On the cover of *Vogue*:
The portrayal of Black womanhood through oppressive archetypal imagery

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**Abstract:** In 1974, American *Vogue*, in a much-heralded occasion, featured Beverly Johnson as the first African American on the cover, an occasion that has been repeated only 39 additional times since. The lack of inclusivity, as well as the manner of presentation on the covers, can be seen as the perpetuation of oppressive archetypal imagery of Black women in dominant media (Johnson, 2012).

This research used content analysis to examine covers of American *Vogue* featuring Black women from 1974 to 2013. Images were analyzed for varied aspects of presentation, including facial expression, hair type, bare skin shown, and position. Image content was compared and contrasted to the three pervasive stereotypical images of Black womanhood that are a staple of American popular culture (Johnson, 2012): 1) the happy, asexual mammy (Harris-Perry, 2011), 2) the sexually aggressive “hot mama” Jezebel (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 76); and 3) the “obnoxious and controlling” Sapphire (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 88).

The researchers found that depictions of Black womanhood on the cover of *Vogue* conformed to the archetypal imagery, with over two-thirds fitting the stereotypical imagery of Mammy. Occurrences of Jezebel portrayal increased in more recent decades, and the belligerent Sapphire was also portrayed, though more rarely. Despite campaigns to increase the prominence of women of color in the fashion industry, the few images of Black women that appear on the cover of *Vogue* and the adherence of those images to stereotypical imagery reinforces the subordinate position of Black women in American society. By perpetuating discriminatory ideologies of Black women through its cover images, *Vogue* remains inequitable for women of color (Hill-Collins, 2009).


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