

five in and out each year at Metro, and ten new faces added and old ones dropped at Scene, like a revolving door. Models' tenure at these agencies ranges from a few months to a couple of decades; on average, most models last about five years.

The result, as Helen, a senior booker at Scene, remarked, is a much different market than when she began three decades ago (and, in her view, it's a less interesting one). Young people are now scooped up, tried out, and spit out in rapid succession. "Everybody's looking for the Kate Moss and Natalia Voldinova," said Helen. "The girl that is going to make the mega bucks. And the fact is, you can't tell whether you've got it or not until way down the line, so everybody just keeps on searching and everybody gets scouts."

Helen looked exhausted as she spoke these words; her business has become a disheartening one. She continued: "I find it really tough. They take people from places, and it's a lot of wasted time and a lot of people [are] sent home [and told], 'Oh, you're no good.' I think it's a shame."

With lower rates and more competition, Metro and Scene are like mice running on a wheel. Though both agencies experienced economic growth and expanded their offices throughout the early decade of 2000, relative to their competitors they are scrambling to keep up. The rise of editorial modeling as distinct from commercial modeling laid the tracks for a race in which agencies would hustle to find that rare fresh face, inflating supply and deflating rates in the process.

Venturing into London on the train from Manchester two years ago, JD didn't see his precarious position amid a broader structural transformation. His brief career with £10,000 fashion campaigns rode on a wave of the globalized economy, a flooded market, dwindling rates, accelerating fast fashion, and a centuries-old career in twilight, now reduced to a fleeting spotlight that shines on fewer and fewer stars.

ARCHITECTURE OF THE MARKET

Looks, like any works of art, cohere into genres. Producers can name these different forms with considerably more ease than they can define their content. For instance, Billy, a New York photographer of six years, quickly rattles off "known" types of looks: "Yeah, there's the crackhead skinny guy. The buff Abercrombie dude. You have the, like, Dolce & Gabbana gay guy," and so on. Among the many colorful descriptions that producers named, here is a sampling:

the tarted-up housewife, ephemeral bohemians, apple pie, the drug addict, yoga fit, the L.L. Bean guy, high-end hipster chicks, little tweety birds, the Brazilians, the Belgians, and Russian baby dolls

The typologies are endless. These different types come in and out of vogue along with fashion trends, so that one look becomes “the look” for particular segments of fashion at any given moment.

But their movement is not random. There is an economy to this jumble of looks, and it follows an anti-economic logic.³⁰ In this economy, some of the most desirable jobs pay the smallest sums of money, while those with the largest cumulative earnings suffer the poorest stature. It is the “economic world reversed,” as Pierre Bourdieu put it, because here, the losers win. And they can potentially win *big*.

The Economic World Reversed

Producers of the look, like producers in any field of cultural production, have a complicated relationship to profit; some of them embrace economic principles, while others reject monetary pursuits. This depends on their location in the editorial or commercial circuits. Within these circuits of value, models book different jobs, earn inversely related amounts of prestige and income, and face varying levels of risk. They also have distinct looks that everyone claims to be able to see. Editorial models have an unusual or, to use industry parlance, an “edgy” look. Commercial models are widely described as “soft” or “classic” looks. Each look appeals to different audiences; just as in avant-garde art circuits, editorial looks are produced for other producers, that is, editors, stylists, and fashion insiders, while commercial looks are produced for mass consumption. A commercial look generates immediate economic returns, but at the expense of long-term profits. Meanwhile, the value of an editorial look matures over the long term—that is, if it doesn’t evaporate into thin air from one season to the next.

Models who specialize in editorial work, so named after “editorial” pages that showcase editors’ opinions, book predominantly magazine shoots and catwalk shows. These are by far the poorest-paid jobs in modeling. But payment in a cultural production field takes several forms, and in modeling, not all monies are equal.³¹ Though editorial jobs pay low immediate economic returns, or “economic capital,” they are rich in prestige, or “symbolic capital.” Prestige is valuable in its own right, as it enables one to “make a name for oneself” and grants authority to consecrate

	Editorial, High Fashion	Commercial, Mass Market
Jobs	Magazines, Campaigns, Print, Catwalk	Catalogs, Showrooms, Fittings, Print Advertising
Earnings	Low, Sporadic	High, Consistent
Prestige	High	Low
Audience	Field Insiders	Mass Consumers
Looks	"Edgy, Strange" Skinny, Teenage	"Classic, Safe" Thin, Young

FIGURE 2.1. Editorial and commercial worlds in the fashion field

"good taste." Agencies and models are betting against the odds that symbolic capital will eventually pay off in the long run should the model score a luxury-brand campaign. This is the occupational jackpot, which can pay millions of dollars, renewable for several years.

Commercial jobs, such as print advertising, catalog shoots, television commercials, and informal fittings and showroom modeling, pay very well in the short term with consistently high day and hourly rates. Steady and predictable, commercial bookings pay the bills for models and bookers alike, but at a cost: this is by far the least prestigious type of work. Those models with steady above-average earnings are valuable economic assets to the agencies, yet they are symbolically worthless. They do not earn the symbolic status required to book campaigns, and a model who becomes "known" for commercial work is essentially out of the running for the jackpot. The penniless editorial model, meanwhile, enjoys a high cultural status but rarely adds to (and often detracts from) his or her agency's financial books.

In her study of the aesthetic economy, Joanne Entwistle documents this trade-off among fashion models and buyers at Selfridges department

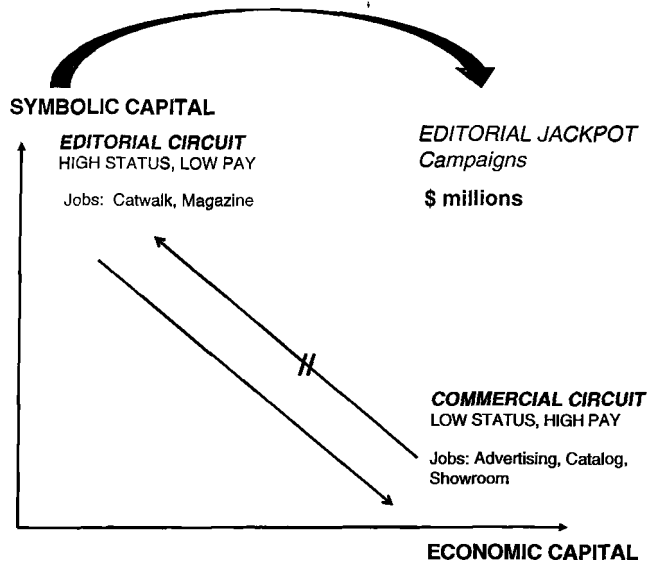


FIGURE 2.2. Structure of the field of fashion

store, noting the valorization process from editorial to commercial spheres, and Patrik Aspers has found a similar tension in his study of fashion photographers in Sweden. The hidden cost of steady commercial work, they find, is its toll on symbolic capital, which in the long run hinders financial gain (This means that, paradoxically, producers have an *incentive* to reject economic *incentives*, and they have an *interest* in economic *disinterestedness*.³²)

In theory, editorial and commercial circuits are polar opposites, but in practice, fashion's circuits are leaky systems; they have blurry and overlapping edges. Models move between editorial and commercial circuits, adapting their look to particular clients. Clients are also dynamic; an editorial client may book a commercially pretty model, or a commercial catalog might gravitate toward an edgy one. High-end catalogs such as *Barney's* and *Neiman Marcus* present edgy looks to mass audiences, and the *Victoria's Secret* catalog is highly prestigious yet targeted to middle-market consumers.

Generally, however, the value of a model's look emerges from the interplay between two distinct circuits. Picture this relationship along two axes, as shown in Figure 2.2.

Models working at the far end of the Economic Capital axis earn high rates in catalogs, showroom, and commercial advertising but are

essentially "stuck" there, in the land of "cheesy" catalog jobs, unable to move up into editorial work. Models working at the far end of the Symbolic Capital axis earn less money in magazines and catwalk jobs, but their prestige can translate into higher rates in commercial jobs as they move along the Economic Capital axis, and they can, so they hope, hit the jackpot by booking lucrative campaigns.

The Beauty World Reversed

There are physical differences between editorial and commercial models, albeit faintly detectable to the outside observer. Commercial models at both Metro and Scene are likely to be older and larger in body size than editorial models. Commercial women range from size 2 to size 6, while editorial "girls" range from size zero to size 4. The colloquial term "girl" somewhat accurately describes the majority of female editorial models, who range from age thirteen to twenty-two, significantly younger than commercial models, who are typically at least eighteen years old and progress into their thirties and beyond. Editorial "boys" tend to be slim, with 28" waists and 36" chests, whereas commercial men are "hunks in trunks," with 32" waists and 40" chests. The hunks are older, ranging from eighteen to fifty and up, while editorial boys range from sixteen to their mid-twenties.

Beyond these physical differences, editorial and commercial models vary enormously in how they are *seen*. Bookers, clients, and models describe commercial looks as conventionally attractive. Commercial women, whom bookers affectionately refer to as "money girls," are just that: they look like, and earn, a million bucks. They work predominantly in showrooms and for catalogs and commercial print advertising, jobs that pay the bills for models and agents alike. The commercial look is, variously stated, cheerleader pretty, manicured, wholesome, classic, clean, all-American, and glamazon. They are attractive, of course, but with widespread appeal, a "better-looking version of the girl next door," as a Metro booker said. This "girl next door" is not necessarily white, but as these terms imply, she is coded as middle class. Commercial men are similarly "handsome," and "classically nice, regular-looking guys," as one booker explained, and "they're probably the guys that would make very good boyfriends." Commercial models are, very relatively speaking, "normal," and their normality translates into reliably high, steady earnings.

Within this "safe" commercial genre are models who specialize in showroom work, that is, fittings and informal runway presentations, and

those who specialize in catalog work. Of most importance for showroom models are precise body measurements between sizes 4 and 8, as clients hire them mostly to aid in the construction and sale of sample garments. Catalog models embody norms of mainstream prettiness that are appealing to the average shopper in middle America:

Like definitely pretty, like a girl that would be walking down the street and you go, "Yeah, she is hot." You know, heads are turning. That's what I think is catalog. Clean, all-American, very wholesome. But usually if a man from middle America thinks she is hot, then that is sort of catalog. (Bre, New York booker)

In contrast to the "everyday smiley catalog girl" or the "generically" handsome guy, the editorial model is seen as "unique" and "strong." An editorial model is typically described as having an unusual or, to use a term that comes up often in the business, an "edgy" look. Producers define edgy as an "atypical" or an "odd" kind of quality.

Everyone in the field had a tough time putting edgy into words. Beyond its rudimentary physical markers of youth and skinniness, edgy is an amorphous quality, perhaps most easily defined negatively. Edgy is *not* commercially pretty but is code for a look that departs from conventional norms of attractiveness. It is the uncanny, sitting on the border between beautiful and ugly, familiar and strange, at once attracting and repulsing its viewer. As Clive, a New York stylist, explained, "You know the really, really good girls? They are freaks. Absolute freaks! Not as people, but physically, they are freakish. . . . But even though it is freakish, it is very attractive."

While producers cherish an edgy look, they realize its value may not be recognizable to field outsiders:

An editorial model generally has a more, um, strong look. . . . At school she was probably considered very ugly by her classmates. And some people, like my mom or whoever, might look at a picture of her in *Vogue* and say, "What's she doing modeling? She's strange-looking." And she *is* strange-looking, but she's strange in a great way. (Fria, London booker)

When classification schemes are not automatically obvious—"soft," "edgy," "classic"—how do the classifiers discern between types of looks? How do bookers manage the "biography" of their models when boundaries between markets are fuzzy? The answer has to do with the people for whom models are intended to appeal. A social hierarchy of consumers corresponds to this classification and hierarchy of looks. The commercial look is presumed to resonate with a field of mass consumers. With its soft and "boring" beauty, commercial models appeal to middle America, fre-

quently expressed as “the Midwest” or “Ohio.” Apple pie, as one booker put it, works best at the mall. In contrast, the edgy look is presumed to resonate with the field of restricted production, that is, other high-end fashion producers, such as the readership of avant-garde magazines.

For example, *i-D* magazine boasts that its readers are “opinion formers and industry style leaders . . . they are able to predict trends, influencing the mass market and define brand credibility.”³³ While the editorial look functions to build brand identities and communicate prestige, the commercial model simply moves merchandise. Along similar lines, Italian sociologist Lucia Ruggerone found in her study of Italian designers that working in high fashion means devoting oneself to the production of brand identities and aesthetics—and things like “edginess”—that are at best only weakly linked with salable products and final consumers.³⁴

Editorial looks are consciously *not* meant to make cultural sense to consumers in “Ohio” but, rather, to field insiders, presumably in New York and other fashion capitals. (This is not an intended slight to Ohio; producers also referenced the Midwest, and more generally, “middle America,” Nebraska, Illinois, and their own mothers as examples of commercial consumers.) Precisely because it does not thrive amid these mass-market audiences, editorial fashion has an elevated status. The more types of people with whom a model can resonate, the less exceptional she is, hence the lower value, perceived or real, attached to a commercial look. Here we can take a lesson from the art world: as a general rule, the credit attached to any cultural product tends to decrease with an increase in the size and social spread of its audience.³⁵

Thus modeling exemplifies the classic tension between art and commerce, and models show us how producers navigate the age-old antithesis.³⁶ Because art is esteemed to be superior to the vulgar material interests of the market, it carries a moral authority, a sort of credibility transferrable to products through branding and lifestyle advertising. The editorial look confers a cultural authority and a form of credit to a handbag, perfume, or a pair of heels, masking cheap consumer products with the distinctiveness of a luxury-brand identity.

Editorial fashion is both the “economic world reversed,” in Bourdieu’s terms, and the *beauty world reversed*. The winners—by any rational economic measure *and* mainstream beauty contest—lose. That is, the “pretty” and well-paid catalog model is shut out of the long-term prestige contest, and, symbolically at least, she is snubbed.

Of course, the differences between “edgy” and “soft” are, like the look itself, contingent and self-reinforcing. An editorial model deemed

prestigious enough to appear in a Prada campaign will, by virtue of her appearance, become a prestigious editorial star. Likewise, "commercial" is a self-fulfilling label, such that the model seen as commercial by her agents will do catalog work that defines her look as commercial. She will tailor her look to fit with catalog clients' expectations, whether or not she prefers an editorial career. Indeed, bookers complain that for any model, the proverbial grass is always greener across the circuit. Editorial models, often broke, always want to do catalog work, and commercial models, feeling slighted, want to pursue high-fashion work. Should a model become too pushy in disputing her categorization, bookers are likely to "drop" her, terminating her contract. The things that we believe to be real, sociologists often say, we *make* real in their effects, and if there's one lesson I immediately learned in fashion, it's the power of beliefs.

Belief in the Game

Fashion's producers believe in the unique existence of the look, be it "edgy" or "classic," because, put simply, they have to. A belief in the rules of any game is a precondition to playing it. To indulge doubt, to question if one model *really* looks all that different from the next, is to question the purpose of the whole enterprise, and to exit the game. Producers must believe in what they are doing, that one look *is* meaningfully different from the next, and that "good taste" *does* exist and is essential to creating good fashion. They believe, in short, in making fashion for fashion's sake. By believing in these rules, producers forget that they are following social conventions; they operate under the illusion that this game of fashion exists independently of their belief in it.³⁷

All producers act under this *illusio*, this belief in the autonomous quest for "the look." Models want to be it, bookers strive to find and sell it, and clients want to choose it. But victory—of being, brokering, or choosing a winner—seems more magical for producers in the editorial than in the commercial circuit.

Let me explain.

Because "edgy" editorial looks exist primarily to communicate brand images and "push the envelope" of artistic innovation, they are harder to identify and sell than those "safe" and "normal" commercial looks, which (almost) never go out of fashion. Editorial producers thus face greater subjective unpredictability and the inability to state in advance

what they want. In the commercial circuit, decisions are more transparently predictable—a look is normal enough to appeal to mainstream consumers—than in the editorial circuit, where the criteria for deciding on one “edgy” look versus another are ambiguous. This ambiguity means that there is an inability to make predictions in the editorial circuit. Editorial models cannot predict their earnings next year (or next month, for that matter). Bookers cannot predict if their new editorial model will catch on. And clients cannot assess whether an editorial model will make their fashions seem more or less fashionable.

Working in the commercial market is a relatively safe and predictable process. Producers have greater ability to state in advance what it is that they’re looking for in a model. There are incremental steps from one job to the next, and though of course the odds are still stiff—few people in the world will ever star in a JCPenney’s advertisement—it seems as though there is no real challenge of “making it” in the commercial circuit, simply because there is nowhere to excel to. Catalogs and showrooms, with their safe, steady earnings and “normal” looks, seem like straightforward and transparently decided jobs. There is no commercial winner who seizes all of the rewards, since there is nothing symbolically worth winning in the commercial circuit. Without the potential for hitting the jackpot, there is no magic. The commercial circuit breaks this aspect of the *illusio*, or belief, in the game.

This is in contrast to the editorial circuit, where there are no intermediary steps from one job to the next but rather leaps with uncertain landing places. The rewards are great but the struggles to reach them are treacherous and ridden with ambiguities. One has the sinking sensation that one may not make it to the next step, which means that when one *does*, well, how extraordinary! With great stakes and unpredictability, the winner in the editorial winner-take-all game seems to have achieved something not only impossible but also miraculous, as though by magic.

THE MONEY TRAIL

Most people tend to see legal tender, such as dollar bills, as “real money,” while nonmonetary exchanges such as “gifts” and “trades” are the extras, mere “perks,” on the margins of serious economic transactions. But nonmonetary payments are crucial to the pricing system in the aesthetic economy. Cash is just one recognized type of currency, and not necessarily the most valued kind. Payment could come in forms

ranging from thousands of dollars to a free handbag, pictures, the promise of publicity, and the association with high-status clients such as *Vogue* and photographer Steven Meisel.

Such unique payments do not correspond to hours worked or effort expended; rather, the range of acceptable tender varies by social standing and by circuit. People in editorial and commercial fashion share an awareness of the proper matching of media, transactions, and status, and they work hard to ensure that appropriate matches are made. Appropriate matches are important to maintain because they mark positions in fashion's hierarchy.³⁸ Following fashion's money trail requires first considering the symbolic meanings of sums.

Cash Value

In the editorial circuit, where uncertainty is at its highest and risk is steepest, models either win big or they don't win anything at all; there is not much of a middle class. This goes for work in prestigious magazines, catwalks, and campaigns.

The average editorial shoot hovers around \$100 a day. *Vogue* magazine pays about \$150 (£75 in the UK) for a day's work of eight hours, plus an extra \$300 for appearing on the cover. A few publishers pay up to £120 and \$225 for a day of magazine shooting. Many magazines in New York and London pay nothing at all, though lunch and snacks are often provided (see Table 2.1).

Editorial models also work for low wages in the most visible and celebrated of a model's work, the catwalk. While top models can command upward of \$20,000 a show—not bad, considering a fashion show lasts thirty minutes at the most and requires four hours of preparation time in rehearsals, fittings, and hair and makeup—the vast majority of models receive little or no pay for their labor. On average, models earn about £280 a show in London (about \$500), while the average rate for a typical fashion model in New York is about \$1,000 a show. Each season, a handful of models is chosen by a few high-end designers such as Calvin Klein, Jil Sander, and Dior to walk “exclusively” in their shows; exclusivity fees can reach six-figure deals.

Finally, editorial models compete for luxury-brand campaigns, the prize of the market. This is the highest echelon of success in the industry, only reached through the risky route of editorial work and only reached by few. Like the catwalk, clients who book models on exclusive fashion or fragrance campaigns pay extra to ensure sole rights to their new

TABLE 2.1 RANGE AND AVERAGES OF WOMEN MODELS' EARNINGS PER JOB

Job Type	Women Models		
	Minimum	Average	Maximum
Fragrance Campaign	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$1,500,000
Luxury-Brand Campaign	40,000	100,000	1,000,000
TV Commercial	15,000	50,000	100,000
Commercial Advertisement	10,000	30,000	50,000
Top-Level Catalog	7,500	10,000	20,000
Average Catalog	2,500	3,000	7,500
Low-Level Catalog	1,000	2,500	5,000
Showroom/Day	400	1,000	2,000
Showroom/Hour	150	250	500
Fashion Show	0	1,000	20,000
Editorial Shoot	0	100	225

model's public exposure. Campaigns can potentially pay several millions of dollars, depending on the exclusivity rights, place, and length of use; exclusive worldwide, multiyear campaigns earn the most money. Among the models I interviewed, women reported astronomical fees upward of six figures, and men reported campaign rates of \$50,000 and rumors of exclusive fragrance contracts with houses such as Dior for \$100,000.

The consistent money is in the commercial sphere. Catalogs, showrooms, and commercial print advertisements provide the bulk of a model's income. Catalog work is the "bread and butter" of a modeling career, with day rates that begin at \$1,000/day for new models, peak at \$20,000/day for top models, and average about \$3,000/day for most. Catalog retailers often book models continuously for days in a row and weeks at a time, often shooting "on location" in exotic locales, providing the models' transportation and hotel expenses in addition to paying a percentage of the day rate for models' travel days. I interviewed some women who earned up to \$10,000 a day on catalog jobs, but most considered \$5,000 to be a high catalog rate.

Print advertising includes photo shoots for nonluxury fashion and non-fashion clients such as alcohol, cigarettes, and mass-market, "high-street" retailers. These rates range, on average, from about \$5,000 to \$50,000.

Metro has another commercial board called the Showroom board, which specializes in informal showroom modeling and fittings. It is consistently high-volume work with small rates, on average about \$200/

hour, but for several hours, days, and weeks at a time. Some of the established showroom models have rates up to \$2,000 per eight-hour day. This adds up to lucrative sums. In fact, the Showroom board brings in well over half of all earnings to Metro. The highest consecutive earner, year after year, at Metro is a showroom model who has the precise size 8 body needed to fit clothing for a major American retailer. She makes \$500/hour and works every day; to my surprise, I learned that she was fifty-two years old at the time.

Showroom models may advance to "house models" at major fashion houses in which they work exclusively for a designer's showroom on fittings and informal presentations, and sometimes they appear in the Fashion Week collections. While still lower in status than the editorial model, a designer's house model is generously paid between \$150,000 and \$300,000 annually. A house model becomes intimately close to the design team, which can have added benefits. Most notably, I learned that the longtime employer of one house model custom designed for her a wedding dress as a bridal gift.

A separate runway division does not exist at Scene or at most other agencies in London, where clothing production is on a much smaller scale compared to New York.³⁹ The London equivalent of the showroom is the hair show. Hair modeling is big business in the UK, the home base of multinational salons. Hair shows entail the grooming, trimming, or dyeing of models' hair before a live audience of salon professionals and press, and these shows are routinely held throughout the year and provide a reliably steady flow of income to agencies. London hair shows pay between £300 and £500 a day and can last two to three days at a time during a "hair convention." Hair shows, however, do not offer reliable earnings comparable to showroom work, as models can only do so much to their hair before endangering their look.

A final type of commercial job is the television commercial, which is very lucrative but sporadic. One model in my sample reported earning \$20,000 to do a department store commercial for fur coats, and another booked a shampoo commercial that totaled \$100,000, plus residuals. Metro and Scene occasionally arranged commercial auditions when invited by commercial clients, but for the most part they arranged for models to work with talent agencies that specialize in TV commercials.

If we break down these earnings by hourly rate, we end up at \$12.50/hour for an eight-hour editorial job, \$166/hour for the catwalk (an average five-hour, \$1,000 runway show), \$200/hour for showroom

work, \$343.75/hour for catalog work (an eight-hour, \$2,750 catalog), and \$2,287.50/hour for advertising.⁴⁰

Consider, for example, *i-D* magazine in London, one of the most sought-after editorial clients for a model. A day of shooting *i-D* does not pay models. It does not cover taxi fare, nor does it cover the cost of the magazine, about £10, which models must buy to put tear sheets—ripped out pages of a magazine—in their portfolios to showcase their work. In the end, models lose money by working for *i-D*. In contrast, a day of catalog work, say, at JCPenney, starts at about \$2,500 minimum for a woman, and an hour of showroom or fitting pays \$150, with a minimum of four hours, or \$600. Agents hedge their bets that the *i-D* shoot will boost a model's profile with symbolic capital such that, in the long run, she will hit the campaign jackpot, and eventually those campaign earnings will far surpass foregone catalog or showroom earnings. But this is a risky bet, bookers admit, and prestige, accountants are quick to remind, doesn't pay the bills.

In addition to making less money, editorial models have less time in the game. With the rapid turnover of "fast fashion," a model's editorial popularity can be as brief as two or three seasons before her bookings "fall off," as one booker put it. Commercial looks can maintain steady work for lengthier periods of up to ten years, such that the lifetime earnings of the showroom or catalog model likely surpass those of a typical editorial model.

But participants are not in editorial fashion for the money alone, and I found, time and time again, that \$150 from *Vogue* was seen as more special than \$1,500 from Target. The classic sociologist Georg Simmel has claimed that money has an "empty quantitative nature" and only takes on meaning beyond its objective number in big quantities, since large sums fire our imaginations with "fantastic possibilities." Viviana Zelizer has since countered that small sums (and, in fact, all monies) also have distinctive meanings, as in the case of the *franc symbolique*, a token sum of money advocated in civil-law countries to be paid to parents as compensation for the accidental death of a child. Contrary to Simmel's original theory—formed in response to growing fears over market capitalism's dehumanizing potential—small sums can carry enormous symbolic weight.⁴¹ It's not the quantity but the social qualities that a payment invokes.

Paid in Promise and Prestige

When asked why magazine and catwalk clients pay so little, many bookers simply state, "Because they can." Because editorial clients pay models in the form of publicity and symbolic capital, there is no need to attract models with further incentives. High-fashion and avant-garde titles also offer models the chance to shoot with top photographers such as Steven Meisel, Mario Testino, Steven Klein, and Patrick Demarchelier, all recognized giants in fashion whose very names function as additional capital bolstering a model's reputation.

For the most part, models accept this logic, understanding that the eventual economic rewards will make up for their immediately low wages. "Some magazines can change your career," Clare, a twenty-five-year-old model working in London told me, remembering how her rates climbed after she first appeared in British *Vogue*. "It sounds really extreme, but there are definitely some shoots that can take a girl from being just another model to being, you know, the top billing for the shows and campaigns."

While some campaigns can yield astronomical fees, others pay surprisingly little. Some of the most prestige fashion houses notoriously pay the smallest sums of money. Rachel, who specializes in booking New York's editorial work, explained:

I remember when we were booking a girl at the other agency; we were just in shock that the rate was so low. Like any of these people, like Prada. A girl can go to Prada and work every day for a thousand dollars a day. That's nothing! *Nothing*. So the more prestigious the job, the less the money.

As bookers know, prestige is its own currency. Bookers know that prestigious clients *know* that they don't have to pay their models much, if anything at all, because they provide models with valuable symbolic capital to start up any model's career:

Armani is not the greatest of campaigns, but whatever, Armani can turn around and build a girl's career or build a guy's career; there's a relationship between the client and the model [that] hopefully mutually benefits both of them, whereas nobody builds their career on the Pepsi ad. (Ivan, New York booker)

Brand-name fashion, as opposed to brand-name soda, adds value to a model's reputation and, hopefully, his or her lifetime earnings. Models also work for pictures and exposure in magazines, though these forms of

are rife with problems. A client may never send the pictures, as promised, or the pictures might not run in the magazine, as promised.

The promise of future success can—and in fact most likely will—go unfulfilled. The prestige of editorial work, however, has lingering social benefits. Several years after quitting the field, the bookers at Metro still fondly refer to the few high-profile Fashion Week shows I managed to secure.

Will Work for Clothes

“Did you get to keep the clothes?”

That question often is asked when my research comes up in casual conversation. Impeccable style is part of our cultural imagination of fashion models, whose wardrobes, we think, must be filled to the brim with fabulous freebies and gift bags. But offerings of clothes, shoes, and handbags, like any gift, do not come free of charge. These “perks” of modeling are not mere extras on the sidelines of the “real” economic transactions. Perks are in fact central forms of payment and are a recognized transaction media loaded with symbolic meaning. They mark social status for models and clients alike.

Gifts of clothing are most frequently “given” during Fashion Week, where many designers pay in “trade,” the term for a system of paying models in clothes. Designers of all levels, from bare budget start-ups to established retail giants, can pay in trade, but generally only new designers in the early stages of their careers barter with last season’s leftovers when hiring models. These “gifts” of clothing can vary widely. During my two years in the field, I received everything from hand-delivered valuable couture pieces to crumpled T-shirts available for pickup out of an old box. After I walked in one small show for a new label, the designer directed the models to her work studio upstairs where we each were told to pick out two items from an enormous pile of rumpled clothes, belts, and bags spread across a large conference table; seventeen models proceeded to pillage through the pickings in a frenzy. Two weeks after walking in a major celebrity-studded show for one famous designer, I received a bag full of five samples from the designer’s past collection, all expensive pieces, but ill-fitting nonetheless. These pieces, usually, became gifts of my own to pass on to friends.

Payment in trade is a haphazard arrangement, quite likely to go unfulfilled. Many designers never send clothes as promised, or they send

damaged or unwanted clothing. In one instance, I shot for thirteen hours for the look book of an up-and-coming designer who promised a wonderful embroidered jacket, which was never to be seen, nor was the designer heard from again; her company went bust. On the opposite end, at yet another Fashion Week show, models submitted an online form to request their favorite item from the collection, which arrived two months later, accompanied by a personalized thank-you note.

Such an irregular system of payment would never be permitted from catalog clients. Precisely because they enable greater access to prestige and high-status names in fashion, editorial clients are able to forgo the monetary payments expected of their commercial peers. Thus the perk marks the client's high social status. Clients may or may not come through on promises of barter, because they have already paid models with the opportunity to appear in coveted catwalks and shoots.

Just as perks mark the prestige of editorial clients, they also signify the low status of novice models. Supermodels do not pick T-shirts out of a box for their efforts; such an arrangement is inappropriate to a supermodel's social standing. Top models can command tens of thousands of dollars for each catwalk appearance, while newcomers must accept any payment. This is the logic of barter in showrooms, where new models are hired to fit clothing in exchange for store vouchers. On the eve of a major designer's Fashion Week show, I was hired to work in a showroom to "build looks," which involves trying on the designer outfits that would be worn the following day by highly paid top models. For four hours of work, I received \$750 store credit to the designer's shop in SoHo, where I learned that the average cost of a dress is \$800 and my store credit would be reported as taxable income. For novice models with lesser social standing, these trades are considered integral parts of their development.

More seemingly peripheral perks are the so-called "freebies" that models enjoy by participating in other service and entertainment industries. As a model I received free haircuts from chic Manhattan salons, deeply discounted gym memberships, and scores of "free" dinners and drinks at nightclubs in New York's Meatpacking District. But, as Marcel Mauss has noted, no gift goes unreciprocated.⁴² The gift creates obligations; it enrolls receivers into the obligation to reciprocate. A gift signifies an exchange relationship, and with every free drink, haircut, and gym discount, models pay with their bodily capital by inadvertently advertising these goods and services. Consider how gifts of clothing are good advertising for designers:

So you've modeled for the client because you're attractive in the client's eyes, and the client knows you to be a good vehicle for selling those clothes. And now, you were paid in the clothes, so you put those clothes on and go out in them, so what are you doing? You're selling those clothes all over again! What a great idea for the client! (Leonard, New York staff)

At one casting with an hour wait in line, models received a "free" pair of designer jeans, but with a catch: models had to walk out of the casting wearing them, a clever marketing strategy to have dozens of models in uniform denim at the height of Fashion Week, turning Manhattan's streets into a conspicuous catwalk. There is no such thing as a free lunch for models, who pay for their freebies with their looks.

Hence, editorial models, for all their prestige, are likely to be broke compared to their commercial counterparts. These pricing schemes are naturally difficult to explain to field outsiders. I met one young Eastern European woman whose editorial career was soaring in London, though she had little to show for it. Even worse; she had trouble explaining to her parents why she needed to borrow money, despite her full work schedule. I could sympathize. My own father had recently remarked, upon learning that I received a bag full of sample clothes for walking in a fashion show, "That and a buck will get you a cup of coffee."

Where Does the Money Come From?

I was surprised to find more than a few stylists, photographers, and designers in straits as dire as the editorial models. Photographers and stylists frequently lose money on magazine shoots, paying for studio and equipment rentals and lunch and transportation costs out of pocket. How do high-end clients manage to pay exorbitant campaign jackpots in the face of these losses? Where, in other words, does the money come from?

Following the catwalk from start to finish reveals a surprisingly complex money trail. Fashion Week shows are particularly expensive for designers. In New York, a single-show budget can run into hundreds of thousands of dollars: \$50,000 to rent space in Bryant Park Tents (now Lincoln Center), \$100,000 on production costs, including hair and makeup, dressers, set design, lighting and music, and another several thousand to pay models.⁴³ The immediate profits of this costly venture are zero. Catwalk shows do not generate direct returns on investment for most designers, but, rather, they are brand-building strategies for future success. Many catwalk designs are not practical, or wearable, creations,

At the Casting, You're All Beautiful

In the spring of 2004, three months into the field, I attended a casting in an uptown designer boutique for a fashion show. When eight models arrived in the shop, a woman introduced herself as the show's producer and pulled us to the side. Standing in a semicircle and holding our portfolios, we listened to her deliberate. She did not look through our portfolios; instead, she looked us over, slowly, with care. "This is the hardest part of my job," she said, as she explained that she would have to "choose" two among us for an upcoming fashion show. "You're all beautiful!" As she spoke, an assistant, an older gentleman, took one each of our composite cards, and he scanned our bodies intensely, even craning his neck to see some of our backsides. He shuffled the cards in his hands, ordering them in a way we could not see.

After the casting, I walked with two models to the subway, and they laughed about how the casting felt "so weird." One model exclaimed, "That guy was looking, I was like, covering my ass!" She gestured with her hand covering her behind. Her friend laughed and added, "We all were. . . . And that guy was shuffling the cards. I was like, 'Am I on top or bottom?'"

Such a casting arrangement is not "weird" in the sense of being unusual. Castings and go-sees are part of a lengthy process of matching models to jobs. Castings typically involve models lined up against each other; models are chosen for employment based on criteria unknown to them. Models sometimes do not know what the casting is for, who will make the final hiring decision, or on what criteria they will be chosen or dismissed for the job.

The casting itself is a predictable procedure. There is a greeting with a handshake, some chitchat, and a review of the model's portfolio. Then the client glances over the model's face and body, perhaps asking to take her picture (once habitually with a Polaroid camera, now with the digital kind). The client then asks the model to try on a sample outfit and watches her walk the length of the room and back. The procedure closes with a pleasant valediction and a "Thank-you for coming."

So while not unusual in modeling work, such a casting arrangement is "weird" in the sense that it feels strange, even repeatedly, because it violates tacit social norms of politeness. For instance, it is rude to stare at women's behinds, or to flatly dismiss job candidates to their faces. Castings are, in Goffman's terms, problematic encounters.¹⁰ Standing before clients for inspection, models must suspend such ordinary social norms

and accept, at least for the duration of the casting, that they are display objects for sale in a silent auction. Clients, for their part, generally make their assessments with as much tact as possible, careful not to identify the losers from the winners or their logic in choosing one model over another.

This is one of the hardest parts of the model's job—walking out of a casting and being unable to assess how the meeting with the client went. Certainly, there are recognizable signs of the client's interest and disinterest, as models explained. If "they like you," clients are likely to spend time with you. They will carefully look through your portfolio, they will laugh with you, they will ask you questions about your life, your interests, and perhaps your future availability. They will compliment you and your pictures; they will smile. In short, they recognize and validate the model's presence. If they do not like you, they may exude the obvious signs: flipping through your portfolio quickly, or not at all, not making eye contact, and perhaps even looking at *other* models in the room (this happens with surprising frequency).

Such signs, however, are just that, mere signals that suggest but do not solidify. I have walked out of many castings with a huge smile on my face thinking, "I nailed that one!" At a casting for a T-shirt designer, the client said to me, "You're perfect." He even introduced me to the company's owner, and then both of them showered me with praise. But I never got the job, never again heard anything about it. Clare explained the let-down of the positive casting experience that leads to nothing:

That's one of the biggest enigmas of the biz, if you can tell or not if they like you. Because the thing is, sometimes you can do a casting, and they're so positive, and they're like "Yeah yeah, you're great, we'll see you tomorrow!" They're *that* definite. You walk out, you call your agency, and they haven't even optioned you, let alone booked you. You're like, why did you bullshit me?!

Alternately, a casting may ruin your day but still land you the job:

But then I've gone to castings where I just went "Oh what a fucking load of shit! I just won't even *think* about that one ever again." Then I get the job. So I think you could define it like a funny fish. You really don't know, like, you just don't know, what it is about castings. (Jack, 22, London)

The "weird" mystery of a casting assessment is the model's first encounter with precariousness to get work. It is the precursor to a series of career gambles.

Options Are Like Air

If the casting is the first tenuous step, then the option is the next blind leap toward securing work. After a casting, the client calls bookers to place models on hold, on "option," for upcoming jobs. They option models in rank order of interest, from first (strong) to third and even fourth (weak) option. While a strong option is an indicator of the client's interest, it is, like the pleasantries at the casting, still just an indicator. As Anna, a twenty-five-year-old Russian émigré put it, "Options are like air. They come off."

Options may appear suddenly and for reasons unknown. In London, a model named Oliver one morning received the news from New York that he was on option for the Dolce & Gabbana campaign. "I was like, just going about my daily activities, you know, waking up, going to the loo in the morning, everything. And meanwhile [as] I was doing those things, there was like Steven Klein or whoever picking out my photo off a website!" To Oliver this meant that somewhere across the Atlantic important decisions were being made that could change his life, and all without his knowledge.

But just as suddenly as they appear, options can be dropped for no reason, often at the very last minute. Edward, a twenty-two-year-old Londoner, learned this the hard way early in his career. Within weeks of signing with a select agency, he was optioned by one of Europe's most powerful casting directors for a prominent Milan show:

My booker's like, we definitely got that, because [that casting director] really likes you. And then they cancelled everyone else's options and left mine up until ten o'clock at night, and then they cancelled my options. I hate [that casting director]. You can put that on tape!

The opposite is also true; models can be called on to attend bookings at only a moment's notice. The result is a schedule that is not of the model's own making, nor understanding. Most models I spoke with tried not to dwell on their options, and a few preferred not to know them at all. Explained Daniella, age twenty-three, in New York, "I would rather not get my hopes up for something that's not cemented."

Try as models might to ignore them, options leave behind an anxiety-producing trail; in fact, they are written at the top of a model's daily schedule and often include gut-wrenching details, such as the name of a famous photographer shooting the job that could have been theirs, or

perhaps a lucrative sum that will be going to someone else. For instance, on my schedule with a list of unpaid castings for the day, the following was written at the top of the sheet:

CANCELLED: Option 1: Job: HOTEL ADVERTISING
 TRAVEL LA, SHOOT LA, TRAVEL BACK TO NY
 \$3,750 + 20% P/DAY × 2 DAYS - NEW YORK
 \$3,750 + 20% P/DAY × 1 DAY - LA
 \$250 P/DAY TRAVEL (LA) × 2 DAYS
 TOTAL FOR JOB: \$14,200 + 20%

When questioning why I did not book a job, or why an option “fell off,” the bookers could rarely produce an answer. During my first Fashion Week, before I was broken of the habit of requesting feedback, I asked Don, a booker, why a major designer had cancelled my option. He answered sweetly, “Just that you’re a little fresh, they wanted more seasoned girls for the show.” Don did not offer advice for how to overcome the problem of being too “fresh” for future work, and after a few weeks I gave up asking.

Precariousness with Bookers

As self-employed workers, models are freelancers. They work for themselves, and in contractual terms, bookers technically work for models and receive commission for arranging jobs that models secure on their own. This working relationship is more complicated than it might appear, however, because it *feels* quite different than what it formally is. It feels like models are at their bookers’ tenuous mercy.

Models need their agents to be their “biggest fans,” said Clare, “or else you’re not gonna get anywhere.” She explained:

Their attitude about you, their enthusiasm about you, is a huge key to making it big, or at least making regular great jobs. . . . They need to be the one who calls up clients and says you have to see this girl, or, like “Since the last time you booked this girl, she looks even better.”

Almost every model explained to me the importance of “getting on” with his or her booker. Agents are gatekeepers who restrict the flow of models to castings and, indeed, to entire segments of the fashion field. A booker’s perception is everything. How an agent sees a model determines her range of possible career outcomes. As Addison, an eighteen-year-old woman from London, said, bookers are “really, really impor-