel may also be interpreted as a provocateur (Cf. Cortese, 2004:53) and as such it may be compared to the representation of the Courtesan in paintings from late imperial China. Even if the beauty ideals of the covered body, lotus-petal face and apricot lips has changed across time, both representations may provoke and be provocateurs. For example, the representation of the supermodel may provoke as she is constructed as reachable and yet untouchable, as she is a young Chinese woman but also the face of Armani. (Man, 2000:180; Cortese, 2004:53)

As was mentioned above, unrealistic ideals of beauty are constructed in the images of celebrities on the cover of *Vogue China*. This beauty construction may be related to the *myth* and narrative on the relationship between Chinese women and modernity. This dominating *myth* has the power to construct an image that shows desired forms of femininity and beauty in relation to modernity and nation building. Hence, the narrative has the power to emphasize certain characteristics of femininity that goes hand in hand with modernity and nation building. Hence, these images show the current political and economic situation in China, just like the lively and beautiful women of the 1930's or the farmers and parachutist in the time period of 1940's to the 1970's showed. (Cf. Robinson, 1985:33; Barlow, 2008:288; Evans, 1997:134) Thus the construction of femininity and ideal beauty on the cover of *Vogue China* may be an example of how the image of a beautiful urban female consumer can be a metaphor for market economy and the social success it brings. Besides, this image may construct beliefs about what is 'true' about how modern femininity is to be understood how it should and practiced by women in society. (Cf. Evans, 2002:217)

#### 5.2.4.2 A comparison of race and gender representations on the cover of Vogue China

The representation of the sexy ‘Miss Superstar’ on *Vogue China* is exemplified by the Asian supermodel and the Caucasian Hollywood actress. Both representations show unrealistic ideals of beauty, however, they differ in how the beauty is constructed. For example, beauty can be formed by different symbols such as the catwalk, the advertisement or the gossip magazine image. The ‘Hollywood touched up’ beauty of the Caucasian actress may differ from the beauty of the Asian supermodel whose beauty is constructed, for example, on the catwalks of Paris. Hence, the beauty of the American Hollywood actress is mainly constructed by the camera, while the beauty of the Asian supermodel is constructed ‘live’ on the catwalk. These two representations also differ in how beauty is formed by each celebrity’s image, for example how the Armani advertisement constructs a sexy impossibly beautiful woman in a sophisticated way, while the exceptional beauty of the sexy Caucasian model rather is constructed by ‘photoshopped’ images in gossip magazines.

## 6. Conclusion

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*This is the last chapter of the thesis and it consists of two parts. The first part is a summary and a discussion of the findings in relation to the aim and the research questions. The second part reflects upon the thesis and provides suggestions for future research.*

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### 6.1 Summary and discussion of the findings

This study showed how the representation of the model on the cover of *Vogue China* is constructed as seductive, sexy and independent. The representation of the cover model has been described, analysed and interpreted, and the result is a comprehensive account on how the simplified and mythical construction of women on the cover of *Vogue China* can be understood. The findings also relate to the understanding of magazine cover as a powerful medium. As was mentioned in the introduction, the cover is a powerful medium as it is constantly present and has the power to communicate norms and ideals of women. The summary and discussion below will show how the representation and construction of femininity on the cover of *Vogue China* communicates and constructs norms and ideals of women, as a part of the fashion system and its commercial and official rhetoric’s.

In order to summarize the findings on how to understand the simplified and mythical construction of women on the cover of *Vogue China* the research questions will be considered one by one. Firstly, the question on how the model is portrayed on the cover of *Vogue China* from 2005 to 2009 is considered. The trends and changes in cover representations describes how the cover model of *Vogue China* is a supermodel or a film star, she is also 'white', 'Asian' or 'black'. Furthermore, the representation of the cover model is sexy, seductive and independent. For example her body is represented as seductive and sexy, her hands construct the body as delicate and sexy, and her alluring and partly closed eyes projects seductive emotions. Besides, her eyes make direct eye contact, and her face is confident or haughty. Thus, her attitude also project confident and independent vibes. Secondly, the imaginary representations, the "identities", of the models on the cover of *Vogue China* gives an indication of how femininity is represented and constructed within the fashion system in Shanghai. The comparative analysis and interpretation of the "identities" on the cover of *Vogue China* and the American *Vogue* show that there exist differences and similarities in the stereotypical representations. The similarities show how the Chinese and American cover model is represented as confident. The differences show how the Chinese cover representations construct a sexy body, while the American cover model are represented with a delicate and elegant body. Moreover, both cover model representations show an attractive and seductive woman. The difference show how the seductive woman on the cover of *Vogue China* is constructed by red lips and pink cheeks, while the seductiveness of the American cover model is constructed by her cleavage and red lips. Furthermore, the representations of the black cover model on *Vogue China* and the American *Vogue* is similar in how both cover representations conform the model to the white ideals of the global fashion system. However, the difference show how the representation of the black model on the cover of *Vogue China* mixes the conformed representation with exaggeration techniques, which construct her as a wild, athletic and exotic African woman. Whereas the portrayal of the Asian model is played up as exotic. The difference also shows how there does not exist an Asian model on the cover of the American *Vogue*, and how the representation of the Asian model sometimes is played up on the cover of *Vogue China*.

Lastly, the stereotypical representation of the model shows a supermodel and an American Hollywood actress on the Chinese cover, while the American cover portrays an American Hollywood actress and the wife, the First Lady, of the President of the United States. Hence, the representation of a sexy and physically perfected woman on the Chinese cover is a

sophisticated and photoshopped beauty, while the American cover model shows 'photoshopped' or 'real' beauty. To sum up, the representation of the Chinese cover model can be understood as confident/independent, seductive and sexy in relation to the American cover model, which also is portrayed in similar manners, even if the representations slightly differs.

Thirdly, the analysis of the Asian, Caucasian and black model on the cover of *Vogue China* shows that the combination of symbols constructs the Asian model as sexy, seductive and confident/independent. For example, symbols construct the Asian model, compared to the Caucasian model, as confident. Moreover, the symbols red lips, pink cheeks or bare skin constructs both the Asian and Caucasian model as seductive. Besides, the Asian model is, compared to the black model, not conformed to the 'white ideals', but rather the combination of symbols plays up the 'exoticness' of the model. Lastly, the image of the sexy and sophisticated Asian supermodel is constructed on the catwalk, while the beauty of the sexy, 'photoshopped' Caucasian model is constructed in gossip magazines.

However, it is important to remember that the findings show representations of women that are stereotypical constructions. Hence, it symbolizes an ideal that might not resemble reality. However, the fashion magazine cover is a powerful medium in the fashion system that communicates these ideals. More to the point, it communicates, constructs and maintains norms and ideals of femininity based on both commercial and an official rhetoric's. These cover images may have profound social implications as it may convince us that this is how 'real' women are or should be. For example, the cover images of *Vogue China* construct ideal femininity and are a part of the historical discourse on how women throughout time have symbolized modernity. Moreover, the cover images of *Vogue China* may also be thought about in relation to tools of subjugation or of empowerment. In relation to the above, a bit simplified, the images may be tools of subjugation as they construct stereotypical ideals of women, which have the power to control women's lives and make them conform to certain ideals of fashion and femininity, which are defined by both the commercial discourse - male gaze of the fashion industry - and the official rhetoric's. However, the fashion system and global fashion trends are rather new to Shanghai, which may result in the cover images being tools of empowerment as they may inspire women to create their own styles of fashion, and become members of the global consumer culture and high fashion lifestyles.

## 6.2 Contribution and suggestions for future research

This study has focused on stereotypical representations of gender across cultures on the covers of *Vogue China*. As was mentioned in the introduction there is lack of research on the topic and previous research has presented a one-sided simplified picture. Hence, this research aimed at creating a nuanced description and understanding of how models are represented, and this study showed nuances in cover model representations and hence it contributes with new insights into the stereotypification of gender on fashion magazine covers. Besides, the study contributes to the understanding of covers as a specific medium and as powerful spaces when it comes to the construction of simplified and mythical gender stereotypes. However, these insights may be specific to magazine covers and to *Vogue*. Hence, studies of fashion advertisement and studies of covers of other fashion magazines may produce different findings.

When it comes to future research, a few studies logically follow from the research presented above. For example, it would be interesting and important to compare stereotypical gender portrayals on the cover of *Vogue China* with local Chinese fashion magazine covers. It would also be interesting to compare both the local fashion magazine cover and the International fashion magazine cover with older women's magazine covers such as the covers of *Women of China* published by All-China Women's Federation. This would be interesting and important as these studies may explore similarities and differences in gender representations across time, space and place.

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## Images

*Vogue China* covers from the year 2005 to the year 2009.

American *Vogue* covers from the year 2009.

Contact the author for original cover images.

## Appendix 1– Coding Manual

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Coding categories	1	2	3	4
<b>1. Body language</b>	Active, relaxed or laid-back	Composed, mannered or static	Sexually attractive	Only face visible
<b>2. Self-Touching</b>	Touching face or neck	Touching hair	Touching legs or hips	Hands not visible/ no touching
<b>3. Facial Expression</b>	Half or full smile	Confident or haughty	Coy, naïve or girlishly	Face turned away from camera/ not visible
<b>4. Gaze</b>	Eye contact with the camera/ audience	Alluring, partly closed eyes	Distant, empty look or detached	Eyes not visible
<b>5. Race</b>	Asian - includes all Asians regardless of origin	White - includes women of European, Hispanic and Caucasian origin	Black - Includes women of African origin	Other race
<b>6. Celebrity</b>	An internationally, prominent and highly paid supermodel	A popular film star	A well-known wife/girlfriend of a famous, football player, musician or film star	Other celebrity

The coding categories are based on the checklist by Gillian Dyer (1982:96-104).



## Appendix 2 –Coding Schedule

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Case Number	Year	Month	Body Language	Self-touching	Facial Expression	Gaze	Race	Celebrity

## Appendix 3 – Vogue China cover images 2005-2009

2005



2006



2007

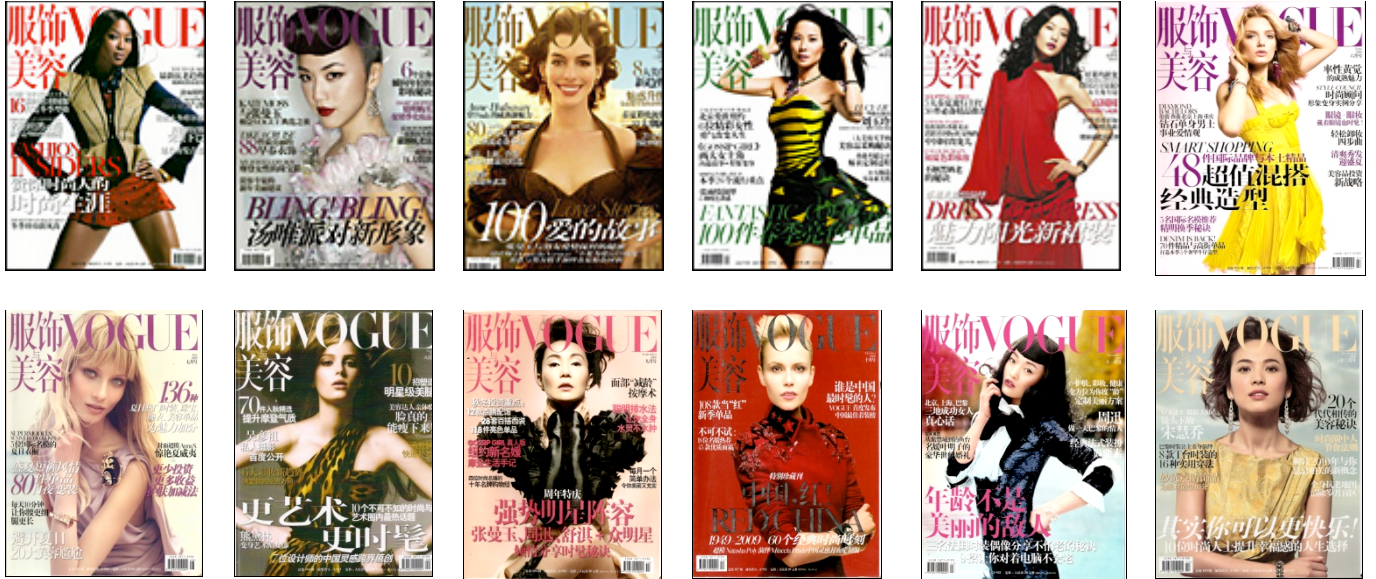


2008





2009



## Appendix 4 – Frequency Tables

A

Body Language	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Active,	25%	17%	33%	17%	17%



<b>relaxed or laid-back</b>					
<b>Composed, mannered or static</b>	0%	50%	42%	41,5%	25%
<b>Sexually attractive</b>	75%	25%	25%	41,5%	58%
<b>Only face visible</b>	0%	8%	0%	0%	0%

## B

<b>Self-touching</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Touching face or neck</b>	25%	0%	8%	8%	17%
<b>Touching hair</b>	0%	0%	0%	8%	25%
<b>Touching legs or hips</b>	50%	67%	75%	67%	33%
<b>Hands not visible/ no touching</b>	25%	33%	17%	17%	25%

## C

<b>Facial Expression</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Half or full smile</b>	0%	0%	0%	17%	41,5%
<b>Confident or haughty</b>	100%	92%	100%	75%	41,5%
<b>Coy, naïve or girlishly</b>	0%	8%	0%	0%	17%
<b>Face turned away from camera/not visible</b>	0%	0%	0%	8%	0%

## D

<b>Gaze</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Eye contact with the</b>	25%	50%	58%	33%	33%

<b>camera/ audience</b>					
<b>Alluring, partly closed eyes</b>	75%	33%	34%	50%	42%
<b>Distant, empty look or detached</b>	0%	17%	8%	17%	25%
<b>Eyes not visible</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

## E

<b>Race</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Asian – Includes all Asian regardless of origin</b>	0%	25%	58%	58%	50%
<b>White - includes women of European, Hispanic and Caucasian origin</b>	100%	75%	42%	42%	42%
<b>Black –includes women of African origin</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%
<b>Other race</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

<b>An internationally, prominent and highly paid supermodel</b>	75%	92%	92%	58%	50%
<b>A popular film star</b>	25%	8%	8%	42%	50%
<b>A well-known wife/girlfriend of a famous, football player, musician or film star</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Other celebrity</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

**F**

## Appendix 5 –Madonna Vogue Lyrics

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<p>Strike a pose Strike a pose Vogue, vogue, vogue Vogue, vogue, vogue</p> <p>Look around, everywhere you turn is heartache It's everywhere that you go (look around) You try everything you can to escape The pain of life that you know (life that you know)</p> <p>When all else fails and you long to be Something better than you are today I know a place where you can get away It's called a dance floor, and here's what it's for, so</p> <p>Come on, vogue Let your body move to the music (move to the music) Hey, hey, hey Come on, vogue Let your body go with the flow (go with the flow) You know you can do it</p> <p>All you need is your own imagination So use it, that's what it's for (that's what it's for) Go inside, for your finest inspiration Your dreams will open the door (open up the door) It makes no difference if you're black or white If you're a boy or a girl If the music's pumping it will give you new life you're a superstar, yes, that's what you are, you know it</p>	<p>Come on, vogue Let your body groove to the music (groove to the music) Hey, hey, hey Come on, vogue Let your body go with the flow (go with the flow) You know you can do it</p> <p><u>Beauty's where you find it</u> Not just where you bump and grind it Soul is in the musical That's where I feel so beautiful Magical, life's a ball So get up on the dance floor</p> <p>Vogue (vogue) Let your body move to the music (move to the music) Hey, hey, hey Come on, vogue (vogue) Let your body go with the flow (go with the flow) You know you can do it</p> <p>Vogue (vogue) Beauty's where you find it (move to the music) Vogue (vogue) Beauty's where you find it (go with the flow)</p> <p>Greta Garbo, and Monroe Deitrich and DiMaggio Marlon Brando, Jimmy Dean On the cover of a magazine</p>	<p>Grace Kelly, Harlow Jean Picture of a beauty queen Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire Ginger Rodgers, dance on air</p> <p><u>They had style, they had grace</u> <u>Rita Hayworth gave good face</u> Lauren, Katherine, Lana too Bette Davis, we love you</p> <p>Ladies with an attitude Fellows that were in the mood don't just stand there, let's get to it <u>Strike a pose, there's nothing to it</u></p> <p>Vogue, vogue, vogue Vogue, vogue, vogue</p> <p>Oooh, you've got to Let your body move to the music Oooh, you've got to just Let your body go with the flow Oooh, you've got to Vogue, vogue, vogue</p> <p>(Link 1)</p>
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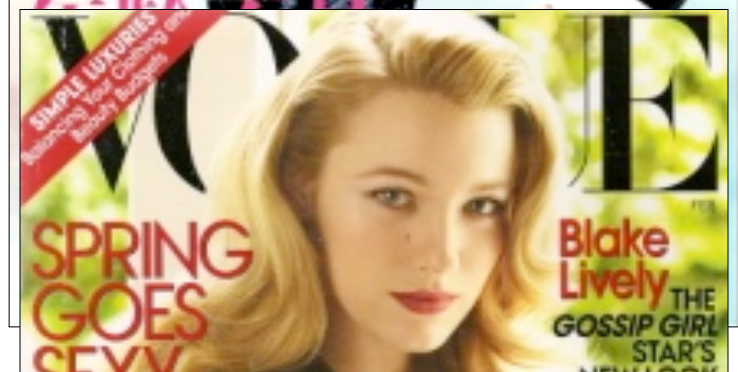
## Appendix 6 – ‘Miss Sexy Magic’

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**Appendix 7 – ‘Miss Fairytale’**

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## Appendix 8- 'Miss Beautiful Stranger'

