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**Understanding Feminist Backlash Through a Fashionable Framework: A Content Analysis of *Vogue*
Magazine**

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Understanding feminist backlash through a fashionable framework: A content analysis of
Vogue Magazine

Brooke Rutherford

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the M.A. in Communication

Department of Communication

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Abstract

Drawing from feminist, post-modern and performative theory this investigation sets out to determine whether fashion is empowering or constraining for women in a period of US political backlash. Incorporating anthropological, historical, philosophical and sociological approaches the application of fashion in *Vogue* Magazine is assessed through a macroscopic content analysis using a systematic random sample methodology. Data is assessed according to twenty-three quantitative variables. A qualitative analysis determines the presence of subculture style, menswear fashion influences, functional fashion, work-suitability, and the relation of clothing in reference to the body. These conceptual variables answer the research question through tangible forms and demonstrate, in conjunction with theory, how fashion works as language to empower women. These findings indicate that in addition to providing women with means of subverting social constructions of gender, fashion and *Vogue* are catalysts for cultural change and work to neutralize the constraining movement that backlash politics imposed on the visibility of women.

Introduction

“Great fashion is about cutting moments of transition out of cloth” (Buttolph, Doe, Mackrell, Martin, Rickey & Watt: 1998). Such an inspiring thought characterizes the work of Yves Saint Laurent, the late designer renown for revolutionizing women’s wardrobes and bringing the taboo and unconventional to the forefront of fashion. This designer, who once proclaimed that a seductive woman is one who dresses to “appeal to men”, has in countless circles been awarded the honour of liberating women through fashion. How is it possible for one man to do so? Especially while operating within a system steeped in patriarchal values? The response is quite literally by providing androgynous suits, tuxedos and trousers to women—evoking the spirit of men’s fashions and providing flocks of career women with camouflaging business attire for survival in the workplace (Glasscock, Price & Tavee: 2008). A more sophisticated depiction of women, fashion and liberation is vastly complex and bestrewed across various disciplines. One area in particular, being deeply invested, is feminism.

These aforementioned concepts are very much entwined in a theoretical debate or tension about the achievement of gender equality and looking good. Entitled the agency/constraint conundrum by Waggoner and Hallstein (2001), this tension is best synthesized as a hostility towards fashion as a result of a mind-body split that has pervaded academia. Essentially, this tension between women, fashion and liberation is rooted in the preconceived notion that serious thinkers must “free their minds from their bodies in order to engage in unadulterated intellectual activity” (Waggoner & Hallstein, 2001: 29). The distinction between mind and body is extremely relevant in feminist and gender studies for within such realms the body often compromises the integrity of the mind. What’s more, as *the* source of distinction between men and women, upon which

centuries of oppression grounded in biological and social difference have operated, the body is seen as a distinguishing marker of inequality. Biological difference has perpetuated the distinction of women *from* men (Wolf, 1991). As a result of this deeply ingrained distinction an understandably hostile and cynical perception/rhetoric/ideology within feminist and gender studies exists around fashion as a magnifier of bodily difference.

This tension between women and fashion is mirrored in the work of Pulitzer Prize winner Susan Faludi for her contribution in *Backlash: The undeclared war against American women* (1991). This body of work not only identifies some of the key arguments in feminist theory but gives countless examples of a widespread backlash against women's increasing equality found in American political and popular culture (Faludi, 1991). The concept of backlash is best described as a response to women's changing role in America in the early to late 1980s from Neo-conservative groups, American Neo-liberal politics, and a shifting social climate inspired by fear and apprehension towards women's growing equality achieved during the Women's Liberation Movement. This widespread response, accordingly to Faludi, has pervaded popular culture and is especially evident in the fashion industry. With predominantly hegemonic underpinnings, Faludi's interpretation epitomizes the tension between women and fashion, and strongly represents one opponent in this debate. What's more her work pinpoints a time-frame for this investigation, and her assessment of the fashion industry provides a case study upon which a critical analysis is befitting.

Drawing from examples such as Christian Lacroix's couture debut, Faludi's journalistic background presents a starting point for investigation and inspires an evaluation of the various interpretations of fashion from a variety of approaches. This

influence is reflected in the literature and includes historical, anthropological, philosophical and sociological perspectives on fashion and women, independently and in respect to each other. Furthermore, Faludi's arguments are set in a period of hotbed feminist debate. Several compelling arguments surrounding women and fashion emerge at this time with considerable acclaim and attention. What's more is that several of the authors published in this period engage in rhetorical face-offs (Wolf, 1991; Paglia, 1992) further portraying the captivating nature of this debate. Finally, this timeframe of investigation coincides with the sweeping influence of post-modernism as a means of understanding social phenomenon. Theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard characterises this period as a rebellion against the "universal truths", fixed meanings and binary oppositions (subject-object, man-woman, reality-appearance, reason-emotion) that have grounded Western philosophy and the social sciences (Schwartz, 2008: 395). Recognizing unicity, difference and diversity, post-modernism inspires a third position in the debate surrounding women and fashion, challenging the very systems of knowledge that produce this debate.

Faludi's work inspires not only an investigation of the facts and rhetoric contained within, but has influenced the direction of the research and has inspired a reconciliation of the tension between academic and applied theory. This has led to the all-encompassing research question: Is fashion a mechanism of empowerment or constraint for women?

Answering such a vast and gargantuan question in its entirety would surely prove overwhelming to a thesis of this scope. However, uncovering such a question through a macroscopic content analysis would prove to be more manageable. Evaluating the claims set forth by Faludi (1991) inspires an analysis of fashion through an outlet of popular culture. Providing a direct route to fashion design, industry publications prove to be

readily available and easily referenced, presenting an excellent synthesis of the most significant and influential fashions in the period from which it is published. This rationale inspires the use of *Vogue* for analysis, based in part on its availability at the Ottawa Public Library but more importantly as an iconic, pioneering fashion magazine in American culture (Condénast Publications, 2007).

This introduction would be nothing without a glimpse at popular culture in its contemporary form. At present the year 2009 has witnessed two significant events demonstrating the relevance of this research, both occurring within a two-week span. The first is the appointment of Michelle Obama to the role of First Lady upon the inauguration of President Barack Obama. The second is the assault of Grammy-award winning pop singer Rihanna by her equally famous boyfriend Chris Brown. What do these women have in common, aside from their status as fashion icons representing women in contemporary American culture? They both situate women, fashion, and the issue of liberation at the forefront of contemporary American culture, proving this topic as deeply significant and relevant to the field of academia.

Identified as the “daughter of the Women’s Liberation Movement” (Talley, 2009: 434) Michelle Obama’s impact on American culture and politics is paramount. Considered a fashion icon by magazine editors, fashion designers and bloggers alike (Safe, 2009), Michelle has been championed for reviving the American fashion industry by incorporating mass market fashions from American retailers with high-end fashions from young emerging American designers (Givhan, 2009). Something which *Vogue*’s Editor-in-Chief Anna Wintour proclaims is a demonstration of her iconicity used carefully, responsibly and productively (Wintour, 2009). A testament to her iconic status,

in both fashion and as a representative of American women, Obama graces the cover of American *Vogue* for March 2009 becoming only the second First Lady to do so (Johnson, 2009). The media attention dedicated to Obama's wardrobe, especially for inauguration, illustrates not only her role as a fashion icon but the significance of fashion in general as a reflection of the times and political culture.

The politics of fashion is alive and well as a serious topic warranting investigation. This significance is exemplified in the countless newspaper articles and broadcasts dedicated to Obama's fashion. What is the significance of her style choices? They accordingly have set the tone for President Obama's administration: "[Michelle] has been compared to Jacqueline Kennedy, the last First Lady to so thoroughly embrace style as a form of communication" (Givhan, 2009: A01). Similar to the work done by Ruth Rubinstein (1995) in *Dress codes: Meanings and messages in American culture*, the fashions worn by the First Ladies have a strong correlation to the politics of the period. In the compelling news excerpt "Yes, she can be the new fashion icon: Remaking America", Obama's fashion choices proclaim "My fashion outlook is as fresh and proactive as my husband's politics" (Safe, 2009). In actuality the importance Obama places on style is profound: "If I can have any impact, I want women to feel good about themselves and have fun with fashion" (Talley, 2009: 431).

Another testament to the significance of this topic in a post-modern period is the question of equality and the existence of domestic violence. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1200 deaths and two million injuries are experienced by women as a result of family violence (Drug Week, 2009). Part of this reality is attributed to the lack of funding in the US federal Violence Against Women Act, a body which offers real hope and pro-active strategies for violence (Drug Week, 2009). The

lack of funding or dedication to this issue magnifies the failures of the US government to implement policies protecting women from violence, and furthermore demonstrate that since the protection from harm is seldom a priority then surely safeguards for pay equity, healthcare services, and childcare are not prioritized adequately either. Measuring the degree for which equality has been achieved is tricky and is beyond the scope of this investigation. However, if the fundamental protection against harm for women is not guaranteed in contemporary US society then clearly the issue of gender equality is still alive and well.

Nothing exemplifies this issue more than the assault of pop singer Rihanna by her equally famous boyfriend R&B artist Chris Brown. An incident occurring in the early hours of March 8, 2009, Brown allegedly punched Rihanna in the face several times and proceeded to render her unconscious through asphyxiation as a result of a headlock (Tucker, 2009). This heavily scrutinized criminal act has added a public dimension to the reality of domestic violence, uncovering “what happens privately in [the US] every hour of every day” (Drug Week, 2009: 1). Considered a fashion icon in her own right Rihanna is the spokesperson for Cover Girl cosmetics and the upscale fashion house Gucci. Recognized as a young and modern icon by the company’s creative director Frida Giannini, Rihanna is considered the ideal “Gucci woman” (Tucker, 2009: C01). Strong, confident and self-assured the Gucci label’s convictions in the pop singer illustrate her influential status and relevance to fashion and modern women on an international level (The Gucci Group owns several designer houses and is based out of Milan). Clearly then it was a surprise to her fans and the world alike when the two parties involved reconciled: “If she were really a Gucci woman”, the argument goes, “she wouldn’t bother with an abusive boyfriend” (Tucker, 2009: C01).

Because the act of domestic violence has long been considered a private issue—a result of the convoluted view of right and wrong in terms of a relationship between a man and a woman—the action for its abolition has stagnated. In other words, this act of violence and the many responses which mull over its significance demonstrate the degree to which inequality is systematic, institutionalized and pervading American culture in a contemporary sense. What this highly-publicized act also shows is that regardless of wealth, fame or success one is not immune to domestic violence, and that such an issue knows no boundaries in terms of socio-economic status, education, or position in society. This has huge implications for the study of equality and hopefully will shine a light on the much needed progress for abolishing violence against women.

Linked to political and social issues, these examples are drawn from contemporary US popular culture and are grounded to the core questions of this research. This investigation will uncover fashion in the period of backlash in order to determine whether fashion is a mechanism of empowerment or constraint in the lives of American women. Chapter one will investigate the various bodies of work that are relevant to the discussion of women and fashion, including the epistemological roots of gender performance and culture, contemporary arguments from feminist perspectives, and academic fashion theory as a interdisciplinary approach to understanding mainstream fashion from the industry and the street. This chapter will incorporate various perspectives from history, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, politics, as well as communication and journalism to uncover the relationship between women and fashion, and to form conceptual variables for investigation.

Chapter two will present the specifics of the research design and methodology. The main research question is deconstructed in this chapter to produce more specific and measurable questions. The sampling strategies for data collection are also presented, as well as the variables and subsequent steps taken following the collection of data.

Chapter three will present the findings and analysis of the data, including the quantitative results derived from SPSS software, the relevant charts for understanding the data, and the qualitative findings and analysis. Included in this chapter is an ongoing discussion pertaining to the results of the data, ultimately answering the various research questions stated in chapter two. Following this chapter are the concluding thoughts, the confirmation of the main research question and the contribution this investigation makes to the various interdisciplinary fields surrounding women, culture and fashion.

Chapter 1—Literature Review

American philosopher Judith Butler provides a significant contribution to the discussion of women and fashion by reformatting Foucault's surface politics of the body and challenging universal truths of gender through a post-modern deconstruction lens. Through the work of Gill Jagger (2008) Butler's theories are explored at length to demonstrate how the body and gender are not natural categories of classification but constructed realities depicted through performative acts. In this research fashion is thought of as a performative act in proceeding to determine whether it serves as a mechanism of empowerment or constraint. This contribution gives preference to an interdisciplinary approach, allowing one to understand fashion as a reflection of history, sociology, politics, anthropology and culture.

To analyze the specific period chosen the works of Steele (1996), Wolf (1991), Paglia (1992), Brown (1990), and Faludi (1991) are unveiled. These authors are engaged in a theoretical debate surrounding fashion as a mechanism of empowerment or constraint. At one end of the debate liberal feminist authors Wolf (1991) and Faludi (1991) situate the struggle for gender equality in direct competition or opposition with the fashion industry and its supporting structures, namely fashion journalism and publications such as *Vogue*. Under this approach fashion poses a threat to gender equality for it objectifies female bodies and amplifies the distinction between secondary sexual characteristics, which in turn abolishes an equal level playing field for achieving gender equality. Furthermore, fashion as an institution in American culture perpetuates gender injustice by devaluing and undermining women with images of beauty that are impossible, unattainable and questionable in terms of health. This maintains a stronghold over women, encouraging them to consume and spend incessantly, which in turn

establishes an allegiance to the fashion and beauty industries. Finally, this side of the debate is convinced of the superficiality of fashion: a preoccupation with appearance results in a devaluation of intelligence, resulting in a lack of awareness and education, and an overall weakened collective effort by women in the fight for complete equality.

Authors Paglia (1992), Brown (1990), and Steele (1996) question the validation of this perspective and situation fashion in the realm of consumer agency. Fashion plays a role in the distinction of gender and sexuality, which is a positive contribution to the achievement of equality. Embracing sexuality, sensuality, and the female body celebrates difference and contributes to a pleasurable experience. Fashion is a source of erotic pleasure, bringing consciousness to the body, fulfilling fantasies, and playing a vital role in sexual and gender expression. Fashion also enables the expression of unorthodox sexualities, usurping conventional images of strict sexual behaviours under the crux of heterosexuality. By finding pleasure in their bodies women reclaim their status as the more powerful gender in American culture (Paglia, 1992). Enjoyment in this regard is seen as an assertion of right rather than a privilege.

Fashion is a uniquely-female focused source of information for women. Fashion journalism as an aspect of popular culture presents information to a wide female demographic on issues directly relevant to women. This information is easily accessible to multiple demographics and does not discriminate, unlike feminist academic theory which targets an elite and highly educated minority. Or so is the argument set forth by several authors here. The accessibility of information derived from magazines is key to educating women on their rights, stressing health and well-being as essential to the quality of life. The question of whom fashion serves is further explained in its role as an outlet of popular culture. This side of the debate sees mainstream fashion as supplied by

demand. Consumers determine what is in fact popular through their unanimous support (i.e. spending). Finally, reducing fashion to a question of gender and appearance removes an essential component which is fundamental in the development of fashion. A cultural approach embraced by this side of the debate unveils a unique perspective on fashion—that its diversity is a result of class structures *as well* as gender structures.

Challenging the very foundation of these arguments is Judith Butler's theory of performativity presented in the work of Gill Jagger (2008). The question is not whether fashion is pejorative or congratulatory, but rather *how* does it function as so? This theory takes into consideration the fundamentals of each argument presented above, namely the constructs of gender, sexuality and appearance. Arguments against fashion based on gender assume an ontological core of male/female as natural. In this regard fashion is assumed to be an essential component to the outward appearance of gender, and as such supports this strict binary of male/female under the umbrella of heterosexuality.

Fashion is performative because it is used to achieve a performance of gender. However, fashion's performative nature also works against heterosexuality and subsequently against the male/female binary, made evident in the existence of drag and trans gender. In this regard gender is portrayed through outward appearance by fashion, contradicting the supposed natural match between gender and sexuality. Fashion therefore works to contradict and challenge a strict ontological core of male/female, and in fact is performative of unorthodox sexualities. In summation, gender and sexuality are constructed realities that exist similar to fashion, as both pejorative *and* complimentary. The significance however is in fashion's potential to usurp orthodox sexualities just as it enforces the binary of male/female.

Performativity and constructed reality

Judith Butler's sexual politics attempts to uncover gender, sexuality and subsequently the body from the hegemonic stronghold of compulsory heterosexuality. A poststructuralist philosopher, Butler is concerned with how identity categories such as sexuality and gender are constructed to appear normal or natural. In other words, how is it that one is classified as a man or woman, and secondly, how it is that this classification results in an attraction between these binary poles. In *Judith Butler: Sexual politics, social change, and the power of the performative* (2008) Gill Jagger examines the origins of Butler's key theoretical concepts, demonstrating their relevance to paradigms of feminist thought.

According to Jagger (2008), a synthesis of Judith Butler's work can be organized under the poststructuralist umbrella concept of performativity, derived from the philosophy of language and the works of John L. Austin in conjunction with Derrida's treatment of speech act theory. Performativity, as explained by Jagger (2008), describes the process of assigning meaning and signification through language, and is used explicitly by Butler in reference to identity categories such as gender and sexuality. An abstract concept, performativity is the process of constructing meaning in reference to identity, and as such is relevant to feminist and queer theory debates (Jagger, 2008).

Butler views heterosexuality as a compulsory requirement for identity. As coercive as this seems such a perspective suggests that, if in fact true, countless academic theories and knowledge on the body, sexuality and gender, are cemented in hegemony (the belief that order is natural and seemingly results in a hierarchy of sorts) (Jagger, 2008). Compulsory heterosexuality is the seemingly natural coherence of sexuality and gender categories under the production of a binary framework conditioned by procreative

intercourse (Jagger, 2008). These categories are culturally constructed through the repetition of stylized acts in time to depict an essential ontological core of male and female (Jagger, 2008). Butler considers heterosexuality compulsory in a sense that the performance of gender is not voluntary but enforced through regulative discourses of language and the appearance of sex and gender as seemingly natural and biologically given (Jagger, 2008).

The relevance of performativity and compulsory heterosexuality explored by Jagger (2008) lies in their application to identity categories in general, and in the contextualizing of women's bodies, gender and sexuality in particular by feminist theorists (2008). Butler's work recognizes the coercion of binary identity categories through the propagation of language and biological determinism (i.e. man/woman), which is relevant to feminist thought. In other words, identity categories become "performative effects of language and signification, rather than properties of individuals" (Jagger, 2008: 18).

These identity categories subsequently become resurrected through discourse—a mode of organizing knowledge and ideas—to appear natural. Understanding the role of discourse in identity category formation contributes to a comprehensive view that meaning is inherently constructed through the monopolization of language. Butler's performativity opens up identity categories from their 'naturalized' state, specifically gender and sexuality for which Butler states are products (rather than effects) of compulsory heterosexuality (Jagger, 2008). Therefore, identity categories such as gender and sexuality within the binary of male/female are fictional products of 'regimes of power and knowledge' (Jagger, 2008).

This terminology from Butler's original work demonstrates the perspective in which performativity and compulsory heterosexuality operate, and shows how identity categories are culturally constructed through language discourse under the notion of power. Although Jagger (2008) fails to present a concrete and definitive definition of power the presence of tension and struggle is apparent in the various debates Butler's work has intersected such as the discussion of trans gender and drag (2008), demonstrating that gender and sexuality are sites of political, social and cultural debate.

Perhaps most relevant to understanding the performative power of sexuality and gender is Butler's point-of-departure from the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Foucault (Jagger 2008: 27). Beauvoir's notion that 'one is not born a woman, but comes one' emphasizes sexuality and gender as products of social construction rather than nature, sustained through performative acts (Jagger, 2008). Borrowing from Foucault's 'surface politics of the body' Butler argues that gender is a constructed reality:

An enacted fantasy or incorporation in which acts, gestures and desires produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications, manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Jagger, 2008: 27)

The existence of repetitive 'stylized acts' (parallel to fashion) demonstrates how sexuality and gender are enacted at the surface making them superficial markers of identity (Jagger, 2008: 27). In other words, social and biological categories of sexuality and gender, and their projected outward appearance, are performances of compulsory heterosexuality and power discourses which are neither natural, given, nor universal.

These abstract concepts of performativity make a significant contribution to the discussion of fashion design in a period of gender backlash since corporeal enactment of

sexuality and gender can be traced to outward appearance and fashion design. As a contribution to fashion design analysis, Butler's claim that nothing precedes our existence in this theoretical framework suggests that gender-specific designs *should* be considered meaningless or irrelevant since their reference to gender is based on total fabrication. Fashion as a 'stylized' act is comparable to identity categories in that fashion design is constructed in part through language to signify meaning. Clothing as an example of language can construct meaning alone, but it often works in connection with identity categories to create or enhance a particular meaning. For example, an article of clothing can often be characterized as 'feminine' on its own, however it also works in collaboration with the body to signify 'femininity' or female sexuality and gender.

A constant analogy between fashion and language this thesis is formulated through Butler's use of 'stylized acts', modelled after Sartre's 'a style of being', Foucault's 'stylistics of existence' and de Beauvoir's view of bodies as 'styles of the flesh' (Jagger, 2008: 27):

Bodily movements and gestures (corporeal styles) that are socially approved and politically regulated in keeping with 'a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality'...It is through this that the illusion of a stable fixed identity is promoted, perpetuated and believed.

To Butler this 'corporeal style' or 'stylized act' produces the effects of an "internal core or substance on the surface of the body" in an attempt to express or impersonate a specific identity (Jagger, 2008: 27). Therefore the body acts as a signifier through which identity categories are established and sustained, but is *not* a naturalistic predetermination of these identity categories (Jagger, 2008).

Jagger's (2008) analysis of 'stylized acts' illuminates the process through which meaning is conferred through an outward appearance of the body. This use of style as a

performance of identity categories fits appropriately with popular culture concepts of fashion. Fashion is often seen as synonymous with style, or rather viewed as interchangeable in the sense that fashion as a collection of tangible inanimate objects is constructed through the process of stylization. Design is stylized in a sense that the physical construction of clothing pieces are made in a particular manner or technique that is characterized as a process of styling, or is performed by a stylist. Butler's terminology denotes a relationship between fashion design and identity categories, suggesting that fashion design is heavily intertwined with performativity.

Since the body is indicative of gender and sexuality many feminists protest against industries and ideologies that propagate a strict division of male/female thereby suppressing women through economical and political means. Wolf (1991) and Faludi (1991) condemn popular culture for this exact reason. Butler's theoretical stance, on the other hand contradicts this strongly supported perspective on the grounds that identity categories are powerless in creating physical oppression, simply because they are based on something that is not real. That bodies are naturally given through biology, which creates and supports this division between men and women, is a social and political fallacy and a propagation of compulsory heterosexuality (Jagger, 2008).

Butler's approach to pornography in relation to women, the body and sexuality further illustrates the significant role of language in the process of meaning making. From this rationale Butler argues that pornography is a mode of hate speech, or rather a demonstration of language as a form of conduct (Jagger, 2008). According to Butler, "hate speech does not destroy the agency required for a critical response but rather provides the possibility for such agency—precisely because of the citational, temporal nature of speech acts, including those that are injurious" (Jagger, 2008: 116). In others

words, language enables the existence of hate speech as it is the process which performs the negative depictions of women in pornography. On the other hand, protests against pornography are formed with the same excitable speech. The performative acts made possible through language are both responsible for the depiction of women in pornography as they are for the discourse which condemns it as negative to women's equality.

Butler's presentation of trans gender and drag is the most significant contribution to the discussion of performativity and constructed reality, providing compelling evidence of a disconnect between the identity categories of sexuality and gender. The existence of trans gender gives further legitimacy to that fact that sexuality and gender do not seemingly coexist in nature (Jagger, 2008). Even more indicative of the compulsory nature of heterosexuality is the systemic violence and persecution of homosexual and trans gendered individuals. The outward projection of fear and hostility towards unorthodox gender and sexualities demonstrates the strict functioning of such identity categories and further indicates the coercive nature of heterosexuality. Although this rationing seems relatively justifiable, many question this evidence on the grounds that a lack of connection between gender and sex does *not* necessarily undermine or transcend the binary of male/female. Trans gender, according to Jagger (2008), becomes a matter of assimilation rather than resistance and fails to challenge the binaries of sexuality and gender under compulsory heterosexuality. Instead of challenging the heterosexual binary trans gender actually appears to reinforce it (Jagger, 2008).

According to Jagger (2008), Butler's theories are often struck down as politically weak since "there is no independently existing body on which to base feminist and queer projects and no independent truths of sex, gender and sexuality on which to build

identity” (Jagger, 2008: 137). This is also problematic to many feminists since removing the materiality of the body from the equation fails to account for the living and breathing flesh of women’s bodies, making “the all-too-obvious and thus invisible difference that it makes to be a woman [drop] out of view” (Jagger, 2008: 154).

Butler’s objective behind performativity, compulsory heterosexuality and constructed reality is to open up the categories of sexuality, gender and the body for multiple determinations and a proliferation of genders and sexes beyond the binary framework. Revealing the heterosexual binaries of male/female as unstable contributes to an understanding of gender and sexuality as inherently political, rather than personal, and uncovers the possibility of sexual politics within the investigation of fashion design.

Popular culture and subculture

To fully comprehend the role of fashion in the period of backlash various historical and cultural accounts of twentieth century fashions must be taken into consideration. Specific socio-economic and cultural contexts generate a wealth of creative and subversive fashions that challenge orthodox ideologies regarding appropriate dress codes. Fashion theorists, anthropologists and sociologists alike are in relative agreement regarding the position of subcultures in reference to the dominant population and the inherent influence this has on appearance. Subcultures produce through stylization specific fashions which are symbolic of their marginalized position—based on racial, class, gender and sexual difference—in culture. The presence of these fashions in mainstream popular culture suggest that fashion itself has inherently rebellious roots, as youth and street style symbolize an excellent source of inspiration and a significant influence on mainstream and high-end fashion.

An investigation into the concepts of culture and subculture provide a starting point through which subculture stylizations can be best understood. This starting point begins with a definition of culture, in its most primitive sense, as “that complex whole produced by people’s historical experience”, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law and custom, and “any other capabilities and habits acquired by [people] as member[s] of society” (Harouel, 1991: 3179). This Tylorian definition, from nineteenth century English ethnologist Edward B. Tylor, indicates that ‘everything is culture’—this dogma would later guide nearly all anthropologists in the twentieth century (Harouel, 1991). From this definition culture can include all forms of everyday life in its “often prosaic and even trivial aspects” (Harouel, 1991: 3179).

Culture could also be defined as “that level at which *social groups* develop distinct patterns of life, and give expressive form to their social and material life-experience” (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson & Roberts, 2006: 3). The emphasis here on social groups acknowledges the plurality of said groups, while the recognition of ‘social and material life-experience’ suggests that such experiences are diverse. Originating from British Cultural Studies this sociological approach to defining culture emphasizes the class component, which according to key cultural studies theorists, is the catalyst in forming fundamental groups and major cultural configurations (Clarke, et al., 2006). Within these cultural configurations exist subcultures, or rather smaller sub-sets, differentiated within larger cultural networks (Clarke, et al., 2006).

This broad definition synthesizes the work done by prominent cultural theorists in *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain* (Clarke, et al., 2006). A key concept derived from this body of work is the identification of dominant cultures as “parent” cultures in relation to smaller sub-sets, referred to here as “subcultures”. The

relationship between dominant cultures and subcultures can be understood as a relationship between parent and child, especially when subcultures are comprised almost exclusively of a youthful demographic. A prerequisite for distinction between these two cultures is formed in a large part through fashion:

[They] must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their 'parent' culture. They must be focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artefacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture. But since they are sub-sets, there must also be significant things which bind and articulate them with the 'parent' culture (Clarke, et al., 2006: 7).

Dick Hebdige's investigation in *Subculture: The meaning of style* (2003) emphasizes the role fashion in establishing cultural group formations. According to Hebdige, a sociologist and media theorist, the struggle between dominant cultures and sub-sets can be characterized using Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Hebdige, 2003). Hegemony is the complete social control of subordinate groups by the "winning and shaping consent" by the dominant social groups in order "that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural" (Hebdige, 2003: 16). Within this power struggle the emergence of youth subcultures signals the breakdown of the consensus between parent cultures and sub-sets of the populations in the post-war period (Hebdige, 2003). Even more intriguing however is the mode with which youth subcultures subvert domination: "The challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather it is expressed obliquely, in style" (Hebdige, 2003: 17). The point behind subculture styles, according to Hebdige (2003), is the communication of a significant difference between sub-sets and parent cultures.

In addition to magnifying the difference between subcultures, style serves to construct social group identification (as members or non-members) of specific cultural

groups (Barnard, 2007). Barnard places an additional emphasis on the power of fashion to convey meaning in *Fashion as communication* (1996): “Entire cultures can express themselves in or through what members wear” (174). Hebdige (2003) supports this point, presenting the fashions of the Punk subculture in post-war Britain as evidence: “The various stylistic ensembles adopted by the Punks were undoubtedly expressive of genuine aggression, frustration and anxiety. But these statements, no matter how strangely constructed, were cast in a language which was generally available—a language which was current” (87). That language was style, manifested through fashion.

Fashion and anti-fashion

Although stylistic variations between cultural groups are fundamentally different, there is a substantial element of rebellion rooted in the ideologies of the subcultures, subsequently affecting their respective fashions. For instance, Hippie subculture style has been more successful in penetrating American mainstream popular culture than Punk subculture style (Hebdige, 2003), perhaps because the anti-establishment ethos based on peace and love is far less threatening in some contexts than an aggressive approach characterized by the Punk movement. Furthermore, Hippie subculture originated in US Southwestern suburbia, while the Punk subculture evolved out of localized metropolitan centres like London and New York City (Buttolph, et al., 1998). Nonetheless, both subculture styles, rooted in rebellion and resistance, have had a significant influence on western culture, predominantly in regards to fashion.

Polhemus and Procter (1978) model the difference between fashion and anti-fashion as the difference between ‘fixed’ and ‘modish’ types of clothing. ‘Fixed’ fashion, synonymous with anti-fashion, changes slowly in time and its value depends upon its

permanence: “Anti-fashion adornment...is concerned with time in the form of continuity and the maintenance of the status quo”, it reflects and expresses, “fixed, unchanging, rigid social environments”, while providing “the illusion of social and cultural stability” (Polhemus and Procter, 1978: 16). While fixed or anti-fashion is concerned with social stability and maintaining the status quo (i.e. Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation gown as a symbol of continuity and tradition), ‘modish’ clothing or fashion, changes rapidly in time. Transformation in ‘modish’ fashion exemplifies fashion’s very essence: “It function[s] as a symbol of change, progress and movement through time...reflects and expresses changing, fluid situations of social mobility” (Polhemus and Procter, 1978: 12).

Fred Davis takes this notion of anti-fashion a step further, incorporating a sociological and psychological approach to fashion in reference to identity formation by outlining five concise and distinct cultural sources of anti-fashion: utilitarian outrage, health and fitness naturalism, feminist protest, conservative scepticism, and minority group disidentification.

‘Utilitarian outrage’ describes the attitude that castigates the “wastefulness, frivolity, impracticality, and vanity associated with fashion”, and condones its obsolescence from season to season (Davis, 2007: 89). ‘Health and fitness naturalism’ outlines the negative health consequences of many fashions and the unnatural demands it makes upon the human body (Davis, 2007). ‘Feminist protest’, perhaps one of the most relevant categories to this investigation, sees fashion as a means by which the institutions of patriarchy “have managed over the centuries to oppress women and to relegate them to inferior social roles”. ‘Conservative skepticism’ is not entirely against fashion, but against which the fashion industry, the fashion press, and other assorted “authorities” are “trying at a particular time to foist on them” (Davis, 2007: 95).

Lastly 'minority group disidentification' describes the use of anti-fashion by subcultures as a means to differentiate "via clothing and other behaviours one's subgroup from the culturally dominant segments of a society" (Davis, 2007: 96). Erecting a barrier of interaction between others this anti-fashion attitude "keeps the group relatively isolated and safe from secular and other forms of moral contamination" (Davis, 2007: 97). This category summarizes subculture fashion as typically anti-fashion, or a mode of solidarity achieved through style.

If anti-fashion is the maintaining of the status quo in one instance, and is the rejection of the status quo by subcultures in another, then how does one consider fashion? Essentially speaking this is the conundrum that surrounds fashion as a double-edged sword. What is consistent however is this underlying theme of rebellion. Anti-fashion is the style used by subcultures as a voice of rejection, while at the same time is used by the dominant culture to instil and maintain social stability. Within subcultures a rejection of mainstream fashion is an attempt to relegate social, political or culture change (i.e. the rejection of fashion by the Punks was a rejection of conventional society). How then does one typify fashion if in one sense it is rebellious of dominant cultures, while in another sense it is rebellious of social change? These hypothetical questions demonstrate the convoluted ideology surrounding fashion while at the same time illustrating that fashion, entrenched in cultures, is inherently rebellious.

Diffusion of high and low culture

Faludi's (1991) focus on fashion in the period of backlash is an excellent synthesis of the all-too common criticisms of fashion in the lives of modern women. She argues that the fashion industry plays an inherently coercive role. This belief is grounded

in the conviction of an all too-powerful designer and a submissive consumer. It also assumes that designs follow a trickle-down model where fashions are passed from the upper classes to the working classes, thereby exonerating the huge impact of street style in the revitalizing of fashion design.

‘Designer’ fashion became a prominent concept in the ‘80s encapsulating all that was brash about the wealth and ostentation proliferating this period in American culture (De la Haye & Mendes, 1999). In an analysis of twentieth century fashion De la Haye and Mendes (1999) explain how the growing popularity of designers occurred in a time of economic prosperity. Designers, such as the late Gianni Versace, became celebrities in their own right from dressing socialites and actresses in overtly sexy and glitzy evening wear (De la Haye & Mendes, 1999). A characterization of the period, fashion houses epitomized glamour and wealth with their luxurious use of fabrics, cuts and craftsmanship.

Decoding meanings and messages in American culture, sociologist Ruth Rubinstein attributes the popularization of designer fashion in part to the political culture of the ‘80s, which she argues goes hand-in-hand with public sentiment. “The 1980s were characterized not only by a glorification of capitalism, free markets, and finance”, attributed to the Neo-liberal political sentiments that elected Republican Ronald Reagan to President, “but also by an ostentatious celebration of wealth” (Rubinstein, 1995: 229). According to Rubinstein, flamboyance and greed pervaded the culture up until the late ‘80s, a period which ended with the stock market crash of 1987.

Faludi (1991) coincidentally makes use of Lacroix’s infamous couture debut in 1987 as the starting point for her chapter on backlash in the fashion industry. This particular collection featured clothing in the grand tradition of Lacroix: “Intricately cut

garments in luxurious fabrics embellished with handworked beading, tassels, braids, fabric flowers, laces and embroideries” (De la Haye & Mendes, 1999). This collection, according to Faludi (1991), epitomized coercive fashion by enforcing a strict code of ultra-feminine dress.

A fashion-theorist approach uncovers Lacroix’s tradition for producing collections of this grand scale, drawing inspiration from “an eclectic range of sources, including his Provencal childhood, historical costume and London street-styles” (De la Haye & Mendes, 1999: 247). De la Haye and Mendes’ analysis of Lacroix’s collection displays a photograph of a red satin shawl-line bodice dress over black lace and a short, crinoline-style striped skirt (De la Haye & Mendes, 1999). Knee high leather boots juxtapositions this eighteenth century inspired ensemble, bringing historically influenced designs into modern day culture through the adaptation of fetish subculture pieces.

A key point for Faludi is the very impractical hemlines that debuted in Lacroix’s collection. These leg-baring hemlines were reason enough to indict his collection as impractical and inappropriate for real women (Faludi, 1991). However, returning to Rubinstein’s work shows that Lacroix’s use of short skirts was a forecasting of what was to come next in fashion. Shortly after his initial collection a new fashion ideal was popularized by the masses, and proved to be unconventionally feminine:

The short skirt became the new fashion story. It was worn with a form-following jacket that covered the hips. Also new were the lingerie dress and tights with an oversized shirt. All three outfits left the legs exposed; the breast, waistline, and hips, the traditional means of anchoring women in society, were thus deemphasized (Rubinstein, 1995: 233).

In addition to being far too impractical and exploitative of women’s bodies, Faludi (1991) cites financial absurdity as another reason to condone Lacroix’s designs. Lou Taylor’s historical investigation of the Haute Couture industry would caution otherwise.

Studying the evolution of the couture industry in Paris, Taylor (1992) argues there is a clear distinction between couture and ready-to-wear collections. Couture is tailored to a specific clientele—usually royalty—whom of which can afford the lavish costs associated with its production. Ready-to-wear, in contrast, is more readily produced for department stores and clothing retailers, and comes in standardized measurements so they can be worn “off the rack” (Taylor, 1992).

Catering to an extremely small demographic, couture collections are designed with no financial limitations in mind. As a result, these collections and runway shows are spectacles in their own right, serving to market the creativity and skill of a designer and a design house. Faludi cites a lack of consumers for Lacroix’s collection as evidence of a widespread rejection of the fashion industry by American women in the late 1980s, failing to account for the fact that only a small segment of the population actually purchases couture. Furthermore, the authors mentioned here would argue against her conviction—that the fashion industry is out-of-touch with real women based on one specific collection—on the grounds that couture functions as an exhibition of the designer’s creativity and skill, and is by no means a summation of what women must wear.

Consumer agency I

Reminiscent of the ‘feminist protest’ of fashion (Davis, 2007), Faludi (1991) believes that the fashion industry imposes specific designs, ideals and acceptable codes of dress on women. This assumption regards the consumer as submissive to a select few, whom of which operate the fashion industry. Angela Partington’s (1992) work on popular

fashions and working class-affluence disagrees with this concept, citing an interchangeable relationship between consumers and the industry itself:

Within this [fashion] system, the people who determine what becomes fashionable are professionals such as fashion editors in publishing, and fashion buyers in retailing. But these professionals act as agents of specific sections of the fashion-consuming public whose tastes and preferences it is their task to anticipate (150).

A hegemonic approach would assume that fashions appear as natural when in fact they are portrayed and promoted by a hierarchical system. According to Faludi (1991) this is obviously true, and is exhibited in the work of Christian Lacroix, dictating ultra-feminine fashion to the masses. Many fashion and cultural studies approaches argue against this perspective on the belief that a designer's success is dependent upon his or her ability to predict change. Essentially, designers are able to identify a need and a popular sentiment and provide products based on these demands.

In Vogue: The illustrated history of the world's most famous fashion magazine (2006) provides a compelling account of *Vogue's* history and sheds light on the role of the fashion industry in relation to women. This body of work suggests that the fashion industry maintains a give and take relationship with its consumers, with women having the ultimate say in terms of what is produced and presented. Originating in 1892 as a biweekly publication reporting on the social events of the elite upper-class New Yorkers and European aristocrats, *Vogue*, according to Angeletti and Oliva (2006) was produced for the "rich, the very rich, and the super rich" (123). Despite its selective target audience, *Vogue* grew to surpass its competitors such as *Harper's Bazaar* in attracting huge advertising revenue (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). While most publications of the time attracted two to three dollars per page per one-thousand readers, *Vogue* was attracting ten

dollars a page. This advertising prominence came to *Vogue* in the early 1900s when marketing enthusiast Conde Nast purchased the publishing rights to the magazine (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). According to Angeletti and Oliva (2006) this foundation of unsurpassed advertising revenue and a tradition of elitism and excellence has made *Vogue* a prominent presence in the lives of women and in the production of fashion design. A bridge between consumers and producers, the significance of *Vogue* in the lives of American women is made clear by the various eras Angeletti and Oliva (2006) cover in their historical analysis: the sexual liberation and freedom of the 1960s, the economic recession and the advent of women's permanent presence in the workforce in the 1970s, the opulence of the designer decade in the 1980s, and the recurring recession and subsequent minimalist fashions of the 1990s.

These periods, spanning the greater portion of the twentieth century, are in no way as simplistic as the above synthesis. Nonetheless, in this investigation of fashion design it is noteworthy to discuss the prevailing evidence pointing to an explicit relationship between social and political change, and changes in fashion itself. For each specific era in American culture *Vogue* was not only present but highly influential to both the fashion industry and female audiences (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). Angeletti and Oliva (2006) make a successful attempt at demonstrating the great influence of *Vogue* over consumers and producers of fashion. The importance of their contribution is not to simply classify *Vogue* as a long-standing static force in the lives of women readers, but to illustrate how this role has changed along with social, political and cultural change as well.

The adaptation of *Vogue* to societal change, whether through editorial content, fashion photography, or the use of celebrities over models, symbolizes *Vogue's* role as a medium of information and demonstrates its need to adapt in order to stay current and

relevant to its audience. According to Angeletti and Oliva (2006), this change is best understood as coinciding with *Vogue's* change of editors, something that happened rarely, on seven occasions in the span of a century. According to Angeletti and Oliva (2006) nothing exemplifies *Vogue's* adaptation more than the appointment of prominent women who would represent the magazine and make the most significant decisions upholding its standards of excellence in fashion, editorial, photography and publishing.

Perhaps the most evident of these changes occurred in the later half of the twentieth century with the onset of a fashion revolution, coinciding with social and political events that would be later recognized as the sexual revolution. According to Angeletti and Oliva (2006) the woman primarily responsible for this revolution in clothing was editor-in-chief Diana Vreeland who arrived at *Vogue* in 1963. "Until Vreeland's arrival, it was the designers of haute couture who dictated the fashions that the magazines would carry" (185).

Vreeland produced an "audacious formula" for an "audacious decade", using very stylish clothes with the most eccentric lines, sourcing photo shoots to exotic locations, and constructing visions of fantasies from scratch for magazine content (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). Vreeland had clothing created to fit her vision, demonstrating for the first time ever *Vogue's* potential to heavily influence fashion. Vreeland's mission statement, to "give readers what they never knew they wanted" exemplifies *Vogue's* approach to fashion and women in the 1960s (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 187).

Vreeland was the first editor-in-chief at *Vogue* to treat fashion as a form of entertainment (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). This whole aspect of fashion as entertainment was cemented in the symbol of youth, which was *the* driving force and source of inspiration for the decade, "In this social climate clamoring for changes and new power

spaces, the youth fashion phenomenon flourished” (178). Fashion was evidence of social change, and as a result changed significantly: second hand clothes once associated with charity and poverty were chic and eclectic, leather and ethnic clothing were adopted as symbols of a return to nature, fashion as entertainment translated into short vinyl raincoats and tight knit pullovers, while jeans, t-shirts and the recently born miniskirt (1965) supplanted the stiffer garments of the ‘50s (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006).

The authors give a brief synopsis of the social and political changes that were greatly influencing the fashions of the period, citing disenfranchised baby-boomers—rebelling against all expressions of authority including parents, the church and state—for dictating the currents of fashion (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). Other consequences were felt in the fashion industry: “the models broadcasted sexuality and more liberated images, less oriented toward romance and luxurious domesticity than towards self-realization” (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 200). This rebellious spirit, embracing change and the abandonment of traditional values and behaviours, gave way to unisex clothing and marked for the first time ever an overwhelming influence of street fashion, as youth cultures began to use dress as an expression of political and social beliefs.

The acceptance of radical dress, especially in respects to unisex clothing, presents a compelling example of clothing’s performative potential. The distinction, however, is in the use of fashion as a tool of rebellion against the mainstream and traditional performativity of orthodox gender and sexuality that has, in some ways, been static in the fashion industry. Fashion in the ‘60s goes hand-in-hand with the prevailing attitudes and values, and works to reinforce these values of rejection and rebellion. Unisex clothing in particular is an excellent example of the performative power of clothing for customs of dress that toy with strict gender and sexuality divisions are equally performative of

unorthodox sexualities under Butler's compulsory heterosexuality. This period of social and political change really illustrates the radical and resistive potential of fashion design, and its acceptance and display by the upper-echelon publication *Vogue* exemplifies the relationship between popular culture and fashion, and demonstrates fashion as a subservient player to audiences.

The replacement of Diana Vreeland with Grace Mirabella as editor-in-chief of *Vogue* indicates the next significant shift in social and political change in American culture as identified by Angeletti and Oliva (2006). Her appointment as editor-in-chief in 1971 coincided with a nationwide economic recession affecting advertisers, fashion houses, and magazines alike (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). The extravagant clothes that *Vogue* produced under Vreeland ceased to appeal, while the paradisaical locations for photo shoots were far too expensive. Vreeland's lavish work habits could not be supported by a weakening economy, and her penchant to produce exotic and impractical clothing led readers to believe that she did not care about the "new woman".

Angeletti and Oliva (2006) also make a significant observation regarding the cultural fabric of the 1970s which gave way to Vreeland's demise: "[With] the message from the women's movement that fashion magazines were The Enemy, audiences turned their backs on *Vogue* and simply stopped buying" (206). Although feminists alike would regard this statement as all too simplistic, it is relevant nonetheless as typifying the role of *Vogue* and fashion in the lives of women during the 1970s. This period provides evidence to the ever-changing relationship and relevance of fashion in the lives of American women. Mirabella once again adapted the magazine to fit with the social and political times and therefore recognized the need to serve women. "Women [were] entering the work force for the first time in record numbers" and as a result "needed

something to wear” (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 206). Her proclamation to make *Vogue* “democratic” was a way to come to grips with the needs of working women “who had to look smart the entire day—at the office, at a meeting with lawyers, at a business lunch, at a cocktail party, at dinner” (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 213).

This was also a means of compensation, since *Vogue* under Vreeland had alienated women by focusing on fashion as fantasy and subsequently ignored their needs. Mirabella’s *Vogue* catered to these needs, making it a witness to the times, rather than a protagonist force (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). Fashion in *Vogue* remained elegant but fantasy gave way to ease and practicality. Mirabella herself widely endorsed the emergence of pants and trousers for women, and considered them the “masculine icon par excellence” and the “best symbol of the strides being made by women” (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 222). Her interests sided with working women and “the whole feminist gain of strength in those years” (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 225), exemplified by her belief that “A magazine with *Vogue*’s influence could and should commit itself to something that would improve the lives of women” (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 242). It is this formula that cemented *Vogue*’s circulation growth to 1.2 million, which, according to Mirabella occurred as a result of taking women seriously through fashion.

Adhering to the needs of women, Mirabella was inspired to promote issues regarding women’s health, in addition to their appearance and lifestyle. Her interests clashed with the economic interests of the magazine when she began promoting the negative affects of tobacco and cigarettes. Her advocacy with anti-smoking campaigns angered tobacco advertisers, and her refusal to endorse Christian Lacroix’s baby-doll collection in 1988 further illustrated a disconnect between the changing times and the editor-in-chief at *Vogue* (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). Creative Director Alex Liberman,

responsible for ensuring the success of *Vogue*, replaced Mirabella with Anna Wintour as editor-in-chief in 1988.

Wintour's appointment to editor-in-chief would illustrate the shifting role of *Vogue* from a passive position in the lives of female audiences to both a witness and an active participant in popular culture. Wintour's insistence, that *Vogue* should "reflect changes in fashion and society", as it "touches pop culture, art, politics, sport, design" (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 250), is a testament to this changing relationship between women and fashion. Upon her appointment to editor-in-chief Wintour revamped the cover of *Vogue*, using the entire silhouette of the cover model as opposed to just a portrait. Perhaps even more interesting, in regards to Wintour's *Vogue* debut, was the stylization of her first cover: a Christian Lacroix jacket, in all its crowing glory, paired with worn-out jeans and a fresh faced model.

Angeletti and Oliva (2006) identify Wintour's tenure as a period witnessing huge swings in fashion, from targeting a new class of yuppies from corporate America—men and women defined by work, money and conspicuous consumption—to reporting on designers that would later define the decade. Upon Wintour's arrival at *Vogue* fashion shows were very theatrical with shoulder pads denoting power, and the opulence of red and gold illustrating global wealth. This period would later be known as the designer decade as designers dominated the industry:

Armani dressed trouser-suited armies of upwardly mobile business men and women; Japanese designers stormed Paris with their asymmetrical, apocalyptic vision in black; Vivienne Westwood laid skirts about royalty; Calvin Klein stamped his name on underwear of the world; Jean-Paul Gaultier put Madonna in outrageous conical bras; Donna Karen perfected the 5 piece jersey wardrobe for the executive woman on the run; Gianni Versace glorified the hedonistic excess of an explosive and flamboyant fashion era (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 255).

Aside from the exuberant fashions leading up to the late '80s, Wintour's reign also coincided with the demise of the Super Model, the growing popularity of celebrities, and the move towards a minimalist aesthetic that would come to define the '90s (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006). This shift towards a realist approach to fashion is best exemplified by Wintour:

The move towards using real people instead of models began when the stock market broke in the early '90s, it was pretty grim. There wasn't a lot of disposable cash around, and fashion went black, dour, and minimal. It was happening and we had to deal with it (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 275).

Angeletti and Oliva (2006) provide few criticisms regarding Wintour's contribution to *Vogue*, compromising the validity of their investigation. This lack of constructive criticism could be a result of Wintour's collaboration with the authors in their historical investigation.

Faludi's (1991) work would go as far to argue that *Vogue* as a media outlet played a prominent role in the backlash against women's rights. The historical evidence put forth by Angeletti and Oliva (2006) would suggest otherwise, claiming that as a witness and active participant in the fashion industry *Vogue's* purpose was to report on social events and fashion designs that reflected the times. Under Vreeland, Angeletti and Oliva (2006) agree that *Vogue* was perhaps a more active protagonist in the construction of fashion design, while Mirabella's tenure at the magazine signified a period of passiveness that gave way to a liberated and active female audience. Wintour's reign, both authors argue, would combine these approaches and establish the magazine as an active entity in the fashion industry, but still very much a reflection of popular culture.

Angeletti and Oliva (2006) make a significant contribution to the investigation of women and fashion since their historical investigation demonstrates the ever-changing

and heterogeneous relationship between design itself and audiences. According to the events throughout *Vogue*'s publishing history, there is no *one* standard relationship between magazines, fashion and women. This interaction is subject to continuous change and cannot be reduced to a simplistic hegemonic relationship. Angeletti and Oliva's work (2006), from an historical and biographical perspective, include the cultural, economical and political history behind the making of *Vogue* and its evolution as a significant fashion and lifestyle magazine worldwide. This history uncovers the potential to interpret *Vogue* as a perpetuator of backlash. Nonetheless, if we relate the evolution of *Vogue* to the feminist movement and ideology we can see from the previous synthesis that a pro-active position has been developed throughout the history of *Vogue* in accordance with the changing needs of women. Therefore *Vogue* was not only a witness to the changes in American culture but acted as a catalyst in promoting this change.

Consumer Agency II

Camille Paglia's work in *Sex, art and American Culture* (1992) continues to shed light on the relationship between the fashion industry and its consumers, suggesting that women are conscientious and engaged in the realm of popular culture. Drawing from a compilation of theoretical thought, based on theories of anti-establishment and anti-feminism, Paglia (1992) believes that second-wave feminist critiques of popular culture, specifically fashion, originate from "old-guard establishment feminists", whom of which have a "sexual ideology problem" from a convoluted view of society (11). Academic and "elitist" feminists fail to acknowledge that popular culture originates with the masses. According to Paglia (1992) no individual can be coerced into finding music, art or fashion appealing. It is the widespread acceptance of these cultural elements in a social

context that creates the concept of popular culture, and anything deviating from this reality is simply “cultural snobbery”:

A serious problem in America is the gap between academe and the mass media, which *is* our culture [original italics]. Professors of humanities, with all their leftist fantasies have little direct knowledge of American life...But mass media is completely, even servilely commercial. It is a mirror of the popular mind. All the P.R. in the world cannot make a hit movie or sitcom (Paglia, 1992: ix).

Since consumers and voyeurs determine what is in fact popular culture then one can reason that their relationship with the power structures of popular culture is not entirely dictated. Applying Paglia’s ideas to the fashion industry, one can see that consumers have a significant influence over what is produced and what is successful in terms of design. Angeletti and Oliva (2006) also assert that particular media outlets, such as *Vogue*, are subservient to their audiences’ wants, needs and desires. These ideas point to an engaged, conscientious consumer and a customer-driven popular culture machine.

Mary Ellen Brown’s critical analysis of television production provides another perspective contradicting a condemned approach to fashion design and the industry itself. Challenging a cultural determinist perspective, Brown (1990) advocates for the benefit of cultural industries like fashion for its accessibility to women and their coverage of female-focused issues. Brown’s work in *Television and women’s culture: The politics of the popular* (1990) investigates popular culture as a vital source of information accessed by mass female audiences. In reference to fashion design, Brown implies that fashion magazines, and the designs encompassed in these publications, serve a crucial purpose as a relevant source of information *for* women on women’s issues. Knowledge and information are easily accessed through these forms of media, while concentrated coverage on issues pertinent to women provides legitimacy, self-awareness, and education. These elements have long been an essential component to establishing

women's equality, while a comprehensive network of medium directed towards women has equated to a forum for discussion and unification amongst many female demographics (Brown, 1990).

Employing resistance theory with evidence from popular culture, both Paglia (1992) and Brown (1990) argue that feminist identified sources of oppression such as the fashion industry, are misinterpreted. The fashion industry, as an aspect of popular culture, provides a starting point for resistance to oppression through the representation of women and women's issues. What's more, they reassert women's power in society by challenging hegemonic representations of women, further enabling female audiences to renegotiate identity categories of sexuality and gender. Forms of culture, including mass media and popular culture, not only provide inspiration for resisting modes of oppression, they are vehicles for reasserting women's command of society.

Brown's work mediates between a rejection of feminist assessments of media and culture and an acceptance of these arguments to some degree, demonstrating the complexity involved in assigning a definitive relationship between women and fashion. Brown's edited collection of essays answers a cumulative research hypothesis: contrary to television's status as a dominant force in the maintenance of cultural hegemony, forms of this medium can elicit resistive textual readings from female audiences, negotiating the roles of women *and* television in the maintenance of cultural oppression (Brown, 1990).

Brown's work bridges theoretical conceptions with practical examples from popular culture such as audiences and television programmes. This approach, encompassing resistance theory,

Addresses the issue of how ordinary people and subcultural groups can resist hegemonic, or dominant pressures, and consequently obtain pleasure from what

the political, social and/or cultural system offers, despite that system's contradictory position in their lives (Brown, 1990: 12).

Although fashion is largely constructed by male producers and fails to offer voyeurs the opportunity for "escapism", the physical act of endorsing designs both through physical clothing and the reading of fashion magazines constitutes an act of resistance (Brown, 1990: 36). This resistance is derived from renegotiating the relationship between the object-subject-gaze and the positioning of women's issues at the forefront of fashion genres.

In other forms of media, such as film, women are typically depicted as objects upon which the male audience gaze is focused. In rock videos and fashion spreads a new relationship between the performer/object and the audience/viewer emerges. The performer or model is no longer simply the object of gaze but actually returns the gaze, which is "characteristic of direct address" and actually undermines voyeurism and puts the character into a position of power over the audience (Brown, 1990: 103). Cyndi Lauper's music video *She-Bop* is presented in Brown's work as a demonstration of this assertion of power via gaze,

[Lauper] reads a beefcake magazine in her car before sidling up to the motorbike boy [insinuating to audiences that she is masturbating]. This constructs her as the active pursuer of her own desire...It centres pleasure within oneself rather than through the good graces of someone else (Brown, 1990: 110).

Aside from the re-negotiation of gaze, game show genres presented by Brown provide examples of how media targeted towards female audiences can eliciting resistive readings. This example is applicable to fashion magazines since both modes of popular culture embrace women's cultural forms. Game shows such as *The Price is Right* and *Family Feud* value consumer skills and the ability to understand and empathize with what

people are thinking (Brown, 1990), two essential elements in female-targeted fashion magazines. Not only are these skills rewarded within magazines like *Vogue*, but the act of broadcasting these skills as valuable “removes them from the sphere of the subjugated, silenced domestic labour, and repositions them in the sphere of liberated, acclaimed public leisure and fun” (Brown, 1990: 137).

Both Paglia (1992) and Brown (1990) have provided seemingly different approaches to understanding a phenomenal theme in this investigation. This theme is the relationship between women/audiences/consumers and the respective structures which produce popular culture into tangible and physical forms. The opposite end of the debate uncovers these structures as inherently coercive, forceful and misogynistic, while the two authors discussed in this section uncover the resistive potential and interchangeable relationship between consumers and producers. When applied to design and the supportive networks of the fashion industry these authors demonstrate that not one summation can describe its role in the lives of American women during the backlash period. Therefore to better understand the coercive relationship between fashion design and consumers an investigation of the physical and symbolic properties of clothing is required.

Rebellious design in backlash: Fetish

In an historical analysis of fetish subculture fashions Valerie Steele (1996) demonstrates the resistive potential of fashion design while simultaneously exemplifying the performative power of clothing. The transcendence of fetishized clothing into mainstream contemporary fashion and society demonstrates that fashion, like sexuality and gender, is culturally constructed through language to signify meaning. These

subjective properties of fashion demonstrate that the importance is not in the function of the designs themselves but the symbolic power they convey. Fetish clothing negotiates categories of gender, power and sexuality while continuing performance of unorthodox sexualities. The emergence of these styles into contemporary society is indicative of fashion's potential for resistance.

Fashion design is culturally constructed through language to signify meaning, and as such is constantly redefined. This is exemplified by the presence of fetishized clothing in the mainstream fashion industry (Steele, 1996). Steele (1996) examines the popularity of specific clothing designs such as corsets, stilettos and undergarments as historically and culturally rich (Steele, 1996). The corset has often been associated with femininity and more recently with women's physical and social subjugation (Steele, 1996).

Critiquing Faludi's (1991) work on the presence of backlash in the fashion industry, Steele (1996) objects to the argument that women were "laced tight" with corsets as a means of social control. Tight lacing, as a practice relegated to fetish subcultures, was by no means widespread (Steele, 1996).

Steele (1996) makes the distinction between ordinary "fashionable" corsetry and fetishistic tight lacing, the former as practiced by most nineteenth-century women and the latter performed by a minority subculture including sadomasochists and trans gendered individuals. According to the testimony of Fakir Musafar, a key figure in the world of body modification and corsetry, various motivations exist for donning a corset:

First...the 'corset nonconformists,' who want to change the shape of their body...and realize some kind of aesthetic ideal. Second...the 'corset identificationists,' who associate corsets with femininity and feminine undergarments. They are not necessarily particularly interested in sculpting the body but by wearing the corset they seemed to have a kind of gender transformation. Third are the 'corset masochists' who tight-lace to create erotic discomfort (Steele, 1996: 63).

The process of transforming gender through fashion illuminates the performative power of clothing. The physical act of wearing a corset does not make one a woman, but the various meanings behind corsetry signify an association with women's bodies (Steele, 1996).

Describing the various reasons for wearing a corset make explicit the fact that fashions are in no way universally meaningful. The tight lacing objectives Faludi (1991) associates with contemporary and historical fashions confuse fashion with fetishism. The difference, according to Steele (1996), is that corset-wear relatively disappeared from mainstream fashion by 1910 but still remains a permanent fixture in fetish subcultures today.

In a contemporary analysis of the fashion industry Steele (1996) identifies several key designer collections as evidence to the growing popularity of fetish fashion. Famed British designer Vivienne Westwood was heralded by *Vogue* for her 1985 collection of corsets that "push[ed] breasts up into a ripe cleavage" (Steele, 1996: 86). Westwood was inspired by the earlier versions of corsets known as 'stays', which supported the back and bust as opposed to cinching the waist. The designs were heralded for their visual appeal and symbolic power, instead of their potential to reconstruct women's bodies.

Westwood's corsets zipped up, were symbolically powerful rather than functionally sound, and were a far cry from the tight lacing bondage corsets donned by fetishists.

Jean-Paul Gaultier produced a similarly thought provoking collection in 1987, attaching projectile cone breasts to satin corsets (Steele, 1996). The popularity of these designs was made evident when Madonna donned a shell-pink version for her *Blonde Ambition* tour in 1990. Other influential designers such as Betsey Johnson, Chantal

Thomass, Christian Lacroix, Valentino, and Karl Lagerfeld have designed and produced corsets in this period as well, and by 1994 the corset had reappeared as both outerwear and underwear in mainstream fashion (Steele, 1996).

Gaultier's projectile breasts, criticized by feminists *and* fetishists alike, were considered "sexist" and a mockery of fetish fashion (Steele, 1996). Gaultier himself admitted that the collection was "a little aggressive", but insisted it was simply "a fantasy exaggerated" (Steele, 1996: 136). The projectile breasts are a satire of secondary sexual characteristics and are phallic in a sense. Nonetheless, the fallacy of the projectile cones contributes to the performative power of fashion, emphasizing women's breasts as a reiteration of gender difference.

Like Gaultier, the late Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace produced a seemingly controversial collection entitled "Bondage", receiving criticism from various minority groups including both fetishists and feminists (Steele, 1996). According to Steele's analysis some women took offense to Versace's "exploitative and misogynistic" S&M clothes while others regarded the dominatrix look as a "positive amazonian statement—couture Catwoman" (Steele, 1996: 164). Versace defended his designs on the grounds that women were strong, and thanks to liberation now have "the freedom to be sexually aggressive". The fashion press followed suit and according to Steele "actively embraced" the image of a powerful and sexy woman (Steele, 1996: 164).

Steele emphasizes two important aspects that make a significant contribution to understanding the performative power of fashion. First, the transcendence of fetish clothing into mainstream fashion was and continues to be considered "sexist" by feminists, while fetishists regard it as a "co-opting of radical sex by the fashion industry". The fact that both groups oppose this fetish-inspired collection suggest that mainstream

fashion lies somewhere in the middle between political correctness and fetishistic subcultures, representing popular culture and a broader audience. Fashion, as opposed to pleasing a select few, is reflective of the masses and society as a whole. Lastly, the failure of fetish subcultures to identify with mainstream versions of their fashion designs indicates the potential for fashion to signify a multitude of meanings.

Steele (1996) uncovers the symbolic performative power of fashion by associating the popularization of fetish costume with the connection of pornographic imagery and contemporary fashion, both of which foreground issues of power and sex. Steele (1996) attributes the popularity of fetish costume with women's "desire to assert themselves as independent sexual beings" (164). Her historical analysis of footwear fetishism explores the origins of the stiletto, and its association with femininity upon the more subdued fashions of men's footwear. According to Steele (1996) high heels have long emphasized women's bodies for many characteristics commonly associated with "feminine sexual attractiveness" are amplified with the adornment of a fetishistic high heel:

High-heeled shoes...affect the wearer's gait and posture. By putting the lower part of the body in a state of tension, the movement of the hips and buttocks is emphasized and the back is arched, thrusting the bosom forward. High heels also change the apparent contour of the legs, increasing the curve of the calf and tilting the ankle and foot forward, thus creating an alluringly long-legged look (Steele, 1996: 111).

Aside from the physical affects of wearing high heels, their symbolic power is significant in an American context. Steele (1996) argues that high heels are strongly associated with prostitutes, cross-dressers and sexually sophisticated women, while low heels have long denoted the absence of female sexual allure. Within fetish subcultures, both historic and contemporary, impossibly high heels are designed for inserting into the

fetishist's rectum. Fetishistic pornography goes as far to describe how heels are used by women to scratch, stab and penetrate men (Steele, 1996).

In a content analysis of footwear fetish magazines Steele (1996) uncovers correspondence from readers that illuminate the negotiation of gender and sexuality within fetish subculture: "The whole idea of a female wearing high heels is to emphasize her naturally dominant and aggressive personality", "The man who worships high heels is actually humbling himself before the superior sex" (Steele, 1996: 101).

Steele's (1996) analysis investigates the historical and cultural context behind fetish costumes to reveal that S&M practices make explicit the power relationships that exist throughout society. Fashions that signify unorthodox sexualities and genders of fetish subcultures are performative in the same sense as gender and sexuality within Butler's work. The distinction however is that fetish groups, according to Steele (1996) do not necessarily endorse the strict binaries of male and female under compulsory heterosexuality. In this regard fashion is a mode of performance, or a stylization, in that it does not operate to create strict binaries of gender but serves the same function as language in sustaining these categories. Nonetheless, fashion has the performative power to uphold strict binaries of male/female while at the same time making explicit unorthodox sexualities advocated by fetishistic groups.

The contribution of Steele's (1996) work to an understanding of the performativity of fashion is not necessarily in the functions of the fashions themselves, but rather their symbolic meaning. Returning to Vivienne Westwood's corsets, the purpose was not to achieve the same results as those who wear such fashions for fetishistic reasons, but rather to signify a similar meaning of "breaking taboos", challenging the "orthodoxy in dress" and "making a statement about how bad you are"

(Steele, 1996: 37). Furthermore, Steele (1996) critiques Faludi (1991) and Wolf (1991) for synthesizing fashion as a “beauty trap”, arguing that it is far too simplistic to characterize contemporary fashion as a backlash against independent women.

While many feminists identify the emergence of fetish costume in mainstream popular culture fashion as a means of backlash and social control Steele (1996) is quick to point out the apparent flaws in this assessment. She is skeptical of Faludi’s connection between the tight lacing of corsets as evidence of a backlash in the fashion industry. Faludi, like many critics, has made the all too common mistake of simplifying the historical and cultural origins of clothing (Steele, 1996). Citing the testimonials of male readers in the Victorian publication *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, Faludi (1991) misinterprets the directions to “lace her tight” as a widespread endorsement to exert social control over women through clothing (173). This particular publication, according to Steele (1996) was targeted to select groups, whom of which endorsed the practice of tight lacing for fetishistic purposes, and should by no means be considered reflective of fashion as a whole.

Steele concludes that the growing popularity of fetish fashions within the wider culture is directly related to the charisma of deviance in contemporary society. Following the events of the latter half of the twentieth-century, including the sexual revolution, the status of the “sexual outlaw” is widely admired today (Steele, 1996). Furthermore, the charisma of deviance is also a result of the recent “explosion of unorthodox sexualities” (Steele, 1996: 194). Steele offers several explanations supporting this claim, citing Poet Diane Ackerman’s reasoning why “sexual chic” and “perversion as fashion” are so popular. Ackerman attributes the popularity to American culture’s return to Victorian morals, which attempts to stifle sexuality and results in the desire to “act out” (Steele,

1996). In addition to this, Ackerman blames the advent of AIDS for producing a heightened sense of voyeurism in a time when sexual promiscuity is life-threatening (Steele, 1996). Steele (1996) does not necessarily agree with this reasoning but cites philosopher Herbert Marcuse as an additional explanation: “the perversions seem to give a promesse de bonheur greater than that of normal sexuality [because they express] rebellion against the subjugation of sexuality under the order of procreation and against the institutions which guarantee this order” (196).

Steele’s (1996) explanation for the growing charisma of deviance is devoid of conviction, yet the emerging popularity of fetishized fashions is all too obvious that a shift towards cultural/sexual exploration exists. Taking this into consideration when drawing conclusions on the existence of fetishism in mainstream popular culture fashion could indicate a period of social experimentation instead of panic and constraint as advocated by Faludi (1991) and Wolf (1991). In other words, the advent of fetishized fashion in popular culture may in fact indicate a move away from the performative binaries of gender and sexuality theorized by Butler, indicating the resistive potential of fashion design as an aspect of popular culture.

Addressing the appeal of deviance in relation to fashion is optimal when discussing fashion’s revolutionary leader French designer and couturier the late Yves Saint Laurent. His role as an iconic leader of fashion is very much relevant to the discussion of both subculture styles and mainstream high-end fashion. As a highly successful and most followed couturier Saint Laurent has reached the utmost in commercial success, yet demonstrates perfectly the allure of deviance in dressing through his own views and perspectives on fashion and style. In a documentary about his legacy and vision the designer conveys his passion for rebellious fashion (Baute, 2004):

What do you hate most?

YSL: The snobbery of money.

Favourite Colour?

YSL: Black.

Do you prefer beatniks to executives?

YSL: If I could start over I'd be a beatnik... Maybe because I've seen a lot and if I wanted to change... I missed out on my youth I'm sad to say.

You don't like bourgeois women?

YSL: No! I detest their humour, their transience.

Their taste?

YSL: That too.

How do they dress?

YSL: They don't, they're boring... The inevitable pearl necklace, a brooch pinned on them and that's it. And their hair—well-combed, well brushed.

Of course his desire to be a beatnik illustrates the appeal and allure of subcultures, for a successful and wealthy designer to relinquish his achievements to become a so-called social outcast is quite a feat. This desire to fulfill a deviant role is perhaps rooted in his aesthetic beliefs: “the word elegance is as outmoded as the word couture” (Baute, 2004). Aligning his values with that of France's own youth subculture—the Beats—illustrates further the significance of youth and street style as a source of inspiration in the realms of high-end and mainstream fashion while demonstrating the appeal of subculture style.

Steele's historical analysis identifies the transcendence of fetish into contemporary mainstream fashion, uncovering the potential of resistance within fashion design and contributing to an understanding of the performative power of fashion. As a non-verbal communication tool fashion works in conjunction with language to achieve performativity regarding sexuality and gender. However, it is also an expression of eroticism. This concept, contributed by Steele, establishes a third approach to quantifying fashion: that fashion is not significant enough on its own to convey meaning, but that it

must operate in conjunction with language to achieve performativity. Nothing conveys this more so than the use of fashion designs within various camps of subculture style.

Steele's work as a cultural historian, in conjunction with Faludi's approach as a journalist, and Wolf's sociological and political background contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the performative power of fashion design. Faludi (1991) and Wolf's (1991) proclamation of the social control achieved through fashion design provide a strong debate against Brown (1990) and Paglia's (1992) belief in the resistive potential of popular culture and sexual difference amplified through fashion, while Butler's poststructuralist philosophical approach calls into question the basic tenements of this debate (Jagger, 2008). Steele's fashion-centered investigation looks specifically at the popular designs of the backlash period and uncovers the various anthropological roots behind the designs that Faludi and Wolf leave out. Perhaps even more significant is the third position Steele brings to an analysis of fashion design and its relationship to women. Fashion as either good or bad is a far too simplistic measurement that the authors above make when attempting to synthesize the relationship between women and fashion in the period of backlash.

In addition to being far too simplistic, Steele argues against the cultural deterministic approaches that Faludi and Wolf make in reference to their respective analysis of the fashion industry and cultural constructions of beauty. These arguments fail to account for the various cultural significations behind fashion designs, which are critical in forming a succinct and accurate analysis of fashion (Steele, 1996). This triad position that Steele brings to the empowerment/constraint debate of fashion uncovers a more accurate depiction of the performative power of design, and exemplifies the communicative properties of clothing. Steele also presents the alternative meanings

behind fashions produced in the period of backlash, abolishing Faludi's indictment of fashion design and the fashion industry for exerting social control over women through clothing. Steele's work provides a juxtaposition to the various feminist approaches to fashion, representing the historical and cultural elements that are integral to an accurate analysis of fashion design.

Chapter 2—Research design and methodology

This theoretical discussion leads into a practical analysis of cultural productions that will help to determine whether women are empowered or constrained by fashion. A content analysis of *Vogue* magazine is performed, using the fashion encompassed in *Vogue* as the sole unit of analysis. The question behind this research was broken down into several more tangible measurements. In order to determine the relationship between women and fashion, through inductive and deductive reasoning, an analysis will be framed in reference to the criteria of equality outlined by the authors discussed above. Equality is broken down into more measureable aspects, specifically sexual freedom and employment equity, and examined in reference to fashion as a means to these ends. The presentation of work suitable clothing indicates that fashion, and the magazine presenting it, is aligned with the needs of contemporary women by providing them with solutions to their business attire needs. Sexual freedom is broken down into how fashion portrays women, or how it assists in the positive presentation of women's bodies, either as embracing sexual difference or concealing difference altogether.

These theoretical concepts inspired and produced the following measurable research questions: What is the ratio of exposed versus concealed bodies? Is there a distinctive presence of impractical work attire? What is the ratio of work suitable fashion to unsuitable fashion? Is Faludi's analysis of the fashion industry accurate in terms of the fashions presented to women? What is the frequency of masculine and feminine performative fashions? What is the frequency of subculture style elements?

Several prominent authors presented in this research have identified early to late 1980s as a significant period of time for the discussion of women's equality. Faludi (1991) pinpoints this time frame as a widespread backlash against the rights achieved by

women in the '60s and '70s. Several fashion theorists and historians discussed here have also shown that the '80s are characterized by drastic changes in fashion: from extreme opulence to an immediate streamlined minimalism following an economic recession of 1987.

To answer the overarching research question of whether fashion is a source of empowerment or constraint a content analysis is most appropriate for it allows for the objective identification of special characteristics of messages, incorporating qualitative and quantitative analysis to not only determine the frequency with which certain fashions are present, but to allow for an analysis of the characteristics in relation to fashion theory. Furthermore, a content analysis is aptly suited to an examination of *Vogue* for photographs within said publication can be transformed into text. Fashion has been effectively documented in magazines for over a century, and unlike newspapers fashion-specific publications dedicate a significant portion to the depictions of fashions themselves. The fashions shown in *Vogue* are clear and substantial, with a rich history of documenting fashion and a renown reputation as the most competitive fashion publication in the publishing and fashion industries, *Vogue* is an appropriate outlet for analyzing fashion in the backlash period.

A content analysis of *Vogue* from January 1985 to December 1989 provided a five year glance at fashion during the period of backlash. Volumes 185 to 189 were found at the Ottawa Public Library, and were available for public viewing. These magazines were examined at first glance to determine the sample's population size. With the unit of analysis identified (as the fashion encompassed in the photographic spreads), a tally was then taken to determine the quantity of pages dedicated to fashion per issue. Counting commenced two-thirds into each issue starting from "Point-of-View" (launching point for

fashion news coverage). The total number of fashion pages were tallied and recorded for each issue in each volume producing a total population size of just over 3000 from January 1985 to December 1989. In order to produce a reliable and valid sample from the population size an equation sample size ranging from 1000 to 10 000 required a sample of 10 percent. Therefore, 10 percent of a population of 3000 equals a sample size of roughly 300.

A systematic random sampling technique was implemented in order to identify pages for analysis. This technique required two components: that the technique would be systematic and random. For the sampling to be systematic an interval was determined based on the division of the population by the sample size (3000/300) equalling an interval value of 10. For the sample to be random a number was chosen without method. This number was 7. The value of the interval was added to the randomly selected number to guide the sampling process.

To account for the discrepancy of fashion pages between each issue, 10 per cent of each issue's fashion pages were analyzed using the interval and the randomly selected number. For instance, in an issue with 52 pages dedicated to fashion the selected pages for analysis were 7, 17, 27, 37, and 47. To further clarify, the pages selected for analysis were strictly the pictures of fashion, devoid of editorial content, while analysis was limited to fashion and did not include an examination of setting, context, or body language of the models depicted.

Population size = 3000+
Sample size (10%) = 300+

Interval = population/sample = 3000/300 = 10
Random number = 7

Once the data collection method and sampling strategy were finalized the research questions were then operationalized into twenty-three separate variables using a content analysis form. In order to determine the frequency and occurrence of any given fashion presented in *Vogue* twenty-three variables were constructed to account for each potential item, and were organized into categories or items of fashion to maximize the accuracy with which the items were assigned values, tallied and utilized with SPSS software. The variables are identified as follows: tops/short sleeve, tops/long sleeve, knits/short sleeve, knits/long sleeve, pants, skirts, dresses, separates, jackets, outerwear, footwear, accessories/gloves, accessories/belts, accessories/scarf, accessories/hats, accessories/handbags, undergarments/tops, undergarments/bottoms, swimwear, hosiery, jewellery/bracelets, jewellery/necklaces, and jewellery/earrings.

The categories listed under each of the twenty-three variables were assigned a number value correlating with the specifications entered into SPSS. In addition to the variables the volume and year were both assigned a number correlating to the data inputted into SPSS. For instance, the variable ‘dress’ was conceptualized into 10 items: evening gown, cocktail dress, shift dress, wrap dress, shirt dress, maxi dress, mini dress, sweater dress, sundress, baby-doll dress, and other. A value was assigned to each item for the purpose of collecting data into Microsoft Excel. Following the data collection, the results were then entered into SPSS and calculated to determine both the frequency of the items and the results of a crosstabulation between the variables and year.

Aside from the use of SPSS for quantitative data analysis, qualitative methods were utilized in order to account for the material composition of the fashion presented in *Vogue* as well as any association the fashions may or may not have with other factors such as subculture style, body-conscious or concealing fashion, masculine and feminine fashion, and functional or work suitable fashion. Distinguishing cases that resonated with any of the above considerations were recorded and later revisited for the pursuit of qualitative analysis.

Once the results were produced with SPSS software they were analyzed according to frequency and crosstabulation of each variable against each year. Charts were constructed from the crosstabulation data using Microsoft Excel in order to visually demonstrate the trends and results (be it either fluctuating or static data). The data recorded for qualitative purposes was then revisited and analyzed for its portrayal of the body, its function, its material composition, and its association with subculture style.

Determining an association with subculture style, perhaps less pragmatic than the other elements of investigation (namely the portrayal of the body and functional purpose), a synthesis of subculture fashion provided the required insight into classifying variables along subculture guidelines.

Punk style emerged from a social climate characterized by rising unemployment and disaffection in the mid to late '70s. Popular among students, this subculture was primarily comprised of youths who set out to shock and disrupt conventions of dominant and mainstream culture (Barnard, 1996; Buttolph et al., 1998; De la Haye & Mendes, 1999). Although Punk originated in post-war Britain, similar developments were emerging in the US, especially on the New York music scene.

Upon its inception, Punk style elicited fear in mainstream sectors of the population. As the decade progressed many aspects of Punk style were adopted by mainstream popular culture and eventually transcended into mass market and high-end designer fashion (De la Haye & Mendes, 1999). According to De la Haye and Mendes (1999), Punk had a revitalizing effect on Britain's fashion industry, and contributed to its re-establishment as an innovative source of youth style. Punk fashions include but are not limited to:

Painted leather jackets, Dr. Martens boots, studs, spiked hair, safety pins (also worn as jewellery), bondage trousers, PVC and plastic fabrics, ripped clothing, second-hand or thrift shop clothing, tight black trousers, mohair sweaters, chains, miniskirts, fishnet tights, stiletto heels, clothing adorn with obscene languages or images, rubber, garments affixed with razor blades (Barnard, 1996; Buttolph et al., 1998; De la Haye & Mendes, 1999)

Special attention is paid to the challenge that was posed to performative binaries of masculine and feminine by Punk style, especially with its focus on uniform colours and designs and generally androgynous garments.

Grunge subculture style emerged out of west-coast Seattle in the late '80s (though its popularity in mainstream culture is often relegated to the '90s). Characterized as a 'slacker lifestyle' among American youth, Grunge fashion reflected boredom and an overall dependence upon technology for entertainment. Dishevelled, lazily thrown together and unkempt looks are the mainstay of this subculture style. Associated with images of decay, poverty, and disaffection the emergence of Grunge style into high fashion "appeared to mock fashion from its site of privilege" (Gill, 2007). This satirical approach illustrates fashion as a site of resistance, playing with conceptions of gender and rebellion. Grunge stylistic elements include:

Homemade, customized or second-hand clothing, outdoor garments including hiking boots, layers of garments, heavy work boots, low-riding, tattered, washed-out jeans, flannel shirts, loose fitting t-shirts, rock t-shirts, loose and comfortable pants, army trousers, baby-doll dresses, cardigans, Birkenstock sandals (Buttolph et al., 1998; Gill, 2007; Oxoby, 2003).

Although the popularity of Grunge style did not amount to quite the same success or notoriety of Punk fashion, it is significant nonetheless. Grunge has its roots in the stylistic ideology of Punk, and manifests the same rebellious approach to dominant conventions and cultures. Furthermore, Grunge's birth in the late '80s demonstrates a rejection of the 'go-getting' ideology that characterized much of this period. Also, Grunge emerged in close proximity to the ostentatious fashions of the backlash period, suggesting that these fashions gave birth to Grunge elements of style.

Unlike Grunge and Punk, fetish subcultures do not have a significant place of origin or a specific demographic. Steele's (1996) analysis of fetish fashions demonstrate that these designs have a convoluted history, and rather than being fixed to a specific time and place, have actually spanned centuries in existence. Corsets and fetish footwear date back to the sixteenth-century, while the emergence of "second skins" evolved from the debut of synthetic materials from the mid-twentieth century, including rubber and polyvinyl chloride (PVC). The infiltration of high-end fashion by fetish clothing can in part be attributed to the popularization of Punk style, for this subculture utilized fetish clothing as a mode of mocking mainstream culture, including the use of bondage trousers and PVC. Elements of fetish style include:

Leather, latex, nylon, PVC, spandex and fishnet fabrics, stiletto heels and boots, hobble skirts, corsets, collars, full-body unitards, stockings, miniskirts, black lace, garter belts, synthetic pants, bondage clothing, chains, full-sleeve gloves, leather caps, harness boots, lacing, undergarments worn on the outside (Steele, 1996).

The emergence of Punk fashion is often attributed to designer Vivienne Westwood whose store *Sex* was primarily responsible for distributing Punk fashions to British consumers in the mid '70s (De la Haye & Mendes, 1999). It is not surprising then that fetish and Punk fashions are intertwined, nor that Grunge exhibits aspects of Punk style. The common thread of inspiration is difference and distinction from mainstream culture, and this is achieved through the performative function of fashion, and the existence of subculture styles in the backlash period. These theoretical and conceptual contributions can help in the readability and understanding of *Vogue* by identifying connections between subculture style and the high-end fashion contained in its pages.

Chapter 3—Findings and analysis (see appendices for reference)

Quantitative findings

Tops

Tops/short sleeve represent 14 percent of the fashion in *Vogue* from 1985-1989. This variable is broken down into blouses (26%), t-shirts and tank tops (24%), and shirts (14%). The most infrequent tops/short sleeves are evening and strapless (6%), followed by polos (2%). Tops/short sleeve fluctuate from year to year and remain consistent (22%) for '85, '87 and '89. Of the tops/short sleeve variable the most frequently presented item were blouses at 26 percent, followed by t-shirts and tank tops at 24 percent. The years '85 and '87 bear witness to a strong presence of blouses whereas '86, '88 and '89 feature more frequently casual options such as t-shirts and tank tops. The prevalence of tank tops indicate a tendency to reveal the body, but this tendency is by no means overwhelming especially in comparison to the frequency of t-shirts, which tend to conceal the torso and are more casual in comparison to the other items. Blouses, both more formal and work suitable, dominate the tops/short sleeve variable in '85 and '87, symbolizing a more formal approach to fashion in those periods.

Tops/long sleeves represent 18 percent of the fashion in *Vogue* from 1985-1989. This variable is broken down into shirts (73%) and blouses (20%). Seldomly presented tops/long sleeves are the evening and tunic varieties (3%). Tops/long sleeves were on the rise from '85 to '88 where they peaked at 34 percent. Blouses were the second highest top/long sleeve presented, occupying 20 percent of the fashion from '85 to '89. In 1989 the steady presence of long sleeve tops decreased by about 360 percent. Long sleeve shirts, including a collar, mimick the long sleeve collared shirts worn in menswear fashion. The prominence of this style in '88 could be attributed to a more practical and

functional approach to fashion, favouring sensible and suitable work suitable pieces while its decline in '89 supports a more casual and simplistic aesthetic that is mirrored amongst several other variables under investigation.

Knits/short sleeve represent only 3 percent of the fashion presented in *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989. Of this small percentage sleeveless knits were most frequent at 46 percent, followed by turtlenecks at 36 percent. Knits/short sleeve cardigans and crewnecks were seldom presented at 9 percent. About 10 percent of the fashions tabulated in this study included long-sleeve turtlenecks, comprising of roughly 60 percent of the knits/long sleeve variable. The significance in this finding is the design of the item itself: a full-length sleeve in conjunction with a high rising collar covers the neck, chest, and décolleté entirely. This design also brings focus to the face and distracts attention away from the torso. It completely conceals skin, and depending on the fit, can conceal shape. The most frequent occurrence of knits were the sleeveless variety at 46 percent, followed by turtlenecks at 36 percent. The year '86 witnessed the highest presentation of short sleeve knits at 46 percent followed by '89 at 27 percent. Interestingly enough, there were no short sleeve knits presented in '88.

Of the long sleeve knits presented in *Vogue* 60 percent were turtlenecks, followed by cardigans at 18 percent. Turtlenecks dominated the variable for every year examined with the exception of '89 in which cardigans were more prominent. What is significant is the prominent use of turtlenecks throughout the sample since they heavily conceal many aspects of the body, depending on fit of course. The suggestiveness of a turtleneck comes from the degree to which it hugs the body, emphasizing curves without drawing attention to secondary sexual characteristics such as the waist, breasts or hips. The shift from turtlenecks to cardigans in '89 could have demonstrated a growing preponderance

towards casual and relaxed pieces, and demonstrates the emerging influence of subculture style through its association with grunge fashion.

Bottoms

Of the entire sample, pants occupied 25 percent of the fashions. Trousers and wide-leg trousers consisted of 43 percent and 31 percent (respectively) of the pants presented in *Vogue*. Essentially over 70 percent of the pants worn by models in the pages of *Vogue* from '85 to '89 were trousers and wide-leg trousers. The distinction between the two was made in regards to the fit in reference to the model's body. Form fitting, or following a woman's waistline and leg silhouette, were recorded as "trousers" while a flowing silhouette with distinctive space between the model's leg and the inseam were indicated as "wide-leg trousers". Hot pants and jeans carried the same weight, about 7 percent of the pants presented in *Vogue*, and just over 1 per cent of the entire sample.

In 1987 the presentation of pants dropped to its lowest record (10%), a dip from 24% in '86 and 30% in '88. The most significant presentation of pants in '87 were trousers, followed by wide-leg trousers. In 1988 pants increased from 10 percent to 30 percent, demonstrating a 300 percent increase, and providing the greatest display of pants across the span of five years. Immediately following '87 (the year of the dress) pants made a significant appearance. Of these pants, 31 percent were wide-leg trousers while 43 percent were standard trousers, far surpassing other items such as jeans and hot pants (7%) and demonstrating *Vogue's* inclination for more formal fashion pieces.

The skirt variable comprises of one quarter of the total sample, or 25 percent of the fashion presented in *Vogue*. Mini-skirts comprise of 56 percent of this quarter, with knee-length skirts equalling 18 percent, and pencil skirts 10 percent. This is significant

for it demonstrates that mini-skirts (baring several inches above the knee) comprise of the majority of skirts shown within *Vogue*. These items of fashion are unsuitable for work, (depending on the hemline height of course), and furthermore suggest an overwhelming emphasis on legs.

The mini-skirt appears to have been the dominant trend over the five-year period, with the exception of '87, in which knee-length skirts provide the only real rival to the mini. In 1987 skirts increased 127 percent from '86, yet declined sharply by 311 percent in '88. This decline continued in '89 with skirts representing only 10 percent of the fashions, a stark contrast from '87.

Dresses comprise of roughly one quarter or 23 percent of the total fashion presented in *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989. Of this variable 32 percent were evening gowns, followed by shift dresses at 30 percent and cocktail dresses at 16 percent. The frequent presentation of evening gowns indicated a penchant for formal and Haute Couture fashion in *Vogue*. Shift dresses on the other hand provide a straight silhouette with no shaping and minimal leg coverage. This style emerged in the '60s but the same concept was shown in this sample with more adaptations including a more form-fitting shape. The frequency of the shift dress, as an alternative to separates such as pants and skirts, may be attributed to the silhouette it achieves which is similar to the mini or knee-length skirt. The cocktail dress, often shorter in length but still comprising of the same elaborate materials as an evening gown, is semi-formal attire, and its frequency in conjunction with evening gowns further enforces the ideology of formal fashion in *Vogue*.

The sporadic presentation of maxi-dresses, sweater dresses, sundresses and so forth indicates even further the projection of formal fashion at the expense of informal fashion. These dresses are relatively casual pieces, often not appropriate for professional

events, and the materials themselves take on a more relaxed feel. With less structure and tailoring these pieces are not renowned as high-fashion for more often than not they do not showcase tailoring and fabric selection. Mini-dresses also comprise of only .6 percent of the fashions presented in *Vogue* during this period. This data is compelling especially since the presence of mini-skirts was overwhelming. This suggests that the display of legs is limited to a combination of mini-skirts with blazers, blouses and outerwear, uncovering a popular combination of clothing in which the lower part of the body is emphasized, while the torso is concealed.

The largest percentage of dresses presented in *Vogue* occurred in 1986 at 26 percent, followed by 25 percent in '87. The sharpest decline in dresses occurred in '88, falling 400 percent. Essentially speaking, there is a steady but increasing presence of dresses leading up to '87, which then declines in '88. Evening gowns were prominent in '85, '86 and '89. Shift dresses in '87, and cocktail dresses in '88. This indicates a possible shift towards more casual dress in '87 and '88, with the display of legs overlapping in '86 and '87.

Jackets/Outerwear/Separates

Vests as separates were shown only 2 percent of the time. Waistcoats were not overly present either, indicating that a typical trousers-waistcoat-blazer combination was by no means popular during this period. Cumber bunds, present for only 1 percent of the study, further indicate that certain elements of menswear inspired clothing does not hold significant weight which may suggest that menswear is not a prominent influence on fashion in this period. However, other factors must be examined before reaching a conclusion based on relatively uncommon separates.

Jackets represent 29 percent of the fashion presented in this period. This is a significant portion for it is over one quarter of the sample. Of these jackets, 71 percent were blazers, 14 percent evening jackets, and 8 percent leather jackets. The popularity of blazers indicates that a significant amount of clothing presented in the sample were suitable for work. Shown in wools, tweeds and pinstripes with exaggerated shoulders and nipped-in waists, these blazers conceal a woman's upper torso, emphasizing the waist in some instances and concealing it in others while drawing attention away from the hips. Some blazers are shapeless, evoking a very menswear-inspired style. Furthermore, the frequency of blazers indicates a formal approach to fashion while downplaying more casual options like denim jackets, which were presented less than 1 percent of the time throughout 1985 to 1989.

The frequency of evening jackets illustrates a dominance of formal fashion in *Vogue*, favouring exuberant cuts, materials, embellishments and couture over more casual fashions. In addition to evening jackets, about 2 percent of the total fashions presented in the sample were leather jackets. Aside from the small percentage, leather jackets were the third most frequently presented jackets in the entire sample, indicating a significant presence of "second skin" in *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989 (Steele, 1996). Leather as a "second skin" (Steele, 1996) is considered a luxurious material yet has distinctively rebellious roots, demonstrated by its significant presence in fetish and Punk subculture fashions. Because of its raw edge and subculture connections, attributed in part by its origins as animal hide, leather is well adapted as casual fashion, and depending upon regulations, is often inappropriate for the work place. Aside from its cultural characteristics however, it is presented in a sophisticated manner paired with more formal fashions. Leather jackets were the third most popular style with the highest increase in

'87, the year of the dress and the year of "ultra-feminine" fashions (Faludi, 1991). This is a subculture element and is equally masculine, therefore its presence in '87 is relevant to an assessment of fashions for that given year.

Blazers dominated the fashion pages of *Vogue* in 1987, the same year that mini-skirts skyrocketed in frequency. The highest indication of jackets as a whole occurred in '88 at 24 percent (comprising of blazers, evening and denim jackets). A consistently high presentation of jackets occurred from '86 to '88, an increase of 116 percent from '85 to '86, and declining by 147 percent in '89. The significance of this variable comes from the items contained within it, particularly blazers which are synonymous with business attire and suiting and which provide significant coverage of the female body as a solution for work apparel. The presentation of evening jackets is also significant for they represent alternatives to evening gowns, or can be paired with more revealing fashion for more body coverage. They are often synonymous with the tuxedos worn by men on formal occasions and as such could provide a masculine-inspired solution to formal dressing.

Outerwear comprises of 16 percent of the fashion presented in *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989. Of this number fur coats appear 46 percent of the time, followed by trench coats at 23 percent, and short coats at 16 percent. Down-filled coats are most infrequent at less than 2 percent, signalling a strong relationship or theme within the magazine that coincides with dressing-up as opposed to dressing-down.

Fur as a "second skin" and status symbol is consistently represented in *Vogue* throughout this period. The rarity and cost associated with fur and the frequency through which it is presented gives further indication regarding *Vogue's* approach to fashion and the projection it wishes to parlay to women. The ostentatious wealth that synthesizes '80s fashion is perhaps epitomized in the significant display of fur coats. As a second skin or

animal pelt fur is often heralded in fetish subcultures for its mere aesthetic effect: the beauty, the cost, the feel. It is also associated with pubic hair, something that Steele (1996) links to Freud and his explanation for sexual fantasies involving fur.

The trench coat also makes a frequent appearance in the pages of *Vogue*, occupying roughly 23 percent of the coats presented. Trench coats shield the body from the elements, and are so named from their use as protective garments during World War I (Buttolph et al., 1998). The trench coat evokes a military sense of dress, something which fetish subcultures draw inspiration from. It is also a signification of business attire outerwear, which supports the dressed-up theme parlayed throughout *Vogue* during this period.

Fur coats comprise of 46 percent of the outerwear variable, followed by trench coats at 23 percent. The highest occurrence of trench coats occurred in '88 as well, a significant increase of 500 percent from '87 to '88, especially following a sharp decline of 300 percent from '86 to '87. This is also significant for trench coats are often regarded as menswear inspired clothing, and are very androgynous, for the decline and increasing in presentation in '87 demonstrates a growing trend towards feminine dressing, and an even more significant switch to masculine dressing following '87.

Footwear

Footwear is present in 40 percent of the sample. Pumps make up the majority of footwear during this period at 37 percent. Loafers come in at a distance second (11%). The most seldom shown footwear are high-heel boots (.7%), over-the-knee boots (2%), and work boots (2%).

The popularity of loafers and pumps demonstrate moderation and seriousness with the least popular footwear being fetish-esque high-heels, over-the-knee boots, and Punk and Grunge inspired work boots. This suggests that footwear is less inspired by subculture fashions than hypothesized, with the magazine presenting sensible yet androgynous loafers and modest yet feminine pumps as the foregrounding footwear choices for women. Dramatic or drastic footwear does not rival the much more subdued pump.

The greatest presence of pumps occurred in 1985 at 12 percent. Because footwear is widely accepted as essential the frequency across year is not significant. What is significant however is the sharp increase of pumps in '85 and '87. Following Faludi's "Year of the Dress", pumps declined by 200 percent in '89, with the magazine favouring an equally dispersed representation of high-heel sandals, loafers, trainers, booties, work boots and over-the-knee boots in addition to pumps. The emergence of casual footwear with trainers, work boots and the like perhaps represents a shift from feminine to more gender neutral footwear.

Accessories

Gloves are frequently presented as the go-to accessory for the era's silhouettes. Present 29 percent of the time from 1985 to 1989 the majority of gloves shown are made of second skin leather, followed by wrist-length gloves at 22 per cent, and opera length gloves at 16 per cent. What is significant is that each glove style is represented, including opera length gloves, which evoke both an evening-inspired look as well as a fetish subculture stylization. Covering three-quarters of the arm, opera length gloves also conceal the hands and wrists and are often used in fetish subcultures for dominatrix

costume, or more specifically to transform the body into an armoured phallus (Steele, 1996: 169).

Gloves were assessed as a variable, based upon the process of open coding, because of their overwhelming presence in *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989. Of this variable leather gloves were most prominent at 62 percent. The greatest occurrence of leather gloves happened in '85 and '86. The steady presence of gloves from '85 to '88 diminished in '89 by 180 percent. The decline of this particular accessory could further indicate a shift towards a more casual and relaxed aesthetic in fashion, or a freedom from the restricting bound achieved in part by gloves.

Belts in this study were divided into two items: the waist cincher and the hip slung varieties. The examination of belts in this study was to determine how, as an accessory, it assisted in creating a silhouette, either hour-glass with emphasis placed on waist, hips and breasts (a performatively feminine form), or a dropped waist, de-emphasizing secondary sexual characteristics and creating a more androgynous silhouette. Of the 359 cases under investigation belts were present approximately 20 percent of the time. The majority of the belts utilized were waist cinchers, occupying 91 percent of the belts presented. This indicates that a distinctive waist is the primary silhouette of the period.

In combination these two belts were most prominent in 1986 at 34 percent, a peak between the years '85 and '87 which saw both an increase and decrease of 160 percent. The use of waist cinching belts declined drastically by 31 percent in '86 to 7 percent in '89. The use of hip slung belts also declined following '86, returning to a standardized 1 percent for years '85, '87, '88, and '89. What is significant is that the use of hip slung belts remains seldom but steady across the board, while the waist cinching belt declines

drastically towards '89. What this indicates is that the hourglass silhouette achieved by this accessory declines following its peak in '86, while the shift towards a dropped waist achieved by a hip slung belt is more constant. This could also indicate a possible decline in regards to accessories—additives to the ensemble—favouring a minimalist and more androgynous silhouette. Faludi's "Year of the Dress" (1987) witnessed the first decline of the waist cinching belt by 169 percent, demonstrating a shift away from the hourglass performative shape.

The scarf variable is broken down into silk scarves (54%), neck ties (21%), knit scarves (18%) and pashminas (7%). The primary objective of this variable was to determine the extent to which neck-ties were present as an indication of androgynous and suit dressing. The majority of the scarves presented were silk scarves, followed by neck-ties. The greatest presence of scarves occurred in '86 and declined in '87 to increase again in '88. A sharp decline of 400 percent occurred from '88 to '89, demonstrating once again a shift away from addition accessories and favouring a minimalist aesthetic. Neck-ties were present in years '85, '86 and '88, with zero appearing in '87 and '89. Silk scarves, more universally performative than menswear inspired neck-ties, maintained prominence across the board until '89 with a decline to zero.

Of the hats presented in *Vogue* 27 percent were berets, followed by straw hats at 22 percent and evening hats at 19 percent. Berets were steadily shown across the period with the exception of '86 and '87. A gender neutral hat, the beret is often associated with Beatnik subculture from mid-century onwards, and has a close association with Parisian style (Hebdige, 2003). Its absence in '86 and '87 further indicate a prominence of ultra-feminine dress for these years. The most prominent hat in '87 was in fact the evening hat, associated with formal dressing and formal attire. The highest incidence of hats occurred

in '85 and '88 with significant declines in '86, '87, and '89. This data appears inconsistent with the fluctuation of other accessories and may indicate no pattern or trend.

The presence of handbags remains high from '86 to '88, declining 216 percent in '89. Shoulder bags occupy the majority of handbags presented (24%), followed by clutches at 20 percent, and totes at 18 percent. Brief cases, seldomly shown, were present for the years '85, '86, and '88, and were absent in '87 and '89. This again may indicate a strong absence of menswear inspired fashions in 1987 because of the predominance of ultra-feminine fashions. The sharp decline of handbags in '89 again appears to support a reluctance of accessories for a minimalist aesthetic.

Undergarments

Undergarment/bottoms were not a significant variable in this sample. Only one item was represented—briefs—which comprised of .6 percent of the total fashion shown in *Vogue*. However, of the undergarment/tops shown 50 percent were bodysuits, followed by chemises at 25 percent and bustiers at 15 percent. The presence of undergarments/tops fluctuates each year from '85 to '89. The highest indication of undergarments/tops occurred in '89 followed by '87, with bodysuits as the most frequent item for both years. This indicates a trend towards body-conscious clothing, emphasizing the female body, torso, breasts and hips and a streamlined aesthetic of '89, as well as a penchant for athleticism.

Swimwear was divided into two items: one piece and bikini. Of the swimwear presented in *Vogue* 54 percent were one-piece suits followed by bikinis at 46 percent. With the exception of 1985, one-pieces were shown more frequently than bikinis. The presentation of swimwear fluctuates from '85 to '89, with a significant increase in '89 of

approximately 230 percent from '88. An interesting blip in data suggests a move away from body-conscious clothing in '88 as the presentation of swimwear drastically declines by 160 percent (lowest point). This decline is consistent across more bodily-conscious items within undergarments/tops, skirts and dresses variables.

The significant distinction between a bikini and a one-piece is the extent to which the skin is revealed, a one-piece covering a woman's torso more so than a bikini. With the exception of '85 one-pieces are more readily shown. Because this data includes '85 and onwards one cannot see the trends for swimwear prior to this year. This may indicate a shift towards concealing aspects of the body yet emphasizing silhouette, and may reflect growing conservative trends occurring in the mid 1980s.

An examination of hosiery is furthermore integral to better understand the silhouette portrayed throughout *Vogue* and to better understand which parts of the body are being emphasized throughout this period. Hosiery plays a substantial role in the fashions from '85 to '87, after which its presence declines drastically by 230 percent in '88. Sheer hosiery is most popular at 46 percent providing a subtle sheen while ensuring a clear view of the legs. The second most prominent is opaque hosiery at 30 percent, which completely covers the legs with zero transparency. These two items dominate the hosiery variable up until '89 at which point leggings become the most represented forms of hosiery. A distinction is necessary for leggings are made of thicker more durable fabric, and simulate a cross between pants and hosiery. As a result they achieve the same streamlined covering of the legs but can be substituted in place of pants or hosiery to achieve a similar silhouette. Leggings are also a more casual option to hosiery as they do not necessarily require pairing with other items such as dresses, skirts and pants and can be worn alone. What is significant regarding the decline in hosiery and a marked increase

in leggings is again a shift in silhouette and a penchant for a streamlined and less-formal affect. Leggings are often comprised of lycra cotton blends and are not suitable in conjunction with suiting for business appropriate attire, therefore a shift towards this item indicates a more casual representation of fashion in '89.

Jewellery

There is a steady decline of jewellery/bracelets from 1986 onwards. From the highest presentation of bracelets in '86 to the lowest point in '89 there is about a 400 percent decline. Of the bracelets presented in *Vogue* 42 percent were cuffs, followed by bangles at 33 percent. The distinction between these two items is the fit, as bangles are wider in diameter and tend to hang loosely whereas cuffs fit snug to the wrist and have greater width. Cuffs are also frequently used within subculture styles especially Punk and fetish subculture fashions. Comprised of either leather or metal they achieve a bondage affect, binding one's wrists in shackles (Appendix B, figure 28, p. 121). The marked decline of bracelets/accessories in '89 further supports the idea that excessive items are relinquished for a more streamlined affect, supporting the emerging minimalism of the '90s.

Of the necklaces shown in *Vogue* 39 percent were chain based, followed by chokers at 29 percent. Because necklaces come in a variety of styles it was important to determine the material base or structure of the item and what look it potentially achieved. Chains, comprising of metal, evoked a similar style achieved by the use of chains in Punk subcultures, relying heavily on zippers, safety pins and studs for adornment. Chokers also evoked both Punk and fetish subculture looks, fastened securely to the neck achieving a collar, similar to that of an animal. The frequent presentation of necklaces in *Vogue*

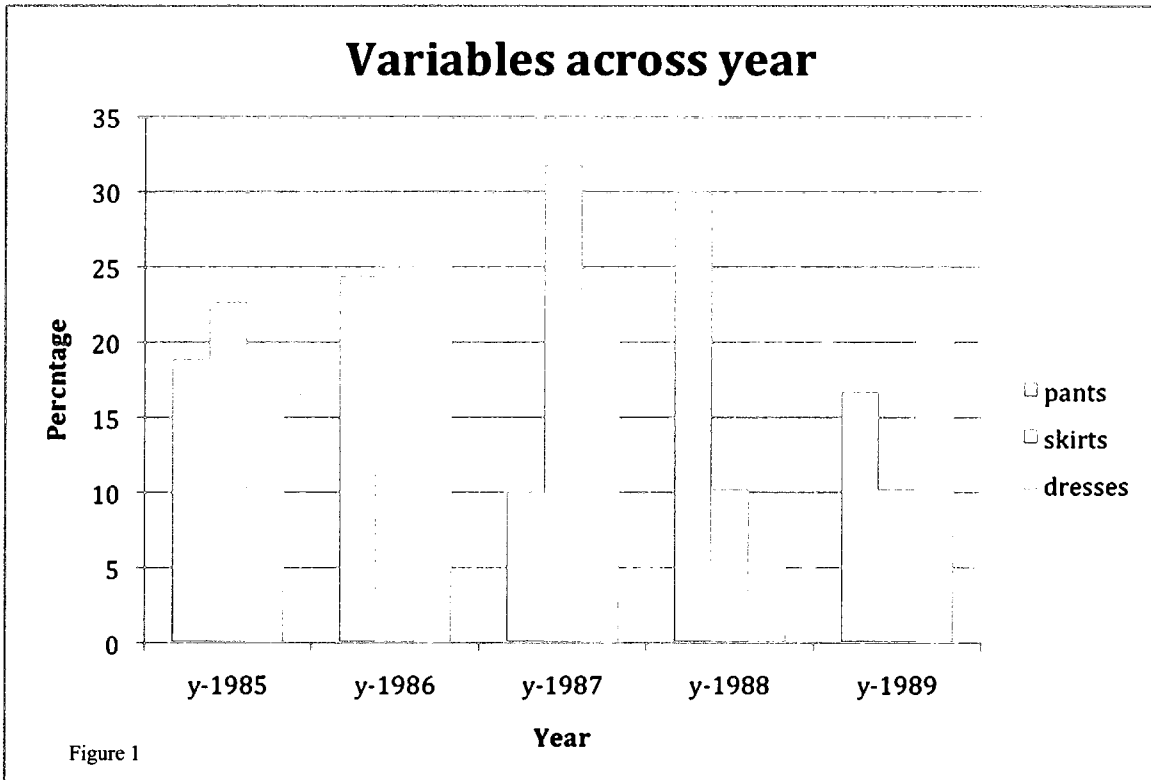
fluctuated from year to year with a significant increase in '88 and '89. While most accessory variables declined in frequency in '89 necklaces garnered significant attention (32%) that same year. This was the first increase of accessories for '89 and may indicate a shift towards the popularity of necklaces.

Earrings were examined because of their frequency during this period and for their performative function as distinctly feminine accessories. In '85 earrings were present in 27 percent of the fashions. The most frequently presented earrings were danglers (67%), so named for their departure from the lobe, followed by less-dramatic studs (31%). From '86 to '89 there is a marked decline in the popularity of earrings (246%). Again this suggests a decline in the use of accessories in *Vogue* favouring a more simplistic "less is more" aesthetic.

Identified as an ultra feminine period in fashion one would assume that the presence of earrings, particularly dangle earrings, would be paramount in '87 as these accessories would be utilized to enhance the performance of gender. However, a sharp decrease of dangle earrings along side a steady decline of stud earrings indicates that not every element of fashion is utilized in the achievement of gender performance. In other words, if the objective is to achieve an unwavering façade of femininity then wouldn't the use of distinctly feminine accessories like earrings be vital to achieving this image? Furthermore, this decline in the use of accessories with respect to earrings demonstrates a shift towards a less ostentatious style of fashion, favouring a more simplistic aesthetic.

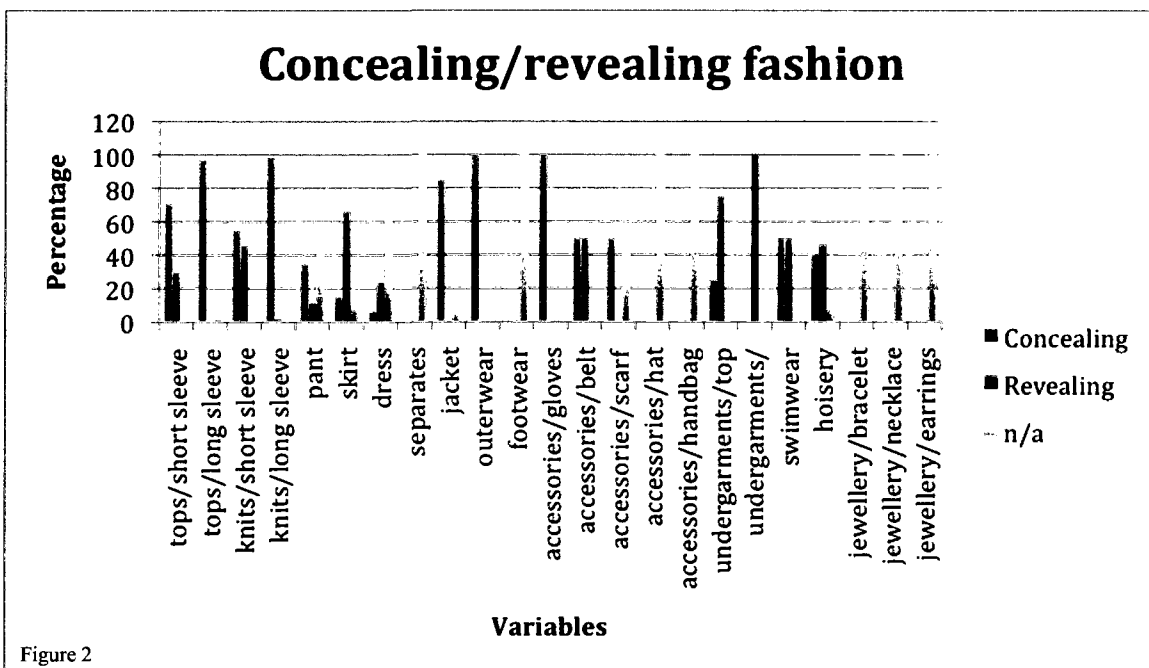
Quantitative analysis

Pants, skirts and dresses were singled out from the remaining twenty variables for their symbolic properties and their relationship to women. Skirts and dresses are associated with the female domain of fashion, and more often than not are exclusively



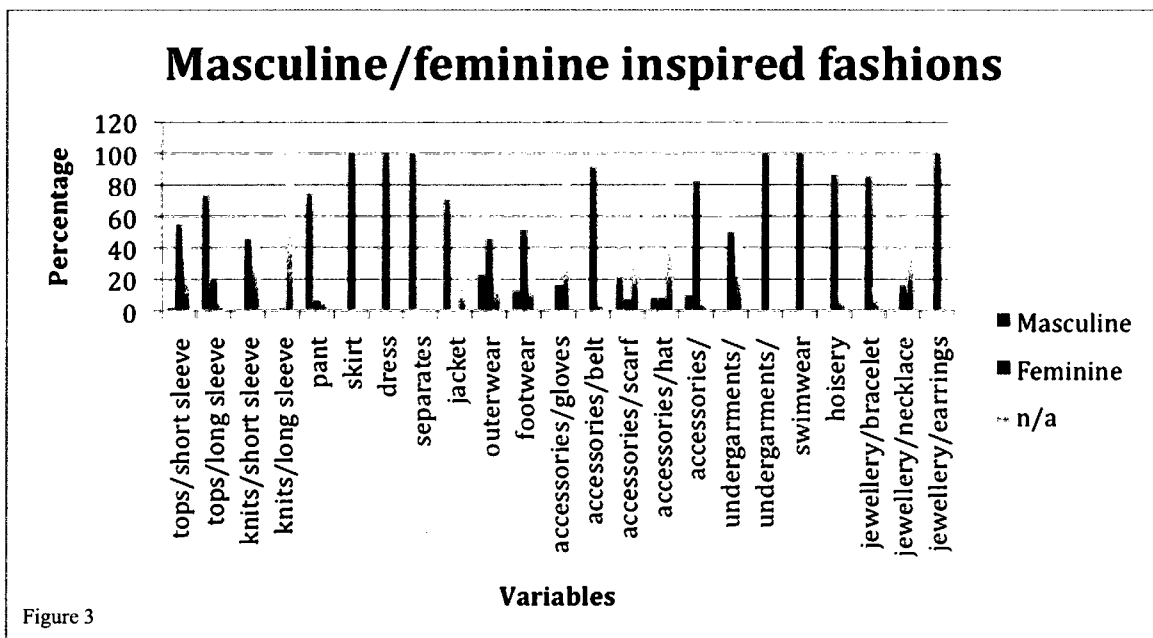
worn by women, while pants have traditional been relegated to men’s realm of fashion (Wolf, 1991). The revolutionary collection by Yves Saint Laurent was one of the first debutes of trousers and suits as a option for more formal attire, and came at a time when women were beginning to experience the fruits of their labour from the ‘60s and ‘70s Women’s Liberation Movement (Baute, 2004). This chart (figure 1, pg. 75) demonstrates the presentation of each variable across time, illustrating the fluctuating trends of each fashion, and showing when each fashion is most prominent.

Identified by Faludi (1991) and several popular culture outlets as the “Year of the Dress”, 1987 does infact have a significant presence of skirts and dresses, the former moreso than the latter. This is significant for it indicates that contrary to the supposed trends of the season skirts actually frequent the pages of *Vogue* more often than dresses.



What this shows is that aside from the fashions themselves the real significance lies in the silhouette that is achieved from both of these pieces. What is also interesting is the increase in frequency of pants following this particular year. In '88 pants were presented more frequently than skirts and dresses combined and is the first year since '85 in which pants outperformed dresses in terms of frequency.

What is also significant is the frequency at which mini-skirts are presented throughout this period of investigation. Mini-skirts make-up 56 percent of the fashions presented in *Vogue* from 1985-1989. This silhouette can by no means be classified as strictly feminine despite its relegation to women's fashion domain as material composition and fit must be considered in addition to its practicality and suitability for American women. The streamlined look achieved by the mini-skirt uses women's legs as the focus, bringing attention away from the waist and décollette (two traditional markers



of gender and sexuality). When paired with a blazer, turtleneck or outerwear the look is further streamlined to draw attention exclusively to the legs, demphasizing all other aspects of the body.

This analysis of fashion in relation to women was divided into three categories to determine the extent to which the fashion presented in *Vogue* concealed or revealed

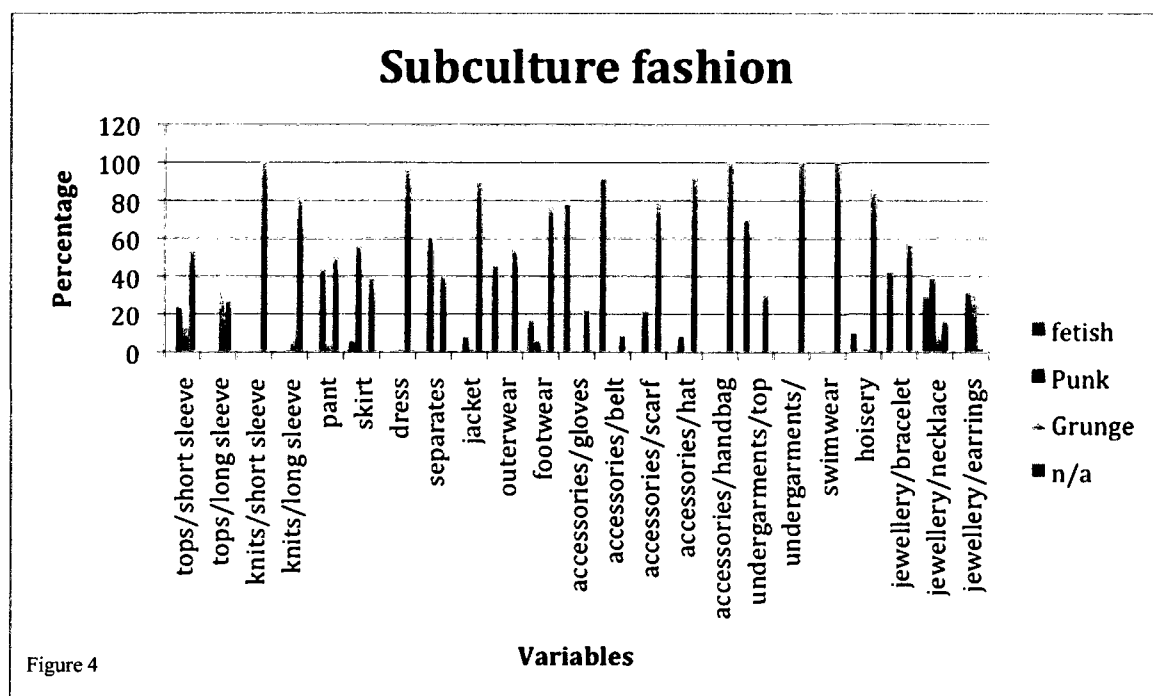


Figure 4

women’s bodies, or were entirely non-applicable. The objective of this investigation was to answer the research question of whether women’s bodies were on display, and therefore objectified, or whether they were predominantly concealed by the fashions presented in *Vogue*. This chart (figure 2, pg. 76) illustrates that between concealing and revealing fashion more often than not most fashion presented in *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989 served to conceal women’s bodies (38%) more so than reveal them (22%). These

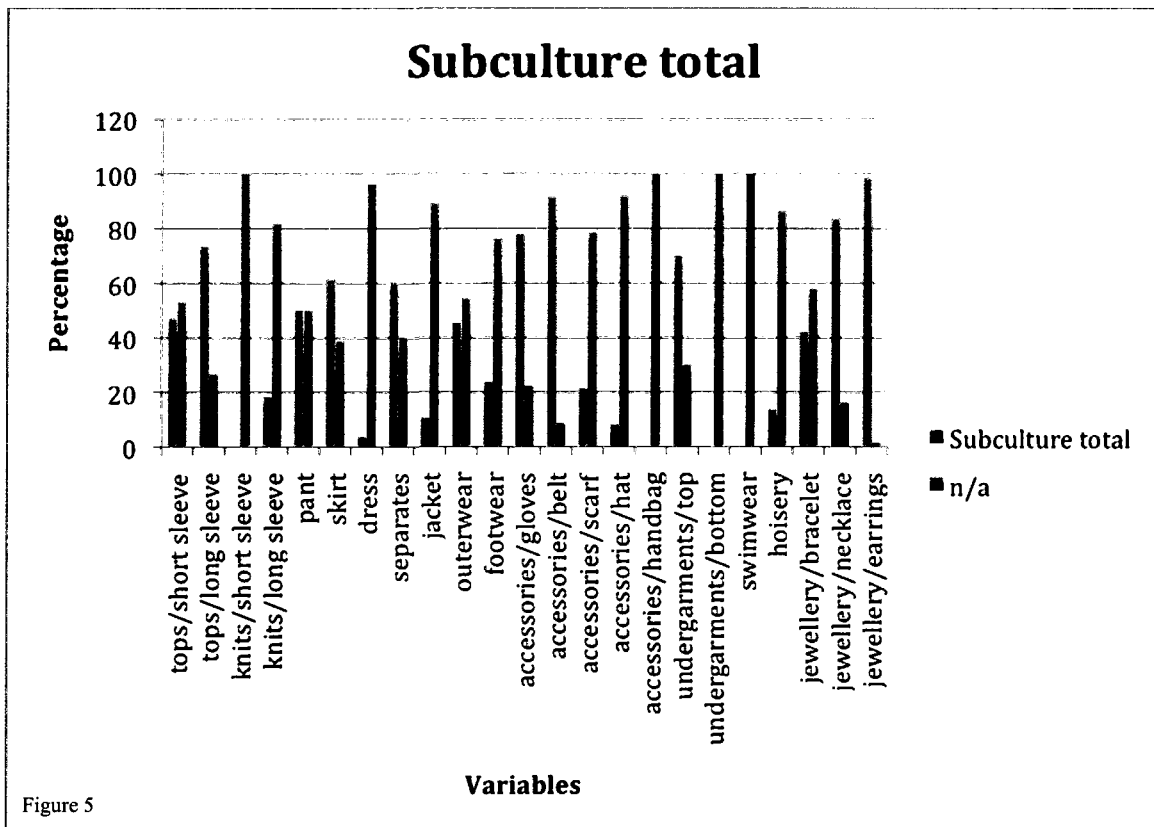
findings challenge the opposing perspective, namely that the fashion industry manifested in *Vogue* portrays fashions which objectify women's bodies, are useless in regards to function, and as a result do not serve women but rather constrains them.

The division of variables into masculine and feminine fashions served to illustrate the degree to which menswear-inspired fashions were present in the pages of *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989 (figure 3, pg. 77). Because *Vogue* is a woman's fashion magazine, and because women's fashion have an ingrained and significant history it is assumed that the majority of the fashions presented in *Vogue* would be performatively feminine. However, by charting the two categories (masculine/feminine) one can see the extent to which masculine-inspired fashions are present in comparison to feminine-inspired styles. With the exception of long-sleeve tops, pants, separates and jackets the majority of the variables contain feminine-inspired fashions (51%). However, masculine or menswear-inspired fashions still comprise of 17 percent of the variables examined and therefore can not be discounted. These results serve to assess the extent to which Faludi (1991) was correct and accurate in her analysis of the fashion industry and fashion trends in the late 1980s. According to Faludi (1991) fashions for this period were ubiquitously feminine, and further served to "reign [women] in" (Faludi, 1991: 172). What her analysis failed to identify were the alternatives to ultra feminine fashions that were also present in this period. The presence of menswear-inspired styles indicates that fashion is by no means homogeneous, and that assuming so fails to provide an accurate reflection of the industry during this period.

The division of variables into three distinctive subculture styles measured the extent to which they were present in the pages of *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989 (figure 4, pg. 78). Each item of fashion within the twenty-three variables was measured for its

association with subculture style. For instance, stilettos and work boots were recorded as having subculture style inspiration or properties, fetish and Grunge styles respectively. Of the fashions presented in *Vogue* 17 percent included fetish subculture styles, followed by Punk (13%) and Grunge (10%) subculture fashions, whereas 61 percent of the fashion did not have any subculture influence or association. Therefore, over one-third of the fashions presented in *Vogue* contained subculture style influences or associations. This is significant for it pinpoints the rebellious thread that is present throughout the fashions in this period of backlash.

This chart (figure 5, pg. 80) demonstrates the overall subculture presence in *Vogue*, combining all three subculture styles that were examined in this study to illustrate



the magnitude of their influence on mainstream and high-end fashion. Variables which contained the most significant amount of subculture influence or association were accessories, which were heavily relied on for stylization purposes during the majority of the years under analysis.

The variables within this analysis were also measured by their suitability for employment (figure 6, pg. 81). To answer the research question of whether or not fashion was presented in accordance with women’s needs (i.e. functional clothing for work), the variables were classified into two categories: work suitable or unsuitable.

This category of analysis served as a segue in answering the overarching research question of whether or not fashion is a form of empowerment. If the proportion of

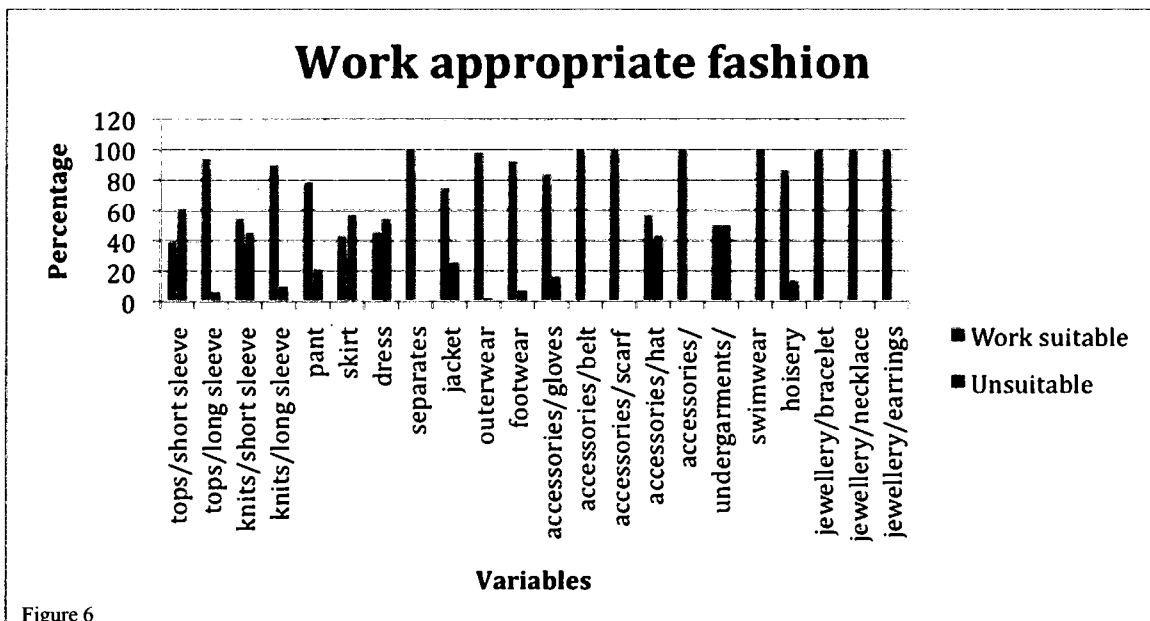


Figure 6

clothing presented in *Vogue* is a reflection of the time spent outside the home (i.e. based on a full-time 40-hour work week) then roughly one-quarter of the fashions in *Vogue*

should be work suitable. Following this rationale, if the presentation of fashion is a reflection of time spent in gainfully employed positions then the fashion contained within *Vogue* can be deemed empowering for it presents women with suggestions and advice regarding what to wear to work, and thus provides women with assistance for successfully achieving equality as set out in this thesis.

What is significant is the overwhelming presence of work suitable clothing at 77 percent or approximately three-quarters of the fashion presented in *Vogue*. The remaining 23 percent, as it should be noted, also accounts for swimwear. When assigning the classification of 'work suitable' or 'unsuitable' to each item within each variable several factors were taken into consideration: the extent to which the fashion revealed the body, the material composition, and the overall look the item would convey in terms of formality. For instance, mini-skirts and sweatpants, both under the skirt and pants variables were classified as unsuitable. The first because of the amount of leg the item displayed, the second for the informal look it portrayed. Each item under each variable was assigned a classification, and the results were tallied and analyzed in accordance with this procedure.

In order to pinpoint the shifting of trends with regards to fashion a synopsis was developed indicating the most popular silhouette for each given year (Appendix B, figure 1). Using this tool one can see that long sleeve turtlenecks dominated the knit/long sleeve variable for each year with the exception of '89, at which point cardigans became more popular (Appendix B, figure 1). This indicates a shift from the streamlined yet concealed look of the turtleneck to a more relaxed and less structured silhouette.

Trousers dominated the pants variable until '88 at which point both trousers and wide-leg trousers became equally popular. This shows a growing tendency towards a

looser silhouette that not only conceals women's bodies but more or less mirrors the trousers worn by men. Evening gowns dominate the dress variable with the exception of years '87 and '88 when shift and cocktail dresses become more popular. These more casual alternatives grow in popularity during the 1987 "Year of the Dress", suggesting that the popularity of the dress was more or less based on the casual and sensible (read: practical) option then the theatrical costumes scrutinized by Faludi (1991).

The growing popularity of blazers following '85 is another indication that a shift in priorities in regards to fashion occurred during this period of backlash. Prior to its rising popularity (1986) evening jackets were shown more frequently, suggesting that prior to '86 functional business attire gave way to more formal and less practical fashions. This shift in priorities and styles was also reflected in scarves under the accessories/scarves variable as knit scarves emerged in popularity in '88 and '89 when the presentation of silk scarves declined.

In addition to witnessing a clear shift towards more casual fashions '86 marks the emergence of the bodysuit in the pages of *Vogue*. The more embellished bustier declined in popularity only to make room for the body-conscious streamlined look of the bodysuit. This shift towards more casual, sportswear-inspired pieces is made explicit with the emergence of leggings as the dominant form of hosiery in '89. Finally, the prominence of one-piece swimwear from '86 to '89 would also indicate a shift towards more sporty and functional swimwear with the subsequent decline of bikinis after '85.

Qualitative findings and analysis

Of the three-hundred images examined in this study several examples were reserved in order to conduct a qualitative assessment of the fashion presented in *Vogue*. These fashions were examined for their material composition, function, relation to the body, masculine influence, and association with subculture style. Because of their qualitative properties many of these examples overlap. For instance, fetish subculture styles are strongly associated with the eroticism of the body, and as a result favour a body-conscious aesthetic that is equally pertinent to a discussion of fashion in relation to the body.

Subculture association

The association between high-end fashion and subculture style is a significant and frequently occurring theme in the pages of *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989. The three most evident subculture styles are fetish, Punk and Grunge. The extent to which these styles were present in the pages of *Vogue* was determined by the inclusion of one or more items which evoked their spirit. For instance, in this particular example (Appendix A, figure 1) the model is wearing an evening hat embellished with black netting fixed to the front, partially covering her face. This look reflects the gothic inspiration so prevalent in both fetish and Punk subculture styles, while the concealment of the face achieves a seductive yet mysterious allure. This stylization is far more subculture than ultra feminine, and is by no means demure but is actually aggressive.

The use of leather, fur, vinyl and rubber as second skin evokes a similarly exotic yet aggressive quality that is paramount in fetish subculture style (Steele, 1996), while the frequent use of second skins throughout the pages of *Vogue* demonstrates the

significant impact subculture styles have had on mainstream and high-end fashions. From this example (Appendix A, figure 2) one can see the extent to which leather is utilized to convey sophistication and cutting-edge innovation in fashion. The model is fully adorned in leather with a skirt suit, complete with a zippered jacket, almost opaque black hosiery, a high-collar black undershirt, leather boots, gloves, a croc-embossed leather briefcase and a gold chain bracelet. The zipper adorned leather suit evokes both Punk and fetish subculture style, while the notion of a concealed body plays with conventional and performative displays of gender thereby subverting traditional displays of femininity.

In another display of second skin, this particular model (Appendix A, figure 30) is wearing vinyl pants, an embellished blouse and several strands of pearls. This ensemble provides a mix between more formal, feminine and conservative pieces (i.e. pearls), and overt fetishistic fashion (i.e. vinyl pants). The combination of the two provides a unique balance or juxtaposition between hard and soft, traditional and rebellious, dominant and counter-culture. The vinyl pants illustrate how influence is drawn from subculture style and furthermore demonstrates how such sources of inspiration are utilized to re-work traditional fashion pieces. The refinement, luxury and conservative character associated with pearls is presented as young and modern when paired with the unorthodox choice of vinyl, long associated with second skin in subculture style. In this instance, mainstream high-end fashion relies on the subversion found in subcultures to be innovative and new. The mixing of the two extremes is perhaps more evident in later years of analysis (1989), and again is indicative of *Vogue*'s more casual and unexpected approach to fashion.

Another excellent example of the use of subculture style (Appendix A, figure 5), this model is wearing a black, sheer, zippered blouse over a black tank top in combination with a zipper-adorned shirt. Holding a zipper-clad motorcycle jacket in her

leather/stud glove-adorned hand, her torso equally speaks fetish and Punk style with her hip-slung and waist cinching belts heavily embellished with sharp metal studs.

This use of second skin in fetish subcultures is not restricted to leather, vinyl and rubber but also includes fur, suede and animal print fashions. Demonstrated by the use of oversized, ankle-length fur (Appendix A, figure 2) these materials make a frequent appearance in the fashions throughout *Vogue* and further demonstrate the heavy influence of subculture style in mainstream and high-end fashion. In this particular example the body is completely concealed by an oversized ankle-length fur coat. As an iconic status symbol this use of fur to conceal the body conveys several significant things. The emphasis on material rather than cut and fit demonstrates how fur is often used as an extravagant demonstration of wealth and prestige. Furthermore, as it conceals the body fur fails to achieve the performance of femininity or the exploitation of the female body. Rather than emphasizing secondary sexual characteristics fur simply masks the female form. This is illustrated once again in Appendix A, figure 20 which demonstrates how the use of fur is incorporated into fashion to convey wealth and prestige often at the expense of the female form. This look is significant for it incorporates both casual and more formal luxury pieces together demonstrating how fashion is hardly ever homogeneous. The addition of sturdy work boots incorporates both Punk and Grunge subculture style, while the fur exemplifies the luxury and formality in contrast to the more casual pieces such as the sweatshirt and knit scarf.

The use of animal print in this particular fashion spread (Appendix A, figure 31), accessorized with leather gloves and pumps, is demonstrative of the fetishistic qualities found in mainstream and high-end fashion. Animal print, similar to fur and leather, evokes the same exotic yet luxurious image so heavily relied on in fetish subculture

fashions. Latent with exotic connotations, and quite literally symbolizing the concept of second skin, zebra and leopard print are readily found in the fashions presented throughout *Vogue*. For instance, in this particular spread (Appendix A, figure 32) animal print is juxtaposed with an oversized man's cashmere cardigan, achieving a laidback yet avant-garde look. In this particular spread the significance is not the shape or silhouette of the body, but the subversive, unorthodox possibilities achieved by fashion.

The reliance on second skin in fetish subculture style is exemplified by the infamous dominatrix. Adorned from head to toe in leather, rubber or vinyl, she achieves a supremely phallic figure and makes explicit the erotic pleasures found in dominating the opposite sex (Steele, 1996). This look is achieved in part through the use of second skin gloves, usually covering the arm entirely or in conjunction with a leather, vinyl or rubber bodysuit. Adorned with elbow-length leather gloves and covered by a stud-embellished, black suede scarf, this model (Appendix A, figure 2) exemplifies the similarities found in subculture, mainstream and high-end fashion. This look includes both leather and suede as second skin, maintains a black-clothing palette consistent throughout fetish and Punk subculture styles, and furthermore utilizes fetishistic elements like full-length gloves to conceal the body. This is an example of the aggressive qualities conveyed through subculture inspired fashions, further demonstrating that fashion is by no means subversively feminine at all times.

What is significant in regards to the dominatrix style, aside from the inclusion of second skin material, is the silhouette that is achieved with these fashions. The shape and outline of the body is integral rather than the display of skin or the revealing of one's décolleté. The form-fitting pencil skirt combined with the black concealing turtleneck and waist cinching patent leather belt in this particular image (Appendix A, figure 6) hugs the

body and illuminates the shape. Her extremities are concealed with hosiery and gloves while simultaneously shackled in rhinestone encrusted jewellery and bondage-inspired stilettos. This look is entirely body-conscious, revealing no glimpse of skin but emphasizing all aspects of form, shape and silhouette.

This particular silhouette is shown on several occasions throughout *Vogue*, and is demonstrated here (Appendix A, figure 7) by the pairing of a form-fitting pencil skirt, turtleneck sweater, sheer black hosiery and knee-high black leather boots. Topped off with a floor length fur coat, leather waist-cinching belt, and black opera length leather gloves the model is covered from head to toe with only a glimpse of skin peaking through the sheer hose.

Leather, shearling and bondage-inspired cuffs shown in this example (Appendix A, figure 13) are reminiscent of the subculture elements that invade fashion as depicted through *Vogue* in this period. The full body coverage achieved by this look lends itself again to a dominatrix-inspired stylization, while the cinched waist and concealed upper body provides a subtle rather than overt sensuality.

Finally in this particular image (Appendix A, figure 18) the model is adorned with floor length fur, a vinyl mini-skirt and sheer black hosiery accented with gloves and over-the-knee boots. This particular combination is intriguing for it showcases the predominant silhouette of a streamlined bottom with an oversized top, de-emphasizing the traditional markers of femininity (i.e. breasts, waist and hips). The use of fur, vinyl and sheer black hosiery once again evokes several fetishistic qualities and presents a contrast to ultra feminine fashion in the form of sexually suggestive, edge-induced styles.

When discussing the close association of fashion in this period with subculture style a discussion of bondage-inspired fashion is very much essential. Revisiting the work

of Steele (1996), bondage-inspired fashion can include anything from cuffs to ankle-straps to extra fabric fastening a particular style to the body. Resembling that look of “tied-up” or bound is quintessentially fetish and widely endorsed by *Vogue*. Dressed in a one-piece, bondage-inspired swimsuit (Appendix A, figure 17) this model evokes the aggressive strength that is communicated through fetish subculture style. Additional straps and several detachable armbands complete this fetish-inspired look, demonstrating how such elements provide another level of interest to a traditional black swimsuit.

Aside from adding another element of interest the use of bondage-inspired fashions also presents a hardened and tough stylization that subverts the ultra-feminine and traditional approach to fashion. This is exemplified by the use of bondage-inspired accessories (Appendix A, figure 27). In this particular fashion spread subculture elements are paired with high-end, traditional fashion pieces like pearls. The fastened cuffs and chains evoke bondage dressing, but when juxtaposed against pearls, mitigate between fetish, Punk and more formal upscale fashion.

Bondage-inspired footwear is a mainstay throughout *Vogue* during this period. The oversized blazer and mini-skirt in this example (Appendix A, figure 16) is given an aggressive and sexually alluring stylization when paired with ankle-strapped and bondage-esque stilettos. When styled on its own the blazer reveals a provocative glimpse of skin, yet can easily be transformed for work-place appropriate fashion. Not only does this look clearly evoke the fetishistic style so prevalent in this period but the androgynous-inspired blazer plays with performative categories of gender, blurring the lines between masculine and feminine fashion.

Playing with the performative constructs of gender, fetish subculture often relies on the traditional notions of masculinity as a source of homoerotic pleasure (Steele,

1996). A significant element in fetish subculture is the uniform as it is often regarded as the epitome of masculine fetishistic fantasies and is attributed to cowboys, police officers, bikers and military personnel (Steele, 1996). In this instance (Appendix A, figure 33) the masculinity associated with cowboys is displaced onto the model using a western inspired suede coat, cowboy boots and jeans. The excessive fringe on the coat is fetishistic as the animal hide presents an aggressive yet luxurious façade. Furthermore, the jeans and cowboy boots provide a toughness that is often associated with blue-collar uniform (Steele, 1996), and when matched with the luxurious full-length suede coat, provides an interesting mix of traditional and subculture style.

Aside from Punk and fetish styles an additional subculture influence emerges on the fashion-scene towards the end of the 1980s, as formality and opulence give way to more casual and undone fashions. This laid-back, more deconstructed style really exemplifies the emergence of Grunge subculture style into mainstream fashion (Appendix A, figure 26), and is demonstrated by this pairing of Bermuda shorts, cropped top and flannel shirt, strategically tied around the waist. Crucifix accessories are again demonstrative of the same culture influences associated with Grunge subculture style (Rubinstein, 1995), while the shirt fixed to the waist evokes the casual mantra, almost *laissez faire*, that characterizes the late '80s and early '90s American popular culture (Oxoby, 2003).

Menswear inspiration

The adaptation of menswear for women is symbolic of women's career advancement and further demonstrates their successful infiltration of corporate culture. The significant presence of menswear inspired fashion is widely believed to have debuted

with the launch of Yves Saint Laurent's "le smoking" tuxedo collection in 1966—a time when women's rights were at the forefront in American politics and culture (Baute, 2004). Serious debate surrounds the use of menswear in women's fashions, and many argue that the successful translation of menswear into women's requires unique tailoring especially designed for women's bodies (Mower, 2008). What is undeniable is the significant influence of menswear inspired fashions in the pages of *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989. These fashions not only evoke an androgynous feel but also provide women with relevant solutions to their work wardrobes. One can see a definite relationship between menswear inspired fashions and work appropriate pieces in the countless examples presented below.

Material composition illustrates the significant presence of menswear in *Vogue*. Herringbone, tweed, grey flannel and navy colour palettes evoke masculine dressing and illustrate the countless examples of menswear-inspired fashion that proliferate the period. Comprised of neutral colour tones these materials are sturdy enough for suit construction and are worn by men in part to convey conservatism, tradition and authority (Faludi, 1991). Countless examples of these fabric combinations are presented in *Vogue*, as illustrated by this tweed suit ensemble (Appendix A, figure 19), complete with neck-tie, earrings, handbag and gloves. This menswear-inspired suit is complemented with feminine-inspired accessories, creating a significant juxtaposition between masculine and feminine performative fashions.

Another illustration is this a grey flannel suit, comprised of a double-breasted blazer, trousers and a high collard shirt (Appendix A, figure 21). The masculinity found in these fashions is overt and could be considered performative. As one can see, there is no distinctive presentation or focus drawn to the model's décolleté, waist or hips. The

look is distinctively androgynous. This image plays with the concepts of fashion discussed within feminist theory and renegotiates preconceived notions of strictly feminine and masculine fashion.

The grey flannel suit once again illustrates the magnitude of menswear inspired fashion, and is paired this time with a white collard shirt, waist cinching belt, silk scarf, earrings, bangles and a leather clutch (Appendix A, figure 24). Overall the look conceals the body and is professional attire for the American working woman. This demonstrates how well masculine pieces are adapted to women's bodies, and further demonstrates the successful incorporation of menswear pieces into the wardrobes of women.

The presentation of suits is paramount throughout this period in fashion. Separates such as blazers, trousers and neck-ties evoke a masculine look and are offset with feminine accents to achieve a balance known as androgyny. An excellent example of this is found in the combination of inherently feminine pieces with overtly masculine fashions (Appendix A, figure 23). This model is wearing a strapless cocktail dress, complete with pumps, sheer black hosiery and a double breasted pin-stripe blazer. The masculine connotations in this ensemble are overt, illustrated by the pin-stripe blazer inspired by menswear suiting. The body-conscious dress paired with the oversized blazer is an excellent juxtaposition of feminine and masculine, usurping traditional concepts of performative fashion.

The mixing of suit separates with unconventional pieces like Bermuda shorts is a continuous theme found in *Vogue*. In this particular fashion spread (Appendix A, figure 25) the model is wearing shorts paired with a collard shirt, neck-tie, waist cinching belt, sandals and a straw hat. Another instance of pairing shorts with more formal yet masculine pieces, this model (Appendix A, figure 22) is wearing trouser shorts, a collard

shirt and a trench coat, complete with earrings, a necklace and sheer hoisery. In both these examples the tie, shirt and trench coat evoke a masculine stylization, while the leg-barring hemlines paired with accessories present a more feminine performance of fashion.

The oversized silhouette achieved through suit dressing also plays with conventional notions of performative dress. The relaxed fit of a suit conceals the body and any markers of sexual difference (Appendix A, figure 8 & 9). In one particular spread (Appendix A, figure 29) three models are adorned in khaki-coloured suits, complete with white collard shirts, androgynous trainers, and beret hats. This example is quite literally an illustration of androgynous dressing, concealing all aspects of the body and pairing masculine inspired suits with unisex accessories. This theme of concealing menswear inspired fashions is explored again in two distinctive fashion spreads (Appendix A, figure 11 & 15). In both examples the models are wearing a combination of trousers, knitwear, collard shirts and long coats. Both looks are inherently menswear, with oversized jackets and masculine inspired footwear. Both models are completely concealed by the billowing silhouette of the fashions, which not only conceal skin but hide the shape and form of the body.

In each of these menswear inspired looks the notion of concealment is paramount and extremely relevant to the discussion of work appropriate fashions. The lack of body-consciousness found in menswear inspired fashions gives evidence to its suitability for work, and its overwhelming presence throughout *Vogue* suggests that fashion in the period of backlash is by no means entirely impractical or exploitive.

Body-consciousness/Body-con

To deny the presence of body-conscious fashions in *Vogue* would be a falsehood of magnificent proportions. In reality the fashions presented throughout *Vogue* from 1985 to 1989 are very much conscientious of the female body. The frequent occurrence of mini-skirts has already been established, displaying countless exhibitions of the leg, while the presentation of swimwear is very much a mainstay throughout *Vogue*'s publishing history. What is key when examining the display or exploitation of women's bodies through fashion is the extent to which it appears positive and/or liberating. Revisiting the work of Paglia (1992) helps to frame an understanding of what is in fact a positive portrayal of women in regards to sexuality. Sexual difference, according to the author, is a source of expression and freedom and should be embraced rather than discarded as an obstacle to women's equality. The role of the body in this discussion is vital, for it is the route to establishing sexual difference and embracing sexuality. Fashion that embraces or magnifies sexuality is therefore seen as positive, and is regarded as a tool for empowerment. The presentation of body-conscious clothing throughout *Vogue* is assessed with this framework in mind.

The emergence of the body-suit in 1986 epitomizes the body-conscious fashion that is prevalent throughout *Vogue*. Demonstrated in combination with leather and suede this body-conscious look (Appendix A, figure 10) magnifies the lower portions of a woman's body. The streamlined form-fitting fashion is offset with an over-sized top, bringing the sex appeal of this ensemble down to a more sophisticated level. The combination of leather, suede, bodysuit and oversized shirt gives this look a very fetishistic quality, while the attention drawn to the lower half is a very non-traditional

display of the body, focusing on the legs and diminishing the distinctive qualities of secondary sexual characteristics.

In another compelling display this particular model is wearing a sheer black lace bodysuit with a leather jacket wrapped around her frame (Appendix A, figure 14). The material is completely transparent and is very fetishistic, exemplifying a more aggressive take on sexuality portrayed in *Vogue*. This particular example suggests that the question of sexuality is not whether it is a form a negative conduct but rather to what extent is it portrayed as strong and assertive.

Discussion/Synthesis/Concluding remarks

Determining whether fashion plays a role of empowerment or control in the lives of American women was the overarching question that guided the research and investigation of this study. The operationalization of this research question into tangible and measureable variables required a significant amount of reliance on the theory and conceptual framework presented in the literature review. Essentially the relationship between fashion and empowerment or control can be determined by its functionality, its rebellious roots and cultural significance, its relationship to women consumers as one of agency, and its positive projection of women's bodies and sexuality. Each of these factors have been explored both in the literature and in the data collection and analysis, while several findings produced as a result of this study indicate an empowering relationship between women and fashion.

Perhaps most indicative of the empowering role of fashion in the lives of American women—through the lens of *Vogue*—is the discovery that 77 percent of the fashions presented from 1985 to 1989 were business-appropriate clothing. This profound finding confirms fashion's empowering potential for over three-quarters of the fashion presented in *Vogue* satisfied women's needs for work-appropriate clothing. The fact that over three-quarters of the fashion encompassed in *Vogue* was indeed work-suitable further indicates that catering to women's needs as active, engaged, and employed members of the public is a significant priority for the publication and the fashion industry alike. The importance of business attire in *Vogue* for this period is further magnified by the absence of casual or informal fashion. That is to say the disproportion of casual fashion against more formal and professional clothing solutions. In addition to the findings on fashion and function several other key results exist that support fashion as a

mechanism of empowerment over its role as a mode of constraint. These factors include the existence of subculture style and menswear influence, and a positive projection of women's bodies in conjunction with gender theory.

When considering the extent to which fashion serves as a mechanism of empowerment several considerations come to fruition. Namely the perspective that popular culture and fashion (and all that is entwined) is a source of resistance for women, based on its accessibility, the transmitting of knowledge, and the subject matter as dedicated primarily to their needs. With this approach in mind an examination of theory and literature suggests that fashion, entwined with culture, has some very distinctive rebellious roots. This notion of fashion as rebellion furthermore fuelled an investigation of subculture style, which produced the revelation that such styles are associated with, influenced by, and are a significant source of inspiration to the fashion exposed by this research.

The identification of several prominent subculture styles including fetish, Grunge and Punk resulted from subculture theory and coincided strongly with the period under investigation. Both Punk and Grunge subcultures were prominent in the '80s and '90s, while fetish subculture has shown to transcend time and space. Nonetheless, the existence of fetish subculture style was proven relevant to a discussion of '80s fashion by several academic theorists, and the association of sexuality, gender and the body in fetish subculture is even more relevant to an assessment of fashion and women through the lens of gender and performative theory.

Roughly 40 percent or nearly half of the fashion presented in *Vogue* contained subculture style association or influence. This magnitude indicates a sizeable presence of subculture style in fashion for the period under investigation. Although not as substantial

as the existence of business attire this finding indicates that there is in fact a connection between mainstream, high-end fashion and subculture style, thereby pinpointing fashion as a distinctive source of cultural rebellion.

An additional consideration included the presence of menswear—a reflection of both business attire and subculture style. Relevant to both categories under investigation and to Butler’s theory of gender performance the question of masculine inspired fashion served to highlight the existence of androgyny in *Vogue*. Business attire borrowed heavily from men’s suiting (fabric, cut, fluid shape and the de-emphasizing of the body) while cross-dressing and unisex fashions play with conventional forms of gender as a means of erotic pleasure in fetish subcultures. Approximately 17 percent of the fashions were menswear inspired, indicating that androgynous and unisex style composed of roughly one-quarter of the fashions presented in *Vogue*. This finding is significant for the popularity of androgynous fashion not only disputes Faludi’s indictment of the fashion industry, but indicates that the objectives of androgynous dressing—the challenging of gender conventions—run parallel to the customs at *Vogue*, a key player in the fashion industry.

Although this investigation produced several significant findings that are relevant to further studies in fashion and culture there are some limitations in terms of demographic representation that could potentially compromise its general application. The investigation of mainstream popular culture and high-end fashion through the context of *Vogue* could be deemed as highly irrelevant to other echelons of American society. Targeting “the rich, the very rich, and the super rich” (Angeletti & Oliva, 2006: 123), *Vogue* presents countless designer and high-end fashions that are not entirely

accessible to American women. Nonetheless, this investigation is concerned with popular culture fashion in the United States from a macroscopic conceptual level.

This investigation also has significant implications for the study of backlash in feminist studies. Linking feminism with fashion and the politics of Judith Butler has uncovered the potential of fashion as a means of communication. The findings and discussions presented here scratch the surface of this topic and by no means exhaust the various avenues of exploration in terms of fashion and performance. An examination of body language, set design, model demographic and other contextual factors would surely produce a multitude of answers regarding fashion's empowering role.

The performative function of fashion has long been understood as a projection of gender and orthodox sexuality. What this investigation has shown is that fashion has the potential to be equally performative of radical identities and sexualities just as it serves conventional notions of heterosexuality and the binary of male/female. While backlash was embedded in the conservative politics of the period (1980-90) fashion was acting as a kind of counter power, neutralizing the backlash response and promoting the visibility, advancement and positive portrayal of women. In this sense *Vogue* has been a catalyst for cultural changes and has collaboratively worked along side fashion design to give women recognition on a global scale.

This study has proven that an essentialist perspective regarding fashion fails to account for the historical, cultural, political and social implications woven into every garment. From its inception as a design idea or sketch to the sourcing of textiles and fabrics, to the making of a pattern and subsequent construction and fitting. Every step of the way there is a motivating factor driving design, whether it is satisfying consumer

demand or implementing an innovative image. For every objectifying fashion produced there is one of opposite proportions.

The significance of fashion design can not be denied, for it is reflective, forecasting, responsive, living and breathing. There is an entire industry dedicated to its survival, and it is essential to ours as human beings. Reduced to its most primal state clothing is an aspect of shelter, vital to our protection from the elements. It is no wonder that an appreciation for clothing and fashion has developed into a branch within academia. Fashion theory—in its most sophisticated academic form—can be found in the UK and other parts of Europe, with considerable progress made in the US and burgeoning success in Canada.

Furthermore a discussion is necessary to demonstrate the merits of this research for future studies. What does this research bring to knowledge and the field of academia? It bridges gender with design, history, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies thereby showing how something like fashion is relevant to every aspect of life. The same is true for gender and sexuality. Butler's discussion of gender performance aims to open up categories of sexuality from their preconceived naturalized states. When one brings this discussion to the forefront with something more relatable like fashion it creates discussion and causes individuals to re-evaluate their assumptions about each topic. Furthermore it injects creativity into the discussion of gender making the topic more colourful (literally and figuratively), and compelling. Because fashion does not often warrant much thought from some walks of life the pairing of these two topics not only bridges theory with practicality but bridges different cultural groups. Many are not able to view the world through a gendered lens, and many are not able to consciously

contemplate how they dress themselves at the start of each day, but combining these two areas of interest would surely enough draw more people into the discussion.

This is also true for academics and scholars. A gendered lens to view knowledge does not always apply while the discussion of fashion in a serious framework leaves little to be desired. When paired together this combination of gender and fashion not only makes sense but is very appealing. It takes the abstract notions of gender and spins them with practicality. This creative approach to examining gender demonstrates how something so practical and connective can be applied to more abstract and convoluted ideas. It encourages the creative use of resources, taking something deemed superficial and applying it to its polar-opposite like gender academic theory. When combined with notions of culture and subculture this topic surely enough presents an original approach to research.

This research also sheds light on the origins of design, uncovering the role of the designer, producer, promoter and the consumer of material fashion and can be applied to every design process. It demonstrates how the origins of a concept come from the combination of a well-attuned artist or creator, an inspirational audience with specific wants and needs, and innovations in the technology that result from this continuous back-and-forth dialogue. Understanding this relationship can help one better understand the creation process but furthermore gives us an accurate reflection of how fashion comes to fruition. Giving unsolicited authority to the role of the designer in the creation process undermines the role of the audience and consumer and fails to understand the significant power audiences wield. Needless to say understanding this relationship is relevant to areas of marketing, advertising, public relations, broadcasting and so forth as service providers must be attuned to their target audiences in order to best serve their needs. This

research also demonstrates how influential grass-root phenomenon can be not only in terms of fashion but in terms of culture as a whole. Faludi (1991) illustrates this best with her demonstration of backlash as spurred by various political and religious groups fearful of the advances made by women.

Both inside and outside the realm of academia this research encourages a look at one's immediate surroundings—to view all the intricacies of our environment. It truly inspires a questioning of the aspects of life we take for granted. Because fashion is perceived as one-dimensional and superficial rarely do people ever question its relation to culture, society and change. A parallel between the changes in fashion and changes in society helps to better understand how our world is changing. It truly is a mirror of social change and therefore should warrant further study and investigation as a cultural barometer.

What is also worth mentioning is the parallel between fashion in the 1980s with fashion in its contemporary form. There is a clear connection between the present day trends in fashion and those shown from 1985 to 1989. A quick glance at recently published issues of *Vogue* indicate that the swinging pendulum of fashion has returned to a similar time and space where subculture style reigns supreme on the catwalk and in mainstream fashion. What social, political and economic conditions foster such edgy and out-of-the-box fashions like Grunge-inspired torn denim paired with almost archaic pointed shoulders, fetishistic bondage-dresses and the excessive use of leather that would make Punks proud? Relating this question back to the literature of Hebdige (2003), Hall and Jefferson (2006) one can see the proliferation of subcultures coinciding with the breakdown of consensus in dominant culture.

An interdisciplinary field of academia, fashion is relevant to the study of women, communication, culture, consumerism and media, as well as foregrounding disciplines such as history, politics, philosophy, sociology and even economics. The association of fashion with “low” culture is furthermore disputed by the indictment of an essentialist perspective in cultural studies. The narrow-minded perspective, that something can be reduced to authentic or fake, high or low, art or junk, is readily found in the assertions surrounding fashion, especially in academia. This reality could change if we invest energy and legitimacy into the study of fashion, as it truly is an artefact of magnificent proportions.

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Appendix A

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27

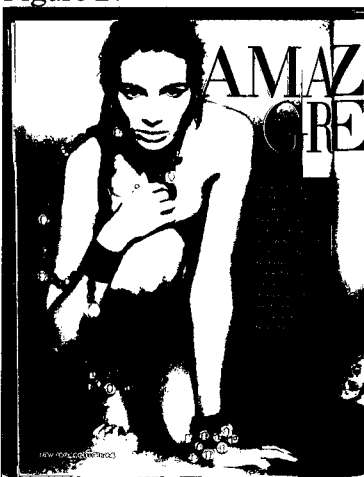


Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33



Appendix B

Figure 7

Variables	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
tops/short sleeve	blouse	t-shirt	blouse	t-shirt	shirt/tank top
tops/long sleeve	shirt	Shirt	shirt	Shirt	shirt
knits/short sleeve	sleeveless/turtleneck	sleeveless/turtleneck	turtleneck	n/a	sleeveless
knits/long sleeve	turtleneck	turtleneck	turtleneck	Turtleneck	cardigan
Pant	trousers	Trousers	trousers	trousers/wide leg trousers	trousers
Skirt	mini-skirt	mini-skirt	mini-skirt	mini-skirt	mini-skirt
Dress	evening gown	Evening gown	shift dress	cocktail dress	evening gown
Separates	n/a	vest/cumberbund	vest	Vest	cumberbund
Jacket	blazer/evening jacket	Blazer	blazer	Blazer	blazer
Outerwear	fur coat	fur coat	fur coat	fur coat	fur coat
Footwear	pumps	Pumps	pumps	Pumps	pumps
accessories/gloves	leather gloves	leather gloves	leather gloves	leather gloves	leather gloves
accessories/belt	waist cincher	waist cincher	waist cincher	waist cincher	waist cincher
accessories/scarf	silk scarf	silk scarf	silk scarf	silk/knit scarf	knit scarf
accessories/hat	beret/straw/evening	Straw	evening	Beret	beret
accessories/handbag	tote	Clutch	shoulder/sling bag	shoulder bag	shoulder bag/clutch
undergarments/top	bustier	bodysuit/bustier	bodysuit	Bodysuit	bodysuit
undergarments/bottom	n/a	n/a	briefs	n/a	briefs