A woman in Chanel is still a woman: A qualitative study on the portrayal of women in adverts for luxury brands in *Vogue.*

Student Name: Ana Carolina Rodrigues Jorge Facca
Student Number: 452891

Supervisor: Dr Giulia Evolvi

Master Media Studies – Master Media & Business
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

Through the lens of semiotics, this work analyses the portrayal of women in advertising for luxury brands in the American *Vogue,* from 2015 to 2019. For this reason, this research introduces the history of the magazine, the definitions of luxury, the contextualisation of the topic, the research question and the social and scientific relevance. Later, a theory background is presented and the theoretical framework explained, which includes Goffman's codes (1979), the liberal feminist movement's general principles, the American feminist movement and the influence of the feminism in the fashion industry. After that, the methodology is delineated including the research design, details of data collection, conceptualisation, operationalisation, sample description, data analysis and ethical concerns. Following this, the results are described and conclusions drawn, including theoretical and social implications, the critical assessment of the study and suggestions for future research. Furthermore, it is found that women are still sexualised, objectified and infantilised in advertising. Besides this, some unique nuances are observed such as the use of the low angle to objectify women's bodies instead of empowering them and the portrayal of racial bias related to black models in adverts. Lastly, this research points out how companies/brands should work together and continue to create images that are more gender-equal, that protect women's welfare but are also profitable in business terms.

KEYWORDS: *Advertising; luxury brands; Vogue; woman*

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1. Introduction

This chapter will outline the subject of this study and its context, which is the representation of women in adverts for luxury brands in *Vogue* from 2015 to 2019. Furthermore, the history of the magazine will be presented, followed by the delineation of the concept of luxury, since it is crucial for this research. Lastly, social and scientific relevance will be indicated.

1.1.   *Killing us Softly? Contextualisation and Research Question*

Jean Kilbourne has argued that women's representations in adverts are problematic and in need of change. She is a public speaker, activist and filmmaker known for her studies about the portrayal of women, alcohol and tobacco in advertising. Her documentary series *Killing us Softly?* is, nowadays, extensively used in several educational sectors, such as psychology, social sciences and communication to discuss how sexuality and women are portrayed in the media (Conley and Ramsey, 2011), and that documentary series is what inspired this thesis. The first and second documentaries were released in 1979 and 1987 by Cambridge Documentary Films, while the third and fourth date from 2000 and 2010, released by Media Education Foundation. Kilbourne was concerned about how women are commonly represented in the media as less active and submissive to men. She believes that advertising has a huge impact in society because the average American citizen is exposed to three thousand adverts a day (Baker, 2005). Besides this, Kilbourne maintains that female models are, in most cases, placed with objects in front of their mouths to indicate silence, that they are infantilised and that they occupy little space in the scene. Moreover, the four films in the series show that women are constantly objectified and sexualised in adverts. When analysing fashion magazines, such as *Vogue*, whose target audience is women, it is curious to observe that these magazines often display adverts which represent their own public in a stereotypical way (Conley and Ramsey, 2011). Most of these images carry social stereotypes such as women represented in domestic or maternal roles or portrayed according to conventional Western beauty standards – light skin, long hair, skinny body, exaggerated use of makeup, long legs and so on (Conley and Ramsey, 2011). This portrayal of women and these stereotypes in advertising can be so detrimental to society, in terms of the construction of values, that some countries, such as the United Kingdom, have regulatory organisations to control it. For instance, the ASA (Advertising Standards Authority) is a self-regulatory organisation responsible for contesting every type of advertising which reproduces stereotypes, especially related to women.

The American *Vogue* is the magazine selected for this thesis to investigate the portrayal of women in adverts for luxury brands over the past five years. It intends to answer the following research question:

How have women been portrayed in adverts for luxury brands between 2015 and 2019 in *Vogue*?

The idea of ownership of the body is also important to consider, since the bodies of models are likely to be contemplated as more important and to receive more attention than the products themselves. Moreover, women still lack agency when it comes to their bodies, rights, professional roles and so on. Goffman (1979) analysed the portrayal of women in magazine advertisements and concluded that they are infantilised, represented as submissive and sexually objectified. By employing his codes and assuming a liberal feminist perspective as a theoretical framework, which will be detailed explained further in this research, this study shows that society has developed in diverse aspects, such as culturally and technologically, but it seems that women still need to fight for agency, independence, respect and gender equality. In this way this subject continues to be relevant since the representation of women in advertising shapes and/or reflects social values today. Lastly, a brief introduction about the history of *Vogue* is necessary, as this has shaped the magazine today – both in its content and how women are represented in its contemporary adverts.

1.2.   The history of Vogue

Vogue is a magazine for which the target audience is women, as previously mentioned. Curiously, the majority of its adverts are images of luxury brands, many of which also represent women in a stereotypical way. That is why this magazine has been chosen for this thesis. What follows is a brief introduction of its history, which is essential to understand how the magazine was created and why it is how it is today.

 On December 17, 1892, the first edition of the weekly journal *Vogue* was published in the USA, combining journalism, fashion and style, and originally targeted at both female and male audiences (Hill, 2007). The intention was to create a New York social gazette, since the fashion journalism market was already extremely competitive, with magazines including *Harper's Bazar*, *McCall's*, *Delineator* and *Ladies' Home Journal* (Hill, 2007). Founder and Princetonian socialite Arthur B. Turnure invited the wealthiest American citizens to be part of the new magazine (Hill, 2007). Amidst these influential names, two became the central managers of *Vogue*: Cornelius Vanderbilt, a business magnate from the sector of shipping and railroads, and Marion Stuyvesant

Fish, an American socialite who maintained stately homes in New York City at this time (Hill, 2007). Josephine Redding was the editor and creator of the name of the new magazine, and the art director Harry McVickar contributed to creating the marketing logo and branding icon of *Vogue* (Hill, 2007). The first issues of the magazine included advertising, topics related to society and satirical cartoons, but later the journal started to include reviews of music, art and books, as well as fashion articles in regular columns such as *Of Interest to Her* and *As Seen by Him*, intending to guide readers on how to dress when attending important social events (Hill, 2007). Through the years, *Vogue* became highly fashion directed, with detailed images and precise eloquent texts (Hill, 2007). In 1899, the clothing maker Rosa Payne, together with the editor Josephine Redding, started a section in *Vogue* on garment patterns, giving readers access to these for the fifty-cent price of the magazine (Hill, 2007). The demand for these rose, making *Vogue* as both a social periodical and a seller of patterns for many years (Hill, 2007).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, *Vogue* became a fashion magazine with an explicitly female target readership, as it remains today, achieving in 1904 more than 26,000 subscriptions (Hill, 2007). However, in the following years, circulation started to decline after the direction of the magazine changed (Hill, 2007). In 1900, Josephine Redding left, and Marie Harison, who was Turnure's sister-in-law, took over as the editor, though her lack of experience and leadership became a problem for *Vogue* (Hill, 2007). Later, Harry McVickar also lost interest and left, and Tom McGreedy became responsible for the advertising; his ambition to increase sales led the quality of the journal to decrease (Hill, 2007). For this reason, other fashion magazines started to appear and *Vogue* lost many subscribers (Hill, 2007). In 1905, the ailing *Vogue* was desired by Condé Montrose Nast – an American magnate, entrepreneur, founder of the mass media company Condé Nast in New York and former business manager of *Collier's Weekly*. He proposed purchasing *Vogue* and closed the deal in 1909, introducing a completely new approach to the magazine, with a different design and colours, as well as special editions based on particular themes or personalities (Hill, 2007). Moreover, writers from *Collier* such as Upton Sinclair and Booth Tarkington and other art professionals such as Frederic Remington and Charles Dana Gibson were brought to *Vogue* by Nast with the intention of improving its quality in terms of content and layout (Hill, 2007). Of course, his experience with *Collier*, *Quarterly Style Book* and *Ladies' Home Journal* gave Nast the tools he needed to raise the fashion magazine beyond the standard set by Turnure, who died in 1906 (Hill, 2007). The changes Condé Nast made were perceptible and extremely important for the future of the magazine, and all his actions were commented on and celebrated in the special edition of the fiftieth anniversary of the magazine, in 1943 (Hill, 2007). He also opened *Vogue* to the public, so they could pay a small fee to journal and post a message of maximum twenty-five words about services, products and so on (Hill, 2007). A great number of staff members were reluctant to

keep the paper patterns, but Nast reinforced his ideas based on his conception that *Vogue* should be for every woman passionate about fashion and who wanted to be well dressed, regardless of income (Hill, 2007).

Condé Nast also gave huge importance to the design of the magazine's covers and contacted popular names in photography and illustration to produce them, such as Salvador Dali, Pavel Tchelitchew, Giorgio de Chirico, Edouard Benito, Cecil Beaton and Clifford Coffin (Hill, 2007). In 1921, Nast bought a printing company located in Greenwich, Connecticut to guarantee a high quality of printing (Hill, 2007). The numbers showed how successful Nast's changes were: sales tripled, subscriptions doubled and in 1910 *Vogue* had more than half a million profit from adverting revenue (Hill, 2007). *Vogue* became a much sought-after place for advertisers and, unlike his predecessor Turnure, Nast gave plenty of space to advertising, as well as feeling responsible for how those adverts were presented to citizens in the magazine (Hill, 2007). After so much investment, Nast transformed the magazine into what it is today – a worldwide item of status, quality, luxury and sales. *Vogue's* editorial content has now long been a symbol of "a fashion magazine that transcended the style gulf between Paris couture and American Main Street ready-to-wear" (Hill, 2007, pp. 13). Until 2019, the American *Vogue* was the market leader with a print circulation of 192,212 and a readership of 861,000, with 4.1 million unique users online in May 2019 (ABC Jan-Jun 19; PAMCo 3 2019; Google Analytics Aug-Oct 19). Having become an international luxury fashion magazine with high circulation and a longstanding female target audience, *Vogue* is the perfect object of study to see how females are portrayed in adverts. For this reason, it is also necessary to provide an analysis of the possible meanings of *luxury* as a concept in the American context, which is investigated in the next section of this chapter.

1.3.   Luxury brands: definitions and consumers' profiles

This thesis intends to investigate the portrayal of women in adverts for luxury brands in *Vogue* from 2015 to 2019 since, as already mentioned, this fashion magazine is a global brand, is targeted mostly at a female audience and the majority of its pages are taken up by adverts of luxury brands. Luxury brands in particular have been chosen for this thesis since, in the words of Stokburger-Sauer:

"in a majority of markets and product categories, the price for female luxury brands is significantly higher compared to their male counterparts. These differences might result

from a higher perceived symbolic and social value of such luxury brands that have traditionally been more important for women than for men […] Additionally, for female consumers, luxury brands provide more uniqueness, status and hedonic value than non-luxury brands" (Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann, 2013, pp. 01).

Therefore, luxury products seem to be more desired by females than males. Perhaps because it represents a uniquely female-only market, so it represents a 'purer' form of female-targeted representation, which makes these types of brands/products useful for analysing the representation of women in advertising.

Kim et al. (2019) argue that studies on luxury brands are important because they help retailers and brands to create, shape and redefine their own identity. In this context, luxury products can be defined as "products and services that possess higher levels of quality, taste, and aspiration than other goods in the category but are not so expensive as to be out of reach" (Silverstein and Fiske, 2003, as cited in Kim et al., 2019, pp. 278). Luxury products can also be described as "goods for which the simple use or display of a particular branded product brings esteem on the owner, apart from any functional utility" (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004, as cited in Kim et al., 2019, pp. 278). Furthermore, the luxury dimensions of a product consist of high costs, functionality, quality, singularity and durability over time, and the consumption of those products occurs because they are characterised as authentic, urbane and high-class, and are related to pride, pleasure and individuals' self-esteem (Kim et al., 2019). In this thesis, some specific luxury brands will be selected according to an annual list made by BrandZ of the most valuable brands in the world, a selection which is explained in greater depth in the methodology.

According to Brun and Castelli (2013), luxury is a concept that may have diverse meanings for different people, and the spread and consumption of this category of goods influences what luxury means (Brun and Castelli, 2013). Luxury can be considered a privilege (Freire, 2014), a lifestyle of an elite, whose products are made with special and precious materials and are high-priced (Freire, 2014; Hennigs, Wiedmann, Klarmann & Behrens, 2015). They also demonstrate reliable performance and are vehicles for personal amusement and synonyms of wealth, status, quality (Brun and Castelli, 2013) and self-expression (Belk, 1988; Brun and Castelli, 2013). The origin of the concept can be historically explained since, in the civilisations of the ancient world, luxury was associated with supremacy, power, status, non-basic needs and prosperity (Brun and Castelli, 2013). In ancient Greece, luxury was used as a source of pleasure which would shift the attention of the citizens from the polis and its issues to the private life (Brun and Castelli, 2013). However, the Romans associated luxury with a negative meaning (Brun and Castelli, 2013). As noted by Brun and

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Castelli, "according to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, the term 'luxury' comes from the Latin 'Luxus' which means 'soft or extravagant living, sumptuousness, opulence', and shares a root with the term 'luxuria', which means 'excess, lasciviousness, negative self-indulgence'" (Dubois et al., 2005, as cited in Brun and Castelli, 2013, pp. 827). Later, with the rise of the bourgeoisie in Europe, the term received a more positive meaning related to comfort (Brun and Castelli, 2013). However, the modern meanings of luxury are a symbol of status and "habit of indulgence in what is choice or costly or something enjoyable or comfortable beyond the necessities of life" (Brun and Castelli, 2013, pp. 827), and they surged after the Second Industrial Revolution. Before that, craftsmen produced luxury products by hand, but with the Industrial Revolution, those goods started to be produced by modern companies (Brun and Castelli, 2013). Due to high demand and consumption, manufacturers started expanding to other countries and luxury goods became global, leading to the origins of today's worldwide luxury businesses (Brun and Castelli, 2013). According to Giorgio Armani, luxury is characterised by exclusivity, while, for Coco Chanel, it is marked by the absence of indecency (Brun and Castelli, 2013). Moreover, luxury goods are recognized by high prices (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993) and also by the quality of the products and outstanding shopping experiences and practices (Brun and Castelli, 2013). As already mentioned by Brun and Castelli (2013), previous studies have associated luxury goods with high-quality materials which promote durability of the product and high price (Antoni, Burgelman and Meza, 2014; Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2016); creativity in terms of design and colours (Atwal and Williams, 2017); tradition, since luxury brands have existed on the market for a long time (Belk, 1988); elitism (Brun and Castelli, 2013) and glamour and respect (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2016; Vigneron and Johnson, 2017). On the other hand, Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2016) have argued that the high price of luxury goods is only a characteristic of their definition as luxuries. The correlation of price with quality is not *stricto sensu*; a luxury product may cost many times more than a normal product, but this does not guarantee quality in the same proportion (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2016). Rather, users are willing to pay high prices not simply because luxury brands sell products, but because these are symbols of dreams (Kapfere and Valette-Florence, 2016).

By selling dreams, magazines such as *Vogue* focus on these types of brands because this consumption promotes the feeling of belonging to one unique community (Amatulli and Guido, 2012). Amatulli and Guido (2012) not only discuss the meanings of luxury but the reasons for its consumption since these motives define the essence to the concept. The authors make the distinction between public luxury goods, also called externalised luxury, and private luxury goods or internalised luxury (Amatulli and Guido, 2012). The dimensions of the external/public luxury are ostentation, materialism and superfluousness since these goods are a symbol of prestige and exclusivity, and are not considered essential to survival (Amatulli and Guido, 2012). The dimensions

of the internal/private luxury are the individual's lifestyle, hedonism and the desire to belong to a certain culture (Amatulli and Guido, 2012). In the words of Dumoulin, "the expression of today's luxury is about a celebration of personal creativity, expressiveness, intelligence, fluidity, and above all, meaning' (Dumoulin, 2007, as cited in Atwal and Williams, 2017, pp. 46). Moreover, luxury goods are products that distance citizens from the masses and make them feel part of a rare fragment of the population, what Catry (2003) calls the "corporate identity culture" (Catry, 2003, pp. 15). Along similar lines, Dubois and Duquesne (1993) have identified different variables that compose the connotation of luxury: income, due to high prices; cultural identity, since luxury goods promote a feeling of identification with one another within a group and, lastly, superiority in service and artistic design of products (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993). In addition, Freire (2014) has emphasised luxuries' mythological and revered aspects, as luxury products enable consumers to build another self (Freire, 2014). Advertising of luxury goods intends to make the consumer self-identify with the character shown, encouraging the purchase of the product by playing on the user's self-esteem, for Freire (2014), as well as on the idea of buying or selling dreams (Amatulli and Guido, 2012), as already mentioned.

To conclude, luxury goods can be defined and explained as elitist, expensive, wealthy, exclusive, rare, high quality, sophisticated, superior, creative, magic, dream-making, of international reputation, good taste, superfluous, pleasing and as the extension of the self. Most consumers of luxury products are female, corresponding to the fact that women have been shown to be more concerned about their appearances than men (Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann, 2013). For this reason, women use fashion (clothing, perfumes, makeup, accessories) to support their appeal and have a more positive attitude towards luxury goods, which makes them a more "valuable target segment" for the fashion industry (Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann, 2013, pp. 895). *Vogue* is a magazine read predominantly by women. However, in this type of magazines, adverts show females as submissive rather than empowering (Conley and Ramsey, 2011), which is also discussed in Jean Kilbourne's documentaries, presented at the beginning of the chapter.

1.4.   Social Relevance

This research is socially important because the representation of women in adverts can shape the values of society and may reinforce or deconstruct certain gender and beauty stereotypes. In this sense, it is also fundamental to define the concepts of gender and gender stereotypes. Sex describes the biological categories of male and female, while gender denotes the psychological aspects related to these biological conditions (Six and Eckes, 1991). Further, the

gender stereotype can be described as "the structured set of beliefs about the personal attributes of men and women" (Ashmore and Del Boca, 1979, as cited in Six and Eckes, 1991, pp. 58) and is composed by subcategories such as sexual behaviours, physical appearance, social status and social roles (Six and Eckes, 1991).

A liberal feminist approach in this thesis is necessary because even though the social structures have transformed, women are still not occupying the same levels and positions as men. For example, in the job market, sometimes women are paid less than men for executing the same functions. Another example is the political sphere. In 2019 the UK elected 220 female members of parliament for the first time in history. It shows how although women have gained their space in politics, this number still constitutes only a quarter of the seats, otherwise occupied by men (Duncan and Busby, 2019). This clarifies the notion that even though women are participating more in society, gender equality is far from reality. For instance, this thesis has found that women are still sexualised, objectified and infantilised in the media, which makes this study even more socially relevant. This paper confirms these contexts just mentioned and also reveals some unique nuances, such as the use of the low angle to objectify women instead of empowering them and the portrayal of racial bias related to black women. Furthermore, women's representation in advertising can impact how females perceive themselves and how others, especially males, look at them, which may lead to self-perception issues, low self-esteem and eating disorders as mentioned by Kilbourne (Conley and Ramsey, 2011). For this reason, some self-regulatory institutions such as ASA, as previously mentioned, exist to contest every type of stereotype against women in the media. Additionally, adverts are spread widely among society, and people are exposed to them constantly (Kilbourne, 1999; Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008). Moreover, the World Health Organization (2020) states that women's health, violence against women and gender equality are still great concerns today, and studies show that the representation of women in the media as sexual objects stimulates and reinforces the acceptance of violence against women (Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008). Therefore, this study is relevant to show how, from the business perspective, advertising could be more gender equal while also profitable, and to improve women's welfare.

1.5. Scientific Relevance

Some studies related to the representation of women in advertising have been published over various decades, such as Goffman (1979) and Bell & Milic (2002), which will be explained in more depth in the next chapter. Moreover, other scholars also have studied gender and advertising and concluded that women are sexualised, objectified and infantilised in the media (Conley and

Ramsey, 2011; Gill, 2007; Moeran, 2010; Sheehan, 2014). However, a more contemporary study is necessary, useful and scientifically relevant to observe if the representation of women in the media remains as it was years ago or if it has changed, following the changes which have happened in society. Furthermore, woman have gained the right to study, to work, to vote and even to be participants in politics. Due to all these improvements, it would be expected that the representation of women in advertising would be different than the one coded by Goffman (1979), but this does not appear to have happened since, as already mentioned, this research has found that women are still sexualised and objectified in the media. Further, these findings will be detailed later in this thesis in the Results chapter. It seems, still, that "American women have exited the home and stepped up to the department store beauty counters" (Bubsy and Leichty, 1993, as cited in Plous and Neptune, 1997, pp. 629). In contrast with cultural development, as a result of which women can now enter jobs previously considered only for men, women became dominated by images of sexualisation and beauty (Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008). For this reason, this thesis promote awareness to companies and brands whose advertising may lead to an improvement in the representation of women in the media.

Lastly, Lindner (2004) also studied the representation of women in *Vogue* and *Time*. However, the author analysed advertising in general from 1955 until 2002. This present study is more contemporary since it discusses adverts from 2015 to 2019, and innovatively and specifically analyses luxury brands, comparing them in relation to the portrayal of women in advertising. This makes the work potentially innovative since no other study appears to have covered and compared the representation of women in adverts of these types of goods and brands from a semiotic analysis and a liberal feminist perspective.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the two components that compose the theoretical framework of this study. Goffman's codes are one of these, also providing the basis of the methodology of this research, while the other is American liberal feminism.

Erving Goffman (1922-1982) was a Canadian sociologist who studied daily life and the construction of the self in American society. He analysed, in 1979, the representation of women in print advertising in magazines and concluded that females are infantilised, sexualised and objectified in the media. As previously discussed, even though society has developed, it seems that women still need to fight for agency, respect and gender equality, indicating that Goffman's interpretation of society may continue to apply today. Likewise, the fight for women's rights is the feminists' aim, since they are in constant conflict with male supremacy and gender relations in society. Hence, what Goffman observed in the media is exactly the reflection of the struggle among feminists and the social structure, and, for this reason, these two approaches have been selected and combined to analyse how women have been portrayed in adverts of luxury brands in *Vogue* in the past five years.

Therefore, the chapter is divided into three different parts. In the first part, Goffman's codes will be explained and the representation of women in the media will be debated. The literature discussed has been selected because authors have mentioned, responded to or based their research on Goffman, and this thesis expects to produce similar findings. The second part discusses the general principles of the liberal feminist movement and feminism in the US. Some scholars normally refer to feminist waves when talking about feminism. Broadly, the first wave spanned the mid-nineteenth century to 1965, the second wave happened between 1965 and 1975, the third wave took place from 1975 until 2012 and the fourth wave is contemporary (Balda, 2019). However, it is important to mention that the concept of feminism used in this research cannot be identified according to the wave categorisation since I agree with some scholars who "reject the usefulness of the wave-metaphor as an adequate model of feminist historiography because it conflates the multiplicity of debates, practices and strands of feminism into a unilinear, progressive and sequential timeline" (Titton, 2019, pp. 750). Thus, this study approaches liberal feminism as a continuous movement that borrows and lends ideas and behaviours between different generations. Lastly, the third part will approach the influence of feminism on the fashion industry, since this thesis analyses adverts for luxury brands.

2.1. Literature background and Goffman's codes

Erving Goffman is a sociologist who studied social interactions in daily life and how the self is constructed in this context in American society. In 1979, he wrote *Gender Advertisements* where he coded how women were portrayed in American magazines. Goffman's codes of the presentation of the self suggest that the body is the venue of an individual's self-esteem and is considered a vehicle of pleasure (Shilling, 2003). Furthermore, Goffman's codes are categorised as follows: (1) Relative Size, (2) The Feminine Touch, (3) Function Ranking, (4) The Ritualization of Subordination, (5) Licensed Withdrawal, (6) The Family and (7) Infantilization (Belknap and Leonard II, 1991). The first, Relative Size, is related to the size of the female model in advertising in comparison with images of men. As Kang (1997) later explained, this code refers to the images where normally women were portrayed in a smaller size than men. This code reflected social forces in which women were considered weaker or less significant (Kang, 1997). The second code, The Feminine Touch, refers to the ritualistic touch displayed by women where they are barely in contact with an object or person (Goffman, 1979). As Kang (1997) explains, this feminine touch is superficial, normally only tracing the outlines of an object or softly touching themselves for example on the face, legs or waist, but it is distant from actions such as grabbing an object or product. The Function Ranking code describes gender roles in adverts, where men mostly take action while performing tasks and female models are placed as decorative objects (Goffman, 1979). This has been described by Kaiser et al. (1991a), Kang (1997) and Paff and Lakner (1997, pp. 32) as "being and doing", where females are *being* passives and men are *doing* something concrete. This dichotomy is further described as "Agonic power" (Paff and Lakner, 1997, pp. 32), where the men are powerful, strong and active, and "Hedonic power", where females are weak and dependent of others (Paff and Lakner, 1997, pp. 32). Moreover, the fourth code, The Ritualization of Subordination, is related to the subordination of women when they are placed in vulnerable and sexual positions, such as with bent knees, lying down or sitting with legs open, where the body position demonstrates lack of power and inferiority (Goffman, 1979; Kang, 1997). The Licensed Withdrawal can be observed in two different directions. In one, women are portrayed as lost, confused, upset or looking far ahead, with the head turned (Goffman terms this 'head cant') or with the eyes not facing the reader (Goffman, 1979). The other direction is noted by Kang (1997), where females are represented as overreacting and barely maintaining control (e.g. laughing or displaying emotions excessively). The Family code refers to gender roles in the family (Goffman, 1979). As discussed later by Kang (1997), in this situation, women are subordinated to domestic tasks and childcare, while men are portrayed in the workplace. Lastly, Infantilization can be identified when women are represented as vulnerable and in need of care and protection (Goffman, 1979). In this sense, women are sometimes featured with teenagers' clothing, in bright colours and flower prints, with little makeup,

braided hair and so on (Kang, 1997).

Besides Goffman (1979), several other scholars have found similar results by analysing how women are portrayed in the media. For instance, according to Gill (2007), marketing professionals utilise the notions of male and female to transmit values and messages in the media. Another purpose of gendering in the media is for profit (Gill, 2007). To illustrate, one brand of men's perfumes, for example, may portray a beautiful woman attracted by the fragrance, selling the idea that if a man buys this product, he will attract this type of woman. Some authors have stated the power of socialisation that adverts have since they transmit an ideal type of how things should look and how women should be and behave (Baker, 2005; Belknap and Leornard II, 1991; Goffman, 1979). Furthermore, Gill (2007) and Conley and Ramsey (2011) have argued that while advertising may be reshaped to suit diverse religious and cultural environments, adverts mostly reinforce stereotypes (Paff and Lakner, 1997) and represent women in household functions, as sexual objects or lacking intelligence (Conley and Ramsey, 2011; Gill, 2007). By the same token, Gill (2007) like Goffman (1979), also notes different levels of power between men and women. According to both authors, both genders are portrayed in diverse positions in adverts, which illustrates men as more powerful than women, considering their functions, places and salience in the advertising (Gill, 2007; Goffman, 1979). For instance, if a man is pictured in front of a woman, it may symbolise the submission of the woman to him. In other cases, women are represented in vulnerable positions, such as lying down, with legs open, reclining on an object or on bent knees (Conley and Ramsey, 2011; Gill, 2007, Goffman, 1979). Furthermore, women very often play a decorative role, only using their hands to hold objects or touch themselves, which means that in adverts the required actions are mostly done by a man (Conley and Ramsey, 2011; Gill, 2007; Goffman, 1979). Likewise, in some adverts, only a specific part of the woman's body is shown, such as the breasts, shoulders, legs or chest, and the woman is sometimes silenced, with an object or even a part of her own body covering her mouth (Conley and Ramsey, 2011; Goffman, 1979). Therefore, as already mentioned in the documentary series *Killing us Softly?*, the sexualised, objectified image of women in advertising has been used to attract the attention of consumers, intending to make the product more attractive in the market (Gill, 2007). Moreover, the sexual objectification of women occurs "when a woman's sexual parts or functions are separated out from her person, reduced to status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her" (Barthy, 1990, as cited in Moradi and Huang, 2008, pp. 377).

Similarly to Gill (2007), Sheehan (2014) has also stressed how stereotypes are reproduced in the media, where women are normally responsible for household tasks, are mothers and are skinny, young and beautiful, while men are powerful, successful and charming even if looking older

(Sheehan, 2014). For the author, women and men are not only represented differently in advertising but also interpret and respond to it according to their self-perception and to their roles in society (Sheehan, 2014). This replication of stereotypes is also discussed by Moeran (2010), who affirms that women absorb those concepts through adverts and associate those values with self-worth, with how they perceive themselves and how they think that others perceive them (Moeran, 2010; Paff and Lakner, 1997). This is problematic since it may also influence their personal and professional relationships (Eisend, 2010). In this sense, advertising may shape "cultural impressions of what it means to be male or female" (Kaiser, Lennon and Damhorst, 1991a, as cited in Paff and Lakner, 1997, pp. 30).

In addition, like Gill (2007) and Goffman (1979), Conley and Ramsey (2011) and Baker (2005) have also stated how women lack agency and action in advertising, making them submissive, decorative and sexual objects. This suppression appears, as well, in the reduction of women's power and authority in comparison to men in advertising and their portrayal as less intelligent humans, responsible for the procreation of the species (Sheehan, 2014). For this reason, a woman does not need to appear independent in adverts but rather sexy to attract the views of consumers (Sheehan, 2014). This sexy and beautiful woman does not only get attention from consumers but is also a symbol of status since male models in adverts are empowered by having an attractive woman beside them (Baker, 2005). From Goffman, Bell and Milic (2002) also describe this suppression of women as "Infantilization" (Bell & Milic, 2002, pp. 204), which can be identified by some patterns: the size of the female model and the angle the photo was shot, since women tend to be placed behind or smaller than men; the representation of the woman in roles considered feminine, such as mothers and cleaners and, lastly, the fact that the man is portrayed as the protector of the woman, since she is fragile and vulnerable and needs to be protected (Bell & Milic, 2002; Conley & Ramsey, 2011; Goffman, 1979).

However, this portrayal of women is related predominantly to white females, since other ethnicities are represented according to other racial stereotypes (Baker, 2005). For instance, the sexuality of black women is represented as aggressive, "predatory and animal-like" (Plous and Neptune, 1997, as cited in Baker, 2005, pp. 16). Therefore, black women are normally wearing animal print or shot close to a wild animal, since these females are considered sexually aggressive (Baker, 2005). Although some researchers argue that the animal print symbolises African pride and should therefore not be considered racial bias. Plous and Neptune (1997) conducted a content analysis among advertising in six fashion magazines that contests this argument on the grounds that if the animal print symbolised pride, men would also wear it, which does not happen. Besides, the tigers and snakes emulated in these prints are not animals originally from Africa, challenging

their association with feelings of pride in favour of the wild sexualisation of black women (Plous and Neptune, 1997). *Vogue* is a white-oriented magazine targeting heterosexual women, and all models, including black women, assume traditional Western beauty standards (Baker, 2005; Paff and Lakner, 1997). For this reason, black women are still a minority in the magazine (Plous and Neptune, 1997) and are normally portrayed very thin and with straight hair (Baker, 2005). Women, according to traditional Western beauty standards, should be white, skinny, tall, with long legs, straight hair and full lips, because this is what is currently profitable for magazines, television and the fashion industry (Baker, 2005; Paff and Lakner, 1997). Likewise, *Vogue* is also considered a heterosexual magazine since studies show that in this type of periodical, women are likely to be thin, feminine, long-haired and young, while in homosexual magazines women are often heavier with short hair and dress differently, in larger clothes, neutral colours and without heels (Milillo, 2008).

Assuming Goffman's codes together with the liberal feminist perspective as a theoretical framework, this work will investigate how women are represented in *Vogue* and also how those values are transmitted through the magazine since the representation of women's sexuality is one of the causes of gender inequality (Baker, 2005). Goffman's research was conducted more than thirty years ago, and this more contemporary study is therefore necessary to evaluate the possible changes and continuities in the portrayal of women in advertising, while innovatively comparing this representation among luxury brands in a feminine fashion magazine such as *Vogue*. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Goffman's (1979) codes have been selected since it seems to be a reliable study, given how many researchers, cited in this section, have used Goffman's perspective as the starting point of their analysis.

Furthermore, Gill (2007) and Halliwell, Malson and Tischner (2011) have also addressed feminist and postfeminist points of view about advertising. According to them, feminists consider adverts to be vehicles of sexism and racism, while postfeminists have a different approach (Gill, 2007; Halliwell et al., 2011). For postfeminists, adverts can be considered as a space where women state their freedom over their bodies, which means that the female body is not sexualised but is rather an expression of women's power to do what they wish with their bodies and to seek pleasure how they like (Gill, 2007; Halliwell et al., 2011). Therefore, from this perspective, women are not sexual *objects* but sexual *subjects* (Halliwell et al., 2011). However, this sexual subjectification of women for postfeminists can be quite similar to sexual objectification, since beauty and appearance are still of central importance in advertising from both perspectives (Halliwell et al., 2011). Similarly, Eisend (2010) has used the terms *pessimism* and *optimism* instead of framing perspectives as feminist or postfeminist (Eisend, 2010). As the names already suggest,

the pessimist believes that the portrayal of women in advertising remains sexualised, objectified and infantilised, while the optimist argues that this representation has become more equal to the portrayal of men (Eisend, 2010). Based on this context, Eisend (2010) has pointed out that marketing professionals try to dialogue with feminism in adverts, associating objects that represent power, such as suits, cars, etc. with female characteristics like heels, makeup and long hair, since they expect to transmit the notion that women can be powerful, but they will always also be sex symbols (Eisend, 2010). The results of this present study will be discussed in more depth later, but broadly this thesis agrees more with feminist/pessimist approaches related to the representation of women in the media since it employs the tenets of Goffman's interpretation of images of women, as well as of liberal feminism.

Lastly, the feminist approach has been chosen because although society and technology have developed among the years, women still face a lack of agency and still need to engage in gender equality dilemmas. For this reason, this liberal feminist perspective is fundamental in this study to fight against the suppression of women in the media. This approach was inspired by the academic Sarah Benet-Weiser, who discussed the contribution of feminine labour and gender to branding, and also the fight of the feminists against popular misogyny, which will be debated in the next section.

2.2. Liberal feminism: general principles and the American movement

The consumption and representation of the body in contemporary culture has been studied by some scholars such as Featherstone (1991), who identified and stressed the importance of the appearance and embodiment of beauty for expressing social values (Featherstone, 1991). Based on this, the author divided the body into two different components: the inner and the outer bodies, where the inner is associated to the health and conservation of the body and the outer is related to the presentation and physical aspects of a human being (Featherstone, 1991). Advertising emphasises this differentiation between the appearance and the well-being of the body and gives a higher degree of importance and priority to physical attributes (Featherstone, 1991). As well as the importance of the body, Featherstone also shows how gender can play a role in diverse sectors of society, such as social policies and citizens' welfare and protection (Featherstone, 1991).

The consumption of the body in the media and women's welfare mentioned by Featherstone (1991) are central in some feminist debates. Some terms and ideas are intrinsic to these discussions, such as justice, liberation, rights and independence (Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rotterberg, 2019); equality of opportunities for both genders; the idea that women have value as

individuals; the end of sexualisation and prejudice against females; the idea that education is a powerful tool for political and social changes and that women are not instruments of men's pleasure (Wendell, 1987). In the US, for example, some feminists are in constant objection to social and political orders (Rottenberg, 2014); according to Delmar:

> "feminists are the leaders, organizers, publicists, lobbyists, of the women's movement; they come into their own and into existence relatively large scale in the course of development of a women's movement. The social movement, particularly in its political dimensions, provides the context for feminism; feminists are its animating spirits"
> (1986, pp. 16).

Rights are central in liberalism, which suggests that every citizen has rights and freedom, and one's rights end when the other's start (Groenhout, 2002). Hence, from the liberal feminist perspective, a woman has rights and owns her happiness, welfare, self-care and success (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). This well-being in the US's feminist movement – liberal and neoliberal – seems to be "predicated on crafting a felicitous work-family balance on a cost-benefit calculus" (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019, pp. 05; Rottenberg, 2014, pp. 420), meaning that women could be mothers and also work professionally.

It is crucial to emphasise that the focus of this study is on American feminism, for several reasons. Firstly, the edition of *Vogue* selected for this research is the one from the US. Secondly, John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* emerged from the United States, raising important discussions about human rights, freedom and agency. These notions form the central debates among some feminists and establish a connection between the political, social and economic spheres. Lastly, political and economic liberalism and feminism in the US were strong and powerful and not only shaped the American scenario but also influenced social movements around the world. Some liberal feminists state that women and men are equal in their capacities but that differences in socialisation and access to opportunities make them differ considerably (Bristor and Fischer, 1993; Dill, 1983; Hekman, 1992). Liberalism, especially in the US, states on the other hand that women and men are equal if they have the same level of rationality (Rottenberg, 2014). However, as already mentioned, many feminists believe that although intellect is equal, in the past, the difference in access to opportunities has made them unequal. This inequality persists until today, even though opportunities should be equal for both genders. Therefore, rationality cannot be a measure of gender equality (Bristor and Fischer, 1993; Hekman, 1992). While some liberal feminists have criticised liberalism for this idea of gender equality based on rationality (Rottenberg, 2014),

they have also borrowed from liberalism the ideas that every individual has the right and the power to "reject familial or social constraints" (Groenhout, 2002, pp. 54) and that different points of view and all individuals, independently of their gender, should be respected (Groenhout, 2002). These notions have been used by several feminists to fight against popular misogyny, which can manifest in different ways such as sex discrimination, violence against women, sexual objectification, patriarchy, male dominance and women's sexualisation (Groenhout, 2002).

Furthermore, it is important to analyse and contextualise the feminist movement in the US since American *Vogue* is the edition which has been chosen for this study. The fundamental terms through which the feminism in the US can be examined are *sisterhood* and *sisters* (Beins, 2010). These terms appeared in 1970s, permeating the movement and found in books, on T-shirts, accessories, music and so on (Beins, 2010). The terms were also used to create a sort of identity among American women and a feeling of solidarity between them, as well promoting the centralisation and homogenisation of the movement, even though it was spread all over the country (Beins, 2010). According to Agatha Beins, "sisterhood encompassed a relationship between women and characterised feminist practices; the frequency of its use implies its central role in producing the boundaries, practitioners and goals of US feminism" (2010, pp. 295). Some studies, such as Fox-Genovese (1979-80), pointed out that the movement was racist since it included only white, middle-class women (Beins, 2010; Dill, 1983), while other researchers like Hooks (1995) mentioned that black women were included but on conditions set by white women (Beins, 2010; Dill, 1983; Hooks, 1995). Despite its critics, the feminist and the sisterhood movements in the US were able to unify many women against male power and predominance, sexism and popular misogyny (Beins, 2010; Dill, 1983). The Sisterhood, used to describe the beginning of the feminist movement in the US (Beins, 2010; Dill, 1983; Hooks, 1995), agreed that the sexist oppression suffered by women came from social structures where men were socialised to subjugate and to abuse, while women learned behaviours that were used to maintain the status quo (Dill, 1983; Hooks, 1995). Not only men but also women have always been socialised with the idea that females are enemies and must compete, while the American feminist movement instead emphasised solidarity, strengthening the movement (Dill, 1983; Hooks, 1995). Moreover, as stated by Hooks (1995), the critiques against Sisterhood came from the fact that these women unified themselves as victims, which only reinforced popular misogyny by reproducing the idea of the victimisation of women (women as natural victims). However, this present study does not agree with this position, since women could and still can be considered victims of the system in which they are sexualised and objectified, especially in the media, and in which they face inequalities in the workplace. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that, at least decades ago, racism from white women towards black women existed, which may have led to certain internal conflicts in the American feminist

movement (Dill, 1983; Hooks, 1995). However, many feminists argued that racism was also considered and combatted alongside all other forms of prejudice or inequality, and that individuals' struggles should not be prioritised over collective ones because:

> "when we show our concern for the collective, we strengthen our solidarity […] and we can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity"
> (Hooks, 1995, pp. 137–138).

Moreover, the central idea of this theoretical framework is the previously mentioned fact that the liberal feminists are in a constant fight with popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser, 2018) and seek gender equality in the public, private and corporate spheres (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). Today, liberal feminism is more business-oriented and focuses more on the individual than it used to. Many liberal feminists also use the media and the internet to empower women worldwide and to struggle for self-confidence, body satisfaction, the end of sexual harassment, the end of the patriarchal society and racism, equality in the labour market such as equal pay for equal work and so on (Banet-Weiser, 2019). However, popular misogyny attempts to re-establish in the status quo relations that benefit white masculinity (Banet-Weiser, 2018). For instance, popular misogyny tries to damage women's confidence, restoring embarrassment about their bodies through abusive sexual images (Banet-Weiser, 2018), and through body imagery that seeks feminine perfection, especially in advertising (Bordo, 2013). Therefore, the body is where feminist struggles have emerged (Bordo, 2013). In this sense, many feminists aim to reconstruct notions of gender, social relations and the construction or expression of the self without reflecting the patriarchal, theological and sexist way of existing and of interpreting society (Flax, 1987). The notion of gender is socially considered rigid and exclusionary in and of itself since a person can only be defined as man or woman, but not both (Flax, 1987). Even in the case of transsexuals, for example, the individual must choose (to meet social expectations) between being a male or female, legally and/or psychologically. These exclusionary gender relations have been relations of power, where men have been mostly the dominant side (Flax, 1987). This can be traced back to the constant conflict of feminists against misogyny and male dominance, where some feminists wanted to deconstruct this idea that gender is something natural (Flax, 1987). If gender is something only related to the sex that each individual is born into, it is useless to rethink gender relations due to the fact they will be intrinsic and unmodifiable (Flax, 1987). For this reason, many feminists would like to "denaturalize" (Flax, 1987, pp. 634) the notion of gender and gendered social relations since

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body, sex and gender can be also related to an individual's culture and mind (Flax, 1987). Therefore, many feminists see a dilemma between what is natural and what is socially constructed (Flax, 1987), explaining the conflict against popular chauvinism, since several feminists believe that the dominance of white masculinity imposed by popular prejudice against women, especially in the media, is socially constructed and, therefore, does not reflect the truth (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Flax, 1987). As stated by Hawkesworth (1989), the Western intellectual heritage has been built by men, contributing to the spread and reinforcement of misogynist ideas that place white masculinity in a superior position in comparison to women. This argument strengthens the notion mentioned by Banet-Weiser (2018) and Flax (1987) that gender inequality and sexism are socially constructed. In this sense, male reason/rationality uses men's power and chauvinist ideas to establish political and economic situations that fit the patriarchal conception of submission of women to male dominance (Hawkesworth, 1989). Therefore, as John Stuart Mill argues, "the male reason promotes the interests of men as a sex-class by securing women's collusion in their own oppression, transforming each woman from a forced slave into a willing one" (as cited in Hawkesworth, 1989, pp. 541). However, feminists have coherent reasoning and the knowledge to use this cleverly to overturn male pre-eminence and supremacy and to combat preconceptions of women (Hawkesworth, 1989).

Furthermore, gender assignment is something attributed to every individual since birth by reason of simply having biological characteristics (Ahmed, 2016). However, although gender stereotypes are taken for granted, each individual can choose to respond to, accept or change the way society assigns gender (Ahmed, 2016; Butler, 2015). Hence, vulnerability is a question of receptiveness and reaction (or not) to stereotypes (Ahmed, 2016; Butler, 2015), which is present in the feminist ideology "to begin the process of self-formation within and against its terms […] and to exercise power over how we are addressed" (Butler, 2015, as cited in Ahmed, 2016, pp. 485). In this sense, women have the right to exercise their agency against the structure, where agency can be explained as the individual's freedom to independently take actions and make choices, while the structure is composed by factors that limit or control those actions and choices, such as gender, social class, religion, culture, nationality and so on (Barker and Jane, 2016). Considering the aim of this study, these definitions are important since advertising can be interpreted as the structure which limits and controls women's agency through sexual images and though their figurative subordination to men in the media.

Lastly, this sexist subjugation and the "pornographication of everyday life" (McRobbie, 2004b; Paul, 2005, as cited in Gill, 2008, pp. 38-39), which can be understood as the mass exposure of society to sexualised images, are often concerns both of many feminists and consumers of fashion products. Advertising is frequently associated with the usage of sex to sell goods (Gill,

2008), and it is possible to encounter issues in magazine adverts related to women's sexuality, self-expression, lack of power to seek pleasure and lack of possibility of speak out (Jackson, 2005, as cited in Gill, 2008). Therefore, the feminist movement has influenced or at least is trying to make a difference in the fashion industry and in how women are represented in adverts, which is addressed in the next section.

2.3.   The influence of the liberal feminism in the fashion industry

Sexism does not happen only in social relations and magazine adverts, but also in other vehicles of communication, such as television. As stated by Joy and Venkatesh (2002), with the ascension of electronic media, the objectification of the female body has increased. The authors cited the television channel MTV as an example, where the female body is idealised and glorified in diverse programs on the channel (Joy and Venkatesh, 2002). It is not only TV programs but also advertising on television that exploits the female body for profit-making, where "the marketing industry was [sic] making billions of dollars by selling […] the body itself as the central concept of contemporary life" (Joy and Vankatesh, 2002, pp. 338). Therefore, the feminist fight for gender equality is essential, since gender bias and the objectification of women are present in diverse types of media.

The relationship between advertising and feminism is ambiguous, as can be observed later in the analysis of this thesis. While advertisers often try to incorporate feminists' ideas in their productions, they also try to overcome feminist criticisms and political and social militancy (Gill, 2008). In other words, in some adverts, this research was able to encounter traces of women's empowerment alongside examples where they were also sexualised and objectified. Moreover, the marketing of goods, especially luxury products, suggests ideas and outfits that force women to be "polished, powerful, fit and sexy – but not revealing too much skin, fat, sweat or desperation […] and successful woman should be feminist but still feminine, powerful but not too forceful, sexy but not desperate" (Hopkins, 2018, pp. 100). This representation of women, which is the sexualised and stereotyped image covered up by superficial empowerment, was stressed in the February 2016 issue of *Vogue* (Hopkins, 2018). This new "girl power" (Hopkins, 2018, pp. 100) was addressed only to the wealthy women who fitted certain beauty standards (Hopkins, 2018). It involved women in business and powerful women, but who were thin, well-dressed, sexy and mothers (Hopkins, 2018). This is the "'perfect' self-actualised woman as a winner in business, marriage and motherhood" (Hopkins, 2018, pp. 102). Furthermore, advertisers have represented images of women as sexualised and objectified to serve economic demands, showing female consumers an exaggerated

need to take care of their appearance (Paff et al., 1997). As mentioned by Wolf (1991), if advertising portrayed women according to reality, consumers would not buy the products (Paff et al, 1997). Paff et al. (1997) analysed *Vogue* and concluded that women are represented through unrealistic images and in feminine roles for profitable intentions.

In conclusion, it is clear that while feminism has influenced the communication field, it still far to change the representation of women to what is considered ideal, showing that Goffman's codes still apply to society even after thirty years. Moreover, Goffman's (1979) conclusions about the sexualisation and objectification of women in print advertising characterises precisely the debates and struggles between feminism and the social structure, where males are placed in positions of power and dominance. Therefore, merging the influence of liberal feminism and academic studies like Goffman's (1979) makes this study even more relevant insofar as it combines forces between academia and popular movements to advocate for positive and productive change in the fashion industry and in communication regarding how females should be portrayed in advertising.

3. Methodology

This chapter describes in detail the methodology used to understand how women are represented in advertising for luxury brands in *Vogue* between 2015 and 2019. It first presents the research design, followed by the method applied, the details of data collection – including the operationalisation and sample description – and, lastly, the process and analysis of the data.

3.1.   Research Design

To answer the research question specified in the introduction of this work, a qualitative approach was necessary since this type of research enables the researcher, with large theoretical and literature support, to interpret images, words and experiences according to the social and cultural contexts they occur and are produced (Brennen, 2012). Since this is a qualitative study, validity and reliability cannot be tested because the results are not generalisable or identically reproducible, but all the procedures realised in this study are detailed to convince the reader about the credibility of the research (Brennen, 2012). Furthermore, media studies is a field extensively composed by images, and semiotics is therefore a relevant method to use because it gives necessary assistance and guidance to understand visual and non-verbal communication such as the magazine adverts selected for this study.

3.2.   Method

Featherstone (1991) studied, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, the importance and values of the body in contemporary culture. Besides physical attributes, he stated that every human body consists of practical functions such as sleeping, eating, moving, and so on (Featherstone, 1991). However, the body is characterised by meanings, in contemporary society, at the micro and macro levels (Joy and Vankatesh, 2002). The micro level is composed of physical characteristics, while the macro-level encompasses all the meanings the human body may have and promote (Joy and Vankatesh, 2002), and both levels together "produce the cultural imaginary into which are incorporated bodily discourses and practices" (Joy and Vankatesh, 2002, pp. 339).

According to Machin and Mayr (2012), objects and symbols are only able to transmit a message when associated with the meanings and values behind them (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Therefore, to understand the concepts diffused by advertising and discourses of the body, it is

necessary to consider every feature in the image, for which reason the method selected for this study is semiotics. This method has been chosen since its advantage over other methods is the fact that every single and specific detail in the image is carefully examined, which gives the researcher the possibility to look for symbolic meanings. Other methods, such as content analysis, analyse the concrete meaning of words and objects, but not all possible values behind it. Semiotics is a suitable method to analyse images, such as advertising, and to show how objects and other signs can work ideologically and conceal inequalities, power and social struggles (Dumitrica and Pridmore, 2019), as is the case with gender representation in adverts.

It is worth noting that there are two different traditions of semiotic analysis. The first tradition, used in this research, is the one founded by Swiss linguist Fernand de Saussure and followed by other scholars such as Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and Umberto Eco (Dumitrica and Pridmore, 2019), while the second tradition is associated with Charles S. Peirce (Dumitrica and Pridmore, 2019) and Charles Morris (Manning and Collum-Swan, 1994). As explained by Dumitrica and Pridmore (2019), semiotic analysis can be defined as the study of signs and their meanings. A sign is composed of a signified – the subjective idea that the sign points to – and the signifier, which is the form of the sign (e.g. a text, image, etc.) (Dumitrica and Pridmore, 2019). In simple terms, the signifier is the sign itself, such as an image or a text and the signified is the idea or mental concept behind the sign (Dumitrica and Pridmore, 2019). Other scholars have used the terms 'expression' to characterize the signifier and 'content' for the signified (Manning and Collum-Swan, 1994). The relationship between the signifier and signified can be polysemic because it carries diverse meanings in different cultures and social contexts (Dumitrica and Pridmore, 2019), such that there is no "true meaning" (Halls, 1997, as cited in Dumitrica and Pridmore, 2019, pp. 10). Even though there are multiple possibilities of meanings of signs, it is possible to analyse them since "semiotics proposes that the ways in which signs are put together – and their relation to each other – works by selecting certain sets of meanings that we are supposed to recognize" (Dumitrica and Pridmore, 2019, pp. 10). However, it is opportune to remember that the meaning or content of a sign depends on individuals' interpretations (Mannin and Collum-Swan, 1994), and that other researchers may have a different perspective about gender representation in advertising than this study.

Another aspect of semiotics, the focus of this work, is stressing the importance of analysing the objects, settings and salience in images, since every detail may have a denotative and a connotative meaning (Hall, Evans and Nixon, 2013). Denotative meaning is related to the concrete meaning of an object, which can be found in the dictionary (Hall, Evans and Nixon, 2013). For instance, the denotation of a flower according to the Cambridge dictionary is "the seed-bearing part of a plant, consisting of reproductive organs (stamens and carpels) that are typically

surrounded by a brightly coloured corolla (petals) and a green calyx (sepals)" ("Flower", n.d.). However, the connotation of it is the value expressed by the word. For example, someone can be considered beautiful, sweet or delicate like a flower. In this case, the word flower carries a different meaning, which is an attribution of characteristics to a person. Moreover, the settings and the saliences should be also considered. The setting includes everything around the models and around the product which is being sold, and the analysis of the salience includes the observation of the colours and the sizes of the objects, the understanding of possible symbols and the foregrounding and overlapping of models and objects (Hall, Evans and Nixon, 2013).

Likewise, semiotics is composed of different types of resources which are valuable for analysing images: the observation of the physical attributes of the model(s) and the relationship between the model – in this case the woman – and the viewer/reader (Gee, 2008; Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). This relationship can be "encoded through the use of point of view, distance and contact" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, pp. 05). The "point of view" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, as cited in Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, pp. 03) is related to the analysis of how the model/product is shot and its relation with the position of the reader/viewer/consumer. For instance, the vertical position symbolises power in the sense that if the individual in the image is looking down, this person is in a more powerful position than others, while looking up would represent a lower power level than others, and at eye-level they would be placed in figurative equality (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). Instead of power, the horizontal positions may carry notions of "involvement" and "detachment" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, pp. 03) from the reader to the product/model being photographed. If the photo has been taken from the front position, it promotes the idea that the viewer is more involved with the product being adverted, while a photo taken from the side shows more detachment from the reader to the advert (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). However, all these relations are context-dependent, and the interpretations/meanings are limitless, which makes the 'point of view' a useful tool for semiotic analysis (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004) and therefore also for this thesis. Besides, "'power', 'detachment', 'involvement', and so on, are not 'the' meanings of these angles. They are an attempt to describe a potential meaning, a field of possible meanings, which need to be activated by the producers and viewers of images" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, pp. 03). The contact is another resource of semiotics, which is related to the 'fictitious relation' that the model establishes with the viewer (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). This relationship is characterised as demanding, where the individual in the image requests something from the reader (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). However, as mentioned by Jewitt and Oyama (2004), in most cases, males are portrayed in the demanding position while females are pictured in the offering position. Thus, "women were [sic] visually represented as more sexually passive and available than men who were visually represented as sexually active or demanding" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004, pp. 15). Distance is another

resource for this type of analysis. If the model is photographed in close-up, where only the face and shoulders appear, it indicates intimacy between the image and the reader (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). A 'medium-shot' carries the idea of a social relationship, where the model is pictured from the head until the waist or knees (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). Lastly, the 'long shot' is when the model is photographed entirely and represents a distant relationship (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004).

All these elements belong to semiotics and in this study were analysed as interdependent and correlated components. For example, the setting is observed as it connects to the position of the woman in the advertising, her clothes, her body display (body language / posture / position) and so on. It is crucial to remember that the interpretations of images and the meanings of the signs are unlimited and subjective, and so Goffman's codes and the liberal feminist perspective are utilised as the theoretical framework to guide the analysis and to narrow the diverse readings an image may have.

Lastly, it is fundamental to stress that semiotics has been chosen for this analysis since it is the method that helps the researcher to understand the meanings of an image through the arrangement of signs (Dumitrica and Pridmore, 2019). In other words, an object or a person alone in the image may have one meaning or none, but the combination of objects and/or people in a certain configuration produces and leads to a different interpretation. For instance, the figures of a man or a woman in an image may represent only a man or a woman. However, if the woman is placed behind the man, it may lead to the reading that the woman is less important than the man since she is in the background (Goffman, 1979). Therefore, the man or the woman alone does not create meaning; it is rather the arrangement of them in the advert that has a connotation. Also, it is valuable to add that researchers often use semiotics to analyse advertising because the objects and models in the adverts acquire a metaphoric meaning. In other words, as will be explained later in this work, women become a metaphor for the product, where their bodies are no longer just bodies but vehicles of other meanings such as luxury, sex, desire or consumption. For this reason, semiotics is a valid method to use since it guides the mental process of the understanding and the interpretation not only of signs but how and why they are combined in a specific way.

3.3.   Sample description and details of data collection

Sampling is an important action and method that reduces all the valuable data to a feasible, reasonable and valid number of ads (Flick, 2007). In this analysis, the heterogeneity of the sample was useful for providing interesting results and to enable the researcher to establish comparisons within the data corpus and to find differences and similarities among the units of the data

(Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). Considering these criteria, the sample utilised was extracted from the American edition of *Vogue* and the time frame (from 2015 to 2019) was chosen because the editions are recent and the interest of this study is in the contemporary representations of women in the media, so that the changes since Goffman's work can be assessed. Moreover, this time frame provided a great variety of adverts, which made it possible to achieve saturation (when nothing new could be found anymore in the data set). Two adverts per issue were analysed, constituting a total of 120 adverts of luxury brands. The brands selected were Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Hermès, Gucci, Cartier, Burberry, Dior, (Yves) Saint Laurent and Prada. This selection was made because these were the nine most valuable brands in 2019 according to BrandZ, a brand database from the marketing company *Millward Brown* that has been used every year since 2006 to generate a list of the 100 most influential global brands (Ritson, 2006). Two observations are important to make at this moment. Firstly, it was not possible to select an equal number of adverts from each brand, since brands such as Chanel, Dior and (Yves) Saint Laurent are present with more frequency in *Vogue* and photograph more women compared to brands such as Hermès and Cartier. Secondly, the case of (Yves) Saint Laurent needs to be explained. The brand designer Hedi Slimane rebranded the company and declared that the name Yves Saint Laurent can be used for makeup, perfumes, shoes and bags, while the women's ready-to-wear collection is called Saint Laurent Paris. This explanation is important to understand because some adverts analysed from the brand were named Yves Saint Laurent and others Saint Laurent Paris, but they are two components of the same brand.

Moreover, the adverts were purposively sampled, such that there had to be at least one woman in the image and the presence of a man was not mandatory. As previously mentioned, the body and its appearance are fundamental in the creation of adverts. Therefore, while selecting the advert, the woman's image (whether including her face or not) had to be accentuated in the advert, so it could be part of the sample. Likewise, the adverts selected are for different types of products, such as bags, shoes, clothing, makeup, perfumes and accessories, but all goods were targeted at a female audience. For this reason, products made for men were not included in the sample. In addition, some adverts were composed of images and words, such as the brand's name, and others contained only images. However, this was not the main focus, which means that the presence or absence of words was not considered important during the sampling. Furthermore, the issues were easily accessed in the *Vogue* archive online (see appendix for a summary of data collection).

Lastly, ethical considerations were considered, and it was decided to avoid the involvement of participants who may belong to a vulnerable population. Moreover, given that the models had already permitted to having their images published in the advert, no further consent is needed.

3.3.1. Operationalisation

To analyse all adverts selected, liberal feminist ideas and Goffman's codes (1979) were employed. From the feminists, this study borrowed ideas such as the necessity of fighting for gender equality, the sexual oppression of women in the media and the notions that women are sexualised and objectified in advertising. Moreover, the liberal feminist perspective has been used to guide the semiotic interpretation of the data and also during the sample collection. For instance, when the model looked upset or lost, the advert was purposively selected based on how some feminists argue that women are suppressed in the media. Therefore, the upset or distant looking were considered potent symbols of this suppression and selected accordingly. In other terms, the upset or distant looking are both used for sample selection and as an analytic to categorise that sample. Hence, feminism not only guided the interpretation of the images but also influenced the sampling procedure. Even though that theoretical framework guided this study, it also implements Goffman's codes (1979). Of these, the ones applied were the (1) Relative Size, (2) Feminine Touch, (3) Function Ranking, (4) Ritualization of Subordination, (5) Licensed Withdrawal and (6) Infantilization. The *Family* code was not used since no advert selected from *Vogue* portrayed women in a family role. The meanings and explanations of these codes were detailed in the theoretical framework chapter, but Figure 1 also summarises how these codes were used in the analysis. Moreover, the application of the codes is a combination of how Goffman applied the codes and the employment derived from the analysis during this study. The line between Goffman's and my application of the codes is tenuous, and it is therefore difficult to delineate precisely the applications derived from Goffman (1979) and the ones developed by this research.

GOFFMAN'S CODES	APPLICATION OF THE CODE	POTENTIAL MEANING
Relative Size	1- Size of the woman (e.g. smaller, taller or the same length as the other objects/models) 2- Size of the parts of the woman's body (e.g. if the head is smaller or bigger than the body) 3- Position of the woman in the image (e.g. in the	Men represented as strong, powerful and important while women are represented as less powerful, weak and less significant (potential meaning applies in the cases that women are shown to be smaller)

	background or the front)	
Feminine Touch	1- Women barely touching people and/or objects 2- Women using hands and fingers to trace outlines of an object instead of grabbing it 3- Women touching themselves (e.g. hands touching hair, or placed around face or waist, touching their clothes or other parts of body)	Women as decorative objects and sexually available; weak, lacking agency and individuality compared to men.
Function Ranking	1- Men portrayed as the executor of a task 2- Women play a decorative role in the image (no action done by her)	Women as objects and decorative; incapable of executing any task; weak and inferior compared to males; away from the workplace and only executing domestic tasks.
Ritualization of Subordination	1- Head and body cant (e.g. the woman looking down, sideways or not facing the reader) 2- Subordinate position of the model (e.g. sitting, legs open, bent knees, lying down) 3- Only part of the body is photographed (e.g. only the breasts or only the legs) 4- Shot in places such as the bedroom (on the bed), on the couch, sitting on a chair	Inferiority and vulnerability of women, lack of power and feminine objectification.

	with legs open or lying on the ground. 5- Placing an object or part of her body in front of her mouth.	
Licensed Withdrawal	1- Women appearing to be lost, upset, distant, looking down, inert, without feeling or emotions; lifeless 2- Seems to be only physically present in the image, but apparently lost, confused or absent 3- Overreacting to the point of losing control (e.g. extremely excited or laughing uncontrollably)	Women as powerless, dominated by men, inactive; fragile and weak (even in controlling themselves).
Infantilization	1- The woman represented as very young 2- Represented with clothes that recall school uniform 3- Clothes and setting in bright and soft colours and sweet prints (e.g. flower prints) 4- Absence of makeup or only very soft colours 5- Braided hair 6- Being protected by a man from something (e.g. rain, snow, etc.)	Females as humans who need care and to be protected by men; vulnerable, incapable of taking care of themselves, less experienced in life.

Figure 1 – Table of Goffman's codes.

This research does not only use Goffman's codes, it also provides a more contemporary coding frame. For instance, Goffman did not consider in depth the use or absence of makeup and its colours (bright or dark colours). Furthermore, Goffman did not focus on racial bias or how black women were portrayed in advertising. Additionally, for him, all his codes together provided the idea of a sexualised woman. Instead, I have decided to create an additional code for sexualisation, which includes bodily display (e.g.: nude or semi-nude), some accessories worn, lips slightly open, eyes slightly closed, and presence of the red in makeup, clothing, nail polish and other objects since red is considered sexy. Besides Sexualisation, the other three codes created after the analysis of the images were Femininity, The Black Women and Empowerment, explained further in the Theoretical Framework of this thesis. Figure 2 demonstrates how these codes were applied and their potential meanings.

NEW CODES	APPLICATION OF THE CODE	POTENTIAL MEANING
Sexualisation	1- Bodily display (e.g. nude or semi-nude, with some parts of the body highlighted such as chest, back, shoulders, legs or breasts) 2- Lips slightly open and eyes slightly closed 3- The presence of the red colour in makeup, clothing, shoes and accessories	Woman as a sexual object – sexualised for the pleasure of men and the viewer.
Femininity	1- Use of makeup, wearing dresses or skirts and high heels; 2- As in *Infantilization*, bright colours can be also used to indicate softness/sweetness	The idea that for a woman to be considered feminine she should use makeup, wear dresses or skirts and use high heels. Besides, as a general point, almost all females models have traditional

	(characteristics which an 'ideal woman' should have.	Western beauty characteristics (e.g.: very thin, long legs, thin waist, bright skin, long and straight hair, thick lips, and so on).
The Black Woman	1- Black woman represented with traditional Western characteristics (e.g. thin body, straight hair, full lips, white skin and long legs) instead of African beauty standards (e.g. larger hips, curly or Afro hair, more curves, etc.) 2- Black model photographed with wild animals 3- Black women represented either with empowered or sexualised characteristics (e.g. of empowered: photographed in business clothes and/or from a low angle – e.g. of sexualised: lying down or in bent knees)	The black women are normally represented as more independent, with traditional Western beauty characteristics and the wild animals are used to show aggressiveness and link it to sexualisation (the black woman is sexually aggressive such as the wild animal – mostly a tiger, a panther or a lion).
Empowerment	1- The woman photographed in a	The woman represented as empowered and belonging to

	position of power (e.g.: taller than a male, looking down to a man under her or in front of him) 2- The clothing: wearing business suits or no parts of the body sexually appearing (e.g. none or small necklines, pants instead of short dresses and skirts, and so on) 3- Lips closed and the woman facing the reader	the workplace.

Figure 2 – Table with the new codes created during/after the analysis.

3.4. Processing and analysis of data

After data collection, the adverts were analysed chronologically (from January 2015 to December 2019). On the image, all potential signs were identified, highlighted and coded through the lens of semiotics with their denotative and connotative meanings, and based on Goffman's codes (1979) and the liberal feminist approach, detailed previously. After that, patterns among all adverts were observed and codes were created, which have been detailed explained above. Later, the adverts were placed in groups which contained images belonging to the same brand. For example, the Gucci adverts were grouped, and the same with Chanel and so on. In the end, the representation of women in these adverts was compared with other adverts of the same brand and also others. In other words, this thesis analysed the development of women's portrayal over five years of each brand and, afterwards, a comparison between the brands was established to analyse which brands had improved and which had retained sexualised images of female models. This brand division was relevant since some brands such as Dior and Saint Laurent represented women in a sexualised manner more often than the other brands. However, Gucci and Burberry were

responsible for more racial bias compared to the others. Examples of the coding and the adverts are available along with the Results' chapter and in the Appendix to enable easier visual interpretation.

4. Results

This chapter will explore the analysis which has been done on the representation of women in advertising for luxury brands in *Vogue* from 2015 to 2019. This analysis, as previously mentioned, has been conducted thought a semiotics lens, based on Goffman's codes (1979) and liberal feminism as theoretical frameworks. Some general patterns have been found among the adverts, which were grouped in ten themes as described in the methodological section of this thesis. Curiously, the codes which were overwhelmingly present in this research were the *Ritualization of Subordination*, together with *Licensed Withdrawal*, *Infantilization a*nd *Sexualisation* since they are the ones that directly relate women to a sexual connotation. All codes are detailed in this chapter, and some images are used to illustrate and to give the reader a visual understanding of the portrayal of women in the magazine.

Lastly, Goffman's codes – *Relative Size*, *Feminine Touch*, *Function Ranking*, *Ritualization of Subordination*, *Licensed Withdrawal* and *Infantilization* – are presented in the same order used by the author. The additional codes created during this analysis – *Sexualisation*, *Femininity*, the *Black Woman* and *Empowerment* – will be presented in this order since the first two codes (*Sexualisation* and *Femininity*) are directly connected to Goffman's codes, while the *Black Woman* and *Empowerment* are entirely additional codes which Goffman (1979) did not consider. However, the *Black Woman* is still related to a sexualised image of women and will therefore be presented immediately after *Femininity*. *Empowerment* is the last code explored since it is the one which differs most considerably from the others. It is also important to mention that there are overlaps between codes in two ways. One occurs when different codes can be observed in the same image. For example, a woman can be photographed in the background while the man is in the foreground – characterising the *Relative Size* code – but she also can be lying down on a bed, which is associated with the *Ritualization of Subordination* code. The second kind of overlapping is where the combination of the codes leads to the sexualisation of women. For instance, the woman may be sitting with legs open (*Ritualization of Subordination*), but she may also have her head turned to show vulnerability, which is a characteristic of *Licensed Withdrawal*. So, in this sense, both codes work together to portray the woman as a sex object.

4.1.   The Relative Size

Relative Size is a code created by Goffman (1979) applied by him and in this thesis to identify the size of women compared to men or other objects in the image. It was also used to observe the position of the woman in the image (e.g. in the background or in front, behind a man or in front of him). In most of the images in *Vogue* containing a man and a woman, the woman was smaller than the man or photographed behind him. In this sense, based on Goffman's (1979) observations and the liberal feminist perspective, these positions of women in the image attribute to men characteristics such as power, strength and importance, while the woman can be observed as powerless, weak and less significant. Every brand which was analysed, when displaying both genders in an advert, mostly represented the man as taller than the woman and/or in front of her. In the next pages, some images illustrate how the code was employed during the study.

Figure 4.1.1 from Louis Vuitton from September 2017 illustrates an instance where *Relative Size* was applicable, given than the woman is placed slightly behind the male and is smaller than him. There are various possible interpretations of this image. Firstly, the woman is considered less significant not only by the reason of she is being photographed behind him and smaller but also due to the fact that she is the only one showing any kind of affection. She is hugging the man while he seems to be inactive, signalling that she is not valued by him. Another key aspect is the fact that although the product advertised is a bag made for women, the male is in the foreground. This suggests the reading that if a woman buys this product she will attract a handsome man such as the one in the photo. Lastly, it is also possible to observe the presence of other codes. For instance, the woman looks distant – almost not mentally present in the image. This is a characteristic of *Licensed Withdrawal*, which will be explained in-depth later in this chapter, illustrating the overlapping of codes mentioned at the beginning of this section.

Figure 4.1.1. - Vogue, (September 2017), pp. 102.

Another example (Figure 4.1.2), also from Louis Vuitton, presents the man as taller than the woman, even though they are photographed in front of each other. Besides this, the man's gaze is fixated on the woman and not on the bag, which is the main product of the advert. In this case, the woman is shown as less important through size, but she is also transformed into a commodity for the man since she attracts more attention than the product itself. Furthermore, the woman is softly touching her lips, which defines the *Feminine Touch* code. The bag is also red, considered sexy, and so falls under the *Sexualisation* theme. This image presents one more example of how the codes can be connected and related to one another and how these combinations lead to the sexualisation of women.

Figure 4.1.2. - Vogue, (October 2017), pp. 130.

Likewise, in the advert from Gucci (Figure 4.1.3), it is possible to observe the woman as smaller than the man even though she is placed slightly in front of him. Another feature to examine is the way they are having an ice-cream, since it can be considered suggestive. The man is photographed from the front with eyes open, while the woman is shot from the side and has her eyes closed. Besides, her tongue is visible while she is licking the ice-cream. This may have a sexual connotation since the eyes closed and the tongue can imply oral sex. Once more, it is not only her size but also her behaviours that present the woman as sexually available and objectified.
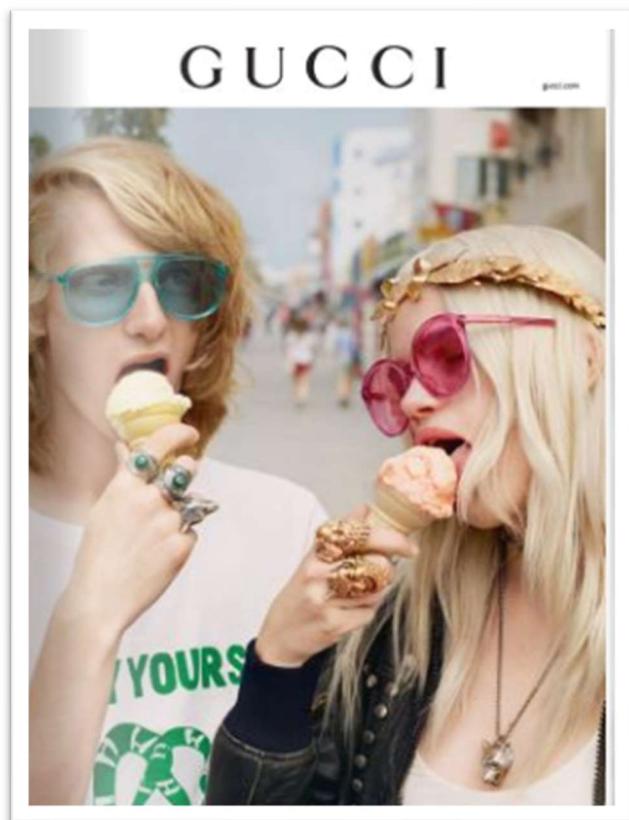
Figure 4.1.3. - Vogue, (May 2018), pp. 61.

4.2.   The Feminine Touch

The *Feminine Touch* was a code also developed by Goffman (1979) applied in this work to highlight images where women are barely touching people or using their fingers to trace outlines of an object instead of holding it. Likewise, women were found in most of the images in the sample to be using their hands only to touch their hair or parts of their bodies, and very often those women had their hands placed around their waists, emphasising this part of the body. Amidst all the adverts analysed, women rarely used the hands to grab things or to perform an action, the advert instead presenting them as decorative objects. If they were holding something, they were superficially or barely touching the object. Furthermore, in some adverts, women were photographed with a finger in the mouth (e.g. slightly biting it) or with arms gently crossed in front of their naked upper bodies ostensibly trying to protect themselves from something. These actions can be interpreted as the women being sexually available, weak, lacking agency and expressing limited individuality compared to men in similar adverts, who were more often photographed interacting more forcefully with objects.

In the Prada advert in Figure 4.2.1, the model in the foreground is superficially positioning her right hand close to her chin without developing any action. The woman behind her, with the pink sweater, is softly tracing the contours of the bag, while the model on the left is holding the blue bag, but at a position with her hand close to her waist. This is not only an example of the *Feminine Touch* but also of *Licensed Withdrawal*, given that the models do not face the reader as a result of looking down or into the distance.

Figure 4.2.1. - Vogue, (October 2015), pp. 02–03.

Figure 4.2.2 shows the woman in two different moments. In the first photo, the model is gently placing her right hand close to the purse handle and her left hand to the side of it. She only traces the outline of the object without any further action. In the second part of the advert, the woman uses her right hand to delicately delineate her lips. She places her hand between her cheek and chin, barely touching herself.

Figure 4.2.2. - Vogue, (October 2016), pp. 08-09.

Furthermore, in an advert for Louis Vuitton (Figure 4.2.3), the female model does not even hold the bag, sat on her lap as she reclines, and her right hand is lightly placed on her face. The same occurs in an advert for Saint Laurent (Figure 4.2.4) where the woman places her hands around her head, outlining her face, but without any action related to the product(s) of the brand. Moreover, the woman in Figure 4.2.3 is reclining backwards, which presents her as vulnerable and sexually available. This is a characteristic of *Ritualization of Subornation* and also an example of the overlapping of the codes.

Figure 4.2.3. - Vogue, (March 2017), pp. C2-C3.
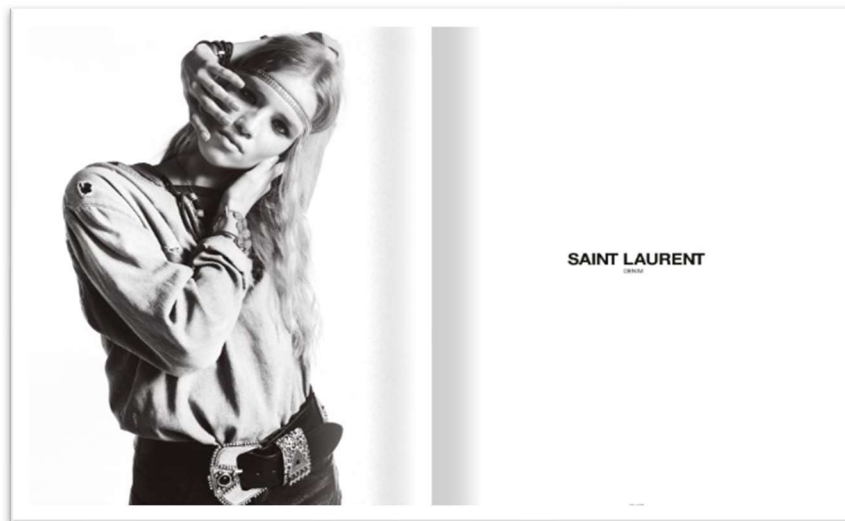
Figure 4.2.4. - Vogue, (May 2019), pp. 20-21.

In all these images, the women touch themselves or the objects in a very superficial way. This suggests the interpretation that females are weak and that their weakness prevents them from firmly holding something. This lack of strength places women as powerless compared to men since if they are not able to hold an object, they will not be capable to reject a man. Therefore, this situation presents women as sexually available. Another possible interpretation is the fact that when women touch themselves, they trace their physical outline. Doing so, they attract the viewer's attention to their appearance, which also presents them as objects. For instance, when

consumers look at these images, they probably notice firstly the woman and her touch (e.g. her lips or her face). Only after that, the consumer may look at the product itself. Once more, women become marketable.

4.3.   Function Ranking

Function Ranking is a code which could be read as correlated with the *Feminine Touch* since it is also associated with the image of women as decorative objects. The difference between these two codes, which was observable during the analysis, is that in the *Feminine Touch* the woman is represented as decorative, but she also has a sexual connotation or is at least wearing or close to the product being advertised. In *Function Ranking*, on the other hand, women are also ornamental, but in this case do not have a connotation of sexualisation – they are not necessary for the image to be understood, nor do they wear the main product of the brand in the advert. As an example, Figure 4.3.1 from a Cartier advert portrays a woman looking at jewellery and apparently desiring it. However, she does not wear nor touch it. In this example, the model is purely decorative since her image is not necessary to make the viewer/consumer understand that this product has been made for women. One interesting aspect of this image is the fact that this product is created for women, but the woman is not using it. It may indicate that this is a type of product targeted at a specific and select group of women – high-income ones.
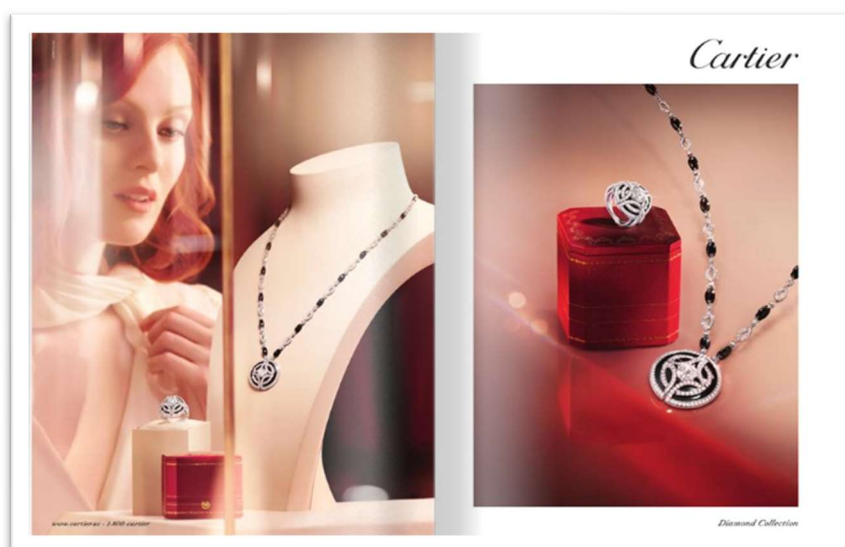

Figure 4.3.1 - Vogue, (November 2015), pp. 32-33.

Another example is Figure 4.3.2 from Prada. The first part of the image shows a young girl, while the second part displays a woman holding a bouquet. The paper around these flowers has the image of the young girl printed on it. In this situation, this girl is only ornamental and has no other functionality. She is only decorating the bouquet and she is not fundamental to the product being sold.
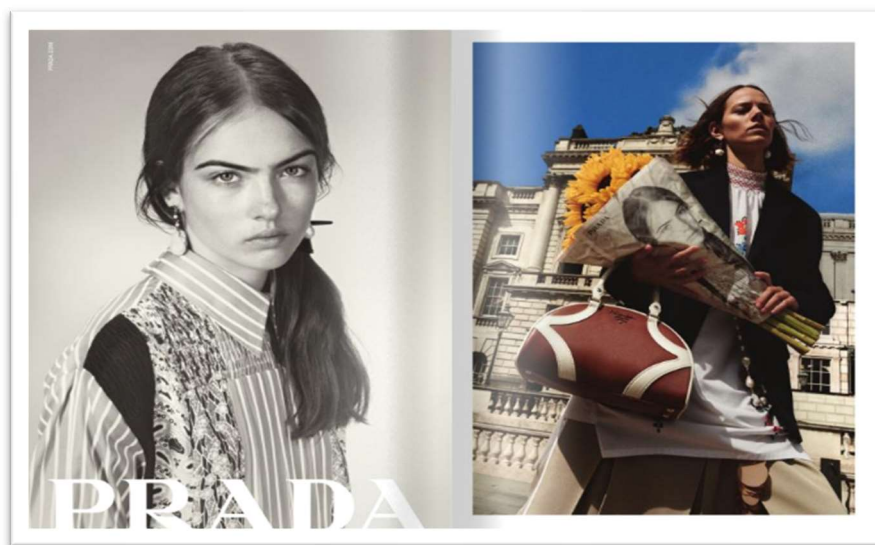
Figure 4.3.2. - Vogue, (December 2019), pp. 12-13.

4.4.   Ritualization of Subordination

The analysis in this research reinforces the findings achieved by other studies previously mentioned in the Introduction. Over five years (from 2015 to 2019), women were represented in most of the adverts as subordinated, vulnerable and powerless. In many of the analysed adverts for luxury brands, the women were sitting with their legs open or lying down on the ground, a couch or bed or shown with bent knees. Moreover, in some images, only specific parts of the body were shot, such as the legs, abdomen or breasts. Unsurprisingly, a favourite scene used in these adverts was the bedroom, by virtue of the fact that a woman lying down in bed with her head turned to the side is proposed as defenceless and exposed, with a sexual connotation. Some women were pictured as silenced by having their hands or objects in front of their mouths, which, according to Goffman (1979), makes women appear speechless and inferior to men.

In an advert from Saint Laurent (Figure 4.4.1), the model is photographed sitting on the dressing table in the background, with her legs open and her head down. In the foreground, a small

piece of the bed appears, establishing the bedroom as the setting. The woman is shot in a position that makes her susceptible and sexualised since the bedroom can be also be linked to sexual relations. The fact that she is in the background also figures her as less important, as explained above regarding the *Relative Size* code.

Figure 4.4.1. - Vogue, (November 2015), pp. 22-23.

The following adverts from Saint Laurent and Dior (4.4.2 and 4.4.3) are examples of women with bent knees, which portrays them as subordinated, sexually available and vulnerable (Goffman, 1979). It is interesting to observe that in this and the previous code, the *Feminine Touch*, there is a clear intent of sexualisation. However, in *Ritualization of Subordination*, this sexualisation is more explicit due to the bodies' positions. Here, the women are photographed in positions with a sexual connotation, such as lying down, with bent knees or sitting with their legs open, while in *Feminine Touch* the images focus more on the faces of the models. Therefore, in the *Ritualization of Subordination*, the body is the main emphasis even though some traces of the *Feminine Touch* are still present. For instance, in Figure 4.4.4 from Saint Laurent, the model has bent knees, which characterises the *Ritualization of Subordination* insofar as she is touching her head with her left hand without concrete action. This touch is superficial, attributed to the *Feminine Touch*.

Figure 4.4.2. - Vogue, (October 2016), pp. 26-27.

Figure 4.4.3. - Vogue, (February 2018), pp. C2-C3.
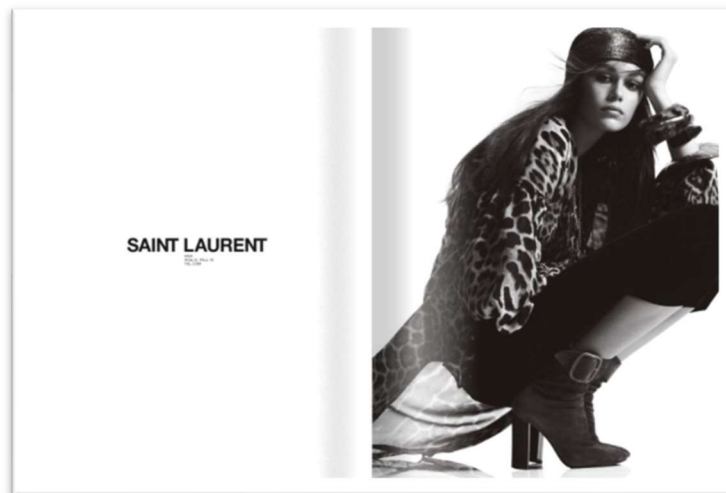
Figure 4.4.4. - Vogue, (August 2018), pp. 12-13.

Figures 4.4.5 and 4.4.6 – from Saint Laurent and Prada, respectively – are illustrations of women represented as subordinated by lying down. Saint Laurent utilises a couch, while on the advert from Prada, the women are lying on the ground. An image for Burberry (Figure 4.4.7) portrays a silenced woman. This silence is characterised by the fact that she places her hand in front of her mouth, indicating that she is speechless and powerless (Goffman, 1979). This can be interpreted as if the opinion of the woman is useless and not important. It is worth remembering that these images are only a few examples of what was analysed since subordination was a theme visibly present in the majority of the adverts.

Figure 4.4.5. - Vogue, (January 2019), pp. 04 05.

Figure 4.4.6. - Vogue, (July 2019), pp. 04-05.

Figure 4.4.7. - Vogue, (May 2017), pp. 28-29.

4.5.   Licensed Withdrawal

Besides *Ritualization of Subordination*, the *Licensed Withdrawal* code could also be observed in many adverts analysed. The female models constantly appeared to be distant, lost, looking down, upset or with their head slightly turned to the side (what Goffman called 'head cant'). It was very common to see inert and lifeless women, not showing any emotions or feelings. Likewise, they often seemed to be only physically present in the advertising, but mentally absent. According to Goffman (1979), *Licensed Withdrawal* is also characterised by the woman overreacting to the point of losing control, such as laughing uncontrollably or looking extremely excited. However, this was not found in this analysis for reasons discussed in the next chapter. In general, women were represented as powerless, inactive and fragile. The following images, taken from different years and brands, illustrate how women were portrayed as passive, distant and apathetic.

In Figure 4.5.1 from Prada, the models are looking forward but seem to be distant and looking in a direction without a purpose. They do not show feelings or emotions and are, apparently, mentally absent.

Figure 4.5.1. - Vogue, (August 2015), pp. 02-03.

Another example is Figure 4.5.2 from Gucci, in which the woman on the right wearing the pink dress is looking down with her head slightly turned to her right side (head cant). She is probably looking at the shoes of the other woman but seems to be passive and does not express

any emotion. Moreover, the two models on the right are sitting on the couch, corresponding to the *Ritualization of Subordination*, which presents them as more vulnerable. They are wearing heels, accessories and colours such as pink, purple and red, which fall under the *Femininity* code, described later. Once more, it is evident how the codes are interrelated and complement each other.

Figure 4.5.2. - Vogue, (June 2016), pp. 06-07.

In Figure 4.5.3 from Saint Laurent, the model has her head turned to the right, with hair covering her face. Using the hair to cover part of her face, especially the eyes, in combination with the head cant was found to be very common among the brands analysed. One interpretation for this is that it is a way to 'remove' the woman emotionally from the image and leave only her body, which consequently becomes also a product to be commercialised (an aspect discussed later in this chapter). An advert for Louis Vuitton (Figure 4.5.4) also shows an emotionally absent woman. In the advert, she is looking forward but also appears distant and only corporeally present in the image. This transmits the idea that women are objects and their feelings or opinions should be not considered since only their bodies may be profitable.
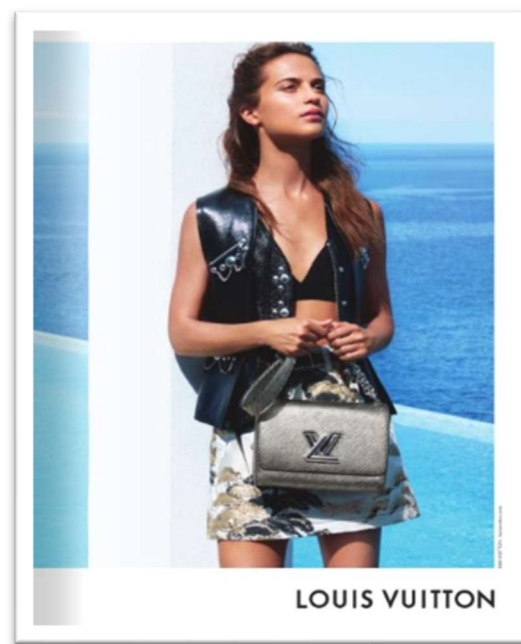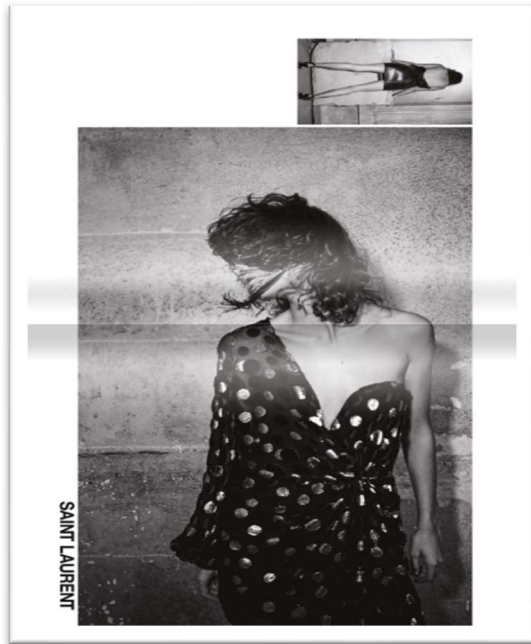
Figure 4.5.3. - Vogue, (March 2017), pp. 28-29.   Figure 4.5.4. - Vogue, (January 2018), pp. C2-1.

4.6.   Infantilization

Women were not only sexualised and subordinated in the adverts analysed, but also infantilised. They were regularly young, wearing clothes in bright colours or flower prints, makeup in soft colours and braided hair and/or with a fringe. The soft tones seemed to be used to state softness, sweetness and purity, which are normally characteristics of a child. Sometimes it could also be observed that models wore clothes that recalled American high-school uniform (e.g. a white blouse with a high collar or tie and long, pleated skirt). On certain occasions, when a woman was photographed with a man, she was also represented as someone who needs protection (e.g. from rain or snow). To summarise, it could be noticed that females were portrayed in need of care by men, as vulnerable and incapable of minding themselves as if less experienced in life. The next images show some examples of infantilised women in advertising.

In Figure 4.6.1 from Dior, a young model is shot with light makeup (or almost without it), a light blue blouse and flower print (on the sleeve, bag and around the brand's name). The setting is also bright (predominately white). The use of the colours in the clothing and the scene conveys the idea that the model is delicate, pure and sweet, which are often attributes of a child. This may also play with men's imagination since an infantilised woman is fragile and vulnerable and, therefore, can be easily possessed and dominated. Likewise, it is useful to draw attention to the fact that this

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model is looking forward and seems to be emotionally distant, typical of *Licensed Withdrawal* and also representing the woman as weak and susceptible.

Figure 4.6.1. – Vogue, (February 2015), pp. C6.

Moreover, In Figure 4.6.2 from Dior, the viewer can see three young females dressed in a way that recalls American high-school uniform (white blouse with a collar and a long, pleated skirt). They are also wearing light makeup and the blond model in the front is holding the bag in a similar way to how students grab their school notebooks. Once more, they are not only infantilised by the clothing but they are also positioned as physiologically absent though *Licensed Withdrawal* features, such as looking far away and without a purpose.

Figure 4.6.2. – Vogue, (September 2015), pp. 08-09.

In Chanel's advert from 2016 (Figure 4.6.3), three women also appear to be very young and are wearing clothes with flower print. The flowers carry the notion of sweetness, delicacy and fragility. Besides this, they are shoeless (wearing only socks), a childlike state. However, even though they are infantilised, they also have a darker pink colour of lipstick, which is considered sensual. One possible reading of this is the intention to play with men's imaginations again through the attractiveness for many of a sexualised young girl.

Figure 4.6.3. - Vogue, (January 2016), pp. 02-03.

Similarly, Figure 4.6.4 from Saint Laurent also represents a young girl, in this case without makeup and with soft facial traces, lying down on the naked chest of a man. He is visibly young since he has no hair, often present in mature men. There are traces of infantilised people (young and kind), but also with a sexual connotation given by the semi-nude bodies and the woman's position lying down on him. This is also a posture of care and protection, where the man is placed as the protector and the girl in need of care. It is useful to mention that men were not otherwise infantilised among the adverts analysed; this image was an exception.

Figure 4.6.4. - Vogue, (September 2016), pp. 28–29.

One more illustration of the man protecting the woman is given in an advert for Burberry from 2016 (Figure 4.6.5) in which the man is shielding the woman from the snow. In this scene, the woman has been placed in a position of incapability of minding herself. She is also shown as fragile indicating that the man should preserve and support her.

Figure 4.6.5. – Vogue, December 2016), pp. 38-39.

The last two examples are from Prada and Burberry. In Figure 4.6.6 for Prada, once more a woman is infantilised but with sensual connotations. The braided hair and the clothes in light colours are, as already seen in the other adverts, connotative of sweetness, kindness and purity. However, in this photo, the female is also wearing red lipstick, which is normally utilised with a sensual and attractive purpose. In Figure 4.6.7 from Burberry, it is interesting to note that there is a model on the left of the image wearing a blue and white suit, which is normally men's clothing. Moreover, this person has wings like an angel, which is a symbol of delicacy and protection. One possible interpretation of this is that a man is protective like an angel and a woman is the one to be protected. In other terms, the position of this angel-man suggests he is protecting the female model in front of him.
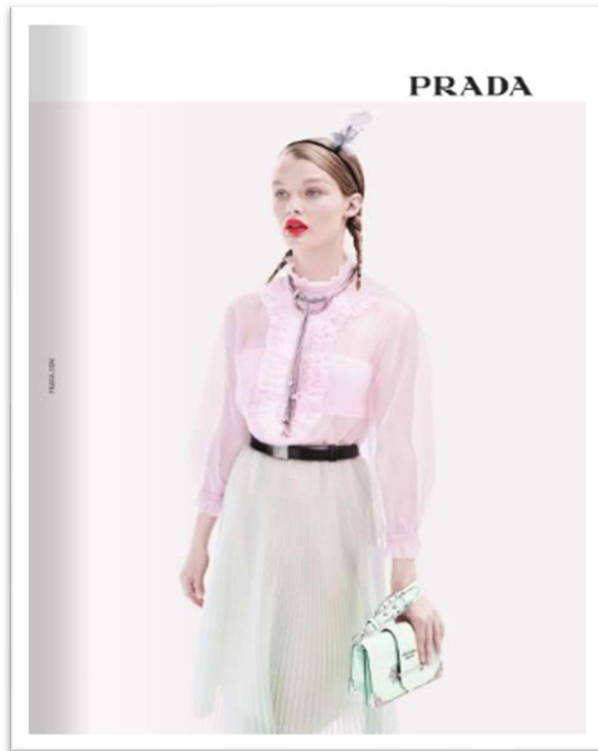
Figure 4.6.6. – Vogue, (December 2017), pp. 17.
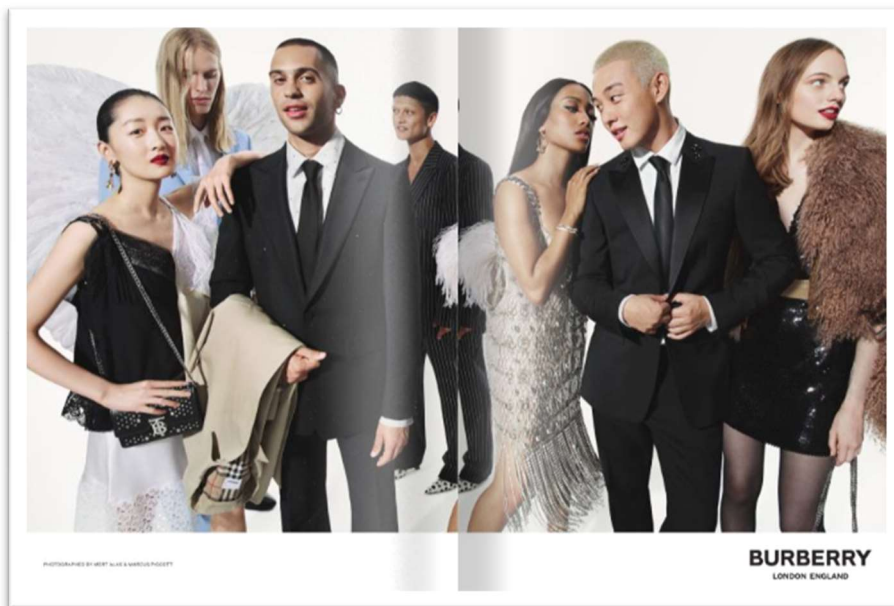
Figure 4.6.7. – Vogue, (December 2018), pp. 40-41.

4.7.   Sexualisation

As mentioned in the methodological section of this thesis, *Sexualisation* was not a specific code for Goffman (1979) since he understood it as the product of all his other codes. For instance, *Licensed Withdrawal* and *Ritualization of Subordination* together contribute to the construction of a woman's image as a sexual object. This thesis agrees with that position, but during the analysis it could also be observed that different factors not considered by Goffman (1979) also shape these sexualised images of females, such as bodily display (nude or semi-nude), red colour in clothing and makeup, considered sexy, and actions with sexual connotations (e.g. kissing, licking, and so on). In several examined images, women were sexual symbols and photographed not only to sell a product but also to please the viewer. Bodily display characterised by nude or semi-nude women was one of the factors that contributed to their construction as sexualised. Very often, female models had part of their bodies naked, such as the upper body, highlighting the chest, breasts, back and shoulders or the lower body, focusing on the legs or the hips. Likewise, in many adverts, women's lips were slightly open, also giving a sexual connotation (Goffman, 1979), and red was present in clothing, makeup, accessories, shoes and nail polish. The following images demonstrate these factors and also how they are combined to result in the sexualisation of women in the media.

Figure 4.7.1 from Louis Vuitton shows two models in underwear and with the upper body naked. The woman on the left is wearing red underwear, while the model on the right has part of her breast exposed and her lips slightly open. In this image, as in previous images, the models may attract more attention from the reader than the product itself. Furthermore, semi-nudity is not necessary in an advert for bags, which instead emphasises women as sex symbols.

Louis Vuitton and Marc Newson celebrate the ⓛ Monogram

LOUIS VUITTON

Figure 4.7.1. – Vogue, (January 2015), pp. 04-05.

In Figure 4.7.2 from Dior, the woman has also her lips slightly open and the sleeve of the dress suggestively lowered, emphasising the shoulder and part of the chest. Furthermore, the model holds the lipstick like a cigarette, for which there are at least two possible interpretations. The first is the idea that women may become addicted to this lipstick since smoking is also addictive. The second reading could be that men will become addicted to the lips of women who use this product, presenting women as sexual and marketable objects.

Figure 4.7.2. – Vogue, (October 2015), pp. 54–55.

Figure 4.7.3 from Burberry is another illustration of the sexualisation of women. There are two different models, both with lips slightly open. The model on the left is photographed in a middle-shot (from the waist until the head) and is partially naked. The product advertised, a bag, is placed around her shoulder and hangs at the same height as her breast. In this example, the partially revealed breast attracts more attention than the bag. Moreover, the model beside her is wearing something that seems to be a black dress with a large neckline, which also engages the reader through sensual connotations.

Figure 4.7.3.- Vogue, (February 2016), pp. 12-13.

In another advert, Yves Saint Laurent (Figure 4.7.4) seem to further develop this sexualised imagery by combining different signs: lips open, red lipstick, the position of the woman lying down almost underneath the man and the fact that he is smelling (or perhaps about to kiss) her neck. This is an advert for perfume and connects its fragrance to seduction and sexual connotations.
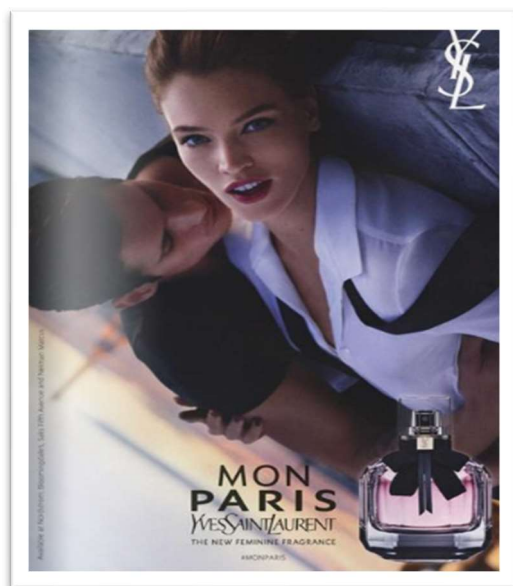
Figure 4.7.4. – Vogue, (August 2016), pp. 74.

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In another advert from Saint Laurent (Figure 4.7.5), the focus is on the small image in the upper left-hand corner. The image does not show the face of the woman, but rather part of a man's face. Her head (used to think, look, hear or speak) has been not considered here, unlike that of the man. This may be read as suggesting that women are not made to think, but rather only to be sexually available. Furthermore, the man is licking her nipple, which indicates the objectification and sexualisation of her body.

Figure 4.7.5. – Vogue, (April 2017), pp. 12–13.

As previously mentioned, nudity is used in these adverts in order to sell products and sexualise imagery of women. Another advert for Burberry (Figure 4.7.6) positions a semi-naked woman, wearing only black underwear, beside a perfume bottle, hiding her breasts softly with her arms crossed in front of her. In another for Dior (Figure 4.7.7), a woman is photographed wearing a flower print dress and sitting with a chair between her legs. In this photo, the model's back is bare and her right breast partially revealed. Note that these two images also represent the woman with her lips marginally open. The combination of all these factors such as the position of the woman, her lips, nudity or semi-nudity, the presence of the colour red and the occurrence of sexual actions portray women in a sexualised and objectified way.

Figure 4.7.6. – Vogue, (December 2017), pp. 56–57.

Figure 4.7.7. – Vogue, (April 2018), pp. 40.

4.8. Femininity

Curiously, in the majority of the adverts, females had long hair and wore dresses or skirts and high heels. Besides this, there was a predominance of traditional Western beauty characteristics: full lips, very thin figures, with long legs, bright skin and long, straight hair. As with *Infantilization*, sometimes bright colours and flowers were used to suggest that an 'ideal' woman should be soft, sweet and delicate. These are the attributes encountered among the brands that seemed to dictate how women should dress or look.

In Figure 4.8.1, Dior have represented the woman in a dress, tights and makeup, with pink flowers around her; she is lying down on a satin bedsheet. These features are symbols of femininity and delicacy. Notice that this model is not only an example of the *Femininity* code but also of the *Ritualization of Subordination* since she is lying down on a bed, and of the *Licensed Withdrawal* due to the fact she looks distant.

Figure 4.8.1. – Vogue, (December 2015), pp. 02-03.

In Figure 4.8.2, an advert from Dior uses a white dress with a light beige overcoat and pink bag to feminise this advert. The model also has soft makeup and Western beauty characteristics. Moreover, an advert from Louis Vuitton (Figure 4.8.3) shows a graceful woman wearing clothes and makeup in light tones of pink and with well-treated skin, again stating how women should be and

should take care of themselves.

Figure 4.8.2. – Vogue, (May 2016), pp. 02-03.
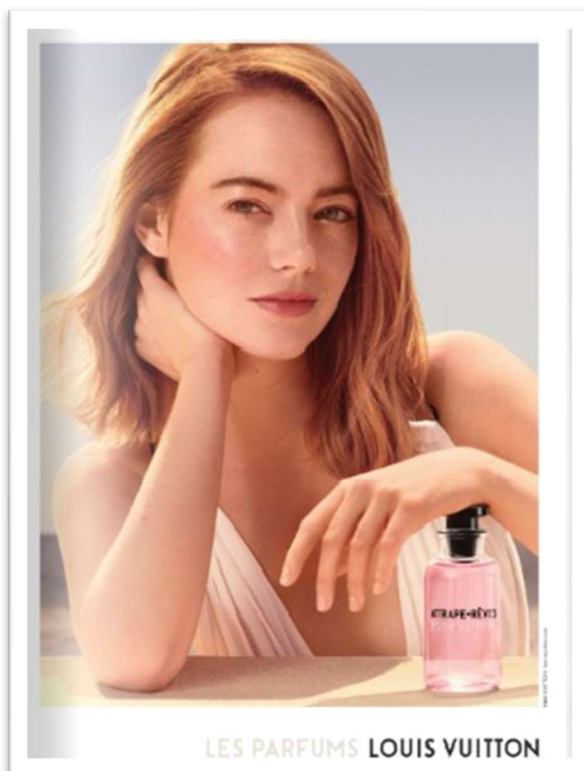
Figure 4.8.3. – Vogue, (October 2018), pp. 84.

In another advert, Cartier (Figure 4.8.4) have used what seems to be the separation of a homosexual couple. The model on the right wears a black overcoat, has softer makeup and shorter hair to suggest some masculine features. The woman on the left is wearing a black blouse (or a dress), more noticeable makeup with red lipstick and her long hair down to imply some feminine characteristics. Once more it is possible to interpret an underlined imperative about women's appearance. More specifically, there is a suggestion of 'conventional feminine appearance'. One possible interpretation of why feminine characteristics are overemphasised may be the fact that women seem to be used to suggest an erotic allure. Their bodies become marketable and their physical attributes become products. Femininity may be overstated since it sells to women an image of how they should look, especially to please men, and therefore what they must buy to achieve this (e.g. nice clothes, beautiful shoes, perfumes or skincare). It is useful to mention that this was the only image in the dataset that represented one woman with less feminine characteristics. In all other adverts, women were portrayed in a very conventionally feminine way. This enables the interpretation that for a woman to be considered feminine she should wear dresses or skirts, high heels, makeup and long hair. This is a notion of femininity imposed very often by the media.

Figure 4.8.4. – Vogue, (October 2019), pp. 14–15.

4.9.   The Black Woman

Black women, unsurprisingly, were a minority among the models in the adverts analysed. The analysis confirmed what was already stated by Plous and Neptune (1997): that black women are often represented with Western characteristics such as straight hair and very thin bodies instead of more typically African attributes, such as a curvier body and curly or Afro hair. This study also confirms the previously mentioned findings of Plous and Neptune (1997) that black models are usually photographed near wild animals or in clothes with animal print. This symbolises the sexual aggressiveness of black women (Plous and Neptune, 1997), as already explained in the previous chapter. Lastly, black women were sometimes represented as inferior to white women.

Figure 4.9.1 from Burberry shows two black models portrayed with typically Western beauty attributes – straight hair and very thin bodies – instead of with non-Western characteristics such as curlier and more voluminous hair and curvy bodies.

Figure 4.9.1. – Vogue, (March 2015), pp. 46–47.

In another advert from Gucci (Figure 4.9.2), three components stand out. The second part of the advert contains one black woman, who is lying down in the background. This characterises a lack of power or importance (*Relative Size*) and subordination (*Ritualization of Subordination*), while the white woman standing in the foreground is represented as more powerful and important in the image (Goffman, 1979). The second element to be noticed is the black panther print on the T-shirt of the white model in front, reinforcing the study of Plous and Neptune (1997). Lastly, in the first

part of the image, the head of a tiger appears. Even though it is situated beside the feet of a white woman, this is still the same advert in which the black woman is present. In this sense, the black woman is portrayed as sexually aggressive and subordinate. One interpretation for this could be that both these stereotypes (aggressive and subordinate) are so conventional that they are used co-presently even when their suggestions are contradictory.

Figure 4.9.2. – Vogue, (April 2017), pp. C4.

Another two illustrations of black woman shot close to wild animals also feature in Gucci adverts (Figures 4.9.3 and 4.9.4). In the first image on the next page, the model is holding an iguana, has very long and sharp nails and is wearing fur like that of a wild feline animal. In Figure 4.9.4, another black woman is photographed close to a tiger.
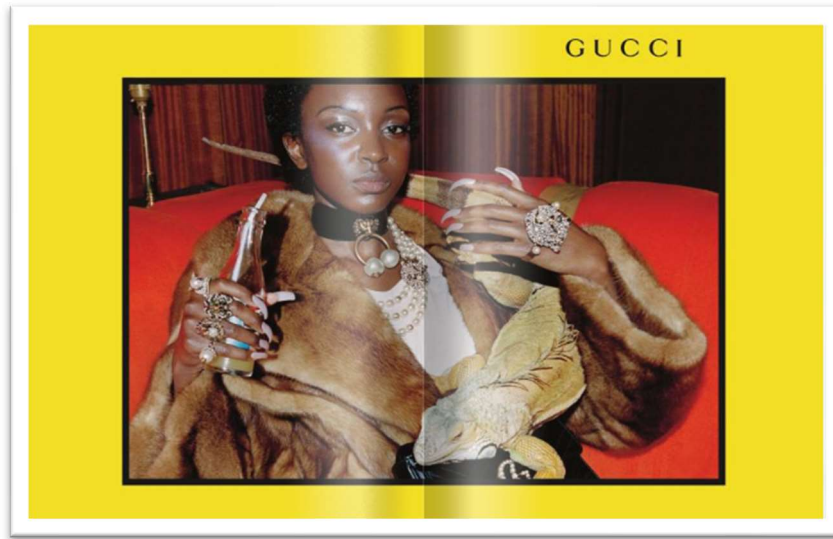
Figure 4.9.3. – Vogue (July 2017), pp. C2-1.

Figure 4.9.4 – Vogue (December 2018), pp. 08–09.

This last example is an advert from Dior (Figure 4.9.5). It shows three models, two white and one black. It can be noticed that only the black model is shaded, while the two white women are portrayed in a clear, visible and solid way. This may be interpreted as the black woman appearing like a shadow and therefore as inferior.

Figure 4.9.5 – Vogue, (February 2019), pp. C2-C3.

4.10. Empowerment

During the analysis, empowered women were rarely found. Despite this code being seldom present among the adverts, it is still important to explore because it may show a small change, or at least a start, in the representation of women in the media. First of all, it is useful to clarify which notions of empowerment are applied here. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, empowerment means "the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you" and also "the process of giving a group of people more freedom or rights" ("Empowerment", n.d.). In other words, empowerment in this context is the use of women's agency and their freedom to take or avoid actions according to what they aspire to and not to what is imposed on them. There were only two moments in which women in these adverts seemed empowered, which are illustrated in Figures 4.10.1 and 4.10.2. The brand Dior (Figure 4.10.1) represented a woman dressed in an elegant black dress and neat high heels. She has been shot in the foreground of the image, which places her as important and significant, as previously explained regarding the *Relative Size* code. Besides, she has been photographed from a low angle, explained later in the next chapter. From this angle, the woman is situated in a position of power. Lastly, due to the lighting, the background appears to be a busy and living city, which is normally connected to an agitated life and business markets. Therefore, this woman is not responsible for domesticity only, but is rather also in the workplace and having a social life. However, it is interesting to observe that even though this woman is represented as a businesswoman, she still has characteristics of femininity such as makeup and high heels.

Figure 4.10.1. – Vogue, (January 2015), pp. C2–1.

Figure 4.10.2 from Gucci (2018) shows three women and three men. They are all approximately the same height, which also gives the idea of empowerment as previously mentioned regarding *Relative Size*. Likewise, they are walking beside each other and holding hands, representing women as equal to men and not only decorative since they are playing a role in the image (i.e. they are walking and giving the impression of talking). Finally, the women are not wearing any clothing with sensual connotations, nor showing any nudity or semi-nudity. It is interesting to observe that three years passed between the previously discussed Dior image (4.10.1) and this one, and that over these years, women were portrayed in this sample as empowered only twice. Even though this shows a moderate start, advertising is still far from being gender equal.

Figure 4.10.2. – Vogue, (July 2018), pp. C2-1.

Nevertheless, there were two occasions where women were falsely empowered (Figure 4.10.3 and Figure 4.10.4). In other words, they appeared to be empowered, but some details in the image revealed certain aspects of sexualisation. The first example is from Burberry (Figure 4.10.3), in which two women are standing in the foreground and facing the viewer. The photo has also been taken from a low angle, which delegates them some power. They do not have any sexual connotation such as nudity, suggestive body position or red clothing. However, a racial bias can be observed in this advert since the woman sitting while these two models are standing has been placed lower, smaller and behind them. While the two women exhibit Western beauty characteristics such as bright skin, long and straight hair, thin and long legs, the model in the inferior position is the only one with (East) Asian characteristics. This might be argued to symbolise that Western societies are superior and more powerful than Asian ones. Furthermore, if the viewer focuses on the setting, in the background three men can be observed hanging a painting on the wall, which represents a sexual relationship between a white woman and a black man where he is in the dominant position.
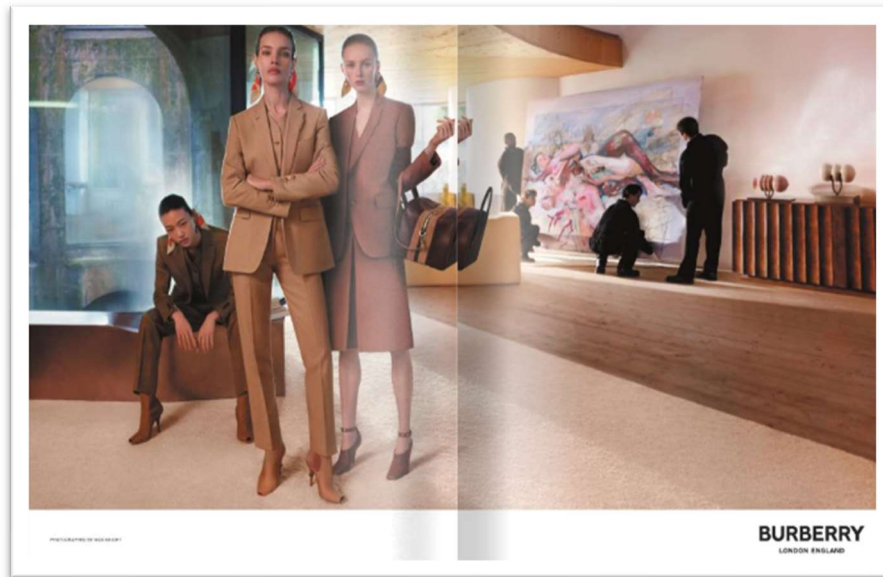
Figure 4.10.3. – Vogue, (March 2019), pp. 62–63.

Finally, in Figure 4.10.4 from Saint Laurent the black woman seems to be physically and mentally present in the image, facing the viewer and also photographed from a low angle, which empowers her. However, she is wearing shoes with jaguar print. The presence of alive wild animals and the use of this type of print represent, as already described in this chapter under the *Black Woman* code, the wild and aggressive sexualisation of black women.

Figure 4.10.4. – Vogue, (June 2018), pp. 06–07.

4.11. Discussion

In general, over the five years studied, the adverts in *American Vogue* appear to have represented women as sexualised, infantilised, objectified, decorative, powerless and less significant than men. Women have been rendered speechless where their voices are not considered and their opinions are not respected. Furthermore, some beauty standards and examples of femininity are imposed on them, suggesting that women should seek to be beautiful and attractive, according to conventional standards. Black women represent a minority of the models shown, and when represented they are portrayed with racialised tendencies, and empowerment of women is very uncommon. Moreover, Burberry and Gucci are the brands with most racial bias, and Dior and Saint Laurent were the brands which portrayed women more often in a sexualised and subordinated manner.

Furthermore, it is useful to return to the semiotic features discussed in the Methodology chapter of this thesis, such as point of view, distance and contact. In a certain way, these features underline and encode all the themes explained in this section, especially Goffman's codes. For instance, when Goffman (1979) considered women in the background or behind men using his *Relative Size* code, the angle of the photo and the distance between the model and the viewer became meaningful in a sense that they suggested how powerful or important a woman was in the image. Another connection which can be established is between *Licensed Withdrawal* and the contact and distance semiotics features, in the sense that *Licensed Withdrawal* is characterised by eye contact and how close or distant, physically or emotionally, the woman seems to be from the reader. Therefore, the usefulness of semiotics in this analysis is once more shown to be visible and concrete.

Finally, it is also important to reaffirm that the codes are correlated and dependent on one another such that it becomes difficult to define where one finishes and the other begins. For example, *Femininity* and *Infantilization* are highly correlated considering the presence of flower prints and bright colours. *Relative Size*, *Licensed Withdrawal*, *Ritualization of Subordination* and *Sexualisation* offer a predominant reading that directs us to understand the woman as a sexual object. Lastly, *Feminine Touch* and *Function Ranking* work together to place the woman as decorative. All themes, therefore, link women to the same condition of subordination and sexualisation. Nevertheless, this thesis found that luxury brands do not portray women in family roles as in Goffman's (1979) discussion of *The Family* – for which reason this code was not used, as previously mentioned in the Methodology. The position of women as mothers is associated to care, nourishment and love, which does not suit the profitably sexualised and objectified image of women found in this thesis. Lastly, some notions of femininity and the importance of the angle of

the photo are interesting to discuss since they were observable in the majority of adverts and contributed to the construction of the sexualised image of women. These topics will be approached and discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

5. Conclusions

This last chapter states the main findings of the research and discusses the results obtained and their relation to previous studies, mentioned in earlier chapters. Furthermore, the theoretical and social implications are mentioned and the study is critically assessed, examining the advantages, drawbacks and limitations of the thesis. Lastly, some suggestions for future research are considered.

5.1.   *Main findings and discussion*

The main goal of this research was to analyse the changes and continuities in the representation of women in advertising since Goffman's *Gender Advertising* (1979). In that work, he found that females were sexualised, objectified and infantilised in the media. Besides this, he concluded that women were used decoratively in the images and predominately associated with domestic tasks and the mother's role (Goffman, 1979). Therefore, this present study, based on Goffman's codes and the liberal feminist perspective, aimed to observe if this representation had changed alongside the development of society, or if Goffman's findings remained applicable today. Furthermore, this thesis has analysed the portrayal of women in adverts for luxury brands; it was designed to answer the following research question: How have women been portrayed in adverts for luxury brands between 2015 and 2019 in American *Vogue*?

Through a semiotic analysis based on Goffman's codes (1979) and liberal feminism, the findings achieved in this work have supported other studies (Milillo, 2008; Moeran, 2010; Paff et al., 1997; Sheehan, 2014; Shilling, 2013; Six and Eckes, 1991; Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008), which also concluded that women are sexualised and objectified in the media, especially in advertising. Moreover, women were found to still be portrayed as powerless, weak and decorative. In several images, females were photographed behind and/or smaller than men or in the background, which symbolises lack of power. Likewise, they were very often shot touching themselves superficially but rarely performing a task or holding an object, rendering them decorative rather than active. Women were also portrayed in a subordinate position, such as lying down on the ground or a bed, sitting with their legs open or with bent knees. Furthermore, they were also represented as distant, emotionally absent from the image, barely facing the viewer and often nude or semi-nude to construct a sexualised image. Moreover, an image of empowered women was rare; rather, women were often suggested to be in need of care and protection and incapable of minding themselves.

Black women represented a minority of models in the adverts and, reinforcing the conclusions of Plous and Neptune (1997), were found when present to be photographed with racial bias, such as according to Western instead of non-Western beauty standards, as well as mostly close to wild animals, symbolising sexual aggressiveness. Lastly, femininity stereotypes were also found to occur, insofar as adverts imposed how women should look and how they should take care of themselves in order to be beautiful and attractive. They were most often shot in high heels, dresses or skirts, wearing makeup and with soft, sweet and delicate features, such as bright colours and flower prints. Even in photos where women were represented as professionals and empowered, they still showed characteristics of femininity such as makeup and heels.

Various scholars over many years have obtained similar conclusions regarding the representation of women in the media. Baker (2005) found that women are constantly portrayed as sexual objects in magazine advertising, that submission and dependency are most often associated with femininity and that beauty is often related to being white (Baker, 2005). Belknap and Leonard II (1991) also found that the representation of women in the media does not challenge the social structure, but rather reinforces male supremacy: "images of females have been stable, traditional, conventional and supportive of the status quo" (Signorielli, 1989, as cited in Belknap and Leonard II, 1991, pp. 104). Likewise, in Kilbourne's documentaries, mentioned in the Introduction, it has been stated that women are not only sexualised in advertising but also silenced in such a way that their opinions and feelings are not considered. This notion was also considered by Gill (2007), who showed that women in advertising are silenced by placing objects or parts of their own bodies in front of their mouths, indicating that they are less intelligent than men (Gill, 2007). Similarly, women in the media are portrayed as flawless, such as with perfect skin, without wrinkles, young, thin and with shiny hair (Conley and Ramsey, 2011; Eisend, 2010). Furthermore, this research also confirmed Kang's (1997) findings that females are barely represented as professionals or business people and rather as sexual objects. More, as in Moradi and Huang (2008), this thesis has concluded that women are still reduced to marketable products, their bodies central often to the point of being more attractive than the product advertised.

Moreover, some curious observations and new insights, which were not considered in the previous literature, should be discussed at this point. First of all, Goffman (1979) described of his code *Licensed Withdrawal* that women in advertising could often be seen laughing uncontrollably and almost losing control of themselves. However, this was not found among this thesis's sample, in which most of the women instead appeared serious, upset or lifeless. One possible explanation for this could be the fact that showing women as inactive and humourless is also a way to objectify them since it states that their feelings and opinions are not considered and not heard. This may also

be the result of this study focusing on luxury brands; perhaps adverts for a different type of product would show other results. Therefore, future studies could investigate if women are also shown as lifeless and inert in different brands and/or products. A second point to consider, mentioned by Conley and Ramsey (2011), is the question of why a brand sexualises women in adverts of products for which the target audience is female. A possible explanation might be that brands utilise women to convince others from the same gender to buy products by reason that if they do, they too can look sexy, attractive and beautiful to men, just like the models in the advert. For example, as already mentioned in a previous chapter, some feminists would say that the sexualisation of women in adverts of products for which the target audience is female is imposed by the fashion industry and, therefore, should be debated or even criticised. On the other hand, post-feminists would say that it is a model of femininity which can inspire women. This analysis showed that even though all brands portrayed women as sexual objects, this representation did not occur consistently. In other words, some brands represented women as sexualised more often than others. For instance, Dior and Saint Laurent portrayed women more often as sexual symbols, while Gucci and Burberry represented more black women with racial bias. This may be explained by the origin (nationality) of the brands, given that Dior and Saint Laurent are French, Burberry is English and Gucci is Italian – and so the population of these countries are predominantly white. Additionally, images of empowered women were rarely found in these adverts between 2015 and 2019, which does not indicate improvement or progression in the representation of women. Another interesting aspect was the angle from which the photos were taken. According to some scholars, such as Jewitt and Oyama (2004), explained in depth in the Methodology, the angle from which a photo is taken can underline how powerful the woman is considered and reflect her social level. In this study, the vertical angles and directions of the woman's eyes or look were examined. The low shot or shoulder level shot are photos taken from a lower position, so that the model looks bigger and should therefore appear powerful or more central and significant in the image (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). The high shot is a photo taken from above, which makes the woman smaller and, for this reason, less powerful than the viewer (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). Lastly, an eye-level shot is an image at the eye level of the reader, which is supposed to represent the woman as equally powerful to other people or objects in the advert (Jewitt and Oyama, 2004). Moreover, the directions of the eyes of the woman were also considered. If she was looking up, it was taken to mean that she was below something or someone and therefore less powerful. If she was looking into the eyes of the viewer, she was placed at an equal level of power, while if she was looking down, it was taken to mean she was above someone or something and therefore more powerful. That said, if she was looking down to the point of hiding her face, the woman was interpreted as inferior, weak and vulnerable – as identified by *Licensed Withdrawal*. Nevertheless, this analysis

found another interesting aspect that contradicts this technical explanation. In the majority of adverts during the analysis, the models were shot from a high angle, which indeed seemed to represent them as less significant and weak. However, even when the models were photographed from a low shot, which is supposed to empower them, they were still sexualised and objectified thought their body position (*Ritualization of Subordination*), their clothes or how they appeared or appeared to feel (*Licensed Withdrawal*). From this perspective, the angles of the photo were not used simply to empower or reduce women but rather to place them as central to the function of objectifying and commercialising their bodies. Regardless of the angle, they became central in almost every photo not as human beings but as products. Their physical appearance and sexualisation rendered them marketable, and very often they attracted more attention from the consumer than did the product itself. This can also be seen to update the findings of Jewitt and Oyama (2004) given that this more contemporary study has found, unlike those authors, that the low angle does not only empower women but can also objectify them.

On the other hand, it is relevant to consider a different analysis of the representation of women in the media. Some post-feminist scholars such as Rosalind Gill (2007) and Halliwell et al. (2011) argue that women are not sexualised or objectified in advertising but rather have the agency to use their bodies and sexuality the way they desire. According to them, many years ago women were not allowed to be naked or semi-naked in the public sphere and were criticised and reprehended for showing their sexual desires (Gill, 2007; Halliwell et al., 2001). Today, this has changed and women have the freedom to expose their bodies and sexuality however they prefer. Therefore, from a post-feminist perspective, sexualised images of women in the media do not represent the objectification of women but rather their empowerment. Gill argues thusly:

"not only are women objectified (as they were before), but through sexual subjectification, in midriff advertising, they must also now understand their own objectification as pleasurable and self-chosen. If, in earlier regimes of advertising, women were presented as sexual objects, then this was understood as something being done to women (from the outside) by a sexist advertising industry – something that many people began to realize and critique through the impact of feminist activism. In contemporary midriff advertising, however, (some) women are endowed with the status of active subjecthood so that they can 'choose' to become sex objects" (2007, pp. 45-46).

However, it warrants questioning whether women choose to be sexually exposed in advertising or if

this sexualisation is imposed on them by the fashion industry. I believe that this objectification and sexualisation are not something chosen but rather something demanded by the fashion business, and that sexualisation is still "the root cause of gender inequality" (MacKennon, 1989, as cited in Baker, 2005, pp. 13).

In summary, the results of this study answer the research question by showing that women continue to be sexualised, objectified and represented as vulnerable, weak, speechless, inactive and powerless in advertising for luxury brands in *Vogue* from 2015 to 2019, which reinforces what has been mentioned in the introductory chapter. This research is important since it advocates for women's welfare and gender equality in advertising, and it can also help brands and marketers to think more critically and develop adverts which disrupt the status quo and popular misogyny.

5.2.   Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of the observation of the results provide insight and surprising findings, contributing to academia and adding value to older and future research. Primarily, this research analysed the representation of women in advertising for luxury brands based on a liberal feminist perspective, and through Goffman's codes and the lens of semiotics. This combination makes this study original since luxury brands have not been used until now to study the portrayal of women in this way. Moreover, this thesis has contributed to the discussion about the sexualisation of black women and how wild animals are used to represent their purportedly aggressive sexuality. Goffman (1979) did not consider the representation of black women in advertising at all, and only Plous and Neptune (1997) discussed this subject, though their findings are now outdated, for which reason this present work explored the issue from a more contemporary perspective. This thesis not only analysed the representation of black women but also how they are portrayed in adverts for luxury goods, which is predominately new. Besides, the use of the angle of the photo to sexualise or empower models is something which has been discussed among scholars and other professionals, but the results of this analysis showed an interesting new point of view. The low angle is normally attributed to the empowerment of women in the image since it portrays the woman as bigger and therefore powerful. Nevertheless, the analysis has shown that the low angle in the images selected was utilised to reinforce the objectification of women. Women's bodies became central and important, they attracted more attention than the product, and they were commercialised in the advertising of luxury goods. This is a potentially innovative reading that contributes to academia and society in general since companies and brands may become aware of this problematic and improve how advertising is created and how models are photographed.

5.3.   Social implications

As already mentioned in previous sections, the study of the representation of women in the media has social implications since, from the business perspective, it can promote companies' and brands' awareness while creating profitable and gender-equal advertising. For instance, corporations should use this type of study to critically analyse how to represent women in a more empowered manner, especially when the target audience of the brand or product is women. For this reason, females could be more often photographed as professionals instead of only sexual objects. Likewise, businesses should be aware of the importance of diversity. Different types of models should be used in advertising since the audience is also diverse. Different nationalities, body types and beauty standards should be present in the images and feature fewer stereotypes given that, for example, black women represented alongside wild animals cannot be understood as a step forward for diversity. For instance, more black, Asian and curvy models should be considered since society is not only composed of white, thin and Western people. This diversity in advertising could be, for example, a topic for further investigation where studies could examine whether women will be more loyal to a brand that represents them fairly.

5.4.   Suggestions for future researches

One of the limitations of this study was the sampling method. A purposive sample was taken instead of a random sample, which can be critiqued. Some may argue that this sampling technique was utilised to intentionally select adverts which represented gender inequality, power struggles and the sexualisation of women. However, this study believes that selecting images in a purposive way may more simply communicate and stimulate further debate about the influences of gender representation on social relationships. Besides, selecting 120 adverts only from luxury brands in *Vogue* poses difficulties for generalising these findings since a larger number of images from different magazines could have been selected. However, this was not feasible in this thesis and could therefore be a suggestion for future studies. Furthermore, one positive aspect that should be taken into consideration is that the codes created by Goffman (1979) and those developed in this research are not mutually exclusive, strengthening the results since it shows how different aspects in the image lead to the sexualisation of women. Moreover, some brands appeared in the dataset more often than others such as Saint Laurent, Dior and Gucci, which can be a drawback since it makes the sample quite homogeneous. Nonetheless, these were the brands advertised most often in *Vogue* from 2015 to 2019, and therefore the predominance of these brands could not be avoided.

Furthermore, in the future, other research could not only increase the number of adverts selected but also compare gender representations among different magazines or diverse types of media, such as television or the film industry. This could also help to achieve more generalisable results. It would also be useful to analyse masculinity and the portrayal of men in the media and to establish a comparison between the representation of men and women, so that power relationships and gender inequality would be more evident. Moreover, some studies could continue investigating gender representation in the media to further develop or dialogue with Goffman's codes, for example. Some codes created for this thesis seem intuitive but might be questioned. In other words, my attribution of the features defining these codes was subjective. For instance, why is a woman lying down necessarily subordinate? Why is a woman looking distant or upset necessarily fall into *Licensed Withdrawal*? Why does braided hair symbolise Infantilisation, and why does the height of the model place him or her in a more or less powerful position? It appears that some of the codes make use of 'taken for granted' elements to describe the representation of women in advertising, which can be further investigated and debated. This may not necessarily be a limitation, but further research could analyse this type of advertising through a method other than semiotics.

Furthermore, despite the limitations, this study has shown original and interesting insights into the portrayal of women in the media. This was feasible considering the guidelines for this paper, which innovatively analysed gender inequality in advertising for luxury brands, contributing to women's welfare and the consciousness of society and companies. From a business perspective, this study is relevant since it contributes to the awareness of companies and marketing professionals about how to make advertising profitable but also gender-equal. For example, if a company wants to sell a product to women, it is not intelligent to advertise this product with females represented in a sexualised and stereotypical way. Therefore, if brands or companies create adverts which portray women in a more equal and/or empowered manner, this may also increase profits. Lastly, in this time during which debates about human rights and social issues are continually brought up, we can state that we, as global citizens, still have a long way to go until we achieve equality for all. With this study, I hope to contribute to the discussion of women's rights since we will only succeed if we stand together.

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7. Appendix A: Examples of coded adverts

Denotation

Connotation

Figure 7.01. – Vogue, (November 2017), pp. 46-47. Dior.

Lips open; an object between the lips (bite). Red lipstick – clothes.

Model's right eye covered with the hair.

Eyes: looking slightly up and one is covered with the hair.

Absence; Licensed Withdrawal.

Angle: looking up (placed in a lower level – lack of power).

One is covered with the hair (absence; impossible to see, to be present).

Lips open; object biting; Red - sexualization.

Lips slightly open; finger bite; red (rouge) lipstick and nail polish.

Head cant; sunglasses; her right hand touching her hair; red

Model: light skin, thin, long hair, full lips.

Lips slightly open and finger bite: sexuality (sexual available); Red (rouge) lipstick and nail polish: sensuality/femininity/sexuality.

Head cant/sunglasses : absence – Licensed Withdrawal.

Hand touching: Feminine touch – superficial, no action - decorative

Head around the waist.

Superficial touch – decorative; no action; Feminine Touch.

Western beauty characteristics; femininity; beauty stereotypes; whiteness.

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Figure 7.02. – Vogue, (February 2019), pp. 32-33. Saint Laurent.

Eyes looking up;

Western beauty characteristics: thin, white, long and straight hair, full lips.

Eyes looking up: the woman is placed in a lower position/angle – less important; powerless.

SAINT LAURENT

Woman's position/place/legs: vulnerability; sexual available; weak; powerless; sexualization; decorative object; Ritualization of Subordination.

Her right hand holding the purse/bag handle (the bag is placed on the floor).

Feminine touch – no full action (she is only holding, but the bag is on the floor – she is not carrying. Superficial; only tracing the outline of the object. Woman as decorative – inactive.

Woman's position: sitting inclined backwards – almost lying down on a chair/couch; legs slightly open.

8. Appendix B: Summary table of data collected

Brand	Month	Year	Page Number
Dior	January	2015	C2-1
Louis Vuitton	January	2015	04-05
Dior	February	2015	C6
Gucci	February	2015	10-11
Burberry	March	2015	46-47
Prada	March	2015	21
Gucci	April	2015	12-13
Saint Laurent	April	2015	30-31
Burberry	May	2015	28-29
Dior	May	2015	02-03
Dior	June	2015	28-29
Louis Vuitton	June	2015	56
Dior	July	2015	04-05
Louis Vuitton	July	2015	C4
Prada	August	2015	02-03
Saint Laurent	August	2015	28-29
Dior	September	2015	08-09
Hermès	September	2015	596
Dior	October	2015	54-55
Louis Vuitton	October	2015	108
Prada	October	2015	02-03
Cartier	November	2015	32-33
Saint Laurent	November	2015	22-23
Burberry	December	2015	36-37

Dior	December	2015	02-03
Chanel	January	2016	02-03
Dior	January	2016	C2-1
Burberry	February	2016	12-13
Prada	February	2016	06-07
Chanel	March	2016	237
Louis Vuitton	March	2016	C3
Chanel	April	2016	18-19
Prada	April	2016	14-15
Chanel	May	2016	50-51
Dior	May	2016	02-03
Chanel	June	2016	C2-A
Gucci	June	2016	06-07
Louis Vuitton	July	2016	C4
Prada	July	2016	04-05
Gucci	August	2016	04-05
Yves Saint Laurent	August	2016	74
Gucci	September	2016	C6
Saint Laurent	September	2016	28-29
Dior	October	2016	08-09
Saint Laurent	October	2016	26-27
Dior	November	2016	02-03
Hermès	November	2016	C2-C3
Burberry	December	2016	38-39
Saint Laurent	December	2016	28-29
Chanel	January	2017	02-03
Dior	January	2017	04-05

Dior	February	2017	C2-C3
Saint Laurent	February	2017	22-23
Louis Vuitton	March	2017	C2-C3
Saint Laurent	March	2017	28-29
Gucci	April	2017	C4
Saint Laurent	April	2017	12-13
Burberry	May	2017	28-29
Saint Laurent	May	2017	14-15
Chanel	June	2017	C2-C2A
Gucci	June	2017	04-05
Gucci	July	2017	C2-1
Louis Vuitton	July	2017	C4
Prada	August	2017	14-15
Saint Laurent	August	2017	16-17
Chanel	September	2017	40-41
Louis Vuitton	September	2017	102
Chanel	October	2017	22-23
Louis Vuitton	October	2017	130
Dior	November	2017	46-47
Gucci	November	2017	07
Burberry	December	2017	56-57
Prada	December	2017	16-17
Chanel	January	2018	C2-1
Saint Laurent	January	2018	02-03
Dior	February	2018	C2-C3
Prada	February	2018	02-03
Dior	March	2018	12-13

Gucci	March	2018	06-07
Dior	April	2018	40
Saint Laurent	April	2018	18-19
Chanel	May	2018	14-15
Gucci	May	2018	61
Chanel	June	2018	C2-1
Saint Laurent	June	2018	06-07
Gucci	July	2018	33
Gucci	July	2018	C2-1
Louis Vuitton	August	2018	36
Saint Laurent	August	2018	12-13
Dior	September	2018	106-107
Saint Laurent	September	2018	30-31
Louis Vuitton	October	2018	84
Saint Laurent	October	2018	16-17
Louis Vuitton	November	2018	56
Saint Laurent	November	2018	C2-C3
Gucci	December	2018	08-09
Saint Laurent	December	2018	18-19
Chanel	January	2019	02-03
Saint Laurent	January	2019	04-05
Dior	February	2019	C2-C3
Saint Laurent	February	2019	32-33
Burberry	March	2019	62-63
Chanel	March	2019	02-03
Gucci	April	2019	06-07
Prada	April	2019	08-09

Dior	May	2019	02-03
Saint Laurent	May	2019	20-21
Louis Vuitton	June	2019	32
Prada	June	2019	152B
Louis Vuitton	July	2019	C4
Prada	July	2019	04-05
Gucci	August	2019	02-03
Louis Vuitton	August	2019	04-05
Hermès	September	2019	188
Saint Laurent	September	2019	22-23
Cartier	October	2019	14-15
Dior	October	2019	05
Dior	November	2019	02-03
Saint Laurent	November	2019	C2-C3
Burberry	December	2019	40-41
Prada	December	2019	12-13
Total	120 adverts	2015-2019	