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Fashion and the Image of the Ideal Woman

As society has evolved over the years, so has the image of the ideal woman. The fashion industry has played a crucial role in shaping this image, often promoting a certain body type or look as the standard of beauty. From the hourglass figure of the 1950s to the ultra-thin model of the 1990s, fashion has constantly reinforced the idea that there is an ideal woman, and that women should strive to look like her. However, this ideal is not only unattainable for most women, but it also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and contributes to the marginalization of certain groups.

In the early 1950s, the hourglass figure was promoted as the ideal body type. Women were encouraged to wear corsets and girdles to achieve a tiny waist and curvy hips, creating

an exaggerated hourglass shape. This image of the ideal woman was largely influenced by Hollywood actresses such as Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor, who epitomized the hourglass figure. While this body type was celebrated at the time, it was also restrictive and unattainable for most women. It reinforced the idea that a woman's worth was based on her appearance and that she should strive to look a certain way to be considered beautiful.

By the 1960s, the ideal body type had shifted towards a more boyish, athletic look. This was largely influenced by the rise of Twiggy, a British model who was known for her waif-like figure and androgynous look. The fashion industry began promoting a thinner, less curvy body type, and women were encouraged to wear mini skirts and shift dresses to show off their legs. This new ideal was not only unattainable for most women, but it also perpetuate harmful stereotypes about femininity and the female body. Women who did not fit this ideal were often marginalized and made to feel ashamed of their bodies(Nnadi Mitchell, Nickerson, 2020).

Twiggy

The Twiggy LOOK
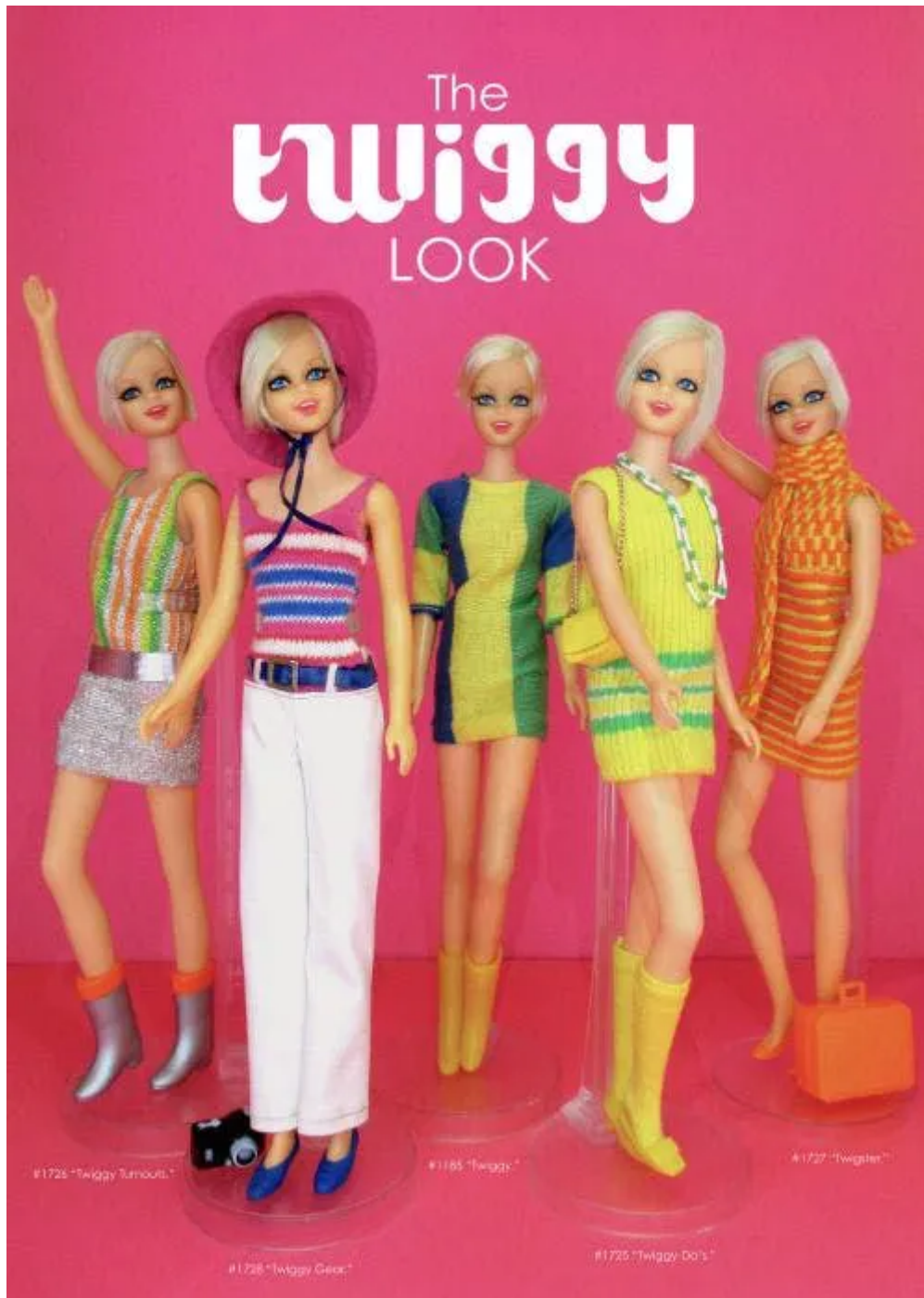
In 1967, Twiggy was given her own Barbie doll. It was the first Barbie that Mattel produced that resembled a real person, and was a true indicator of her international popularity.

In the 1990s, the ideal body type shifted once again towards an even thinner, more androgynous look. This was largely influenced by the rise of the supermodel, who was celebrated for her tall, lean frame and chiseled features. Women were encouraged to wear low-rise jeans and crop tops to show off their flat stomachs and toned abs. This ideal was even more unattainable than previous ones, as it required a strict diet and exercise regimen to

maintain. It also perpetuated harmful stereotypes about beauty and femininity, as it promoted a very narrow and limited definition of what it meant to be beautiful(Choi,2016).
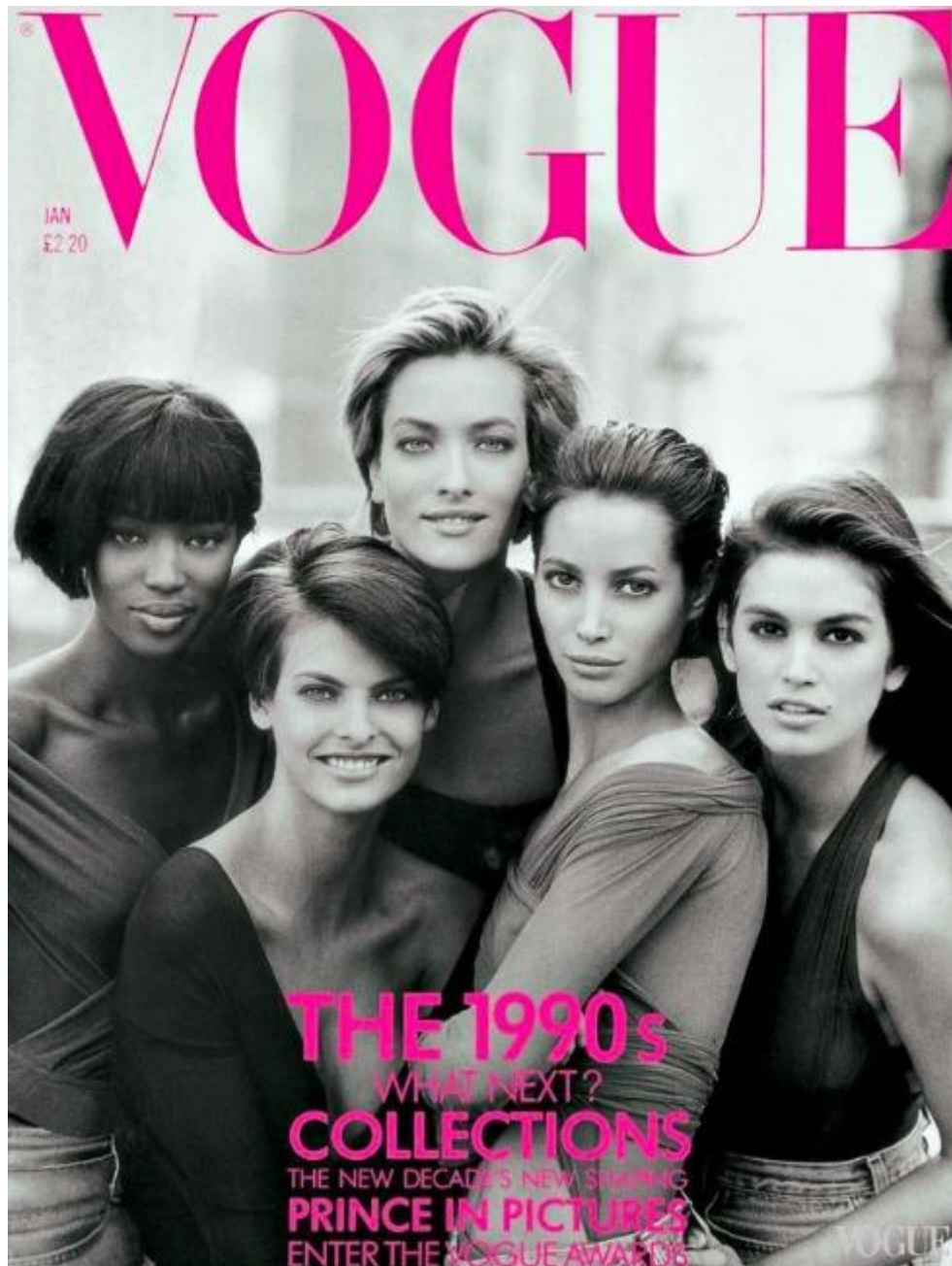
Vogue Cover in January 1990 portraying the feminine ideal in the 90's

In recent years, the fashion industry has made some strides towards promoting a more diverse and inclusive image of the ideal woman. There has been a rise in plus-size models and models of different ethnicities, and brands are starting to use more diverse body types in their advertising campaigns. However, there is still a long way to go, as many brands

continue to promote a narrow and unrealistic image of the ideal woman. This not only harms women's self-esteem and body image, but it also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and contributes to the marginalization of certain groups(The Guardian,2017).

One Size Does Not Fit All: The Rise of Diverse Fashion Models

The issue with the fashion industry's representation of the ideal woman is that it is unrealistic and unattainable for the majority of women. Many models are genetically blessed with unique physical features that are hard to come by, which is why the average woman can never achieve the same look as these models, no matter how hard she tries. Furthermore, the use of excessive photoshop and retouching in advertisements further perpetuates the notion that the ideal woman is someone who looks perfect, but in reality, that perfection is an unattainable goal (Dragani,2021).

"YOU'RE SO BASIC" "YOU'RE SO CLEVER IT'S INTIMIDATING"

"YOU'RE TOO GIRLY" "YOU'RE JUST ONE OF THE GUYS"

"YOU'RE MORE OF A SHAG" "YOU'RE MORE OF A GIRLFRIEND"

"YOU'RE TOO HIGH-MAINTENANCE" "I PREFER GIRLS CLEAN SHAVEN"

APPEARANCE

The impact of the ideal image of women in fashion on the general public is undeniable. Women, and to some extent men, feel immense pressure to look a certain way and conform to societal beauty standards. This pressure can lead to a host of physical and mental health issues such as eating disorders, body dysmorphia, anxiety, and depression. The fashion industry has a responsibility to create a more inclusive and diverse image of the ideal woman, one that celebrates all body types, skin tones, and ages, and promotes self-love and acceptance rather than self-hatred(New York Times, 2018).

In recent years, there has been a movement towards inclusivity and diversity in fashion, with more brands using models of different sizes, races, and ages in their campaigns. However, it is important to note that this movement has been slow and there is still much work to be done. The fashion industry needs to continue to push the boundaries of what is considered beautiful and challenge the notion that there is only one way to look good.

Models From Around the World Celebrate Today's Global Runway—in a Gorgeous Mosaic of Denim

In conclusion, fashion has played a significant role in shaping the image of the ideal woman throughout history. While this image has evolved over the years, it has often been unattainable and harmful, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and contributing to the marginalization of certain groups. As the fashion industry continues to evolve, it is important that we promote a more diverse and inclusive image of the ideal woman, one that celebrates. The fashion industry has a significant impact on the image of the ideal woman. While the industry has made strides towards inclusivity and diversity, there is still a long way to go. The ideal woman portrayed in fashion is often unattainable, unrealistic, and can have a damaging effect on the mental and physical health of women. The industry has a responsibility to create a more inclusive and diverse image of the ideal woman, one that promotes self-love and acceptance. It is time for the fashion industry to recognize that beauty comes in all shapes, sizes, and colors, and to celebrate this diversity in their campaigns.

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