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A Critical Cultural Study of Lived Experiences and Societal Implications

of the 21st Century Natural Hair Movement

by

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CRITICAL CULTURAL STUDY OF THE 21ST CENTURY NATURAL HAIR
MOVEMENT

Abstract

A Critical Cultural Study of Lived Experiences and Societal Implications

of the 21st Century Natural Hair Movement

Kahleeka "Nikkie" Perry

The natural hair movement of the 21st century emerged as a declaration by African-American women to embrace and celebrate their natural hair textures. Through a critical cultural study, this project demonstrated the divide that exists between the dominant American culture and the natural hair movement. Three research questions were used to investigate this phenomenon: (1) how do African-American women negotiate their understanding of natural hair? (2) how do African-American women feel about their experiences of natural hair? and (3) how are African-American women influenced by mass media messages about natural hair? Using a qualitative mixed-methods approach, eight major themes were revealed: colorism, good vs. bad hair, journey, identity, microaggression, self-esteem, bonding, and social media usage. Findings showed that certain societal norms continue to influence how African-American women perceive natural hair. Suggested topics for future research include perceptions of natural hair based on generational and geographic/regional differences.

Keywords: African-American women, Black women, Black feminism, culture, identity, natural hair, oppositional code, perceptions, respectability, society, standards of beauty, stereotypes.

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Introduction

Research Study Outline

This study begins with a brief historical perspective about the history of natural, Afro-textured hair. The historical perspective provides readers with background information as to how natural, Afro-textured hair has been perceived in both mainstream society and within Black culture over the last four hundred years through evidence of depictions and images circulated from historical archives and in mass media, most notably in television, film and advertising.

The study examined multiple theoretical frameworks. Initially, the author uses Black feminist perspectives, intersectionality, double consciousness, cultural studies and encoding/decoding theories to examine the data. Next, the researcher highlighted the complex and, sometimes, controversial relationship that exists between the natural hair movement of the 21st century, the African-American/Black female experience and use of new forms of media and technology within the larger American society. Lastly, the theoretical frameworks served as the foundation from which the research questions were developed and were later answered through examination and analysis.

The researcher then moved on to predict that several patterns and themes would emerge from the conducted personal interviews based on the responses and lived experiences of study participants. Next, the study identified three research questions to serve as the basis for investigation. The qualitative method of textual analysis and personal interviews were used to answer the research questions as part of the results and discussion sections.

Lastly, the researcher concluded the study with additional observations made over

the course of the study as well as recommendations for further analysis and investigation

regarding natural hair and Black culture.

Researcher Statement

My decision to explore the lived experiences and the possible implications that the 21st century natural hair movement has had on African-American women lies beyond the scope of what may appear as an interesting or trendy topic. The study represents a personal journey that parallels my own struggles with self-identity, self-awareness, and most importantly, self-acceptance. Please note that the terms Black and African-American are used interchangeably throughout the study in reference to describe individuals and/or study participants who are of African descent or origin.

The desire to have long silky hair dates back to some of my earliest childhood memories starting at the age of five. At the time, my mother was seen as unconventional in our north Jersey neighborhood for refusing to apply a chemical relaxer to the scalps of my younger sister and me. By no means, however, did my mother go against the popular belief that straighter-textured hair equated to better-looking and more socially acceptable hair. Saturday mornings would consist of my sister and me taking our respective turns at the high-top chair strategically placed near the stove. Our little bodies would squirm and our faces would wince in pain as we felt the heat from the cast iron hot comb rake through our hair, close to our scalps, and near our ear in an effort to make our hair texture softer, straighter, and more manageable (Appendix A).

I first became aware that I had coarse thick (also known as "kinky") textured hair during my preteen years. By this time, my family had relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina and my mother began sending my sister and me to the beauty salon once a month. I can still recall sitting down in the swiveling salon chair as a quiet and shy 12-year-old with thick-framed glasses only to hear the stylist exclaim, "Her hair is so thick!

'Chile it's like it came straight off the boat [Africa]!!" The images I associated with Africa were mostly shaped by what I had seen on television: a desolate land, consumed by famine, disease, and un-kept hair. Though I considered myself to be proud of my African-American heritage, I immediately felt ashamed. The experience marked an important turning point in my life as I made a vow to never feel that sense of humiliation about my hair ever again.

As a teenager and throughout my undergraduate studies, I faithfully wore sew-in weaves (hair extensions that are usually sewn on to one's real hair) and would spend the money I earned from my part-time job to have my weave professionally installed on a regular basis (Appendix A). I went to great lengths to make sure my weaves were appealing and "natural-looking" (Appendix A). Yet, I felt like a fraud. This was not *my* hair...no matter how much I paid or how many compliments I received. My sense of self was conflicted, and I felt dishonest despite the positive attention.

I later chose to wear my real hair, albeit chemically relaxed, after completing my undergraduate studies (Appendix A). I had given up the charade of trying to look like the girls on TV, in the magazines, and in music videos. I was now ready to embrace the "new" me. The continued use of chemical relaxers on my hair and scalp, however, brought forth a new set of issues. Despite having hair now down the middle of back, my strands were thin, lifeless, and my scalp was in a constant state of irritation (Appendix A). I was referred to a dermatologist in 2009 for further investigation. The dermatologist determined that chemicals in the hair relaxers were damaging to my hair and scalp and that I would continue to experience problems with further usage. The shy and embarrassed 12-year-old girl in the salon chair suddenly reemerged. A sea of negative

thoughts began to rush into my head at that very moment, "How was I going to look? I

can't show up to work (or in public for that matter) with my hair undone?! Walking

around the office with nappy hair is not professional! How will I be taken seriously?"

Armed with this information, I went to the Internet and began to frequent hair

care blogs such as Blackhairmedia.com and Curlynikki.com that discussed Black hair

texture. These sites provided me with a wealth of information on how to properly care for

my hair at home and address my hair and scalp issues. It was, however, the discovery of

natural hair video logs (also known as vlogs) on YouTube that marked a significant

turning point in my journey of self-discovery. Natural hair care vlogs on YouTube

provided me with the ability to see African-American women who celebrated their God-

given kinks, curls, and coils without fear, reservation and most importantly, apology.

Contrary to messages that I received all my life through mass media, these women were

beautiful, articulate, educated and provided encouragement to other African-American

women who were looking to embrace their natural beauty in all aspects (including hair).

These vlogs served as my place of refuge as I could interact with like-minded women and

witness through the power of the Internet and video on how they achieved certain

hairstyles, addressed negative encounters or comments about their hair, and used their

natural hair journey as a vehicle for self-acceptance. As a result, I made the decision to

"go natural" in early 2010 (Appendix A).

Therefore, my own personal journey of self-identity, self-awareness, and self-

acceptance coincides with my participation in the 21st century natural hair movement. It

has created a desire for me to learn more about the encounters and lived experiences of

African-American women who have also made the decision to go natural. I want to

examine the potential implications this movement has had on the greater American

society in the seven years since I've been natural given the access and utilization of new

media channels including the Internet, blogs, social media, vlogs and video chat. It has

led me to consider a number of important questions as to whether the mass media,

through the creation of more commercial advertisements about natural hair and natural

hair products, has contributed to a cultural shift in perceptions about Afro textured hair?

If yes, how so? If not, why and what challenges remain? Do African-American women

demonstrate, reinforce, or debunk commonly-held notions as presented in mass media

and popular culture? How does an African-American woman's choice of hairstyle or

texture of hair align with or counter the ideals of society, consciously or subconsciously?

A Historical Perspective: The Natural Hair Movement

Mass communication plays an integral role in helping to shape ideologies within American society. Consequently, mass media channels in the 21st century play a major role in helping to frame and disseminate negative perceptions of Afro-textured hair as demonstrated through strategic use and placement of certain image types and dialogue (Howard, Kinloch & Patterson, 2016). Recent examples include the 2008 caricature of an AK-47 gun-toting, Afro-wearing Michelle Obama on the cover of *The New Yorker* magazine (Appendix B - Blitt, 2008; Jere-Malanda, 2008); Giuliana Rancic's characterization of actress-singer Zendaya as "smelling like patchouli oil" at the 2015 Academy Awards due to her waist-length faux locs (Whispers, 2015), and the dismissal of California Representative Maxine Waters criticisms against President Donald Trump by former Fox News television host Bill O'Reilly because he was distracted by "her James Brown wig" (Concha, 2017). Thus, Afro-textured hair has been shown in many forms of mass media as a negative antithesis of the desired European textured hair type.

However, recently, a new movement has taken shape aimed at reframing the depiction of Black women's hair using mass media. This movement utilizes several new channels and platforms including social media, in the form of Facebook groups and blog sites, video content, in the form of YouTube tutorials, and digital content, in the form of podcasts and virtual Q&A sessions to disseminate information and engage with its intended audience. The emergence of the natural hair movement of the 21st century has made its most significant impact on college-educated, African-American females, particularly aged 25 and older (Bankhead & Johnson, 2014).

To better understand the natural hair movement, one must have a firm grasp of its

historical origins in connection with the Eurocentric standards of beauty that operate

within American society. The following quote from a 2001 study (Jandt & Tanno, 2001)

paints a vivid picture of the American beauty industry prior to the emergence of the

natural hair movement:

> In contemporary times as in colonial times, cultural 'Others' have not been
> defined according to who they are but who they are not. In colonial times,
> indigenous people were defined as "not civilized", "not Western", "not
> developed". In more contemporary times, women have been defined as "not
> male", male homosexuals have been defined as not "heterosexual" and lesbians as
> "nonexistent" and Latina/o and other ethnicities as "not white". (Jandt & Tanno,
> 2001, p. 122-123)

With its coily, curly, and kinky patterns, African-textured hair has undoubtedly

been defined as 'not European' and regulated to an 'Other' category since the arrival of

the first slaves nearly 400 years ago. In the book, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of*

Black Hair in America, authors Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps describe America's long-

standing and contentious relationship with African-textured hair. Slave ship captains

would order the heads of slaves be shaven bald as African-textured hair was considered

unsanitary for the more than 5,000-mile journey to America (Byrd & Tharps, 2001;

Appendix C). The notion that Afro-textured hair was unsanitary and unsuitable continued

throughout the 1700 and 1800s, even as America gained its freedom and independence

from England. For example, enslaved women were expected to cover up their "wool-

textured" hair using shreds of fabric to be worn as headscarves or head wraps in order to

appear presentable and so as not to offend the slave master or any guests (Byrd & Tharps,

2001). Further evidence of this occurrence is detailed in the study, *The African-American*

Woman's Headwrap: Unwinding the Symbols (Griebel, n.d.). Author Helen Griebel

contends that headscarfs or head wraps possess different meanings for women of African

descent based on their origin location (Griebel, n.d.). Griebel explains that, in Africa,

headscarves and head wraps are used to display a women's sense of style and is symbolic

of the customs, traditions and views of her respective culture. Yet, the headscarf worn by

women in the United States is more multi-dimensional in meaning. For some women,

headscarfs and head wraps are symbols that pay homage to the African culture and

identity that was lost through captivity and enslavement during the American slavery

period. While other women view the head scarf and head wrap as symbols of oppression

inflicted upon Black women in the United States. Griebel references language from slave

codes in Louisiana and South Carolina, which required slave women to wear headscarfs,

as evidence of headscarfs being equated with low social standing (Griebel, n.d.). Despite

the belief that Afro-textured hair was undesirable in society, sexual relations between

white slave masters and Black slave women produced biracial children. With lighter skin

complexions and softer, more European-like textured hair, these biracial children

possessed what is commonly known in the African-American community as "good hair"

(Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

Capitalizing off the desire for African-American women to achieve good hair, the

first female self-made millionaire, Sarah Breedlove (also known as Madame C.J.

Walker), successfully built her business in the early 1900s by creating hair care products

designed to make African-textured hair softer and straighter (Appendix D). The act of

straightening Afro-textured hair was largely adopted by African-Americans as both a

grooming practice and a societal norm (Araiza, Davis, Doss, Ellis-Hervey & Nicks, 2016;

Walker, S., 2007), with a few notable exceptions including the teachings of Marcus

Garvey in the late 1910s and early 1920s, which called for African-American women to

embrace their natural, Afro-textured hair (Biography, 2017; Higbee, 2001 as cited in

Harris & Johnson, 2001; Walker, S., 2007) and in the writings of Benjamin Stolberg, a

White journalist, who openly criticized Madame C.J. Walker's hair care products and the

attempts made by African-American women to "unkink their hair" as evidence of racial

self-hatred and an insult to racial integrity (Higbee, 2001 as cited in Harris & Johnson,

2001).

Popular hairstyles worn by African-American women from the 1920s through the

1950s primarily relied on the use of chemical concoctions being applied to hair follicles

in order to achieve such popular hairstyles as finger waves, the Chignon, pin curls, and

ringlets (Thirsty Roots, 2016; Vissa Studios, 2017). During the 1960s, hair wigs,

primarily used by African-American actresses and entertainers, including Aretha

Franklin, the Supremes, and Diahann Carroll, became popular with African-American

women as a way to maintain a sleek and straight hair appearance (Booker, 2014). The

"Black is beautiful" movement of the 1960 and 1970s encouraged political and social

activism to combat racist Jim Crows laws, police brutality, improve the state of African-

American communities and restore Black racial pride and unity (Van Leeuwen, 2000).

Researchers have attributed the racial pride doctrine of Marcus Garvey from the early

20th century as a source of influence for this movement (Van Leeuwen, 2000). The Afro,

which received notable attention in television, movies, and music during this time, came

to serve as a symbol of Afrocentrism, Black pride and a defiance of Eurocentric

domination (Jere-Malanda, 2008; Thompson, 2009). By the late 1970s, however, visual

representations of the Afro appeared to slowly diminish from mainstream media

channels.

In 1977, Irish-American businessman and chemist, Jheri Redding (born Robert

William Redding) invented the Jheri Curl hairstyle (Battle-Walters, 2004; Ware, 2017).

Touted as 'wash and wear hair' the Jheri Curl contained chemical formulas designed to

loosen and set African textured hair into a softer, wavier state (Battle-Walters, 2004;

Taylor, n.d.). According to the blog site 80sfashion.org, the first version of the Jheri Curl

hairstyle required a salon visit and cost approximately $300 dollars (80sfashion.org,

2015). Comer Cotrell, an African-American businessman and founder of the Pro-Line

Company, developed an updated version of the Jheri Curl, called the Curly Kit

(Appendix E), which allowed consumers to apply the kit in their homes at the

inexpensive price of eight dollars (Bates, 2014). The sudden affordability of the Jheri

Curl made the hairstyle widely popular in the 1980s and resulted in huge profits for the

Pro-Line Company and M&M Products, another African-American owned business,

based in Atlanta, which also sold and distributed home-kit versions of the Jheri Curl

(Bates, 2014; Black Enterprise, 1989; Thompson, 2009). According to *Black Enterprise*

magazine, M&M Products recorded more than $43 million in sales of its Jheri Curl

products in 1983 (Black Enterprise, 1989).

The decision of African-American women to wear their hair texture in a

straighten or chemically-altered state during the 1980s was also reflected in television

including such popular sitcoms as *Give Me a Break* (Lachman & Rosen, 1981)*, 227*

(Banks & Boulware, 1985), *A Different World* (Cosby, 1987), *and the Fresh Prince of*

Bel Air (Borowitz & Borowitz, 1990)*.* African-American women who opted to wear their

hair in a natural state during this time were overshadowed in the media by women who

wore weaves or returned to straightened hair texture. Thus, the perception of the larger

American society was that the quest to achieve "good hair" continued well after the

abolishment of slavery and throughout the 20th century among African-American women.

Exceptions to the Eurocentric beauty standards are evident in concentrated

pockets of film, television, and music among a seemingly limited number of African-

American celebrities during the 1980s and 1990s, including in the 1986 Spike Lee film,

She's Gotta Have It (Lee, 1986), in which the main character, Nola Darling, wore her

hair in short, natural, tapered state (Appendix H); actress/model Grace Jones; and actress

Erika Alexander, who wore dreadlocks and portrayed successful attorney, Maxine Shaw,

on the television show, *Living Single* (Bowser, 1993); singer Erykah Badu, who rose to

fame with the release of her 1997 debut album and wore her hair wrapped in African

patterned cloth material, *Baduizm* (Wright, 1997); and Lauryn Hill, who wore her hair in

dreadlocks and whose 1998 debut album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, garnered a

record 10 Grammy nominations (Hill, 1998).

The Cosby Show (Cosby, Leeson & Weinberger, 1984), one of the most

successful television series of the 1980s (Strong, n.d.; Fearn-Banks, 2009), also presented

a set of unique circumstances in how natural hair was represented through its female

characters. While the main character, Clair Huxtable, portrayed by actress Phylicia

Rashad, wore her hair in a straighten state, other characters showcased a wide variety of

natural hair textures worn by African-American women (Cosby, Leeson & Weinberger,

1984). For example, Denise Huxtable, portrayed by actress Lisa Bonet, went from

wearing her hair in a straightened state to wearing her hair in dreadlocks (Cosby, Leeson

& Weinberger, 1984). Vanessa Huxtable, portrayed by Tempestt Bledsoe, also went from wearing her hair in a straightened state to wearing her hair in a short, natural, asymmetrical cut (Cosby, Leeson & Weinberger, 1984). In the final season of the show, Vanessa wore her natural textured hair in a short Afro hairstyle (now commonly referred to as a 'teeny-weeny-Afro' or 'TWA') (Cosby, Leeson & Weinberger, 1984). Lastly, the youngest Huxtable, Rudy, appeared to wear her hair in a lightly, blown out state which did not appear to be chemically altered during the television show's eight-year history (Cosby, Leeson & Weinberger, 1984).

While the above historical perspective provides an in-depth background regarding the history of Afro-textured hair, the research study looks for evidence of the current rhetoric or discourse at work through a number of personal interviews and, specifically, questions pertaining to how natural, Afro-textured hair is depicted on newer channels and platforms of mass media. The study also looks to reveal the societal implications of the dominant American culture as described through the lived experiences of African-American women who currently wear their hair in its natural, non-chemically processed state and whether wearing their hair in such a state renders: (a) support from family, friends, peers, and colleagues, (b) criticism or ire in personal, professional and/or social settings, (c) redefinition or change in self-identification, (d) adaptation or modification in other areas of their life.

Literature Review & Theoretical Perspectives

To understand why an investigation of the relationship between the natural hair movement of the 21st century and the dominant ideals of the American culture is important, readers must first have a clear understanding of the larger theoretical

frameworks in place. The theoretical frameworks help to not only put the subject matter

into perspective, but also provide historical and evidence-based cues of how and why it

continues to manifest as part of a larger American society today.

Black Feminist Perspectives

With origins dating back to the Reconstruction Era, the Black feminist movement

started largely due in part to the rejection Black women faced from their white

counterparts as participants in the Women's Suffrage Movement of the early 20th century

(also known as the first wave of feminism) (Brown, 1989; Mendes, 2012; Reenen, 2014;

White, 2001). Early feminist figures including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B.

Anthony, who had been active in the antislavery movements of the late 1800s, abandoned

former alliances with African-Americans in favor of appealing to southern white women

in order to further the cause of the Women's Suffrage Movement (White, 2001).

According to researchers Harley & Terborg-Penn (1978), these feminists argued that

giving white women the right to vote would maintain and further the order of white

supremacy (Harley & Terborg-Penn, 1978). African-American women were ultimately

rejected by influential groups like the National Women's Party in their attempts to form a

strategic alliance and also gain the right to vote (Jensen & Scharf, 1983 as cited in

Brown, 1989). Thus, Black feminism was born in response to African-American women

being further marginalized and excluded as participants in the Women's Suffrage

Movement as well as the failure to recognize the significance of living in a doubly-

oppressed state, to be both Black *and* female.

As described by author Jessica Petocz, Black feminism tackles, "…the problems

of Black women's sexuality – namely the problem that others use it to play out battles

over race, class, gender, nation, and sexuality and the subsequent lack of attention to their actual sexual experience, desires, and subjectivities" (Petocz, 2011, p. 274). The consensus among the selected peer-reviewed literature is that in spite of America's abolishment of slavery nearly 200 years ago, negative sexualized depictions of African-American women still persist in literature, film, television, and more recently music videos (Brown, Griffin-Fennell & White-Johnson, 2013; Dagbovie-Mullins, 2013; Durham, 2012; Baez & Durham; 2007; Gilman, 1992; Railton & Watson, 2005; Few & Stephens, 2007; Tolman, 1996). More modern versions of the Jezebel stereotype, including the ho, hoochie, freak, gold digger, video vixen, urban girl, and most recently the THOT (an acronym for "that-ho-over-there"), have emerged to continue the legacy of characterizing African-American women as sexually promiscuous deviants in mass media (Brown, Griffin-Fennell & White-Johnson, 2013; Dagbovie-Mullins, 2013; Gordon, 2008; Coleman & Ross, 2011; Few & Stephens, 2007; Phillip & Stephens, 2003; Glasgow, Ojie, Townsend & Wallace, 2011).

The Black feminist perspective offers a counterculture, self-created perspective in which the experiences of Black women are visible, validated, and united in the context of having survived countless forms of oppression (Howard, Kinloch & Patterson, 2016). Through the process of self-identification and creation with respect to Black feminist perspectives, "...Black women question not only what has been said about African-American women but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define. When Black women define ourselves, we clearly reject the assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do so"

(Collins, 2002, p.114). Thus, the author seeks to call attention that Black women often

are defined by others and not of themselves.

One such example of this notion is the characterization of poor Black females as

"Welfare Queens." The Welfare Queen is often described as a Black female welfare

recipient with little to no work ethic, dishonest or cunning in nature, poorly educated,

who lacks the ability to make responsible decisions, likely to participate in criminal

activity, while living lavishly off the fruits of labor from hard-working, taxpaying, white

Americans (Dyck & Hussey, 2008; Baumgartner & Rose, 2013; Kelly, 2010; Lindhorst,

Masters, & Meyers, 2014; Luna, 2009; Motley & Perry, 2013). This characterization was

first introduced during Ronald Reagan's 1976 presidential campaign speech in Chicago

and has been repurposed and circulated throughout traditional and social media as well as

part of domestic political commentary ever since (Demby, 2013). Yet, according to 2013

data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the SNAP and EBT

programs for the low-income, 40.2 percent of its program recipients are White, 25.7

percent are Black, 10.3 percent are Hispanic, 2.1 percent are Asian, and 1.2 percent are

Native American (Delaney & Scheller, 2013). The depiction of poor Black women as so-

called "Welfare Queens" is not only divisive, it is factually inaccurate. To that end, an

important focus of Black feminism is to actively combat the often-one-dimensional

stereotypical representations of Black women as depicted in mass media.

At the center of Black feminism are two polarizing schools of thought concerning

the appearance and so-called respectability politics of Black women. Respectability

politics, a term coined by Harvard professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham

(Higginbotham, 1993), is defined as codes or rules marginalized people must follow to

earn acceptance and respect in mainstream society (Johnson, 2015). One school of thought in the context of respectability politics looks to dispel the widely-held notion of Black female sexuality as primitive, promiscuous, and insignificant by encouraging women to adopt principles of respectability (Chepp, 2015; Durham, 2012; Petocz, 2011). These principles include, "aggressively shielding the body, concealing sexuality, and foregrounding morality, intelligence, and civility as a way to counter negative stereotypes" (Thompson, 2009, p. 2).

Policing the outward appearance of Black women was an especially common practice as millions of African-Americans left the rural South for cities in the Northeast and Midwest during the Great Migration of the early-and mid-20th century. Black religious organizations and social clubs maintained strict standards over the outwardly appearance of Black woman. Black women were strongly encouraged to wear skirts below the knee and to keep their hair in a neat, albeit smooth, and secure hairstyle (Walker, S., 2007; White, 2001). Black women within this particular arena have received historically conflicting messages regarding "acceptable or respectable" standards of beauty and sexuality.

For example, African-American beauty entrepreneur and inventor Marjorie Stewart Joyner recalled in a 1993 interview how Black ministers would scold Black female parishioners who opted to straighten their hair and/or wear makeup, "God made your hair like that and it's a sin to straighten your hair…and you must be interested in a red-light district or you wouldn't be putting that rouge and lipstick on you and powdering up your face to look like white people" (Kelly, 2016; Walker, S., 2007). Yet, Black Baptist church women in the early 1900s were discouraged from wearing revealing

clothing, but were encouraged to maintain a "respectable" public appearance that

included having straightened hair so long as it was covered up or worn underneath a hat

(Walker, S., 2007; White, 2001).

Female members in the Nation of Islam were also expected to adhere to codes of

respectability by wearing clothing that shielded the body and to straighten and cover their

hair from public sight (White, 2001). Evidence of this occurrence can be found on the

organization's website as appearance for women is described as, "our women are taught a

dress code of modesty that will lead to the practice of high morality" (Muhammad, 1996).

Further evidence regarding the importance of maintaining female respectability can be

found in speeches made by former Nation of Islam leader, Elijah Muhammad (Jefferies,

2015). Mr. Muhammad admonished women who he believed dressed in appropriately,

degrading not only themselves, but also the larger community. In addition, he believed

provocative clothing made women susceptible to sexual advancements and acts of sexual

violence (Jefferies).

In her book, *A Nation Can Rise No Higher Than Its Women: African-American

Muslim Women in the Movement for Black Self-Determination* (2015), author Bayyinah

Jefferies suggests the modest appearance of Black Muslim women drew admiration and

respect from non-Muslim men as Black Muslim women were revered for their chaste and

morally pure nature in ways non-Black Muslim women were not (Jefferies, 2015). The

author argues that some African-American women's social clubs tried to generate the

same type of revere that Black men (both Muslim and non-Muslim) held for Black

Muslim women by emulating their modest appearance, with only minor success

(Jefferies, 2015). Thus, the fixation of trying to erase past characterizations and

stereotypes of the Black woman as sexual deviants or of low moral and social standing

became the focus of numerous social and religious organizations within the Black

community.

Many African-American beauty and cosmetic companies capitalized off the

preoccupation and policing of the Black woman's appearance as well as the desire for

upward mobility. These companies encouraged Black women to purchase their products

in an effort to "look your best…you owe it to your race" as straight hair was symbolic of

achieving middle-class status at the turn of and into the early 20th century (Byrd &

Tharps, 2001; Walker, S., 2007). In policing the outward appearance of Black women,

participants to this school of thought deployed politics of respectability as a form of racial

uplift while attempting to combat racism in 20th century America (Chepp, 2015;

Giddings, 1984; Higginbotham, 1992; White, 2001).

Opponents to this school of thought assert that, by taking on such a conservative

approach, members were only concerned with silencing the self-expression of Black

female sexuality and doing little more than reinforcing historic and restrictive white male

dominant codes of perceived female respectability in society rather than uplifting the

Black race (Chepp, 2015). As highlighted in her 1992 essay, *Revolutionary Black

Woman*, author bell hooks contends that class stratification has resulted in the Black

bourgeois monitoring behaviors and policing anyone who does not conform to their

prescribed notions of Black female identity (hooks, 1992b). Instead, subscribers to the

oppositional school of thought rejected the conservative doctrine in favor of sexual

agency, desirability, and pleasure (Chepp, 2015). Scholars point to Black female blues

singers of the 1920s and 1930s such as Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Gladys Bentley, Bessie

Smith and Ethel Waters as agents of this school of thought (Chepp, 2015; Peppers 2013). With its bold lyrics of Black female sexual expression and satisfaction, this genre of music is described as the antithesis of conservative ideals in providing a voice to the Black female underclass who were unapologetic in their outwardly appearance and expression of sexuality (Chepp, 2015).

In his 2011 short film entitled, *T'Aint Nobodys Bizness: Queer Blues Divas of the 1920s* (Peppers, 2013)*,* filmmaker Robert Phillipson presents the speakeasies and bars of the 1920s as settings in which Black female blue singers could comfortably express their sexuality free from the disapproval of the Black bourgeoise. The documentary describes the behaviors of these singers such as drinking alcohol in public, dressing in a flamboyant manner and lyrics that described their sexual tendencies as evidence of rejecting the ultra-conservative, respectability politics of the Black middle-class (Peppers, 2013). As an example, lyrics from Bessie Smith's 1931 song, *Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl*, used the description of "sugar in her bowl" to illustrate the sexual yearnings of a Black woman. The song goes on to state that "the Black woman's whole world's wrong because she has no man to put "a little hot dog on [her] roll" (Granda, 2011). Thus, Black female blues singers, through their sexually charged lyrics and unorthodox behaviors, rejected the principles of Black female respectability and, instead, chose to freely express their sexuality contrary to societal norms and conventions of the early 20th century.

Intersectionality and Black Online Feminism

In 1989, Black Feminist scholar and UCLA law professor, Kimberle Crenshaw introduced an important addendum to the Black feminist perspectives (Crenshaw, 1989). The concept, intersectionality, was developed to describe how various forms of

discrimination, much like the flow of traffic at a busy intersection, can come from

multiple directions, and is neither just racial *or* gender in nature (Crenshaw, 1989; Smith,

2013). The theory argues that racial and gender discrimination have historically been

evaluated as two separate, mutually exclusive entities within the judicial and political

systems (Crenshaw, 1989; Smith, 2013). Yet in cases involving Black women,

particularly pertaining to issues of social justice, the possibility of an individual being

subjected to both racial *and* gender discrimination has largely been dismissed without

regard for further consideration or investigation (Crenshaw, 1989; Smith, 2013).

Such is the case in the 1976 *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* employment

discrimination lawsuit (Crenshaw, 1989; OpenJurist, n.d.; Smith, 2013). The lawsuit

alleged that despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964, General Motors Corporation did not

employ Black female assembly line workers prior to 1970 (Crenshaw, 1989; OpenJurist,

n.d.; Smith, 2013). Subsequently, all Black female assembly line workers later lost their

jobs as part of massive layoffs during the economic recession of the mid-1970s

(Crenshaw, 1989; OpenJurist, n.d.; Smith, 2013). The Black female workers contended

that the seniority-based layoff practice administered by General Motors, equated to both

racial and gender discrimination as no Black females were hired as assembly line workers

by the corporation prior to 1970 and, therefore by default, they lacked the seniority level

needed to keep their jobs (Crenshaw, 1989; OpenJurist, n.d.; Smith, 2013). The United

States Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the lawsuit sought to create a new

special sub-category by attempting to combine racial and gender discrimination

categories together and that the combination of such categories would result in a new

"super-remedy" and place the plaintiffs at an unfair advantage (Crenshaw, 1989;

OpenJurist, n.d.; Smith, 2013). The court determined that the lawsuit could be examined

for racial discrimination *or* gender discrimination, but would not consider it on the

grounds of both (Crenshaw, 1989; OpenJurist, n.d.; Smith, 2013).

The General Motors court case serves as clear evidence of the short-sighted and

restrictive classification system assigned to African-American women. Recognized only

by race or only by gender, but not seen equally as both, the unique experiences of

African-American women have largely been ignored and, as in some cases, intentionally

suppressed by the larger dominant society.

Since its inception in 1989, intersectionality has become more widely known and

has been applied to include other underrepresented and oppressed groups whose unique

experiences have been ignored by the broader feminist movement, including Latinas and

Muslim women (Dastagir, 2017). Yet, intersectionality continues to be used within Black

feminist perspectives to highlight the racial and gender inequities Black women continue

to face in the 21st century.

In 2015, Viola Davis, who became the first African-American woman to win an

Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series for her portrayal of

attorney Annalise Keating, in the ABC series *How to Get Away with Murder* (Norwalk,

2014), was chastised by actress and self-proclaimed feminist, Nancy Lee Grahn for

bringing up issues about the lack of diversity and opportunities for women of color

actress as part of her acceptance speech (Peterson, 2015) (Appendix G). Grahn responded

to Davis' acceptance speech by posting on Twitter that, "Emmys not venue 4 racial

opportunity. ALL women belittled" (Lee, 2015). The attempt by Grahn to negate Davis'

calls for more opportunities for women of color by simply lumping her experience into a

single oppressed category for all women exposes the fact that Black women continue to

be viewed as an "either or" but neither Black *and* female. Grahn's comments is an

example that the rejection of the Black female experience by the broader White feminist

movement is not a historical context or reference but remains apparent in the 21st century,

thus emphasizing the continued need and importance of the intersectionality theoretical

framework to give value to the unique Black female perspective.

Another example as to the importance of the intersectionality theoretical

framework in the 21st century comes from author Safiya Umoja Noble in her 2016 article

entitled, *A Future for Intersectional Black Feminist Technology* Studies. In the article,

Noble details the role new forms of technology and media, specifically the Internet, play

in maintaining a carefully-constructed hierarchy and social structure (Brock, 2011;

Kendell, 2011; Noble, 2016). Citing previous studies completed by researchers Lori

Kendell and Andre Brock (2011), Noble describes the Internet as a structure in which the

"...default identity of the internet users" is assumed to be "White, masculine, bourgeois,

heterosexual and Christian culture through its content" (p. 1088). As a result, the

inclusion and accurate representation of women and minorities is marginalized in the

field of information and communication technology (ICT) just as they are in other areas

of society (Noble, 2016). Evidence of this occurrence is reflected in the lack of Black

female employment within Silicon Valley, a world-renowned center for high-tech

corporations and venture capital firms. According to an October 2017 *Moneyish* article,

Black female executives accounted for less than one percent of management at Apple; the

DNA/genomic testing company 23andME had no Black women in positions of

management; while AirBnB reported having three Black women in leadership roles (Ang,

2017). Simply put, Black women executive employment is virtually non-existent in

Silicon Valley, thereby, resulting in the lack of means and the access to power needed to

change the representation and framing of Black females on the World Wide Web.

Although some may reference non-profit organizations such as, Girls Who Code (Girls

Who Code, 2017) and Black and Brown Girls Who Code (Girls Pursuing Science, 2016),

as evidence of notable change in this area, these initiatives have not produced massive

employment and representation of Black women in science, technology, engineering, and

math (STEM) fields.

　　　　While the lack of executive Black women highlights systemic issues regarding the

representations and contributions of African-American women in the information

technology industry, technology and new media platforms have made it possible for

Black women to create their own spaces and give a stronger voice to Black feminist

perspectives in the 21st century. Black feminists have adopted technology and social

media platforms to create and mass distribute messages that call attention to issues

specific to the experiences of Black women. One such example is #SayHerName, a social

justice movement created by African American Policy Forum. According to a quote from

organizational co-founder and executive director, Kimberle Crenshaw (who also

introduced the concept of intersectionality), #SayHerName calls attention to the often

marginalized or overshadowed experiences of Black women who have been victims of

police violence through death, rape or assault (AAPF, n.d.). While some may argue that

the BlackLivesMatter movement highlights social justice issues that are relevant to the

Black community, others may point to the gender inequities that exist within the

organization. For example, despite being founded by three African-American women

(Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi) (Black Lives Matter, n.d.), men such as

DeRay McKesson, Kwame Rose and Shaun King are shown more in the media as

representatives of the Black Lives Matters Movement than its organizers. Furthermore,

demonstrations and rallies involving recent cases of Black men who have been killed by

the police such as Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Walter

Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina, and Eric Garner in New York City have been

more prominently featured by the organization than those of Black women such as

Natasha McKenna in Virginia and Yvette Smith in Texas who were also killed by the

police (Moore, 2015). In response to the continued marginalization of Black women

pertaining to matters of social justice, the #SayHerName movement highlights the lack of

media attention and collective demands for justice within the Black community when the

victim of police brutality is both black and female. Some of the most notable names in

association with the #SayHerName movement are Rekia Boyd, a 22-year-old Black

woman who was shot and killed by an off-duty Chicago police officer in March 2012

(insert citation); Sandra Bland, a 28-year-old Black woman who died of an apparent

suicide after a July 2015 traffic stop in Waller County, Texas; and Korryn Gaines, a 23-

year-old Black woman who was shot and killed by a Baltimore County police officer in

her Randallstown, Maryland apartment in August 2016. As such, the #SayHerName

movement demonstrates the concepts of intersectionality and Black feminist perspectives

at work in support of the need for Black women to create their own spaces to achieve

validation of their unique experiences using new forms of technology and social media

platforms.

In addition to creating spaces for social justice issues, intersectionality, Black feminist perspectives and technology and social media have also led to the creation of spaces aimed at giving credence to the unique and collective experiences of Black women's hair care that were largely ignored by the commercial beauty industry. Due to the lack of accurate representation and positive messages regarding natural, Afro-textured hair on the internet during the early 21st century, African-American women, in response, created their own spaces as a means to embrace and celebrate their natural hair. In these spaces, primarily in the form of blogs, Black women operated as both content creators and consumers. Messages within these newly created spaces countered negative depictions of Afro-textured hair and encouraged Black women to openly share their unique hair care experiences in a virtual, collective and unregulated environment. As a result, Black hair care blogs such as CurlyNikki, UrbanBushBabes, BlackGirlLongHair operated outside the parameters of large advertising, beauty and cosmetic companies, which historically served as gatekeepers to mass consumer markets, and grew in popularity as it connected Black women with one another in platforms that not only identified but exalted the unique experiences of having Afro-textured hair. The introduction of social media platforms in the mid-2000s (i.e., Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), Youtube (2005)) led to more enhanced conversations around natural, Afro-textured hair as Black women now possessed the ability to interact with one another through more instantaneous means by establishing closed Facebook groups, creating YouTube video channels and live video streaming events. The creation of spaces geared to address the nuances of Black women's hair care through advanced forms of media and technology has provided the means for Black women to express their feelings on what it

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is like to have natural hair, establish a voice(s) that are representative of their encounters and emerge as a collective group…the natural hair community.

W.E.B DuBois and the Double-Consciousness Concept

A term first coined by author and sociologist W.E.B DuBois in 1903, double-consciousness describes a sense of awareness Black people often develop with respect to their individual identities (DuBois, 1903; Jacobs, 2016). The concept maintains that, over time, Black people develop an understanding that their identities are indicative of an outlier and, as such, not readily deemed as acceptable by the larger American society (DuBois, 1903; Jacobs, 2016). Because of this, Black people tend to view and evaluate their sense of identity from two different perspectives, one as an individual entity, and the other, from the viewpoint of the larger American society (DuBois, 1903; Jacobs, 2016). According to DuBois, the result is a constant state of confliction as the sense of self tries to navigate and adapt to the dominant society through assimilation and conformity while simultaneously trying to retain authenticity and connectedness to one's individual identity (DuBois, 1903; Jacobs, 2016). The following passage from DuBois vividly describes this conflicted state when attempting to negotiate between the two opposing perspectives:

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unmasked question: unmasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter around it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, 'How does it feel to be a problem?' they say, 'I know an excellent colored man in my town' (DuBois, 1903, p.1).

> It is a particular sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by a type of world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two-thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (DuBois, 1903, p.3).

An important point to consider when attempting to evaluate and measure the

Black psyche through the concept of double-consciousness is that the concept first

appeared in 1903, a mere 40 years after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and only

35 years after the ratification of the 13th amendment. Therefore, the very notion of

'Black identity' was, still in many cases, a foreign concept when compared to the more

than 200 years of enslavement of Black people in America.

Today, examples of double-consciousness have become more visible in American

society. One of the most notable examples is the current controversy taking place

between predominantly, self-identified African-American/Black National Football

League (NFL) players and their decision not to stand for the national anthem. First led by

former San Francisco 49ers player Colin Kaepernick in 2016, the decision not to stand,

and instead kneel, during the national anthem serves as a symbolic form of protest against

police brutality and various forms of social injustice in the United States (Wyche, 2016).

The decision for Black football players of whether to stand or kneel during the national

anthem presents a case of double-consciousness as the ideals of what it means to be both

African-American/Black *and* an American collide. Which identity becomes primary?

Which identity does the football player feel more connected to? Does identifying more

with one sense of identity result in the automatic termination or abandonment of the

other? While racial and social justice advocates may call for Black football players to join

in the protests, does a player's decision not to join in automatically cast him into a

category of being an "Uncle Tom" or only out for self and not for the greater community?

In this circumstance, can a Black football player be equally patriotic and equally against

police brutality and social injustice? The concept of double-consciousness brings this

internal complex to the surface as African-American/Black football players struggle to reconcile their equal and, at times, conflicting identities.

As it pertains to the topic of study, Black women's hair remains in a constant state of double-consciousness as ascribed meanings of radicalism and questions of competency and professionalism are at times assigned by the very nature of its existence. In addition, societal, Eurocentric standards of beauty are ever-present and can dictate the appearance of Black women in both professional and social settings. For example, author Neal A. Lester describes the unwillingness of his 78-year-old African-American grandmother to, "...socialize or sightsee after arriving until she had gotten her hair 'fixed.' We shopped around and found a hairdresser, spent well over two hours at the hairdresser's and paid a whopping $68 for this service" (Lester, 2000, p. 204). The account given by Lester goes well-beyond characterizing a woman who is fixated on her physical appearance. The description points to evidence of double-consciousness in that she deems herself unworthy to operate within society until she receives services designed to alter the appearance of her hair so that she is operating in accordance to the established Eurocentric standards of beauty. In addition, her word choice of having to get her hair "fixed" suggests that her Afro-textured hair is problematic and in need of correction.

A second example to support the notion that Black women's hair remains in a constant state of double-consciousness casts light on the juxtaposition that Black women often encounter when operating within a corporate or professional setting. In her 2006 study, *Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair? African-American Women and their Struggles with Beauty, Body Image, and Hair,* author Tracey Owens Patton suggests that many African-American women opt to straighten their hair for employment and social mobility

purposes (Patton, 2006). She goes on to explain that the decision of African-American woman to straighten their hair can be regarded as an assimilationist act - conforming or "...subscribing to dominant cultural standards of beauty" (Patton, 2006, p. 27). Patton points to claims made by authors Mark Orbe and Tina Harris to recommend that hair straightening is not solely an assimilationist act, but rather behaviors organizational members must learn as part of balancing their identities in a professional or organizational setting, "Just as [a] young woman must negotiate her identities, so must an organizational member who comes from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group. Some organizational members may feel their racial/ethnic identities becomes less important as they climb the ladder of success" (Harris & Orbe, 2001, p. 192). As a result, Black women's hair remains in a constant of conflict between the authentic versus the (socially) accepted.

Cultural Studies Theory

Developed by cultural theorist Stuart Hall, cultural studies examines the actions, behaviors, and perceptions that manifest, either from an individual or a greater society, as a result of embedded cultural ideologies expressed through television, music, film, and advertising (Childs, 2015).The theory is largely connected to the discipline of critical theory and literary criticism and uses past examples from art, history, critical media and feminist theories to study how mass media and pop culture influence societal perceptions of race, class, gender roles, ethnicity and accepted cultural norms (Childs, 2015). As evidence of the theory in practice, the study (1978), "Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order," looked at how negative characterizations of Blacks reinforced through rhetoric from then-British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher and negative

images and depictions through mass media (i.e. newspapers, magazines, television) gave rise to pro-nationalist/anti-Black Caribbean policies and sentiment in the United Kingdom during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s (Clarke, Critcher, Hall, Jefferson & Roberts, 1978; Harman, 2016). This resulted in racially-targeted police operations such as Operation Swamp, a six-day period during the spring of 1981 in which members of law enforcement stopped and searched more than 1,000 young men in the predominantly Black neighborhood of Brixton, in a showcased effort to curtail street crime, also known as racial profiling (John, 2006 as cited in Harman 2016).

The link between negative images and depictions as represented through mass media and its subsequent influence on society has also occurred in the United States. For example, the 1990s gave rise to particularly violent, morally void depictions of African-Americans as evident in such films as *New Jack City* (Jackson, McHenry & Van Peebles, 1991), *Boyz in the Hood* (Nicolaides & Singleton, 1991), *Menace to Society* (Hughes, Hughes & Scott, 1993), *Sugar Hill* (Brown, Ichaso & Langlais, 1994), and *Juice* (Frankfurt, Heyman & Mortiz, 1992). African-Americans in these films were portrayed as violent criminals, drug dealers, drug users, and/or lazy members of society who would ultimately wreak havoc on communities at large if their actions and movements were not closely monitored by members of law enforcement. Such negative depictions in mass media made it possible for government and police officials to justify the enactment of policies that targeted specific racial groups, one example is New York City's 'stop-question-and-frisk' policy. Former New York City police commissioner, Bill Bratton, and former mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, regarded the implementation of the 'stop-question-and-frisk' policy as necessary to protect the public from the ills and dangers of criminals

(Bump, 2016; Naspretto, 2012). It is important to note that while the stop and frisk policy was found to have no significant correlation in reducing crime in New York City by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), despite largely targeting African-American and Latino populations (Bump, 2016; Naspretto, 2012). In 2013, a federal judge ruled the policy unconstitutional on the grounds of discrimination and that it was executed in mainly minority communities (Bump, 2016).

Cultural studies theory was used to examine to the research topic through evidence of negative, widely held perceptions about African-American women by society due to depictions, images, and representations as distributed through mass media. For example, a 2013 study conducted by *Essence* magazine and research consultants looked at the representation of Black women in mass media, specifically in television, music videos, and on social media (Walton, 2013). The study found that negative portrayals of Black women appeared twice as much as positive portrayals (Walton, 2013). Of the negative portrayals, nine stereotypes were regularly used to depict Black women: Gold Diggers, Modern Jezebels, Baby Mamas, Uneducated Sisters, Ratchet Women, Angry Black Women (ABW), Mean Black Girls, Unhealthy Black Women, and Black Barbies (Walton, 2013). Black female study participants reported that many of these stereotypes were inaccurate in their depiction of Black women (Walton, 2013). The study also revealed six characterizations of Black women that were not widely represented in mass media: Young Phenoms, Real Beauties, Individualists, Community Heroines, Girls Next Door and Modern Matriarchs (Walton, 2013). The study also revealed that white female participants reported negative stereotypes (specifically Baby Mamas, Angry Black

Women, Unhealthy Black Women and Uneducated Sisters) as accurate representations of their real-life encounters with Black women (Walton, 2013).

As previously stated, African-American women have historically been characterized as sexually promiscuous in literature, film, television, and more recently, in music videos and social media. A clear example of this sexualized characterization can be found in the 2003 music video, *Tip Drill*, by St. Louis-born rapper, Nelly (Nogueira, 2011). The video portrays African-American women as mere sexual commodities readily available for consumption as groups of bikini-clad women gyrate on and in close proximity to the rapper and his associates, simulate threesomes and sexual acts with other women against the background of a pulsating, hip-hop beat (Nogueira, 2011). Throughout the seven-minute video, the camera zooms in on the buttocks of several women with song lyrics stating, "It must be your ass, 'cause it ain't your face. I need a tip drill. I need a tip drill" (Nogueira, 2011). A female voice responds at the three minute and 37 second mark stating, "It must be your money, 'cause it ain't your face. I need a tip drill. I need a tip drill...I got you payin' my bills and buyin' me automobiles" (Nogueira, 2011). Perhaps the most controversial segment of the video shows a credit card being placed in and swiped between the buttocks of a bikini-clad woman who is lying on a table, simulating a credit card purchase transaction (Nogueira, 2011). Nelly's *Tip Drill* video provides an example of the presentation of African-American women as sexual commodities. In addition, the video perpetuates the Gold Digger and Modern Jezebel stereotypes as women in the video both through imagery and song lyrics express having sexual relations in exchange for financial gain (i.e., having one's bills paid and possession of material goods). The consequence of these negative images have been

linked to high rates of sexual violence, with approximately 22 percent of African-American women reporting having experienced rape at some point in their lives in comparison to 18.8 percent of White women and 14.6 percent of Hispanic women, according to the 2011 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Basile, Black, Breiding, Chen, Merrick, Smith, Stevens & Walters, 2011).

In addition to influencing how society perceives a particular group of people based on the account of race, Hall argues through his 'circuit of culture model' that mass media also affects how individuals see themselves as demonstrated through the adaptation of certain actions and behaviors presented in music, television, movies, advertising, the Internet, and most recently, through social media (Childs, 2015). The circuit of culture model, "consists of three distinct cultural artifacts: visual, written and social text" (Childs, 2015, p. 63). Visual text includes text that can be seen such as people, objects, places, music videos, television programs and movies (Childs, 2015). Written text describes text that must be read in order to gather meaning and interpretation (Childs, 2015). Examples of written text include social media posts, memes, song lyrics, quotes, digital or magazine advertisements, etc. (Childs, 2015). Lastly, the social text is much more integrated and involves interaction between humans as individuals or as a group (Childs, 2015). The social text can be demonstrated through certain styles of dress, dance, language or material consumption (Childs, 2015). Relative to the topic of hair, examples of social text can be found in the popularity of certain hairstyle types among Black women, including the Afro during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s; the asymmetrical haircut first introduced by female rappers Salt-N-Pepa during the 1980s; the "Halle Berry, Toni Braxton or Nia Long" haircut; and "box braids" made famous by

singers Brandy Norwood and Janet Jackson during the 1990s (Root Staff, 2016). The

popularity of these hairstyles shows the connection between how Black women were

presented in mass media and how some chose to adapt or emulate these representations.

As previously stated, African-American women have historically been portrayed

in mass media as aggressive, hostile, and violent (Walton, 2013). The Angry Black

Woman (ABW) characterization is perhaps one of the most widely known and widely

used stereotypes to depict African-American women. Origins of this characterization can

be traced back to the period of Reconstruction and the early days of film with the

introduction of the Sapphire stereotype: an argumentative, loud Black woman who

emasculated her male partner and belittled those around her (Childs, 2005). An early

example of this depiction in mass media can be found in the character Sapphire Stevens

from the radio and later television show, *Amos n' Andy* (Correll & Gosden, 1928)*.*

Portrayed by actress Ernestine Wade, Sapphire Stevens was cast as the demanding, sharp-

tongued and overbearing wife of main character, George 'Kingfish' Stevens (played by

former vaudeville actor Tim Moore) (Correll & Gosden, 1928). Thus, the Sapphire

characterization of Black women in mass media served as an antithesis of the delicate,

feminine traits possessed by Anglo-Saxon female characters (Ashley, 2014; Bennett &

Morgan, 2006; Childs, 2005; Malveaux, 1979). The depiction of African-American

women in television today, more specifically reality television, provides a current

example of Hall's circuit of cultural model at work. Proof of the ABW remains apparent

as presentation of African-American female characters that are rude, confrontational,

materialistic, vulgar, and violent as depicted on such popular reality television shows as

Basketball Wives, the Real Housewives of Atlanta (RHOA), and *Love & Hip Hop* (Sisson,

2014; What Tami Said, 2014 as cited in Hawley, 2014). In 2011, *Newsweek* writer, Allison Samuels referenced these characteristics in support of her description on the representation of African-American women in television, "the small screen is awash with Black females who roll their eyes, bob their heads, snap their fingers, talk trash, and otherwise reinforce the stereotype of the 'angry Black woman'" (Samuels, 2011 as cited in in Hawley, 2014). Yet (instead of denouncing these representations) many African-American women tune in weekly to watch these programs and emulate behaviors by incorporating such infamous phrases as 'who goin' check me boo?' and 'a non-motherfucking factor' into their daily speech. In addition, the RHOA is reportedly the highest-rated show on Bravo and one of the highest-rated on cable (Hawley, 2014).

As it relates to the topic of study, natural Black hair continues to be regarded as problematic and largely unaccepted by mainstream society as demonstrated in mass media, public policy and in corporate America. Patricia Williams, author of *The Politics of Michelle Obama's Hair* describes how natural hair has historically been perceived as threatening in society, "African-American women's hair was constantly being scrutinized for signs of subversion: the more natural, the more dangerous" (Williams, 2008 as cited in Jere-Malanda, 2008). Evidence as to the heavy scrutiny of Afro-textured hair is not solely limited to historical references. In 2014, the United States Army encountered controversy when it revealed updates to its AR 670-1 "Wear and Appearance of Army Uniform and Insignia" policy (Ferdinando, 2014; Glenn, 2014; Myers, 2017). The policy, which banned cornrows, dreadlocks and twists, drew public ire and prompted a series of online petitions calling for the removal of the policy as it appeared to target African-American women (Glenn, 2014; Myers, 2017). A PowerPoint presentation also created

by the U.S. Army, which was later leaked to the media, used images of African-American

women to illustrate hairstyles that were classified as "unauthorized" (Glenn, 2014)

(Appendix H). One African-American female Army veteran expressed her criticism of

the policy, "It's very targeted because we all know who they're talking about even though

they never explicitly say the world 'Black' or 'African-American.' We all know who

typically wears these types of hairstyles and then they went as far as to include pictures of

Black women in the PowerPoint" (Glenn, 2014). The growing public controversy and a

request to review the policy from the Department of Defense, prompted the U.S. Army to

make several revisions, including reversing its decision and approving for female soldiers

to wear their hair in cornrows, dreadlocks, and twists, "in light of concerns that the

hairstyle policies were too restrictive for African American women" (Ferdinando, 2014;

Myers, 2017).

As such, the question of what it means to be a Black woman presents unique

challenges and circumstances with respect to the cultural studies theory, the circuit of

culture model, and the defined topic of study. The experiences of Black women in the

21st century relative to stereotypes, clichés, or expected behaviors is important to consider

while examining how mass media's depictions influence societal perceptions and policies

that impact everyday lives of African-American women in both personal and professional

settings (Childs, 2015).

Encoding and Decoding Theory

Also developed by Stuart Hall, the Encoding and Decoding Theory challenged the

accepted notion that messages in the media (particularly television) were stable and

transparent (Hall, 1973). The theory also recognized the cognitive ability of the audience

to interpret messages delivered through the media (Hall, 1973; 1980). Hall proposed that

messages in the media were carefully and systematically constructed by dominant

systems of power and authority in order to reinforce cultural ideologies, norms, and

values to the audience, *but* that audiences also possessed the power to accept, partially

accept, or reject the constructed messages and their intended meanings (Hall, 1973;

1980). The Encoding and Decoding Theory describes audiences as active participants in

the communication process with the cognitive ability to reason and develop their own

interpretation(s) of messages based on their personal and cultural experiences (Hall,

1973; 1980).

　　　According to the Encoding and Decoding Theory, the encoding process occurs

when messages are distorted within embedded ideologies or meanings of the dominant

code (culture) (Hall, 1973; 1980). Messages of the dominant code are designed to appear

as a transparent reflection of the world as it exists, when, in actuality, what is shown is

defined by various structures of power (i.e., advertisers, broadcast companies,

entertainment industries, forms of government, etc.) as part of the dominant code

(ideology) and later becomes accepted as reality by society (Hall 1973; 1980). One could

argue that the connection between the dominant code and the encoding process is an

example of how society exerts power over the individual self (or television viewing

audiences) as most notably described by Prussian philosopher, Karl Marx and French

philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault. According to Marx, entities that control the

production of hegemonic messages also control the production of one's thoughts and

ideas (Battle-Walters, 2004). Thus, the dominant code acts as the authoritative power

over its members (audiences) and, exercises its power in various ways through the

creation of systems (or encoding messages), which serve as extensions of the dominant

society. It is important to note that while structures of power may encode television text

to serve as an extension of the dominant ideological meaning, these same texts may not

be decoded or read, by audiences in the ways in which they were intended (Hall 1973;

1980).

The salon haircare industry provides an example of the encoding process at work

in connection with the research study. Estimated at a global market value of $20 billion

dollars in 2012 (Wagner, 2017), the salon hair industry has historically used advertising

text to influence members of society to adopt certain behaviors as merely an extension of

societal norms and not as carefully constructed messages originating from authoritative

and dominant systems of power (Musa & Radzi, 2017). The power of encoded messages

and its potential influence on audience perception of the world is far-reaching as

described in a 2001 study, "once encoded, in print or culture or both, the order becomes

authoritative and planetary consciousness is born" (Jandt & Tanno, 2001, p.122). For

example, a woman who frequents a hair salon to receive services is generally regarded by

society as maintaining one's self-appearance or engaging in a routine practice of self-

care. As such, the "beauty or beauty shop" has served as a location in which African-

American women would the process of altering, straightening or styling their hair as a

means to assimilate in society and conform to established Eurocentric societal norms,

including standards of beauty since the days of the Emancipation Proclamation (Hargro,

2011 as cited in Araiza et al., 2016, Walker, S, 2007). However, one could argue that hair

salon experiences possess different ideological meanings and encoded messages that

extend beyond hair care for African-American women. In addition to receiving hair care

services, the beauty salon/beauty shop also provides a setting in which African-American

women have been able to remove the proverbial "mask" they use to operate in society.

Thus, the beauty salon/beauty shop becomes a culturally sacred place where they feel

safe to expose their true, authentic selves without consequence or repercussion (Battle-

Walters, 2004; Walker, S., 2007). Author Kimberly Battle-Walters (2004) provides a

detailed description regarding the extreme significance of the hair salon as experienced

by African-American women:

> The shop is a haven for women for the women who patronize it. For at least two hours each month, these women find refuge and support without the cares or concerns of families, jobs, or communities. If only for a while, in the shop these women can take a break from their demanding roles as mothers, wives, and workers and finally catch their breath. Shop time is their time. With it they can choose to be pampered, but, more important, they can count on being heard. (p. 14)
>
> Another example of the encoding process can be found in a 2012 study (Zaslow,

2012) that examined, through a series of observational and experimental assignments,

how the Barbie doll reflects an encoded standard of beauty and femininity as defined by

powerful business conglomerates such as toymaker, Mattel. Zaslow contended that

messages as part of the encoding process are much more powerful than most readers

recognize:

> In mass media, particularly, texts are frequently encoded with the hegemonic desires and values of advertisers and other ideologies who finance media production and distribution.
>
> Unless a reader is already involved in a radical political critique, (s)he is more likely to read a message through the dominant hegemonic framework in which it was encoded. (Zaslow, 2012, p. 195)

The study described the Barbie doll as, "the original blond haired, blue-eyed

Barbie, first created by Ruth Handler in 1959, while an American product, is a global

icon and a plaything selling in more than 150 countries around the world" (Parker, 2008).

Although the Barbie doll was commonly regarded as a doll marketed to young adolescent

children and adult collectors, the study argued that "Barbie is a media text that has

staying power and almost universal familiarity" (Zaslow, 2012, p. 195). A feminist

critique of Barbie within the study characterized the doll as, "a media text reifies

patriarchal hegemonic values such as normative beauty, thinness, whiteness, domesticity,

sexual objectification, heteronormativity, and excessive consumption" (Zaslow, 2012, p.

196). Lastly, the study highlighted the extensive power of the Barbie doll through

successful advertising efforts of mass communication and research:

> Students who do not have direct personal experience with Barbie will have visual
> familiarity with the doll from advertisements and toy store shelves. Though
> Barbie may be an unlikely "media" text, she surely fits the bill as an object of
> mass communication, and has been studied by communication researchers.
> (Zaslow, 2012, p. 195)

The Zaslow study provided a solid framework for how, through the encoding

process, the Mattel Barbie doll contains and perpetuates dominant codes with respect to

American standards of beauty and femininity. The study also highlighted Barbie's

widespread influence in the field of mass communication, research, and society as the

doll has been sold in more than 150 countries around the world (Zaslow, 2012).

For the purposes of this study, the dominant code perpetuates the notion that

Eurocentric physical features such as white skin, straight or blonde hair, blue-eyes, and a

thin body statue as symbolized through the iconic Barbie doll represent the ideal and

"acceptable" standard of beauty for all women (Bissell & Yan, 2014; Jones, 2008;

Thompson, 2009). Determining one's perceived level of beauty or attractiveness, more

precisely for women, is therefore measured in comparison to how close or far one

deviates from the aforementioned standard of beauty. While white females have been

categorized as possessing premium forms of beauty, non-whites have historically been

perceived as inferior. As evidence of this practice, non-whites were prohibited from

entering the Miss America beauty pageant until the 1950s, some 30 years after the contest

originated. African-Americans were restricted from entering the contest until the late

1960s. It wasn't until 1984 when Vanessa Williams became the first African-American

woman to win the title of Miss America. It should also be noted that while Vanessa

Williams is African-American, many of her physical features mirrored the European

standard of beauty: light skin, light eyes, straight hair, thin nose, and a thin physical

frame (Jones, 2008). Therefore, the degree to which one deviates from the "ideal standard

of beauty" is used as a measuring stick to not only calculate one's level of attractiveness,

but has also been used to gauge individual intelligence, status/social rank, and purity

despite the fact that, according to the Social Issues Research Center, European standard

of beauty, "...is attainable by less than five percent of the female population" (Araiza et

al., 2016).

The second part of the Encoding and Decoding Theory, known as decoding,

focuses on an audience's power to interpret ideological, encoded messages of the media

and the ability to accept or reject it (Hall, 1973; 1980). Regarded by Hall as the most

important aspect of the communication process (Hall, 1980), the decoding process

represents a dynamic shift from other mass communication theories as ownership in the

cognitive ability to process information and interpret messages is placed in the hands of

the audience (Hall, 1973; 1980). Unlike other communication theories, audiences are not

merely a byproduct of downward or one-way communication, but rather active

participants in the final interpretive outcome(s). The decoding process is best explained

by defining its three distinct categories based on audience interpretation and response to encoded messages. It is important to note that audience response to encoded messages can and, often, do vary depending on a variety of influential factors including, source/sender, content, delivery, medium, etc.

   Dominant-hegemonic code. The first category, known as the dominant-hegemonic code, occurs when an audience interprets the encoded message(s) in totality, as intended, and as being 100 percent accurate (Hall, 1973; 1980). Perhaps the best example of the dominant-hegemonic code in practice is the second invasion of Iraq, in late March of 2003, by the United States. In 2002, top-ranking officials of the Bush administration including then-Vice President, Dick Cheney; Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfield; National Security Advisor, Condoleeza Rice; Secretary of State, Colin Powell; and President George W. Bush appealed to the US Congress and the American public to re-engage military defense exercises against then-Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, on the grounds that he was in possession of "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD) (Massing, 2004). Through a series of scheduled news conferences, White House staff meetings, speeches to the United Nations (UN), and the introduction of the Iraq War Resolution, the claim was made that Hussein was harboring WMD that would later be used against the United States (Massing, 2004). Officials with the Bush administration argued that WMD and Saddam Hussein posed, "such an immediate threat to the United States that pre-emptive military action is necessary" (Massing, 2004, p. 46). Commercials detailing this supposed threat soon began to populate American television and radio airwaves. In 2002, the phrase "weapons of mass destruction" and its connection to Iraq appeared in newspaper articles 270 times in the period between October 11th – 31st

(Moeller, 2004). According to a March 24, 2003, Gallop poll, 72 percent of Americans

favored military action against Saddam Hussein due to the threat of WMD (Newport,

2004). Congress quickly passed the Iraq War Resolution, by a margin of 296-133 votes in

the House (New York Times, 2002) and 77-23 votes in the Senate (Washington Post,

2002). In late March of 2003, the United States invaded Iraq for a second time with the

intent to disarm Saddam Hussein and dismantle his WMD program.

Despite overwhelming support from the American people, US Congress, and the

political propaganda surrounding an imminent threat from Saddam Hussein, all of these

efforts later proved to be in vain as no WMD were ever discovered. A 12,000-page

submission by the Iraqi government in the winter of 2002 to the UN declared that it had

no WMD (Massing, 2004), an analysis of Iraqi military operations, would later determine

that claims of WMD were false and unfounded. The American public's complete

acceptance of the encoded messages of danger, a looming threat to security, and the need

to disarm Saddam Hussein of nonexistent WMD, provides a clear depiction of the

dominant-hegemonic code in practice. Through encoded messages of political

propaganda, Americans perceived these messages as accurate and the basis for the second

invasion of Iraq, as intended by the Bush administration.

Proof of the dominant-hegemonic code in connection with audience acceptance of

negative perceptions held about Black hair were found in hair care practices of African-

American women at the turn of the 20th century. Print, radio, and television ads suggest

that mass communication channels served as effective tools in helping to perpetuate the

European standard of beauty on African-American women. For example, many white

beauty and cosmetic companies of the early 1900s marketed their products to African-

Americans based on the societal belief that Black hair and skin was problematic. This marketing strategy was rooted in the notion that European beauty standards were readily accepted by African-Americans as the conventional norm and, as such, Black hair and skin must be fixed in order to be socially acceptable (Hall, Russell & Wilson, 1992; hooks, 1992a; Mayes, 1998; Walker, S., 2007). The European standard of beauty was also adopted by prominent African-American beauty and cosmetic companies as part of their marketing and print advertising strategies. Madame CJ Walker founded her business on creating hair care products to make African-American hair softer, straighter, and "beautifully silky" (Walker, S., 2007, p. 41). Many African-American women widely accepted the encoded messages of Eurocentric beauty as quintessential and, in response, flocked to beauty salons and kitchens alike in an effort to alter their so-called bad hair through the use of straightening combs, relaxers, and various hair care products (Camp, 2015; Walker, 2007).

Negotiated code. The second category, the negotiated code, occurs when an audience accepts major parts or points within the encoded message(s) while rejecting other parts that are in direct conflict with their personal and cultural experiences (Hall, 1973; 1980). An example of the negotiated code can be found in a 2013 qualitative research study (Yousman, 2013), which compared the depiction of prisoners on television with individuals who had previously been incarcerated. Researcher Bill Yousman conducted a series of focus group interviews with 26 former prison inmates, ranging from 20 to 50 years of age, regarding their interpretation of the HBO show, *Oz,* and its depiction of prison life. The study focused on the content and images of the television

show while asking participants to, "comment on their perceptions of the reality/fantasy

aspects of this television representation of prison life" (Yousman, 2013, p.199).

Yousman reported that while the majority of participants accepted the encoded

message of extreme violence, as depicted on *Oz,* including stabbings, murders, and

attacks on prison officials, many of them "described prison as being a much more

restrictive environment than *Oz* makes it out to be, with strict supervision and severe

consequences for disruptive behavior" (Yousman, 2013, p. 204). The study also revealed

that ex-prisoners were more accepting of the show's account of chaos, mayhem, and

informal systems of hierarchy that operate within the prison system, but rejected certain

acts of violence deemed as exaggerated or unrealistic:

> …objecting only to a sequence when a prisoner attempts to blow up the prison
> with a bomb, were made after the respondents were also shown scenes from *Oz* of
> prisoners bricking each other up in a wall, poisoning each other, kicking each
> other down elevator shafts, electrocuting each other by shoving each other's heads
> into television sets and so on. Despite this, the respondents were able to accept the
> veracity of the program's images, drawing a line only at the attempted use of an
> explosive device (Yousman, 2013, p. 206).

The research study of experiences from 26 ex-prisoners in comparison to prison

depictions as seen on the HBO television show, *Oz*, illustrated the negotiated code in

practice. While accepting major, encoded themes and depictions of violence operating

within the television program, participants of the study rejected depictions of violence

deemed to be exaggerated based on their personal experience and intimate knowledge of

prison operations (Yousman, 2013). Yousman's ex-prisoner study detailed how encoded

messages undergo the negotiated code process by an audience based on their personal

and cultural experiences.

Evidence of the negotiated code within the scope of the study can be found

through an application of certain elements or traits of the European standard of beauty

while an apparent rejection of others. The use of hair extensions within the natural hair

movement highlights a practical example of the negotiated. This example occurs when

additional hair is added to natural, Afro-textured hair to achieve the illusion of longer

hair. While an individual's own hair remains chemically unprocessed, the act of adding in

hair can be interpreted as adopting the particular segment of the Eurocentric standard of

beauty which places a preference of long hair over short hair and equates feminine appeal

to possessing long hair. The different textures of hair extension chosen by members of

the natural hair community can also be regarded as an example of the negotiated code in

practice. Although an African-American woman may opt to achieve longer hair through

the use of extensions, the texture of hair extensions that she selects may be similar or

different in nature to her very own hair (i.e. coily, kinky, frizzy, curly, etc.), but does not

emulate the silky, straight nor blonde attributes of the dominant European standard of

beauty as in the case of kanekalon, marley, or yaki-textured hair extensions. Hair color

provides another example of the negotiated code in practice within the natural hair

movement. The use of hair color by women within the natural hair movement has been

the source of spirited debates (AuNaturale, 2011; BlackizBeautyful, 2016;

NaturallyNellzy, 2013; Yvonne, 2017). Opponents proclaim that women who color their

hair by using chemicals are not 100 percent natural. These individuals, instead, encourage

women who want to use more natural and traditional methods, such as henna, to color

their hair. To the contrary, supporters contend that women who choose to color their hair

through more conventional means including semi or permanent hair dye should still be

recognized as natural because their hair follicles have not been chemically altered by

calcium or sodium hydroxide, the main ingredient in lye and no-lye formula hair relaxers.

Lastly, the hair typing system, first introduced by celebrity hair stylist, Andre

Walker, has been developed as a way for women to better understand the traits of their

natural hair texture (Black Hair Media, n.d.; Walker, A., 2017). The system uses letters

and numbers to classify individual hair type (Black Hair Media, n.d.; Walker, A., 2017).

The numbers range on a scale of one to four and are used to describe one's natural hair

texture (i.e., 1=straight, 2=wavy, 3=curly, 4=kinky) (Black Hair Media, n.d.; Walker, A.,

2017) (Appendix I). The letters within the hair typing system are used to describe one's

curl pattern (i.e., a=loose, b=medium, c=tight) (Black Hair Media, n.d.; Walker, A.,

2017) (Appendix I). While use of the hair typing system as part of the natural hair

movement has fostered an understanding about the unique characteristics of one's own

hair, it has also appeared to result in a casting-type system in which certain hair types are

deemed as more attractive and socially acceptable than others (Duru, 2014; Araiza et al.,

2016; Kryztals, 2016). Proof of an apparent casting system operating within the natural

hair movement can be found in the number of advertisements that feature models with

curlier hair textures and looser curl hair patterns (Appendix J) as opposed to models with

kinker hair textures and tighter hair patterns (Appendix K). One of the most recent and

controversial examples of the casting system in connection with the natural hair

movement occurred with the release of Shea Moisture's #EverybodyGetsLove ad

campaign (Dieker, 2017). Released in April 2017, the ad showed several women stating

how Shea Moisture products delivered them from "hair hate" (Dieker, 2017; Duster &

Payne, 2017). Though the ad featured four women, only one of the women featured was a

woman of color (Dieker, 2017; Duster & Payne, 2017). Critics argued that the woman of

color shown was racially ambiguous as her racial background could not be clearly

determined. In addition, the hair texture of the woman of color in the ad was curly and of

a loose curl pattern (Dieker, 2017). The ad did not feature any women with dark

complexions, nor kinky or coarse type hair textures despite previously stating that their

products embraced and celebrated all hair types and textures. The reaction to the ad was

swift with many African-American women calling for a boycott of Shea Moisture

products and taking to social media to express their dissatisfaction with the ad (Duster &

Payne, 2017). The hashtag #AllHairMatters soon began trending on social media with

claims that the ad was, "...an erasure of the loyal demographic who supported the brand

from day one: Black women with curly, kinky and tightly coiled hair" (Duster & Payne,

2017). Shea Moisture pulled the ad from its various platforms and issued an official

apology citing that the ad could be perceived as by the company as "whitewashing, a

marketing ploy, and a rejection of Black women" (Duster & Payne, 2017) (Appendix L).

Thus, a closer look at the natural hair movement and its use of hair extensions,

hair extension textures, and the debate surrounding the use of hair color and the hair

typing system reveals instances in which elements of the European standard of beauty

have been incorporated and continue to resonate as part of the negotiated code.

Oppositional code. The third and final category within the decoding process of

the Encoding and Decoding Theory is known as the oppositional code. Audiences that

openly reject or resist the encoded message(s), as presented through mass media, use the

oppositional code in their interpretation and response to the dominant ideology (Hall,

1973;1980). The oppositional code is used to not only resist or reject encoded messages

of the dominant ideology, but as evidenced through history, has been used to create new messages, meanings, and develop new forms of government, legislation, and subcultures within society as in the case of the civil rights, gay rights, and anti-apartheid movements. These critical moments in history emerged from an audience's rejection of the encoded message(s) and dominant ideologies of its time.

The Encoding and Decoding Theory and the Natural Hair Movement of the 21st Century

Through the strategic placement of commercial and product ads and as depicted in film, television, and music, the encoded message that straighter, silkier, and European-textured hair was socially acceptable had been reinforced through American mainstream media (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2014; Randle, 2015). European-like textured hair was viewed as a symbol of assimilation, and progression, and the status quo among African-Americans (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2014). To conform to the dominant code of Eurocentric beauty, African-American women went to great lengths to alter or "tame" their natural hair texture including the use of cast iron straightening combs, chemical compounds (conk (made from lye, eggs, potatoes) and relaxers (applied to the base of the human hair shaft)), petroleum grease, wax pomades, and hair weaves (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Randle, 2015).

The 2009 release of comedian Chris Rock's documentary, *Good Hair* (Appendix K; Rock & Stilson, 2009), sparked a catalyst for change in the connection between African-American women and the estimated $684 million Black haircare industry (Mintel, 2013) (Appendix M). The film illustrated, through a series of demonstrations, the potential for harmful and irreversible damage to the scalp due to the use of chemical

relaxers. The film also highlighted the psychological effects among young African-American girls with respect to their hair. In particular, the belief that, in its natural state, their hair texture was bad and all little girls should get a perm (relaxer) in order to feel pretty (Rock & Stilson, 2009). The impact of the film among African-American women and the Black haircare market was immediate and widespread. African-American women challenged the dominant code by abandoning hair grooming practices designed to achieve straighter, softer, more European-like textured hair (Randle, 2015), while constructing new messages to fit their informational, cultural, and personal needs. The audience's sudden and massive opposition to the dominant code also resulted in a major economic shift among consumers within the Black haircare industry. Sales of hair relaxers declined 26 percent between 2008 and 2013, according to Mintel, a consumer trends firm based in Chicago (Mintel, 2013).

Unlike the "Black is beautiful" movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the natural hair movement of the 21st century rejected the encoded messages of beauty not only as a form of self-acceptance, but also due to an increase of identified health risks associated with the use of chemical relaxers and hair weaves such as scalp dermatitis, alopecia, and the occurrence of fibroids. According to a 2010 investigative research study, positive correlations between the extended and frequent use of hair relaxers (usually 10 years or more) resulted in an increased risk of uterine leiomyomata (fibroids) for African-American women (Cozier, Palmer, Reich, Rosenberg & Wise, 2010). In fact, the detection of fibroids in African-American women was two to three times greater than detected in Caucasian women due to the presence of phthalates, a hormonally active

chemical that can be absorbed into the skin through scalp burns and lesions caused by

hair relaxers (Cozier et al., 2010).

Blog sites, such as CurlyNikki.com and KinkyCoilyMe.com, serve as platforms

for the oppositional code including rejecting the use of chemical relaxers while

promoting natural hair practices through online Q&A discussions, best practices and tips,

and weekly online features of African-American women with natural hair. African-

American women also take to YouTube as a source for information on how to care for

and maintain their natural hair. According to a 2015 study (Ellington, 2015), YouTube

was cited as the most widely used social networking system for information about natural

hair. As one study participant commented, "I don't know how anyone could go natural

without watching YouTube videos" (Ellington, 2015, p.25). Several YouTube figures

such as Naptural85 (over 870,000 channel subscribers), MyNaturalSistas (over 661,000

channel subscribers), GlamTwinz (over 622,000 channel subscribers) and NaturalNeiicey

(over 461,000 channel subscribers) have emerged as "natural hair gurus" due to their

strong presence on YouTube detailing their natural hair care practices through video

tutorials and product reviews. Through Facebook groups and online forums, social media

has also been instrumental in providing means of emotional support, empathy, and

encouragement for women who have recently transitioned (going from chemically

straighten to a natural state of hair texture) or who have experienced emotional trauma

related to their big chop (cutting off all relaxed hair texture) as part of the natural hair

movement. The existence of such Facebook groups and forums serves as another

example of the natural hair movement utilizing the oppositional code. Conversations

within these specific groups and forums are constructed to meet the cultural,

informational, and emotional needs of the audience, while simultaneously rejecting the encoded message of Eurocentric beauty as presented through American mainstream media.

An indication as to the effectiveness of the natural hair movement through the oppositional code can also be found in the number of major retail chains (i.e., Target, Walmart, and Walgreens) that now carry popular, natural hair product brands such as Shea Moisture, Kinky Curly, and Miss Jessie's in response to consumer demand (Sidibe, 2015). Companies like L'Oreal's Soft Sheen-Carson, who for decades marketed the Dark and Lovely brand hair color and relaxers to African-Americans women, have also responded to the popularity of the natural hair movement with the launch of its Au Naturale product line (Sidibe, 2015). In an unprecedented shift of power, African-American women are now driving the product development, marketing, and placement efforts of major corporations that previously regulated their hair grooming options to operate within the Eurocentric standard of beauty. The natural hair movement, as an example of the oppositional code, has put African-American female consumers in the driver's seat and has helped to redefine the multi-million-dollar Black haircare industry.

The natural hair movement of the 21st century provides a straightforward example of how the oppositional code can yield large-scale, systemic change and reverse the structure of power in relation to the dominant code, when strategically applied through the use of multimedia and social networking platforms as well as through consumer purchasing trends. As a direct result, the encoded messages within the American beauty industry has begun to shift to address the growing popularity and meet the consumer demands of this emerging and powerful subgroup.

Themes

A number of possible themes and stereotypes, as detailed within the literature review, were explored during the qualitative research study in connection with natural, Afro-textured hair and the women who chose to wear their hair in this state. Several themes emerged from interviews conducted between the researcher and interview participants. As the researcher, I anticipated these themes would result from participants past exposure to various images, messages, and representations of natural, Afro-textured hair as depicted in television, movies, advertisements, the Internet and social media as well as through personal interactions and encounters. Once the themes emerged, they were coded and placed into a codebook for further analysis (Appendix V). I then revisited the codes and refined them to ensure clear definitions and examples were used to explore close relationships between each of the conducted interviews.

Research Questions

The theoretical framework from the Literature Review and the possibility of emerging themes helped to provide the context for which the following research questions were examined as part of the textual analysis and personal interview process:

R1: How do African-American women negotiate their understanding of natural hair?

Developing an understanding of natural hair can extend far beyond identifying one's own unique characteristics (i.e., hair type, curl pattern and porosity level) (Walker, A., 2007), it can reveal the act of automatically labeling or placement of African-American women into defined categories based solely on the perceived appearance of their hair (Wells, 2011). African-American women may also find themselves faced with

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and having to confront fixed historical and modern-day stereotypes that were in place before the decision to 'go natural' was ever made by the individual (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Walton, 2013). Consequently, developing an understanding of natural hair can expose one's own preconceived notions and biases regarding the concept of beauty (i.e., good vs. bad hair, straight vs. kinky or nappy textured hair) (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Higbee, 2001 as cited in Harris & Johnson, 2001; Walker, S., 2007; White, 2001). For example, author Veronica Wells noted in her 2011 article, '10 Things They Don't Tell You About Going Natural', that some African-American women's perceptions of self, expectations, and level of sexual appeal are affected (sometimes challenged) as they develop an understanding of what it is to have natural hair (Wells, 2011).

R2: How do African-American women feel about their experiences of natural hair?

The experience of having natural hair is distinctive to the individual. While some interview participants may reveal that their experience with having natural hair has largely been positive and that they have received encouragement and support from members within their academic, professional and/or social circles, others may reveal that they experienced backlash, regulations, restrictions or sanctions, and/or were questioned about their decision. Examples of this practice include the case of the U.S. Army's 2014 AR 670-1 "Wear and Appearance of Army Uniform and Insignia" policy, which forbade the female soldiers from wearing twists, braids, dreadlocks or their hair in a "bulky" state (Ferdinando, 2014; Glenn, 2014; Myers, 2017) or 12-year-old Vanessa VanDyke, who was threatened with school explosion for her "puffy do" (Kovacs, 2013).

**R3: How are African-American women influenced by mass media messages about
natural hair?**

  As described earlier in the Literature Review section, African-American women
have received negative messages about the state and societal perceptions of their natural
hair since the inception of the Transatlantic Slave Trade dating back to the 1600s (Byrd
& Tharps, 2001). The development of mass media during the Industrialization and
Reconstruction periods provided dominant systems of power with the means to
perpetuate the ideology, to the masses, that natural, Afro-textured hair is unacceptable,
undesirable and needs to be changed (Howard, Kinloch & Patterson, 2016). Notable
exceptions include the Black Nationalist and Pan-African Nationalist movement by
Marcus Garvey (Biography, 2017; Higbee, 2001 as cited in Harris & Johnson, 2001;
Walker, S., 2007; Van Leeuwen, 2000), Black is Beautiful social movement of the 1960s
and 1970s (Jere-Malanda, 2008; Thompson, 2009; Van Leeuwen, 2000), independent
filmmakers such as Spike Lee (Lee, 1986), and the neo-soul musical genre of the late
1980s and 1990s (Hill, 1998; Wright, 1997). The study found that acceptance of natural
hair is more visible and championed through newer channels of mass media such as
online blogs, social media and through YouTube than in more mainstream, traditional
forms of mass media such as film, television, magazine advertisements and music.

Method and Materials

Research Design

The study used a qualitative mixed method approach of textual analysis and
personal interviews to examine the lived experiences and societal implications of the 21st
century natural hair movement among 13 African-American women. The purpose of the
research study is exploratory in nature, meaning that its aim is to investigate the
experiences of 13 randomly selected Black women who wear their Afro-textured hair in
its natural state and, therefore, generalizability is not intended. The research study was
conducted in September of 2017. As a description of the research design, textual analysis
was introduced to participants as an icebreaker activity followed by personal interviews
which included a series of open-ended and dichotomous question types.

Textual analysis. According to McKee (2003), performed textual analysis on a
text (anything one could make meaning from) is a way to make an educated guess at
some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of the text. The type of textual
analysis performed in this study is rhetorical criticism. This approach is one that
examined, evaluated and interpreted persuasive messages embedded within specific
images or text (Andrews, 1983).

Textual analysis was introduced as an introductory icebreaker activity in the
research study process. Participants were shown three *Ebony* magazine ads from three
different era (one from 1962, one from 1972, and one from 1982 (see Appendix N-P).
Each magazine ad showed an image of an African-American female (**the 1982 magazine
ad showed an image of an African-American male and female*). Participants were then
asked for their individual opinions as well as the perceived opinions or perceptions of

society for each of the three magazine ads. Thus, the textual analysis allowed the

researcher to explore how to interview participants responded to messages about Black

hair and standards of beauty.

Personal/Respondent Interviews. Qualitative interviews were selected as the

second method approach given the many opportunities it presents for researchers to

extract rich contextual information and uncover hidden truths. Qualitative interviews

allow researchers to obtain in depth and detailed information about a particular topic or

area of study through gentle guidance of discussions and interactions with participants

(Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As described by researcher Irving Seidman, "Interviewing

provides access to the context of people's behavior and, therefore, provides a way for

researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior" (Seidman, 1998, p. 4).

In addition to extracting rich contextual information, qualitative interviews enable

researchers to interact with participants in a more private setting. Participants in such

settings may find it easier to share lived experiences that are of a private and/or deeply

impactful nature with the researcher as opposed to focus groups that include several

individuals in one setting to gather information and responses. Therefore, the private

setting of interviews assisted the researcher building a rapport and establishing a sense of

trust by creating an environment in which participants felt comfortable to express their

emotions including sadness, anger, embarrassment and/or fear.

The researcher selected respondent interviews as the specific type of interview

format used to carry out the study. Respondent interviews feature a number of

distinctions from other types of interviews, including ethnographic, informant, narrative

and focus groups, used in communication research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Respondent-type interviews are limited to no more than two sessions with participants and, as described by researcher Paul Lazarsfeld (1944), include five primary goals: (1) clarifying meaning of general concepts and opinions; (2) distinguishing decisive elements of an expressed opinion; (3) determining what influenced a person to form an opinion or act in a certain way; (4) classifying complex attitude patterns; (5) understanding the interpretation or reasons people give to act in certain ways. Second, respondent-type interviews ask participants to express themselves regarding a particular issue or situation in relation to the social world (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Therefore, the aim of the researcher in the study was to capture responses about the experiences of African-American women who have chosen to wear their hair in its natural state and what, if any, implications their choice of hairstyle has had in their lives. Lastly, respondent interviews are classified as the preferred type of interview to view the interaction between an "individual's internal state with the outer environment" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 179). Under the scope of critical cultural theories, participants in respondent interviews "...are conceptualized as sites of multiple, changing, and often contradictory cultural discourses" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 179). Thus, respondent interviews may provide greater clarity and in depth knowledge of how and to what degree do the theoretical frameworks of Black feminism, cultural studies, and encoding/decoding have contributed to the creation, success, or challenges of the 21st natural hair movement.

Open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are described as questions that provide interview participants with the ability to explain themselves and their individual experiences about a subject or topic (Dartmouth, 2015). Open-ended questions are preferred in qualitative research because they create a space in which participants can

express attitudes, emotions, and thoughts (Infosurv Research, 2016). Open-ended questions also minimize the likelihood of respondents to answer questions in a limited, yes or no fashion (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Based on this information, the aim of the researcher was to capture individual meaning and foster conversation by allowing participants to describe their personal lived experiences with having natural, Afro-textured hair. The researcher began each respondent interview by posing a series of broad, open-ended questions to participants such as, 'how would you describe your natural hair?', 'what influenced your decision to 'go natural?' 'describe your process to become natural?', 'what are some of the most common questions you've been asked about your natural hair?' (Appendix S).

Sampling. The total number of women who self-identify as African-American in the United States is approximately 21 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). However, for feasibility purposes and to effectively study both the lived experiences and possible societal implications in connection to the topic of study, 13 respondent interviews were conducted. A non-probability, purposive sampling method was used to identify African-American women, who currently wear their hair in its natural state, between the ages of 18-70 who live in urban, suburban and rural areas in the East Coast and Southeast regions of the United States. In addition to purposive sampling, snowballing sampling was also used to elicit interviewees to encourage participation in the research study among friends, relatives or colleagues for completion. The researcher accounted for saturation while conducting the interview process. Saturation occurs when the same information, patterns, or responses are repeated despite an increase in the number of interviews (Elam, Lewis & Ritchie, 2003 as cited in Mason, 2010). Because

context, interpretation, and meaning were identified as key goals of qualitative research,

the interview process would end, and data collection would begin when the point of

saturation was reached and new information or meaning(s) were no longer extracted.

Recruitment. The researcher recruited for study participants by posting an

electronic flyer via the researcher's personal Facebook page (Appendix U). The

researcher also recruited for student participants within the Towson University Student

Government Association (SGA) group, Naturalistas. According to their online

description, the purpose of the group is to help maintain healthy hair, creating a sense of

pride about natural hair and "...educate young women and men on their crowns with open

conversation." The group meets weekly on campus at 5:00 pm.

Procedure

Table 1 - Participant Demographic Information Chart

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Interview Location	Months/years natural
Tameka	25	Baltimore, MD	26 years
Elyse	25	Baltimore, MD	6 years
Pamela	26	Charlotte, NC	8 years
Tabitha	38	Baltimore, MD	9 years
Samantha	25	Baltimore, MD	9 years
Tonya	36	Baltimore, MD	6 months
Kimma	35	Manassas, VA	6 years
Allyson	36	Charlotte, NC	16 years
Trina	60	Charlotte, NC	6 years
Bethany	36	Charlotte, NC	6 years
Toni	19	Towson, MD	2 years
Tammy	20	Towson, MD	8 years
Natasha	18	Towson, MD	4 years

Participant registration and selection process. The online registration form for

the research study was launched on September 11, 2017 (Appendix S) and coincided with

a public post to the researcher's personal Facebook page (Appendix T) and 20 color-

printed flyers that were posted in various locations throughout Towson University's

campus (Appendix U). The Facebook post and printed flyer provided a brief overview of

the study and encouraged in individuals to register using the designated hyperlink (for

Facebook recipients) or to email the researcher (for who viewed the printed flyer). The

online registration form contained fields to capture the name, age, email address, city of

residence, how they learned about the study, preferred method of communication, and

selected dates, times and preferred location of availability of interested individuals.

Using the established criteria from the research design section (i.e., females

between the ages of 18 to 70 years of age, self-identified as being of African descent or

origin, currently residing along the East Coast of the United States, and available during

specified times and dates listed on the online registration form), a total of 48 individuals

registered to take part in the research study over the two-week open registration period.

Registrants used a seven-option multiple choice question to self-identify their

racial category. African-American was the largest racial category accounting for 56.3

percent of registrant responses, followed by Black at 18.8 percent, Afro-Caribbean at

12.5 percent, Bi-Racial/Mixed Race at 8.3 percent. None of the 48 registrants self-

identified as African or Afro-Latina descent. Using a random number generator from

google.com and a cross-reference of the online registration form in comparison to the

researcher's schedule, 13 individuals were randomly selected as participants in the study.

The above Participant Demographic Information Chart (Table 1) shows participants

ranged in age from 18 to 60. The average participant age was 30.7 years old. In addition,

the average length of time participants reported wearing their Afro-textured hair in its

natural state was 8 years and 8 months, with the shortest amount of time reported at six

months and the longest amount of time reported at 25 years.

Table 2 - Participant Interview Chart

Participant Pseudonym	Interview Date	Interview Length
Tameka	September 14, 2017	55 minutes, 44 seconds
Elyse	September 20, 2017	54 minutes, 00 seconds
Pamela	September 23, 2017	56 minutes, 01 seconds
Tabitha	September 14, 2017	55 minutes, 39 seconds
Samantha	September 15, 2017	94 minutes, 37 seconds
Tonya	September 15, 2017	22 minutes, 23 seconds
Kimma	September 30, 2017	51 minutes, 44 seconds
Allyson	September 23, 2017	53 minutes, 27 seconds
Trina	September 23, 2017	58 minutes, 36 seconds
Bethany	September 23, 2017	57 minutes, 44 seconds
Toni	September 27, 2017	31 minutes, 56 seconds
Tammy	September 21, 2017	38 minutes, 04 seconds
Natasha	September 30, 2017	29 minutes, 53 seconds

Interview Length. Using the above Participant Interview Chart (Table 2) for

reference, the average time to complete the personal interview portion of the study was

50 minutes and 54 seconds with the longest interview taking 94 minutes and 37 seconds

to complete and the shortest interview completed in 22 minutes and 23 seconds.

Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identities of each study participant and were

used throughout the remaining sections.

Research study locations. Research interviews were conducted in several

different geographic locations. The most frequent geographic location was Baltimore,

Maryland where five out of the 13 studies were conducted followed by Charlotte, North

Carolina with four interviews, Towson, Maryland with three interviews and Manassas,

Virginia with one interview being conducted in this location (Table 1). In addition to the

geographical location, the study was conducted in a number of physical settings despite

the library branch locations options listed on the online registration form. The changes in

venue occurred to best suit the needs for study participants to engage in an open dialogue.

As such, five of the 13 interviews were conducted in a home setting, three interviews

were conducted in a professional work setting, three interviews were conducted at

Towson University's Cook Library and the remaining two interviews were conducted in a

public coffeehouse setting.

Research study structure. Prior to beginning the study, the researcher presented

each participant with the Informed Consent Form. Participants were advised of the form's

purpose and were asked to read over the form, and if in agreement, print their first and

last name, provide their signature and date in the appointed areas to serve as confirmation

that they were willing to move forward with their participation in the study. The

researcher then collected the signed Informed Consent Forms from each participant and
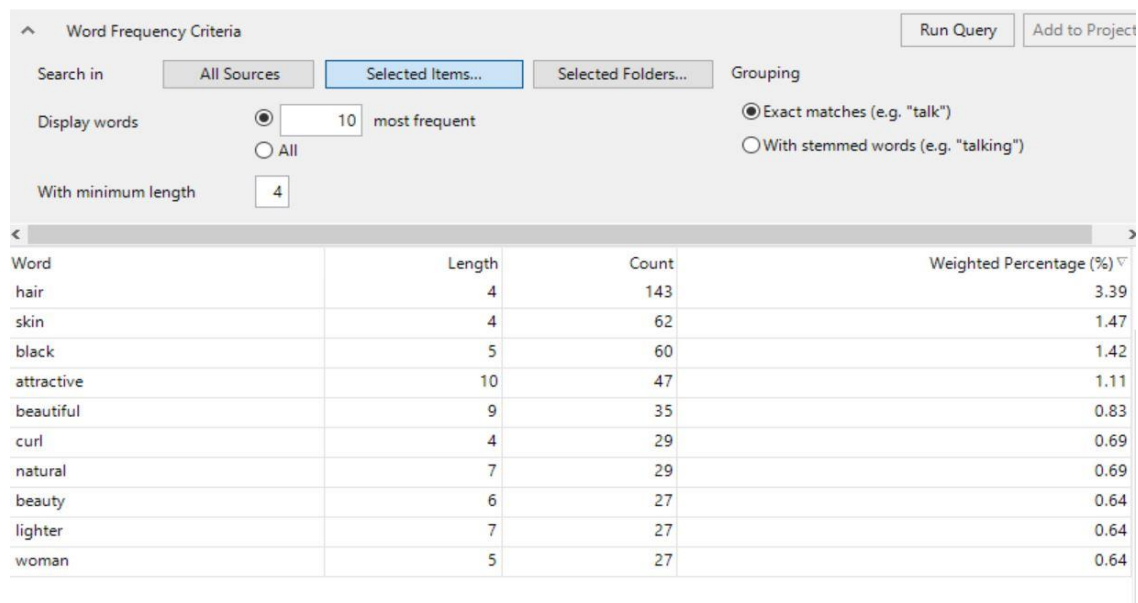
stored them for record keeping.

The researcher then described the structure of the study as two main components

to each participant. The first component of the study would consist of the researcher

showing participant three magazine ads on the screen of a computer tablet followed by a

series of questions pertaining to each featured image (textual analysis). The questions

would be the same, but the three images shown would be different. The second

component would comprise of the interviewer asking the participant series of questions

related to their personal experiences and perceptions on having natural hair (personal

interviews).

The researcher posed seven questions for each of the three magazine ads shown,

resulting in 21 questions posed for the textual analysis portion of the study (Appendix Q).

An additional 29 questions were posed to participants as part of the interview portion of

the study (Appendix R). Of the 29 questions, two questions, "What do you think may

think of the images shown?' and "How do you think others would perceive the images?"

were combined into a single question, "How do you think others may perceive the

images?" to provide clarity as feedback participants early on in the study indicated that

the questions appeared to be redundant. Additionally, four questions: "How do you think

natural hair is perceived by men, in particular, in terms of dating and/or a romantic

interest?", "What is your perception or opinion of dreadlocks?", "How do others perceive

dreadlocks?", and "Is there a difference between locs and dreadlocks?" were added over

the course of the study based on participant feedback.

Table 3 – Word Frequency Chart: Textual Analysis

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%) ▽
hair	4	143	3.39
skin	4	62	1.47
black	5	60	1.42
attractive	10	47	1.11
beautiful	9	35	0.83
curl	4	29	0.69
natural	7	29	0.69
beauty	6	27	0.64
lighter	7	27	0.64
woman	5	27	0.64

Word frequency – textual analysis. The researcher used word frequency counts

to identify the most common words used by participants to assess and evaluate the three

magazine ads that were shown as part of the textual analysis icebreaker activity. This
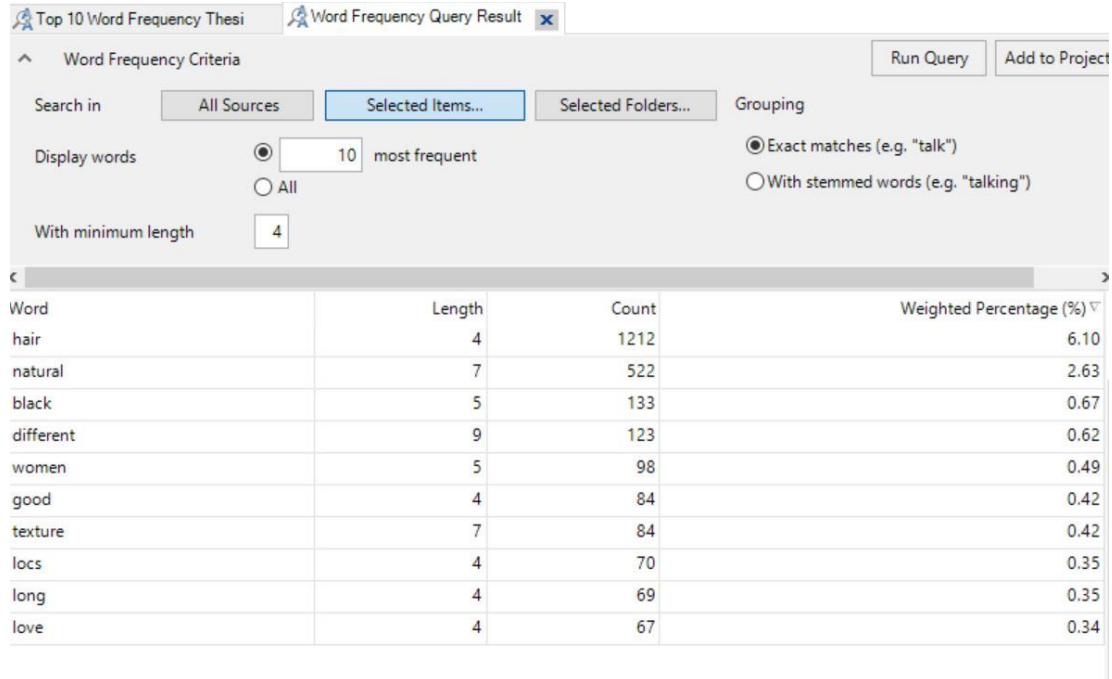
approach allowed the researcher to look for information frequencies and patterns relevant to the magazine ads through an objective measurement tool.

To achieve objectivity, all text spoken by the researcher was removed from the transcription record of each participant. Next, all text pertaining to the open-ended/personal interview section of the study was also removed from all participant transcription records. The modified transcriptions were then saved and uploaded into NVivo 11, a software tool using to compute and classify quantitative research data (QSR International, 2015). Once all 13 transcription records were uploaded into NVivo, prepositional words (i.e., like, because of, to, between, etc.) and behavioral descriptions (i.e., chuckle, cough, sneeze, laugh) were identified as 'stop words' and omitted from the word frequency query search. The query search criteria was restricted to the top 10 words that were at least four letters in length. As a result, the top 10 words most frequently used by participants during textual analysis portion of the study are as follows in descending rank order: hair (143), skin (62), Black (60), attractive (47), beautiful (35), curl and natural (29 tie), beauty, lighter, and woman (27 tie) (Table 3).

Table 4 – Word Frequency Chart: Personal Interviews

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%) ▽
hair	4	1212	6.10
natural	7	522	2.63
black	5	133	0.67
different	9	123	0.62
women	5	98	0.49
good	4	84	0.42
texture	7	84	0.42
locs	4	70	0.35
long	4	69	0.35
love	4	67	0.34

Word frequency – personal interviews. The researcher also used word

frequency counts to identify the most common words used by participants in answering

questions relative to their personal encounters, lived experiences, and opinions about

having natural hair. The procedural steps used to investigate word frequencies for the

personal interview portion of the study was similar to what was used for textual analysis.

However, all text pertaining to the textual analysis portion of the study was removed

from each of the 13 participant transcription records. Like textual analysis, this approach

allowed the researcher to look for initial patterns and frequencies of information relevant

to individual experiences and perceptions about having natural, Afro-textured hair. The

top 10 words most frequently used by participants during the open-ended/personal

interview portion of the study are as follows in descending rank order: hair (1212),

natural (522), Black (133), different (123), women (98), good and texture (tie 84), locs

(70), long (69) and love (67) (Table 4).

Results/Discussion

A series of personal interview sections conducted in September 2017 explored the natural hair experiences of 13 African-American women, ranging in age from 18 to 60. The sessions revealed the many complexities that exist in connection with the natural hair experience of Black women in the 21st century.

The experiences of these women go far beyond discussing the aesthetics of natural hair. Rather these sessions exposed the historical, cultural, and psychological dynamics that continue to regulate how African-American women are classified and perceived within the intracultural and dominant spaces of society. Eight major themes were revealed from the study: colorism, good vs. bad hair, journey, identity, microaggression, self-esteem, bonding, and social media usage (Appendix V). In addition, to the eight major themes outlined, several unique intricacies relative to the natural hair experience of study participants were also revealed from the research study.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis was introduced as an icebreaker activity to help the researcher build a rapport with participants before entering into the personal interview portion of the study as some of the questions were considered personal in nature.

The textual analysis also provided the researcher with a starting point of reference to measure participant's perceptions about natural hair. As such, the textual analysis portion of the study presented how Black hair has historically been represented in print media in connection with how it is perceived by individuals today. Such an analysis is critical to topic of study as it helped to frame individual perspectives and revealed the impact such images and messages have on Black women today relative to natural hair.

1962 Arta Product Ad. The 1962 Arta Product ad (Hairston, 2016) (Appendix N) was the first image used for the textual analysis portion of the study and resulted in a wide range of responses among the 13 study participants. The magazine ad shows the side profile of a light-skinned African-American or biracial woman with straightened black hair, makeup and earrings holding her hand out with the words "The Arta Promise" appearing just above her open palm. The model in the ad is looking down at the words. Another phrase, "Lighter, lovelier, skin beauty for you is…" appears just above the model's line of sight and is aligned with "The Arta Promise" text. An image of the Arta skin tone cream product and packaging is located underneath the model and the main text of the magazine ad.

The consensus among study participants was that the ad promoted concepts of colorism and prejudice, in which lighter-skinned is preferred over darker-skinned and considered more beautiful. Participants also noted that the ad seemed to promote "Whiteness" by referring to the model's European-like physical features, including her pointed nose and thin lips.

When asked to give their opinions on the model's hairstyle, participants noted that her hair texture had been altered in some way, either by applying a chemical relaxer or though using a hot comb, to achieve the look as shown in the ad, but it did not reflect the model's hair texture in its natural state. Study participants deemed the model shown in the Arta ad as very attractive.

Textual Analysis – 1972 Kodak Product Ad

The 1972 Kodak Product ad (Moore, 2014) (Appendix O) was the second image used for the textual analysis portion of the study. The Kodak Product magazine ad shows

a brown-skinned African-American woman whose hair is styled in an afro. The woman is

smiling while holding a slender black camera with both hands that covers a portion of her

face. The words, "Little camera. Big pictures" appears just below the woman's hands. A

second smaller photo of three African-Americans (one man and two women) is shown

smiling and posing during what appears to be a summertime cookout. Lastly, the words,

"New Kodak Pocket Instamatic" describes the type of Kodak camera featured in the ad.

Respondents noted the natural, Afro hair texture of the model shown in the Kodak

ad. The words "natural", "natural hair" and "Afro" were commonly used to describe the

model shown in the ad. One participant reported the model's hair as "Afro goals."

In addition to hair texture, the model's physical features and an assessment of her

attractiveness were also reported among participants for the second ad. Terms such as

"brown skin", "pretty facial features", "dark skin", and "cutesy" were reported. One

participant described the model as being reminiscent to the character Thelma Evans from

the 1970s sitcom *Good Times*. Participants also noted that, like the first ad, the full facial

profile of the model in the second ad was not fully visible. When asked to rate the

model's level of attractiveness, study participants reported the model in the Kodak ad to

be slightly more attractive than the model shown in the Arta ad.

Textual Analysis – 1982 Donnie's Super Curl Product Ad

The 1982 Donnie's Super Curl hair product ad (Hairston, 2016) (Appendix P) was

the third and final image used for the textual analysis portion of the study. The magazine

ad features an African-American woman and man whose hair is in the Jheri Curl

hairstyle. The ad shows the side profile of the man looking off into the distance while the

woman is looking straight ahead, smiling and has both of her arms wrapped around the

man in an embrace. The words "Super Curl" appear above the heads of the man and
woman in larger font. A second and much smaller photo appears near the bottom of the
ad showing the Super Curl product.

Laughter, in conjunction with references to the 1988 film, *Coming to America*,
were the two most popular responses/impressions among study participants. It appears
participants that viewed the magazine ad an extension of the comical parody shown
throughout the movie about the Jheri Curl hairstyle ad fictitious *SoulGlo* hair product.
However, study participants also noted the apparent affection shown between the two
models in the ad as a representation of "Black love."

The Jheri Curl hairstyle shown in the third ad was the least favored among study
participants in comparison to the two previous ads. Respondents stated that these
hairstyles were "outdated", "don't exist anymore", or were specific to a certain era. Other
participants commented that the hair texture of the models were "very wet", "shiny",
"greasy" and "curls dripping", while one participant found the hairstyles to be "neat" and
"well-shaped."

Most participants rated the models shown in the third magazine ad as attractive.
However, the male model evoked a stronger response and received higher ratings of
attractiveness in comparison to the female model shown in the same ad.

Personal Interviews

Some of the most vivid accounts were recorded during the personal interview
portion of the study as participants revealed encounters that influenced their perceptions
and, in some cases, behaviors relative to their individual natural hair experiences. These

experiences highlight the historical, racial and psychological conflicts that continue to
operate within modern day society.

One example of the historical, racial and psychological conflicts that exist in
society relative to natural, Afro-textured hair and natural hairstyles is the subject of
cultural appreciation. Despite recent occurrences, including Kim Kardashian's 'boxer
braids' (Aterbery, 2016) and Marc Jacobs 'mini buns' during his Spring 2015 fashion
show (Oliver, 2015), the topic of cultural appropriation was not mentioned by any of the
study participants in connection to their natural hair experiences. The lack of reference to
cultural appropriation may suggest that subject is more of an issue on a case-by-case
basis within the music, fashion, and entertainment industries and not in the personal day-
to-day lives of research participants.

The question 'what influenced you to go natural?' generated a range of different
responses from study participants. While some women reported seeing images on social
media and video tutorials on YouTube as sources of inspiration to go natural, others
reported a concern for their personal health and stopping the use of chemicals as
motivation for going natural. One participant noted her experience in beating cancer as a
major factor in her decision to natural as she stated, "…it's a healthier choice. If it's any
spot that you can get a slice of health in, you need to get it."

Several women also highlighted the strong influence that family members had in
their decision to go natural. Some women reported receiving encouragement from family
members to go natural, while others revealed that they were among the first in their
families to stop the use of applying chemicals to their hair.

One participant noted that she "accidentally went natural" as she could no longer afford routine visits to the hair salon to receive a "touch-up" (the process of applying hair relaxer to newly grown hair follicles located near the base of the scalp). The study identified an array of circumstances and sources to explain why Black women have opted to abandon the use of chemical hair relaxers in the 21st century. No single source was identified to explain this occurrence.

Lastly, the interviews also highlighted shared commonalities among study participants even though each interview was conducted independently and in different locations.

R1: How do African-American women negotiate their understanding of natural hair?

African-American women negotiate their understanding of natural hair in a variety of ways and from a variety of sources, including, but not limited to: mass media, personal encounters (including familial relationships) as well as through historical accounts and references.

For example, several participants attributed relationships with family members as being one of the greatest sources of influence in shaping their concept of natural hair. Of interest to the researcher was the vast range of opinions about natural hair with respect to familial relationships in Black culture. For instance, Allyson recalled how her older sister (who has been natural since 1995) referred to chemical relaxers as "creamy crack" and equated the process of applying chemical relaxers as "trying to teach you how to hate yourself". Comments from Allyson's sister appear to suggest that the process of applying chemical relaxers serves as a function of confirming to the ascribed identity that

mainstream society has created for Black women to be deemed socially acceptable (long, straight, European-looking hair). Yet, Tabitha recalled the importance placed on getting a relaxer in her family as a necessary practice to maintain acceptance in both in her native Jamaican culture and family dynamic. Tabitha described how her cousin's decision to go natural more than 20 years ago drew negative responses and was perceived as a "scandal" within her family.

In addition to familial relationships, accounts from several participants appear to point to a generational divide regarding the perception and acceptance of natural hair in Black culture. During their interviews, some participants expressed that natural hair was not favorable among older generations, particularly among Baby Boomers and Traditionalists (Center for Generational Kenetics, 2016). One participant suggested that older generations within Black culture, "may not understand the allure of keep Afro-textured hair." The perception of natural hair as unkempt was reported during a number of interviews as one participant recalled her grandmother's disapproval of a television game show contestant appearing on screen with her natural, Afro-textured hair.

Colorism. A byproduct of the Antebellum era and sexual relations between White slave masters and Black slave women, the colorism theme was present throughout many personal interviews. It is described in the codebook as, "terms used to describe a preference of lighter-skinned over darker-skinned individuals." The concept proved to be especially painful for one research participant as she attempted to recall her childhood haircare experiences. Participant Tabitha attributed colorism, a big part of her native culture, had as to why her haircare needs were neglected as a child and why she was not regarded as favorably as lighter-skinned members within her family:

> I grew up in a family that was very impacted by colorism…so the challenge was that I wasn't liked as much as my stepmother's kids and my Dad's family, they were very color struck and they were all, 'Why isn't my hair texture not' – none of us have this particular hair structure – I mean they're hair texture, it was lighter, looser than others but I can't really remember having my hair done as a child.

Through this painful experience, Tabitha developed an understanding that her skin complexion was not accepted by certain members of her family nor by certain members of society. The colorism theme can also be found within mass marketing and advertising campaign strategies connected to the natural hair movement. Several major hair care companies and manufacturers have expanded their brand and broadened their consumer base at the expense of omitting or removing darker-skinned women from their billboard, print, and commercial ads. While some may cite the 2017 Shea Moisture commercial ad referenced in the Literature Review as proof of this occurrence, evidence of this theme was also present in 2014 when Carol's Daughter began replacing its promotional ads, which previously featured darker-skinned celebrities, like Jada Pinkett-Smith and Mary J. Blige, with more racial ambiguous models after the company was purchased by L'Oreal (Jerkins, 2017). Thus, the message both in the context of a personal, traumatic childhood experience, as in the case of Tabitha, and on a larger commercial scale reinforces the basic premise of colorism that lighter-skinned is more preferred, socially acceptable over darker-skin as in the case of Shea Moisture, Carol's Daughter, and L'Oreal product ads.

Good vs. Bad Hair. Intertwined with the theme of colorism, origins of the good vs. bad hair theme also stem from sexual relations between White slave owners and their Black female slaves during the Antebellum period in American history. By codebook definition, the good vs. bad hair theme is the concept of preferential treatment given to

individuals who possess a finer, looser hair texture ('good hair') in comparison to

individuals who possess a thicker, more tightly coiled hair texture. Participant Elyse

recalled using good vs. bad hair in her attempts to frame the concept of having natural

hair. Elyse recounted, "Oh yeah, so kind of to see people with natural hair, I

automatically assumed they must have 'good hair' you know, they're natural."

Study participants also referenced perceptions held by others through personal

encounters for developing their concept of good vs. bad hair. Participant Bethany recalled

an exchange with her uncle who perceived her natural hair as 'nappy', a term often used

as a synonym for 'bad' or tightly coiled hair, and expressed his disapproval:

> …my uncle said to me once on a Sunday afternoon, 'What's wrong with your
> hair? Why does your hair look like that? It looks really nappy.' And the best
> statement that I could say to him was, 'You'll have to take that up with God.

Bethany noted in her description of the encounter that her uncle's light-skin and

hair texture were likely the result of sexual relations between White slave owners and

Black female slaves, "…And so it upset me and I almost wanted to say to him that his

master had a closer relationship with the women slaves than mine did."

In present day, the good hair vs. bad hair theme has evolved into a concept widely

known within the natural hair movement as texture discrimination. Texture

discrimination is the preference and prominent feature of one type of natural hair texture

versus another and has been a source of debate within the natural hair movement. In

many cases, curly, wavy, ringlet, type 3 ('good') hair texture is preferred and represented

more in mass media over the kinky, coily, cotton-like, type 4 ('bad') hair texture. In June

2017, Queen Bri, a popular hair blogger, took to Instagram to address this phenomenon

and the hierarchy system that has been created within the natural hair movement as a

direct result, "At the top of the hierarchy is loose curly hair and at the bottom is kinky

hair. There is no denying the natural hair community displays a preference for looser

curls" (Jet, 2017). Bri went on to describe the differences with respect to exposure,

popularity, and endorsement deals between the two different hair types. "The top

vloggers who have the most followers and the most opportunities to work with natural

hair companies all tend to have loose curly hair. The Instagram natural hair sites tend to

showcase 3c hair and looser the most. I rarely see type 4 hair represented" (Jet, 2017).

Texture discrimination has also been applied, in some cases, as a form of

regulation for who should and should not be included in the natural hair movement.

Evidence of this occurrence was described by Elyse:

> I had a debate on Facebook, with actually one of my cousins who has that TV ad-
> type natural hair. And she was saying like, 'Oh, I don't even understand why girls
> go natural with this 'Kunta Kinte' [a reference to the main character in the 1977
> film *Roots*] hair'…bashing women who had a different hair texture than she
> had…I'm one of those cotton-having hair chicks. So, I'm like, umm, no, no you
> won't! How dare you as a Black woman…a natural Black woman bash someone
> who's one of your own because your hair feels a different type of way.

Though the debate between the participant and her cousin is of interest, perhaps,

what may be more telling of this exchange is a reference to the "TV ad-type natural hair".

This specific reference supports the notion that one natural hair type may be featured

more prominently through mass media channels, including television, than other natural

hair types.

The good vs. bad hair theme and the evolution of texture discrimination concept

show evidence of a pervasive, divisive cast system that continues to operate with attempts

to regulate the visual representation of natural hair and/or an individual's entry into the

natural hair movement. This, despite the premise that the natural hair movement is a

rejection of the dominant-hegemonic Eurocentric standards of beauty and a celebration of

beauty in all its natural forms. Thus, the good vs. bad hair theme and references to texture

discrimination show that to understand natural hair, an individual must also understand

that not all hair textures will be equally regarded and respected in the natural hair

movement.

In the context of natural, Afro-textured the decision made by some individuals to

wear their hair in locs or dreadlocks was found to have possessed multiple meanings and

interpretations among study participants. As such, a clear distinction emerged when

participants were asked if there was a difference between locs and dreadlocks. Some

participants felt the terms locs and dreadlocks were interchangeable. Other participants

believed the term dreadlocks is used specifically to describe an individual of the

Rastafarian cultural and religious movement, while the term locs is used to describe the

aesthetics of the interlocked or sisterlocked method that is achieved through palm-rolling

loose hair to a uniform size. While others described "dreadlocks" as a term that has been

placed individuals by others who choose to wear their hair in this hairstyle.

Feedback from one participant seemed to suggest a shift in how the perception of

dreadlocks has changed within the 25 years. Perceived to be a hairstyle indicative of

social awareness and unity as illustrated through popular artists from the 1990s such as

Arrested Development, Lauryn Hill, and Soul II Soul, this hairstyle seems to have taken

on new meaning in the 21st century. As evidence of this shift in perception, writer Dawn

Trice details how the meaning of dreadlocks has changed from one of social

consciousness to criminality in her 2013 article entitled, *"Have Dreadlocks Outgrown*

their Old Meaning?" The focus of the article centers on Timothy Simmons, a 32-year old,

Chicago lab research technician. Simmons details how his dreadlocks, once perceived as "a power statement" and symbolic representations of his image, heritage, and strength, drew increased negative attention from the police, prompting Simmons' decision to cut his dreadlocks (Trice, 2013). "I cut my hair because I didn't want to be identified as a thug," recalls Simmons (Trice, 2013). The article describes a shift in the perception of the dreadlocks hairstyle from the socially conscious "…handing out fliers on the quads of university campuses" or as "…the artsy, urban professionals working gigs that welcomed…expression" to symbols of gangsterism and drug activity as personified by rappers Lil Wayne, Chief Keef, and Wiz Khalifa (Trice, 2013).

Further evidence an apparent shift in the perception of dreadlocks can be found in Hampton University's, a historically Black college, decision to ban its business school students from wearing dreadlocks in 2001 (Trice, 2013). Thus, understanding natural hair not only involves influences from established personal relationships and through personal encounters, but also accounting for possible shifts in meaning and perceptions within the intracultural (same cultural group) dynamic as described in Dawn Trice's article on dreadlocks.

R2: How do African-American women feel about their experiences of natural hair?

Journey. Participants often referred to their natural hair experience as a journey. Specific use of the term appears to allude to the mental, emotional, and, in some cases, spiritual distances traveled relative to each individual's natural hair experience. As such, learning to care for one's own natural hair was described as a major focal point within the journey theme. Participant Trina used journey as a metaphor to describe the learning curve she faced in attempting to care for her natural hair:

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> It really, really is a journey and you have to kind of look at it in that way…Just like almost anything else in life is a journey, but when…you've become used to doing your hair a certain way for so long, and now all of a sudden all of that is taken away… Just like anything else whether it's…learning a new language or taking a course or something like that. It's going to take a minute to acclimate and get yourself…

In conjunction with the perceived learning curve, participants reported their natural hair experience resulted increased levels of patience they developed from trying various hair products, hairstyles, and different techniques to achieve a desired look. Participant Kimma described the journey in terms of length of time, commitment, and patience required to understand natural hair:

> Going natural…it takes years, years and years and years to really get to know your hair, get to know the type of manipulation it needs, um, to do the certain things that you want it to do. You know, everybody's hair doesn't twist the same…it literally depends on what you want your hair to do and what you're looking to get out of it. Um, it, it's patience, it's a journey…

While the journey concept was used to describe the patience, commitment, and time required in learning to care for one's own hair by participants, the term can also serve as a representation of the distance required to re-learn one's own sense of self in the context of mainstream society. In other words, the personal natural hair experience of participants may not solely be indicative of forward-thinking or forward-moving in terms of visual aesthetics such as mastering a particular hairstyle, but rather the journey metaphor may symbolize the distance required to reclaim their personal roots, literally, figuratively, and culturally.

Identity. While some participants within the study viewed their natural hair experiences as a journey, others felt their experience spawned an assessment, re-evaluation, and re-discovery of their individual identities. A number of participants reported their natural hair experience forced them to consider who they were and how

they saw themselves in the context of others and the larger society. Participant Elyse

described questioning the authenticity of her identity as part of her natural hair

experience:

> …and then, it also makes you question, do you really know who you are if you've
> never experienced or you don't know what your natural texture hair is? …before
> going natural, I didn't know because it had always been so ingrained in me to just
> relax, relax, relax.

An example as to how major hair care companies used messages of social

acceptability and, in some cases, maternal affection to promote the sale of chemical

relaxers and influence individual perceptions of identity can be found in a 30 second

1994 PCJ commercial (Richardson, 2017). In the commercial, a young African-American

girl is seen coloring at a table with ballerina music from a music box playing in the

background (Richardson, 2017). A voiceover of a young girl states, "The things my

mommy does to show me that she cares. She makes cards that say I love you and pretties

up my hair" (Richardson, 2017). At the eight second mark, the voiceover of a woman

proclaims, "I use PCJ's pretty and silky no-lye relaxer. It's improved conditioning

formula has less harsh chemicals than other no-lye relaxers" (Richardson, 2017). The

commercial goes on to describe the product and at the 21 second mark the little girl

states, "My mommy gives me PCJ pretty and silky because she loves me!" (Richardson,

2017).

What is most telling about the ad are its underlying messages. For example,

applying a chemical relaxer to a little Black girl's scalp will not only result in her having

"pretty hair", but is also indicative of a mother's love. The ad seems to suggest that little

girls who do not receive chemical relaxers are not loved by their mothers. Thus, the PCJ

commercial serves as an example of the dominant-hegemonic code in action as part of the

encoding and decoding theory. The commercial illustrates how power entities, such large

product manufacturers and hair care companies, used mass media to distribute carefully,

crafted messages and influence perceptions about standards of beauty specific to the

relationship between Black mothers and daughters. In doing so, these powerful entities

played a significant role in shaping how African-American little girls connected their

sense of identity relative to the appearance of their hair.

Further evidence of the apparent connection between chemical relaxers and Black

female identity was noted during the personal interview with participant Kimma. Kimma

called for Black mothers to be more responsible in their decisions of whether to

chemically relax their daughter's hair and its potential consequences. She cautions that

applying chemical relaxers to the scalps of Black little girls can hinder their sense

individuality and, instead, result in an ascribed identity that has been cast upon them by

mainstream society and their mothers:

> …African-American women, we often have children, girls, and we get frustrated with their hair…because it's not something they know how to do because we aren't really big doing hair, we're not all hairdressers contrary to popular belief, so, um, we run out and we usually get them a perm or something as a quick fix. Like, you know that goes back to your parenting skills and stuff, but if you force the envelope on them, you know, by the time that they decide to...okay, I'm on my own or something, they could be in their 20s and what happens is you force an identity on them, that they're not 100% sure that that's who they are or that's who they want to be. When you do that and, and as a young person, you're trying to find yourself, that's really, really, hard, you know, versus if you had natural hair, and you know…holistically who you are, it's a lot easier to have discernment in say, "I think I want to try this," versus "I've done this all my life, I don't know any differently and I'm kind of scared to go and see what I look like holistically.

As such, some participants viewed their natural hair experience as an opportunity

to rid themselves of these scribed identities and create new patterns or reinvent their

sense of identity. Study participant Tammy describes how her 'big chop' coincided with a decision to reshape her sense of identity:

> … I just need a fresh start. I just need to reinvent myself. I don't like who I am right now, so I'm going to change everything. And your hair can be just like an identity...And...I didn't like my identity so I wanted to change it…so I felt the first start was getting rid of this damage..So, just getting rid of that and starting over. I wanted to start over in all aspects.

The decision made by participants to re-evaluate, and in some cases, rid themselves from past identities or reinvent themselves serves as an example of the complex relationship between individual self and the dynamics of power as exhibited within Western society (Burkitt, 2008). According to author Ian Burkitt, the way in which an individual sees him or herself is a byproduct of the power society exerts over individuals through classifications and labels. In support of this notion, French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault argues that society applies its power and authority "by studying and cataloguing all the varieties of individuality that exist around the norm" (Burkitt, 2008, p. 91). Therefore, the concept of personal identity and what it means to be a Black woman in Westernized society has been largely shaped by systems of classification and cataloguing (i.e., racial and ethnic categories, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic, etc.) as a demonstration of society's authoritative power.

In addition to an assessment and reinvention of personal identities, participants also described their natural hair experience as a daily attempt to negotiate their sense of identity between two distinct worlds, mainstream America and Black culture. This form of existence, known as double-consciousness, results in a constant state of conflict as a person's individual identity tries to navigate and adapt to the dominant society through assimilation and conformity while simultaneously trying to retain authenticity and

connectivity to one's individual identity. Workplace and professional settings were referenced as the state where double-consciousness most frequently occurred according to study participants. The need to be regarded as professionals in the workplace was noted in several interviews.

According to a 2001 study (Harris & Johnson), Hair that is straighter in texture is deemed as acceptable and professional, while hair in its natural state is viewed as unprofessional or unsuitable. Former *Glamour* magazine associate editor Ashley Baker's comments about natural hair provides further evidence of how natural hair is regarded as unprofessional. During her June 2007 presentation entitled, "Dos and Don'ts of Corporate Fashion" to a group of Manhattan lawyers the former editor reportedly stated, "Just say no to the 'fro" (Doring, 2007). As for dreadlocks, how truly dreadful! Shocking that some people think it it's appropriate to wear those hairstyles at the office" (Jere-Malanda, 2008, p. 18).

To this end, several study participants described blow-drying or straightening their natural hair or wearing a wig to present 'a professional look' during the employment interview process. Consequently, many participants reported wearing their natural hair once they were hired. This complex expresses a desire by study participants to remain true to their natural identities while still garnering acceptance and respect from their colleagues and superiors. Participant Bethany described carrying "Bobby pins and a flat iron for emergencies" as specific measures she takes to maintain her natural hair in the workplace. Bethany stated taking these measures to avoid being viewed unprofessional, "I don't want to look bad in front of anyone. I don't want to look like I don't…take care of my hair or, um, that I look disheveled. If I leave my Bobby pins behind, I panic..."

Double-consciousness presents a world of inconsistencies, colliding interpretations, and a constant state of adjustment. Adjustments to fit in mainstream society while simultaneously remaining true to one's individual identity. For example, is the standard for who or what entities set the standard for professionalism? Are efforts to maintain a polished and professional look as described by Bethany deemed as attempts to tame one's natural hair for the sake of approval and comfort of mainstream society? Is it possible to remain completely authentic to one's sense of identity without incorporating elements of the dominant society?

An account from participant Pamela demonstrates a second example of double-consciousness in being regarded a cultural and racial point of reference relative to her experience as natural-haired Black woman:

> …being Black and keeping my natural hair, which they might not be used to, I end up being a reference, perhaps, an archetype…I feel the extra pressure to, um, put my best foot forward, my best face forward, at all times…being a minority…I think your actions can be taken out of context or much deeper than they should be because they're projecting the whole race upon you. You are the representative.

Thus, the identity theme demonstrates participants' use of double-consciousness, the negotiated and oppositional codes to describe feels about their natural hair experience imposed systems of classification and catalogue and create their own sense of self through their natural hair experience.

Microaggression. Closely connected to the identity theme, microaggression is defined as, the "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Nigatu, 2013). Yet, a simple word dissection reveals the true nature of this concept: Micro – slight, small, or modest

and Aggression – negative or hostile acts or actions. Microaggressions describes the

relatively common ways in which racial, ethnic, and other minorities are marginalized by

the larger society.

For example, the microaggression theme revealed longstanding issues with

respectability politics and double-consciousness as Black women often find themselves at

a crossroads or walking a tightrope in attempts to remain true to their identities *and* a

desire to be accepted by their peers. Bethany's account of keeping Bobby pins and a flat

iron for emergencies, appears to suggest that Black women continue to view themselves

through the lens of others and, in doing so, are likely to adopt certain measures to

maintain the approval of mainstream society even in the context of having natural hair. In

addition, the microaggression theme gave rise to historical notion that the Black female

body, including hair, continues to be viewed as an object. In their separate accounts,

participants Tabitha and Tameka detailed that their hair has met with intrigue and has

been subjected to unauthorized touch similar with no regard to seeking approval

beforehand.

For example, participant Tameka recounted how her hair natural hair has, at

times, made her feel like a pet or a subordinate by mainstream society due to

unauthorized acts of touching her hair, "I feel like they make you feel subordinate. Like

you are an object like that they can just touch without asking or anything like that." A

similar account from Tabitha supports the notion of natural hair being subjected to

authorized touch by member of mainstream society:

> I have to say this, because I think every Black woman who is natural has had this
> experience. I had a coworker and she was married to a Black man, and I think she
> thought because of that…she felt she had license to do this...she touched my hair.
> I was like, 'Girl, why are you touching my hair! I don't know you like that!' I

reacted this way by slapping her hand away because I was very shocked to get that. I think they think that you're a pet or something. Or they feel some sort of permission, license to be overly fascinated with your hair.

The perception of natural, Afro-textured hair as animalistic or exotic in nature and readily available for touch serves as an example of Black feminist perspectives, intersectionality, and the commodification of the Black female body at work. The American slavery dynamic presented the Black female body, including hair, as foreign, exotic and bestial in nature based on its African origins. As such, the slavery system regulated the Black female body by force whether through acts of physical or sexual violence or by mandating that Black hair remain covered. Historically, the Black female body has subjected to physical touch without regard and has long been considered a being that requires regulation, but never powerful enough to regulate the acts of others. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that mainstream society does not feel the need to get permission to touch a Black woman's hair as history suggests that the Black female body is readily available for human consumption and touch.

A second form of microaggression relative to the natural hair experience of participants is the radicalization or political portrayal of natural hair. Study participants expressed dissatisfaction with instant associations to anti-government or militant groups simply by choosing to wear their hair in its natural, un-chemically treated state. Participant 'Samantha' described her frustration with the assumed militant persona of Black women with natural hair:

>…natural hair or a Black woman's decision to wear her hair natural is seen as political. It's like the moment that a woman decides that she doesn't want to model her aesthetic after, um, the majority culture…somehow, she is dangerous, that somehow, she's defiant…

While some may dismiss the militant persona of natural-haired Black women simply as a historical reference symbolic of the social and political climate during 1960s, the portrayal of women with natural hair as abrasive, defiant, and political continues today. A recent example of this occurrence can be found in the 2017 BET television series *Rebel*. One notable example is the 2017 BET television show, *Rebel* (Singleton, 2017). The television show's main character, Rebecca "Rebel" Knight, portrayed by Danielle Moné Truitt, is brown-skinned African-American women who wears her hair in its natural state. She is depicted in the television series an aggressive, dominant, and strong woman who is often involved in physical confrontations and becomes an adversary figure against the Oakland police department. Thus, the association between natural hair and the aforementioned traits possessed by the show's main character perpetuates the microaggression that African-American women who wear their hair in a natural state are angry, defiant, and political, worthy of marginalization as they are dangerous to the established system and orders of society.

Self-esteem. The concept of self-esteem was apparent throughout all interviews. The recurrence of the self-esteem theme was presented in a variety of ways relative to each participant's natural hair experience. Participants expressed a range of feelings from insecure and vulnerable to confident and developing a sense of pride relative to their self-esteem and personal natural hair experience. As, such self-esteem was an integral part of each participant's natural hair experience.

Feelings of insecurity and vulnerability were frequently reported by participants as part of the initial stages of their natural hair experience. These feelings were often described related to how their natural hair would be viewed by others. Participant Allyson

recalled feeling inadequate and unattractive in middle school due to a lack of knowledge

about her natural hair. She recounted going to school, "looking a mess. A pure D mess."

As a result, Allyson stated that her self-concept was negatively affected.

Like Allyson, many participants also reported feeling insecure among their peers

about their natural hair within an academic or school-type setting. Bethany shared feeling

insecure regarding her natural hair experience and starting her freshman year of college.

She described doing the 'big chop' just prior to leaving her home for college. At the time,

Bethany viewed it as a rite of passage, a symbolic transition from adolescence into

adulthood. Yet, Bethany recalled feeling insecure about her natural hair upon arrival on

campus because, "I don't recall anybody looking like me when I got there. So, it like,

backfired. The natural didn't feel natural."

In addition to the perception among peers, participants also expressed feeling

insecure and vulnerable regarding romantic interests. Elyse recalled feeling exposed and

vulnerable relative to her natural hair experience and romantic relationship, "…with

natural hair…it's like seeing me naked…he's seeing the real me…is he going to think

this is attractive? …it is, like, nerve wrecking as hell."

The above descriptions should not lead one to assume that the natural hair

experience has not been without benefit or reward to study participants. While

participants recalled feelings of insecurity and vulnerability during the early stages of

their natural hair experience, an equal number of participants reported gaining a new

sense of confidence, pride, and self-love as part of their natural hair experience.

Many participants reported that their natural hair experience went beyond

removing the use of chemicals from their hair grooming practices. The act of 'going

natural' was regarded as a process in which study participants were forced to address their deepest insecurities to arrive at a place of self-love. Many participants reported questioning their understanding and assessment of self-love during this time. Elyse recounts her thought process when questioning the concept of self-love, "…it kind of makes you question, 'How much do you really love yourself?'…you don't know how much you love yourself or how much you *think* you love yourself until you have to be at the rawest, purest form of yourself…"

In addition to questions about the meaning of self-love, participants reported gaining renewed self-confidence through their natural hair experience. Tammy reported a boost of self-confidence related to her natural hair, "Having natural hair has taught me that I have more confidence than I thought I did …it was the biggest…boost for my confidence that I could ever have. I don't think…I would be as confident as I am." Pamela also echoed sentiments of confidence and pride as she expressed a belief that she naturally possesses physical features and traits that have recently been made popular through cosmetic surgical procedures, "…the trend these days, especially for non-Black people, are to try and texturize their hair…so I do realize that I'm born with a lot these attributes that people are…going to cosmetic surgery for. So, I feel naturally blessed."

While the concept of self-confidence was more closely connected to one of internal and psychological advancement for some participants, other participants noted that an increase sense in self-confidence meant freeing themselves from the ritual of frequenting hair salons. In her detailing her natural hair experience, participant Trina recounted, "I'm just happy that I can manage my hair better…because in the beginning I

felt like I was kind of a slave to the natural hairstylist because I didn't know how to do my own hair."

Thus, the concept of self-esteem represented a broad range of emotions unique to the personal experiences and encounters of study participants. From feelings of insecurity and vulnerability to self-love and self-confidence, self-esteem was a persistent state in which all study participants reported was part of their natural hair experience.

Bonding. Bonding was the final theme reflected in participants' accounts of their natural hair experience. Participants reported developing an informal bond with other African-American women who also wear their hair in its natural state. Recognition of this newfound kinship appears to have spawn the creation of a newfound term, naturalista. According to Urban Dictionary, naturalista is described as, "a Black female who takes pride in her Black hair (that is not permed or been chemically processed in anyway)." While textually accurate, the term does not fully embody the personal encounters, positive exchanges, and sense of community that has developed as evident by the number of regional, national and international natural-hair meetup events (such as the annual CurlFest event) in celebration of natural, Afro-textured hair. Participant Natasha recounted feeling part of a larger community when describing her natural hair experience, "…it makes me feel like I'm part of a community, like a secret club and I like that a lot. I feel more connected to other Black women with natural hair." Samantha recounted receiving more complimentary remarks and positive words of affirmation from other Black women in her experience of being natural, "…I feel like, since the natural hair movement, that gives us…a conversation starter. I feel like, more Black women have spoken to me or complimented me because I am a natural woman."

**R3: How are African-American women influenced by mass media messages of
natural hair?**

African-American women in the 21st century are continuously inundated daily
with messages and images through traditional and new mass media channels. The
presence of new media platforms has been influential in creating, disseminating, and
shaping the perception of natural hair among study participants. Particularly, the Internet
and social media provide instantaneous access to public spaces in which both positive
and negative perceptions about natural hair can be created, disseminated, and reproduced.
As such, study participants reported receiving messages about natural hair through
several mass media channels, including advertising, television, film, music videos, and
social media.

It is, however, important to consider new media in the context of online Black
feminism and the existing power dynamic. While YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and
Twitter all contain content rich content relative to images of natural hair, online
communities, and a host of video tutorials, the platforms in which user-driven content is
hosted on continues to be owned by traditional, hierarchical systems of power and
authority. There is a difference in the power dynamic between ownership of a platform
from which messages are created and disseminated (as in the case of Twitter) versus a
collective group using said platform to create content of which messages and
interpretations are circulated (as in the case of "Black Twitter").

Print advertisements, particularly those featured in magazines, proved least
influential on study participants regarding images or messages of natural hair. As
demonstrated from the textual analysis portion of the study, participants ranked the

models shown in the 1982 Super Curl ad as the most attractive in their personal opinion, with the model from the 1962 Arta product ad deemed as the least attractive through calculated scores. It is also important to consider the age of print advertisement in comparison to other mass media channel. Many study participants expressed their opinions about the magazine ads in the context of newer words, phrases, and concepts that have been developed in the 21st century. For example, one participant expressed her disappointment about the 1962 Arta product in the context of being 'woke' (an individual who is attune to social justice issues). Another participant used the word 'melanin' to convey her high regard for the model featured 1972 Kodak ad. This may suggest that African-American women are rejecting the historical dominant-hegemonic messages that equates lighter skin to beauty and, through their participation in the natural hair movement of the 21st century, illustrating examples of the negotiated and oppositional codes by creating their own concept of what is beautiful. This may also explain why this print advertisement was least influential among study participants regarding messages about natural hair.

Study participants referenced specific television shows such ABC's *Blackish, How to Get Away with Murder*, and *Scandal* and HBO's *Insecure* as being some more visible in the representation of natural hair on television. As evidence, participant 'Tameka' pointed to *Blackish* and Issa Rae (creator of the *Insecure* television series) as example of television's recent efforts to accurately depict natural hair, "You definitely see a lot more women with natural hair…we have now like the [TV] show *Blackish*, and everything Issa Rae does and just the people who are doing their best to make TV…be representative about how things really look."

Several participants expressed that representations of natural hair are far more infrequent in the music and film industries when compared to television. During her interview, Kimma noted an apparent gender disparity of natural hair in the music industry as she referred to several male artists including J. Cole, Kendrick Lamar, and Common who wore their hair in its natural state, but was only able to name one female artist. "I think with a lot of more conscious artists, they don't mind it as much…on the male side…like J. Cole and Kendrick Lamar or Common…there's certain types of people who help push the envelope…they encourage you to…be yourself…on the male side." However, most study participants felt that mass media and the R&B/hip-hop music industry still promoted images of women with long, straight, European-type hair as the ideal standard of beauty as evident through the popularity of such artists as Beyonce, Rhianna, Nicki Minaj, and Cardi B.

The American film industry was also noted for its lack of accurate representation of natural hair. Some participants stated that natural hair most often appeared in film as a historical reference or in association with the period of American slavery as depicted in the film *12 Years a Slave*. While several participants referenced the 2017 film *Girls Trip* for its all-Black female leading cast, many observed that weaves or extensions were worn by all actresses except for comedian-actress Tiffany Haddish.

Social media usage. Social media has become a form of digital technology that much of world can't seem to live without. From accessing video tutorials to participating in live group chats, the presence of social media is intertwined with so many different facets of life in the 21st century.

The consensus among study participants was that social media, specifically YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were primary sources for creating and distributing content relative to messages about natural hair in mass media. According to a 2014 Pew Research Study, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were the top three social media networks for African-American users (Krogstad, 2015). However, accounts from participants interviews show that messages about natural hair are not consistent across these top three networks platforms. For example, participants reported that messages on Twitter about natural hair appeared to be more negative regarding public perception. Participant 'Toni' recalled seeing posts on Twitter that equated natural hair to being in a state of poverty, "On Twitter, like I've always seen, "Oh, if you go natural you're broke." The association between natural hair and poverty on Twitter was also echoed by Natasha during her interview, "I've seen it on Twitter and stuff, like oh she looks broke, like whatever. I don't like this natural hair thing."

However, study participants pointed to Facebook as a source for online communities and virtual support groups for natural-haired Black women. Allyson referenced her mom's participation in an online Facebook group as an example, "…there's a support network. My mom's a part of…some group on Facebook that gives natural hair ideas where you can put your little picture up to show your cute hairstyle."

In addition to serving as a resource, Facebook has also become a tool for advertisers to produce content specific and influence the purchasing patterns of users based on past viewing and engagement behaviors. Relative to the posed research question, Pamela reported seeing an increase in advertisements for locs and natural hair on her timeline, "I guess perhaps I've spoken about natural hair or locs enough times

where Facebook knows that, perhaps, I would like this type of product." As such,

Facebook sought to influence Pamela through strategically placed advertisements about

locs and natural hair based on her past browsing behavior, prior levels of activity and

engagement, and user network.

Study participants also referenced visiting and following various Instagram

accounts as a place for guidance and inspiration on how to properly care for, maintain,

and style their natural hair. Participant 'Tonya' described her frequent visits to these

networks for information on natural hair, "…I follow a lot of people on Instagram or link

to their YouTube videos for tips and for, you know, advice and for just guidance. Maybe

the way I want my hair cut…"

Although the above social networks were reported as credible sites for

information about natural hair, YouTube was credited the most popular, go-to social

network for positive images of natural hair, and guidance, in the form of video tutorials

among study participants. Many study participants attributed YouTube as the foundation

of the 21st century natural hair movement, influencing their decision to go natural,

purchase certain products, and attempts to create new styling methods. Pamela recalled

watching YouTube videos for over a year before, ultimately, making the decision to go

natural. "I had been watching YouTube videos about natural hair probably for a

year…after I had watched enough instructional videos. I just felt like I had enough

information, um, to go into the natural hair journey."

As further evidence of the powerful role YouTube has played in creating and

disseminating influential images and messages about natural hair, study participants

provided examples of how popular natural hair YouTube individuals and channels have

evolved into endorsement deals with major corporate brands including Colgate, Nike, and

Walmart.

Thus, the far-reaching power of mass media, social media in particular, has been

identified the greatest source of influence pertaining to images and messages about

natural hair among study participants.

Implications

An investigation of natural, Afro-textured hair goes well beyond looking for differences or unique traits in the physical properties of an individual's hair follicles. For many African-American women, the decision to wear their natural, Afro-textured hair symbolizes their presence in, or absence from mainstream society.

Results from this research study demonstrates how natural hair has both a direct and an indirect impact on the daily existence of Black women relative to their sense of identity and self-esteem, personal and professional relationships, concepts of beauty, and the ability to navigate and interpret messages received through digital, online spaces in the 21st century. While themes described earlier highlighted commonalities among study participants, participants also revealed several nuances worthy of mention for future exploration relative to natural hair. These nuances may serve as a guide to future research studies as academic interest in natural, Afro-textured hair continues to grow.

Natural hair perceptions: mothers vs. daughters

One interesting dynamic was the difference in the perception of natural hair between mothers and daughters. Participants Bethany, Elyse, Kimma, Pamela, Tameka and Tammy revealed that their mothers were skeptical and, in some cases, openly opposed to their decision to go natural. In one circumstance, natural hair was presented as a contradiction between verbal expression and direct action. For example, although Tameka reported being natural her entire life and discouraged by her mother from using a relaxer, her mother would apply a chemical relaxer to her own hair. When asked about the apparent contradiction between her mother's words and actions, Tameka explained that her mother perceived her own hair to be a misfortune that required her to use relaxers

in order to achieve a certain look, but that Tameka was "blessed to have beautiful hair"

and, therefore, did not need to engage in the practice of applying a chemical relaxer.

What is particularly interesting about this dynamic is the classification of natural hair into

two distinct, polarizing categories as either beautiful and, therefore, blessed or something

of a misfortune. The apparent contradiction between rhetoric and practice lends itself to

suggest that the good vs. bad hair may use alternate codes (blessed and beautiful vs.

misfortunate) in the 21st century. What does the difference in how natural hair is

perceived among mothers and daughters suggest about how womanhood is defined

within the Black community? What are the potential implications given the conflicting

points of view?

Perception of natural hair in romantic relationships

Another circumstance revealed from the study was the perception of natural hair

in connection with romantic relationships. Participants reported a wide range experiences

when asked to share how their natural hair has been perceived in terms of dating or

establishing romantic relationships. Participants Elyse, Tameka and Samantha reported

that their natural hair has been accepted by their significant others. Yet, participants

Bethany and Tonya revealed that natural hair was viewed negatively by their significant

others.

For example, Bethany explained that her husband viewed natural hair as

masculine and equated it to individuals suffering from an illness. This account was

largely based on his personal experience of watching his mother's transformation of

having long, relaxed hair to shorter, Afro-textured hair due to her cancer diagnosis and

subsequent chemotherapy treatments. In the context of natural hair and dating, participant

Allyson shared that a man's perception about her own natural hair was significant in

determining the suitability of a potential partner:

> …being that I have the looser curl… if a guy mentions it to me, you know like,
> 'Oh you have good hair' or something like that, that's like an automatic, hell no!
> You know what I mean? That's like an automatic...your mind is not where I'm
> trying to...where I'm trying to be, like, to me, it's like you got that slave mentality
> in you.

In addition to the perception of natural hair, dynamics with respect to length of

romantic relationships were also discussed during the study. Several participants reported

that being natural held little to no significance in the health or stability of their long-term

relationships. Does this pattern suggest that natural hair is more readily accepted in long-

term relationships versus casual dating? Thus, the question of whether positive or

negative opinions about natural hair increase or decrease over time relative to romantic

relationships can also be an area for future study. An investigation of the opinions of

male partners from diverse racial, ethnic and geographic background as well as form

various age categories is recommended for this proposed study.

Regional perspectives of natural hair

Participant interviews also showed differences in the opinions expressed about

natural hair from a regional or geographic perspective. For example, when asked as to

what advice they would give to other Black women who were considering going natural,

three of the four participants from Charlotte, North Carolina were more hesitant to advise

women to "just do it (go natural)." On the contrary, women from Baltimore and Towson,

Maryland were much more directive in their response and advised women to simply "do

it."

The difference in the expression or hesitation by women in Charlotte, North

Carolina versus Baltimore and Towson, Maryland may point to topics surrounding

politics of respectability. This notion is based on the fact that Charlotte, North Carolina is

located in the southeastern region of the United States, whereas Baltimore and Towson,

Maryland are located in the mid-Atlantic region. Cultural differences among Black

women within these two distinct regions may be the cause for the difference and

expression of opinions. Many women in the southeastern United States, commonly

referred to as "the South" have been raised to adhere to behaviors and mannerisms

consistent with the Southern Belle image. The Southern Belle image, symbolic of societal

ideals of high social status and female respectability for White southern women (Biddle,

2014), has more recently been in embraced by Black southern women (Calhoun, n.d.).

For Black southern women, the Southern Belle serves as representation of elegance,

grace, humility and the belief of traditional gender roles. The fictional character, Whitley

Gilbert, as portrayed by Jasmine Guy in the television series, *A Different World* (Cosby,

1987), brought the depiction of the Black Southern Belle to wider audiences. In 2013,

former Atlanta Housewives cast member, Phaedra Parks, released her book, *Secrets of*

the Southern Belle: How to Be Nice, Look Pretty, Have Fun and Never Have an Off

Moment, as a how-to guide for women to become Southern Belles (Parks, 2013). In the

section entitled, "Don't Let Geography Stand in Your Way", Parks points out cultural

differences within various regions of the United States as she describes southern women

as packages of "looks, charm and determination", while covertly suggesting that women

from other regions fall short of possessing such attributes (Parks, 2013, p. xi). The book

also states that southern women "treasure being respected and respecting others" (Parks,

2013, p. 4) and do not "…make direct requests. It just sounds so forward and [is] frankly unpleasant…" (Parks, 2013, p. 18). Given this information, southern Black women may view issuing a directive such as "just do it" in connection with natural hair as abrasive or unladylike. Thus, the hesitation made by southern women in the study to issue a directive may serve as evidence that politics of respectability continues to operate within the Black community. As such, the impact of regional culture in shaping how Black women express their opinions can be an area for future examination relative to intracultural dynamics, politics of responsibility and natural hair. Such a study, may show that perceptions of natural hair or the natural hair movement may differ based on location and politics of respectability specific to the communities of Black women.

Lastly, given the multitude of images and messages that are disseminated through new media platforms and channels, a dedicated textural analysis comparison study about how natural hair is represented on social media channels including, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube is recommended. Although this research study highlighted the presence of social media relative to the 21st century natural hair movement as part of the participant interviews, a more thorough study can contribute greatly to the context of how natural hair is presented through user-generated channels. In examining the types of images and messages being distributed via social media as it relates can also provide insight as to whether social media serves as an extension of traditional, dominant-hegemonic systems of power or rather negotiated or oppositional entities used to shape fluid conversations and perceptions about natural, Afro-textured hair.

Limitations

While the study provided in depth information and context regarding the

relationship between perceptions about natural hair, the role of mass media, and the lived

experiences of Black women relative to the interviews from 13 participants, three major

limitations were identified from the analysis and completion of the critical cultural study.

Scope of Study

The scope of the study was limited despite efforts to promote the study among

participants from various locations along the east coast of the United States. The primary

locations of study participants were limited to Charlotte, North Carolina and the

Baltimore, Maryland metropolitan areas. It is recommended to expand beyond the two

identified locations and include research study participants representative of an entire

region such as the mid-Atlantic, Southeast, or Midwest.

Age Range

The age range of the participants presented another area of improvement for the

study. Of the 13 participants, three participants were between the ages of 18-24, four

participants were between the ages of 25-34, five participants were between the ages of

35-40, and one participant was aged 60. As such, the study failed to capture natural hair

accounts from participants between the ages of 40-59. The lack of participants from this

particular age group equated to a significant lack of representation about the natural hair

experience of middle-aged participants.

Locs/Dreadlock Participants

The number of participants who wore their hair in locs or dreadlocks were limited

to just one participant and, therefore, was not a sufficient representation of individuals

who wear their hair in a locs or dreadlocks. The research study comes up short in

examining and comparing the natural hair experiences of those who prefer to wear their

hair in a loose state (loose naturals) versus those who prefer to wear their hair in

locs/dreadlocks to look for patterns, differences, and similarities.

Appendix A

Nikkie Perry - 4 years old

Nikkie Perry - 8 years old

Nikkie Perry - 15 years old

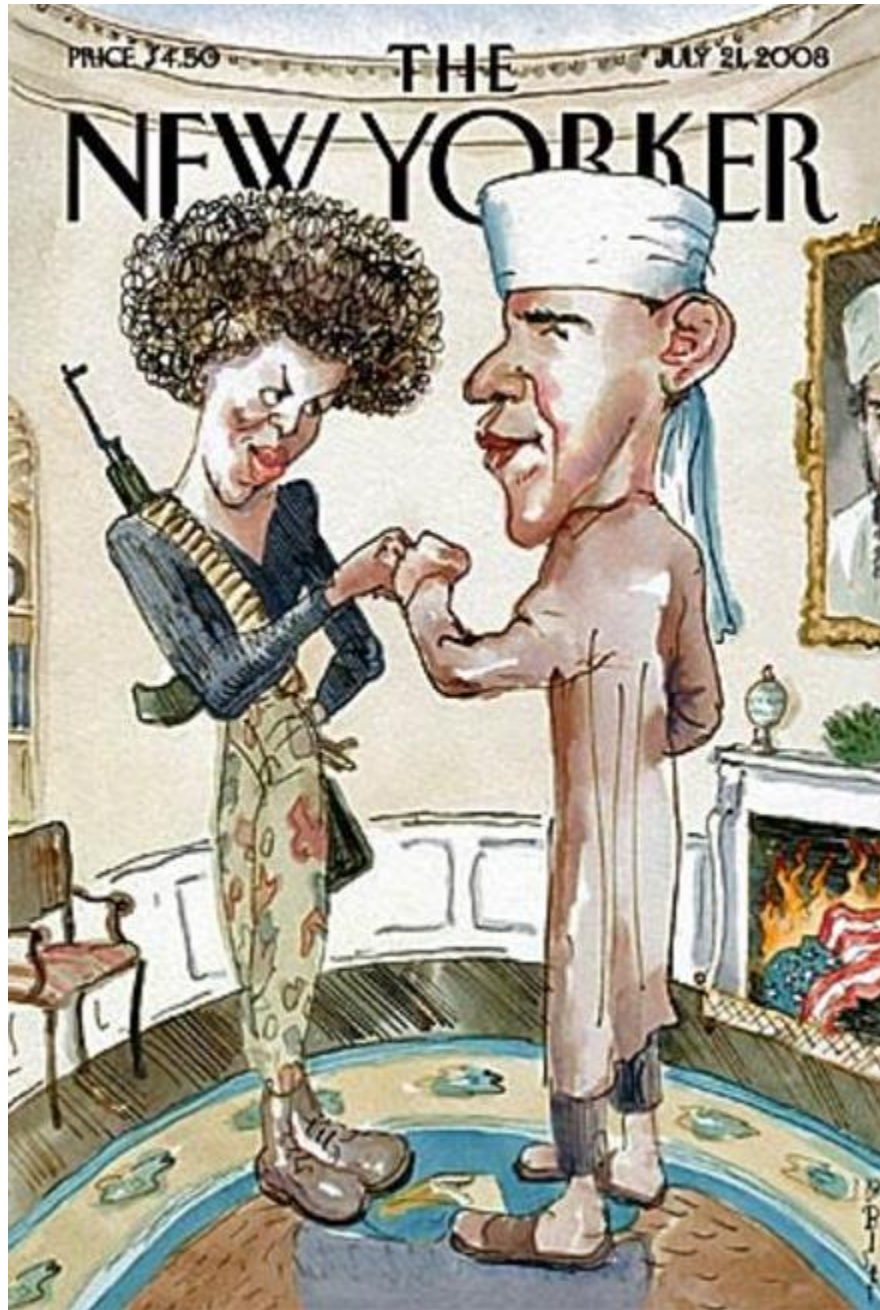Nikkie Perry - 19 years old

Nikkie Perry - 26 years old

Nikkie Perry - 31 years old

Appendix B

Source: Blitt, B. (2008, July 21). The politics of fear [cover image]. *The New Yorker*.

Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/07/21
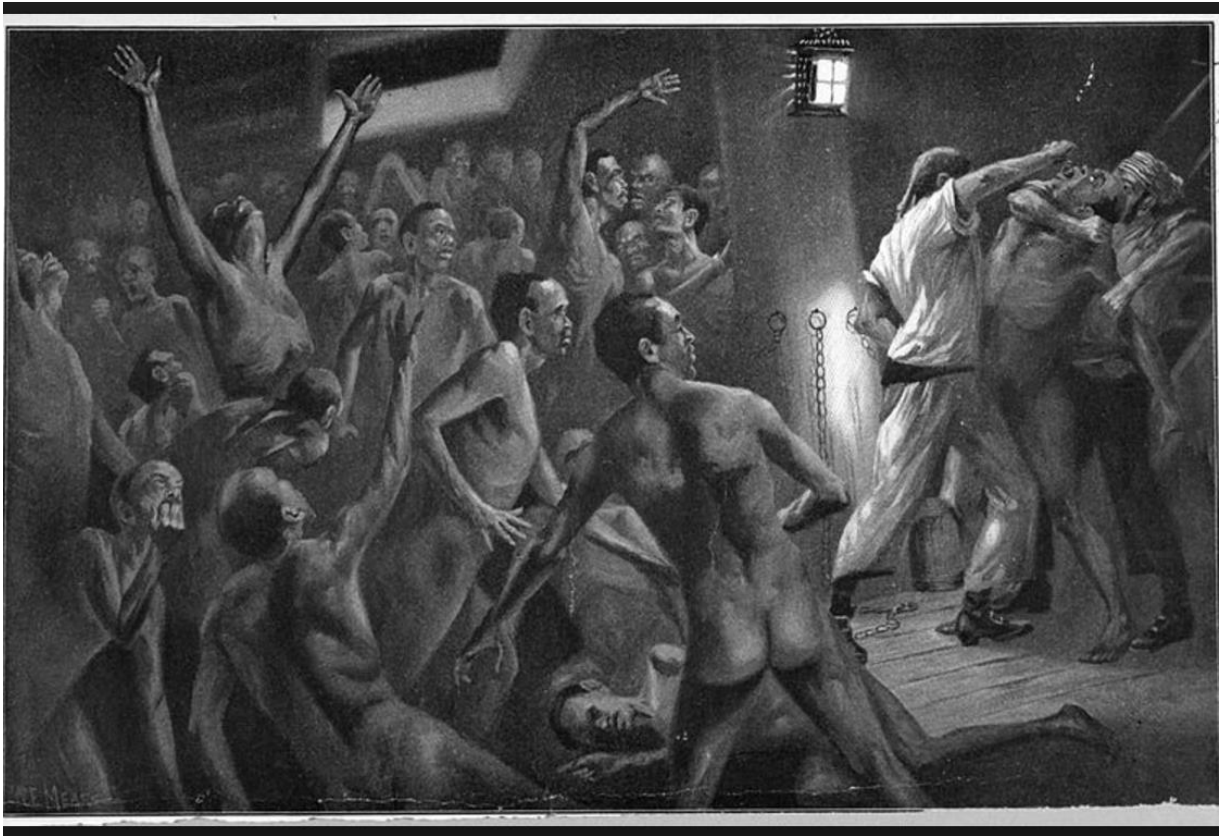
Appendix C

Source: Egerton, D. (2017, March 6). Unearthing the Human Stories of the Transatlantic

Slave Trade [photo image]. *Black Perspectives*. Retrieved from

http://www.aaihs.org/unearthing-the-human-stories-of-the-transatlantic-slave-

trade/

Appendix D

Madam Walker before and after her wonderful discovery.
A'LELIA BUNDLES/WALKER FAMILY COLLECTION
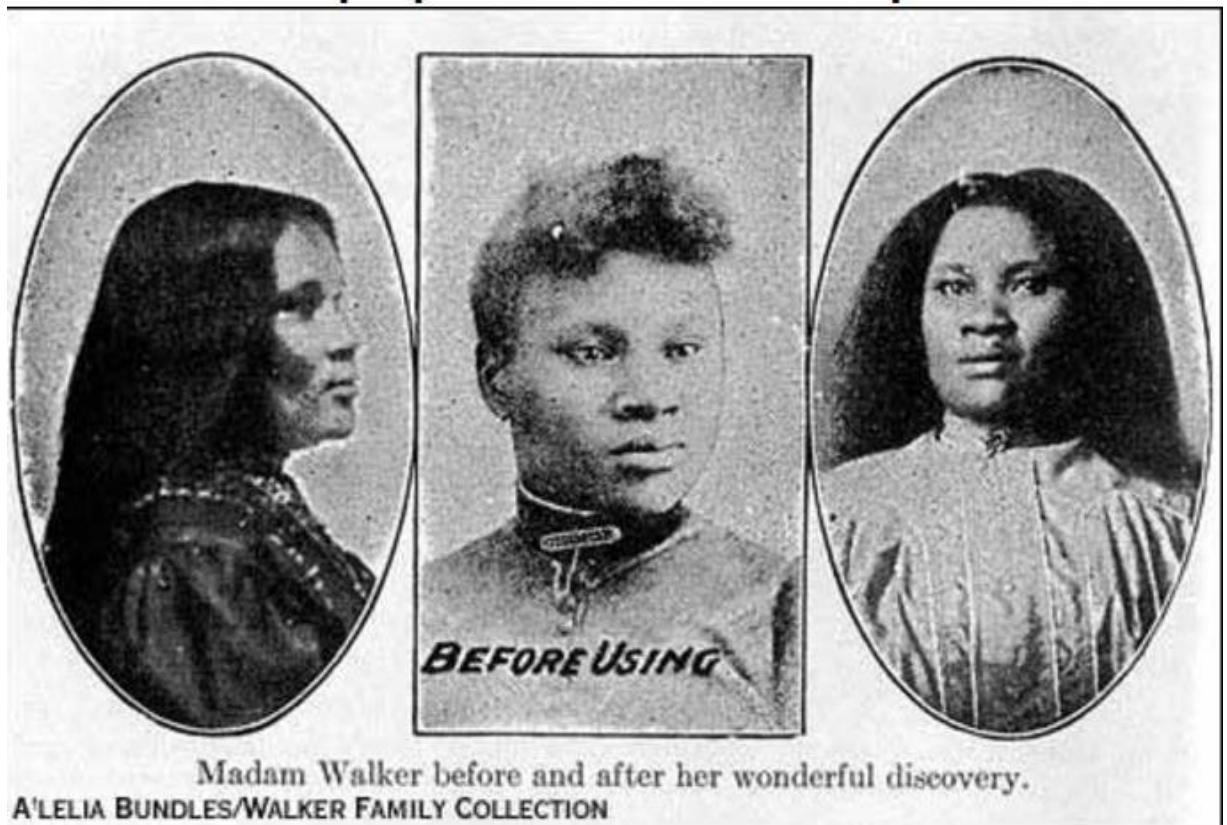
Source: Bundles, A. (2001). *On her own ground: The life and times of Madam C.J.*

Walker [photo image]. New York: Scribner. Retrieved from

http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/04/01/reviews/010401.01jeffert.html

Appendix E

Source: iamthenuBlack.com. (n.d.). [Art + Design] Vintage Black hair ads [photo image].

Retrieved from https://www.pinterest.com/explore/jheri-curl/

Appendix F

Source: Myers, S. (2014, May 9). Great character: Nola Darling ("She's Gotta Have It")

[photo image]. Retrieved from https://gointothestory.blcklst.com/great-character-

nola-darling-shes-gotta-have-it-7ba7416421f5
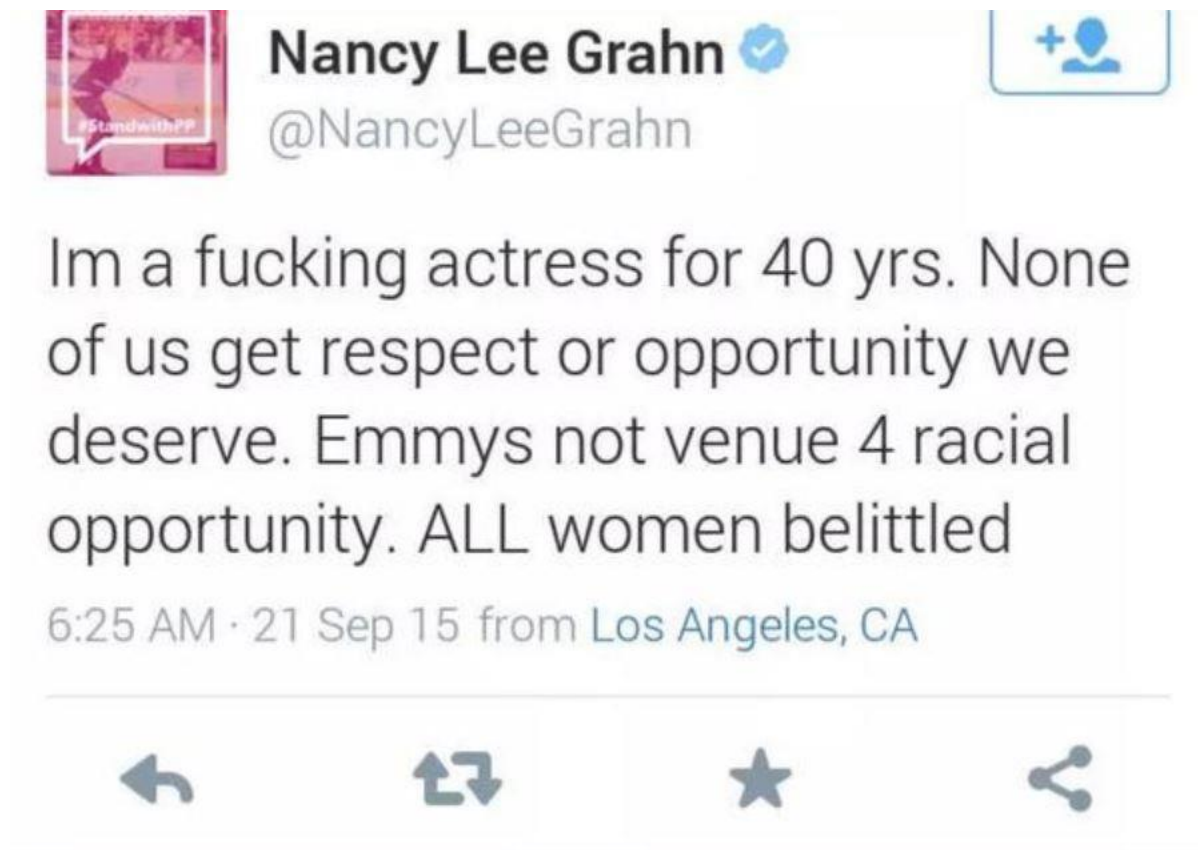
Appendix G

Source: Imani, Z. (2015, September 21). Black Twitter Responds to Shady Tweets

During Violas Davis Emmy Win. *Atlanta Black Star.* Retrieved from

http://atlantablackstar.com/2015/09/21/black-twitter-responds-shady-tweets-

violas-davis-emmy-win/

Appendix H

Source: Coker, H. (2014, April 1). Army bans braids and twists because they don't

understand Black hair. *Jezebel.com.* Retrieved from https://jezebel.com/army-

bans-braids-and-twists-because-they-dont-understa-1556250329

Source: Little, A. (2014, April 11). A hairbrained regulation. *Dish Andrew Sullivan.*

Retrieved from http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2014/04/11/a-hairbrained-

regulation/

Appendix I

Source: Adojo.com. (n.d.) Classification of hair types by Andre` Walker, 1, 2a, 2b, 2c,

3a, 3b, 3c, 4a, 4b, 4c. Retrieved from http://adjocom.com/content/200-type-

cheveux-andre-walker.

Appendix J

Source: Ahanotu, N. (2017, June 23). *Attn.* Retrieved from

https://www.attn.com/stories/17840/theres-some-missing-these-advertisements-

natural-hair-products

Appendix K

Source: Craig, A. (2016, April 12). Beauty collaborations: Cantu Beauty 30-day

challenge. *Change your life with beauty.* Retrieved from

http://www.changeyourlifewithbeauty.com/2016/04/12/beauty-collaborations-

cantu-beauty-30-day-challenge/

Appendix L

SheaMoisture
21 mins · 🌐

Wow, okay – so guys, listen, we really f-ed this one up. Please know that our intention was not – and would never be – to disrespect our community, and as such, we are pulling this piece immediately because it does not represent what we intended to communicate. You guys know that we have always stood for inclusion in beauty and have always fought for our community and given them credit for not just building our business but for shifting the beauty landscape. So, the feedback we are seeing here brings to light a very important point. While this campaign included several different videos showing different ethnicities and hair types to demonstrate the breadth and depth of each individual's hair journey, we must absolutely ensure moving forward that our community is well-represented in each one so that the women who have led this movement never feel that their hair journey is minimized in any way. We are keenly aware of the journey that WOC face – and our work will continue to serve as the inspiration for work like the Perception Institute's Good Hair Study/Implicit Association Test that suggests that a majority of people, regardless of race and gender, hold some bias towards women of color based on their textured or natural hair. So, you're right. We are different – and we should know better.

Thank you all, as always, for the honest and candid feedback. We hear you. We're listening. We appreciate you. We count on you. And we're always here for you. Thank you, **#SheaFam**, for being there for us, even when we make mistakes. Here's to growing and building together...
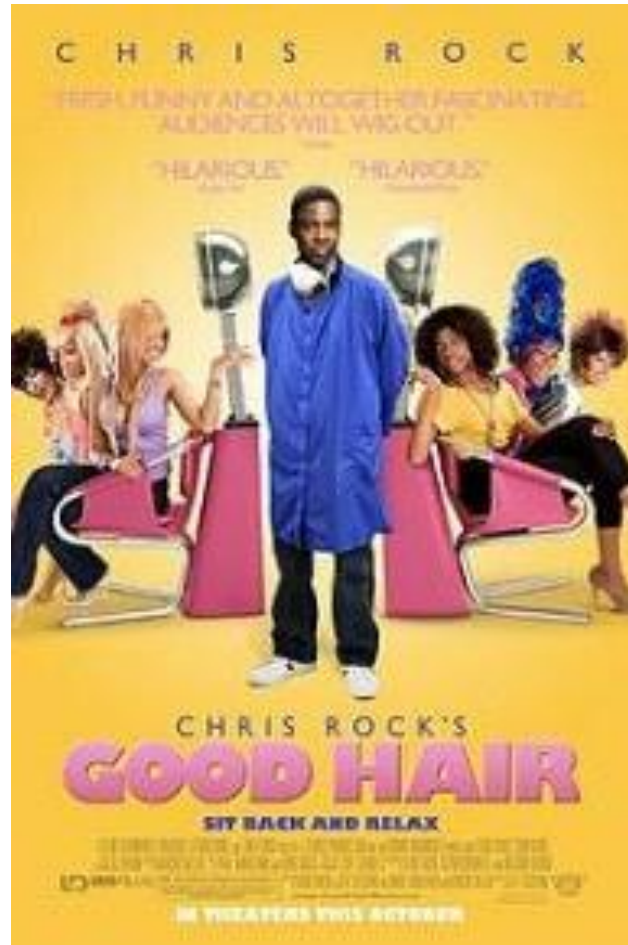
Source: Callahan, Y. (2017, April 24). *Black women are upset over SheaMoisture's new*

whitewashing marketing plot. The Grapevine. Retrieved from

https://thegrapevine.theroot.com/black-women-are-upset-over-sheamoistures-

new-whitewashi-1794603970

Appendix M

Source: Rock, C. (Producer), & Stilson, J (Director). (2009). *Good Hair* [Documentary].

United States:Chris Rock Entertainment and HBO Films.

Appendix N

Source: Hairston, T. (2016, March 1). *Splinter News.* Retrieved from

https://splinternews.com/a-look-back-at-4-decades-of-black-hair-and-beauty-ads-
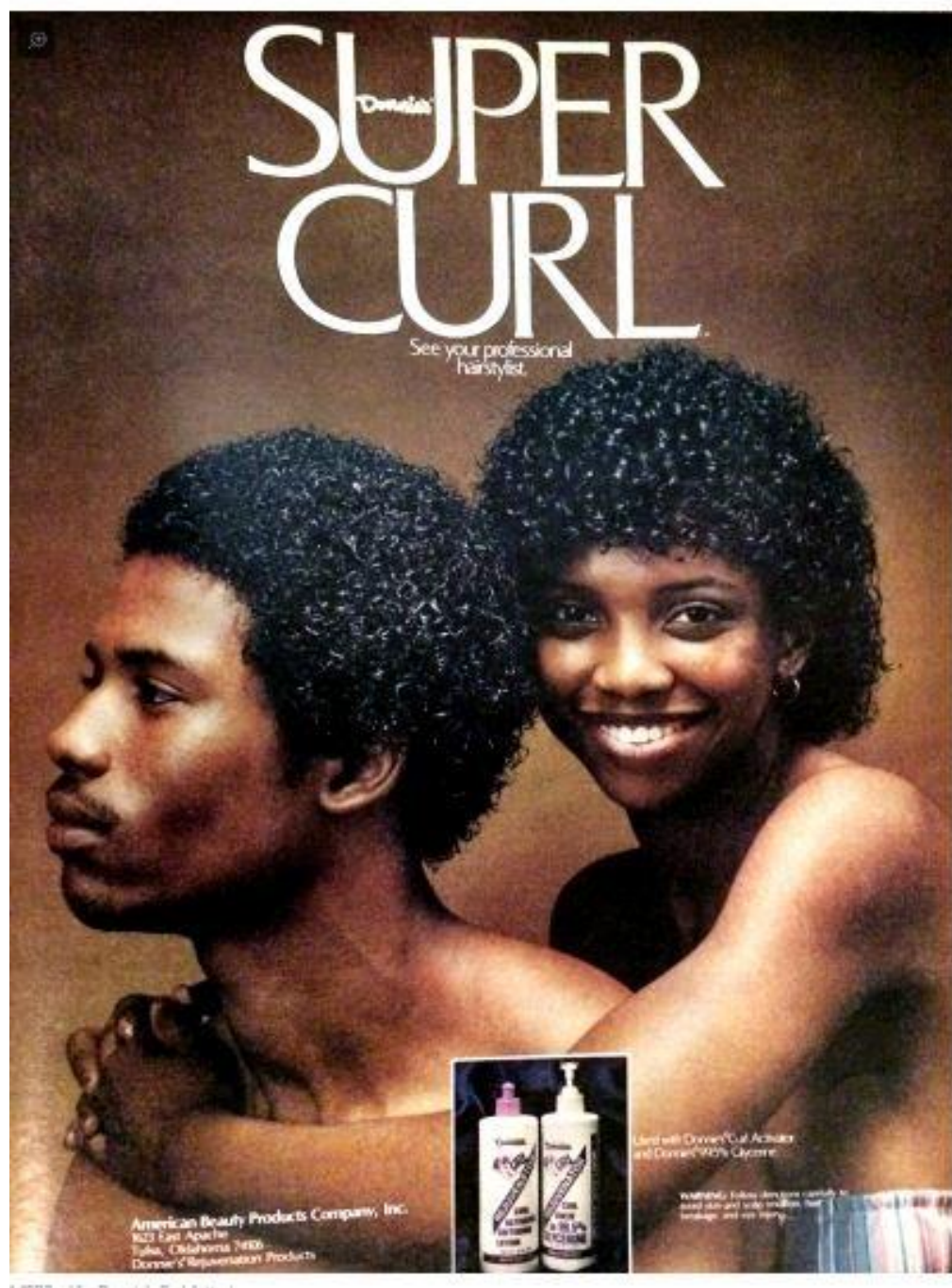
1793855531

Appendix O

Source: Moore, D. (2014, June 25). Daily 70s ad: Kodak Pocket Instamatic (1972).

Retrieved from http://www.bionicdisco.com/2014/06/25/daily-70s-ad-kodak-

pocket-instamatic-1972/

Appendix P

Source: Hairston, T. (2016, March 1). *Splinter News.* Retrieved from

https://splinternews.com/a-look-back-at-4-decades-of-black-hair-and-beauty-ads-

1793855531

Appendix Q

Textual Analysis Instructions

I will begin by showing you three magazine advertisements from the 1960s, 1970s & 1980s.

1) Please describe the first three things that come to your mind as the advertisement is shown.

    a) What do you think about the hairstyles shown?

    b) How would you rate their level of attractiveness?

2) What do you think others may think of the images shown?

    a) What about the hairstyle(s) shown?

    b) How do you think others would rate their level of attractiveness?

3) How do you think these images are perceived by society as a whole?

Appendix R

Personal Interview Questions

1) How long have you been natural?

   a) In terms of the natural hair movement, how would you describe the timing

   of your decision to go natural?

2) Do you have any family or friends who are also natural?

   a) If so, how long have they been natural?

   b) Do you recall being influenced by any family members, family friends or

   teachers who were/are natural?

   c) What were your earliest memories of women who had natural hair?

3) How would you describe your natural hair?

   a) Prompt question: Have you ever colored your natural hair?

4) What have been some of the biggest benefits or challenges of being natural?

5) Describe the moment when you made the decision to go natural.

   a) What was it like?

   b) What were you going through emotionally at the time when you made the

   decision to go natural? How did it feel?

      i)   Describe the reaction(s) of your friends and family.

      ii) How do you think your natural hair was perceived at school or

      work?

6) What influenced you to go natural?

7) Why did you choose to go natural at the time that you did?

   a) Was it an epiphany? Or was it something you considered for some time?

8) Describe your hair before you went natural?

9) Talk to me about the experience of having your hair done as a child?

    a) What do you recall?

    b) Is there anything or experience that stands out in your memory?

10) What are some terms you've heard about people with natural hair?

    a) Prompt question: Where did you hear this from?

    b) Prompt question: What comes to mind when you hear the expression 'natural hair nazis'?

    c) Prompt question: What are your thoughts on the term 'texture discrimination'?

11) What it is like being a natural-haired, African-American woman?

12) Describe how having natural hair has affected your life?

13) Can you recall a situation where your decision to go natural was questioned?

14) How do you feel natural hair is represented on television, film, and music?

15) How do you feel natural hair is represented on social media?

16) Are there any misconceptions you feel other people have about natural hair?

17) Complete this statement: 'Having natural hair has taught me _____ about myself.'

18) What advice would you give to other women who are considering going natural?

19) If you had to do it all over again, would you make the decision to go natural?

    a) Why or why not?

20) Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix S– Natural Hair Registration Form

QUESTIONS   RESPONSES 48

Natural Hair Study - Interviewee Registration

Hi! My name is Nikkie Perry and I am a graduate student in the Mass Communication and Communication Studies (MCCS) program at Towson University.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the lived experiences of African-American/Black women, between 18-70 years of age, who have made the decision to wear their hair in its natural state and to explore what, if any, impact the natural hair movement has had on the greater American society.

Please complete this form if you are interested in participating in the study. Approximately 12-15 individuals will be selected to participate using a random sample method. If selected, you will be asked to take part in a minimum one hour, in-person individual interview.

By registering for this study, you be added to a group of interested individuals who may or may not be selected to participate. There is no personal risk or discomfort directly involved with this research. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.

- Nikkie

Email address *

Valid email address

This form is collecting email addresses. Change settings

Contact Phone Number   *

Short answer text

Preferred method of contact - Email or phone? *

Short answer text

Self-Identification - How do you classify your racial identity? *

1. African

2. African-American

3. Afro-Caribbean

4. Afro-Latina

5. Black

6. Bi-Racial/Mixed Race

City of current residence *

Short answer text

Hometown *

Short answer text

How did you learn about this research study? *

1. Flyer

2. Word of mouth

3. Club/group announcement

4. Facebook

5. Other

Interview sessions: Please select the top 3 dates and times that work best for your schedule.

Description (optional)

Individuals who live outside of the greater Baltimore metropolitan area are encouraged to select a Saturday or Sunday interview session.

Description (optional)

Wednesday, September 27
- 6:00 - 7:00 pm
- 7:00 - 8:00 pm
- 8:00 - 9:00 pm

Thursday, September 28
- 6:00 - 7:00 pm
- 7:00 - 8:00 pm
- 8:00 - 9:00 pm

Friday, September 29
- 6:00 - 7:00 pm
- 7:00 - 8:00 pm

Saturday, September 30
- 9:00 - 10:00 am
- 10:00 am - 11:00 am
- 11:00 am - 12:00 pm
- 2:00 - 3:00 pm
- 3:00 - 4:00 pm
- 4:00 - 5:00 pm
- 5:00 - 6:00 pm
- 6:00 - 7:00 pm

Interview location: Please select your preferred location to conduct the interview.

Description (optional)

The interviewer will arrange for alternate meeting locations for selected participants who live outside of the greater Baltimore metropolitan area.

Description (optional)

Question

- Baltimore County Public Library - Arbutus Branch

- Baltimore County Public Library - Cockeysville Branch

- Baltimore County Public Library - Owings Mills Branch

- Baltimore County Public Library - Perry Hall Branch

- Baltimore County Public Library - Rosedale Branch

- Baltimore County Public Library - Towson Branch

- Baltimore County Public Library - Woodlawn Branch

- Towson University

Appendix T – Facebook Study Recruitment Post

Appendix U – Study Recruitment Flyer

Natural Hair Movement Research Study

Wanted:

African-American/Black Female Participants Needed for Natural Hair Movement Research Study

Eligibility:

- African-American/Black Females
- 18-70 years old
- Must complete and submit online registration form
- Must be available to meet in-person for interview (30 minutes minimum)

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of the research study is to investigate the lived experiences of African-American and/or Black women who've made the decision to wear their hair in its natural state. The study hopes to illustrate societal views of natural, Afro-textured hair and offer recommendations on future research pertaining to mass media implications and critical culture.

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS WANTED!

TOWSON UNIVERSITY

The research study is being conducted by Nikkie Perry, a graduate student in the Communication Management master's degree program in the Mass Communication and Communication Studies Department, Towson University.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS AT TOWSON UNIVERSITY.".

For more information or to register, contact: Nikkie Perry, kperry12@students.towson.edu

Appendix V - Codebook

Coding Categories	Codes	Definition	Example
Bonding	Affirmation/encouragement	Participants recount receiving approval, compliments, and/or praises from others due to their natural hair.	"…since the natural hair movement, that gives us, like, more Black women have spoken to me or complimented me because I am a natural woman."
	Community/ Connectedness/unity	Comments from participants that describe being a connected member to a larger, distinct group through having natural hair.	"And um, I have a lot of different, um, friends who we like share ideas, share products, and sometimes it makes me feel like I'm part of a community, like a secret club, and I like that a lot because I don't know. I could have conversations about natural hair for so long and it just feels so-it makes me feel so happy. Um, I just really like that."
Colorism	Color struck/light-skinned vs. dark-skinned	Terms used to describe a preference of lighter-skinned over darker-skinned individuals	"…so the challenge that I had was that I wasn't liked as much as my stepmother's kids and my Dad's family they're very color struck."
Good hair vs. bad hair		The concept of preferential treatment given to individuals who possess a finer, looser hair texture ('good hair') in comparison to individuals who possess a thicker, more tightly coiled hair texture. Origins of this concept can be traced to slavery, often used in conjunction with color struck, light-skinned vs. dark-skinned and color struck codes.	"So is that, like, when they say good hair and bad hair? That's what I would get from that. They would say if you're light-skinned with curly hair that looks better than if you're darker-skinned with a bush."

Coding Categories	Codes	Definition	Example
	Nappy	A colloquial term often used within the African-American/Black community to describe the opinion of someone with a coarse or tightly-coiled hair texture. This term has negative connotations.	"My uncle, which she knows, my uncle said to me once on a Sunday afternoon, 'What's wrong with your hair? Why does your hair look like that? It looks really 'nappy'. And the best statement that I could say to him was, 'You'll have to take that up with God.' That is the state that he chose for this hair to come out of my root, out of my scalp."
Identity	Ascribed	Examples that suggest that certain characteristics or traits have been developed by others (usually those in a position of power) to shape the identity of African-American/Black girls and women through hair.	"…I think that that' something we have to stop doing because getting a perm is such a, such a personal choice that you shouldn't force that on anybody at a certain age where they don't understand what's being done to them because you then set them up in a cycle where they either have to stop it, and when they stop it, they have to, um, do a full cut and figure out, you know, like what their hair is like, you know, they then have to learn themselves in a different light…what happens is you force an identity on them, that they're not 100 percent sure that's who they are or that's who they want to be, um, and when you do that, and…and as a young person, you're trying to find yourself…"
	Double-consciousness	Personal accounts from participants that detail having to navigate between/within the dominant, mainstream American society and maintaining their sense of authenticity and identity as an African-American/Black	"But I do realize in these situations, especially being the minority in a situation, and not only being Black, but being Black and keeping my natural hair, which they might not be used to, I end up being a reference, perhaps, an archetype and I…Basically what I am saying is that I feel the extra pressure to, um, put my best foot forward, my best face forward, at all times. Um, because I don't have the option or…I think, uh, being a minority and sometimes having the eyes on you, I think your actions can be taken out of

Coding Categories	Codes	Definition	Example
		woman. Coined by W.E.B. DuBois, this concept exposes the conflicts that arise regarding natural hair and social acceptance.	context or much deeper than they should be because they're projecting the whole race upon you. You are the representative. So, in those situations, I feel like a representative that needs to put their best foot forward."
	Self-awareness	Comments that describe how participants became aware of their individual identities as a direct result of going natural.	"And then, it also makes you question, 'Do you really know who you are if you've never experienced or you don't know what your natural texture hair is?' Because like I said before going natural, I didn't know because it had always been so ingrained in me to just relax, relax, relax."
	Reinvention	Examples that describe participants redefining and reshaping their own sense of identity through having natural hair.	"Then, my hair is like a symbol of rebirth at times…You know to start anew of what I was going through, yeah, I know what I was going through at the time. But yeah, it was like, let me get a new energy…So, I needed a new energy, so I cut my hair all the way off and started again…"
Journey		Comments from participants that detail the process of gaining information about how to care for their natural hair.	"It's not going to be a perfect thing. You know? You're going to have your days, You're going to have your trial-and-error. Things that don't work out. And that's fine. You know, just pick it up, try something new the next day."
	Patience	Participants describe having to work with their natural hair and	"…it's taught me patience in the fact of…it's so easy to say, 'You know what? I'm just so frustrated today, I'm going to go [a]head and put a relaxer in my head and be done with it and go back to old habits….But I have not. So, kind of just working through that and just finding more products and what will work for my hair, make it look better that next day or…like kind of being in those imperfect days and still just saying, 'You know what? Let me just find something positive about what I'm going through right now.' So

Coding Categories	Codes	Definition	Example
			it is a journey. It's taught me patience and I'm kind of liking it a little bit."
Microaggression	Animalistic/exotic	Accounts that natural hair is viewed by others as animalistic, subhuman coupled with a measure of curiosity and intrigue.	"I feel like people will kind of make you feel like an alien or dog. A dog because…if you're a dog lover…you see a cute dog walking down the street…You probably wouldn't think twice and you bend down...and you pet the dog. I feel like people tend to do that with hair. They see a cute hairstyle and it's, like, it's magnetic, I just need to touch it. I just need to what it is. Umm…so I feel like they make you feel subordinate. Like you are an object like that they can just touch without asking or anything like that."
	Political/Radical	Examples in which women who wear their natural hair are stereotyped as militant or revolutionary. Evidence of this code can be found on the July 2008 cover of *The New Yorker* magazine showing former First Lady Michelle Obama with an Afro, camouflage pants, combat boots and an AK-47.	"And I hope the perception is changing, but often times, natural hair or a Black woman's decision to wear her hair natural is seen as political. Um, ambrasive, um, it's like the moment that a woman decides that she doesn't want to model her aesthetic after, um, the majority culture, I guess I would like to say, that somehow she is dangerous, that somehow she's defiant…they have this stigma that comes with them [Afros], like, um, somebody is radical like the Black Panthers or like that."
Self-esteem	Confidence	Participants describe gaining a newfound sense of freedom and control through having natural hair.	"Having natural hair has taught me…I just feel more empowered because I don't have to rely on anyone else. I don't know if that's a teaching thing, the ability to take care of my hair and have it look attractive and presentable and this is someone who is not a hair person."
	Inadequate/insecure	Participants' accounts of feeling less than in comparison to	"…in middle school I felt inadequate. Because I couldn't do it, I could do it myself and my mom had to leave before I went to school. So I would go

Coding Categories	Codes	Definition	Example
		others. Participants described having these feelings in both a public setting (school or work) or among friends and family.	to school looking a mess. A pure D mess. And you know, so I didn't feel good. It reflected in how I related to my peers. What I felt about…I didn't feel attractive because, like, your hair is a mess. You know what I'm saying, and so, I think that affected my self-concept."
	Pride/self-acceptance/self-love	Increased positive feelings of one's sense of self through having natural hair.	So it really teaches you to like, I don't know if there's a lesson, but it kind of makes you question, 'How much do you really love yourself?'… So, you don't really know who you are and you don't know how much you love yourself or how much you *think* you love yourself until you have to be at the rawest, purest form of yourself and you have to go into society, who you *know* a lot of people are not going to find you attractive, well, you know, find it attractive or not perceive what you're doing as beautiful looking because it's not what they're used to."
	Vulnerability	Feelings from participants that having natural hair has meant being exposed and facing some of their biggest insecurities as a woman.	"So with natural hair it's like 10 times worse because you just, like, this is...it's like seeing me naked. It's like my rawest, purest form. You just like, you know, he's seeing the real me, maybe, prob- like the first time. This is serious. You want to know, like, is he going to think this is attractive? Is he going to be like, 'Oh you need a weave!' Like, so it is, like nerve wracking as hell…"
Social media usage		Participant use of varying social media platforms (i.e., blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube) to gather information and gain a sense of community.	"…I think a really big catalyst of it are these YouTubers and these Instagrammers. These women who...umm..have found a way to make a living off of celebrating their hair and teaching other women different hairstyles and how to care for their hair and different products that work and that don't."

Appendix W – IRB Approval Letter

TOWSON
UNIVERSITY

Date: December 6th, 2017

Office of Sponsored
Programs and Research

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Towson University
8000 York Road
Towson, MD 21252-0001

TO: Kahleeka Perry   DEPT: Mass Comm Studies

t. 410 704-2236
f. 410 704-4494

PROJECT TITLE: *A Critical Cultural Study of Lived Experiences and Societal Implications on the Natural Hair Movement of the 21st Century*

SPONSORING AGENCY: None

APPROVAL NUMBER: 1708022233

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants has approved the project described above. Approval was based on the descriptive material and procedures you submitted for review. Should any changes be made in your procedures, or if you should encounter any new risks, reactions, injuries, or deaths of persons as participants, you should notify the Board.

A consent form   ☑ is required of each participant
                      ☐ is not

Assent   ☐ is required of each participant
                      ☑ is not

This protocol was first approved on August 16, 2017.
This research will be reviewed **every year** from the date of first approval.

Elizabeth Katz, Chair
Towson University Institutional Review Board, IRB

Appendix X – Informed Consent Form Sample

IRB Application for Thesis Project – Kahleeka "Nikkie" Perry

Informed Consent Form: Minimal Risk Potential

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in the study entitled "A Critical Cultural Study of Lived Experiences and Societal Implications of the 21st Century Natural Hair Movement," which is being conducted by Nikkie Perry, a student in the Communication Management master's degree program in the Mass Communication and Communication Studies Department, Towson University. The purpose of this research is to perform a critical cultural study between the divide that is thought to exist between the dominant American culture and the natural hair movement of the 21st century.

The proposed study will use textual analysis and respondent interviews to examine the lived experiences and societal implications of the 21st century natural hair movement among African-American women. The researcher hopes to use information collected from the study to illustrate societal views of natural, Afro-textured hair, provide evidence of tactics used to perpetuate or counter historical and societal perceptions and offer recommendations on future research pertaining to mass media and critical culture.

As a participant, I understand that I will be expected to participate in a number of experimental tasks including the completion of forms, questionnaires, and observation activities relating to my knowledge, attitudes, perceptions and behavior about natural, Afro-textured hair.

I have been informed that any information obtained as part of this study will be recorded with a code number that will allow Nikkie Perry to determine my identity. The key that relates to my name with my assigned code number will be destroyed at the conclusion of this study for anonymity purposes. Under this condition, I agree that any information obtained from this research may be used in anyway thought best for publication or education, provided that I am in no way identified and my name will not be used.

I understand there is no personal risk or discomfort directly involved with this research, that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. A decision to withdraw from the study will not affect any services available to me from Towson University.

If I have any questions or problems that arise in connection with my participation in this study, I should contact Professor Erin Berry, the project director at 410-704-2138, eberry@towson.edu or

Dr. Elizabeth Katz, Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants at Towson University at 410-704-2236.

_____
(Date)   (Signature of Participant)

_____
(Date)   (Investigator)

_____
(Date)   (Witness)

"THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS AT TOWSON UNIVERSITY."

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    doi:10.1080/17404622.2012.668

Curriculum Vita

Nikkie Perry

███████████   █████████████
███████████   █████████████

Summary Statement

*Seasoned professional with 10+ years of healthcare marketing communications
experience. Skilled in the areas of branding, corporate/internal communications,
event/project/and social media management, strategic planning. Design creation of
annual reports and marketing collaterals.*

EXPERIENCE

Johns Hopkins Medicine, *Baltimore, MD*

Marketing Manager, August 2016 – present

- Healthcare Marketing: Directing national marketing efforts for Johns Hopkins
  Medicine's Department of Surgery to consumers and referring physicians,
  including social media, e-mail marketing, search engine marketing; coordinating
  written and video patient stories; guiding web content strategy efforts. Effectively
  managing campaign development from concept to completion, with attention to
  budgets, timeframes, and quality outcomes

TBI / Tissue Banks International, *Baltimore, MD*

Marketing Manager, August 2014 – July 2016

- Product Marketing: Strategic planning/execution of VisionGraft® product
  marketing activities, including white paper development, ad/article placement,
  and publication of case/investigative studies in national trade magazines and
  scientific journals; oversee message development and advertising purchases;
  communication deployment of product fee increase to 600+ customers

- Healthcare Marketing: Managing TBI's nationally accredited continuing medical
  education (CME) conferences and programs including, accreditation certification,
  subject matter development, event marketing promotion (email, print, direct mail,
  and video marketing), online educational webinars for physicians, resulting in a
  38% attendance increase in February 2015

Mecklenburg Emergency Medical Services Agency (Medic), *Charlotte, NC*
Internal Communications Specialist, January 2010 – July 2014
- Branding: Project Manager for Medic's rebranding strategy including: new logo design and typography, Medic Branding and Style Guide creation, collateral development, new employee ID badge implementation and distribution

- Internal Communications: point of contact for Agency-wide communications, weekly output of redesigned internal newsletter to 500+ employees, designing and distributing Medic brochures, policy/protocol notifications and signage, Project Manager of Medic's FY Annual Reports resulting in a 40% cost savings since 2010

- Media Relations: serving as the secondary media relations/PIO point of contact, promptly providing accurate information to incoming media inquiries; development of talking points for on-camera staff interviews with the media

- Statistical Analysis & Monthly Reporting: point of contact for timely tracking, archival, reporting and distribution of P1 Trauma Response Time, Performance Pay, Response and Transport Volume reports

- Website Administration: content management and enhancement of Medic's website and extranet site; scheduling monthly updates; daily site maintenance; web analytics; graphics; applications; forms and links

Hill, Chesson & Woody, *Chapel Hill, NC*
Marketing & Business Development Coordinator, October 2007 – May 2009
- Prepared information for monthly sales meetings
- Wrote copy for special marketing initiatives, e-mail campaign blasts, brochures and webpages
- Special events planning for company programs
- Maintained up-to-date prospect/customer database information

EDUCATION
North Carolina State University
B.A. in Communications, Concentration: Public Relations

Towson University
M.S. in Communication Management
2015 – 2017

Perry, K. (2017). *A critical cultural analysis of lived experiences and societal implications of the 21st century natural hair movement* (Unpublished master's thesis). Towson University, Towson, Maryland.