



Judi Dench is 85 and on the cover of Vogue – this is the new and wonderful normal

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When I was an intern starting in women's magazines, an editor once quipped, casual as offering an office round of teas, that "black, old or ugly faces just don't sell magazines". Nobody around her batted an .

In the years following the 2008 recession, print ad revenues nosedived, the battle to be prominent on the newsstand was apparently being used as an excuse for overt racism, sexism and ageism. For various reasons, chiefly the rise of online publishing, but among them undoubtedly an inability to move the times, many magazines folded in the years that followed.

Diversity in all its forms become an increasingly essential and consumer-demanded ingredient in the output of the fashion, beauty, film and TV industries, and it's long overdue. Recent fashion weeks have seen designers champion a range of ages and ethnicities on catwalks and beauty bid adieu to the "anti-ageing" selling point, ageing being something we all hope to be to do – today more than ever.

For June, [Judi Dench](#) has become the person at 85 to be a British Vogue cover star in the magazine's 104-year history. (Before her, Oprah Winfrey was the previous title-holder for oldest solo cover star, appearing on the August 2018 British Vogue cover at 64.) Wearing a blush pink floral Dolce & Gabbana coat collar frames her face, the appears close , the lines of her skin and silver hair dominating the cover. It's strikingly beautiful.

Last year, I sighed with when [British Vogue](#) sent out press releases announcing 81-year-old Jane Fonda as a cover star when in fact she was gracing the cover of a L'Oreal-sponsored supplement that accompanies the magazine. As a L'Oreal ambassador, this was more a reflection of the good work of the beauty brand, which has been known for its age-diverse roster of models, from Helen Mirren to Viola Davis, than it was reflective of Vogue's increased age diversity on magazine covers.

But the positive response that Vogue received for promoting the Jane Fonda supplement have been a key driving factor in including Dench this month. The is always right after all. According to Conde Nast, the average age of the Vogue print reader is 39, and 44 online.

Perhaps more striking than an 85-year-old appearing on the cover of the fashion bible is that it isn't a "special issue" patronisingly dedicated to age: Dench just is the cover star.

Historically, when choosing to put someone on their cover who is a day over 21 or has some of "unusual beauty feature" a miniscule mole or a stray eyebrow hair, fashion magazines dedicate their entire issues to a theme, virtually negating the positive message of the cover.

An example of this backfiring was in April 2016 when Glamour in the US featured Amy Schumer on the cover of their "chic at any size" issue, without thinking to forewarn Schumer about the issue's theme. When the issue hit newsstands, the comedian tweeted, "Plus size is considered size 16 in America. I go between a size 6 and an 8. [@glamourmag](#) put me in their plus size only issue without asking or letting me know and it doesn't feel right to me."

British Vogue editor-in-chief [Edward Enninful](#) has made it his mission to promote diversity at the magazine the beginning of his tenure. In 2017, when his predecessor Alexandra Shulman printed a photograph of the team for the magazine's centenary issue, the striking lack of diversity display was not received well. Posting the photograph on her Instagram, Naomi Campbell captioned it: "This is the staff photo of British Vogue under the previous editor Alexandra Schulman. Looking to an inclusive and diverse staff now that Edward Enninful is the editor."

Representation matters, we know this. Countless studies have shown the positive effects of seeing people who like you or come from your background being represented in the media. the age of 31 (to my mind still young... although reader, you may call me deluded) I've become acutely aware of age for the first time in my life. No longer in the "young" category, female actors my age are inexplicably playing mothers of teenagers in movies. , women in twenties are romantically partnered with men their age.

Speaking in the accompanying interview in Vogue, Dench's daughter the magazine that: "This age thing, I think, affects very much how [my mother] feels about herself and this [Vogue cover] has given her just that little boost of confidence to make her go, 'Oh, maybe I'm still OK'."

If Oscar-winner Judi Dench feels "ghastly" being old, there's not hope for the rest of . Dench's successful 60-year career be lauded. Bravo Vogue for once again proving why it continues to the way.