

# Photography and fashion



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Fashion in Photography has established itself as an acute aesthetic while at the same time a form of advertising focusing primarily on commerce. The dual concern of fashion photographers to increase revenue for designers and clothing companies while at the same time to maintain artistic credibility, makes it an intriguing field. The converging of these two aesthetic has also significantly shaped the western ideal of beauty and success.

Photography and film both adhere to the laws of color theory, which are basically a group of practical guidances that involve color mixing and understanding the visual impact specific color combinations have on a viewer's perception. Where this requires a more mastery of craft on the behalf of a painter, digital photographers merely need to click a button, and hold an advantage in that respect. An example of the great effect digital coloring has on perception can be seen in the cinematography used in the film *The Aviator*. The film, which depicted the life of mogul Howard Hughes, was awarded for its artistic use of Technicolor.

There are many scenes in the film where the sky is made a slightly bluer shade, or the grass is made slightly greener, to correspond with wardrobe, or a character's eyes. An issue that is largely proclaimed as part of the reason for photography's decline in credibility is the ushering in of the digital era. Now that photographs can be digitally enhanced it has created an era where photography is not easily as trusted. Many critics feel photography has become just as fictional as painting. This is just a further complication during war time, adding to more political scandal and potential methods of war propaganda.

Many of the war time photographs of acclaimed photographer Franco Pagetti, who shoots for Time Magazine, have been praised as some of the best pictures of the past year. Despite this, many feel that his photos along with those of many other war time photographers fail to express as much as painted work. An example of this can be seen in the painting *The Third of May 1808*, by Goya. In the painting, Goya is able to personify the machine like nature of evil and its contrast with innocence through specific coloring, shading and the placement of characters.

This is something that is sometimes implied through real life situations, but can not always be captured as clearly in a photograph. This proves that paintings can do a better job of relaying metaphorical meaning. One advantage photographs do have over paintings is their ability to capture iconic images. Andy Warhol made a habit of painting franchise objects, like picture of Campbell's soup cans and Coca cola bottles. He argued that the American economic structure had allowed these objects to become iconic throughout the world.

A Coca cola that the president drinks is no different from one drunk by a homeless man on the street. This places the coca cola at a symbolic level of familiarity that is uncontestable by most celebrities. Warhol's artistic statement was noted and universally understood, but time has shown that the public rather see their human icons in photographs than in paintings. This can be seen in the popularity of celebrity magazines, Play Boy, Time, and National Geographic. Though it has become virtually assumed that photographs are touched up, paintings have a tradition of exaggerating images and making them larger than life.

Since celebrities are already deemed as larger than life, photos of them which capture them in real life situations are often more valued than paintings promoting the same theme. The value of these photographs has recently come into jeopardy through the use of digital interference, but this has just made authenticity the measure of their worth. Of course, it can always be argued that paintings are the ultimate signifier of celebrity, considering that Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa gained more notoriety through Da Vinci's artistry than through Lisa Gherardini's celebrity (the woman in the painting).

While photography has its grounding in the artistic world, and has for the most part been paralleled with other aesthetics such as painting and poetry, Fashion photography has a relationship with commerce whose effects are undeniable. Most often conducted for the purpose of advertisements or enhancing the mystique of fashion magazines, fashion photography has developed as a respected aesthetic in its own right. Both Konig and Kracauer reveal some important connections between women, fashion, and photography in Weimar mass culture. Fashion photography as well as advertisement photography bare testimony to a rather paradoxical cultural reality in which sociological, technological, and aesthetic aspects are hard to detach from one another (Geneva, 2). " Here Geneva basically argues that there relation between fashion and photography has allowed for a complex correlation between the ideal woman and the real are hard to disconnect.

This can be seen in the sociological crisis within western culture of how women become more prone to anorexia and bulimia due to an overindulgence of fashion magazines and an obsession to mimic the images

they portray. This also make them more inclined to become retail junkies, as well as develop a false sense of identity. She goes on to point out that in the late 1920's major magazine publications began to put pictures of attractive women on the cover of their publications to increase sales as well as compete with other journals.

As Geveva points out " As has been pointed out in many critical studies including Kracauer's, photography was the visual media that contributed most to the construction and proliferation of images of " modern women," and these images also were employed effectively in the competition among illustrated magazines (Geneva, 2). " Fashion photography quickly established itself a valid medium of photography based on the potential revenue and sales backing it. Magazines like Vogue ushered in an era of around the 1940's that is most commonly considered the golden age of fashion photography.

Vogue's June 1939 issue opens with an editorial by Edna Woolman Chase, accompanied by a photographic illustration, credited to " Baxter" but which bears many similarities to the work of a surrealist Artist (Crawforth, 214). " Karen Lehrman argues that contemporary fashion photography is in a slump and constantly declining. She points out how a 1951 Vogue cover by Irving Penn recently sold for \$28, 750 at an auction, but a photo taken by contemporary photographer David LaChapelle sold for \$3, 000.

Her explanation for this is that fashion photographers today see themselves as artists, while those of the past looked at their work as a means to a paycheck. When assessing a photograph taken for Vogue in a February 2008 issue, shot by respected photographer Michael Thompson Lehrman notes

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that, (Lehrman, 3). “ She goes on to claim that the other crisis in fashion photography today is a disregard of commerce; in this case, she refers to a photograph in the March issue of hip New York fashion magazine Paper where the photographer takes a picture of a woman’s legs in an attempt to sell shoes and barely captures the shoes in the frame.

The decline in fashion photography that Lehrman speaks of comes from a golden age in the aesthetic which is most commonly considered to be in the 1940’s and 50’s. Lehrman argues that, What made Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue emblems of visual sophistication during the '40s and '50s was their visionary art directors, Alexey Brodowich and Alexander Liberman, respectively. Both used only exceptional photographers and then set their photographs off to maximum effect with a generous use of white space.

Their goal was to turn the fashion magazine into a luscious exotic escape. (Lehrman, 7) The same sophistication that Lehrman claims revolutionized the western view of where photography could take fashion has found itself in decline in the modern era with enticing draw of commerce associated with tabloid press and paparazzi photography. The Source and U. S. Weekly are two major selling magazines in the U. S. They both have their respective markets. Both magazines target a market base of age groups 18-34, but The Source basically targets black males, while U.

S. Weekly focuses more on white females. The magazine has become the most respected name in hip-hop journalism. Upon first glance of U. S. Weekly, the reader is bombarded with images of fashion, stereotypical beauty, and often current scandals in the entertainment world. Glamorous ideals promoting the everyday lives of the wealthy, and advertisements

centered on makeup, lingerie, acne medication, and ads for television shows that are marketed to woman as well, make up the majority of the sponsors.

On the cover of issue 629 March 5, 2007, there were three main pictures on the front cover. One was of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie walking their newly born and adopted children in dual strollers through the streets; below this was a picture of a very glamorous and happy looking newly coupled Kate Moss and Owen Wilson, both with bright blond hair, shiny white teeth and blues eyes. Next to these two small photos, was a huge leading photograph of Britney Spears with a partly shaved head and a lead title statement saying, Help Me.

This cover page gives perfect insight into the magazines ideology, in that it shows what ideals the editors promote as well as what goes against their values. By U. S. Weekly degrading Britney Spears for shaving her head, as apposed to putting it in a positive light, or doing any genuine investigative/informative journalism on her motives, the magazine takes a definite stance. Using Spear's image in this way is a combination of exploitative scandal, and the magazines way of taking a finite stance against her fashion decision, but it takes it even further.

The fact that she cuts her hair is not treated as just a fashion mistake, but as a sign that she needs psychological analyses. Her personal and family life is put in question and she is virtually crucified by the magazine for simply cutting her hair. U. S. Weekly revolves around a foundation that is based on wealth. Britney Spears is heckled and exploited by the magazine due to her fame and wealth. If one were to flip through it they would find article titles

like: Star's Valentines day dates, Hot Hollywood Pics, and of course Inside Britney's Breakdown.

These articles are intertwined with polls done to estimate which photos of actresses men and women consider to be most attractive. These photos are used to promote excessively expensive clothing lines and glamorous lifestyles beyond the means of the reader, but the majority of these views promote capitalism. This is the main trait U. S. Weekly has in common with The Source. Though they may both cater to different demographics and emphasis differing cultural ideals, ultimately the magazines are tools of capitalism.

The Source is a full-color magazine that covers hip-hop music, politics and culture. It was initially founded as a newsletter in 1988 by Harvard college students David Mays and Jon Shecter. The magazine is currently owned by Black Enterprise Incorporated, and the current president is Jeremy Miller. If one were to open an issue of The Source, they would find many hip-hop critiques debating the best rap albums of the year, along with advertisements for expensive automobiles, Jewelry, and many pictures objectifying women.

The artists are depicted wearing millions of dollars in Jewelry, and sitting in expensive cars, are prime examples of the ideals the magazine attempts to promote. This is very similar to the imagery U. S. Weekly uses, except black males are seen in this magazine enjoying wealthy lifestyles as apposed to white females. The magazine does have an advantage over U. S. Weekly in that it has been declared as the source for insightful articles on Hip-hop music.



Perhaps the most ironic notion when considering the contribution fashion photography in such magazines as *The Source* and *Us Weekly* might be the idea that these publications will one day be viewed as historical relics, not just reflecting the changes in fashion over time but serving as a historically relevant interpretation of culture. In his book, "Printing History and Other History" G. Thomas Tanselle acknowledges the works of Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, the authors of *L'Apparition du livre* published in 1958, for the contribution to the study of print and photographs and their impact on society.

Tanselle says the authors find that, "the geography of the printing industry, the economics of the publishing business, the systems of magazine distribution, the demographics of reading, and the effects of book design on the reading process are primary elements in social and intellectual history (Tanselle, 1995)." This places the influence of print on society in the position of being something intangible without a clear understanding of the specific sociology and history from which each publication stems.

Tanselle further goes on to say, "history is a subject about which everyone seems to have a heated opinion, including the determination to ignore it. Fashions in the way history is approached are a product of history itself, with one set of attitudes toward the past, and the place of the past in the present, succeeding another (Tanselle, 1995)." Here Tanselle recognizes that history has an influence on the present; likewise, how driven a collected society is to uncover the truth within that history is entirely dependant on how their culture views the remnants of the past.

Remnants refers to, but not solely, historical artifacts. Tanselle argues that it is through objects that history is recorded and relayed to the public when he says, " Thus one may say that the study of human history is largely the study of physical objects, for the double reason that they both reflect and stimulate thought (Tanselle, 1995). " Within this understanding, fashion magazines are considered artifacts as well, but Tanselle points out that these artifacts would be of no values if they didn't have some form of text to create the image of a direct line of communication between the writer and the reader.

It is through print that the past gains relevance; and, it is through print that a scope of history is formed. In sum, photography and fashion are both two respected aesthetics whose interactions with each other expand the minds of the public while influencing it just as dynamically. Virtually all of the characteristics of women idolized by western culture can be attributed to the close relation of fashion and photography. Throughout the history of America, this has in many ways been both empowering for women and degrading. Most apparent is that the medium of Fashion photography is not going anywhere. It will continue to grow