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# I Am Not Your Mammy

Media role models, size discrimination,
and "fat" Black women in the workforce

*This paper deals with the issue of equity in the workplace and particularly with size discrimination against "fat" Black women. The 1984 publication of Judge Rosalie Abella's report on equity in the workplace is the initial foundation of my research. The report found that race is a significant factor contributing to structured inequality among different ethnic groups in Canada. However, the report did not list size as a discriminating factor in the way that certain individuals were treated compared to their colleagues. Additionally, the topic of discrimination against size (sizeism, weightism, anti-fat prejudice, weight stigma, etc.) and the effects that this can have on employment equity has not received sufficient attention in scholarly literature relating to equity in the workplace.*

## INTRODUCTION

Equity in the workplace has been an issue that has dominated the research on labour relations for more than twenty years. Judge Rosalie Abella's report on equity published in 1984 was the foundation of the Canadian Employment Act. The intention of the Act was to oblige employers to provide fair employment opportunities for all job seekers with the required qualifications and abilities to perform the specified occupation assignments. More specifically, the purpose of the Act was "to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences" (Employment Equity Act, 1995). Judge Abella (1984) did not consider workers affected by weight-based discrimination as a designated group to be protected in her report. The Employment Equity Act has been amended several times since this report, and although the consequences of weight discrimination in employment have been "conditions of disadvantage" for

those affected, there has been no stipulation in the amendments to correct or to protect this group. Additionally, this issue of size discrimination and its significance to employment equity has not received sufficient attention in scholarly literature relating to fairness in the workplace.

The neglect of this topic within the discourse on employment equity means that the question, "Does a woman's size affect her access to employment and the way she is subsequently treated in her working environment?" has not been adequately addressed. This leads to further questions such as "Are there policies to protect women from size discrimination or has this issue been completely ignored?"; and with the added dimension of race, "Is there a significant difference between the way that larger White women are discriminated against and the way that larger Black women are discriminated against?"

My interest in this topic is both personal and academic. My personal interest is in the form of resistance to a stereotype that has been imposed on people like me. During my childbearing years, I steadily gained weight to a point where I was considered morbidly obese. I did not have a problem with self-esteem, though my spouse divorced me citing that he was not attracted to fat women. For years, I held on to the assurance that this was his loss, because not only am I kind, loving, and caring, I am also very beautiful and well educated. With that in mind, I was positive that my future prospects relating to remarriage and employment were optimistic. Back then, as a recent immigrant to Canada from Jamaica, I was naive about some of the social, cultural, and economic values and expectations of my new home. That is, from preliminary observations, fat Black women (fBw), despite their level of education, are often viewed as "unsuitable" to employers. Also in the realm of romance, many men will not "publicly" associate with fat women. Worst of all, they are often not considered as "marriage material" (the literature on this topic is extensive; see in particular Powell & Kahn [1995]; Root [1990]; Scruggs [2001]; DeJong & Kleck [1986]). At the time, I was only beginning to appreciate how strongly media views connected to how fBw were represented influenced how other people perceive women who are fat and Black.

However, I was very happy when I finally got a part time job, working for a professional who was also overweight, according to society's standards. She was a good employer, but I was mystified when she regularly referred to her chemist as "Aunt Jemima," and she did so without reservation in my presence. I finally met the chemist to whom she had referred. She is indeed a very tall, fBw who is exceptionally graceful, articulate, and intelligent. I later learned that she is a Harvard graduate, who is renowned and is well respected in her field. Thereafter, I became extremely insulted and annoyed when my employer continued to refer to this chemist as "Aunt Jemima," wondering if similar comments were also hurled at me in my absence. I knew that the term was degrading to Black women, but at the time I was unable to deconstruct or contextualize the situation. In this paper, I will

analyze the function that media role modelling plays in the sociology of work and labour, particularly as it relates to the intersectionalities of race and gender in North America and with a focus on the Aunt Jemima image.

In approaching this issue, I will discuss the power inherent to determining beauty and will provide an overview of the Aunt Jemima concept, along with an examination of the role feminism plays in the deconstruction of male power, with a focus on concepts of idealized beauty. The implications this has for the economic development of Black women has formed the basis for this discussion. I have purposefully used the word "fat" instead of overweight, heavy, obese, large, etc., despite its negative connotations, as a form of semantic power and resistance to the language of disempowerment. My definition of fat is anyone over the standard body mass index (BMI) of 30, which is usually more than 30 pounds over the "ideal" body weight. The World Health Organization (WHO) uses BMI to assess the percentage of body fat. It defines an overweight person as one with a BMI of 25-29, an obese person as having a BMI of 30-39, a morbidly obese person as having a BMI of 40-44, and a super-obese person as having a BMI of 45 and over (WHO, 2000).

## SITUATING MY RESEARCH IN THE DISCOURSE

The primary aim of my own work is to contextualize the discrimination against fBw in employment within the larger discourse surrounding the way that this type of woman has been crafted within White, patriarchal society, and more specifically through the reproduction of specific images of fBw in film. In doing so, my goal is to determine to what degree this image acts as a barrier for Black women and equity. I hypothesize that fBw face triple discrimination based on gender and race, but also, more specifically, because of their size. I further hypothesize that a reason for this is an inability for people to separate fBw from the Aunt Jemima stereotype that has been so closely linked with this imagery in North America. This particular image has significance as it is a direct product of the enslavement of Black women and the disregard for their personhood. As a result, this image acts as a symbolic representative of the fBw, which situates her within a type of femininity reflective of the social, psychological, and economic oppression of Black women. Though my topic directly relates to Black women and size discrimination in the workplace, I am aware that obesity is a global epidemic that affects many people, regardless of race or gender; however, research has shown that the group for whom the economic consequences are most severe is women (Cawley, 2000), particularly fBw, as opposed to White women and men (Averett & Korenman, 1999; Judge & Cable, 2011; Caliendo & Lee, 2011; Gable et al., 2009; Kristen, 2002).

## OBESITY AND THE "CULT OF THINNESS"

Women's status and sense of worth in North American culture is imposed through society's standards of beauty, which includes the maintenance of a specific weight

and a youthful appearance. Thinness is central to body image and as a result, both women and men collude in this construction in order to be accepted by and to fit into society. These standards of beauty are also transported to and persist in the labour market, where looks and body image often take precedence over qualifications or experience. Consequently, the thinner one is and the more youthful one's appearance, the more one will be rewarded economically. People who do not fit this standard of beauty are considered "deviant" (Clinard & Meier, 1998; Goffman, 1963) and are punished by society; they are stigmatized; they are made to feel like outcasts; they are made to feel "ugly." People who are considered to be fat are stereotyped as being lazy, lacking discipline and will power. According to Levy-Navarro (2010), the pervasive cultural assumptions attached to the fat woman is that she is a "victim of her appetites and that she is the very embodiment of 'death'" (p. 2). In addition, the medical and insurance industries deem fat people as being unhealthy: "fatness" is seen as a disease that needs to be cured or eradicated (Erdman, 2011). With this in mind, Hesse-Biber (2007) concludes, "it is no wonder that American women are obsessed with thinness. They are exhorted to strive for a physical ideal that is laden with moral judgment. Slenderness represents restraint, moderation, and self-control—the virtues of our Puritan heritage. Our culture considers obesity 'bad' and 'ugly.' Fat represents moral failure, the inability to delay gratification, poor impulse control, greed, and self-indulgence" (p. 2).

When it comes to beauty and body image, men and women are not judged by the same standards. Regardless of race, a man's age and weight are not significant contributing factors to his employability (Acemoglu & Angrist, 2001; Solovay, 2000), except in rare cases where he is morbidly obese or so old and tired that he appears physically unable to work. In the workplace, women often face inequities on many levels, but when they are young and thin, they have a better chance to "fit in"; if they are fat or old, they are "out in the cold." To make matters worse, if they are fBw, regardless of their educational background, finding or maintaining employment is a challenge in the North American labour market (Barnes, 1989; Rothblum, Brand, Miller, & Oetjen, 1990).

**RACE, POWER, AND THE CREATION OF HIERARCHIES OF "BEAUTY"**

Within the history of North America since colonization, White femininity has been the universalized ideal that women of all races are expected to adopt if they are to be viewed as "desirable" (Cole & Zucker, 2007; Duke, 2002; Schippers, 2007). Within the context of race and the representation of "beauty," this ideal has been exclusive of cultural differences that view beauty along a spectrum with a multitude of attributes that can be viewed as desirable (Berry, 2008). However, through colonization, the ideal of White beauty came to be expected as the dominant aesthetic ideal for all women, and women who did not fit this ideal were

positioned as "unattractive," irrespective of racial, cultural, or ethnic differences (Lange-Barry, 2003). The dominance of a White hegemonic ideal governing female beauty is rooted in the power that Whites had over socially constructed values regarding the female form (Gilman, 2008). Thus, Black women were viewed as "unfeminine" because of their inability to fit into the aesthetic that demanded that they be fair skinned, fragile of body, and thin (Berry, 2008).

The dominant White society establishes the status quo, which includes making decisions that endorse prescribed standards of beauty (Perry, 2005; Rice, 2002; White, 2010). Allowing this ideal to remain unchallenged amounts to a continuation of the oppression that was imposed on Black women throughout the history of the West, and in so doing, the oppression of the Black female constructed during slavery remains. Judging people based on physical appearance serves a stratifying function (Solovay, 2000); if there is nothing inherently good or bad about being attractive or unattractive, the question then becomes why looks-stratification exists and why it persists. While these are important and interesting questions, they remain outside the scope of this paper; nonetheless, they are worth pondering for future exploration.

To accept or exclude people, to place them within hierarchies, and then to allow this placement to determine life opportunities regarding income and jobs, marriages and social networks, and so on, purposely maintains an uneven playing field. The purpose of an uneven playing field in terms of physical appearances is the same as the purpose of an uneven playing field based on sex, race, age, and other determiners of prejudice: such a bias benefits some to the detriment of many (Rutherford, 2008). While it may be tempting to dismiss issues of attractiveness as superficial, this power to determine where a woman fits within hierarchies of attractiveness is directly connected to patriarchal power to determine what social and economic rewards a woman can expect from where she is positioned within a hierarchy that determines attractiveness according to White standards (Richards, 2003). For Black women, attractiveness in White, male eyes is more than a superficial concern—it is connected to the ability to find and maintain employment. This power to determine who is able to get a job and who is not because of their proximity to the White ideal of beauty is compounded when size converges with biases based on race and gender. Sexism and racism long prevented women and non-Whites from getting traditionally White male jobs, for example as professors, doctors, airline pilots, and the like, and thus kept competition at a minimum, almost exclusively among White men. To level the playing fields, as we have progressively done with the women's movement and the civil rights movement, it had to be made clear that women and non-Whites were as capable as men and Whites, respectively. In levelling the looks-based playing field, the trick has become redefining human worth based on something other than appearance (Berry, 2008); however, the issue of sizeism is specific to Black women

in a way that is not always relevant to White women because of the way that the image of the fBw has been solidified almost as an archetype in Western discourses concerning the female body.

## A REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

The emerging literature that focuses on the treatment of overweight or obese people in the labour market consistently reveals that the problem of weight discrimination is dire for these job seekers, even at the onset, because, for the most part, employers are reluctant to hire fat people due to the perception of their inability to fit "the corporate image" (Cawley, 2000; Larkin & Pines, 1979; Roehling, 1999). To concur, Elizabeth Kristen (2002) cites that discrimination against fat people takes many forms, including "failure to hire, payment of lower wages relative to thin or average-weight counterparts, relegation to non-contact positions, and failure to promote" (p. 62). Similar scholarship on the intersection between weight and economic privilege has found that there is a relationship between how much a person weighs and how much she or he makes. For example, Judge and Cable (2011) argue that income disparities exist between thin and fat people, though thin *women* are generally rewarded while thin *men* are often penalized. Gable et al. (2009) have also found significant differences between the ways in which thin vs. fat people are treated at work. This suggests that there is an underlying discrimination based on size that is largely undocumented and therefore understudied as a factor relating to workplace discrimination.

Weight discrimination has no direct legal mandates in the Canadian judicial system (Browne & Kubasek, 2012; Brownell, Schwartz, Puhl, & Rudd, 2005; Luther, 2010). Caliendo and Lee (2011) state that, "Despite evidence that obese people experience discrimination, to date, with the exception of the state of Michigan in the US, which enacted a law in 1977 prohibiting discrimination against overweight people, there are no laws protecting overweight people from discrimination in employment, education, and health care" (p. 122). Khazzoom (2003) notes that if a person gains weight while on the job, depending on the type of job, she or he may be demoted or pressured to lose the weight within a given timeframe to avoid termination of their employment (p. 489). For this type of weight-based discriminatory practice, there is very little legal recourse in most of North America.

John Cawley (2000) more specifically states that several studies have found a negative correlation between body weight and wages among women, but previous studies had been unable to determine whether high weight was the cause of low wages or low wages the cause of high weight. Applying the method of instrumental variables to data from the United States Department of Labor's National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, he presented two broad explanations to the phenomena of obesity causing lower wages and of lower wages causing obesity.

He states that because obese women face discrimination in the labour market, they are deemed less productive and, as a result, they are paid less; therefore, obesity causes lower wages. To demonstrate that low wages cause obesity, he summarizes that poor labour market outcomes lead to depression and depression leads to weight gain. These two broad categories of explanations need further deconstruction, but at this point are worth pondering.

Averett and Korenman (1993) summarized labour market outcomes and found that obese women from the ages of 23 to 31 consistently earned less than thin women. They also "use sibling differences as an alternative approach to controlling for social class or family background differences between obese persons and others. This technique (same-sex sibling differences) confirms the finding that family background differences do not account for the social and economic disadvantages experienced by obese women" (p. 6). Finally, they present findings using separate models of Black and Hispanics and conclude that there are "statistically significant and large race differences in the obesity differentials; the social and economic penalties attached to being overweight appear to be much smaller among black women" (p. 7); however, recent literature has contradicted this final point of the study.

This perspective on the connection between size, race, and class has also manifested itself in discrimination within the labour force. The work of Judge and Cable (2011) and Gable et al. (2009) examines the stratification that exists within labour regarding size and the effect this has on wages. Both studies found that when compared to thinner colleagues, people who are larger are on average paid less for comparable work. Both studies explain the pay difference in terms of prejudicial views about fat in Western culture. I would add that, when considered in juxtaposition with earlier theories of fatness, race, and class, these studies replicate an ongoing social understanding of size as reflective of a lack of education.

Though there is little research that has been done including race and gender as independent variables, the work of Averett and Korenman (1999) is among the few that consider how race impacts sizeism. They argue that race further compounds the problem of size discrimination, noting that the perception of fBw within the imagination of White society has had a detrimental effect on the ability of these fBw to progress economically when compared to their White counterparts.

## THE AUNT JEMIMA STEREOTYPE AND THE PERCEPTION
## OF fBw IN THE WORKFORCE

Given the way that Black women as a group have often been marginalized as a result of social restrictions placed on them through their bodies, it is necessary to explore the way that the image of the large Black woman has been constructed in the social imagination. My focus here will be on the ways that the images of Aunt

Jemima and the "mammy" have been represented and utilized since their construction to perpetuate the stereotypical fBw. While some scholars make careful distinctions between the images of the mammy and Aunt Jemima, for the purpose of this paper, I will use them interchangeably because they are both characterizations of the fBw. The Aunt Jemima effect is based on the construction of a stereotype of what the fBw is or should be, and this interpretation has been replicated in the ideologies related to large Black women in the workplace. To a certain extent, the image in the media of the fBw upholds the image of the fBw in the workplace because there is the belief that the two represent the same thing. Thus, in order to deconstruct the way that women in the workforce who are fat and Black are understood, it makes sense to begin by gauging how this image has been maintained in the media over time and how it exists in the popular imagination at present. In doing so, my aim is to consider how this image replicates earlier images that promote discrimination against fBw.

Aunt Jemima is a fictional Black woman who was initially used in the advertising and packaging of a type of ready-made pancake mix. The Aunt Jemima character was prominent in minstrel shows in the late nineteenth century and was later adopted by commercial interests to represent the Aunt Jemima brand. Despite the fact that this image of a Black woman has been defended as fictional, there is a subtext lurking beneath the Aunt Jemima advertisements: this image embodies an early-twentieth-century idealized domesticity that was inspired by Old Southern hospitality, which was rooted in slavery. Aunt Jemima represented a stereotype of the Black woman who existed as a specific type of labourer in a White world, namely the "mammy." The concept of the mammy as a house servant was introduced in the 1830s as a stout, dark-skinned, smiling, hardworking, doting woman who offered the only "redeeming embodiment of Black womanhood imaginable within the intertwined race, class, and gender distinctions of the Old South" (Turner, 2002, p. 40). This image of a fBw has been idealized as a real conception of how fBw have come to be viewed in the workforce. This image informs the way that White people see Black women who are fat, as desexualized, somewhat masculine, and hostile towards other Black people. The result is the transferral of the expectations attached to the mammy becoming imposed on fBw in the workforce.

## CHALLENGING WHITE PATRIARCHAL IDEALS OF
## BEAUTY AS A BLACK FEMINIST ISSUE

Typically, Black women have a larger frame and a more curvaceous body and generally tend to have a higher percentage of body fat (Agocha, Overstreet, & Quinn, 2010; Collins, 2004; Hooks, 1981; Shaw, 2006). Within the Black community, the aesthetic of a larger, more curvaceous woman is often preferred; this body type is only "problematic" to the extent that 1) women's employability is

often determined by their attractiveness; and 2) white patriarchal ideals of feminine beauty are often at odds with common physical features of Black women. Therefore, the central issue here is the ability of men to determine the type of work for which women of any race or ethnic background are suitable based on their looks, and to exercise control over women's bodies to the degree that their ideas about attractiveness can have an economic effect (Williams, 2003). Black women are at a further disadvantage because of the distance between common notions of beauty within the Black community and those of largely white, male employers.

Fat oppression, therefore, must also be discussed within the context of feminism since this provides a context for women who seek to explain attitudes and anxieties about female bodies, including what it might mean to be fat. Such debates continue the tradition of "the personal is political," according to Cooper (1998), and reframe women's private experiences in a public forum (p. 6). As Cooper explains, "Feminist discourse around beauty and appearance are relevant to fat women. Fat, like beauty and appearance, can be read in a political context; the stigma attached to being fat is a control mechanism which supports a power structure of one group of people over another, and fat politics is a way of challenging that status quo" (p. 6).

The need to deconstruct the image of the large Black woman, especially as it relates to the maintenance of the Aunt Jemima stereotype, locates this issue within the discourse of third-wave feminism. As Richards (2003) argues, the uncritical maintenance of this image lends credibility to its legitimacy. This image is one that has roots in slavery and the authority that White men had over Black women's bodies. By maintaining this image of the Black woman as an Aunt Jemima in the workforce, there is an endorsement that this image is reflective of a reality rather than a continuation of a racist belief that has not been properly addressed.

**METHODOLOGY: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FILMS**
**WITH FAT BLACK CHARACTERS**
In order to locate the necessary information to construct and support my argument, I have conducted and reviewed content analyses of several films. I have considered how each film depicts the way that fBw are treated in the work place. This has allowed me to compare how work environments are constructed ideologically through images and the implications of these ideologies for fat women in the workplace. I have analyzed ten classic and ten contemporary films: *The Golden West* (1932), *She Done Him Wrong* (1933), *Imitation of Life* (1934), *Judge Priest* (1934), *Alice Adams* (1935), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Made for Each Other* (1939), *Pinky* (1949), *The Big Wheel* (1949), and *The Sound and The Fury* (1959); *Soul Food* (2000), *Kingdom Come* (2001), *Brown Sugar* (2002), *Bringing Down the House* (2003), *Beauty Shop* (2005), *Phat Girlz* (2006), *Dirty Laundry* (2006),

*Madea's Family Reunion* (2006), *Precious* (2009), *For Colored Girls* (2010), *The Help* (2011), and *Jumping the Broom* (2011).

I have examined how women are situated in the films in terms of their roles as primary or secondary characters. I have noted their economic status, state of mind, demeanour, sense of style, and the volume of their speaking parts, as depicted in the films; I have also noted how the roles of these fat Black actresses fit in the content of the stories and how the films or actresses themselves are reconciled: did they need heroes to rescue them? I have made note of the consistencies and the discrepancies of the films in general in my content analysis.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

An analysis of the content of the films indicates several shifts in the representation of fBw and the role that they occupy as labour in film. I have consciously chosen films from the pre-1960 era (i.e. the pre-Civil Rights era) and films produced in the new millennium to illustrate the net differences in how fBw are portrayed in the cinema; the 1960-2000 era is an interesting phase insofar as it is a transition period in the portrayal of fBw, though as such provides a less uniform picture of filmmakers' perception of them. In the pre-1960 films, fBw occupy roles that position their labour as menial and requiring little education. It is in these types of domestic servitude roles that the images of the mammy and the Aunt Jemima are most prevalent and blatant; that is, their roles are one-dimensional in nature and they have very little to do with the development of the plot of the film beyond performing duties which possibly mirrored the way that fBw were viewed in society. Their roles are one-dimensional in that they are positioned as household servants, but the films never show them with their own families or children. Instead, their lives as a fixture in White households encapsulate their entire existence. It is as if these women do not exist beyond the borders of the White household, and by showing them only in this capacity, there is the suggestion that their labour is only noticeable in relation to the White people for whom they work. The language that they use is usually a stereotyped form of African American Vernacular English meant to convey a low level of education, and they serve the function of contrast between themselves as uneducated and their refined White, female counterparts. Black women of the pre-1960 films are always depicted in some type of domestic atmosphere. That is, they are only shown within the house and always in the company of White characters. The message that this conveys is that this is their "proper" place, as servile and dependent on the generosity of White people.

The films that fall into the category of post-2000 show a radical transition in the way that fBw are represented in the workforce, but there is still some alarming continuity between these films and the ones released prior to the 1960. In the later films, fBw have moved outside of the domestic sphere and are no longer dependent

on White women; however, they are usually cast as secondary rather than as primary characters. They most often occupy the role of the comic relief, the best friend who is either asexual due to her lack of a love interest or as hypersexual, indicating her willingness to take any man who will have her. In the film *Beauty Shop*, the lead character is a fBw, but she is actually surprised that a handsome, hardworking, Black man is interested in her. This reflects a trend in several of the films where the fat Black female character has to be told that a man finds her attractive almost as though this is something she is not used to and is therefore unable to recognize for herself.

The post-2000 films depict fBw as aggressive and often as heads of families. It is almost an inversion of the mammy role where she is now only concerned with her own household rather than with White households. This type of inverted mammy character has been labelled the "Sapphire" stereotype (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). Although the mammy and the Sapphire share several traits, the Sapphire character is reflective of the trite attitude and demeanour of the Black woman being angry, evil, and "bitchy." The women of the post-2000 films, despite changes in Black female education levels, also speak a variety of African American Vernacular English, which can again be read as a representation of a lack of formal education, which in turn indicates that this "type" of woman is unable to secure employment that requires a high level of qualification. The result is the constant repetition of the image of the fBw as someone who is aggressive, uneducated, unattractive, and only capable of doing work that has been traditionally constructed as female, that is, work involving either domestic duties or in relation to beauty. Rarely are fBw constructed as business women, medical or legal professionals, or engineers, but rather are seen as being only a small step removed from the duties that their predecessors were expected to fulfil in White households: making the homes and the bodies of White women beautiful to look at and to occupy.

**DISCUSSION**

What the content analysis demonstrates is that the image of the fBw, which is presented to society over and over again in various but unvarying forms, represents a hegemonic image of fBw in the labour force. When this analysis is contextualized with the discrimination that fBw face economically, it is not surprising that connections can be made between the way that the labour of fBw is depicted in film and the way that this is then reflected in social reality: fBw are invisible in positions of authority and tend to be overrepresented in labour that is connected to domesticity or cosmetology. It is reasonable to argue that a part of what accounts for this respective invisibility and overrepresentation is that society has been taught to see these kinds of women as only fit for this type of employment. The result of this hegemonic view of the "proper" category of labour for fBw is that fBw who do not wish to engage in this form of labour and opt instead for different fields of work

find themselves unfairly stereotyped as unfit for them. The creation of images like the Aunt Jemima stereotype was initially responsible for the belief that fBw were most capable of domestic work. The maintenance of this image as a socially accepted signifier for the proper labour role for fBw means that there has been little real change in the way that fBw are positioned as members of the labour force. People are taught to see fBw this way and they become uncomfortable with fBw who do not know "their role," so to speak, believing that they should remain in the types of labour they are constructed as best suited for. This in turn feeds stereotypes in films about the types of actresses who should play certain roles, and the representation of fBw in a one-dimensional role is therefore maintained.

In conclusion, the maintenance of the Aunt Jemima stereotype in the imagination of North Americans contributes to the marginalization of fBw. People both consciously and subconsciously live by the tenets that the media prescribe—we are not born with ideas about what constitutes beauty, we learn them from family, peers, and, perhaps most of all, the media. Although size has been determined as a factor in the marginalization of different groups, for fBw this discrimination is very focused vis-à-vis the Aunt Jemima image. There is no comparable image for women of other races and this suggests that the fBw experiences discrimination differently from women of other races. The legacy of the Aunt Jemima image continues to contribute to the positioning of fBw as fit for only certain types of work, despite education level and qualifications. I hope to have provided a critical analysis of some of the challenges facing fBw as a result of stereotyped media portrayals, and call for further work to be done on this topic to critically deconstruct the economic disadvantages that fBw have experienced in relation to both thin Black women and Black men.

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