

# Naomi Campbell: “The Ebony Enchantress”, Fashion politics and Cultural Transformation(s)

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## NAOMI CAMPBELL

- \* 1977, British model, actress and businesswoman
- 5 ft 10 in (1.78 m)
- Discovered at the age of 15, established herself as one of the most well known and (in)famous models of the world
- Was declared of “the” supermodels in the 90s by the media and the fashion industry ( “The Fall of the Supermodel”)
- Has been active in other areas, for example music, films and reality competition shows (“The Face”, “Making the Cut”)

## ASPECTS OF NAOMI CAMPBELL

- Her walk on the runway
- Fashion photography portraying Naomi Campbell
- Influences on popular culture, especially gay and queer culture
- She was the first Black model on the cover of French *Vogue* in August 1988 (“Naomi Discusses How Saint Laurent Got Her French *Vogue* Cover.”)
- In 1989, she appeared on the cover of American *Vogue*, in the September issue which is the biggest and most important one in the year (Ibid.)
- Afterwards, she rose to stardom, with a career lasting until present day
- Was part of the “Big Six”, an elite group of supermodels including Christy Turlington, Cindy Crawford, Linda Evangelista, Claudia Schiffer and Kate Moss (Time, “The Fall of The Supermodel”.)
- Naomi Campbell became an icon through different artistic forms, she appeared in music videos by Michael Jackson, George Michael and in some work by singer Madonna

→ In all in all of Naomi Campbell’s encounters with the public, she was categorized, labeled and judged by magazines, men and the structures behind the fashion industry (e. g. editors, publishers, agents)

## ANALYSIS IN THE FIELD OF CELEBRITY STUDIES

- Naomi Campbell’s presence and impact is based on “the politics of the first” -> Naomi is the first seen Black model in the fashion industry since the Civil Rights movement, but appears to be the only one with that high amount of visibility (Cheddie 2002, 64)
- Naomi Campbell’s persona embodied an elegance and power at the same time which paved her way to the top in the superficial and very visual world of fashion (Soley-Beltran 2004, 317)
- Naomi Campbell becomes an archetype for other Black people in the media, an image created by others which is claimed by others for inspiration
- As mentioned above, celebrities do not own their public image, they are in an arena trying to create and maintain a certain image (Wissinger 2015, 38)

## BASIS FOR ANALYSIS (DATA + METHOD)

- Fashion photography (e. g. image below)
- Contemporary articles from the time of the 90s fashion era
- What I did not include: gossip and conversations about Naomi Campbell concerning her social life and her legal issues as well
- Is rooted in the still underrepresented field of Black Gender Studies, but more importantly, in the field of Black Gender Studies in Celebrity and Culture Studies
- More importantly, the first cultural impact of Naomi Campbell happened without “the Internet”, but still has transformed the cultural space ever since with social media etc.

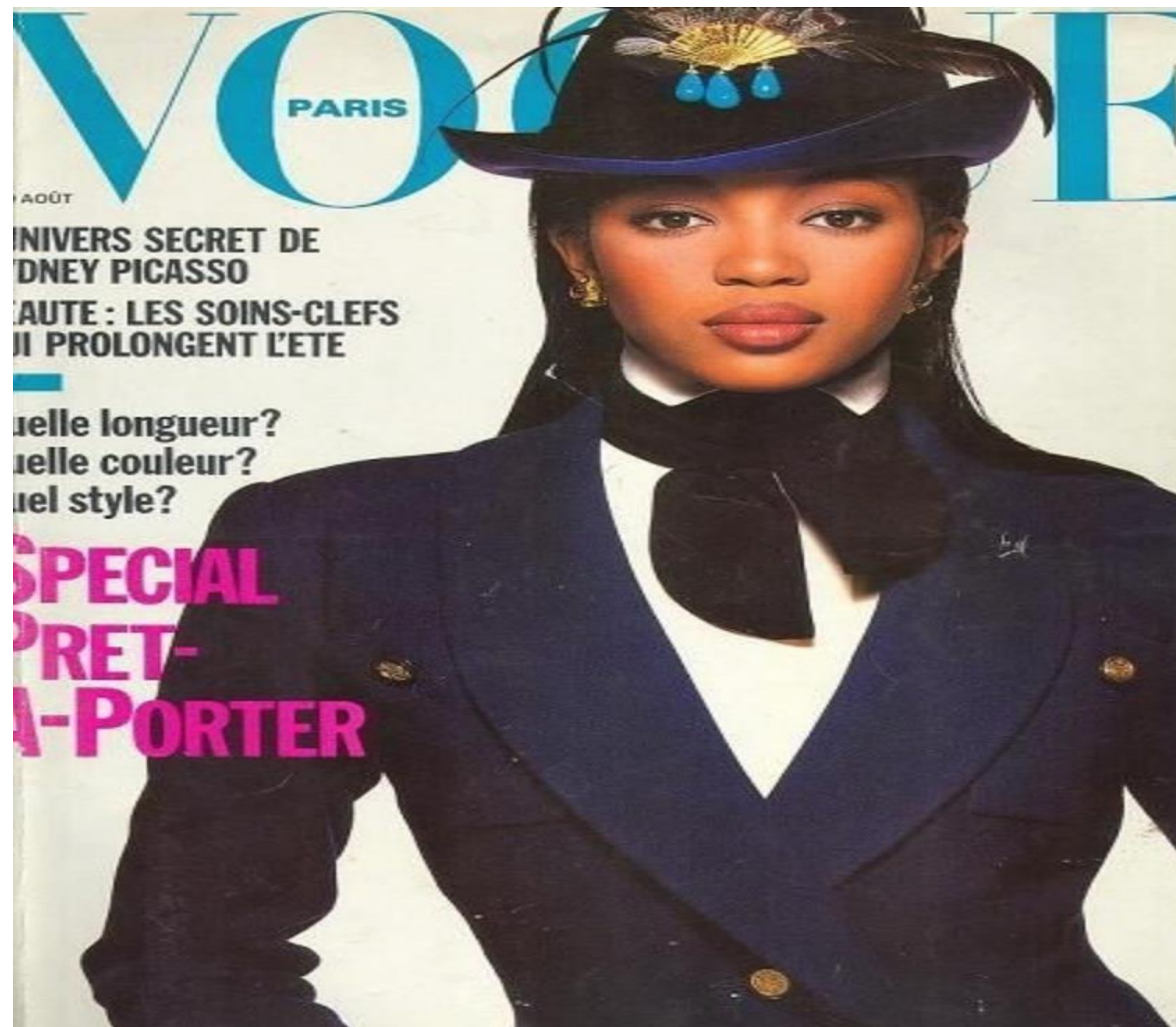


Image source:

Above: Dazed. „Naomi discusses how Saint Laurent got her French Vogue cover”. *Dazeddigital.com*, 9. Februar 2017, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/34648/1/how-saint-laurent-got-naomi-campbell-her-first-french-vogue-cover>.

Right: Koda, Harold, et. al. *The model as muse : embodying fashion; [exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from May 6 to August 9, 2009]*. 3rd print., Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010.

## FINDINGS

- Naomi Campbell belongs to a circle of few that had longstanding success and influence in the fashion world and beyond
- Back then, in the 90s, big publishing houses and magazines controlled more of public life, especially in the fashion industry where everything is printed and relies on prestige and reputation
- Her celebrity image still has an influence on queer and gay culture, for example “RuPaul’s Drag Race” (Moore 2017, 150)
- Being a Black model or being different in any aspect which does not portray a western, heteronormative way of life has been and still is political and something precarious (Cheddie 2002, 76)
- A model’s celebrity image is layered and filtered through a lens, literally and metaphorically

## THE 90S SUPERMODEL ERA



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