FRAMING OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN MAINSTREAM AND BLACK WOMEN’S MAGAZINES

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ABSTRACT

For decades, there has been a concern with the negative framing of black women in the media. Historically, black women are placed into four stereotypical frames: The Mammy, The Jezebel, The Sapphire and The Matriarch. However, in 2008, a new image of black women arose through Michelle Obama. She was well rounded — beautiful, intelligent, insightful, humorous, strong, yet soft all at the same time. This study seeks to understand the changes in the framing of black women since Michelle Obama’s time as First Lady.

More specifically, this study focuses on the medium of magazine journalism, which seems to be largely ignored in the realm of media studies. Thirty articles from a mainstream (Glamour) and a black women’s magazine (Essence) were analyzed for the presence of historical frames along with the emergence of new ones. The study employs the qualitative method of textual analysis as a way to determine frames and their meanings through a grounded theory approach.

The primary outcomes of this study are a greater understanding of how historical frames still affect how magazines, mainstream and black, frame black women, and the revealing of new frames that depart from those historical representations. Furthermore, this study will be used as a foundation for editors, writers, educators and students alike, to create more authentic and multifaceted stories about black women.