This article explores the possibility of cosmopolitics, using the global magazine franchise *Vogue* as our starting point. Drawing on Saito’s conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism, we investigate whether *Vogue* promotes cosmopolitan engagement, which we define as promotion of human diversity, cultural omnivorousness, and cosmopolitics. Our analysis focuses on racial diversity and health, two moral issues recently addressed by *Vogue* itself. We present a content analysis of *Vogue*, and media coverage of Vogue in China, the Netherlands, and the US. We conclude that *Vogue*, because of its global basis, high status, and reliance on visual materials, has the potential to address and unite transnational publics around global issues. However, the success of such attempts depends on local cultural and institutional contexts and the role of local actors, who may adopt, but also reframe or ignore attempts to promote cosmopolitan engagement.

Keywords: *Vogue*, cosmopolitics, cosmopolitanism, beauty, race, health

**Introduction: cosmopolitics in the beauty industry?**

Cosmopolitanism is said to be the corollary of globalization: increasing contact with ‘otherness’ may lead to tolerance and openness to new cultures, tastes and styles (Beck 2002; Delanty 2009). Sociologists, like philosophers before, often describe cosmopolitanism as a personal disposition. However, cosmopolitanism implies a normative engagement with global issues that extends beyond individual moods and motivations (Calhoun 2002). Saito (2011) specifies three dimensions of cosmopolitanism: tolerance – openness towards ‘human others’ – and cultural omnivorousness – openness to diverse styles and tastes – fosters the creation of a transnational public sphere where people ‘debate global risks and work out collective solutions – to engage in “cosmopolitics”’. (Saito 2011: 125).
This step towards cosmopolitics moves cosmopolitanism from individual disposition to collective engagement. Tolerance and omnivorousness may result from individual life experiences, although they are often cultivated by institutions like schools, media, museums and other cosmopolitan educators (Levitt and Nyíri, this issue). Cosmopolitics, however, requires transnational institutions to spark and shape engagement, and to mobilize publics across national borders. Moreover, debates between ‘citizens of the world’ (Saito 2011:130) need transnational arenas, media and intermediaries to facilitate exchange. The question then arises: What institutions can reach, create, and potentially unite transnational publics, around what sort of issues? How, where, and between whom would a transnational debate unfold? In other words: how does cosmopolitanism become cosmopolitics?

We explore the possibility of cosmopolitics in an institution that may seem unlikely: Vogue magazine. Vogue has 19 editions in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia, and claims an average circulation of 11.3 million, and a monthly online audience of 1.6 million.\(^1\) Because of Vogue’s high status in international fashion and media, what gets featured in Vogue often ‘trickles down’ to media around the world. Vogue therefore is a global institution that potentially reaches transnational audiences. However, like the entire fashion and beauty industry, it is not exactly known for its political engagement. So: why look for cosmopolitics in Vogue?

Vogue has recently launched initiatives that addressed global moral issues that actively speak to transnational publics. In 2008, Vogue Italia published the ‘Black Issue’ that exclusively featured models of African descent. In 2012, editors of all 19 editions signed the Vogue Health Initiative that pledged not to work with underage models, and to ensure healthy working conditions for models. These initiatives received global attention. Vogue’s global prestige and its reliance on visual materials allowed for smooth diffusion across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

This article takes these attempts at transnational political engagement as the starting point for an exploration of the possibilities and limitations of cosmopolitics. Vogue is strategic case to study this because of its high status, global reach and recent normative turn. Scholars, politicians and policy makers increasingly identify entertainment media as breeding grounds for political engagement. They reach large audiences, including audiences not otherwise interested in politics. The ‘entertainization’ of politics has broadened the scope of politics to include topics traditionally seen as part of the private or female sphere, like health, lifestyle, body and beauty (vanZoonen 2005).
Moreover, political engagement increasingly revolves around consumer issues (Johnston and Taylor 2008; Soper 2007). Consumption is a main source of identity in the global ecumene. Magazines like *Vogue* address their readers as cosmopolitan consumers of global brands and trends. Their attempts to cultivate transnational allegiances may become a site for cosmopolitan identification and engagement.

The emergence of cosmopolitics may result from top-down interventions, but also from dissent and protest from below. *Vogue’s* recent normative turn was motivated by ongoing critiques of the fashion world. *Vogue*, therefore, is not only a potential creator or facilitator of cosmopolitics, but also a focal point for debate about issues related to beauty, health and race, and possibly for political engagement against the fashion and beauty industry.

Our analysis focuses on two normative issues emphasized by *Vogue*: racial diversity and health. We look at coverage of these themes in *Vogue*, and public debates surrounding *Vogue* in China, the US, and the Netherlands. Guided by Saito’s three dimensions of cosmopolitanism, we look to what extent *Vogue* embodies or promotes 1. Tolerance, particularly regarding racial diversity; 2. Omnivorousness or openness towards diverse styles and tastes; and 3. Cosmopolitics. Since political engagement only translates into cosmopolitics when it resonates among wider publics, we also analyze responses: how is *Vogue’s* engagement with these issues taken up and interpreted in the public domain? Finally, more speculatively, we try to establish whether *Vogue’s* interventions foster cosmopolitics. We define cosmopolitics as transnational normative engagement with global issues of broad concern, addressing not specific groups but ‘citizens of the world’.

These questions are a starting point for an exploratory analysis of a topic that is the subject of much theorizing, but little actual research: cosmopolitanism. Rather than provide definitive answers, we aim to produce tentative generalizations and generate new hypotheses about the possibility of cosmopolitics on the basis of a comparative empirical case study. Our analysis suggests that *Vogue*, because of its global basis, high status, and reliance on visual materials, has the potential to address and unite transnational publics around global issues like racial diversity and healthy body size. However, the success of such attempts depends on local cultural and institutional contexts and the role of local actors, who may adopt, but also reframe or ignore attempts to promote cosmopolitan engagement.
Vogue in the global fashion field

Vogue is generally considered the world’s most influential fashion magazine (Oliva and Angeletto 2006; Godart and Mears 2009). Founded in the US, Vogue now has 19 (women’s) editions around the globe. Although publisher Condé Nast does not own all local editions, the brand identity is carefully controlled. Each edition cultivates a certain local flavor, but all editions aim to make readers feel connected with global high fashion: the runways of Milan, New York and Tokyo, the glamour and adventure of global cities, tropical beaches, and the international jetset.

Vogue sets the standard in global fashion for anything from models’ looks and new fashion trends to styles in photography, styling and writing. However, it rarely uses its power for moral or political interventions. The ‘edgy’, avant-garde aesthetics of high fashion is not easily reconciled with a normative stance. Moreover, normative statements may be commercially unattractive because they spoil the mood of hedonism and luxury consumption.

The international fashion and beauty industry is widely criticized for diffusion of unrealistic and unhealthy body standards; exploitation of (young) models; and the reproduction of racial and ethnic stereotypes. Some brands have responded to this critique. Dove Cosmetics launched an international campaign portraying ‘real women’ of diverse body sizes and ethnic backgrounds (Johnston and Taylor 2008). However, high fashion generally ignored its critics. What interests us is not why Vogue has taken up these critiques, or why so late, but rather: how have they addressed them and to what effect? What happens when Vogue addresses its readership in an ethical or moral register?

Method and data

This article analyses cosmopolitan engagement in Vogue, and responses to this, in the US, China, and the Netherlands. This comparison allows us to trace transnational flows of images and ideas, and connect them with relations and positions in the transnational cultural field of fashion and beauty. The US, the country of origin of Vogue, occupies a powerful central position in this field. China and the Netherlands represent two versions of ‘periphery’. China is a global economic and political power and an important manufacturer of fashion. However, for new or prestigious styles, brands, trends and models, Chinese generally look to global centers abroad. The Netherlands is small and linked with nearby fashion centers like Paris and London through production (models, designers) and consumption. Its position is best summarized as ‘suburban’ in relation to
global fashion: well-connected but fundamentally dependent. Our comparison does not attempt to contrast national characteristics or institutional constellations. Instead, following Shih(2013), we understand ‘comparison as relation’: distinctive relations link these three countries in the fashion and beauty world system.

First, we did an explorative content analysis of the 2012 editions of American, Chinese and Dutch Vogue to assess the prominence and framing (cf. deVreese 2005) of issues of health and race. We investigated specifically whether the framing of these themes promoted openness to diversity, omnivorosity, and/or cosmopolitics. This phase was deliberately open-ended to allow us to discover cosmopolitics in unexpected shapes and places.

Second, we did a content analysis of the national press in these countries from 2008-12. For the US and the Netherlands, we used LexisNexis, which includes a wide selection of online and offline news media. For China we used three archives of Chinese periodicals and newspapers: Wisenet, Zhongguo Qikanwang and Zhongguo Baozhi Ziyan Quwen Shujuku. These databases provide a good starting point for understanding public debates because they cover a wide range of media, audiences and genres, including online sources. To gauge the presence and framing of racial diversity we searched ‘Vogue’ combined with Vogue Black; Black issue; African-American; ethnic; diversity; colored; race; Chinese; oriental; for health we looked for ‘Vogue’ and Health Initiative; health; thin models; weight; body size (and Dutch and Chinese equivalents). While we did not systematically measure coding reliability, we jointly discussed our data and interpretations.

This study is not a classical comparative analysis: our goal is not to explain differences and similarities between China, the Netherlands, and the US. Looking for global phenomena, we expect similar themes and treatments of these themes across countries. Therefore, we have pooled our findings, analyzing them as a set to compare the conditions under which cosmopolitics may emerge.

**Black beauty and Oriental beauty: Vogue and racial diversity**

The fashion and beauty industry has often been critiqued for its racial politics. Models around the world are white, often blue-eyed and blond (Frith et al. 2005), embodying Western middle-class ideals of slim, pale beauty (Mears 2011).

In July 2008, Vogue Italia, the most avant-garde of all Vogue editions, published the Black Issue, which exclusively featured models of African descent photographed by star photographer Stephen Meisel. It contained photoshoots with black celebrities and
top models, a critical article (in Italian) about the portrayal of women of color, and artistic-looking collages of stereotypical images of black women. Afterwards, *Vogue Italia* started an English-Italian website dedicated to ‘Black Beauty’ that explicitly targets a global audience.

The black issue is a cause célèbre in the fashion world. It sold very well, in and outside Italy, and perfectly matched the high fashion aesthetic: stylized, glamorous, yet experimental and provocative, with Naomi Campbell’s bare breasts, cut-up images of offensive stereotypes, and edgy models in awkward poses. In itself, the decision to use black models in Italy, a country that is neither very racially mixed nor race-conscious, was provocative. The editor’s introduction, critical articles and art works communicated the issue’s political intent.

The Black Issue/Vogue Black website is our first case for exploring the possibility of cosmopolitics in *Vogue*. It champions racial diversity, and its attempt to broaden the *Vogue* aesthetics by including dark-skinned models promotes omnivorousness. It takes a normative stance on an issue that, in Italy, isn’t local, and concerns a social category that is globally disadvantaged (although the individuals represented are privileged). It reached transnational publics. In addition to the international sales success, the Black Issue/Vogue Black site received press coverage in all three of our countries. We located 29 articles in the US, 3 articles in China and 2 in the Netherlands. Dutch and Chinese articles were neutral and factual. For instance, *Xinmin Wanbao* (Xinmin Evening News) discussed the Black Issue in conjunction with Michelle Obama’s rise as a style icon.

In the American media, the coverage was extensive, opinionated and typically favorable. The Black Issue was discussed in *Ebony* magazine, in blogs like *Gawker*, in popular, regional newspapers (*The Daily Oklahoman*), and in elite newspapers (*New York Times*). *The Washington Post* published a long, complimentary profile of *Vogue Italia*’s editor:

> Franca Sozzani, the editor of *Vogue Italia*, has taken the lead on one of the most fraught topics in her industry: diversity. She did so in reaction to runways that, in the past few years, had turned strikingly homogenous as a steady stream of pin-thin, white models - most hailing from Eastern Europe - began to dominate the catwalks of New York and Europe. The result of the whitewashed runways meant that the women being funneled into magazines, cosmetics contracts and ultimately into our popular consciousness as archetypes of the feminine ideal
were overwhelmingly white and often emaciated. (...) Under the prestigious banner of *Vogue Italia*, Sozzani now celebrates black and brown women, fat girls and obese ones, too. 8

New York-based blog Fashiontribe hailed the Black Issue as a ‘coveted’ artifact in the fashion world:

> The fabulous Haute Concept managed to snag a few extra copies of the coveted issue, which, as they note, has been harder to locate than a hooker in a church. To win one, snap a pic of yourself holding a sign that says I’m Haute, email it into them pronto. 9

But it also received praise from the opposite end of the media landscape, feminist blog *Jezebel*:

> While perhaps some may be upset that it took a ‘stunt’ like this to throw a spotlight on the issue of the lack of diversity in magazines and runways, it’s actually a beautiful souvenir, a keepsake to remember these troubled times. A protest song in photograph form. Never has the racism issue looked quite so stunning. 10

In the US, the Black Issue/*Vogue* Black resonated with concerns about race and representation. It coincided with a surge of interest in the politics of race after the election of Barack Obama. Praise for *Vogue* Black was sometimes accompanied by snarky remarks at American *Vogue*. While American *Vogue* had images of women of color in every 2012 issue (including cover images of celebrities of color Rihanna, Jennifer Lopez and Serena Williams), our analysis shows that racial diversity is never explicitly addressed. The American press embraced the Italian plea for diversity they apparently missed in American *Vogue*.

> Dutch coverage of Vogue Black was limited and neutral – in marked contrast, as we shall see, with another Sozzani initiative, Vogue Curvy. Despite the presence of a significant non-white community in the Netherlands, diversity is generally framed in cultural rather than racial terms (Uitermark 2012). Dutch *Vogue* shows limited racial diversity. Although the first issue featured Sudanese-British model Alek Wek, most 2012
issues feature no women (or men) of color, and the issue of race/ethnicity was never addressed.

In China, attention to *Vogue* Black was rare as well. However, another racial issue was prominent in the Chinese press and *Vogue China*: Chinese beauty. Over the years, Chinese *Vogue* has promoted ‘Oriental beauty’. We found seven cover stories with related themes since Chinese *Vogue*’s inauguration in 2005. In September 2010, *Vogue China* presented its ‘Oriental Beauty’ issue. The cover showed six Chinese models wearing Chinese designer Alexander Wang, photographed by star photographers Van Lamsweerde and Matadin. The lead article claims: ‘Oriental beauty is no longer an exotic accessory to the Western world.’ The article cites a range of Chinese female celebrities including Chinese-American journalist Connie Chung, Chinese-American politician Elaine Chao and Chinese-Australian chef Kylie Kwong. ‘These Chinese women didn’t only contribute to their own fields, but also propagate Chinese culture to different corners of the world.’ The lead article focuses more on ‘Oriental’ than on beauty, since these women do not owe their celebrity (primarily) to their looks. However, the cover and the remainder of the issue celebrates ‘Oriental Beauty’ by showing pretty, anonymous Asian models.

Like *Vogue* Black, the ‘Oriental Beauty’ frame promotes a broadening of representation of beauty beyond white or Western-dominated standards. Its showcasing of Chinese designers and successful Chinese women can be seen as promoting omnivorosity, showing a greater variety of styles and people than commonly present in *Vogue*. However, it moves away from the focus on physical beauty of *Vogue* Black, and uses beauty to appeal specifically to all women of Chinese descent. While *Black Vogue* ostentatiously targets global audiences, ‘Oriental Beauty’ addresses Chinese audiences – including ‘overseas Chinese’. Thus, in a manner reminiscent of Chow’s (2011) analysis of Miss China Europe, Chinese beauty is incorporated into the transnational cultural politics of ‘Chineseness’. The plea for Chinese beauty aims to muster national and/or racial allegiances in the wake of the ‘Rise of China’. The Chinese word used to denote ‘race’ – *minzu* – also means ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity’ (Dikötter 2003). Thus, the Oriental Beauty issue does not really promote racial diversity. Instead, it becomes part of a ‘Chineseness’ project that conflates race, ethnicity and nation.

The Oriental Beauty issue, and Chinese *Vogue*’s campaign for Chinese beauty received little mention in the international press. In our sample, only US-based *Business Insider* discussed it, focusing on the global success of Asian models: ‘Meet 10 Asian
models who are making waves in the fashion industry.' Interestingly, American and Dutch accounts of *Vogue China* were diametrically opposed to this Oriental beauty frame. It revolved around a single frame, captured in a *Washington Post* headline: ‘Foreign models flock to China, which is increasingly embracing a Western fashion aesthetic.’ The article notes: ‘China’s Next Top Model may well be a blue-eyed Canadian blonde named Nicole.’

Both the promotion of black and oriental beauty, and this rather hegemonic reporting on Chinese *Vogue* highlight the political dimension of beauty and race. While Dutch and American *Vogue* downplay this, *Vogue* Black and Chinese *Vogue* successfully challenge the exclusionary politics of Western-oriented beauty standards. This strategy of showcasing ‘racial beauty’ manages to speak to transnational audiences because the images easily transcend national and linguistic boundaries. Moreover, it connects the personal – beauty – with the political, potentially mobilizing new publics for an old cause. When it fails as a political statement, showcasing glamorous ‘racial beauty’ may still work as an aesthetic statement. Finally, it works because brand and cause reinforce each other. As long as it is ‘fabulous’, the touting of racial beauty doesn’t imperil *Vogue*’s commercial interests. At the same time, the *Vogue* brand gives glamour to the issue of diversity and equal representation.

*Vogue* Black underlines the potential for beauty as a route to cosmopolitics: it speaks to transnational audiences, both addressing and drawing attention to globally excluded groups. While the Oriental beauty frame is also explicitly transnational, this transnationalism seems partisan rather than cosmopolitan. The lack of international coverage of the Oriental beauty issues attests to this. Thus, while both frames highlight the transnational political dimension of beauty, only *Vogue* Black makes a credible effort at cosmopolitics as we define it. While it does not find appreciative audiences everywhere, it reaches transnational audiences and promotes diversity of style (omnivorosity) and race (human diversity), in a manner that departs rather dramatically from common standards in home country Italy and the fashion world. The Oriental beauty frame, on the other hand, fails to become cosmopolitical: it promotes Chinese styles, celebrities and models to a (transnational) Chinese audience. Thus, rather than advocating tolerance and openness to diversity, it promotes transnational identity politics.

**The Health Initiative: *Vogue* and the framings of health**
Our second case study is the Vogue Health Initiative (HI): a statement published simultaneously in all June 2012 editions of the magazine. It consists of a six-point manifesto, in which the editors vow: (1). Not to work with models who are under 16 or ‘appear to have an eating disorder’; (2). Ask agents and casting directors not to send or hire models under 16; (3). Promote industry-wide awareness of health issues; (4). Encourage healthy backstage conditions; (5). ‘Encourage designers to consider the consequences of unrealistically small sample sizes of their clothing’; and (6). ‘We will be ambassadors for the message of a healthy body image’.14

The initiative builds on the 2007 Health Initiative from the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) and the British Fashion Council. It is also inspired by Vogue Curvy – a subsidiary of Vogue Italia, featuring ‘curvy’ models and celebrities. While not all elements of the HI are equally measurable or concrete, together they entail considerable commitment. Moreover, the HI affects all issues and activities of Vogue, around the world, from the moment of publication. The HI is therefore best understood as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): ‘a continuing commitment by an organization to behave ethically and contribute to economic development, while also improving the quality of life of its employees (…), the local community, and society at large.’ (Lindgreen and Swaen 2010: 3)

The HI is a response to ongoing criticisms of global fashion. The vast majority of the world’s population is regularly exposed to images of the thin and young models favored in the fashion field. Few people meet these standards, but many try to emulate them. In terms of the dimensions of cosmopolitanism, the HI makes a brave attempt at cosmopolitics: it tries to unite a transnational public around a global issue. The simultaneous launch in all 19 issues underlines the global dimension – and the strength of a transnational institution like Vogue. However, the HI comes up short with respect to other dimensions of cosmopolitanism: it does not necessarily promote openness to diversity or stylistic omnivorousness.

Turning to our data, it is striking how differently the HI is framed in different editions. The cover of the American edition shows three American athletes, two female (one black) and one male. The editorial introduction, a forceful defense of the HI, shows a picture of Doutzen Kroes, who was ‘rejected in the past for not conforming to some inconceivable and offensive idea of how she should look and what she should weigh. For the record, the five-foot-nine Dutch model wears a 4. Yet to some in fashion, she is far too curvaceous. To everyone else, Kroes looks like exactly what she is—a particularly
glowing and radiant example of gorgeousness.’ The editorial notes various health challenges to the fashion world and the world at large, including anorexia and ‘obesity levels (...) rocketing upward’.

In all 2012 issues of American *V*ogue, health is a prominent theme. Health is often framed in terms of weight and body size, for instance in articles about ‘embracing the voluptuous woman’ in fashion or getting a ‘rounder and curvier silhouette’. A much-criticized article in April 2012 gave a first-person account of a woman’s struggle with her young daughter’s obesity. Both the article and the critiques link fashion, health and body size in a single media frame. Thus, health is linked with openness to human diversity, although in a broader sense than Saito’s ethnic/racial definition: acceptance of diverse body types. In American *V*ogue, therefore, the HI encompasses all three dimensions of cosmopolitanism.

In the Netherlands, by contrast, the HI’s presentation was understated: a translation of the HI, the same image of Kroes, and a commentary in the Editor’s Letter. The issue features short pieces on ‘beauty ideals’ by several writers, none of which takes a particularly clear stance, and a photoshoot with a model cycling in sports gear. The cover shows a slim, pale model and makes no mention of the Initiative. As *V*ogue’s project coordinator told us, this was the first year of Dutch *V*ogue, so they felt no need to change much. In general, health and body size are less thematized in Dutch *V*ogue. As a new franchise, Dutch *V*ogue was more concerned with winning over Dutch audiences, than with broadening its politics of representation.

The Chinese June issue, finally, has the Chinese version of the HI manifesto. The cover shows (again) Doutzen Kroes, announcing, in English, ‘Healthy living’. The Editor’s Letter frames the HI, remarkably, in terms of ‘simple living’. Editor Angelica Cheung reflects on her daily life, ending with a plea for a simple, healthy lifestyle: controlling her online time, donating unused clothes to charities, buying organic food and making home-cooked meals instead of buying take-away. She writes: ‘In today’s materialistically rich society, the quality life we pursue should be about “better”, not “more!” I decided to take action, to simplify life.’ The entire issue is similarly framed: simplicity is health, discussing issues like ‘how to spend 30 days in 15 outfits’. Later in 2012, China *V*ogue was the first to break the HI, violating its one measureable element. The August issue featured Ondria Hardin, a 15-year old white American model. In China, health is not self-evidently linked with either body size or underage models.
Consequently, the moral message of the HI becomes more individualized and less cosmopolitan.

The HI received considerable media coverage in all three countries. In the US, Lexis-Nexis finds 53 mentions in 2012, mainly in style magazines and critical blogs, but also in elite and popular newspapers (New York Times, New York Observer, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette) and business publications (International Business Times). American coverage of the HI is best summarized as cautiously positive. Jezebel called it ‘potentially pretty groundbreaking’ and Fashionista wrote: ‘While the language in the new manifesto (...) is a bit noncommittal at times, the new initiative is without a doubt a step in the right direction - and it should make a big impact on the kind of models and editorials we see in the magazines.’ The Christian Science Monitor, in an appreciative article, quotes a model: ‘every model and every magazine looks up to them [Vogue] as the standard. I can only imagine this will be a solid step in a direction that will benefit models for generations to come.’ However some media seem skeptical. The New York Times calls the initiative ‘unusual in that the magazines are wading into a controversial issue’.

The wide American coverage is related to the prominence of American media discourses on health, modeling, thinness and beauty standards. Our LexisNexis search of ‘Vogue’, ‘thin’ and ‘health’ yielded many critical mentions of Vogue, couched in a larger critical discourse on the fashion world’s unhealthy beauty standards. American media also praised Vogue Italia’s Curvy website, which like Vogue Black presents a variety of body shapes and sizes, with the same avant-garde aesthetic.

After the cautiously positive reception, American media continued to check Vogue’s compliance with its pledge. Fashionista investigates all 19 editions, asking: ‘So did Vogue’s Health Initiative actually change anything?’ Blissstreet reports: ‘Surprise! Vogues Health Initiative covers aren’t so body positive.’ American media also report critically about a smoking model in the German HI issue: ‘She may not be an underage underweight model and she may not have been made-up or retouched, but she’s doing one of the most unhealthy things you can do.’ The breach of the HI by Vogue China was widely reported in general and fashion media. American media appear to cast themselves in the role of watchdog of the fashion industry. American coverage also played a central role in making the Chinese violation of the HI an international scandal.

In the Netherlands, we found five newspaper articles covering the HI when it was launched. Four were appreciative, but the conservative Calvinist Nederlands Dagblad publishes a mocking entry in the daily limerick contest. The pledge was mentioned
twice later in 2012, notably in a critical article in *NRC Handelsblad* about (failing) attempts to regulate the modeling business. This article is the only Dutch source reporting Chinese *Vogue’s* breaking the pledge.27

In the Netherlands, like the US, we found a widespread critical media discourse on the beauty industry: searches for combinations of *Vogue*, thin and models yielded dozens of hits connecting the modeling industry with eating disorders, body dissatisfaction and exploitation of young women. *Vogue Curvy* (unlike *Vogue Black*) was covered in various newspapers. *NRC Next* (the younger subsidiary of prestigious *NRC Handelsblad*) approvingly notes that the models in Curvy are smiling, in contrast with their ‘emaciated, pale, heroin chic’ sisters: ‘Finally an alternative for the army of stick insects presenting itself to us year after year in magazines and advertising.’ However, their conclusion is critical: ‘if *Vogue Italia* were consistent, it would rename itself *Vogue Italia White* and *Skinny*. This is what remains when curvy and black are crossed out.’28

In Dutch media, *Vogue* functions as a symbol for the beauty standards of high fashion: these standards, like *Vogue* itself, are presented as non-Dutch. In a recurring trope, Dutch models who made it abroad – with their appearance in *Vogue* as proof of their success – are described as too ‘down-to-earth’ for the international fashion world. Popular daily *Algemeen Dagblad* cites a Dutch celebrity celebrating the anniversary of her personality magazine LINDA: ‘In *Vogue* they have a different thin top model every month (...) At LINDA they do it with one middle aged, plus size model.’ [italicized English in original]29 To inhabitants of a semi-peripheral nation like the Netherlands, global brands do not necessarily foster belonging. Instead, they can be used to demarcate local identity. This Dutch framing of *Vogue* as ‘Other’ may explain why the Health Initiative in the Netherlands received less coverage than in the US, despite the shared critical discourse. Consequently, the HI is less likely to foster cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitics in the Dutch context.

In China, finally, the three databases yielded seven reports on the HI. All were published in May 2012 in the wake of the HI, mostly in national and local newspapers, ranging from *Guoji Caijing Ribao* (Chinese edition of *International Business Times*), *Jiafang* (liberation) *Daily*, generally considered part of the party propaganda apparatus, to *Huanjing Yu Shenghuo*, an environment and life style magazine. These articles, like their American and Dutch counterparts, showed appreciation of the HI and *Vogue’s* role in the campaign against thin and underage models. In that sense, they formed a continuation of
a series of Chinese media reports concerning body image, femininity and health issues in connection to fashion models.

The HI received positive – though modest – reception in the Chinese print media. However, these reports of the HI were not embedded in wider critical media discourses on the beauty industry. Moreover, they were framed as part of the global fashion industries, without specific reference to the Chinese context. For instance, the GCR describes the HI as ‘progress’, but it speaks of ‘girls’ in general, commenting: ‘In the pursuit of model-like bodies, girls are harming their own health, succumbing to eating disorders and even sacrificing their lives.’30 Thus, like the Dutch coverage, it appears to place the HI outside the national context, removing much of its potential for or appeal to cosmopolitan engagement.

A skeptical report was published, interestingly, by the official English-language China Daily. Questioning the sincerity of HI, it asked: ‘Vogue vow more hype than health?’31 This article was produced by the Associated Press, and published in English-language newspapers around the world. Possibly, China Daily, serving as ‘a unique window into China by giving the Chinese perspective on the major financial, political and social issues’32, expects its readership to be attuned to Western critiques of the fashion world. Alternatively, The China Daily could feel the need to show the (English-speaking) world its support for the more orthodox party line of suspecting a Western initiative.

The Chinese breach of the HI received little attention. In 2012 alone, London Olympics, Samsung and Apple were reported to employ Chinese underage workers. Thus, it is unsurprising that this particular breach received scanty media attention in China. Vogue China’s editor Angelica Cheung’s apology, however, was widely reported on Chinese online news portals.33 Cheung explained that the photos were taken before the HI and used by accident. She accepted responsibility and pledged never to commit the same error again. Meanwhile, the chairman of Vogue International, Jonathan Newhouse, was quoted as apologizing publically, emphasizing that the error took place ‘in China’. This seems intended to piggyback onto the general assumption that China is a nation where child labor and other abuses of labor rights occur regularly. By framing the breach as localized and confined to China, the main ethical thrust of the HI could remain intact. However, this particular framing stresses a distinction between the Chinese situation and Vogue’s cosmopolitan stance, which is unlikely to appeal to Chinese readers’ cosmopolitan inclinations.
Discussion and conclusion

This article explored the possibility of cosmopolitics, using the global magazine franchise \textit{Vogue} as our starting point. We focused on two moral issues identified by \textit{Vogue} itself: the promotion of racially diverse standards of beauty, and of ‘the message of a healthy body image’. To gauge the transnational dynamics of cosmopolitical engagement, we looked at three countries with different positions in the transnational fashion field.

Drawing on Saito’s work on cosmopolitanism, we asked three questions: To what extent does \textit{Vogue} promote cosmopolitanism, defined as openness to human diversity, omnivorousness, and cosmopolitics? To what extent are \textit{Vogue}’s attempts at cosmopolitan engagement taken up in public debates? Do they foster cosmopolitics: do they address issues faced by people around the world? These questions formed the starting point for our exploratory analysis; we aimed to produce tentative generalizations and generate new questions and hypotheses about the possibility of cosmopolitics.

Our analysis showed that \textit{Vogue} has the potential to contribute to greater openness to human diversity. The \textit{Vogue} Black and Oriental beauty frames promote tolerance by embracing non-white beauty. The framing of health in American \textit{Vogue}, as openness to diverse body types, also touts human diversity. While not usually included in discussions of cosmopolitanism (Saito 2011), acceptance of physical variation implies general tolerance that surpasses common definitions focusing on ethnic or racial diversity. The Dutch and Chinese framings of health are less cosmopolitan by this standard.

Pleas for a broader understanding of human beauty, to include diverse body sizes and racial types signify broader and more inclusive tastes. Also, the aesthetic style of \textit{Vogue} is based on innovation, provocation, and thus: the expansion of styles and tastes. \textit{Vogue} can therefore be said to promote omnivorousness among its readers. However, the \textit{Vogue} aesthetic is also highly exclusive: \textit{Vogue} models conform to specific standards of rarefied beauty. Even non-white and ‘curvy’ models are young, stunning, well-proportioned, with small (stereotypically non-African) noses and large (stereotypically non-Asian) eyes. Thus, \textit{Vogue}’s omnivorousness has clear limits.

To what extent does \textit{Vogue} promote cosmopolitics? Looking at the content of \textit{Vogue}, we concluded that Vogue Black and the American version of the Health Initiative represented credible efforts to do so. However, the Oriental beauty frame used a seemingly similar strategy with the opposite effect: promotion of transnational identity politics. In the Dutch and Chinese \textit{Vogue}, the HI was reframed in ways that removed most of its moral and political significance. However, because the HI involved a formal
ongoing pledge, the content of the Chinese and Dutch *Vogue* was still permanently altered for ‘cosmopolitical’ reasons: an attempt to redress what the HI manifesto identifies as a global wrong.

Our analysis of media responses to *Vogue*’s moral initiatives underscores *Vogue*’s capacity to address transnational audiences. In the US, *Vogue* is both object and initiator of public engagement and debate. In China, *Vogue* is more initiator than object. Its public role is most visible in its promotion of Oriental beauty; but there is little media debate about the role of *Vogue*. In Dutch media, *Vogue* functions mainly as a symbol of the transnational beauty world, which is cast as unhealthy, glamorous, and deeply un-Dutch. Both international and Dutch *Vogue* are object, rather than initiator of debate and engagement.

These national variations reflect each country’s differential relation to and position in the transnational fashion field. These differences were most evident in responses to the Health Initiative. American media cautiously embraced it and went on to behave as a watchdog for a global cause that clearly made sense to them. Dutch and Chinese responses were more noncommittal. In Dutch media, *Vogue* is portrayed as an outside force, which automatically limits its moral relevance. In China, the HI initially lacked relevance because the critiques to which the Initiative responds have not been central to public debates. Its relevance quickly increased when Chinese *Vogue* became the center of a transnational scandal. However, this scandal contrasted (immoral) Chinese practices with a (moral) international community, which can hardly be conducive to cosmopolitan engagement.

Finally, what can *Vogue* teach us about the possibility of cosmopolitics? First, our findings call attention to the role of elite media institutions in the formation of transnational political or normative engagement. Rather than identify new political issues, *Vogue*’s moral interventions gave shape to existing concerns by making them durable and legitimate. *Vogue* Black and the Oriental Beauty campaigns addressed global racial inequalities, latching on to concerns of globally marginalized groups by aestheticizing and ‘consecrating’ race-specific beauty. Similarly, the pledges in the HI consecrate international critiques of *Vogue* and make all national versions of *Vogue* vulnerable to transnational critique and correction. Thus, a prestigious institution like *Vogue* has the potential to address transnational publics for existing social concerns, and to enlarge such publics by adding high status to moral concern. As an entertainment medium, *Vogue* reaches larger audiences than traditional political media, relying on visual materials that
easily transcend national boundaries. However, their effectiveness depends on pre-existing public discourses, and on the framing of local actors and institutions.

Second, cosmopolitics may emerge in domains that seem far removed from traditional politics. On the transnational level, traditional political institutions are weak or non-existent, so attempts to organize transnational publics may emerge in a field as frivolous and commercialized as global fashion, around issues not traditionally associated with international politics: beauty and the body. We hypothesize that consumption is a likely breeding ground for cosmopolitics: a global resource for community, identity formation and moral concern that might very well promote global engagement (Soper 2007). Consequently, Corporate Social Responsibility may become crucial to the development of cosmopolitics.

Our study also points to the limits of cosmopolitics. First, the global scope of *Vogue* sometimes gives its interventions a rather hegemonic, top-down character. As we saw in the controversy around the Chinese breach of the HI, what looks like global moral engagement from one angle may seem rather imperialistic from another. When a global institution like *Vogue* spreads moral concerns to transnational publics, these may be experienced as meaningful, but also as hegemonic dictates, quite meaningless, or both. All attempts to address and unite transnational publics rely on local actors, who may decide to adopt, but also to reframe or ignore the invitation.

Second, the cosmopolitics of *Vogue* paradoxically relies on its exclusivity. It is the exclusion of non-beauty that makes the inclusion of curviness and non-whiteness meaningful. If *Vogue* embraced everything, its openness would lose its capacity to consecrate. This is the paradox of omnivorousness: if openness become total acceptance, it stops being a taste, as taste is about discerning and classifying (Bourdieu 1984). A similar paradox applies to all cosmopolitanism. In order to be open-minded, cosmopolitics requires clear standards for excluding or rejecting certain things. ‘Citizens of the world’ are open to all persons, styles and tastes, from all over the world. However, they have to be discerning. Otherwise, their openness would lose not only its meaning but also its humanistic and moral significance.

References


Lindgreen, Adam and Valerie Swaen. 2010. “Corporate Social Responsibility”.


**Authors**
GISELINDE KUIPERS is Professor of Cultural Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. ADDRESS: Department of Sociology, OZ Achterburgwal, 1012DK Amsterdam, Netherlands. Email: g.m.m.kuipers@uva.nl

YIUFAI CHOW is Assistant Professor at Baptist University Hong Kong. ADDRESS: Sir Run Run Shaw Building, HKBU 224 Waterloo Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Email: yfchow@hkbu.edu.hk

ELISE VAN DER LAAN is PhD Candidate at the University of Amsterdam. ADDRESS: Department of Sociology, OZ Achterburgwal, 1012DK Amsterdam, Netherlands. Email: e.c.vanderlaan@uva.nl

Notes

1 Sources: http://www.condenast.com/brands/vogue/media-kit/print; http://www.condenastinternational.com/brand/

2 Another prominent moral-political theme, notably in US Vogue, is sustainability and ecological awareness.

3 Including Hong Kong and Macao but not Taiwan.

4 The whole issue is available at http://www.vogue.it/en/vogue-black/the-black-issue/2010/02/cover-black-issue

5 Watson, Carol. ‘Italian Vogue selling like the new iPhone.’ AdAge July 18 2008.


7 Since all persons quoted are Westerners, it could be a translation from a Western source. The article has no byline.


9 Scott, Lesley. ‘Win a copy of Vogue Italy’s all-black issue.’ Fashiontribes.com, July 24 2008


13 Health Initiative, Vogue, June 2012.

15 Wintour, Anna. ‘Taking a Stand: International Vogue Editors Join Forces to Support the CFDA’s Health Initiative.’ Vogue June 2012.


Sauers, Jenna. ‘Vogue says no more underaged models.’ Jezebel, May 3 2012.


Kruspe, Dana. ‘So Did Vogue’s Health Initiative Actually Change Anything? We Investigate.’ Fashionista.com June 25 2012

Rognlin, Briana. ‘Surprise! Vogue's Health Initiative Covers Aren’t So Body Positive.’ Blisstree June 4 2012

Mau, Dhani, ‘Vogue Germany’s Health Initiative Editorial Features a Woman Smoking a Cigarette.’ Fashionista.com, May 18 2012.


Vincx, Yaël, ‘De kwestie van de veredelde kleerhangers.’ NRC Handelsblad 10 January 2012.

Geirnaert, Mira & Emma Anbeek van der Meijden, ‘Goed, zo’n site voor ronde modellen.’ NRC Next 18 March 2010


No byline, ‘Shishang zazhi Vogue cheng jiang chedi jiejue mote guoshoude wenti’ (Trendy magazine Vogue claims to fundamentally solve the problem of underweight models) Guoji Caijing Ribao. May 7 2012.

