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Assessing the rise and fall of 90s Supermodels and how they still influence the Fashion Industry in the present day

“Publicity is about social relations, not objects. It’s promise is not of pleasure, but of happiness: happiness as judged from the outside by others. The happiness of being envied is glamour.” (John Berger, 1972)

Throughout the following of this text I would like to take you through a timeline of memorable actions and trends from how the 90’s Supermodels created such a huge impact in The Fashion



Industry. My purpose is to establish how the supermodel was first discovered, rose to their peak and started trends that are still used today on fresh and upcoming faces. And how they suddenly found their feet and used their platform for importance and diva like behaviour by demanding high pay cheques and living luxurious lifestyles which gave them the celebrity status we all know, but also raising awareness on topics like racism and anorexia. "As we have seen, some of the cultural meanings embodied by models are: Nationality, race and earning power." (Patricia soley-Beltran, 2006) There once was a time where the word 'supermodel' did not exist and their reputations were not as accounted for like they are today. It wasn't until the first issue of Vogue in the 90's got released that things suddenly took a turn for the worst, or best, Who will ever know. The cover features Cindy Crawford, Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, Tatjana Patitz and Christy Turlington which was the turning point in their career, a start of a new era and the beginning of the Supermodel. This was the foundation for a revolution and the people already working in the industry could not see what was pending. Even though these girls were quite established already, times were changing and no one knew what kind of an impact this famous five of the 90s would have. "We don't wake up for less than \$10,000 a day." (Linda Evangelista, 1990) During an interview Evangelista regrettably said this not knowing the effects it could have had on her career, and has later said during her peak modelling days she used to regret it but the older that she has gotten it is now just a thing of the passed, and is known for being one of the most iconic quotes to date. She was lucky enough to not have that quote spoil her very supreme and successful career.

(Fig 1)

Peter Lindbergh, who is known for being one of the most famous fashion photographers in the world, shot the cover that changed the Fashion Industries way of publicising editorials for good. It was about reinventing how models can be viewed by his imagery. As he was always known for his classic black and white, moody portraits he transported that into his work for this new era of fashion and with Anna Wintors touch it was revolutionary. "Women are observed more and they have a lot

more of a medal. They are also more responsible and a-lot more open and willing to take risks. Men just stand there with a cigar and their look, getting a photo of Churchill must have been incredibly boring.” (Peter Lindberg, 2015) He described that Vogue cover as “The birth certificate of the Supermodel.” (Peter Lindberg, 2015)

Along came Kate, a petite girl with childlike features, and very much unlike what models had looked like up until then. Five foot seven and flat chested, her innocent look was irresistible to photographers and highly taken advantage of, which for a young girl just starting off became hugely daunting to her. In 1990 Corrine Day created the photo series of Moss named ‘The third summer of love’ which captured her so organically she looks carless. “The Face cover of Kate wearing the crown embodies a seminal, defining moment in Fashion and the Music scene, the zeitgeist of the nineties. Everything changed.” (Melanie Ward, 2019)



(Fig 2)

In 1992 Calvin Klein used Kate Moss for an advertisement alongside Actor Mark Wahlberg which made her career set off and everyone suddenly wanted to know about the grungy girl from Croydon. But it has been revealed that the shoot caused her to have a nervous breakdown due to her still being a 17 year old girl and him so intimidating. “It didn't feel like me at all. I felt really bad about straddling this buff guy. I didn't like it. I couldn't get out of bed for two weeks.” (Kate Moss, 2020) Her ‘heroine chic’ signature style was soon idolised and started being recreated by other models and

even got turned into a day to day trend amongst regular people. The look which consisted of good bone structure, skinny, pale and effortless yet stylish caused controversy when it became noticeable that drugs were highly used in the industry which started to put a downpour of bad publicity on designers and magazine's, especially after the drug related death of photographer David Sorrenti. But for Kate Moss the look stayed forever. I think in modern day fashion this trend has only recently started to fade out, many designers still find difficulty steering away from the classic skinny white girl. Most runways and magazine covers have always been full Moss remakes because her look was what made the products sell. "Supermodels as a marketing strategy involved a sort of visual neo-colonialism in so far as Europe and the US, a model belonging to any other race other than white does not get the same amount of advertising assignments or cosmetic contracts as white models, not even black supermodel Naomi Campbell. (Hudson, 1994) These days brands and designers are starting to include more diversity into their projects so they are able to reach a wider audience. Back in the 90's plus size models were never heard of so it is really important to change tradition by making sure everybody is included. Designers will tend to have sample garments made usually based on a smaller size, mostly 0, 2 or sometimes 4. By having the samples made to those sizes will mean all the runway models will have to fit into them as well. And if the samples don't fit then they will not be chosen to do the show. As we are constantly evolving into new and more accepting ways of life, you see more diversity and less photoshopping being used as mental health is being monitored more closely. During my earlier days of browsing through Instagram I came across a post by model Charli Howard explaining how working as a model caused her to develop an eating disorder just so she could feel approved by the industry. "I don't want to look like that miserable girl on the left, whose gums were always bleeding, hair was falling out, periods didn't come etc." (Charli Howard, 2017) As this had been the way models were expected to look for many years it was time for a change in appearance to make fresh girls and boys aspiring to be models feel more welcomed into the industry. Who knew it would take up until the end of the era to start including these looks.

(Fig 3)



The 90's in England, especially, were known for being a very racist time to live in. So for thriving, young ethnic and asian models they had to work twice as hard as white models to get noticed in castings and auditions. For someone like Naomi Campbell who was so well known in the industry, and still faced backlash about the colour of her skin found motivation from that to work even harder rather than letting it bring her down. "It's not something I care to make an excuse about, it actually motivated me and gave me a lot more drive to accept to say to myself I'm not accepting that. I'll find another way to get where I need to get too. (Naomi Campbell, 2013) And she did exactly that, but I suppose once you have created such a big persona and celebrity icon status like Campbell had then designers will automatically want you walking for them because it adds publicity and familiarity to their show which other models were lacking. This is why she started calling out designers who had either never used a model of colour or ethnicity or at least only a minority to raise awareness that racism still goes on in the fashion industry and has for a long time. "Models of colour are not a trend. We are here to stay." (Naomi Campbell, 2019) In 2013 it still seemed to be a chore to include more diversity into shows and she admitted that time felt like it was going backwards. There was almost no change when you compare the 70s, 80s, 90s and 00s. And you still don't see much of a difference until the present day. If you start looking at current magazine covers, editorials and advertisements I think the inclusion of diversity in these things can come across as "purposely diverse" (Matty Healy,

2019) and that if these companies don't start changing their traditions or moving with the times their business will start to become overlooked. I think it is a huge step for the ethnic and asian models who are trying to succeed in their career but they could also feel it is only for publicity and the passion to use their faces isn't really there.

Many photographers and designers still prefer to use renowned names in their promotions and shoots as they usually have the biggest online followings or famous families. This refers back to what I said about Naomi Campbell's success for being one of the most famous black supermodels due to her reputation and familiarity, the designers and photographers typically like to use models who they have gained a bond with and know how they work. Kendall Jenner who is part of the Kardashian / Jenner clan used her family's profile to gain help growing in the modelling world. Her famous parents' contacts have ended up making her the highest paid model in the world which makes her success look effortless and easy. Jenner once admitted in an interview with Love Magazine that she doesn't have to do every single show in every season which angered many people in the industry. "I was never one of those girls who would do like 30 shows a season or whatever the fuck those girls do." (Kendall Jenner, 2018) Her words were not dismissed by her peers with Daria Strokous writing an instagram post slamming the model. " 'Whatever the fuck those girls do' is do their very best to make their way up and try to make some money. Oh and that's 70 shows a season by the way." (Daria Strokous, 2018)



(Fig 4)

I do not think modelling can be done by anyone and that you should have a certain look to do so, but it was inevitable for Cindy Crawford, who was one of the most famous supermodels in the 90s, to have a daughter and not follow her influential footsteps. As soon as Kaia Gerber turned 16 she was already signed to top agents, walking the runway for high profile designers like Alexander Wang, Bottega Venta and Chloe. She is also the face for Marc Jacobs Daisy perfume. This has also been shown with Lottie Moss, Kate Moss' younger sister, although she doesn't have the height that some agents prefer she still got signed with Storm Models. At the end of the 90s it was becoming more popular to use actresses and singers featuring on the runways and magazine covers which started taking some attention away from the branding of the supermodel. Even today Vogue will still have actresses grazing their front covers, usually ones who have recently starred in the next big movie like Jennifer Lawrence or most recently Judi Dench.

(Fig 5)



In conclusion I have understood how and when the term supermodel was invented and what they did in the 90s to become so powerful with their means. It was the beginning of a new time and they got over excited with their fame which wasn't always handled well, unlike today most supermodels are all celebrities. I think if they had not made such a big imprint on the industry it wouldn't be as iconic as it is today. Without Campbell speaking out for what she believed in it could have been a lot longer until we saw more ethnic and Asian models breaking through on the runway. I also think that models are not just seen as a product anymore but the actual person instead. It feels very progressive to see the runways looking more broad each year and how it will make a difference with new models joining the industry to feel less pressure. It is becoming less common to put stick thin white girls on the runway anymore, and fully airbrush the ones on front covers. Brands like ASOS and Misguided have stopped photoshopping their images for when they are posted on their website so consumers feel more included in what they can buy and doesn't give them "an unrealistic standard of beauty to compare themselves too" (Chloe Pantazi, 2017) The Fashion Industry still has a long way to go but since the Victoria Secret show got cancelled last autumn for backlash they faced after forcefully trying to look more inclusive they have had to be more careful with the way they face certain changes. I hope to be able to continue with this topic for my dissertation and look more widely into menswear and how celebrities reinterpreted runway looks for award shows and red

carpets. Also the relationships made with celebrity clients who don't have the usual body type that designers would sometimes pick for their runways.

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Illustrations

(Fig 1) Vogue Cover <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/peter-lindbergh-vogue-supermodel-cover-story>

(Fig2) Kate Moss

https://www.google.com/search?q=the+third+summer+of+love&rlz=1C5CHFA_enGB849G849&sxsrf=ALeKk00xxKQoFou5OHUyt1rG0knES7J8QA:1589378101589&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiutaLp_rDpAhWwQUEAHf54CvcQ_AUoAXoECBIQAw&biw=1280&bih=646

(Fig 3) Naomi Campbell Vogue <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/556968678891186475/>

(Fig 4) Kendall Jenner <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/models/g5280/kendall-jenner-runway/>

(Fig 5) Kaia Gerber

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