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The Femme Fatale in *Vogue*: Femininity Ideologies
in Fin-de-siècle America

Introduction

A persona found in popular culture media and artworks, the femme fatale is an attractive woman, often a self-determined seductress, who causes anguish to a man who becomes involved with her. Sexual fatalism is often attached. She may appear glamorous or monstrous. The gender identity seems dissonant. Why does “the femme fatale” sell? Critical femininity studies pose an apt question in times of gender multiplicity and identity complexity: what is feminine? (And, what is femme?) According to feminist theory, femininity ideologies are ideas, norms, and restrictions on what constitutes “normal,” “acceptable,” and “ideal” womanhood. They are people’s beliefs about feminine attributes and behaviors. Prevailing ideologies vary according to the social and cultural context. Traditional femininity ideologies emphasize caring for others, being agreeable, and maintaining an “attractive appearance” (Curtin et al. 2011). Femininity ideologies translate to a heterosexual “sexual” script, characterized by availability, passivity, and objectification (Wigderson and Katz 2015). The femme fatale clearly disrupts this supposed feminine ideal, and reflects a patriarchal unease about female empowerment through sexual dominance or indeed female empowerment per se. Studies on masculinity ideologies in our field started to gain attention in the 1990s, and now proliferate in consumer research literature (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Coskuner 2006; Haase et al. 2016; Holt and Thompson 2004; Patterson and Elliott 2002; Schroeder and Zwick 2004). We think it is time to revisit femininity ideologies, and in particular new femininities and dissonant representations of the feminine in popular

culture media (e.g., Crymble 2012; Gill and Scharff 2011). Furthermore, we believe that there is a need for critical historical analyses on femininity in macromarketing.

The purpose of the current study is to investigate myriad forms of femininity as represented in the character of the femme fatale in the context of 1890s America, by conducting a visual analysis of femme fatale images in *Vogue* magazine. This study asks two questions. One is how femme fatale figures emerged and developed in U.S. popular culture media in parallel to those in Europe in the 1890s, where its imagery was used in poster advertisements as well as a motif of artworks. Another is whether there was more than one type of femme fatale figure in the media, and if so, whether a typology of the femme fatale can be developed.

According to Witkowski and Jones (2006), historical research in marketing may serve different purposes. Studies may address historical questions, such as why specific consumer behavior patterns originated, and how values and images in advertisements shifted over time (e.g., Belk and Pollay 1985; Minowa, Khomenko, and Belk 2011). Historical questions may entail how certain historical events, such as the war, affected consumer behavior and advertisements (Clampin 2009; Minowa and Belk 2018; Witkowski 2003). In these studies, understanding the past itself is the purpose. On the other hand, historical research can elucidate existing theory and contribute to the development of new theory (Hunt 2011). For instance, Minowa and Witkowski (2014) confirmed prior theory on consumption practices identified by Holt (1995) through examples from the Roman games, while Belk (1992) found five emerging themes of possessions in analyzing documents from the nineteenth century Mormon migration. It is also possible that a historical study might accomplish both historical and theoretical ends. The meaning of the past would serve as the source of the present (Witkowski and Jones 2006).

The significance of the topic, the femme fatale in 1890s American popular culture media, seems clear. While there has been ample research on femme fatales in popular culture and literature, very few studies on the representations of femme fatales and related images in popular culture media exist in marketing. Brown, Stevens, and Maclaran (1999) provide the gendered reading of postmodern advertising with a female model, the temptress, and derivative of the fin-de-siècle artwork of Mucha. While they discuss its chronological traits as part of postmodernism, their work is not an historical study. Witkowski (2004) engages in a visual analysis of American female consumers who exercised consumer agency as a female prerogative and responsibility in the mid-19th century. But the focus is the history of gender roles and agency in household consumption. On the other hand, while Scanlon (2013) studies the New Woman emphasizing the importance of late 19th century and early 20th century American history, the research is about the contributions of women in advertising agencies, and not the image of those women in popular culture media. Min (2013) also provides historical studies on New Women who were under the influence of Western feminism and advocated free love and marriage, and the elimination of the ideology of feminine chastity. Min's (2013) study pertains solely to 1920s and 1930s Seoul, however.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The remainder of the paper is organized in the following order. First, we discuss a definition and historical odyssey of the femme fatale in 19th century Britain and Europe, and America. Second, we provide a brief history of the target audience of American *Vogue*, elite urban women consumers in 1890s New York and New England, to situate the context of our

study. This section is divided into discussions on: 1) women in Gilded Age America; 2) gender, class, and consumer agency in New York City, and; 3) the rise of New Woman in the 1890s. We assume that images in popular culture media mirror the sociocultural context, namely —trends and aspects of U.S. society. A chronology of events in 1890s America is summarized in Table 1. Next, in the methods section, the data source and analytical methods are discussed. Then, in the femme fatale in *Vogue* section, after a short introduction, we propose emergent femme fatale archetypes based on representations of femme aspirations and its utilizations. Depending on whether the directionality of their empowerment and aspirations is outer-focused or inner-focused, and its utilization is pecuniary or sexual, we propose four types of femme fatale: Diana, Venus, Amazon, and Sappho (Figure 1). Each section provides a succinct definition of these archetypes. The paper ends with implications of the femme fatale in *Vogue* for historical inquiries in gender, marketing and consumer behavior.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Femme Fatale

The subject of this study, the femme fatale, is defined as “an attractive and seductive woman, especially one who will ultimately cause distress to a man who becomes involved with her” (OED). Howard and Kopalyan (2016) and Simkin (2014) include sexual attractiveness that is used to exercise power over men, while Allen (1984) adds eroticism and exoticism, as well as self-determinedness and independence, as characteristics of the femme fatale. The femme fatale is often called a seductress, temptress, sorceress, and is compared to such biblical personae as Eve, Lilith, Salome, Delilah, Judith, and Jezebel, and mythological figures such as Medea,

Medusa, Circe, and Clytemnestra (Luczynska-Holdys 2013) (Figure 2). Real or fictional women of power, such as Cleopatra and Salammbô, are another type of the femme fatale. Monstrous seductresses, a further variant of the femme fatale, are represented as vampire and siren personified (Dijkstra 1986). Without the sexual fatalism attached to the femme fatale, another type, the New Woman—educated, self-supporting, and contestant of dominant sexual morality—emerged as a result of changing socioeconomic conditions, and newly founded women’s colleges and educational opportunities, in the 19th century, both in the U.S. (Evans 1997) and in the UK (Stott 1992). Much like the femme fatale, the New Woman disrupted the dominant ideology and traditional, patriarchal norms in relation to what women should be. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the popular imagination these two powerful tropes overlapped and intertwined to produce a myriad of possibilities in relation to ideal femininity, new forms of femininity, and how these might be represented in the media.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

In the second half of the 19th century, there was a profusion of femme fatales imagery in European literature and art (Bade 1979). Some works are apparently related to the rise of the New Woman. Femme fatale representations in 19th century England range from enchantress to muse, the beauty and terror of the female sublime, demons, and so forth, proliferated in the literary works of John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Algernon Charles Swinburne. There is a profusion of artworks with femme fatale imagery by the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers. Rossetti is considered responsible for promulgating the image of a man entrapped in a woman’s long hair (Bate 1979). He created a prototype of the femme fatale

expressed as languished, self-absorbed, and melancholic. The characterizations are manifest in the works of his followers, such as Edward Coley Burne-Jones's (1873-5) *Laus Veneris* based on Swinburne's (1966/2011) poem.

Another follower of the Pre-Raphaelites, John William Waterhouse (1893) depicted a young enchantress in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, inspired by Keats' (1819/2014) ballad. These women are represented, as Swinburne (1866/2011) sung in his *Satia Te Sanguine*, "crueler... than hatred, hunger, or death; and [they] have eyes and breasts like a dove, who kill men's hearts with a breath." In the 1890s, the femme fatale, a popular theme of the "Naughty Nineties"—a decade of diverse concerns about sex and gender, and a period of restlessness in Britain (Hall 2013)—transforms to de-aestheticized misogynic expressions, exemplified by Aubrey Beardsley's (1894) illustrations for *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde (Figure 3). His other femme fatales are infused with decadence and exotic, and erotic, elements borrowed from Japanese woodprints (Calloway 1998). It must be noted, however, that the term femme fatale did not appear in England until 1912 in the letter by George Bernard Shaw (Braun 2012).

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

Femme fatale representations in 19th century France may be traced to the literary works of Balzac, who popularized the term *fille d'Eve*, or "daughter of Eve," after the title of his book, a metaphor for fallen women (Menon 2006). Meanwhile, images of animalized, serpentine portrayals of women proliferated in popular culture media. Guy de Maupassant (1881/2004) in his short story, *Femme Fatale* (originally titled *La Femme de Paul*), conceptualized another variant: non-heterosexual women whose "unnaturalness" drove men to death. In visual art, the

Symbolist artists used the lascivious femme fatale, entangled with huge snakes, to personify maladies, such as death, disease, and vice (Bade 1979). The celebrated Symbolist Gustave Moreau's misogynic, macabre fantasies manifested in *Salome* and *Oedipus and Sphinx*. His writings show his fascination with the femme fatale and his abhorrence toward the New Woman, as he considered that both represented women's desire to destroy men.

In Europe, the 1890s are regarded as the golden age of advertising posters, and the femme fatale was depicted in the works of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Alfonse Mucha (Figure 4). Sharing the cynical spirit of 1890s with Beardsley, the detached observer Toulouse-Lautrec's femme fatales are often ugly, sinister, and pathetic, found in the demi-monde of the cabarets and cafés. On the other hand, as a follower of the Art Nouveau Movement, Mucha's femme fatales are infused with decorative elements, particularly luxuriant hair. They are decorative rather than threatening. In Mucha's advertisement for the cigarette brand Job (Figure 4) a woman is depicted with her eyes half closed in ecstasy, formulaic of Rossetti.

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

As in Europe, the femme fatale also emerged in America as a motif of visual art (Prelinger 2000), literature (Quinn 2015), and opera (Horowitz 1994) at the turn-of-the century. The dominant European influences were evident, however, in terms of motifs and styles. In the visual arts, for instance, Henry Tanner's (1900) treatment of *Salomé* illustrates a dangerous eroticism, corresponding to that of Moreau. The medieval legend of the knight, a flawed hero, Tannhäuser, who fell into the clutches of Dame Venus, not only inspired such European artists as Richard Wagner (1845/1906), Swinburne (1866/2011), and Burne-Jones (1873-5) in expressing

their conception of femme fatales in different media (i.e., opera, poetry, and oil painting, respectively), but also stimulated American female audiences (Bade 1979; Horowitz 1994). In Wagner's opera, an insatiable erotic desire underpinned the social and domestic oppression of women, a desire that resonated with the lives of corseted Gilded Age American housewives from genteel upbringings, who sought in Wagner an alternative to the constrained world of marriage (Horowitz 1994).

Women in 1890s New York

Women in Gilded Age America

The post-Civil War era of prosperity, roughly from 1865 to 1900, is called the Gilded Age (Calhoun 1996). As explained later, the last decade, the 1890s, overlaps with the succeeding period, the Progressive Era (1890s-1920s) in U.S. history. The Gilded Age was an era of transformation. America experienced an age of excess, industrialization, and technological innovations. One critical factor that altered 19th century American women was education. Women—mostly white, middle- to upper-class—broadened their worldview, and gradually raised their aspirations for family, career, and lifestyle (Collins 2003). The first women's magazine, the immensely popular *Godey's Lady's Book*, was founded in 1830. The editor Sarah Josepha Hale, while introducing women's fashions, lectured on the True Woman: the role of women in society. While demonstrating a professional career and dress as the source of woman's empowerment, she also emphasized that maintaining affectionate relations with men was critical as well (Scott 2005).

In the pre-Civil War era, while there were female laborers, they participated less than men in public life. Women were supposed to be diffident, unassuming, chaste, and passionless.

A transformation then took place in women's status. In the Gilded Age, females, and young immigrant women in particular, became the core work force for the garment industry. In New York City alone, there were more than 6,000 factories (Crain 2016). This trend produced female proprietors, such as Ellen Curtis Demorest, who was a successful designer as well as an astute mass marketer (Gamber 1997; Scott 2005). In parallel, fashion writers and cosmetics manufacturers came into prominence. These included Jane Cunningham Croly and Harriet Hubbard Ayer. The emergence of women proprietors was a precursor and underpinning to the subsequent woman's suffrage movement. On the other hand, there was another breed of women in New York City—wealthy female consumers—who were to eventually take part in “the rise of women.”

Gender, Class, and Consumer Agency in New York City

Transformed by the “mad race for wealth,” the last quarter of 19th century New York society was characterized as “the most extravagant in the world” (Crain 2016, p. 63). Inestimable sums were expended in “palaces” or city residences, “cottages” or summer mansions in the society colony Newport in Rhode Island, attire, entertainments, arts, and so forth, to impress and outpace each other. *King's Handbook of New York City* published in 1893 rates more than 325 New Yorkers already worth more than two to twelve million dollars (King 1893).

Enormously wealthy Americans who competed on social supremacy consisted of two factions: old money and new rich. Old money Americans regarded themselves as the descendants of the original seventeen-century Dutch settlers in Manhattan. They called themselves “Knickerbockers.” They preferred to reside in posh enclaves, such as Gramercy Park, while the new rich preferred fashionable Fifth Avenue. The old Knickerbockers used crests and coats of

arms on carriages and furniture to show their status. In many instances, however, their wealth was generated by the proceeds from rentals, thanks to their ancestors who merely had the foresight to buy land (Crain 2016).

Another group, the new rich, emerged during the Civil War, as they prospered in trade, or in the postwar boom on Wall Street. They were satirized as shoddyites (Crain 2016). Hungry for social acceptance, they were vulgar in displaying their newly acquired wealth. Their social pretensions, coarse manners, and morals were often ridiculed and disdained by critics, including Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, who coined the term The Gilded Age, as the title of their co-authored book. It was America's gilded, not golden, age. Wasteful excess and extravagance characterized the wealthy of the era, reminiscent of Shakespeare's (1596/1990) *King John*: "To gild refined gold, to paint the lily. To throw a perfume on the violet..." (4.2.11).

The battle between the old money and the new rich was symbolized by the consumption style and power struggle of two influential women in society throughout the 1880s: "the" Mrs. Astor or Caroline Webster Schermerhorn Astor, originally from a clan of colonial New Amsterdam, and Alva Vanderbilt, who was the first wife of railroad heir William Kissam Vanderbilt, the new money. If old money preferred opulence and elegance in understatement, new money were ostentatious in their consumption style. Alva Vanderbilt (or Alva Belmont after divorce from Vanderbilt and remarriage to another wealthy man, Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont) later became a prominent suffragist nicknamed Bengal Tiger (Scott 2005). Aside from running her own "parlor meetings," she made sizable donations that enabled the suffrage associations to run the organization, implement their activities, and ultimately obtain suffrage (Johnson 2015; Neuman 2017).

Old money—self-designated “aristocracy”—controlled society scenes. Mrs. Astor was a society gatekeeper. Swirls of balls, parties, nights at the opera, and charity events occupied society women. Invitations were delivered to select New Yorkers each season. Guests to Mrs. Astor’s annual ball were referred to as “Four Hundred,” a list of those who mattered socially to Mrs. Astor. By the 1890s, the new money wrangled their way into society, and the number of the socially prominent increased to two thousand, according to the *New York Social Register* (Crain 2016).

Women of society dressed themselves several times a day. Clothing was a major expenditure. They wore corsets, a signifier of refinement and propriety, rendering them seemingly unfit for labor (Steele 2001; Veblen 1899). Fashionable women owned at least a couple of velvet dresses, and thousand-dollar worth lace for various occasions. They owned dresses for all possible occasions and locations: jackets, overskirts, evening robes in Swiss muslin, for the garden party, croquet-playing, horse races, and yacht races. They had *robes de nuit* and *robes de chambre*. They owned house robes and tea gowns. Tailors and milliners, as well as the garment industry, hence prospered in the Gilded Age.

In the wealth-worshipping Gilded Age, consumerism was in full swing. Ladies’ Mile in New York exemplified the social trend (Witkowski 2018). The trapezoid-shaped shopping mecca ran roughly from 14th street and Broadway, to 23rd Street and Sixth Avenue. The district, as shown in Figure 5, was crowded with well-dressed women during the afternoon shopping hours. Multilevel, windowed emporiums dominated the area. Material objects in stores there, such as the world’s largest Siegel-Cooper opened in 1897, mirrored the desire of rich women and their emulators, including a vast “luckless middle class” that belonged to neither the self-sufficient rich nor the benevolence-reliant poor (Crain 2016). In the late 19th century, Ladies’ Mile became

the site of women's experimentation, with public theatricality and self-displays that defied conventional female modesty and self-discipline (Scobey 2002).

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

The Rise of "New Women" in the 1890s

Despite the greater liberation they enjoyed, as consumers in particular, women at large were still constrained by conventional expectations, and confronted by many restrictions. Pre-Civil War law permitted women to own property, control bank accounts, divorce, retain custody of their children, and work outside of the home (Crain 2016). They could pursue a profession. Yet, society was gender-segregated. Their spheres were dichotomized. Women were not permitted to enter restaurants without male escorts until the emergence of "tables for ladies"—part of the restaurant where women could dine without male escort—in the late 19th century. Instead, unescorted women could use ladies' refreshment saloons or confectioneries. They were not permitted to enter clubs either. And, in rebellion, women started founding their own clubs. Ultimately, however, they were expected to be a caretaker of home and family. In fact, women in New York State did not have suffrage until 1917.

The women's-rights movement in the U.S. emerged in the mid-19th century. Considerable efforts were initiated by two women—Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. These roughly paralleled those by Emmeline Pankhurst and other suffragettes in the UK. It took about 70 years to obtain suffrage in the U.S. The obstacles included misperception and funding. Social fear among women that suffrage would make them defeminized had to be surmounted. Male recalcitrance was obvious, particularly on account of the militant approach adopted by Susan B.

Anthony (Graham 1995). Anti-suffragists used unfavorable imagery of suffragists in the media (Turner 1993). Both the suffragists and anti-suffragists were instrumental in using the media—magazines, illustrations, and political cartoons—to convey their messages, goals, and ideologies in appealing to the public (Nicolosi 2007). The true hindrance of women's suffrage, however, was the indifference of American women (Graham 1995). By the end of the 1880s, suffragist movements were fragmented, controversial, and underfunded.

The decade, 1890s, may be characterized as the resurgence of the equal rights movement. In 1890, the National American Woman Suffrage Association was formed, uniting two formerly separate national suffrage movement organizations. Throughout the decade, American women became increasingly involved in collective political activism, while the agenda varied, founding various new organizations, including the National Society of Colonial Dames (1891); the Daughters of the American Revolution (1892); the National Council of Jewish Women (1893); the United Daughters of the Confederacy (1894); The Woman's Municipal League in New York (1894); and the National Association of Colored Women (1896). Founded earlier in (1873), Woman's Christian Temperance Union, with its large membership, exerted organized effort on suffrage. Concurrently, women became increasingly visible in the public sphere in the late 19th century (Boylan 2010). Thus, the foundations of these women's associations altered the public spaces, city geographies, and transportation practices.

The emergence of the New Woman—educated, independent, and equality-minded—under such a social climate was inevitable. Originating in Mary Wollstonecraft's (1792/2014) *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the New Woman had been a popular theme in the UK, where more than 100 novels were written on the New Woman between 1883 and 1900 (Richardson and Willis 2001). While the prototype had been known in the U.S. in literary work

by Henry James, the term “New Women” reemerged in 1894 with the arrival of the English drama by Sydney Grundy (1894/2012) of the same title (Figure 6).

[Insert Figure 6 about here]

The 1890s was also marked by the growth of modern capitalism that encouraged autonomy in the pursuit of pleasure and consumption, and urban, industrial lifeways (Evans 1997). The new woman’s gay and notorious lifestyle manifested in their adventurous consumer behavior, and their style of fashion. They smoked, drank, and chewed gum (Figure 7). They rode a bicycle and played golf (Figure 8 and 9). They wore bloomers and “rainy daisy” skirts which cleared the ground by six inches. They studied music and art. In the public domain, they revealed more of the body, making it available for visible scrutiny and inviting voyeurism. For women in 19th century America, this suggested freedom, transgression and deviance (Piepmeier 2004).

[Insert Figure 7 about here]

[Insert Figure 8 about here]

[Insert Figure 9 about here]

Meanwhile, being college-educated in the 19th century meant they were from an affluent background, or at least a fairly well-off class, even though they argued for social and political reforms. Indeed, about eight percent of the female labor force (that was only 22.1 percent of the total females) at the turn of the century consisted of professional women who were likely to be from comfortable upper-middle and respectable middle classes (Crain 2016; Sobek 2001), as

opposed to “working girls.” Meanwhile economic depression, labor disputes, and racist terrorism erupted throughout the 1890s, deepening the schisms in society. Thus, the emergence of the New Woman was implicated in social class, aside from the struggles of gender.

Historical studies of the New Woman tend to identify political activism as her main aim, linking it to the rise of feminism as a political ideology, and to the campaign for women’s suffrage. Other studies locate her emergence in the rise of consumer culture and in new approaches to female sexuality. Although these studies acknowledge the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the New Woman, only a few studies seem to have interrogated her visual appearance as part of their contestation (Banta 1987; Köhler 2004; Rabinovitch-Fox 2015). The visual aspects of the New Woman phenomenon demonstrate how modern notions of womanhood were debated through visual representations. These studies, however, rarely consider the connection of these images of the New Woman to fin-de-siècle femme fatale imagery in popular culture media. Thus, we will illustrate such imagery found in *Vogue* magazine after the discussion on the methods.

Methods

This study employs a historical method based on archival research. We rely on images of women on the covers, editorials, and advertisements in *Vogue* magazine primarily between 1892 and 1900, with additional data published between 1901 and 1907 that capture the turn of the 20th century. At its inception, *Vogue*, published by Princetonian Arthur B. Turnure, was positioned as a social gazette for a Eurocentric elite (David 2006), and was the arbiter of taste for high society: it was used as a marker of their turf by the established old money and new rich (Scott 2005). It was published weekly, cost ten cents a copy, and the circulation was about 14,000. The publisher

intended *Vogue* to be “a dignified authentic journal of society, fashion, and the ceremonial side of life” (Turnure 1892, p. 16). Subsequently, however, they expanded the target market, as there was a section called “smart fashions for limited incomes” by the end of the century.

We justify the use of *Vogue* as the data source because fin-de-siècle discourse on woman and femininity—and sexual politics—was closely related to women’s fashion (Steele 2004). The first editor of *Vogue* (1892-1901), Josephine Redding, used the magazine’s editorial page as a feminist forum: sex, beauty, and pleasure were the rights of women, and they did not make women weak, or “objects” (Scott 2005). We used all the available images, including cover pages and illustrations, and did not rely solely on images in commercial advertisements.

Advertisements occupied less space before Condé Nast acquired *Vogue* in 1909, since social elites at *Vogue*’s office “preferred not to sully their hands with the commercial elements” of publishing, such as circulation and advertising revenue (Scott 2005, p. 129). Meantime, the use of cover pages as the data is justified since they became a marketing tool in the 1890s and were used to advertise the publication (Kitch 2001). Concurrently, the cover of magazines represented their personality and promise, as well as their intended audience.

As for the interpretive strategy, we utilized visual social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). This method helps us to understand how the visual is imbricated in the production of femininity. It involves the description and interpretation of a semiotic resource—every artifact and action observed in the visual communication. In analyzing the femme fatale imagery, we examined whether the illustrated women were represented in a narrative or conceptual mode (i.e., representational metafunctions). Then, we explored whether the femme fatale image is presented partially or in full view to create intimacy or distance with the viewer; if the model is seen from a high vertical angle or in a frontal horizontal perspective to

communicate power and involvement (i.e., interpersonal metafunctions). We interrogated the placement and salience of people/objects depicted, as well as how they are connected, or if they are portrayed realistically (i.e., compositional metafunctions).

In analyzing the representations of femininity in particular, we used Riviere's (1929) notion of masquerade in articulating how femininity was constructed. Riviere suggested that femininity is not natural but constructed, and it can be seen as a masquerade performed by emulating what being a woman is meant to be about. Femininity may thus be considered as a mask that hides a non-feminine identity (Rose 2007). Areas of analysis are: construction and repetition of the representation of feminine through woman's body, particularly make-up, hairstyle, dress, and comportment. We also examined the woman's fantasy, the *mise-en-scène* of desire, and how material objects and their interrelations are used to structure and stage desire.

Visiting exhibitions, celebrating the centennial of women's suffrage in New York, at the New-York Historical Society's Center for Women's History and the Museum of the City of New York, complemented our understanding of the context.

The analysis and interpretation of the data proceeded in an iterative fashion between members of the research team, the documented historical context, and the *Vogue* images themselves. Thus, validity of the interpretation was assured by the triangulation among the authors, all with significant experience in interpretive research. These iterations led to the development of an emergent typology around the twin axes of: 1) the outer or inner focus of their empowerment and aspirations; and 2) its utilization for sexual or pecuniary purpose. Repeated observation of data and the iteration in the analysis resulted in the emergence of four archetypal forms of *femme fatale*, as discussed in the next section.

The Femme Fatale in *Vogue*

The emergent four femme fatale archetypes are classified based on representations of femme fatale empowerment and aspirations, and their utilizations. Depending on whether the directionality of their empowerment and aspirations is outer-focused or inner-focused, and its utilization is pecuniary or sexual, we propose four types of femme fatale: Diana, Venus, Amazon, and Sappho. The typology provides a way to systematically classify femme fatales' images through reference to ancient Greek mythological archetypes, a classification in the spirit of America's Gilded Age cultural aspiration to classicism, in contrast to commonly used Biblical personae, whose femme fatale images are frequently portrayed as sexual and evil.

Diana: The Huntress

Sister of Apollo, Diana—or Artemis—is the goddess of the moon and hunt. In mythology, her encounters with men often entailed the administering of cruel punishments. In New York City, the nude statue *Diana the Huntress*, designed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, raised on top of Madison Square Garden in 1891, marked the highest point on the city's skyline (Tolles 2009). The first statue incandescently lit in America, she was a much-adored icon of locals.

In our data, her empowerment is outer-focused. Her concern is pecuniary. In her reverie, she hunts for fortune, and her suitors are her preys. She can be a precursor of the “Gibson Girl,” a hybrid of the feminine, and annoyingly “mannish” in proclivity: she is dangerous to her unsuspecting male prey and her female rivals (Banta 1987; Scott 2005).

[Insert Figure 10 about here]

Incarnations of Diana appeared in the earlier part of the decade. In Figure 10, for example, a young woman, who appears as an ingénue, with heavy eyelids, is portrayed as immersed in her reverie. Unlike the late-nineteenth century male's ideal of the sleeping beauty that symbolized feminine innocence, submission, and virginity (Dijkstra 1986), she is not asleep. Her half-opened eyes do not meet the viewer: she is in her own world of daydreams. She is properly dressed. The folds of the dress are gathered at her waist. Her narrow waistline hints at her corseted body. She lies on her back on a hammock in the garden, stirring voyeuristic fantasies in the viewer. Her legs under her dress seem crossed. She poses in a vulnerable—simultaneously inviting—position. Her feet are not bare, a sign of erotic desire. Rather, from the bottom of her skirt, that shows a lace trimmed flounce, she subtly shows off her feet adorned in fashionable striped stockings and shoes with intricate lace-work and an elegant Louis heel. They are titillating. The propriety of her attire and rigidly un-parted legs seem to refuse profanity, like the virgin goddess Diana. Concurrently, her cool and self-possessed countenance stimulates the viewer to triumph over her—and remove her shoes.

The crescent moon on the left, and five hearts aligned semi-circularly on the right, complete a full moon. Each heart is accompanied by a symbol of her desire. She dreams of “having it all.” They frame her fantasy, the *mise-en-scène* of desire: a bishop's *pretiosa*, an elaborately embroidered miter with lappets, signifying absolute sacred power among mortals; a jeweled crown for legitimate power among seculars with high social class; an elixir of love for the magic to implement her craft; a sack of money for wealth; and an arrow targeting the heart for her prey's blind love. The miter and crown may be a reference to chess, the game in which she exercises her stratagem. While the props dignify the subject matter, her desire is basically all

about exterior, or surface aspects, such as fashion and mannerisms. She is the type of femme fatale who subjugates her suitor with schemes: her ultimate goal is wealth.

The femme fatale imagery here was created by the versatile and then prominent artist, and the initial art director of *Vogue*, Harry Whitney McVickar, who had also provided illustrations for *Daisy Miller*—a novella by Henry James (1878/2012)—in its first illustrated edition in 1892. As such, there are similarities in illuminating the characters of the heroine Daisy Miller in the frontispiece and the femme fatale here: a discreet manner in portraying indecorous American girlhood without visually documenting the transgressions and indiscretions (Sonstegard 2008). She also foreshadows McVickar's (1896) book, *The Evolution of Women*, a cautionary tale in which he illustrated the social Darwinism that could be applied to gender politics with the progression in women's fashion: from skirts to bloomers and breeches.

Venus: The Seductress

The goddess of erotic love and beauty, Venus—or Aphrodite—was the cause of the Trojan War, having Paris abduct Helen, as a bribe to win the “beauty contest.” Her ego subsequently brought much destruction, dismay, and distress to males. In our data, she resembles a Giorgione-esque, graceful, healthy and sensual goddess, exemplified by his *Sleeping Venus* (1510) whose voluptuous body lies amidst pastoral serenity. Or, she may be a “nineteenth century siren”: she uses sexual allure to control men. Her aspiration is inner-focused.

[Insert Figure 11 about here]

In Figure 11, a woman stands in the frontal view. She is surrounded by ten flying winged-males. Unlike amoretto or putti, most of them are adults who are dressed in daytime formal attire: morning coats, stand-up collars, white pique bow ties, patent-leather shoes, and silk hats. Two older males wear a crown and a cape to suggest their noble stock. As the title of the illustration indicates, she—a debutante—is in reverie. She fancies herself to be surrounded by her would-be devotees. Punning on Beatrix Potter's nursery rhyme, the lyrics under the title goes:

Little Miss Netticoat,
 In a white petticoat,
 And a red rose;
 The longer she stands,
 The greater their woes.

Indeed, she wears a white, tea-length, ruffled chiffon petticoat. Her corset is perhaps French gored, bias cut, with whalebone, imparting an hourglass shape to her bodily form. Appearing in the corset alludes to the act of undressing: a tantalizing prelude to erotic liaison (Steele 2001). A red rose on her breast symbolizes her intense passion. Oblivious, she looks into the beyond. Her long, flowing, and abundant hair—a symbolic lasso—that stands up like flaming fire, seems to symbolize her unremitting energy and the wild sexual desire that smolders in her corseted body. Unlike Medusa—a classic prototype of the femme fatale—her hair is not serpentine and does not turn men to stone. Instead it entices them by burning their wings, as shown by the three injured men on the floor. Women's tresses as a medium of dangers, yet

object of fetish that entangle the man's soul, were a favorite trope by nineteenth-century poets and painters (Dijkstra 1986).

Is she imagining herself as the goddess of love and beauty, or a licentious Tenderloin prostitute? The New York social reformer and smut-hunter Antony Comstock (1844-1915) ascribed the Victorian ideal of womanhood—a divine, angelic purity and unblemished moral cleanliness—to women in general and to upper-class women in particular, as the latter were supposed to embody virtue in society (Long 2009). Frustrated, upper- and middle-class women found it to be the impossible ideal (Horowitz 1994; Quinn 2015). The illustrator, Albert D. Blashfield, depicted here the femme fatale image that aptly represents women's honest and intense carnal desire, a gateway to vice, and their curiosity to descend to the moral nadir under the imposed masquerade of childlike innocence.

Amazon: The Warrior

Her aspiration is outer-focused. Her sexuality is unbounded. She is one of the “American Girls” who is aspirational but, unlike the New Women, is not intellectual (Scott 2005). In the late 19th century, women who rode horseback were often referred to as “Amazons,” a term which was also applied to courtesans and women thought to be lesbians (Steele 2004). Thus, while the riding habit was regarded as aristocratic and hence prestigious, it was also perceived as highly erotic, and concurrently, transgressive, challenging, and masculine. Women riding on bicycles might have been classified similarly (Figures 8 and 9): while the view of women riders in bloomers changed from shocking to commonplace in the first half of the 1890s (Guroff 2016), critics continued to regard women riders as subversive (Scott 2005), socially threatening, and risqué (Wosk 2001).

[Insert Figure 12 about here]

In the fabric advertisement (Figure 12), a woman equestrian is represented jumping over a fence that is covered by elaborate fabric. She rides sidesaddle. She controls the horse by gripping the bridle with her right hand and holds a pole of a flag, instead of a whip, in her left hand. Her full-frontal face and torso demand the viewer's involvement. With a triumphant smile, she gazes down on her viewer in the distance. The low angle gives the woman represented in the ad power over the viewer. She is in search of her next conquest. She has strands of wavy hair, evocative of sculptures on the theme of Amazons from Classical Greece.

Her riding habit, however, is not chiton or Oriental costume, but is in the proper equestrian fashion of the late 19th century. She wears a white equestrian blouse and a stock under a tailored jacket with a long skirt. The leg o' mutton sleeves hint at her fashion-consciousness. Unlike the Amazon queen Hippolyte or Penthesilea, she is not a refugee from a lost battle to heroes Herakles or Achilles, but an audacious transgressor, the new woman of the Progressive Era. To symbolize her victory, she wears a crown instead of a top hat. Amazonian disguise by a woman of fashion originated in antiquity; the wealthy Romans carved their portrait à la Amazon with contemporary coiffure on the panel of their sarcophagi, displaying their taste and sophistication (Woodford 1993).

Sappho: The Self-Reliant

Hailed by Plato as “the tenth Muse,” the earliest female writer in the West, Sappho and her fellow women of Lesbos enjoyed a freedom and an opportunity for self-development (Snyder

1989). Inquisitive, her aspiration is inner-focused, and her concern, pecuniary rather than sexual. In the 19th century, the New Woman left home and family for education and a career. Their contemporary male counterparts regarded them as “unnatural.” The representation of the femme fatale as the New Woman was a reflection of male anxiety about women’s changing roles in society. The fin-de-siècle fashion industry, as well as feminism’s founders, was co-opting feminism for profit (Scott 2005).

[Insert Figure 13 about here]

A woman represented in Figure 13, illustrated by Chris Huckel, is this type of femme fatale. She is a concert soloist: a woman with a profession. The representation of the woman violinist evokes images of Sappho playing a lyre. In Western art, representations of string players symbolize reason and intellect, while horn players symbolize unrestrained passion. Although she pursues her career, she is unassuming and introspective, unlike the Amazonian type: she is inner-focused. In her three-quarter profile, she is depicted as in the midst of a nocturnal performance. Holding her left fingers on the first position on the fingerboard, she presses the bow close to the frog and is about to draw a down-bow on the E string. Her pensive expression suggests her concentration on the sounds she is about to produce. She wears a dress with large puffed sleeves. Her natural waistline and flowing white dress suggest remnants of the aesthetic dress movement. Influenced probably by the Gibson Girl, her hair is in a loose bun at the top of the head. She is a beautiful and enigmatic siren. Dangerously haunting to her audience, she represents a Sappho type of the archetypal femme fatale.

In reality, the violinist in the illustration might be modeled after Maud Powell, the first American female virtuoso, who had premiered an extremely demanding violin concerto by Tchaikovsky in 1889, and another one by Sibelius in 1906, in the U.S. She was the first American violinist to earn an international reputation in this male-dominated profession. She might have been an object of both admiration and threat, attraction and anxiety, for her male counterparts, as a New Woman.

Discussion

In examining feminine multiplicity through a visual analysis of femme fatale images in *Vogue* magazine in the context of 1890s America, we have found four archetypes for this important character in marketing: Diana, Venus, Amazon, and Sappho. The emergent typology is based on the two axes: the outer-focus or inner-focus of their aspiration and empowerment, and its utilization as sexual or pecuniary. The latter two mortal archetypes became more popular with the rise of the New Woman in the second half of the 1890s, which was influenced by women's advancement in education and career and their collective political activism. This was one unique aspect of the femme fatale in 1890s U.S.

The Femme Fatale, Femininity Ideologies, and Women's Political Activism

The genesis of the femme fatale is not singular. Femme fatale imagery has been ubiquitous in different times and places. In antiquity, from the Near East to Egypt and Greece, the femme fatale evolved from the monsters and theriomorphic creatures—the hybrid of animal and human features with fantastical attachments. Medusa, sphinxes, and sirens were originally expressed as grotesque monsters. Its considerable feminization and anthropomorphic transformation to bear

female breasts, as well as their aesthetic improvement, took place after the fifth century B.C., “to suit the sensibilities of the classical period” (Karoglou 2018, p. 5). As Aristotle argued in his *Poetics*, it was the power of art that enabled the ugly and the horrible to be represented in a beautiful way. It was the Greek ideal of physical beauty, not the terror from imagined women’s collective empowerment, as found in Aristophanes’ comedy *Lysistrata*, which imparted the gorgeous femme fatale imagery.

On the other hand, the femme fatale imagery in the Judeo-Christian sphere was often accompanied by moral lessons. For example, in 16th century Germany, femme fatale imagery proliferated in the artworld under the theme of “Weibermacht,” the power of women over men. The concept of violent, virtuous women, such as Yael, was transformed from noble to evil, notably by Lucas van Leyden’s *Power of Women* series (1516-19). Another artist Lucas Cranach, the Elder, a proponent of the Reformation, intended to convey a moralizing message through such paintings as *Judith and the head of Holofernes* and *Samson and Delilah*. The artist imparted the work with an allegoric moral warning against earthly temptations and passion. Concurrently, femme fatale imagery from this period hints at the secular spirit of the Renaissance, with its bold eroticism (Friedländer and Rosenberg 1978). It was a “favorite subject with postclassical moralists” (Bothmer 1949, p. 212). Femme fatales are depicted as beautiful, and often ornamented, sexually alluring women. Again, it was not women’s collective empowerment or activism that caused the femme fatale to proliferate.

On the contrary, femme fatale imagery in 1890s America was influenced by the rise of the New Woman, suffragists and other political activists—directly and indirectly from European art and literature, and directly from illustrations in popular media in the U.S. Representations of the New Woman were not homogenous (Kitch 2010). They varied from “the hyperbolically

emancipated woman with a riotous imagination” to “the endlessly self-analytical heroine,” “the epicene creature,” the “strapping Amazon who could outdo any man,” and so on (Richardson and Wills 2001, p. 10). Popular media depicted caricatures of them, suggesting male anxiety about women’s changing status, while the New Woman was a means of advancing sexual and social change for women.

Similarly, the femme fatale imagery was multivalent. Misogynist artists condemned them as an anomaly, while rendering them as attractive. In *Vogue* magazine, for instance, our example of the Venus type (Figure 11) might have been influenced by the New Woman conceived in the UK: George Egerton’s (1893/2004) *Keynotes* and Eugene Grundy’s (1894/2012) drama. Its poster (Figure 6) shows the reference to Egerton’s literary work (i.e., the picture of the key on the wall that was designed by Beardsley for the *Keynotes* series). The illustration (Figure 11) dating from a month after the New York premiere of *The New Woman* drama, seems to reflect the sexual liberation and fulfillment argued in Egerton’s work as well as such proclamations as “Naked But Not Ashamed,” the title of one of the scattered books in the poster for Grundy’s drama.

What differentiates our femme fatales in *Vogue* is their reflection of the temperament of the intended target readers: the social elites of the time. Unlike the New Woman images in popular media, the femme fatale imagery in *Vogue* reveals a generally bourgeois propriety. Our Sappho example—a concert violinist—does not have the connotation of an inept woman that is often attached to New Woman imagery in the popular media. The femme fatale in the Gilded Age representations indicate that femininity ideology had a pragmatic end. The images we studied show their keen aspiration for social advancement. The crown icons illustrated in the example of Diana (Figure 10) and Venus (Figure 11) types were not meant to be utter fantasy,

but reverie with a potential for realization: they were prophetic of the marriage of Consuelo Vanderbilt to the Duke of Marlborough in 1895. In other words, such images focus on female agency and empowerment, albeit of a type related to its historical context and a specific social class. Although the motif of female empowerment has been more often associated with the intersection of marketing and feminism from the 1990s onwards rather than in this early period (see, for example, Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 2005), this study confirms the feminization of consumer agency that took place – as Witkowski (2004) has illustrated - from the late 19th century onwards. Our present study reinforces the historical complexities of this empowerment discourse.

The Femme Fatale, Femininity Construction, and Woman's Fashion

Femininity manifest in the imagery of fin-de-siècle femme fatales was appropriated by fashion. Inevitably, the femme fatale imagery in *Vogue* is unanimously fashionable. While the magazine was positioned as a social gazette of the elites—both men and women—during the 1890s, the contents show that it was largely dedicated to women's interests, and fashion in particular. It declares, “dress is a far-reaching power for good, and not the mere vanity of the hour that so many claim it to be. It marks the character as with a brand, according as it may be –refined, simple, showy, outré, vulgar or daring, and women are elevated or debased by their choice—as they may elect” (November 29, 1894, p. 346).

What role does fashion play in constructing femme fatale imagery, especially for feminine, rather than mannish or monstrous, femme fatale imagery? There are two cultures that perceive the relationship between fashion and femininity.

The conventional criticism is that femininity is oppressive as much as fashion is a form of “bondage” (Beauvoir 1972). Femininity is artificially constructed and thus naturalness or simplicity is avoided. It alludes to the idea that women who are insecure about their femininity use artifice and exaggerate their feminine appearance to hide their insecurity. Being fashionable, as in the *femme fatale* imagery in our study, has been criticized as promoting frivolity, vanity, anti-intellectualism, wasteful consumption, low self-esteem, and the consumerist system that oppresses women (Reger 2012). It connoted the primacy of a woman’s appearance, whereby women’s worth lay in their ability to attract men, vying with other women to attract their attention. As such, this was perceived by many women’s rights activists at the time as enslavement rather than empowerment (Minowa, Maclaran, and Stevens 2014).

On the other hand, proponents contend that fashion is a conveyer of meaning, a medium of communication, a means for driving social change, and a crucial site of ideological contestation. Fashion in the marketplace fosters a complex political discourse. It is not the costume per se but the codified body and signified appearance that culturally forms and molds what it means to be feminine. Appropriating feminine clothing can serve as an expression of women’s power, as argued by a contemporary feminist scholar Jane Gallop who performs *über-femininity*, a schematized performance that appeals to both the artifice and sensuality of feminine attire (Henry 2012). Furthermore, neoliberal, entrepreneurial postfeminists, modeled after fashionable celebrities from popular culture to political arenas, proclaim that successful and powerful women can be feminist but still feminine (Hopkins 2018).

In the history of art and popular culture media, the *femme fatale*, as a temptress, has often been visually represented as being fashionable. Adornment as status symbol is in fact ancient. The aforementioned Cranach’s Judith, for instance, wears bejeweled carcanets of gold

and massive gold chains that sumptuously reflected the latest fashion of the contemporary Saxon court (Warner 1990). Moreau's Salome was covered with a jewel-encrusted garment decorated with an intricate design of eclectic motifs, such as an engraving of a medieval crosier, an ornate clasp from *Le Magasin pittoresque*, and drawings from Egypt (Burlingham 2012). Being fashionable was also significant in the imagery of our femme fatales in *Vogue*. And, it was the minute attention to the details of fashion that made the feminine femme fatales par excellence and aided their stratagem: whether it was the Louis heel, lace-up boots, buttoned shoes, or evening dress slippers.

The finer details of dress design may also convey an ethereal aesthetic. The valorization of detail conforms with the principle asserted by *Vogue* (Sept. 2, 1893, p. 56): "It is this attention to detail which makes or mars a woman. Carelessness often amounts to slovenliness, which is the greatest sin our sex can be guilty of." The importance of detail in constructing aesthetics and the feminine was argued by philosophers—from Hegel to Lukács, Freud and Barthes (Schor 2007). It is a constituent of sublimation, signifier of decadence, and trigger of displacement. Details connote aesthetic dignity, economic capital, and epistemological prestige. Details construct uniqueness and individuation in consumer culture. Schor (2007) claims that detail is feminine, and our study shows that analysis of aesthetic details, as well as fashion more broadly, can be an important marker of female identity, agency and empowerment. With its luxurious artificiality and economic capital, our femme fatale imagery from *Vogue* seems to possess a strong seductive power. These women were apt to seduce the more prominent men of power.

Conclusion

The femme fatale is a culturally constructed metonymic representation of woman. This study offered a nuanced analysis of *Vogue* in its social-cultural-ideological context, and examined a selection of images of the femme fatale in the magazine.

The focus of this study, the femme fatale in 1890s New York, was a creation of the leading elites of society. While the Gilded Age symbolized a period of prosperity in America, it does not mean that the entire population was wealthy. In fact, it was quite the contrary. The Gilded Age in general, and in New York in particular, experienced economic recessions; the Panics of 1873 and 1893 in particular produced a large number of destitute people, caused uproars and riots, and widened the schism between the Rich and the Poor (Crain 2016). Future studies could investigate working-class images of the femme fatale, as well as the role of lower or working-class women as consumers, and the gender power negotiation in exercising consumer agency.

There is certainly a need to understand more about the contribution of marketing phenomena to ideologies of femininity beyond those concerned with housewives and mothers. The undertaking of historical analyses – such as we have done in relation to the femme fatale - reveals how themes of female empowerment have had a much longer-standing and more nuanced history than hitherto realized. For example, the quintessential 1920s trope of emancipated womanhood, the Flapper, is another type of femininity constructed largely by fashion, with freedom of dress equated with women's freedom of movement and emancipation more generally. Clearly the role of the marketing system in relation to women's empowerment warrants further research into its many manifestations and influences.

“The feminine” has been historically debased, disdained, or dismissed. This study affirms the contrary. The femme fatale imagery in this historical inquiry has elucidated that femininity,

constructed by fashion and style, can be a tactic for political movement and social change, as much as for sexual attraction, and thus be a source of empowerment. As feminine identity diversifies, the female body and sexuality, as well as the sexualization of the body, continues to be the locus of power and site of contestation. Therefore, femme fatale imagery in popular culture media continues to provide a provocative source of inspiration, and a richly layered discourse in consumer culture.

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