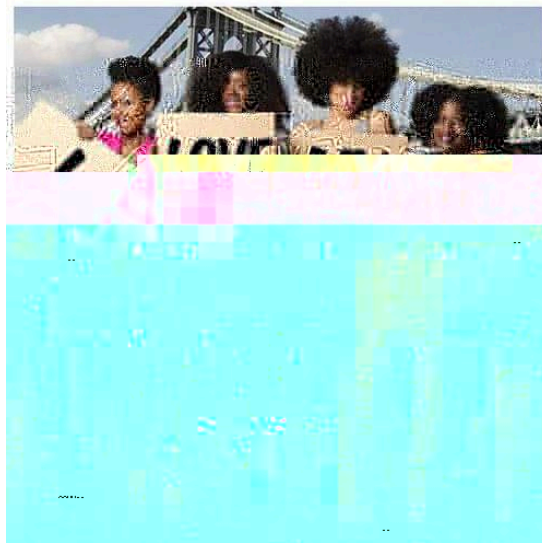


Taking the Kinks Out of Your Hair and Out of Your Mind:
A study on Black hair and the intersections of race and gender in the United States



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Executive Summary

This report reframes the discussion around dominant beauty standards by emphasizing the need to expand the definition of who is considered to be beautiful by American standards of beauty. Specifically, this report takes a look at the natural hair movement and how that movement has propelled Black women to reevaluate the standards of beauty that they currently operate under – and it asserts that Black women are taking deliberate steps towards improving the language and attitudes that are cultivated in Black beauty culture. The natural hair movement is seeking to critically analyze how these actions are reaffirming the dominant European standard of beauty. The use of hair blogs online establishes a special opportunity that could potentially turn the natural hair movement into a larger social movement offline that fosters equity and inclusion of various types of beauty.

Introduction

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Since 1808, Black women have been altering the natural textures of their hair to fit dominant European standards. As mentioned in the quote above, there have been few spaces where Black hair has been affirmed as beautiful. While this may seem vain to think or talk about hair so much, hair holds a strong meaning in United States history, particularly for Black women. European colonists constructed these beauty standards during slavery to eradicate African self-

been made visible again is through the natural hair movement. In recent years, the natural hair movement seeks to teach women how to identify with and love their natural hair textures. At the same time, the natural hair movement is teaching women how to manage their hair. These teachings are being distributed in the form of online hair blogs that feature tutorials on how to style hair. Unlike the Black Power movement, the natural hair movement has its roots based in the proliferation of social media and the internet and is rapidly gaining momentum worldwide to help Black women embrace their natural beauty, both internally and externally.

This research seeks to examine the natural hair movement and its influence on Black uty, bgwo bgwo bgwof000 20 Tm /F1natural

Why does this matter? This issue matters because thousands of women, including and especially Black women, have been falsely told throughout their lives that their societal value in this world is solely based on appearance. Hair and skin color have been included as social criterion for success in one's professional and personal life. Beauty, however, must be understood as socially constructed and an important source of women's oppression. As a Black woman who spent a majority of my life getting my hair done in styles that frequently used heat and or hazardous chemicals, I was once a part of this situation. While doing an internship two summers ago with Black Women for Wellness, a nonprofit organization in Los Angeles, I examined the correlation between Black hairstylists and high toxicity levels in hair salons. I found through surveys and interviews that many of the stylists either knew or were personally affected by various reproductive and health problems such as breast cancer, uterine fibroids, and miscarriages. The stylists also overwhelmingly noted that if they had information or access to alternative solutions, they would prefer to use those products and methods instead of the way they currently do hair.

I was aware, before doing this internship, that the products and procedures frequently done at Black hair salons were chemically changing the texture and appearance of my hair. What I did not know was how toxic these products are to health and the environment. I recall getting my hair chemically straightened and feeling the chemicals burning my scalp. I would cough because the scent of the fumes was so strong and irritated my throat, yet I continued to chemically straighten my hair during most of high school. I remember bearing with the pain because the longer the relaxer cream stayed on my head, the straighter my hair would be and the longer my hair would remain straightened.

During my summer research, I learned about the toxicity of certain products and procedures. I also learned how to read product labels to evaluate and determine how many chemicals are present in the products that I chose to use. I realized that had I not had this experience, I would not have been informed enough to make the decision to go natural, or abstain from altering the natural state of my hair with heat or chemical

products. The decision to go natural is more than for aesthetic reasons: it is also for health reasons. While this project does not focus on hair stylists, it does focus on the emotional and social impacts of a Black woman wearing her hair naturally. What made the research so exciting for me was that I am also the subject and researcher: everything that I am researching directly has and will continue to impact my life.

Research Question

The research I did at Black Women for Wellness led me to my senior comprehensive research. I became interested in examining the ways Black women have been impacted by societal pressures to conform to the dominant into beauty standards. Additionally, I examine the emergence of the natural hair movement and the role of social media such as hair blogs on the Internet in creating new spaces for community building and health education among Black women.

Introduction to Methodology

I have been natural for almost two years, and I wanted to better understand the process of going natural. While I was fortunate that so many people in my life supported my decision to go natural, I know that every Black woman has not been so fortunate. When I sat down and began to seriously consider where I wanted this research project to go, I realized that how I was able to go and

blogging websites. Originally, I had planned on using survey and interviews, but interviews are the most effective method through which to gain in-depth and personal data from women about an often sensitive subject matter. I then utilized my interviews to compare and contrast how Black women think about hair as well as how they perceive hair care/hair styles. Los Angeles and New York City are the two largest metropolitan cities in the United States and

Flow of Interview Questions

pertained to the experts' line of work, and then I asked them select questions from my primary set of questions. Once I created both sets of questions for my interviewees, then I was able to go into the field and conduct my research. I spent three months interviewing forty seven Black women from Los Angeles and New York City about their "hair stories" to see how Black women from both coasts think about their hair. Each interview took between 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on how in depth the participants wanted to answer each question.

Content Analysis

Apart from using interviews, I also conducted a content analysis on hair blogs. To further contextualize my interviews, I looked at two hair blogs: Curly Nikki and Hey Fran Hey. As chronicled in my literature review, these two blogs are examples of how hair blogs help teach Black women how to care for their natural hair. Many Black women have not seen what their virgin unprocessed hair looks like since they were born. Using these two blogs as my models for how the natural hair movement incorporates health education helped solidify my argument. I analyzed the resources that are on those blogs, as well as how user friendly the blog is. Additionally, I also looked at the differences in these two blogs: Curly Nikki is one of the largest natural hair blog sites in the world, while Hey Fran Hey is a smaller blog that is rapidly gaining recognition. Using content analysis and interviews were helpful to better understand the natural hair movement.

Methodology Overview

My interviews led to a robust data set with extensive findings and I was able to support many of the claims made in my literature review. In the next section, I will be documenting as well as analyzing my findings to show what information I learned during the interview process, and what were the major takeaways I got from my 47 interviews.

BACKGROUND: THE EXPERIENCE AND IMPACT OF SLAVERY

“I want to know my hair again, the way I knew it before I knew that my hair is me, before I lost the right to me, before I knew that the burden of beauty – or lack of it –

and control Blacks for the economic, social, and cultural project of colonialism and slavery, European colonists shaved the heads of enslaved Africans “to erase the slave’s culture and alter the relationship between the African and his or her hair.”⁸ Shaving of the hair and replacing with it a new image of beauty was one of many ways that Europeans erased African identity and rationalized slavery and the need to colonize the Black “Other.”

Without a self-identity or the ability to relate to others, the subjugation of Africans into slaves without their consent was quickly facilitated. As noted by Julius Lester, “Of the minority groups in this country, blacks are the only one having no language of their own. Language serves to insulate a group and protect it from outsiders.”¹⁸ For this reason, the mandate for straight hair was immediately enforced as soon as the enslaved Africans were brought to the United States. The eradication of the diverse African cultures during slavery is one of the many reasons why Blacks collectively lack a language, a common food, or even common cultural practices.

BLACK WOMEN’S BODIES

Carolyn West argued that “women’s beauty image has historically been based on white standards, with greater value placed on blond hair, blue eyes, and fair skin.”¹⁹ This standard of White beauty became instituted during the period of slavery, as a means to further eradicate African identity and replace it with a new “American” standard of beauty. Few women fit into this standard already, but even fewer Black women have the features that are deemed attractive, which also came to be seen as “having light skin and more Western-looking features.”²⁰ Hair and skin color serves as cultural and societal indicators of difference, because “black people’s hair has been historically devalued as the most visible stigma of blackness, second only to skin.”²¹ When factoring race into this equation, Black women are then rendered as undesirable and inferior to the White woman. As Naomi Wolf wrote in her book, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Women*

Within Black Communities

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Beyoncé, whom People Magazine recently named as the World's Most Beautiful Woman.²⁶

Beyoncé on the cover of *People Magazine*.

Beyoncé's image on the cover of *People Magazine* is an example of idealized 'Black' beauty, or a Black woman who is light skinned, blonde, and has long flowing hair. The idea that the Beyoncé's of the world are the most beautiful Black women is a reflection of colorism and the effect of hair politics. Images from the media reaffirm that "good" hair, which is long and 'beautiful' is the preferred look. The classification of hair as "good" or "bad" is

struggles and transformations related to race and gender.”²⁸ In the twenty first century, more women have begun to question the validity of existing beauty standards and are beginning to challenge these traditional ideals of beauty. With the birth of the natural hair movement, Black women have started to resist the narrow definition of beauty and expand that definition to include their own natural beauty.

The Natural Hair Movement

The natural hair movement is a cultural phenomenon where Black women are shifting body and hair politics by ceasing to chemically process their hair. The natural hair movement first received major attention within cyberspace, as women formed support groups online on natural hair blogs and it is now beginning to filter offline and into mainstream society. The movement is challenging and resisting societal norms of beauty, while at the same time, reclaiming the Black body and hair as beautiful. Prior to the natural movement, it seemed impossible to “ identify positively as a Black woman when the socialization process is primarily based on the vision that ‘black is bad, ugly and dirty’ and that the ‘woman has a less favorable place.’”²⁹ However, many Black women are beginning to transition – or cut off their chemically straightened hair and embrace their natural kinky hair texture. The natural hair movement is all about helping Black women feel more empowered about their hair, beauty, as well as lead more

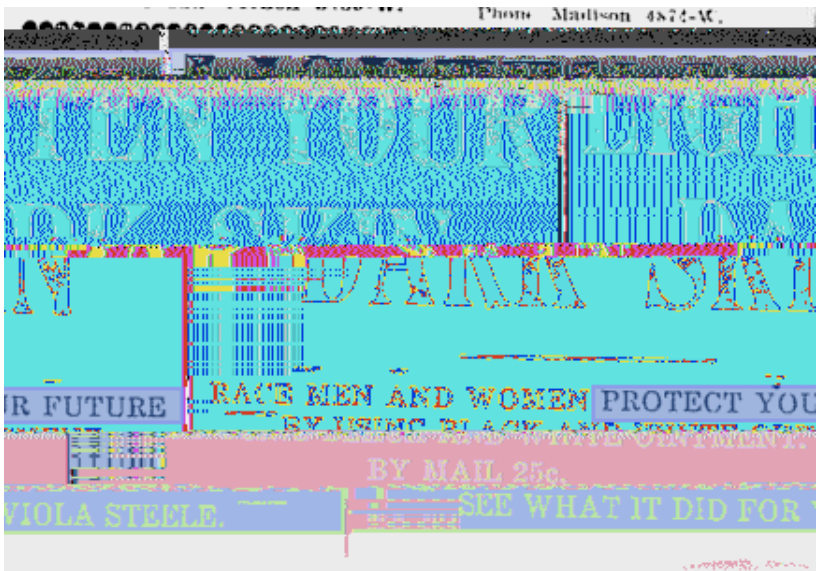
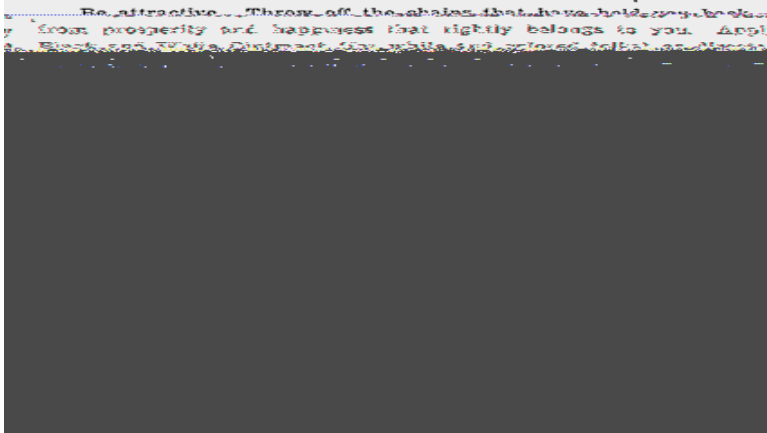
LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to conducting my original research, I developed an extensive literature review based on existing information on my topic. Many of the sources I came across were from sociological journals, articles about natural hair in *The New York Times*, and articles on blogs such as *Jezebel* and *Clutch Magazine*. Additionally, I read many books on colorism, feminist theory

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Millennium, “I always got teased by the boys and laughed at by the girls because my hair was so nappy and always stuck up in the air. I hated my hair and cried many nights. I was so glad when I got my hair straightened. It changed my whole life.”⁴¹



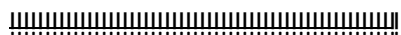
Advertisements seen in The Afro-American Newspaper on May 30, 1919

Although these advertisements were from 1919, not much has changed in the way Black women are expected to alter their appearance to have lighter skin and straighter hair. Moreover, the amount of advertisements targeted towards skin lighteners and remedies for hair straighteners send the message to Black women that they “were expected to accept that their natural features were ugly, or beastly, thereby to accept that their best options for improving those features required imitating white features.”⁵² Today, more Black women are utilizing hair relaxers and exposing themselves to toxic chemicals, such as sodium hydroxide to achieve the straight sleek look.

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⁵² Bell, Monica. “Getting Hair ‘Fixed’: Black Power, Transvaluation, and Hair Politics,” (2011) 6.

As noted in a study done by the Urban Initiative of Reproductive Health, “exposure to certain chemicals can cause a host of reproductive health problems such as infertility and reproductive cancers. Disparities in pregnancy outcomes among people of color, including birth defects, low-birth weight, still-birth, and miscarriage, may result from chemical exposure.”⁵³ Although a direct correlation between reproductive diseases and chemical exposures has not yet been identified, women of color who are either workers or clients in hair and nail salons have been diagnosed with these diseases at a much higher rate.⁵⁴ Since the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has not been regulating chemicals on the market, “it is legal for cosmetic manufacturers to use unlimited amounts of virtually any ingredient in salon and personal use products with no premarket safety assessment.”⁵⁵ This places the entire onus on the consumer to properly read product labels that do not clearly mark if the product contains toxic ingredients or not.

Since Black women face such high pressures to alter their appearance, they are putting their health at risk for the chance to fulfill an unattainable beauty standard. Why are Black women altering their natural hair texture with unnatural and toxic products such as hair relaxers? It is because “hair is something that can be seen and *read* immediately, especially if it does not meet mainstream standards.”⁵⁶ As noted in an interview in Rose Weitz’ study, “My hair is always the easiest way to go. It’s too expensive to buy a new wardrobe. There’s nothing you can do about your face. So your hair, you can go and have something radically done to it and you’ll look like a different person.”⁵⁷ For Black women, black hair can be more easily controlled and concealed in order to appeal to the European beauty standard by chemically altering the hair or wearing hair extensions such as weaves.



⁵³ National Women’s Law Center and Law Students for Reproductive Justice. *If You Really Care About Environmental Justice, You Should Care about Reproductive Justice*. (2010), 1.

<http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/FactSheetEnvironmentalJusticeandReproJustice.pdf>

⁵⁴ National Women’s Law Center, *ibid*.

⁵⁵ The Safe Cosmetics Campaign. *Not So Pretty: Toxic Chemicals Marketed to Black Women*, (2010) 1.

⁵⁶ Bell, 3.

⁵⁷ Weitz, 355.

within.”⁶² Within the Black community, the decision on how to wear hair is rarely made without the conscious (or subconscious) choice to please members in the community: these members are included but not limited to, family, friends, significant others, or even strangers. In relation to hair, “the concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts.”⁶³ How hair is worn also plays a huge role in the identity of Black people because “the discourses that form our identity are intimately tied to the structures and practices that are lived out in society from day to day.”⁶⁴ These discourses could be academic or colloqu

Millennium, one young Black girl said, “no matter what my momma tells me about how pretty I am and not to let anybody tell me anything different – it still hurts when I hear songs like ‘Boyfriend Girlfriend’ by C-Side and Keyshia Cole, with lyrics that say they ‘love a ...redbone⁶⁸ with long hair.’”⁶⁹ As also mentioned in Sirena J. Riley’s memoir, *The Black Beauty Myth*, “I have male friends and relatives who buy into these unrealistic beauty ideals and feel no shame in letting me know where they think I stack up, so to speak.”⁷⁰ While all Black men do not have the same preferences for light skin and long hair, without a doubt, anyone could pick up on that message from watching any major Black television series or music videos.

In short, “the child is taught directly or indirectly that he or she is pretty, just in proportion as the features approximate the Anglo-Saxon standard.”⁷¹

In Ingrid Banks' book, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness*, Banks asked her interviewees about how Black women are pressured to maintain their hair in a particular fashion. One interviewee noted, "It's like there are sisters that don't feel like they have a personal choice and they don't exemplify that and ,

hair and light skin that her dark skinned husband, Jody, frequently lauds. Janie's features "conform to the black version of the white ideal designated as the most important: light skin and long hair."⁷⁸ However, Janie's character actively rejects the notion that light is better than dark, yet she was still physically and verbally abused by her husband for the way she looks. Ironically, Halle Berry was casted to play Janie in the made for television version of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

In the novels *Song of Solomon* and *The Bluest Eye*, author Toni Morrison uses her characters to juxtapose the ways in which Black women think about their hair. The two novels were written in the 1970s, yet still hold much relevance today. In *Song of Solomon*, Hagar believes the notion that White beauty is ideal and feminine while Pilate wears her hair short, natural, and more masculine haircut. However, in *Song of Solomon*, Pilate asks Hagar, "how can he not love your hair? It's the same hair that grows out of his own armpits...it's all over his head, Hagar. It's his hair too. He got to love it...He don't know what he loves but he'll come around, honey, one of these days. How can he love himself and hate your hair?"⁷⁹ Even in Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison addresses the psychological effects of racism and colorism that young black girls someti

What Morrison and other Black women have sought to do is redefine female
beaut

maintain, and it looks 'good.' Yes, I wear my hair short, but I'm careful to adorn myself with markers of femininity and heterosexuality such as lipstick and large earrings...I

cultural representations of Black women.⁸⁷ Each stereotype established caricatures whose body and hair were constructed in various demeaning manners. For example, the Mammy is overweight, with “nappy” hair and coal colored skin tone whereas the Jezebel or the tragic mulatto “was often portrayed as a mixed-race woman with more European features, such as thin lips, straight hair, and a slender nose that tended to be closer to the White standard of beauty.”⁸⁸

Yet, it wasn't until the twentieth century when for the first time, Blacks were collectively free as a people "to resist accepting this image" of White beauty.⁹⁷ This resistance has most commonly been documented within the Black Power movement. The Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s "boldly proclaimed that hair is both important and political. The afro directly challenged the traditional ideal of beauty that devalued natural black features."⁹⁸ While the Black Power movement sought to rectify the marginalized experiences of Blacks, the movement also managed to make hair political, helping redefine blackness as "a positive attribute."⁹⁹ For the first time, the saying 'Black is Beautiful' was acknowledged as well as black beauty and the pride to go with it.¹⁰⁰ Self-love and self-determination became the model of the movement for uplifting the self-

“the most obvious marker of one’s attempt to emulate whiteness.”¹⁰² What happened to the Blacks that had naturally straight hair? They were pressured to rock the Afro look, even if it required putting chemicals in their hair to make it look nappy, or even rock Afro wigs. In short, there became an “overemphasis and narrow defining of Blackness [that] was leading to ‘increased confusion and danger [of] a game of trying to ‘out-Black’ or ‘out-militant’ one another.”¹⁰³ The policing of Blacks again proved to be exclusive and damaging to the overall progression of the goals of the Black Power Movement. While

decide to stop chemically processing, or relaxing their hair.”¹⁰⁶ While the natural hair movement does revoke the Black Power movement’s slogan ‘Black is Beautiful,’ it is distinct because the movement is occurring solely online. Some examples of the hair dialogue going online can best be followed via a natural hair blog, natural video log, or even on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. What is unique about the natural movement is that Black women are able to connect with others and share their hair experiences, which are commonly referred to as hair stories. As noted by Byrd & Tharps, “I think part of the stories that bind us together as Black [people] are our hair stories. I just look forward to the time when the hair stories won’t be as traumatic.”¹⁰⁷ The sharing of stories via hair blogs and video logs have created an outlet for Black women to bond over shared experiences. As noted by Jamila Bey in her *New York Times* article, “I thought, ‘Why don’t I just document my own journey to keep track of what’s working for me?...I want to contribute to the wealth of knowledge that’s out there.’”¹⁰⁸ Since many Black women have not seen their hair in its unprocessed state since birth, learning how to embrace their hair is a psychological process of growth, love, and acceptance.

Natural Hair as a Form of Political Resistance

Part of what makes the natural hair movement a *movement* is the goal of empowering Black women to reclaim and see themselves in the definition of beauty. Indeed, “change is occurring within the Black community, as more and more people embrace natural styles that emphasize the unique texture of Black hair rather than trying to hide it.”¹⁰⁹ While it may seem trite, as noted earlier, beauty issues particularly in the Black community are deeply engrained within our culture. What makes the movement so incredibly powerful within the Black community is that “over 60 percent of Black American women [wear] their hair relaxed and an estimated 5 percent [use] a hot comb to straighten it, there are precious few natural-hair role models out there for visual



¹⁰⁶ Bey, Jamila. “For African-Americans, ‘Going Natural’ Can Require Help,” (2012)1.

¹⁰⁷ Byrd & Tharps, 139.

¹⁰⁸ Bey, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Byrd & Tharps, 170.

The exclusion of certain Black women is not just related to the processing of hair, but also by class. As noted in *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color in a New Millennium*, “Black women who wear natural styles, like braids, cut across socioeconomic lines, but a politically defiant style like locs is generally a middle-class expression of Black consciousness. Inner-city girls and women are probably the least likely to wear locs.”¹²¹ While inclusive in many ways, the natural hair movement is not being accessed by all Black women. Some have attributed to the lack of overall mobilization to the digital divide, or the fact that not everyone has Internet access. However, with the increasing amount of mobile devices with Internet capability, it seems that the movement is strictly focused on the ‘hair stories,’ or experiences of middle-class to upper class Black women.

Within the mainstream media, some critics went so far as to say that Solange was ‘batshit insane’ for cutting her hair and accused of her of doing a “Britney”: or irrationally shaving her hair off.¹²⁹ Solange has also received criticism by people within the natural hair movement.

Some of the comments Solange has received from the ‘natural hair police’ is that Solange’s “curl type is not like other 4C’s” and that she “needs a twistout.” These comments were posted via Instagram and on blogs like Curly Nikki.”¹³⁰ In response to their comments, Solange tweeted multiple tweets, the most memorable one being: “I’ve never painted myself as a team natural vice president. I don’t know the lingo and I don’t sleep with a satin cap...”¹³¹ Also, there is natural hair terminology used to describe hair procedures or styles; for example, naturalistas use words such as *twistout*.¹³² In the natural hair community, the usage of the hair texture system was created to help women find products that would best be suitable for their hair type. However, as blogger Veronica on xojane.com comments “natural hair forums divided themselves in camps according to texture – 3b, 3c, 4a,4b,4c, according to the system devised by Oprah’s hair guru, Andre Walker.”¹³³

The natural hair craze exponentially became thrust into the mainstream consumer market once Carol’s Daughter, one of the larger natural hair care companies at the time asked Solange to become their new spokesperson. Carol’s Daughter was a small business that started in 1980s in founder Lisa Price’s kitchen, which then turned into a multi-billion dollar beauty empire.

by being the 'spokesperson' for one of the largest natural hair care companies in the world. As Solange responded to her decision to leave Carol's Daughter,

[We] couldn't see eye-to-eye with messaging. I was constantly fighting for the right message to be heard. The message that the way we wear our hair is a personal choice, there's no right or wrong way...I really, truly was not even

he noted that there was a relative absence of culturally specific social networks for Blacks, yet he uses research that showed that Blacks are more likely to interact with one another to build community versus their White counterparts.¹⁴⁴ What is interesting to note that in his own personal research, Byrne discovered that heritage and identity were the most commonly researched and used threads on blackplanet.com, a social network forum for young Black professionals. The need for either a physical or virtual space is one that is clearly desired within the Black community, and hair blogs and video logs have successfully formed as a way to satisfy those needs.

The Emergence of Blogs and Video Logs: Social Media for the Natural Hair Movement

What has made the social media so appealing within the natural hair movement are what the Center for Disease Control and Prevention calls the three ‘p’s’ of social media. The 3 P’s are: “personalization – content tailored to individual needs, presentation – timely and relevant content accessible in multiple formats and contexts, and participation – partners and the public who contribute content in meaningful ways. Additionally, many social media channels facilitate social engagement, viral sharing of information and trust.”¹⁴⁵ The first P, or personalization, is one of the most important factors of the use of social media, particularly within the natural hair movement.

The personal nature of sharing stories about hair, whether they are positive or negative stories, helps women work through their issues and connect with other women. Blogs are “web logs [that] are regularly updated online journals that almost anyone with an internet connection can use...blogs can be used to discuss a topic that may be too complex for other channels and to give [a] topic or program a more personal and engaging presence than a website allows.”¹⁴⁶



out that she can confide things with them that she would never share with her family or even her best friend ‘in real life.’¹⁴⁷

For many women going natural, it is hard to maintain that lifestyle without some form of support. Without the offline support of family, friends, or significant others, the decision to remain natural becomes harder. However, with the personal nature of the blogs, women can relate to each other and have the strength to continue on their natural hair journeys. In other words, the personal nature of blogging is “...of the utmost importance because it aids in the development and empowerment of the self...”¹⁴⁸ Social media has been used as a way to mobilize people who otherwise may not be able to meet in person. Additionally, social media also has the potential to be used as a support group.

Hair blogs and video logs are frequently used within the Black female community as a safe space to discuss hair, find new products, and support in going “natural.” Hair blogs are often times the first spaces where Black women can openly talk about and with each other about their experiences going natural. As stated by Nikki Walton, psychotherapist and creator of CurlyNikki, “my career as a therapist is very important to who I am, and what I do even with my persona as Curly Nikki, it’s called hair therapy.”¹⁴⁹ Hair therapy is a great way to describe hair blogs, because it provides a forum of support for women in all stages of their transition as well as a space to talk about societal pressures to alter our hair to fit the European model of beauty. Similar to group therapy, participation on hair blogs “are helping Black women to achieve self-

Another element of the natural hair movement involves the role of bloggers. Hair bloggers and video loggers are revered as ‘experts’ in the field of natural hair care, yet anyone can become a blogger or logger. However, not all bloggers and loggers garner significant success or in turn, can create an entrepreneurial business off of blogging. The key in gaining a stake hold in blogging is creating and maintaining an audience. The core of blogging and video logging is facilitating viral information sharing, or essentially making it easier for followers to share bloggers’ messages. Bloggers such as HeyFranHey uses social media sites such as Tumblr where a person can “reblog” or share on their own Tumblr pages the information HeyFranHey posts. Not only do bloggers help connect themselves to their audience, but they also help connect and share the work of other bloggers and loggers.

Many times on natural websites, other bloggers will give shout outs or post links that other bloggers shared, thus emulating a virtual community of bloggers. Additionally, bloggers are not just limited to a blog: many bloggers have Facebook fan pages, or uploading videos on YouTube and posting photos on Instagram. In these ways, the movement has expanded and began to make a very strong online presence. With so many bloggers and video loggers out there, followers can choose whom they wish to follow and also interact directly with bloggers via making comments or sharing visual content on social media.

Presentation of Hair Blogs and Video Logs

The concept of hair blogs is based on community and uplifting other women. The information on hair blogs is culturally sensitive and relevant, which is important in

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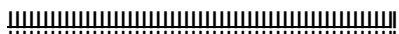
Additionally, the information on hair blogs is culturally sensitive and relevant, which is important in making popular education tools. Indeed, “individual knowledge levels, vocabulary, and customs must all be considered in selecting both the language used and the way concepts are presented.”¹⁵⁸ As a popular education tool, the blog itself is created by Black women and uses words with colloquial meanings within the context of hair in the Black community. Words such as *breakage*, *the kitchen*, and *hair journeys* are used to express difficulties with hair maintenance strategies, difference in curl texture on the head, as well as progress, change, and evolution into a more holistic life. The presence of these words gives power to members who use cultural colloquialisms to refer to their hair instead of using the dominant definitions of Black hair, which are more often than not, negative. By using these colloquial terms, oppressed groups have the ability to frame their ideas in their own words. Reclaiming Black hair and black hair terminology is one of the many ways in which hair blogs function as popular education tools.

Case Study: Curly Nikki and Hey Fran Hey

Curly Nikki

Curly Nikki is the largest natural hair blog and was created in October 2008 by psychotherapist, Nikki Walton. As noted on her blog, CurlyNikki receives over 3 million views worldwide, making it one of the most visited and popular natural hair blogs. Walton created the blog “to make even more women aware of the hair options they believed to be non-existent.”¹⁵⁹

Photo of CurlyNikki Homepage © 2012 CurlyNikki.com



¹⁵⁸ Smolensky, Jack. *Principles of Community Health* (1982) 124.

On her site, CurlyNikki has a plethora of information on different topics once a user clicks on the tabs as seen in the photo above. Users are also encouraged to comment and submit photos of their hair growth and transformation. What is unique to the CurlyNikki blog is that she facilitates meet-ups offline with followers. The meet-ups are hair workshops where people can meet one another offline as well as get product recommendations and hair consultations.

What makes separates CurlyNikki from other bloggers is that not only is her blog incredibly user-friendly (in terms of navigating her blog and connecting with other users), but Nikki Walton is also a licensed psychotherapist. As Walton notes, “people will say on this site sometimes: ‘it’s just hair, it’s not that deep,’ but they come to the site [CurlyNikki.com] everyday, so maybe it is that deep. For black women especially, it’s wrapped up in our quality of life.”¹⁶⁰ CurlyNikki is so successful because she deconstructs the psychological aspects behind hair and helps facilitate hair therapy through her blog posts and with followers in the comments section. For this reason, CurlyNikki has garnered unprecedented success in the hair blogging world and is now the author of her newest book, *Better Than Good Hair: The Curly Girl Guide to Healthy, Gorgeous Natural Hair*. For more information, please visit CurlyNikki.com

your personal goals and achievements. It's not just about becoming a leader so people can follow you, it's about being a leader so that people can also be a leader and empower others. I'm so humbled that people trusted me to create this community of trust and support."¹⁶³ The intimate nature of HeyFranHey's blog is what makes her blog stand out amongst larger blogs such as CurlyNikki.

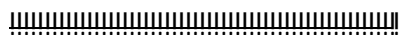
HeyFranHey's blog is incredibly user-friendly and all-encompassing of many different elements of holistic living. HeyFranHey shows that going natural – in terms of hair as well as eating organic foods-- is affordable and doable. As a blogger, she also has made featured appearances with Carol's Daughter and on YouTube mini web series about hair. For information, please visit her blog at www.heyfranhey.com.

How The Natural Hair Movement has begun to take off offline

While the natural hair movement has its base online, many non-profit organizations have been mobilizing Black women around these issues. Organizations such as Black Women for Wellness, West Harlem Environmental Action Inc. (WEACT), and the Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health have been helping continue the dialogue offline and communicating about hair. These three organizations have each focused on organizing around Black women and hair: Black Women for Wellness and WEACT have been mainly organizing to reduce the presence of toxic chemicals in hair products marketed towards the Black community, whereas the Arthur Ashe Institute has focused on creating salon-based health education programs. I will briefly detail what each organization has done in relation to the natural hair movement.

Black Women for Wellness

Black Women for Wellness is a non-profit community-based organization that is located in South Los Angeles. The mission of the organization is to “commit to the well-being of Black women and girls by building healthy communities through health



¹⁶³ Interview with Francheska Medina, conducted on February 3, 2013.

education, empowerment, and advocacy.”¹⁶⁴ Black Women for Wellness has two established programs: Green Chemistry and the Salon Workers initiative. The Green Chemistry program is managed by Nourbese Flint, which is working to create statewide policy that recognizes toxic chemicals as toxic and working to remove these chemicals from all products. The Green Chemistry project also teaches people how to read labels and avoid purchasing products that contain a high level of toxic chemicals. The salon workers initiative is the program that I was working on two summers ago; it involves helping African-American salon workers protect themselves from being exposed to harmful chemicals on the job. While the organization does not condemn non-natural hairstyling, both programs are seeking to make salon workers and their clients more “green,” or using less chemicals in hair products and procedures. For more information, please visit their website www.bwwla.com.

to say that Black males do not have body image issues, because they have also been negatively affected by these standards.

Although I opened my interviews up to Black women between the ages of 18-40 years old, I ended up primarily interviewing younger women. The most reported age of my interviewees was between 19 to 22 years old. Therefore, I believe the answers I received could have been different had I interviewed more older women. I was limited in this respect to older women, who may not be involved with social media. However, I did get to interview a good amount of women who were older than 22 years old, but the majority fell in this range. This could be because I used the snowball effect to garner more interviews on campus.

Besides age, I wanted to look at where my interviewees were born and raised. I believe that place does matter, and people may have different standards of beauty based on geographical location. Additionally, climate plays a large role in the decision for someone to wear his or her hair in a certain way. For example, if an interviewee lives somewhere humid, they may be less inclined to straighten their hair frequently.

Where the Participants were from

The majority of my interviewees reported being born on either the East coast or the West coast. The majority of my interviewees reported being born on either the East coast or the West coast. The majority of my interviewees reported being born on either the East coast or the West coast. The majority of my interviewees reported being born on either the East coast or the West coast.

in Brooklyn. I saw many women in Brooklyn wearing different natural hairstyles while I was walking down the street. As one of my participants, *Cynthia Smith¹⁶⁷, 20 from Brooklyn, NY noted, “In New York, being natural is not an issue. People are more open to being out of the box. Difference is nothing because everyone is different.” Participants from other major cities did not share the same experiences as Cynthia. However, I did notice that more participants have slowly began to embrace going natural. Sheranne Jackson, 20 from Los Angeles, CA noted that she has started to utilize resources in her community such as shopping at Simply Wholesome and using more naturally based products since going natural.

I asked my interviewees to classify their neighborhood as either urban, suburban, or rural. For the purpose of my interviews, urban is being defined as any major metropolis and a suburban environment is a residential community outside of a metropolis or urban area. A rural neighborhood is a community outside of a city or town. 21 respondents were raised in an urban community, and 15 respondents were raised in a suburban community. It was also interesting to note that some people categorized where they live as urban and suburban; this would mean they lived in an urban city but within a suburban neighborhood within the city (ex. Beverly Hills). 11 people identified themselves as living in a community that was urban and suburban. Two people noted that they lived in a rural community.

How Racial and Gender Identities affect hair

I also wanted to know how my participants self-identify themselves racially. Most participants identified themselves as Black, African-American, or mixed heritage. Other identity groups included were Black/African American (they used both interchangeably), person of the African Diaspora, mixed (biracial), or multiracial. The most reported ethnicity was West Indian. Some biracial people identified by multi-ethnicities but also identified racially as Black or African-American. Additionally, I asked my participants if they believed that race and gender affects the way they wear their hair. 78% of my

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¹⁶⁷ This participant requested a pseudonym.

respondents believed that race affected the way they wore their hair, and 85% of my respondents believed that gender also affected the way they wore their hair.

Products and Hair Regimen

“A regimen is anything you do with patience, consistency, and love.” – Felicia Leatherwood

I asked my participants what hair products they use as well as the different ways that Black women take care of their hair. I started by asking participants if they did their own hair or went to a stylist. The majority of my participants reported that they do their

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and cornrows. Jazzy Hulett, 19 from San Francisco, CA has locs and commented how many people find her hair regimen to be difficult. However, she comments, “ People always ask me because I wear locs if I don’t wash my hair. I do things the same, but my

Melissa McIntosh, 21, from Los Angeles, CA noted that “YouTube and reading hair blogs helped my hair grow back and retain my length.” Other participants noted that following hair blogs has also helped gain their confidence. Sheranne Jackson, 20 from Los Angeles, CA noted “It’s given me pride with my hair and how to take care of it and manage it as well. I also refer my younger sister to tutorials, so now she feels more comfortable with her hair.”

Another participant, Brandi Locke, 21 from Bronx, NY noted that she felt stressed out by her tedious hair process --- she would spend up to five hours getting her hair relaxed because she thought it would be easier to take care of. As Brandi noted, “I thought this was a process that I had to go through because mixed hair has to be a certain way. After seeing videos on YouTube, I started wearing my hair more natural.” Celine Joseph, 20, from Brooklyn, NY commented, “I wasn’t born knowing this knowledge.” For many people, these hair blogs are incredibly important spaces to acquire not only information, but also support in the process of going natural. As noted by Cynthia

section was what did my participants believe was the societal standard of beauty and if they believed they fit into that standard. I did not define which standard I was referring to, so it would be open to interpretation by participants. This led people to draw from both White and Black standards of beauty. Even though participants drew from both standards of beauty, the majority of participants still said that the societal standard of beauty was: light skinned, straight hair, long hair, skinny, curves, Blonde, white, tall, thin, and White beauty.

Gabbi Ncube, 19 from Tempe, AZ stated that “[my sister and I] were literally fascinated by straight hair. My mom has straight hair with blue eyes.” Other participants such as Koryeah Cobbs, 19 from Denver, CO also noted the desire to have long hair. Koryeah commented, “In high school, I felt very uncomfortable. I never wanted to wear my hair out [natural] because I had a predominantly white lifestyle, and I always noticed race immediately. I went to a small high school: there were 110 people in my class, and I was the only black girl in all of my high school. Braids were the only way to get long hair. I would be upset that I had to take out my braids. I thought that was the only way of being beautiful.” Similar to Koryeah, Brandi Locke, 21, from Bronx spoke about long hair. She noted, “I could never cut my hair, long hair is part of my identity. Older women look better with it.”

Other participants such as Jazzy Hulett, 19 from San Francisco, CA said “when you see white skinny girls with long blonde or brunette hair, it would upset me that my hair didn’t grow long. I always wanted to be like those girls with long hair, specifically to have their hair (more so with the length).” As Cynthia Smith^{*172}, 20 from Brooklyn, NY noted, “long hair is considered beautiful across all races. The idea is that ‘you are only as beautiful as your hair.’ We are told that and it impacts our relationships.” Based on the data, it is clear that Black women are receiving messages from the media and are internalizing these ideas that White beauty is the preferred or most desirable type of beauty. This data was a bit shocking because I thought more respondents would list Black

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¹⁷² This participant requested a pseudonym.

beauties such as Beyoncé or Halle Berry. Again, those women also have many of the qualities that are listed above.

Do You Believe You Fit into the Standard of Beauty?

42 participants stated that they did not fit into the standard. Only 1 person stated that she did fit into the standard in some ways because she has a lighter skin complexion, light eyes, straight hair, and is thin. However, she also felt that she was not beautiful by Black standards. When I asked if my participants felt pressured to fit into these standards (White or Black), 48% of participants said they still felt pressured to fit into the standard while 23% said they felt pressure in the past, but no longer feel the current need to fit into the standard. Most of the people who stated they feel no pressure were the older participants (30 years and older), whereas the younger participants felt the pressure to be beautiful by societal standards. I wanted to categorize these pressures into three main categories: self-pressure, familial and friend pressure, and societal pressures.

Self-perception about 'Good' Hair versus 'Bad' Hair

When I asked the participants what they considered to be beautiful hair, the seven most reported answers were: healthy hair, shiny hair, hair that is appreciated by their owner, their natural hair texture, hair that is groomed, curly hair, and hair that compliments one's face. These answers were race neutral and reflective of a more generalized observation of healthy looking hair. Allie Brown, 22 from Oakland, CA noted "What works on the person and their confidence level with the hairstyle is what makes hair beautiful." As Melissa McIntosh, 21 from Los Angeles, CA noted, "you can tell when hair is loved and nurtured."

When I asked participants what they considered to be ugly hair, overwhelmingly most people stated that there was no such thing. Other popular answers were damaged hair, dry/brittle hair, they wouldn't use the word ugly to describe hair, hair that is not

participants achieve hair that is deemed beautiful in the eyes of society? The pressure to have straightened hair was incredibly high: 18 people responded that their family found straight hair to be beautiful.

Societal Beliefs of 'Good' vs. 'Bad' Hair

When asked to define beautiful hair based on societal preference, the top seven responses were: straight hair, long hair, wavy hair, silky hair, curly (but contained) hair, Blonde, Tracee Ellis Ross, and Kim Kardashian's hair. Again, there was a clear ability to note a preference for straight hair and for White beauty. The top four answers are reflective of a more European aesthetic, versus the aesthetic that most Black women look like. As Nikki Edenedo, 21, from San Fernando Valley, CA stated, "If hair is not straight and long, then any other type of hair is not seen as beautiful." Ogonnaya Newman, 31 from Santa Rosa, CA also noted "we are moving towards everyone being the same: ethnically ambiguous, but more European looking. Look at popular urban culture. They want you to be 'Black,' but not Black." Allie Brown, 22, from Oakland, CA noted that while society considers hair like Tracee Ellis Ross curls and Beyoncé's hair to beautiful, that these standards are changing. She also commented, "people still want big boobs, big ass, and in a way, that is still black is beautiful. It will always be subliminal."

However, it was interesting to note that Tracee Ellis Ross, Diana Ross' daughter made the list as well as Kim Kardashian. Both women are not White and non-traditional beauties, but their look still reflects the societal norm. As Ogonnaya Newman, 31 from Santa Rosa, CA noted, "constructs shape how we do things." Tracee Ellis Ross has large, luscious, contained curls and Kim Kardashian has straight, silky, long hair. Again, these responses were racialized. It was clear that what is considered to be ugly hair has covert racial meanings.

Participants noted that ugly hair was: nappy and frizzy, natural hair, kinky hair, coarse hair, super short hair, braids, or hard to manage. As Cynthia Smith¹⁷⁴, 20, from Brooklyn, NY noted, "Standards are made to make people less intacki0 50 Tm /Fre ElWs0 0t4 212.1urook

people, and to make people look the same. Look at TV and clothes: whiteness is the norm, and if you're not white, then you're not normal." These are all adjectives that have been used historically to define Black hair as unattractive or ugly. It also was clear that my participants were clearly receiving messages from society that Black hair is ugly. This was a very racialized response, and shows that the stigma of having "Black" hair still holds weight and significance, even in 2013.

Categorizing and Constructing Hair Types

Then, I asked my interviewees how they felt when I was asking them to construct or categorize hair types as beautiful hair or ugly hair. I also asked them how they felt when people use the terms "good hair" or "bad hair." An overwhelming 89% of participants did not believe that people should categorize or construct hair types as "good" or "bad." As Maureen Aladin, 30s from Brooklyn, NY succinctly put it, "good hair is healthy hair."

Other participants spoke about the long lasting traumas of categorizing hair. As

African-American males and beauty standards

I asked if there are different standards of beauty for African-American males, or in other words, do African American males face the same pressures to have “beautiful” hair that women do? The responses were varied. As Cynthia Smith*¹⁷⁵, 20 from Brooklyn, NY said “If I had only short hair all day, this wouldn’t be a problem.” Similar to Cynthia*, Riana King, 21, from Folsom, CA noted, “the standard for male beauty is different. It’s not looked down upon as women with other hair textures.” Allie Brown, 22, from Oakland, CA noted that “Black males do not have the same freedom that we do, most have fades, not too many are in dreads. I can come to work with different hair styles, men have to have short hair and keep it close to their scalp.”

However, other respondents such as Yelka Kamara, 22, from Jackson Heights, NY stated, “Black men are obsessed with having ‘waves.’ What are waves? Does our natural hair have waves? They carry the brush around to impress significant others, since attraction is based on if they have good hair.” In addition, Maya Morales, 20, from Worcester, MA stated, “no hair is good hair for Black men. You don’t see hair texture unless you’re mixed and black, and then you see the curls.” Similarly, Ella Turenne, 39, from New York City, NY stated that “my brother was more obsessed with hair than I was.” Some participants spoke about black men and beauty standards in the workplace. Participants such as Melissa McIntosh, 21, from Los Angeles, CA commented, “dreads and a suit don’t match.” Nonetheless, the responses were ev2tn50 0 02tur Tj ET fET fET 2 50 4.2My(00

“It wasn’t so much the doll, but the impression on her psyche and her identity is expressed... everything else that the world tells that child is expressed through the doll.”
– Alyssa Baylor

“These are messages sent to us by people over time; we can eliminate dolls but can’t escape how Mom tugged at my hair and that feeling.” – Ella Turenne

“The doll is easy to destroy, but these images of beauty are so deeply engrained. My grandmother grew up in a time when it wasn’t ok to be Black, and [society] made being as White as possible to get by [the norm]. These ideas were passed on by generations: “good hair” equals straight hair and natural hair got throwback.” – Serita Robinson

“It’s about recognizing difference in attractiveness. All people go through it, men even go through it. It’s a process of how you appear and where you fall in the eyes of the other. Some people just win the genetic lottery. You can let the Maureen’s of the world be a big weight on you, or you can find what is special about you.” – Khloe Warren*¹⁷⁷

“You can break the doll, but you can’t escape your family. If your family doesn’t think you’re beautiful, it can really affect you. Positivity, especially for little girls, really affects you. You are able to break the doll, but you can’t break what your family says is beautiful...that stays with you all the time. This happens a lot in families of color, not just black families.” – Allie Brown

“It makes sense. The way we are socialized to think about hair (dolls, toys, TV, social media) is just one facet of it, and we hear it from young ages from our parents and peers. And the pressure to fit in is really strong. Really really strong. I hated straightening my hair when I was little. It hurt.” – Veronica Jones*¹⁷⁸

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¹⁷⁷ This participant requested a pseudonym.

¹⁷⁸ This participant requested a pseudonym.

From these responses, it was clear that young black girls can easily pick up on

that being told, “light is right” was detrimental to their self-esteem. Since *Bluest Eye* discusses colorism, I thought it was important to address the issue of colorism in the interview.

I asked if respondents believed that there was an association that exists between skin tone and hair texture: that if you are born with lighter skin, you will automatically have “good” hair, and if you are darker skinned,

or have people in their family who contradict this idea. Some people also noted it's all a matter of genetics; it has nothing to do with anything else.

Conscious of skin color and hair texture

Since respondents acknowledged that there was a clear association between skin tone and hair type, I wanted to see where they noticed this association the most. I asked the question: Do you ever feel conscious of your skin color and your hair, and in what contexts or settings is this most apparent for you? Out of 43 participants who answered this question, 86% of women said they were conscious of hair and color. The places they felt most aware of this are at: school, work, people of all race in one setting (usually all White), or all Black settings.

As noted by Uriah Johnson, 21, from the Bronx, NY, "I feel more conscious of my hair at school. I am more comfortable to do what I want with it, because you can define Blackness at Oxy without people trying to impose ideals on you." Other participants such as Yelka Kamara, 22, from Jackson Heights, NY stated that "I feel more conscious about my hair around black people. There is a sense of policing of hair and even policing of what is beautiful in terms of complexion. I feel like you're always being judged." The participants that responded to this question also talked about the pressures of having to blend into work or social environments, and that it can be difficult when their color or hair stands out from the other people in those spaces.

Do successful African- American women have to straighten their hair?

"This is the politics of being a Black girl. My skin color doesn't define me, so why should my hair?" – Asia Canady

When I asked if African-American women with straight hair are viewed as more successful and more attractive than African American women who wore their hair in a non-straightened style, 89% said that this was true. Many respondents noted that prominent Black women in the media such as Michelle Obama, Condoleezza Rice, women in music videos, and other Black women on television all have straight hair.

Koryeah Cobbs, 19 from Denver, Colorado said “There is more privilege based on straightened hair. Look at the Basketball Wives. They have lighter skin, straighter hair. Both the producers and themselves are styled that way so when Black people watch the show, they think ‘wow, they look like that and can get an NBA player.’”

Similar to Koryeah, Maureen Aladin, social media personality noted that “you only see relaxers in the hair of powerful women. The Essence editor-in-chief is going natural, but relaxed hair is in the media and the news. It hasn’t completely changed yet. Michelle Obama would get nasty comments if she went natural. Younger generations are seeing this change, this is the new normal.” However, many people noted that this association was sad and not necessarily valid. Jazzy Hulett, 19, from San Francisco, CA stated, “it has to do with the idea that a woman in a position of power has to conform to the gender norm, which is having ‘typical’ white hair (standard of hair). They already have two strikes against them: being a woman and being black. Look at Michelle Obama. There’s not many women in power with natural hair.”

Some participants also noted that apart from high profile Black women, regular Black women still face these pressures. As Chardonnay Madkins, 20, from Sacramento, CA stated, “Black women go through a phase of being natural during college, but after that, they go right back to pressing their hair. It’s easier for Black women with straight hair to blend in. It’s more about business than hair. White people can’t tell if our hair is a weave or not. They just see that straight hair is like me, and then they can relate to us.”

On the other hand, there were participants that could list many successful Black women who wear their hair naturally. Felicia Leatherwood, a natural hair guru and celebrity hairstylist commented, “Halle Berry isn’t rocking an Afro, but that’s fine. There’s people rocking afros, curly afros, there’s people on TV, who are on commercials, singers...there are a lot of naturalistas! If they’re expecting Beyoncé to roll out with an Afro in more than 2 days, I don’t think that will happen. Her baby has a cute ‘fro though. In terms of successful Black women having to wear their hair straight, it is a myth and an illusion: if you have an excellent job in corporate America, it doesn’t matter. I’ve had

twists, dreads, braids, etc. I always had great jobs, they never had a problem with my hair because it had nothing to do with my work abilities. We gotta get over that insecurity.”

Some also noted that other-non-Black people may view Black women this way, but that this idea of having straight hair to be successful is not true. Others also noted that some Black people feel this way about Black women and again, that’s not fair or true. As Janel Booker, 20, from Waukegan, IL stated, “Black people can’t stand together as a whole to say ‘this is beautiful,’ that who I am naturally is beautiful. When that happens, then things can change. How can we be divided within the world and our own race?” In addition, some respondents claimed that this was largely dependent on the attractiveness of the woman. People such as Solange and India.Aire were referenced as being beautiful but also not ascribing to the standard of having straight hair to be beautiful.

Pressured to straighten hair

I then asked participants if they felt pressured to straighten their hair. Out of 45 participants, 84% felt pressured to straighten their hair mainly by family, school mates, or significant others. Participants shared personal stories about being teased for wearing their natural hair; some stories were more extreme than others. I was curious to see that participants reported having high self-esteem, yet they also reported feeling pressure from dominant society and internally from family, friends, or significant others. I wanted to see when and by whom was participants being affirmed or pressured by.

Praised or Teased for their Hair

I asked if participants had ever been praised for their hair and what did it look like when it was praised. 100% of participants stated that they have been praised, and it was mainly when it was natural, straight, or curly. Although natural hair came before straight hair, most people said this was only most recently but in past, they were mainly praised for having straight hair. On the other hand, I wanted to see if respondents were teased because of the way their hair looked. 80% reported saying they were teased about how

their hair looked, mainly when it was natural, relaxed (chemically straightened), or in braids. Participants referenced specific childhood memories, but some also talked about reactions in their family to having their hair in a natural style now.

Bell Hooks Quote

“For each of us, getting our hair pressed is an important ritual. It is not a sign of our longing to be White. It is not a sign of our quest to be beautiful. We are girls. It is our sign of our desire to be women” (Hooks, 382).

The last question in the sociological section was another free response question. I asked participants if they agreed or disagreed with the quote listed above in bold text. Out of 42 responses, 50% agreed with the quote although there was still a lot of criticism of the quote. Here were some of the responses:

“No one says a white girl is trying to be black when she takes a curling rod to her head.”
– Sumayyah Shabazz

“ I think its biased, not everyone feels that way: it’s her quest. I believe being a woman is being naturally who you are; not everyone wants to straighten their hair.” –

‘it took three hours’ to get my hair straightened shows the effort it took do my hair like that.” – Ayana Foster

“It’s a part of the process of appearing feminine and buying into what that means.” – Brandi Locke

“The reason for a person to straighten their hair is to look pretty, but to look pretty in a White context. No one consciously thinks that, but then why is it that more people don’t grow out fros?” – Chardonnay Madkins

“For women in general, hair is an accessory; women have the right to do with it as they please. There is a notion that straight hair is emulating Whiteness, but in my case, it was easier to manage straightened.” – Mika Cribbs

“This is a very gendered quote; Black women are made to feel that to be a woman or of a certain stature is to straighten your hair. Why can’t you be a woman with natural hair?” –

Natural or Not?

When I asked participants if they considered themselves naturals, 45 respondents considered themselves to be natural based on their personal definition. It was also interesting to note that 15% of these respondents said they were both. Participants who noted this said they still flat ironed their hair, but abstained from using chemicals in their hair. I also wanted to see how long they were natural for. Most people who identified as being natural have been natural for 1 year, their whole life, 3 years, 4 years, or 2 years. It was interesting to see that most people that I interviewed had either just went natural or have been natural for a while.

Natural Hair Movement

When I asked participants if they were comfortable with the term *natural hair movement*, 91% of respondents said that they were comfortable using that term. 80% of participants also believed that the natural hair movement was indeed a real movement. As Ella Turenne, 39, from New York City, NY mentioned, “if we call it a movement, it sounds urgent. It makes people pay attention. Movement implies changing, getting coalition by-in around a certain issue. It implies a sense of community, it’s the best result of positive community in healthy, self-affirming ways.” However, some people were uncomfortable using the term *movement* to describe what is going on now with the re-emergence of natural hair. Ayana Foster, 19, from Oakland, CA comments, “I love my hair, I don’t want to be part of the next ‘new’ thing.”

Is Black Hair Political or has it been Politicized by society?

Out of 45 respondents, 42% believed that Black hair is political, whereas 40% believed Black hair has been politicized by society. This was one of the most difficult questions for many people to answer in my interview. Many people cited different reasons for responding in the way that they did. Most people noted despite whatever answer they chose, that it’s only Black women who have their hair constructed in this

way. As Ayana Foster, 19, from Oakland, CA noted, “I don’t feel like part of the natural hair movement. I didn’t want to have a receding hairline, but I also didn’t want to do my hair constantly.”

Overall, all the participants who answered this question believed that the way they choose

conscious of their hair too, it makes them think of what they thought of themselves.” To follow up with that, Ella Turenne, 39, from New York City, NY commented, “there is a genuine attempt but we live in a society where there are parameters. Women who are not natural feel excluded just because they don’t have natural hair, doesn’t mean that they’re prescribing to an idea. There’s work to be done to include more women affected by colorism and classism.”

Some mentioned the Twitter hash tags #TeamNatural and #TeamRelaxed which according to some respondents, are reproducing and reaffirming the idea of “good hair” versus “bad hair.” As Ogonnaya Newman, 31 from Santa Rosa, CA noted, “There are people on ‘Team Natural’ but they’re still using parabens. It’s a process, and we haven’t gotten there yet.” Overall, respondents believed that the natural hair movement achieved the goal of being inclusive of all people.

Solange Knowles

The last few questions focused on Solange Knowles, because many of my sources in my literature review were about how she has served as the face of the natural hair movement. However, Solange neither chose nor accepted this role. I wanted to see how my participants felt about Solange being praised and criticized by the natural hair movement.

I asked respondents if they believed if it was fair for Solange Knowles to assume the role as the poster child of the natural hair movement, or if it was a given because she is a Black celebrity. Out of 42 respondents, 50% said that it was fair that Solange has been made into the “face” of the natural hair movement. Many people noted that Solange doesn’t care about the movement or never explicitly asked or agreed to be the face of the movement. As Ella Turenne, 39, from New York City, NY stated, “I don’t want [Solange] to speak for me. She doesn’t mirror my experiences. It’s a burden to her and us.” Additionally, many participants noted that Solange was not the first Black celebrity

Canady, 22, from Sacramento, CA “everyone needs a face of the movement. Solange wasn’t the first to be in that space – there was Diana Ross, Grace Jones. However, she’s great for bringing this movement into the mainstream and is a good juxtaposition between her and her sister, Beyoncé. Other people could do it, but Solange is ok for now.”

I asked a question about the hair texture classification system as a lead-in to my final question. On many natural hair blogs, there are quizzes that people can take to determine what is their specific hair type, which is deemed by a number or a letter (ex. 4B/4C is my hair texture). Based on the results, the blog

Recommendations

I created the following recommendations based off my findings. After I analyzed my data, I was able to see where there was a need for practical solutions. These recommendations are what I believe could best ameliorate the situation for natural hair in the United States.

1) Products and Toxicity

Solution: Create sections on natural hair blogs that explains how to read product labels.

Only 15% of my participants could identify or recognize toxic ingredients. So far, popular (or identifiable) toxic chemicals are sulfates, alcohol, and parabens that now, many products make sure to label that their product is “sulfate free.” Large scaled corporations are seeing economic responses to demands for natural products, since consumers will not purchase products that have sulfates or parabens in them. Now, companies are taking out these toxic chemicals. Therefore, it is importa

48% of my respondents said they felt pressured to fit into societal standards of beauty, mainly by family, friends, and significant others. This booklet would serve as a guide to help women transition and continue being natural offline. Many of the women I spoke to who were natural said they felt pressured by people in their personal lives to straighten their hair. There could also be a guide created for families to help them learn to embrace natural hair, even if that aesthetic is not for them. 89% said that it was not okay to categorize or construct hair types as ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ The booklet would not be a mandate for people to go natural; rather it would be used to help work around the individual to rethink the language we use around beauty culture (ex. ‘good’ hair vs. ‘bad’ hair).

4) *Destigmatizing natural hair in the workplace*

Solution: Showcase trendy styles that can be done with natural hair and that can be worn in the workplace.

86% of participants said they were conscious of hair and color, particularly at school and at work. 84% of respondents also said they felt pressured to straighten hair. Additionally, a staggering 89% of respondents said they believed that African American women are viewed as more successful and attractive with straight hair. If more women felt that they could wear their hair in natural styles in the work place, then they would choose to wear their hair natural. There were some misconceptions that natural hair automatically means unprofessionalism or untamed hair.

However, if women could see trendy styles that can be done with natural hair that are workplace appropriate, then

As I found in my literature review and through my interviews, it is clear that low income Black women are being isolated by the natural hair movement. If community organizations hosted free natural hair workshops, then more Black women could learn about these issues. In the workshops, there could be hair tutorials, showing how to care for hair naturally, finding products in their community that are inexpensive/how to better care for hair, etc. In essence, these workshops are presenting the choice to low income Black women on alternative hairstyles and also less toxic ways to achieve the styles that they would like. On these organization's websites, they could have links to blogs or RSS feed from certain blogs. Organizations then could form partnerships with bloggers in their cities to provide geographically relevant information.

6) *Implementing more Salon health education programs*

Solution: Give health education to Black women in a space that is deemed safe and comfortable and receiving education Q q 09es7h/F1 () Tj ET.6957 688.2609cm BT 50 0 0 50 |

community. Additionally, “patrons who are either waiting for or receiving services are a captive audience for on-site health education and health-promotion presentations.”¹⁸⁵

While clients are waiting to get their hair done, they can receive other health information. This information does not only have to be about natural hair care: it can also be about eating healthy, exercising, basic preventative health education to reduce harm. This has also been done in barbershops around increasing physical activity to reduce hypertension and was very successful (Linnan et al, 2010). This model can then be used to implement lifestyle changes in health behavior (i.e. getting screened for breast cancer).

Other Recommendations

Apart from the more practical recommendations listed above, ideally I would like to see more avenues of support for Black women who want to go natural. I wanted to think more about how the community on natural hair blogs can be replicated offline. Aside from community organizations, another powerful source is the media. If the media portrayed more Black women with different hairstyles and skin complexions, then a more diverse range of beauty will be represented. I do believe that this could be helpful in developing positive self-esteem and images for young Black girls growing upm BT 51 430.0000 120.7152

Conclusion

“I see it as a journey and it’s not done yet. I’m more comfortable when it happens organically. I’m not experimenting anymore, I can’t care about what others think.” – Ella Turenne

This project found that Black women, regardless of geographical location, age, or occupation are still negatively impacted by the dominant European standard of beauty. While the European standard of beauty in itself is problematic, what is equally damaging is the reproduction of this standard within Black families and by significant others who are holding Black women to an unattainable standard of beauty. This came up in my findings and is something that needs to change immediately. Black women are emotionally and physically suffering for beauty. As documented in my findings, common side effects of straightening hair led to dryness, hair breakage, and feeling depressed and or frustrated by their hair. This conflict is not something new that Black women are now just experiencing: beauty issues have affected us

More Black women can be featured in fashion advertisement and television shows that look more ethnic, instead of casting the same ethnically ambiguous models and actresses. On a larger scale, beauty companies can spend less money promoting skin lightening creams and hair straighteners, and better allocate that money to researching ways to using chemicals that are not as toxic to our hair or our bodies. It is not too late to change the beauty standard or demand for more organic and healthier products.

As the natural hair movement gains more of a presence, more people have begun to respond positively towards its goal of uniting Black women and uplifting our natural beauty. Now more than ever, there are more Black women on television with natural hair and natural hair products are in major stores such as Target, CVS, and Walgreens. While there is still more work that needs to be done, both on a microscopic and macroscopic level, it appears that society is leaning towards accepting natural beauty to be just as beautiful as the dominant ideals of beauty.

Last Thoughts

This project has been a life changing experience for me. Ever since my research with Black Women for Wellness, I have developed a passion for natural hair as well as a newfound dedication to bringing environmental justice to communities of color. Through the natural hair movement, I have learned how to love my natural hair and to share that joy with everyone that I come across.

Additionally, going natural has proven to be a very profound experience for me and I have met hundreds of naturals in the process of going natural and while conducting this research project. I feel honored to have had the experience to share my story, to learn from other's stories, and to publish this research so that more women can have access to this information that can ultimately empower them and change their lives, as it has mine.

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www.curlynikki.com

www.heyfranhey.com

Appendix 1

General Interview Questions

Demographics:

- What is your name? Age? City of birth? Where do you currently live (apart from Oxy)? Where were you raised? What environment were you raised in (suburbs, rural, urban)?
- How do you identify racially and or ethnically?
- Do you believe your race and or ethnicity affects how you wear your hair?
- Do you believe your gender affects how you wear your hair?

Hair Stylist Questions:

- Do you do your own hair or do you go to a styl

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7) How have your followers been empowered by the work you do?

Hey Fran Hey

- 1) Who she is/ What inspired your blogging?
- 2) What do you blog about?
- 3) What has inspired you to blog?
- 4) How did you begin blogging?
- 5) How has running a blog about natural hair and beauty (and lifestyle) influenced your personal life?
- 6) Did you see your blog as a resource to help other women?
- 7) How many followers or readers do you get per month, yearly, or daily? Is there any way to track followers?
- 8) Do you believe your blog could be used as a platform of change?
- 9) In your opinion, how does your blog address challenges and or needs for health education in the Black community?
- 10) How can social media build community and encouragement in a virtual space?
- 11) Do you believe that your blog is a form of popular and health education?
- 12) In what ways have you been empowered by the work you do?
- 13) In what ways have your readers been empowered by the work you do?
- 14) How do you come up with blog posts?

Felicia Leatherwood, natural hair guru and hair stylist

- 1) What inspired you to begin your work with natural hair/natural hair care?
- 2) How did you come to create the hair empowerment philosophy?
- 3) What made you interested in styling hair?
- 4) How has natural hair care and products responded to corporations creating “natural products?”
- 5) How did you decide to pursue natural hair care/styling?
- 6) What inspired you to create the Mind, Body, Hair blog?
- 7) How many subscribers follow your blog or vlog (if applicable)?
- 8) Can you describe a typical hair workshop experience?
- 9) How can natural hair blogs and other forms of social media be used to inspire change? 00 118

18) How have your workshops helped encourage health empowerment in Black communities, especially for Black women?

Marilyn Fraser White MD

- 1) What type of work does Arthur Ashe Institute do around health education?
- 2) What is her role at Arthur Ashe Institute?
- 3) What inspired you to work for the organization?
- 4) How have these programs helped encourage health empowerment in the Black and Latino communities?
- 5) How did AA come up with the salon education program?
- 6) How are stylists trained to educate clients? Do clients ever become a part of the education process? (i.e. becoming 'teachers')
- 7) Would you say that the salon based program is more traditional educational format (teacher/student) or embodies elements of popular education (no teacher/student, everyone works collectively and shares knowledge based on their life perspective)?
- 8) What is the criterion to become a part of the program?
- 9) How many people are currently participating in all the salon based programs?
- 10) Does AA do any community organizing around toxic chemicals in hair products?
- 11) Is natural hair care a component of the salon based programs?
- 12) How does the salon based programs, particularly Black Pearls, address challenges and or needs for health education in the Black community?
- 13) How can health education encourage community engagement?
- 14) Does AA do any online organizing?
- 15) How can social media build community and encourage community health engagement in a virtual space?
- 16) How can hair blogs be utilized as a type of resource for health education?
- 17) How has running a successful program such as Black Pearls about hair and health education influenced your personal life?
- 18) Do you see the salon based programs expanding nationwide?
- 19) Do you believe that these salon programs could be used as a platform for change?
- 20) In your opinion, is health education considered to be a social movement?
- 21) In what ways have you been empowered by the work that you do?
- 22) In what ways have others been empowered by the work that you do?

Tomiko Fraser Hines

- 1) What inspires you to be natural?
- 2) How did you get involved with the natural hair movement?
- 3) Do you follow any hair blogs?
- 4) Have you felt pressured to straighten your hair as a model, or has natural hair been acceptable for some shoots?

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Ogonnaya Newman (WEACT)

- 1) What does WEACT do?
- 2) What is her role at WEACT?
- 3) How does WEACT create health education?

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- 4) How does WEACT create or influence public policy?
- 5) Does WEACT do any organizing or target prevention with toxic chemicals in hair products?
- 6) How has WEACT served the surrounding community to help empower people about their health?
- 7) How does WEACT address challenges and or needs for health education in the community?
- 8) How can health education encourage community engagement?
- 9) Does WEACT do any online organizing?
- 10) In your opinion, can health education be considered a social movement?
- 11) In what ways have you been empowered by the work you do?
- 12) In what ways have community members been empowered?

Shanequa Hammock, Occidental College

Appendix 2

Coding Table

This is the table that I generated to convert my interview questions into analytical data.

Demographics:

- What is your name? Age? City of birth? Where do you currently live (apart from Oxy)? Where were you raised? What environment were you raised in (suburbs, rural, urban)?
- How do you identify racially and or ethnically?
- Do you believe your race and or ethnicity affects how you wear your hair?
- Do you believe your gender affects how you wear your hair?

AGE:

31, 20, 18, 21, 21, 26, 21, 20, 30s, 25, 22, 21, 19, 19, 20, 19, 20, 19, 21, 38, 20, 18, 20, 22, 34, 20, 22, 19, 22, 20, 44, 30, 23 , 20, 51, 22, 21, 44, 24, 21, 19, 20, 21, 20

CITY OF ORIGIN:

Santa Rosa, CA
Los Angeles , CA
Manhattan Beach, CA
Los Angeles, CA
Brooklyn, NY
Jersey City, NJ
Brooklyn, NY
Manhattan, NY
Queens, NY
Baltimore, Maryland
Brooklyn, NY
New York, NY
Oakland, CA
Sierra Leone, raised in Colorado (adopted)
Bristol, PA and Trenton, NJ
San Francisco, CA
Waukegan, IL
Oakland, CA

San Francisco, CA
New York City, NY
Houston, Texas
San Gabriel, CA raised in San Diego, CA
Sacramento, CA
Simi Valley, CA
Newark, NJ
Newark, NJ

Urban – 19
Urban and suburban – 11
Suburban and rural – 1

Self identifies as:

Black – 17
African American- 13
Black/African American- 6
Mixed heritage (ethnicities) – 12
Person of the African Diaspora -- 1
Mixed (biracial) – 5
Multiracial – 1

Race affects hair:

Yes- 35
No- 10

Gender affects hair:

Yes – 38
No- 7

Hair Stylist Questions:

- Do you do your own hair or do you go to a stylist?
- If stylist: how long have you been going to your stylist?
- What procedures do you do to your hair? (i.e. coloring, straightening, trim/cut, etc.)
- What procedures have you done to your hair in the past?
- What products does your stylist use in your hair?

Does own hair

20

* some people noted that it depends on the style

Goes to stylist/barber

5

Going to stylist for:

7 years – 2
1 year – 1
5 years – 2
6 months – 1

Brazilian blowout – 3
Dominican blowout – 2
Bangs – 2
Keratin treatment – 1
Natural in transition styles – 1

Products and Toxicity:

- What products do you use?
- Can you list any ingredients in the product you use?
- Do you read customer reviews on products online before purchasing products? Do you just go to the store and test a product?
- Have you experienced any physical or emotional health impacts due to how you handle/care for your hair? (i.e. depression, hair breakage, scalp burn, headaches, etc.)
- Would you like to elaborate?

Products Used

Nature's Blessing -1
Makes own products – 2
Wen products – 4
Olive oil product – 5
Herbal Essence Shampoo – 1
Carol's Daughters products – 5
Tresseme products – 3
Clairol Cellophane – 1
Coconut oil – 6
Dax Hair Pomade – 1
Cantu Shea Butter – 3
Crème of Nature – 1
Shea Moisture products– 8
Giovanni conditioner –

Cream mayonnaise –1
Black Vanilla Shampoo – 1
BP products –1
Organic products –1
Jojoba oil – 3
Hair mimosa shine – 1
French products -1
Paul Mitchell live in conditioner – 1
Keracare – 1
Nioxin – 1
Grease – 2
Moisturizing cream with gel – 1
Water – 2
Moroccan oil – 3
Argan oil- 2
Leave in conditioner -1
Aloe based shine spray – 1
Mango Twist and Lime –1
Lush shine spray – 1
Sami products – 1
Garnier Fructis triple nutrition – 1
Aussie 3 minute miracle Deep Conditioner – 1
Taliah Waajid products – 1
Styling gel – 1
Nexxus Moisturizing Shampoo – 1
Infusium Moisturizing Conditioner – 1
Motions hair spray – 1
Pure Vitamin E oil – 2
Fantasia products – 1
Shampoo, conditioner, heat protectant cream, deep conditioner cream -1
Mizani – 2
Palmer's Olive Oil – 1
Pink Scurl – 1
Moisturizers and oils – 1
Organic Root stimulator edge conditioner – 1
Black Jamaican castor oil – 1
Peppermint oil – 1
Organix products – 1
Pink – 1
SportyAfros – 1
Curlz – 1
Komaza Coconut Hair Pudding – 1
Rosemary oil – 1
Mixed Chicks shampoo and conditioner – 1
Silk Elements Mixed – 1
Argan Oil deep conditioner –1

Hair Rules – 1
Kinky Curly products– 2
Optimum 6 miracle oil – 1
Hot six oil – 1
Mixed Chicks products – 1
Organix Moroccan Oil Curl Clarifying Conditioner – 1
Aloe Vera (from the plant) – 1
Avocado oil – 1
Smoothing serum – 1
Anti-breakage spray (used pre and post procedures involving heat) – 1
Aveda shampoo and conditioner – 1
Spray on gloss – 1
Dr. Palmer's – 1
Miss Jessie's – 1
Curl's Lotion (Pure Shine) – 1

Ingredients in Products

Could List Some – 30

Could not List Any – 13

Could identify or recognize toxic ingredients – 7

Reads Product Reviews online, Word of Mouth, both?

Reads online reviews – 12

Word of mouth – 6

Stylist recommendation – 7

Word of mouth and reviews – 10

Other – 5

- magazines
- read product labels
- Process of elimination ! just test drives a product to see how it does in her hair
- Message boards

Emotional Health or Physical Health Impacts

Breakage – 25

- Everyone noted breakage from excessive hair straightening and due to over perming /relaxing hair.
- Some noted breakage because of pulling hair in an updo
- One person noted thinning around hairline and edges

Scalp burn- 5

Dryness – 11

Headaches – 0

Depression/Frustration- 10

*related mainly to frustration and or teasing around hair

Other (list) – 9

- Stress
- Excessive shedding
- Excessive dandruff
- Eczema ! prescribed a special shampoo to fix one person's stress spots
- Hair falling out
- Emotional stress ! not feeling comfortable enough to wear hair natural at her job
- Shrinkage
- Scalp damage
- Sometimes has allergic reaction to oils and breaks out

Non-applicable – 3

Blogs:

- Have you ever researched how to care for your hair in alternative forms of media such as blogs, online forums, etc.?
- If yes: What blogs do you go on?
- How has looking on hair blogs been helpful in maintaining your hair?
- Do you believe alternative forms of media are successful in fostering community between Black women?
- If no: Would you consider looking at hair blogs or video blogs?
- Can you easily find information about your hair on these hair blogs?

Ever been on a blog or vlog

Yes – 35

No – 7

* All noted that they would consider looking at a blog or vlog

What blogs or vlogs do they visit?

Google search – 9

YouTube suggested videos – 7

Clutch Magazine – 2

Essence Magazine – 2

Curly Nikki – 9

NikkiMay- 2

Chaje – 1
KimmyTube – 1
GlamTwins –2
TheIcing – 1
XGoldn – 1
LongHairDontCare – 2
Blackgirllonghair -- 3
Simply Yonique –1
ToyaBoo – 1
WhoisSugar –1
Naturalsistas – 1
Tumblr – 1
MopTopMaven - 1
LuvsNatural – 1
HeyFranHey – 3
Naptural85 – 2
Pinterest –1
Chescaleigh -1
Facebook fan pages about hair bloggers/hair -- 1
Bronzeqt –1
K is for kinky – 1
Kinkycurlycoilyme – 1
Carol’s Daughter blog – 1
Felicia Leatherwood’s website – 1
Fashion blogs but not specific hair blogs – 1
Urbanbushbabes – 1
Madame Noire – 2
TarynGuy – 1
MopTopMaven -1
Curly Hair Beauties – 1
Shannon Bootran – 1
Those Girls Are Wild – 1
Angela the Healthy Hairstylist – 1
BritneyNGray -1
Product websites – 1
LadyKeys – 1

Helpful in maintaining hair (if applicable)

Yes – 37

No- 5 (not applicable)

Fostering community with Black women

Yes – 41

No – 2

Easily find information about hair on these blogs

Yes – 20

- one person noted however that there is no hub for all this information, and some information is contradictory.
- Some people noted that it was possible to find their hair texture, its just a matter of patience
- One person noted that hair blogs have conflicting messages of having “full” or “long” hair which is not achievable for all hair textures

No- 20

* One person noted that she could not find information on Black women with naturally fine hair

n/a – 3

Sociological Perspective/ Hair Story Questions:

- What do you believe is the societal standard of beauty? Do you consider yourself to fit into that standard?
- Do you feel pressured to fit into societal standards of beauty?
- What do you consider to be "beautiful" hair? What do you consider to be “ugly” hair?
- What do people in your family and/or immediate friend circle consider to be “beautiful” or “ugly” hair?
- What does society consider to be “beautiful” or “ugly” hair?
- How do you feel about categorizing or constructing hair types as “beautiful” or “ugly” or “good” hair vs. “bad” hair?
- Do you believe there are different standards for African- American males and beauty? (***In other words:*** Do you think that Black men face the same pressures to have “beautiful” hair as women do? Do you believe Black men face different pressures?)
- Do you believe that gender roles are played out in hair? (ex. Feminine expression of hair = long hair, masculine expression of hair = short hair).
- How do you feel about this quote?: “...dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world.” – Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
- Do you believe that you are beautiful?
- Do you believe that other people find you to be beautiful?

Societal standard of beauty (terms that came up most frequently) note: a lot of people drew from both White and Black beauty standards –

-

Skinny – 9
Long hair – 13
Thin features – 1
Fit – 1
Straight teeth – 1
Tall – 7
High cheekbones – 1
Big butt – 1
Boobs – 1
Voluptuous (body) – 2
Curves – 8
White – 7
Thin – 6
Luscious hair – 2
Light skinned – 13
Straight hair – 13
Blonde – 7
Blue eyes – 2
Barbie type – 1
Kerry Washington – 1
Light eyes – 1
Silky – 1
Depends on the society – 4
Voluptuous hair – 1
Makeup- 1
White beauty – 5
Light colored hair – 1
Asian like her mom – 1
Racially ambiguous – 1
Blendable beauty – 1
Wavy hair – 3
Big mane (Black community) –

Yes – 1

*in some ways, yes (she has light skin, light eyes, straight hair, thin but she's not by
Bla

Wavy – 1
More creative – 1
How comfortable someone is with their hair –1
Everyone has beautiful hair – 1

No definition -1
Oily hair – 1
Lack of hair (no hair) – 1

Beautiful hair (family and friends) – terms that came up most frequently

Locs (styled and kempt) – 3
Depends on race of friends – 1
Straight –17
Long – 10
Natural – 15
Curly lion hair – 3
White girl hair – 1
Weaves – 2
Don't care – 1
Thick – 2
Relaxed hair -- 2
Dreads -- 1
Perm/relaxed hair –1
Manageable – 2
Ethiopian long and wavy hair – 2
Not nappy hair –1
No idea –1
Maintained hair – 1
Never talked about hair in their family – 2
Mixed girls' hair – 1
Wavy hair – 2
You tried to do your hair – 2
Stylized natural hair – 1
“Put together” – 1
Lighter colored hair – 1
Healthy – 5
Biracial hair – 1
Soft – 1
All hair is beautiful – 2
Silky – 1
Very short hair – 1

Ugly hair (family and friends) – terms that came up most frequently

Uneven – 1
Weave – 2
Dirty – 1
Unhealthy – 3
Breakage – 1
Unkempt curly hair –1

Straight hair – 1
Natural hair – 1
Nappy hair –1
Thin and stringy hair –1
Brittle – 1
Damaged – 2
Frizzy – 1
Untamed – 1
Unnatural colors – 1
Unnatural lengths – 1
Dry – 1

Beautiful hair (society) – terms that came up most frequently
Some people brought up there was a difference in beautiful hair based on society vs. racial groups.

Long – 20
Wavy – 7
* as in beach waves
Fine – 1
Textured -1
Mixed curly hair – 1
Straight – 21
Thick – 2
Flouncy hair (flowing and bouncy hair) –1
Tangle free – 1
Long loose curls – 1
Depends on where you are – 1
Whiteness is the norm – 2
Weaves --1
A certain type of natural hair (ex. Tracee Ellis Ross) – 1
Silky – 5
Presentable –1
Blonde –3
**Garnier Fructis: long strong durable shiny – 2
Beautiful – 1
Kim Kardashian hair – 2
Tracee Ellis Ross Hair – 1
Shiny – 2
Curly (but contained) – 5
Permed hair – 1
Luscious hair – 1
Full – 2
Bouncy – 1
Quicker to accept European hair – 1
Voluminous – 1

Light colored – 1
Proper – 1
Western hair textures – 1
Anything not kinky -1
Beyoncé's hair – 1
Nice, curly, moisturized full locks – 1
Locs – 1
Upkept – 1
Biracial ringlets – 1

Ugly hair (society) – terms that came up most frequently

Nappy hair and frizzy hair – 5
*one of the 3 noted there was a stigma that still exists around nappy hair
Short, knotty, ethnic hair – 1
Coarse – 4
Dry – 1
Brittle – 1
Tangly – 1
Tight – 1
Thick – 1
Hard to manage – 2
Not controlled –1
Crazy –1
My hair – 1
Super short – 3
Braids – 2
Anything outside of beauty norms – 1
Dreadlocks – 1
Unkempt – 1
Natural hair if they don't know how to take care of it – 1
Vibrant colors – 1
Locs – 1
Kinky – 5
Curly hair that doesn't go down unless you straighten it– 1
Unruly – 1
Hair all over the place – 1
Nappy – 1
Natural hair – 4
* this person noted that natural hair is exoticified

Categorizing and constructing hair types

Doesn't think its good – 38
It happens – 5

African American males and beauty

Same pressures – 13

*Some people noted that the same pressures exists but that they are not frequently talked about

* One person noted that Black men have less resources (there are no hair blogs for men), but at the same time, Black men are validated by all types of women for being beautiful regardless of hair and that natural hair is viewed as “cool”

Same pressures but less enforced –

McIntosh

“I think less of hair and more about childhood. I would break dolls’ heads but it sent a message; my mom only bought me Black Barbie dolls.” – U. Johnson

can't escape how mom tugged at my hair and that feeling." – E Turenne

"the norms of what beauty is is determined by what your parents say." – Y.Cooper

"Dolls can be destroyed but people's opinions more than what society wants because people around you influence what you want to look like." – M. Cribbs

"Dolls are based off beauty standards but you can't break dolls. The counter culture is still affected by it and when it consciously affects you, then you are allowing it to." – C. Madkins.

"You can break the doll and reinforce ideas that you can't escape" – A. LaRosa

"Its about recognizing difference in attractiveness. All people go through it, men even go through it. It's a process of how you appear and where you fall in the eyes of the Other. Some people just win the genetic lottery. You can let the Maureens of the world be a big weight on you or you can find what is special about you." – Aesha

"The doll is easy to destroy, but these images of beauty are so deeply engrained. My grandmother grew up in a time when it wasn't ok to be Black, and [society] made being as White as possible to get by [the norm]. These ideas were passed on by generations: "good hair" equals straight hair and natural hair got throwback." – S. Robinson

"Tearing the doll is like tearing a photograph or ignoring media, but people will believe the lies and put it on other people. The binary is there: if a person who has 'better' looks, they will use it against others who don't. We need to change the media and change how people view self to others." - H. Moran

" I think about childhood and consumption. There is a bond with mother and child while doing hair, but its also an attack against culture. People have been straightening hair for generations, and its [seen as] shaking world order. You are able to make it without straight hair; its not necessarily a beauty thing, its more about being taken seriously or in other words, assimilating as much as possible, which is not my goal." – A. Canady

"I could not have white dolls but I can still hear images of people when they see Black females with dark skin. I always got black dolls, and I was upset because I wanted the White doll: I wanted to take care of that doll, and I look back on that sadly now." – G. Ncube

"How you are perceived, as strong as we are, we can't ignore how other people think and feel about our image. There is an internal struggle with having natural hair. You know its beautiful because its your true self, but there is societal value

that is constantly telling you otherwise; you can't shut them out, they're

do, you will receive judgement and pushback.” – A. N’Diaye

“It makes me sad to see that because its not so long ago that this was the standard. This is what young black girls and women have to deal with. If you’re darker and kinkier hair, you’re ugly. If you are lighter and have the ‘good hair’ that’s easy to manage, that was so much better. I feel bad for Maureen, you can’t really escape those stereotypes that light equals good and dark equals bad.” – N. Edenedo

“Even though we can control to a certain extent (breaking doll), the reality is that people are trying to change you. Well intended voices could be harmful as well. It comes from everywhere.” – J Brand

Finds self to be beautiful

Yes- 41

No - 2 (one person noted she was not beautiful based on other insecurities, not on hair)

Others find her to be beautiful

Yes- 41

No- 2

- What do you believe the association between skin tone (light and dark) and hair type (“good” hair and “bad” hair)?
- Do you ever feel conscious of your color and hair? In what contexts/settings is this most apparent for you?
- Do you believe African-American women with straighter hair are viewed as more attractive, more successful, etc. vs. African-American women with “nappy hair?” (***In other words:*** Do you believe that African-American women with straightened hair gain more privilege and acceptance than African women with non-straightened hair?)
- Have you ever felt pressured to straighten your hair?
- Have you ever been praised for the way your hair looked? Have you ever been teased for the way your hair looked?
- Do you agree or disagree with this quote: “For each of us, getting our hair pressed is an important ritual. It is not a sign of our longing to be white. It is not a sign of our quest to be beautiful. We are girls. It is our sign of our desire to be women.” – Bell Hooks from *Straightening Our Hair*

Association between skin color and hair

Exists – 35

- people also noted that the association exists but again it has been reversed (i.e. a dark skin girl with “good” hair)

- also noted that it was more on genetics
- One person considered herself to be borderline because on some days she has hair that is considered to be “bad” hair and other days to be “good” hair

Doesn't Exist – 6

Conscious of color and hair & what settings

Conscious

Yes- 35

- one person said that she was not conscious of her light skin as much as her hair in context
- Another person stated that she was conscious of her hair in situations involving water, sweat, etc.
- One person stated she felt self-conscious of who directors felt was the most beautiful woman in the room during acting auditions
- One person stated that she was conscious when she's on social media and sees hash tags such as #TeamLightSkin or #TeamDarkSkin that makes her reflect what “team” she is on, and how that reflects the younger people who talk to her
- One person was conscious of her hair more so than her skin, although when she was younger, other kids made her feel ashamed of her lighter complexion

No – 6

* one person who said no said they were not conscious of hair, more so skin color in spaces where she is the only woman of color

Settings-

All black settings –5

People of same race all in one setting – 8

*usually all white spaces

Work – 7

School – 11

- Most people noted going to predominately White schools.
- Many noted they never thought about hair or color as much until they came to Oxy; they were made aware of it through comments from peers, both Black and White.

All white male spaces – 1

Corporate settings –1

Water (sweating, pool parties, swimming) – 2

Black men – 1

Family- 1

Fashion outlets – magazines, films, movies (lack of Black people who look like me) – 1

When she is the only Black or Hispanic girl in the room- 3

Everywhere – 3

Formal occasions – 1

- One person said that her teacher told her she needed to straighten her hair to be more professional when she served as ASB President; she also said she felt

Thoughts:

“thinking through layers;” “grown up with pressed hair;” “conflict ! pressed hair
subscribing to societal standards (look up to role models)” but on same token, versatility
with self-representation” “straighten to be white by could have affinity for that look” –
O.Newman

“You feel like you’re coming into your own womanhood” – Bryant

“Straight hair does not make you a woman. I went from straight hair to natural hair.” – J. Booker

“Black people [straighten hair] more for whiteness to be praised. Straightening hair is a rite of passage, and sharing stories is a way of affirming Blackness. For example, saying, ‘it took three hours’ to get my hair straightened shows the effort it took to do my hair like that.” – A. Foster

“Not just a woman thing, you do it to feel beautiful,” – R King

“Now I realize that I wanted hair like my mom, she wa

“You desire to be feminine in the way that society want you to be feminine.
[Straightening hair] was not a ritual, it was annoying: it took hours to do alone.” – G. Neube

“I believe that Bell Hooks is of another generation of women, who are older than myself and younger woman of today. I believe she is speaking to the time when I was coming up. It would be timely of the way women of color felt about their hair.” – T. Fraser

“ That already speaks volumes; pressing your hair means being a woman? That in itself speaks more to me. I want to be a woman, I want to look good, or you can't be a woman or look good if your hair is not pressed?” – Y. Kamara

“I feel like the quote is contradictory. What does that mean? If it's not a question of beauty, then what does that mean? How does that directly correlate to straightening your hair if its not about beauty? Its clearly a sign of feminine and beauty to be beautiful and that is a contradiction. Whoever said this is denying one side of what it means to be a woman in this quote. The whiteness, its not about being white but then it kind of is. White beauty is a strong standard of beauty, and that's about having straight or wavy or long straightened manageable hair. It's not about being white, but its kind of matching up with the standard of beauty of being white.” – M. Morales

“We do not need to be pressured to be confident. Women want to press their hair and they shouldn't have a stigma attached to that. Women should be beautiful no matter how they want to wear their hair, and they should be allowed to do that. Hair is just hair, and we need to allow women to not make it so heavy and identify who we are because of the texture of our hair. It should just be.” – Lachanze

“I feel that its missing the point that beautiful and White in America is historically synonymous.” – S. Jackson

“It's fun to be a girl. I want to wear my hair natural one day, the next day I will straighten my hair. Sometimes I want to straighten my hair. It used to be a ritual until I realized it was completely unnecessary.” – A. Brown

“That resonates with me; there was at one point because I wanted it to be straight so that I could be pretty. I felt very autonomous but I felt like I had to fit into this standard of beauty. The pleasure of getting my hair straightened is for me. I feel more womanly, but I feel that way whether I am wearing straight hair or curly hair. Straightening hair is one way where I felt womanly.” – T. Santos

“Far too often people associate hair straightening with being White or that you're not natural. It's the versatility thing again. I like that I can straighten my hair or wear it natural. Straightening hair was very ritualistic for me; my mom did my hair not to be white, it's a femininity thing. It doesn't make you any less Black or any less natural.” – K. Lewis

- Additionally, Solange Knowles has been criticized by some in the natural hair movement for saying her hair type is 4c when photographically, her hair appears to be more of a 3a/3b texture. Thoughts?
- Do you have any final thoughts?

Natural hair (images or people) – phrases most commonly came up

Black people – 5

Solange – 3

Erykah Badu – 4

Black Panthers – 1

Dreads, braided hairstyles, Bantu knots, twists – 3

No heat – 1

Hippies – 1

Earthy, New Age people – 1

Raw, organic people – 1

Spectrum -1

Afro – 7

Locs – 1
Joy – 1
Volume – 1
Texture – 1
College educated women of color (mainly Black) – 1
Multiracial women – 1
Those who chose to wear their hair natural –1
Urban educated community – 1
Wavy hair – 2
Healthy hair – 1
Natural vs. processed hair --1
Dark hair (brown and black) – 1
Women of color – 1
Natural textures – 1
Black hair textures – 1
Pictures from Tumblr –

Can occur with basic instruments – 1
Your God given hair – 5
Non altered curl pattern – 1
Being yourself –2
Loving who you are – 1
Wearing your hair however your natural hair is and taking care of it – 2
Freedom – 4
Experimenting –1
Challenge – 1
Not really rebellion, but no really fitting into standard of beauty – 1
Comfortable with self and expressing culture –1
Embracing who you are – 4
Being healthy physically and mentally –1
What you want your hair to be – 1
Carefree – 1
Cheap – 1
Beautiful hair –2
Being the best/ doing the best that I can for my hair – 1
Security – 1
Unique – 1
What grows out of your head – 1
Strength – 1
Confidence – 3
*one person noted it takes a different type of confidence to be natural, accepting what type of hair you have, and feeling beautiful
Easy and simplicity – 1
Hasn't been styled in any way – 1
It means so much – 1
Power, confidence, acceptance, owning yourself – 1
The way you were born -1
A black woman being comfortable with her hair as it grows out of her head -1
Not entirely altering her appearance from the way it grows out naturally – 1
A black woman embracing herself, part of who she is – 1

Considers self-natural

Yes- 31

No- 3

Both – 7

*people who said both tended to flat iron or straighten their hair on a daily or weekly basis but did NOT use chemicals in their hair

* one person is transitioning from processed to non-processed hair

Unsure – 2

* trying to be natural or unsure of stance/current stage of “naturalness”

Years of being natural:

Whole life – 5

1 year – 7

2 years -2

2 ! years – 1

3 years – 3

6 years – 2

7 years – 1

11 years – 1

12 years – 1

9 years – 1

4 years -- 2

Comfortable with term ‘natural hair movement’

Yes- 38

No – 4

Is there a real movement?

Yes – 33

- people noted that they did not want the movement to appear not real because they were into what the movement stood for; has potential to be a real movemen

