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African American Hair and Beauty: Examining Afrocentricity and Identity Through the Reemergence and Expression of Natural Hair in the 21st Century

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AFRICAN AMERICAN HAIR AND BEAUTY: EXAMINING AFROCENTRICITY AND IDENTITY THROUGH THE REEMERGENCE AND EXPRESSION OF NATURAL HAIR IN THE 21ST CENTURY

by

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate my thesis to all the women who are individually and collectively challenging the prior notions for how African American women can wear their hair. To all the Black women who have ever felt that it was never good enough to be their true selves. To encouraging and furthering more research that acknowledges and analyzes how societal marginalization can affect the life outcomes of Black women socially, culturally, and economically from embodied characteristics.

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I want to thank my family and friends for always being there and cheering me on to continue pursuing my dreams. My mother for taking the time to sit and listen to me when I felt overwhelmed and unsure about making it through the master's degree. I lastly want to thank my boyfriend Kevis, whom continually supported and motivated me when my endurance and belief in myself waned. He always encourages me to do what I love, no matter how difficult. Because of the support I was given, I want to say thank you to all who helped me through the writing process.

ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, African American women are challenging the stereotypes and limitations of who or what defines beauty. More African American women are cutting off their relaxed tresses and starting anew with the natural roots that was inherited from their African ancestors. The recent transition challenges post-colonial ideas of what it means to have good or bad hair through the empowerment of Black men and women. Rooted within the Black Power and Black is Beautiful movements of the 1970s, African American women are no longer accepting or tolerating how someone else will define their hair. By altering their kinky, coily, and curly texture for straighter hair styles, African American women were erasing markers of their African identities through chemically altering the hair texture or opting for styles mimicking the western standard of beauty. Altering the natural appearance of their hair textures was in response to discrimination towards African American women for wearing the natural appearance or maintenance of their kinky, curly, and textured hairstyles. With the reemergence of the Natural Hair Movement, Black women are embracing their identity and their natural hair texture's appearance through the conceptualization of Afrocentricity. African American women are reclaiming and reemerging their African identity through the aesthetic expression of natural hair. This research will examine how African American women experience intersectional oppression while also analyzing how the reemergence of natural hair displays the foundation for a new social and cultural movement.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine the reemergence of natural hair in the Black community

during the 21st century as a new sociocultural movement. The thesis will intend to

understand how the expression of natural hair impacts prior notions about kinkier hair

textures, while examining the historicity of Black hair politics in the United States. I

intend to explore the connections of the first emergence of natural hair in the 1960s to the

reemergence of natural hair in the present by contextualizing the origins and formation of

the Natural Hair Movement. Discussing the current reemergence of natural hair as its

own distinct movement, I will address how natural hair is reshaping the identity of Black

womanhood and empowering Black women in the U.S. and across the African Diaspora.

Background

Since the 19th century, African American[1] women in the U.S. are consistently

pressured to assimilate to Eurocentric standards of beauty. Women are pressured to

straighten their kinky, curly, or coily hair textures through chemical straightening,

heating tools or adopting protective style. A protective style can include wigs, weaves,

braids, or twists. Black women altered the natural appearance of their hair texture in

response to discrimination towards African American women's hair. The experienced

discrimination stemmed from the appearance of their natural hair texture appearing

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[1] The two identifying categories of African American and Black will be used interchangeably throughout
the thesis. African American and Black are both equally used as a racial identifier within the United States.
However, within recent years, the racial identifier of Black can be used as an umbrella term for all African
descendants across the African Diaspora and to align a shared identity of "global blackness". African
American can sometimes be used as an ethnic group identifier and a formal racial category within the U.S.

different from the accepted norm. Often called ugly, unruly, and "unprofessional";

African hair textures were viewed as another aspect or trait of African Americans which

"needed to be tamed" (Riggs 1987). Seeking out acceptance from White Americans,

African American women started altering their naturally "kinky[2]" textures to match the

beauty standard of the 20th century.

The turn of the 20th century signaled a chance for African American men and

women to reinvent their identities against the racial perceptions that was formed about

Black individuals after emancipation in 1865. The early 1900s, involved straight hair

becoming the preferred hairstyle to signal middle-class status (Byrd and Tharps 2014).

To gain access to the same economic opportunities as Whites, African American women

adopted straighter hair styles that adhered to the Eurocentric norm.

> "The notion that the more closely associated a person is with European
> features, the more attractive he or she is considered; these standards deem
> attributes that are most closely related to whiteness, such as lighter skin,
> straight hair, a thin nose and lips, and light-colored eyes, as beautiful"
> (Bryant 80-81).

Any woman's appearance that deviated from the established beauty norm within the

United States was deemed as ugly, devalued, and essentially "not a woman".

Black women subjected to adhering to the Eurocentric beauty ideal, led to new

methodologies for hair straightening that included lye relaxers or a hot comb to achieve

the desired hair style. "For White Americans, education and training made little

difference if a person looked too "African". Kinky hair, wide noses, and full lips

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[2] The term "kinky" can be used a descriptor for the unique tight bends and curls that are formed
phenotypically in the hair texture of African descendants. In the past this term was used negatively to
describe an undesirable trait to possess and was given social meanings to describe a person. Within the last
few decades, this word has become reclaimed within the natural hair community to celebrate and to
empower Black women to embrace their unique hair texture or curl pattern.

translated to 'ignorant', 'uncivilized', and 'infantile'" (Byrd and Tharps, 2014: 26). Maintaining a Eurocentric appearance increased wider social acceptance of an appearance that prized "whiteness" and conceptualized "blackness" as inferior and wrong. African American women with long and straight hair received social elevation for possessing "good hair". "Good hair" became associated with "whiteness" while "bad hair" became associated with "blackness". The racial dichotomy of White vs. Black allowed the "good hair/bad hair" complex to form which resulted increased internalization of negative characteristics of African American women and their hair. The expectation for straightening hair continued throughout the 20th century until Black Power groups started empowering Black women and men to be proud of their blackness and their beauty. In result of the advocacy for Black acceptance, Black hair underwent its biggest change since Africans had arrived within the United States (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Many African Americans used their hair to show a visible connection to their African ancestors and other African descendants across the diaspora. Becoming known as the Black Power Movement, the increase in black consciousness defined an era "in which hair took a prime spot in defining Black identity for the world at large" (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Using hair as a cultural symbol, natural hair enthusiasts in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s called for Black pride and Black identity through self-definition.

Various conservative commentators attempted to demonize and negatively equate the Black afro with being militant and a sign of rebellion (Figure 1.1) In the 1960s, Black activists who adopted the Afro were depicted as terrorists who were a threat to the national security of the U.S. Because of the embodied meaning behind the Afro and its aligning of Black Power, the Afro as political symbol asserted strength and reinforced

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fear into groups who believed the hair style was negative and communicated a separate Black national identity. However, the reemergence of the Black afro is not to be mistaken solely as a political symbol. The Black afro within the 21st century has progressed as a symbol of reclamation and reinforcing empowerment through a collective racial pride and acceptance of the uniqueness and diversity of African gene expression. Taking on new methods of styling, the Afro in the present can be manipulated to provide more definition to its unique structure. Yet the perception of what the Afro has stood for or continues to symbolize is still prevalent within the memory of U.S. society and even within the hair choices of Black women today.

The transition of Black women from a relaxed or straight hair style to the embrasure of their natural hair texture, is an act of shedding Eurocentric values and moving towards the centering of an Afrocentric identity with hair as a defining feature (Asante 2003; Byrd and Tharps 2014; Patton 2006). Ultimately, the collective action of "going natural" has signaled a shift from straight hair as the ideal accepted standard of beauty and to viewing Black hair as beautiful, versatile, and unmatched in its diversity of natural textures. The expression of natural hair has taken on a new identity of power that encompasses reclaimed African heritage and seeing the self as beautiful and possessing self-worth.

The Reemergence and Expression of Natural Hair Within the 21st Century

By reconsidering how hair is understood within American society, I aim to place how natural hair is being perceived, represented, and valued collectively and individually. Considering the reemergence of natural hair through an Afrocentric lens provides a platform for Black women to discuss how natural hair is a symbol of reclaiming. While

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also explaining how natural hair empowers women to accept of their own unique hair texture. For this project I aim to answer five central questions: 1) What were the societal and cultural beliefs that kept African American women from wearing their natural hair textures? 2) How does the expression of natural hair in the 21st century connect with the Black Power movements in the late 20th century? 3) How is Afrocentric theory being conceptualized and expressed by African American women through Black hairstyles? 4) How are the negative stereotypes about African American hair textures being challenged in the 21st century? 5) How are Black women and the broader Black community empowering women through self-identification and acceptance of natural hair?

 The topic involving the politicization of hair is very broad and encompasses many areas that engage social meanings as its underpinnings to specific shapes, lengths, and textures of hair. From examining prior literature and seeking out answers to my intended questions, I hope to gain an increased understanding of how the politics of hair affects the individual woman and the relationship with their hair.

 The initial assertions I am situating for this research is examining how the expression of natural hair may affect the life outcomes of women within the Black community. By thinking about how the lived experiences of each woman can differ, I also aim to analyze how each individual woman as her own self agent is adding into the collective knowledge and re-articulation about Black hair. My first assertion is "the reemergence of natural hair within the 21st century is challenging the perceptions, stereotypes, and politicization of Black hair within American society". With the current reemergence of natural hair, many questions have arisen over what the exact significance or the expression may be among Black women? The act of expression ties into cultural

practices in Black identity formation, but it also displays the varied meanings behind the "natural" or "Afro". In the past the "Afro" was perceived as wild, "kinky", or too "African" which led towards the enculturation of negative characteristics. The "Afro", once re-symbolized and reclaimed within the 1960s, is currently being rearticulated and restyled in the present Natural Hair Movement (Craig 2002). By including the historical notions surrounding black hair, this thesis will aim to discuss whether Black hair is continually being politicized and if the Natural Hair movement is changing its political associations.

The second assertion is "the expression of kinky, coily, or curly hairstyles are empowering Black women to embrace their hair texture through reclaiming African cultural symbols and racial identification". As more women are increasingly wearing natural hair styles and embracing their hair textures, the visual representation of how natural hair is being worn shows an unconsciousness and conscious method that is empowering and encouraging more Black women to do the same. Through the social act of sharing and communicating their experience of hair oppression, individual actors are increasing Black consciousness and the importance of acceptance and embrasure of their natural hair texture.

By more women becoming natural it is changing how the hair industry once marketed, thought of, and believed were the desired hair choices for women within the U.S. The movement has externally affected the types of products and education about hair that is shared within mainstream culture today. Black women were not the only ones who face hair struggles or hair discrimination, but it is Black hair that is oppressed and encouraged to straighten or smooth before the early 2000s (Banks 2000; Byrd and Tharps

2014; Craig 2002; Jacobs Huey 2007; Patton 2006; Rooks 1996). The second half of this assertion identifies how within Black hair aesthetics and adornment today, more cultural connections or symbols of African culture are appearing within the everyday routines of haircare. Actions of aligning with African identity and culture are ways to display connection and heritage with African origins on the continent. In the late 20th century, Black activists to increase Black consciousness encouraged African Americans to learn more about their history and their origins to empower each other and their power within (Adi and Sherwood 2003; Asante 2003) Symbols such as the "Afro", and current manipulated styles such as twists, braids, or bantu knots; are showing up within everyday life and within the media to establish an individual's blackness. Racial identification of one's "blackness" expresses how women are placing their selves within the African Diaspora by connecting to the shared struggles of other Black populations. By tapping into the interconnections of the diaspora, a sense of "global blackness" is continually developed and progressed through the embracing of natural hair.

The third assertion is "The Natural Hair Movement has led to the creation of a collective consciousness about Black hair that is changing how hair is perceived, represented, and displayed within American society". Discussed within Chapter 1, the Natural Hair Movement has origins within the Black Power Movement where the definitions and perceptions around women's hair was first challenged. A part of challenging the politicization of Black hair is through building a collective consciousness. Young activists preached empowerment within their speeches, symbols, and styles of dress to further assert their blackness and their self-definition of identifying as "Black". By talking about being "Black" as a celebration and aspect to be proud of, it allowed

people during that time to embrace all things that they found unique by being "Black" or of "African" descent (Carmichael 1966). This included being proud of having darker skin tones but also in having "kinky" or "nappy" hair. The re-articulation of black identity within the 1960s and presently within the 2000s, was done through word choice but also through physical embodied symbols such as "hair". By rearticulating new meanings for black identity and for hair descriptors, this has continued the reeducation about Black hair and about how African Americans assert their blackness within society (Craig 2002 and Banks 2000). The re-articulation of blackness will further facilitate the process of changing how hair is perceived and the social meanings that have been tied to it in the past for more positive attributes that celebrate human difference.

When considering prior literature written on the subject, I wanted to create a clearer picture of how Black hair has been a topic that many scholars have addressed and continue to address when discussing the inner nuances in experienced among of the Black populations. Using this literature was also helpful in viewing how prior scholars had framed their arguments around the complexity of Black hair. A distinction that I aim to make within the thesis is discussing the reemergence of natural hair and beginning the conversation about what this may mean for Black women and the larger community when considering the conscious of Black Power. I also aim to start the uncovering process for the true reasons for how negative perceptions were enculturated within American society, by analyzing the connections to scientific racial ideology. Further examining and discussing the nuances for how ideologies are formed in relation to race and relation to hair will aid in understanding the formations of antiblackness and how to reverse them beliefs within society. The politicization of hair is facilitated through media

representations, racial discrimination, and legal policy. However, the larger functioning

hegemony reveals the societal issue of how the U.S. society is very anti-Black. This

problem is greatly seen within the hair and beauty industry when thinking about which

group or groups continue to be privileged over others in terms of visual attractiveness.

Also considering why the groups are deemed attractive by their physical features and the

social meanings of what those features mean in possessing privilege. This framework will

open the discussions for addressing issues of the beauty and hair care industry while

engaging the conversation for how antiblackness takes shape within society.

Theoretical Frameworks

Within the context of social movements, the research for this project seeks to

examine some reasons and ways in how the current Natural Hair Movement formed.

Using social movements as a guiding framework, I aim to address how ideologies of

Black hair are influenced by racism, sexism, and Eurocentric beauty standards. Drawing

from theoretical frameworks of Social Movement, Afrocentricity and Intersectionality; I

will address how African American hair is viewed and self-defined from the emic

perspective and how hair has been defined and marginalized by the etic of western

standards of beauty. I also aim to address how enculturated racial ideologies play into

how beauty is conceptualized within a broader American perspective. The beliefs of

scientific racism influenced the development of negative stereotypes about African

Americans which facilitated the anti-black racism that is used towards African American

women and their appearances (Menand 2002; White and White 1995). Examining how

beauty is conceptualized and dominated by Eurocentric beauty ideals, these trends

negatively impact African American women through racism and sexism by pulling from

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racial stereotypes. The misconceptions of racial stereotypes used to denigrate the efforts of African American women when self-conceptualizing an Afrocentric beauty, identity, and the expression of their natural hair. These notions contribute to how African American hair is consistently politicized and searched for meaning over the choice of a hairstyle. Which displays how antiblackness is revealed through the practices, critiques, and prejudice displayed towards the care and maintenance of African hair textures. The politicization of Black hair was also a technique to declare a statement and to empower the Black community collectively. However before African Americans reclaimed hair as their own symbol, hair in its natural state was perceived as unacceptable within American society.

Social Movement Theory

Since the reemergence and expression of natural hair is ongoing within the 21st century, the approach towards understanding hair culturally will also include analyzing the Natural Hair Movement. A movement can be defined as the act or process of moving people or things from one place or position to another. When the Natural Hair movement first appeared, the initial goal was for natural hair to stop being viewed as "undesirable" or "inappropriate" within society. By connecting ideas across the internet, many Black women started to question how to better take care of their hair without the use of a chemical or heating tool to straighten it. Why does natural hair have to be straightened to be considered acceptable? The initial questions over appearance and health added more fuel to the larger questioning of social and political issues that have marginalized Black women by influencing the development of alternate hair choices. Seeking to optimize hair health, it spurred questions and initiated change surrounding how natural hair can

move from being perceived as wrong to becoming perceived as beautiful and a normalized part of Black womanhood.

A political movement is a social group that operates together to obtain a political goal, on a local, regional, national, or international scope. The politics of hair is an issue that resonates not just in the U.S., but globally through the globalization of Eurocentric beauty ideals in the African Diaspora. The change in acceptance of natural hair is beginning locally and is moving across regions, nations, and transationally as African descendants are uniting under "global blackness". By technology allowing Black women across the globe to share ideas and empower one another through various media platforms, it is further seeking to challenge the political issue of how Black hair has been oppressed. Occurring through policy, institutions (education, government, religion, and professional), environments, and through cultural hegemonies that cause society to enforce and police individuals within their everyday lives.

A social movement can be defined as a loosely organized but a sustained campaign in support of a social goal, either through the implementation or prevention of a change in society's structure or values. Social movements may also be defined as an organized effort by a large group of people to bring about or impede social, political, economic, or cultural change (Killian, Turner, and Smelser 1998; Kurzman 2008). Understanding how the foundation of a movement is organized is very key in examining the politics over natural hair. Overall the common theme about movements is the ability of individuals or a collective group or organization to facilitate change. To position the Natural Hair Movement, an important factor to consider is how African American or Black women are using their agency to influence change in how their hair is perceived,

thought of, represented or valued within society. A person's agency can be defined as the potential power of individuals and groups to contest cultural norms, values, symbols, and ultimately structures of power (Giddens 1984). Black women are using their agency to affect change and move change forward as individual actors supporting a cause. The more women who embrace their natural hair texture and join the movement, increases the collective power of everyone who is using their agency for change. The combined agency of each woman and how those challenges are expressed collectively is part of the examination of how women are being empowered and contributing to the formation of an overall sociocultural movement.

Afrocentricity

The reemergence of natural hair displays how African American women are re-aligning their identity with Africa, the African Diaspora and African cultural expression. The aligning of identity builds a collective consciousness for understanding the oppression against wearing our hair naturally. Afrocentricity is a paradigm based on the idea that African people and descendants should reassert a sense of agency and view new information or the world from a Black perspective. Meaning that the individual is re-centering their own culture and heritage instead of allowing another culture to be imposed as the central culture to adhere to (Asante 1988).

> "…a new perspective, a new approach, a new consciousness invades our behavior and consequently with Afrocentricity you see the movies differently, you see other people differently, you read books differently, you see politicians differently; in fact, nothing is as it was before your consciousness. Your conversion to Afrocentricity becomes total as you read, listen, and talk with others who share the collective consciousness. It supersedes any other ideology because it is the proper sanctifications of your own history" (Asante 1988:7).

Using an Afrocentric framework, I aim to understand how the reemergence of natural hair and Black hair culture has transformed within the 21st century to display how beauty standards among Black women are being self-defined by Black women. Also, to understand how Black women are building a collective consciousness and identity through the reclaiming of cultural symbols such as the afro and self-defining our own beauty ideals. The embracing of natural hair expresses an essence of reclaiming and re-centering of African cultural symbols such as the theory of Afrocentricity. Considering the reemergence of natural hair, using an Afrocentric lens provides a platform for Black women to discuss the symbolization of reclaiming natural hair while also explaining how natural hair empowers women through acceptance of their kinkier hair texture.

For this thesis, the framework of Afrocentricity will be used in two distinct ways. The first will take an approach towards Afrocentrism which will examine how the actions and knowledge about natural hair are being used to build a collective consciousness. The action of "going natural" is facilitating the uncovering of one's true self by centering one's blackness and re-centering one's standpoint in society through the exercise of a Black woman's agency (Asante 2003; Patton 2006). The centering of one's own perspective and experiences challenges the hierarchical position of Eurocentric values. By decentering Eurocentric beliefs, Afrocentricity allows for Black women and individuals to celebrate their blackness and beauty as an equalizer to the accepted norm.

The second distinct approach will analyze how natural hair expression with African cultural symbols are being used to support cultural unity within the U.S., the African Diaspora, and with the African continent. Cultural unity can be established through the actions of building collective knowledge about African descendants and

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incorporating significant markers of African heritage within Black beauty practices (Asante 2003). In *Afrocentricity* Asante argues how group consciousness precedes unity: "Consciousness is a response and it is an action demonstrable and meaningful in terms of psychological and political actions" (Asante 2003: 24). Although the wearing of natural hair styles and cultivating Black beauty practices are empowering women throughout the Natural Hair Movement, without the consciousness of common blackness and shared experiences from marginalization; unity within the movement will be harder to reach. However, the everyday actions being taken to express or assert blackness through natural hair is displaying how empowerment is potentially leading to cultural unity in the Natural Hair Movement.

Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989 by describing the marginalization of African Americans within court proceedings due to not fitting the "typical" cases in discrimination of race and sexism (Crenshaw 1991). Many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender. The intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be fully captured by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1984; Crenshaw 1991; Patton 2006). Since Black women experience oppression dually, racism and sexism within Black hair culture must be analyzed through an intersecting frame because Black women cannot separate their race from their social identity as a woman. Collins expands the framework of intersectionality by highlighting how class, sexuality, and nationality can be analyzed to depict how discrimination marginalizes Black women depending on their social

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location (Collins 1990). The framework of intersectionality is key in examining the politics of hair because of first how racism and sexism are interplayed in the perceptions surrounding why African hair textures have been viewed as "unacceptable". But also because of how class, age, and nationality play a factor within how natural hair textures are discriminated or privileged within the past and within the 21st century.

A significant approach for using intersectionality is understanding how the politicization of Black hair has affected the experience and life outcomes of individual black women. The expression of natural hair has opened more opportunities for hair styling options for Black women, however the option of which hair styles can be worn may involve one's access to specific resources. Depending on the amount of income that a woman receives could affect the accessibility to hair care items and affect the hair styling that is chosen depending on one's career or lifestyle. All the factors of race, gender, and class are key components in understanding how the politics of hair marginalize and oppress Black women within the U.S.

Ideology

To understand how African American women's hair styles and textures are politicized by society, one must first consider how ideologies are formed. An ideology is a system of social and moral ideas perpetuated by a group of people to promote unitary thinking and to clearly define what is accepted and what is not. Ideologies are formed and subconsciously reproduced through our actions, language, and everyday behavior when interacting with people and within our environment (Geertz 1973). Ideologies can also be formed through the values, beliefs, and frameworks through which one sees the world.

How ideologies are formed are very important because of how society reinforces its beliefs through culture, institutions, and within the everyday environment.

Considering the formation of an ideology, the way it affects a society and its people influences me to question: How have Black women's hair become politicized? If an ideology is formed to persuade a group of people to think and support a certain perspective, adding in elements of racism and sexism help to develop the negative stereotypes of how African American men and women are portrayed within American society. By looking at racism, ideologies surrounding the inferiority of populations of color are supported by prejudice and discrimination based on skin color. Examining the roots of where the prejudice surrounding biological appearance is key in understanding how these ideologies about race were formed. African American women are not only discriminated by their skin color, they are discriminated secondly by being a woman and lastly by phenotypic markers such as hair texture, facial features, and body shape.

Since colorism has its roots within the enslavement of African Americans in the 17th to 19th centuries, African American women have experienced racism and sexism differently from Black men and their white women counterparts (bell hooks, 1981). The effects from the oppression of racism and sexism intersecting, are currently still present within the 21st century. Using a framework of intersectionality and considering societal ideologies, analyzing how African American women face oppressions through expressions of hairstyles is a unique perspective to examine personal experiences faced by many Black women within the United States.

Thesis Summary

In Chapter One I will address the historical background of the Natural Hair Movement by examining the connections between the first emergence of natural hair and its current reemergence within the 21st century. Drawing comparisons between the Black Power and Black is Beautiful Movements, I aim to discuss how individual actors have used their self-agency to ignite change within the Black community. I also intend to explore the similarities and differences between natural hair expression in the 20th century and in the current century. While examining the past formations and embodied symbols of blackness to contextualize the formation of the Natural Hair Movement as its own distinct social movement.

In Chapter Two I will address prior literature that has been written about hair within the African American community. Key literature examined will include works by Black women that include their own experiences of hair, while delving into the politics of Black hair within the United States. This chapter will also address the origins of "good" and "bad" hair and how it has contributed to the ongoing political notions of whether certain hair appearances or characteristics are acceptable or unacceptable. It will provide a background of how previous scholars have addressed the politics of hair in the past and will address how the expression of natural hair is impacting the culturally embedded political notions of hair.

In Chapter Three I will discuss the research methods that I employed during summer fieldwork in 2018. The chapter will provide the context for the field site in Columbia, South Carolina and a brief background into why the city of Columbia was chosen. I will also discuss the qualitative methods that were employed and how the

intended methods helped in gaining participants. Each method will detail a brief description to discuss how the chosen method impacted the research positively or negatively during fieldwork. Lastly, the chapter will include ethical considerations that were carefully thought out before fieldwork or data collection began.

In Chapter Four it will provide key themes of analysis that were prevalent within the data. The key themes that are examined may offer new insight into how the expression of natural hair confirms or brings new knowledge into how Black hair is politicized within American society. The analysis includes empirical responses from participants within the study who share their thoughts and opinions about how they place themselves within the Natural Hair Movement and their individual hair journeys. The themes and responses within this chapter could add to the collective knowledge about Black women's hair experiences and how their unique experiences are different from non-Black women within the United States.

In Chapter Five, it will provide a discussion about overall themes within the data and how they connect back to the theoretical approaches within the study. The discussion will also give a summary of the key results from the study and what the results may indicate about natural hair expression. This section will also include concluding thoughts about the research and what the research and the current sociocultural trends may indicate about the future direction of the Natural Hair Movement.

Significance of the Study

The research conducted for this study is important for understanding how the expression of natural hair is empowering Black women to embrace their natural hair textures. It is also important in capturing how the historical and societal influence of

Eurocentric beauty standards have limited hairstyle choice and expression for Black women. The research intends to examine how internalized colonial traumas are still prevalent within the Black community's psyche and how the internalized beliefs extend into how natural hair is expressed today. This topic is relevant to anthropological research because of challenging prior understandings about how black women are viewed by the beauty industry, Americans, and by other African Americans. This research will also be relevant due to the lack of understanding, education, and knowledge surrounding the present-day concerns, sensitivities, or unexplained anxieties over the hair choices of black women.

This research is important to the African American community for addressing questions that are imperative for understanding how Black women construct their identity in relation to hair choice and style. It also raises awareness of how negative internalization of self-identity within young girls and adults are materialized through hairstyle. The research will also provide a better understanding of how African American women navigate an environment with images that disproportionately place Eurocentric beauty standards at the forefront. I ultimately aim to address how Black women are socialized through markers of difference and how natural hair expression is impacting how black womanhood is formed. I also hope to encourage future students to pursue any research topic or question that is personal, important, and worth sharing. Ultimately, to show how anthropological research can be facilitated as a positive academic discipline for African Americans.

Figure 1.1 "Say It Loud, Say It Proud."
"Say it Loud: 9 Black Women in the Black Power Movement Everyone Should Know." Online Photograph. http://www.forharriet.com/2015/05/say-it-loud-9-black-women-in-black.html, accessed 17 April 2019.

CHAPTER ONE:
A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE NATURAL HAIR MOVEMENT

"How do you feel about the Natural Hair Movement and what do you think are the goals of the movement?"
"How I feel about it? I feel like it's revolutionary. I feel like it's liberating. I feel like it's still evolving, in terms of goals. I think each person's goals are different. I don't think the movement itself has a goal besides just embracing your own ethnicity and embracing your own hair. And feeling like you don't have to use chemicals to alter your hair or your appearance to be accepted by others. I think it, in terms of being liberating, is causing more African American women to feel confident in their own skin and in being who they really are." (Candace, age 52)

At the turn of the 21st century, how Black women thought about and perceived their hair began to change. Many Black women started challenging the stereotypes and limitations of who or what could be defined as beautiful. Becoming known as the Natural Hair Movement, African American women started transitioning from having straight hair to embracing their natural hair. Transitioning through the "Big Chop" many Black women cut off their relaxed tresses and started fresh with the natural roots inherited from their African ancestors. Historically rooted within the Black Power and Black is Beautiful movements of the 1960s (Banks 2000), African American women have stopped accepting or tolerating how someone else will define their hair. Altering the natural kinky, coily, or curly hair texture for straighter and looser hair styles; Black women were erasing markers of their African identities by mimicking the Eurocentric beauty standard. Through the emergence of a new movement, Black women are embracing their inner Blackness. They

are reconnecting with their Afrocentric identity by unapologetically wearing their hair as it was naturally meant to be.

To situate the politicization of Black hair, I will address the history of the Natural Hair Movement and its connections to the Black Power Movement in the late 20th century. Discussing the first emergence of natural hair within the U.S., I will highlight how young Black activists asserted their blackness through embodied symbols in the 1960s. The use of hair as a symbol visibly distinguished their cause for civil rights and how their individual power could be transformed into a collective movement. Next, I will draw comparisons between the past and current movements to shape how the Natural Hair Movement can be defined as a social movement. To understand the significance behind the reemergence of natural hair, I aim to conceptualize how Black women and Black men laid the foundation for increasing Black consciousness using social action. Lastly, I will detail the politicization of Black hair and how natural hair reemerged within the present day, while also depicting how African American and Black women reached within themselves to express a "Black" identity in the manner of how they want to be seen and heard within society. Describing the history and politicization of Black hair provides a background about the origins of how natural hair first emerged while also contextualizing the importance of the reemergence and the expression of natural hair as a new social and cultural movement.

Historical Connections: Natural Hair in the 1960s and 1970s

The current emergence of natural hair is not the first time that Black women have rejected Eurocentric beauty standards. The first wave appeared during the 1960s when young Black men and women rearticulated their racial identity to promote solidarity,

power, and a collective consciousness (Craig 2002). During the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in the mid-20th century, Black women stopped pressing their hair. An "un-straightened natural" was the first appearance of Black hair worn in its natural state by women without the manipulation of heat or chemical processing to straighten it. The decision to stop hair straightening was conceived as an act of solidarity against the non-acceptance of Black individuals within American society. The reemergence of natural hair expression in the present can be viewed as a second wave and depicts similar signs of unity that were expressed within the past. The response within the Black community and the U.S. toward natural hair has varied widely. Analyzing how natural hair first emerged within the past will provide a deeper understanding for why its reappearance is so important within the present.

In 1954, ten years after the end of World War II, African Americans experienced no change in how segregation and institutionalized racism affected their daily lives. The ideals of freedom, opportunity, and personal liberty that led many African Americans to join the WWII cause did not permeate into their communities or daily livelihoods (Williams 2013). Incensed from the continued discriminatory practices of Jim Crow, many African Americans in the South begin to agitate for their rights as full citizens of the United States. Transpiring from the consistent mistreatment, the increased agitation inspired many more individuals to stand up against the wrongdoing implemented within the South and across the nation (Williams 2013). The increased rejection of discrimination within public and private spaces became known as the Civil Rights Movement. The organized efforts of civil rights encouraged many individuals across

generational lines to become involved and to also create new methodologies for how African Americans could protest racial prejudice (Williams 2013).

During the peak of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1940s to 1960s, many African Americans organized and agitated against the dehumanization of Jim Crow segregation. The movement did not solely include the efforts of adults. Many youth, teenagers, college students, and young adults were involved within the protests through actively marching and picketing. Various youth were detained in jails for their part within the movement right alongside the adults (Williams 2013; "Youth in the Civil Rights Movement" 2016). Participation in the agitation for civil rights was a family affair that brought families together or pulled them apart over the correct way to fight against discrimination. Overall, the Civil Rights Movement was successful because of the full involvement of all African Americans across generational and class lines. However, the movement would not have become amplified without the involvement of young people and their willingness to put themselves in the line of danger fighting for their civil rights as American citizens.

The involvement of teenagers and young adults, who expressed their fight against racial discrimination in a multitude of platforms, increased significantly within the 1960s. One of the ways their cause was exemplified was through the politicization of embodied symbols to help in emphasizing their points when protesting. Maxine Leeds Craig asserts that race is an embodied identity, meaning one is considered a member of a race because of the physical appearance or the genetic makeup of one's body. Since race is constructed as an embodied identity, challenges to racist hierarchies are often expressed as contests over the representation of racialized bodies (Craig 2002:12). When young black activists

engaged in protests for their civil rights, many wore distinguished styles of dress to further emphasize their politics and positionality in rearticulating their racial pride. Part of that style included young women who wore their hair in an un-straightened style and young men who grew their hair out in Afros to embrace their racial pride through the expression of their natural hair (Craig 2002). Young adults and teenagers felt inspired and empowered through the writings and speeches of Black leaders who spoke of racial pride. Rearticulating the definitions of what it meant to be "Black", wearing an Afro included accepting one's blackness while celebrating the collective consciousness formed to sustain the empowering words and actions of "Black Power" in individuals.

Malcolm X preached for Black men and women to accept who they were and to be proud of being Black. His speeches described how the Black community had been psychologically brainwashed for years to accept the dominant White culture as the ideal position and ideal visual representation to be within the U.S. society (Malcolm X and Haley 1965). Citing his own personal experience with hair straightening and viewing how Black women styled their hair during the 1940s, he discussed how women were pressured to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards because they were taught to view themselves as inferior and ugly. To combat this perception, through Islamic teachings he encouraged Black women and Black men to stop pressing or straightening their hair. He also encouraged them to love their skin, their looks, and their hair as an expression of Black identity and an expression that harkened to their African roots (Malcolm X and Haley 1965).

The speeches given by Malcolm X were supported by the Black Muslim community. Using the religious teachings of Islam and Black identity, Malcolm X along

with the Nation of Islam called for Black people to celebrate their blackness and to embrace their unique features and distinct appearances. He believed that by attempting to adhere to the Eurocentric values and ideals of beauty, that African Americans in the U.S. were undergoing practices of self-degradation (Malcolm X and Haley 1965). Malcolm X was very critical of the integrationist approaches that were supported by Black protestant churches. Actions supported adhering to Eurocentric norms and practices to survive within American society such as Black women straightening their hair. Offering Islam as an alternative to the Black protestant churches, Black Muslims believed in celebrating blackness and black history as a part of increasing cultural unity (Asante 2003). Part of ending self-degradation was by feeling pride in one's blackness and building a consciousness from learning the history of the black community within the U.S.

Stokely Carmichael also spoke out about how Black people should be proud of their race, to be proud of their strength, and to find beauty in everything that Eurocentric culture aimed for the Black community to despise (Carmichael 1966). The empowerment spoken to the Black community allowed for an initial collective consciousness to be built among young individuals for not only agitating for acceptance by Whites, but also to ultimately accept and find beauty within their blackness. Embracing the empowerment within these speeches, the wearing of un-straightened hair gave women the opportunity to rearticulate the meanings of being Black, feminine, and defiant in a society that saw blackness as a negative.

Before the 1960s, the Black community always adopted conservative values that encouraged Black women and Black men to maintain a well-groomed appearance. A well-groomed appearance included conforming to the cultural standards of White

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Americans and aiming to decrease an "African" or "Black" appearance as much as possible to fit in with the majority (Byrd and Tharps 2014; Craig 2002). Black women and their appearances were used to assert a positive image of the entire Black community as an approach for rearticulating the racial gender perception (Craig 2002). Women were expected to always be well groomed to uphold the African American presentation of self, which viewed good grooming as an achievement of respect.

The "presentation of self" is the act of creating an appearance or frontal face that is performed to appease the accepted norm for how an individual should behave or look within society (Goffman 1959). Considering how Black women supported maintaining a well-groomed appearance, this standard was formed to protect Black women from being scrutinized for their external appearance. Since Black men and women live in racially marked bodies, many African American efforts to reclaim the honor for the race have particularly focused on celebrating and defending the beauty or dignity of Black women (Craig 2002:14). Part of a well-groomed routine included pressed hair and neatly worn clothing to exuberate a positive view of Black womanhood. The pressure to adhere to a respectable appearance was to combat how Black women were consistently devalued and perceived as immoral due to prejudicial characteristics or stereotypes assigned to all Black women.

With the pressure of consistently upholding a well-groomed appearance on the shoulders of Black women, the counter approach of Black Power allowed for women to embrace their blackness and their unique hair structures as an extended expression of Black womanhood. To protect the representation of Black womanhood in society, personal appearance was used by women to control for how Black people were viewed

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by Whites. Keeping hair motionless was key in displaying "self-control, discipline, and good morality" (Craig 2002:36). Presenting a positive presentation of self was encouraged by older generations because of how Black women were devalued and were assumed to be sexually immoral based on prejudicial notions of color and inferiority towards the Black population. During slavery, Black women were brutally raped by White men, who justified their actions through demoralization of Black women, by positioning them as the ones who invited sexual advances based on their physical appearance (bell hooks 1981). Therefore, in the 1960s when women started wearing their hair un-straightened, some Black women who believed in maintaining good self-presentation were appalled and felt ashamed by the threat of how the appearance of un-straightened hair would negatively affect the race (Craig 2002).

Given how Black womanhood was socialized within the Black community, the first emergence of natural hair was believed to be a rejection of feminine ideals for Black women. However, the un-straightened natural laid the foundation for how natural hair could be and is a positive representation of Black womanhood because of the physical appearance of hair being a part of the Black women's identity. Although the emergence of natural hair in the 1960s may have initially worked against traditional notions of Black womanhood, the presence of natural hair facilitated the authentic expression of how black women can also be attractive, feminine, and well-groomed with natural hair.

The Expression of Natural Hair as a Social Movement

The Black Liberation Movement signified a time when Black activists questioned and protested the inequalities that disproportionately affected Black communities within the United States. "Black Power" developed as a response and ethnic unifier for Black

people to view themselves as individual and collective actors who could change and take control of their destinies by implementing the societal changes they envisioned (Carmichael 1966). These two movements led to the further questioning of how racial and cultural hegemony dictated how Black individuals were supposed to look, behave, the jobs that could be held, and the suggested position of inferiority to assume within American society. The continued questioning and strive to understand the meaning of the positionality of African Americans within society resulted in increased agitation for the U.S. to accept their blackness and see their humanity in the wrongs dealt towards the Black community. Given that race has been viewed as embodied symbols, Black women contested the intersectional oppression that had been created from Eurocentric beauty standards. If harnessing Black Power involved being proud of your race and being proud of who you are, then Black women rearticulated how Black is beautiful and could be defined through Black womanhood.

A social movement has been defined as an organized effort by a large group of people to bring about or impede social, political, economic, or cultural change (Kurzman 2008). Social movements arise when humans seek to understand the world around them. And through understanding the meaning of an organized structure, a goal is cited to by ignite social action and the structure becomes a site of contestation. Considering how young activists in social movements advocated for the full acceptance of the Black community within American society, the actions by Black women display how vocal they were against the social structure of society. Facilitating change in the perceptions over the appearance of natural hair, to build a consciousness, and empower others are some of the

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main goals set out to ignite Black women to join the Natural Hair movement (Banks 2000; Kurzman 2008).

In lieu of how Black Power was used to empower the Black community to increase social actions, Black women began to empower themselves through the wearing of hair in its natural state. In the 1960s to 1970s, women stopped pressing their hair in conjunction with exclaiming words of "Black is Beautiful". Loudly proclaiming how the Black woman should view herself, "Black is Beautiful" signified the formation of a newer and better beauty ideal that represented the authenticity of blackness and Black womanhood. The assertion of "Black is Beautiful" by women wearing naturals was a rejection of how Eurocentric beauty standards had been used to define how all women should look, behave, and be valued (Craig 2002).

Before the 1960s, many Black women understood that their hair was viewed as acceptable or right when it was straightened through pressing. Hair becomes a marker of racial difference to young girls when they are baptized into the ritual of styling hair as straight (Banks 2000). The everyday styling ritual subconsciously teaches younger girls to view their natural hair as "unacceptable" or "bad" within the eyes of mainstream society. And since society does not accept the appearance of Black hair in its natural state, neither should Black women (Banks 2000). When discussing how meaning is conceptualized, Kurzman asserts that:

> "meaning includes moral understandings of right and wrong, cognitive understandings of true and false, perceptual understandings of like and unlike, social understandings of identity and difference, aesthetic understandings of attractive and repulsive, and any other understandings that we may choose to identify through our own academic processes of meaning-making." (Kurzman 2008:5)

By formulating meaning of what un-straightened hair signified to American society and culture, Black women reasserted and redefined how femininity could be expressed through natural hair within the Black community.

Kathleen Cleaver was one of the main pioneers behind the phrasing of "Black is Beautiful". During a protest for Black civil liberties and rights, she offered an insightful and critical view of how the embracing of natural hair empowers Black women within the U.S. and across the globe:

> This brother here, myself and all of us were born with our hair like this, and we just wear it like this because its natural. The reason for it, you might say, is like a new awareness among Black people that their own natural physical appearance is beautiful and is pleasing to them. For so many years, we were told that only white people were beautiful—that only straight hair, light eyes, light skin was beautiful so Black women would try everything they could—straighten their hair, lighten their skin—to look as much like white women. This has changed because black people are aware. White people are aware of it too because white people now want natural wigs like this. Dig it. Isn't it beautiful? Alright -Kathleen Cleaver- (Foster 2014).

Historically perceived as ugly, unruly, and unprofessional; kinky, coily, and curly hair textures were viewed as another aspect of African Americans that needed to be tamed (Riggs 1987). The significance of wearing hair in an un-straightened state displayed how hair within the Black community has always been politicized within the United States. African American women have always been pressured to alter the natural appearance of kinkier hair textures because of receiving overt discrimination toward certain hairstyles that display a uniquely African texture. The excerpt from Kathleen Cleaver expressed the knowledge about African hair textures that was being shared and embraced proudly within the public. This celebratory emotion was then turned into empowerment and feelings of unapologetic pride in their blackness (Foster 2014).

Using the empowerment that was initiated during the Black Power Movement, the embracing of natural hair emerged in the same manner of asserting blackness during the 1960s and 1970s. Agitation for acceptance of natural hair paralleled the same goals that were agitated for Black liberation through civil and human rights. To express pride in Black self-identification, hair became a political symbol that exuberated the solidarity of young Black activists. The emergence of the Afro proclaimed the entire vision of Black power in calling for solidarity and a movement of collective voices ringing clear for the full acceptance of black people within the U.S. Believing in the goals and admiring the presence of groups such as the Black Panthers, young women stopped pressing their hair and young men let their hair grow (Craig 2002).

The depiction of the Afro signified the strength of progression that could occur by mobilizing large collectives of Black individuals in the movement by using their common identifier of being "Black" (Figure 2.1). Encouraging people to self-identify as Black led to the formation of a collective consciousness built across the commonalities of marginalization that is shared within the Black community. And a collective identification and shared vision of what the Black community was working toward through their agitation for civil liberties. The movement progressed from advocating for civil rights to advocating for the full embrasure of Black people within American society to receive the same opportunities that were offered for Whites. A part of that collective identification of acceptance was expressed politically through the symbol of the natural hair displayed in an Afro.

The adoption of un-straightened hair describes the first emergence of the Afro within the Black Power movement. The Afro was worn to make a statement in protest of

the inequalities that were faced by the Black population. Due to the visual expression of Black identity, the Afro soon became a signifier of the expected appearance to be worn by a young Black activist during that time. In the 1960s, Black individuals were protesting rights for equality and equity in personal liberties, fair housing, economic opportunity, access to quality education, and more in increasing voices. Black activists became characterized to have un-straightened natural hair and large Afros especially when seen out within the public. Any individual who continued to press their hair and used Black Power rhetoric within their speeches was viewed as contradictory to the causes that activists stood for (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Therefore, the Afro became a defining symbol of black power and anyone without it was not viewed as an authentic representative of a liberated Black individual during this time.

Although the first emergence of natural hair sprouted during a period of intense social activism, a few key differences exist between the 1960s and the 2000s. During the 1960s, natural hair emerged in tandem with part of making a political statement against the oppression of Black individuals. It was the first time that women collectively had ever worn their hair out in the public eye as a political statement. Wearing their hair un-straightened allowed many women to feel confident within their skin while also seeing that their natural hair could be beautiful. The increased confidence in their appearance led many more women to adopt the Afro when marching or while attending their college campuses. Women felt liberated and closer to their African heritage by wearing their hair within its natural state. The emergence of un-straightened hair was viewed by some as shameful within the Black community. However, the acceptance of their hair displayed that straightening the Afro was the suppression of a unique characteristic of their identity.

The statement of wearing their un-straightened hair proudly was in resistance to the cultural norms of how hair was supposed to be worn by Black women. Adopting the Afro expressed resistance to how femininity had defined and conceptualized who was or who was not attractive within American culture.

The Natural Hair Movement within the 21st century today has taken these initial sentiments and includes an increased significance of what natural hair means to the individual in relation to the collective community. The wearing of natural hair reflects more than wearing hair within an un-straightened style: it involves the breaking of psychological chains that have become socialized into the psyche of African American and Black women about their hair. The common understanding at the turn of the 21st century was that Black hair was considered "good" or "acceptable" within American society only if it was chemically relaxed, pressed, or straightened in some manner. Having "kinks" within a hairstyle was out of the question! However, increasing information about the damaging effects of relaxers on Black hair, encouraged women to seek out other options for how to take care of their hair without chemical processing. To start the process of breaking down the psychological chains, Black women had to first decide to grow out their natural hair and then they had to learn to love it. How could hair that was had never worn un-straightened, by an individual who was taught to see straight hair as beautiful and good; love the kinks, curls, or coils that naturally grew from their scalp? The distinguishing feature about the reemergence of natural hair within the 21st century is how women openly and proudly embrace their natural hair texture in ways that have never been seen or considered.

What is the Natural Hair Movement? How did Natural Hair Reemerge?

The Natural Hair Movement defines a new period when Black women are rejecting the Eurocentric ideal of beauty and learning to accept their own ideal of beauty through the collective action of Black women wearing and expressing their hair in its natural state. The Natural Hair Movement has focused on encouraging women with African ancestry to celebrate and enjoy the inherent natural characteristics of their kinky, curly, or coily hair texture. The movement is represented by African descended women whom that provide encouragement, advice, product reviews, hairstyle tutorials and much more to other women who are interested in leaving the creamy crack[3] and going natural (Kenneth 2011). The Natural Hair Movement initially gained ground through social media apps such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The social movement is defined through a collective action of refusing straight hair as the norm and instead emphasizing the natural beauty that is inherent within Black women across the diaspora (Asante 2003; Patton 2006; Rooks 2004). Within the United States, natural hair is further emphasized to end the receival of a chemical relaxer treatment and to accept kinkier hair textures in all styles and forms. Before, wearing your kinky hair out in its natural state was widely discouraged. However, with the increased use of technology and accessibility to more information, hair straightening began to decrease as the dangers of routinely straightening Black hair became available. Whether through heating tools or chemicals, the regular manipulation increased damage to the hair follicle and the scalp that could negatively

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[3] Creamy crack is a colloquial term for the chemical relaxer treatment. It is likened to the use of an addictive drug because of the continued use and reliance that many Black women consumed to maintain hair in a permanent state of straightness.

impact hair for years (Davis-Sivasothy 2011). Due to the rising availability of the impact

of hair straightening on Black hair, Black women started to increasingly "go natural" in

search for a healthier alternative for their hair.

In the early 2000s, most African American women wore straightened hair styles

that could be achieved using a hot comb or by receiving a chemical relaxer treatment.

Other straightening methods included the Japanese Keratin Treatment, texturizer, or

using a flat iron. Straight hair was deemed as the acceptable hairstyle for Black women to

adopt and was pushed by the beauty industry as the "in" style of attraction. Straight hair

became popular during the 1990s which glorified the ideal style as long and flowing

"swing hair". Straight hair was also the "go to style" deemed appropriate for all

professional appearances at work, for celebrities, and for maturing young girls who were

expected to maintain the dominant cultural hair standard. A sleek, straight relaxer was not

the only hairstyle worn by Black women during this time. Other Black hair styles pressed

or smoothed the kinky texture to emphasize a "neater" appearance for one's hair (Craig

2002; *The Root* Staff 2018). Since most African American women do not naturally grow

straight follicles out of their scalps, how could the appearance of straight hair be

maintained on an everyday basis?

One of the main ways that African American women gained straight hair was

undergoing a chemical treatment known as the relaxer. The chemical formula literally

"relaxed" or broke down the disulfide bonds in the hair protein structure that naturally

make the hair follicle coil (Davis-Sivasothy 2011). As a result, the follicle structure

weakened, leaving the follicle in a straightened or relaxed state. This procedure became a

part of the everyday styling routine of many Black women to keep their hair straighter for

longer periods of time (Davis-Sivasothy 2011:194). To maintain this appearance, women regularly visited hair salons to touch up their roots every four to twelve weeks. The touch up frequently depended on one's rate of growth, income, thickness, and texture of their hair. The hair straightening routine was expected to be undergone repeatedly for the rest of the woman's life. Introduced in the 1970s, industrial chemists created permanent straighteners that were milder than their home-brewed lye predecessors of the early 20th century. Black women in the late 1970s flocked to drugstores to purchase the newly available item, to produce "the miracle of straightened hair that moved and could be washed" without reverting (Craig 2002:126). This procedure could be applied at home, but the application was safer when completed in a salon. The Black hair salon became a place for women to conform to the Eurocentric beauty standard while also forming a safe place to bond, release, and pass on gender expectations to the younger generation (Jacobs-Huey 2007). The salon could be visited as regularly as once a week to two weeks as women sought out hair advice and regular maintenance of hair from their cosmetologists to achieve the desired style and length.

After the introduction of the milder relaxer in Black hair care, the ritual of visiting the hair salon for hair care and chemical treatments became the cultural expectation. Combined with the desire to enjoy the same opportunities and personal liberties as Whites, Black women continued to wear straightened styles to fit in with the dominant culture of the United States. The ritual of receiving straightened haircare continued into the present century. By the early 2000s Black women had been undergoing chemical relaxer treatments for over 40 years, yet the overall health of Black hair was declining. Chemical relaxers caused thinning hair, premature baldness, consistent hair breakage, and

chronic hair dryness. The chemicals inside the hair products literally suffocated the nutrients and protein out of Black women's hair follicles. A chemical relaxer is by far the harshest process a hair strand will encounter in its lifetime (Davis-Sivasothy 2011). Overtime, the constant application of a chemical relaxer and heat within Black hair regimens created unhealthy hair conditions that could possibly lead to permanent head and follicle damage such premature balding or alopecia. Yet the damage was continually ignored to uphold the cultural standard of having straight hair. Achieving the style of straight hair leveled the playing field for Black women to feel attractive, desired, and feminine within a society that painted appearing too African or too Black as a negative (Byrd and Tharps 2014).

Because chemical relaxers were known to decrease the hair health of Black women, many sought new methods for protecting and preserving their hair straightness and length. Protective styling techniques of braids, twists, wigs, and extension clips were developed to make the wearer's hair longer, fuller, and thicker than it naturally was (Banks 2000). Women who could achieve this appearance naturally with their own hair were praised for having "good hair" and "good genes". A common misconception arose that Black women could not retain length the same way that non-Black individuals could. The assumption among non-Blacks was that Black women could not grow long hair due to their genetics. The shorter length of Black hair was connected to the damage caused from the use of chemical relaxers or heated styling tools (Davis-Sivasothy 2011). The increased knowledge about the effects of chemical relaxers, the racial assumptions, and various measures of preserving hair's straighter appearance led to some women choosing

an alternative or "natural" option. By choosing to end chemical relaxer treatments, many women began going "natural" for the first time in their lives.

"Going natural" was an abrupt shift in the normal pattern of how Black hair was supposed to be styled. Women had first started by getting their hair done in their kitchens, then within Black hair salons, and had now moved back into the stages of "figuring it out" within the privacy of one's bathroom (Byrd and Tharps 2014; Jacobs-Huey 2007). The women who chose to go natural between 2000 to 2005 were the first brave souls who had to navigate the Black hair industry through high concentration of services geared towards preserving straight hair. All the products, hair services, and the media were aimed to influence the Black community upheld the expectation for women to wear their hair straight. Nowhere was it encouraged for women to stop straightening their hair, except to share testimonials for how women could have healthy hair while chemically relaxing. The women who first stopped straightening their hair during this time found encouragement and support communities through online messaging boards and natural hair blogs (Byrd and Tharps 2014).

Individuals who were wearing natural hair styles in the early 2000s included men and women that wore locs. In similar actions of adopting natural hair, many people were wearing locs to spiritually connect to their African roots and the Blackness of their hair's ability to create "locks" in the hair (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Identifying their selves as "Rastafarians", these individuals physically locked the energy and spirit of their hair together by allowing their hair to lock together throughout time. Without the connection to the internet, the collective movement towards embracing natural hair would not have been able to increase in force as it did during the early years of the 2000s decade.

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Message boards and online forums that were available helped make the transition better by offering a place of support through one's natural journey. Through these message boards, women seeking out natural hair products, natural styles, and hair care tips were able to find a community of women who were also taking the plunge away from the "creamy crack". The community of women who were embedded online allowed for those individuals not to feel alone on their journey as they felt within everyday life as the only natural (Byrd and Tharps 2014).

As the internet grew and more computer programs were developed to promote sociability with people across the U.S. and world; the foundations of the Natural Hair Movement were laid with information spreading within minutes to large audiences across the globe. The Natural Hair Movement began as a hair transformation among Black women to allow their kinkier hair textures to grow instead of applying a relaxer. Colloquially identified as "natural", wearing your hair natural first meant to not apply any type of heat or chemical straightener. However, the definition can change depending on who the woman is and their experiences with transitioning from a permanent straight look to a natural one. The movement has changed not only Black hair care, but how all individuals approach their everyday self-care hair regimen practices. Being "natural" is conceptualized as abstaining from using processed chemicals in your food, skin care, clothing, and your hair. For something that seemed to start off on a small scale, the expression of natural hair became a movement within populations of African descent described not just in the U.S. but across the entire African Diaspora. The wearing of natural hair has become categorized as a movement due to how increasing collectives of

women are going natural and how the individual's choice has started the transformation for how society perceives, thinks about, and characterizes natural hair.

Natural Hair Movement in the 21st Century

Embracing natural hair became a movement by individual women who transitioned their hair from being chemically straightened to natural through two methods. The first method was undergoing the "Big Chop", which is the action of cutting off all straight hair and ends by starting over fresh with the roots of becoming completely bald (Byrd and Tharps 2014). This action of starting over is imbued with liberation from the cultural hegemony which structures Eurocentric beauty as the standard to follow within American society. The second method also involved the immediate stop of receiving chemical relaxers and continuing the growth of "new growth" without the decision to go completely bald. "New growth" were the inches of natural hair that peaked through the relaxed hair to indicate when it was time to get another chemical relaxer based on its length (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Each method was decided from the personal decision of the individual as it demarcated the position that many Black women felt with their hair. For centuries, Black women had been taught generation after generation that their hair was unacceptable or unattractive to be worn within American society. To protect African American and Black women from further scorn, the action of straightening and pressing the hair became the dominant hair standard within the Black community. In stark action to change this direction, the unstraightened Afros of the 1960s laid the foundation for the collective empowerment of racial identity expressed through hair. Yet within the 21st century, women began to fully embrace their hair textures through the process of relearning how to maintain it.

The decision to "go natural" was very personal to each individual and marked the beginning of a journey to re-center their Afrocentric identity (Asante 2003). The decision was also made for varying reasons including health, embracing hair texture, or the rejection of dominant cultural hair norms for women in the Black community. Chemical relaxers were not healthy for Black women's hair at all. The products essentially depleted the hair follicle of moisture and left the hair in a constant state of dryness. If a healthy hair care regimen was not adopted to combat the negative effects of relaxers, then the result of hair loss, alopecia, and breakage would increase. The immediate result of decreasing the desire for straight hair was the psychological acceptance of a more honest authentic self with hair growing naturally. Since Africans have lived within the U.S., the unique difference in appearance, texture, and shape was negatively associated with "bad" and "wrong". To continue the devaluation of African indigenous identities, their heads were ritually shaven and passed off for hygiene (Byrd and Tharps 2014). However, the importance and connection of hair within our psyche is strongly linked to who we believe we are and how we are seen to help conceptualize our own personal identities. Fully accepting who we are included the acknowledgment and relearning of the unique characteristics that define African hair textures as distinct. The Natural Hair Movement today showcases how kinks, coils, and curls can and are beautiful and are acceptable in any form. The full embrasure of how the hair of African American and Black women grows, has led towards the complete transformation and education for how hair should be kept healthy while also opening the hair industry to increase the types of products specialized for kinky hair.

Since the increasing numbers of women who are wearing natural hair, the transition has been fully possible with the introduction of specialized hair products for natural hair. Before when walking down the hair care aisle, the products marketed towards Black women were relegated to its own section, on an aisle denoted as "ethnic" section. The use of the word "ethnic" is positioning the hair of African Americans as "an Other" in comparison to the "Haircare" aisle that was marketed towards the non-black population. Many women have traversed this issue when finding hair products that truly worked for their hair, however the options available for Black women were slim unless they went into a beauty supply store. With the increasing awareness of how Black hair culture has been discriminated against within American society, small businesses and stores today are changing their marketing strategy to be more inclusive of black women with natural hair. It has also allowed for black hair brands to enter the market by producing "by us, for us" when advertising towards the consumer (Shea Moisture 2016). Due to the increasing need and attention that African American women are paying to the health and regimen of their hair, the emphasis on the types of chemicals that are being used to develop the product formula has come under a lot of scrutiny because of its damaging effects in the hair follicle and scalp. With the recent emphasis on hair health and hair managing, this has ultimately changed how all women are interacting with their hair daily. Since the Natural Hair Movement has brought significant awareness to how damaging ingredients such as sulfates, parabens, and silicones are; it has transformed how hair products are developed and marketed to Black women and all women across the U.S.

The reemergence and the sustainability of the Natural hair movement would never have been possible without the initial advocacy and empowerment spread through the Black Power movement. It was through the liberating speeches and words of black activists during the 1960s who created the consciousness that would become vital for the resurgence of Afrocentric hair styles in the 21st century. Uniting under phrases of "Black is Beautiful" truly ignited the self-reflection and personal love that many black individuals especially women had never given their selves before. Instead of placing the community over self, Black women rejected that their conformity to dominant beauty standards was the only way to empower and inspire generations of women to gain the same opportunities of non-black women. The action of wearing unstraightened hair and ending the use of chemical relaxers, displays how Black women are using their personal agency to change how their hair is perceived and understood within the United States. As more black women increasingly accept their natural hair textures, the Natural hair movement is truly changing how women see their selves and self-defining their own versions of how beauty can be expressed within the Black community.

Figure 2.1: "Angela Davis Afro."
2017. "The History of the Afro." Online Photograph. https://www.ebony.com/style/the-history-of-the-afro/, accessed 17 April 2019.

CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

The politicization of African American hair is an issue that has recently become an increasing focus among scholars in the social science disciplines. Aiming to understand how Black womanhood is constructed, examining the various struggles that have been identified with styling hair can indicate a lot about the everyday livelihood of African American women in the United States. Black hair culture has consistently been scrutinized and held against the cultural norm of what type of hairstyles are considered "acceptable" within society. The way your hair is styled in the work place, school, and within the media has become a daily battle for how one's hair should look as a Black woman.

In May 2017, a seventeen-year-old junior named Jenesis Johnson was told by her teacher that her hair "was not fixed" and that it needed to be "neat and placed into a style". Occurring at a private high school called North Florida Christian in Tallahassee, Florida, Johnson and her mother spoke out to the WCTV news about the blatant discrimination Jenesis received toward her natural hair (Bennett 2017). Johnson had worn her hair within an Afro for seven months before her teacher told her that her hair was unacceptable. When replying that her hair was "fixed", Johnson was later called to the assistant principal's office two days later. The assistant principal told Johnson her hair was against their dress code by being "extreme, faddish, and out of control". The final decision about Johnson's hairstyle became if she did not change her hair or style it in a

manner that conformed to school policy, then Johnson would not be allowed back to school for the following semester.

The story of Jenesis Johnson is a prime example of how Black hair in an un-straightened or natural style can be treated and viewed as inappropriate within a predominantly White environment. Citing a larger structural concern, Johnson's hair became labeled as an issue for being worn and expressed within an Afro. The subjectivity of Jenesis' Afro portrays how Black hair continues to be policed by dress code policies, the media, and within everyday interactions. Instead of focusing on how Johnson is doing academically within school, North Florida Christian decided to label her natural hair worn within an Afro as a distraction within the classroom. Already internalizing the beliefs of the school, Johnson stated that she sat in the back of the classroom to deflect perceived attention away from herself and her hair (Bennett 2017 and Abraham 2018). The actions taken by North Florida Christian express that within the classroom and in society, it is not okay for a Black woman to wear their hair un-straightened. The school is also suggesting that the only way for Johnson to succeed within a professional environment is through the alteration of her natural hair texture. Although this incident took place within a private school in Tallahassee, the comments made towards Johnson reflect a negative systemic bias towards natural hairstyles worn by Black women. By considering the underlying messages from North Florida Christian High School, this example also displays the daily struggle some Black women may face when choosing a certain hairstyle or wearing their hair naturally.

To understand how Black hair became politicized within American society, curious readers should examine how the history and legacy of slavery remains constant

within the everyday experience of Black individuals within the U.S. The African American population has been consistently aligned with notions of inferiority due to past efforts of justifying slavery as an institution. Several key institutions have been used to further reproduce prejudice against those who are racialized and self-identify as Black. One method that this justification has been manifested is through the systemic practice of discriminating against African descendants for their embodied physical characteristics (Craig 2002). Asserting how race is an embodied identity, Craig states that one is considered within a certain racial group "because of the physical appearance or the genetic makeup of one's body". Since race is constructed as an embodied identity, challenges to racist hierarchies are often expressed as contests over the representation of racialized bodies (Craig 2002:12). By examining the ascribed embodied identity, an individual's skin color, hair texture, facial features, and body shape become a site of contestation when dominant standards of appearance are favored towards Eurocentric conceptualizations of beauty.

With the idealized form of beauty in the U.S. centered toward a Eurocentric norm, everything that is associated with Africa or with blackness is rejected and deemed as "wrong" (Byrd and Tharps 2014). The enculturation of these ideologies created an unequal hierarchy that has placed whiteness at the top and blackness at the bottom. Therefore, Black women are devalued by their natural appearances and inherited African genes. The inheritance of a kinkier or curlier hair texture is a unique identifier to African descendants from African ancestors. The appearances of Black bodies were devalued and aligned with inferiority to instill psychological harm. Due to Black inferiority, Black

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women have constantly been placed under pressure to straighten or alter their hair texture to conform towards the idealized form of appearance within American society.

Before the encounter of Europeans, hair in West Africa was adorned aesthetically to personify various characteristics that could differ based on the individual. In an expansive history about the politicization of Black Hair, Byrd and Tharps discusses the importance of hair on the African continent in 1400AD and develops a historical discussion into the early 21st century (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Their historical narrative addressed how hair was very intimate to one's self-identity and quickly became a site of contestation once Africans and their descendants were living within the Americas. By addressing the history and previous scholarship that discusses the politicization of Black hair, this will lead towards a better understanding for why the reemergence of natural hair is currently very important in considering how Black hair and other phenotype features become negatively associated. One of the oldest notions about hair will be revisited to situate how hair has been assigned various meanings throughout time.

Devaluation of Black Hair in Enslavement

Within the Black community, hair for Black women has been the source of much socio-political contention. The consciousness or unconsciousness continues to shape the way many Black women approach their hair (Davis-Sivasothy, 2011: 26). The political notions surrounding kinky hair textures harken back towards the ideologies created within the foundations of scientific racism. Samuel Morton made conclusions of black inferiority off prejudicial notions of one's behavior to conclude notions of intelligence and social position within society without considering how Black people were positioned in society. Morton supported his ideas from pre-conceived beliefs based off phenotype

differences such as hair texture, skin color, body shape, and other physiognomic factors (Menand 2002). Some scholars attribute polygenists as the originators of spreading inferiority complexes for populations of color, however monogenists were supporting the same white superiority agenda. Polygenists believed that the races were created separately and that they had been endowed with different attributes and unequal aptitudes from the start. Monogenists believed that all humans are descended from a common ancestor, yet inequalities between races are attributed to differing rates of degeneration.

Although Samuel Morton did not loudly express his affiliation with polygenists, his work subtly suggests that he supported the ideologies created through scientific racist research. Menand discusses further how Louis Agassiz and Samuel Morton supported that entire species had declined since creation but some due to climate had declined farther than others (Menand 2002). Ultimately, Morton and Agassiz believed that Africans and African descendants were of a "different, degenerate race"; and everything that is associated with Africa expressed culturally or phenotypically is reduced to being "degenerate". This type of thinking allowed for scientists and racism to permeate society due to their conclusions being defined as "factual". Since inferiority became associated with phenotypical markers of expression, African hair textures were likened to being representational of animalistic factors such as "wool".

During the enslavement of Africans on plantations, Black males and females were not able to elaborately style their hair as they once had back on the African continent. They did not have the same butters, oils, or resources to access which made many enslaved Africans to become creative when seeking out tools to use for combing and styling their hair. The term "wool" started being used to compare their hair to the

appearance of sheep because many enslaved Africans had used the same tool for their heads as was used to keep sheep's wool unmated. This association led towards whites classifying and categorizing African hair textures as "bushy", "uncombed", and labeled as "wool" to connote the inferiority and equation of the enslaved to animals (Byrd and Tharps 2014, White and White, 1995). Likening African's hair to "wool", "bushy", and "unkempt" involved the animalistic comparisons to individuals with African descent. By describing African phenotypes with subhuman categories, it describes the process for how White Americans shamed African Americans by equating them to an inferior status. These decisions were employed using language and actions to discriminate against any one that wore their hair with characteristics and expression of African culture (White and White, 1995).

Samuel Morton, Josiah Nott, George Gliddon, and Louis Agassiz helped to influence the beliefs of populations described as "black" for being less intelligent and more inferior than descendants of European ancestry. Morton measured various skulls for his crania study and produced conclusions of a cranium capacity hierarchy structured off "race". European skulls were ranked as superior with high intelligence, while Africans were ranked as being sub human and inferior and linked with having a small cranium size in relation to primates. The racial categories created during the 19th century was given social meanings to further reinforce the false stereotypic notions of how African descendants behaved, looked, and spoke to equate them as "subhuman". With the partnership of Louis Agassiz, "Black inferiority" created false notions about African Americans and their intelligence and physical appearance by attaching biological and social meanings towards their differences. The ideologies of scientific racism laid the

foundation for how individuals defined and classified as "Black" would be judged by American society solely based off their phenotype gene expression. This led to stereotypes being assigned to races and ethnicities because of prejudicial assumptions made from white Americans at that time because of one's culture and appearance being different.

White and White discuss how enslaved African managed their hairstyles while living among southern plantations and some of politics surrounding their hair care practices. They also hypothesized that although enslaved Africans were pressured to conform to the dominant hairstyles of their enslavers, some enslaved Africans wore their hair elaborately in a manner to rebel against planters. "The idea that the hair of one's head is a medium through which social messages can be conveyed and aesthetic standards of the dominant culture contested should not, nowadays seems strange" (White and White, 1995:51). White and White seek to understand the deeper meaning behind African American cultural expression of hairstyles. However, the evidence used to answer their questions are primarily created by whites. This leaves out Black agency in describing for their selves what their hairstyles mean culturally, instead of someone speaking for them. Their intention of captivating how enslaved Africans styled their hair was very insightful however it was not able to provide a fuller perspective of how the enslaved Africans felt during the process of trying to find hair styles and tools that worked for them. Being empowered about their hair suggested a challenge to white cultural assumptions that emerges again within the late 20th century and early 21st century (White and White 1995:58, Byrd and Tharps 2014).

The Roots of "Good" and "Bad" Hair

Notions of "good" and "bad" hair are rooted within the legacy of slavery. The incident involving Jenesis Johnson exemplifies there is continued negative bias and hair texture prejudice towards the appearance of kinkier and tighter curls. The negative connotations of African hair textures can be linked to colonization and the forced enslavement of Africans by Europeans. During this time, enslaved Africans were physically divided from their ethnic affiliations and their family as a mechanism to keep individuals from rebelling against enslavers. Other divisionary methods were based off skin color and through the psychological manipulation of favoring specific phenotype characteristics over others (Byrd and Tharps, 2014). To foster a sense of inferiority within Black women, some enslaved women were treated better and valued more for possessing "favorable phenotype" characteristics.

The conceptualization of what is "good" or "bad" hair is rooted within the racial discriminatory practices used against Black women during enslavement to increase division and instill racial inferiority. Focusing specifically on hair texture, the White planters treated women with "good hair" better than they treated women they considered to have "bad hair". "'Good hair' was thought of as long, lacking in kinky, tight, or frizzy curls. 'Bad hair' became the antithesis, namely African hair in its purest form" (Byrd and Tharps 2014:18). To have "good hair" meant to have a hair texture that was equated to economic opportunity and social advantage. While "bad hair" was believed to be markers of backwardness and justification for one's inferiority. The psychological scars of believing one's hair texture was not beautiful or valued, was purposely used against Black women as one of the ways to destroy their self-esteem and sense of womanhood

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during and after slavery (bell hooks 1981). Having good hair also became synonymous with Eurocentric facial features and higher social positioning among the enforced racial hierarchy. The individuals who possessed these characteristics in the past tended to be mulatto slaves who typically had White paternal parentage. Miscegenation or racial mixture of African descendants and Whites increased across southern plantations because of white men raping Black women. In result of racial mixture, a lighter-skinned class increased which was used to heighten institutionalized inequalities of African Americans by skin tone (bell hooks 1981; Byrd and Tharps 2014; Wilder 2015).

During plantation slavery, the prevalent division of skin color ignited a divide between lighter and darker skinned slaves because of how darker skinned individuals were treated differently than their lighter skinned counter parts (bell hooks 1981). Those with light skin were frequently given work roles within the house, while those with darker skin were relegated to working conditions outside within the field. Due to their phenotypic features appearing closer to the White planters and their families, lighter skinned slaves and free African Americans received privileges that were not given towards individuals with a darker skin tone (Byrd and Tharps 2014; Patton 2006; bell hooks 1981). Known today as colorism, this system can be defined as the unequal treatment and discrimination of individuals belonging to the same racial or ethnic minority group based upon differences in physical features such as skin color, facial shape, and hair texture (Wilder 2015). Colorism as a divisionary method has become internalized and reproduced among future generations which further influenced a "good hair-bad hair" complex within the Black community.

The structuring of color intertwined with hair characteristics displayed how inequality between White and non-White populations were reinforced along biological physical markers other than solely skin color. Ann Stoler states that when colonialists created a category of "Whiteness", color hierarchies were established to facilitate boundaries for who was included in the dominant group and who was not (Stoler 1989). In addition to how color boundary markers of physical characteristics helped to reproduce color hierarchies. What came to matter was not one's body but who counted as "European" and who did not and how that measure was determined (Stoler 1989). The methods of exclusion became more heavily emphasized along inherent biological physical markers because defining the "dominant class" became difficult with forced, coerced, and voluntary sexual relations between the colonized and the colonizer (Stoler 1989). Moreover, notions of "good" vs. "bad" hair included underlying color and racial prejudices to further divide the Black community along visible phenotypes and to establish hierarchies that placed "whiteness" as the dominant position within society.

In the early 1900s, straight hair had become the preferred hairstyle to signal middle-class status (Byrd and Tharps, 2014). Ideologies of what represented "good" or "bad" hair influenced African American women to straighten their hair. Desiring inclusion in American society, African American women started altering their natural hair textures to match the beauty standard of the 20th century. Centralizing whiteness, the desired look took after Eurocentric values of how a woman should appear publicly. Black women were subjected to adhering to the Eurocentric beauty ideal which led to new methodologies for hair straightening. These methods included the use of lye relaxers and hot comb press to achieve the desired hair style. Maintaining a Eurocentric look

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increased chances of wider social acceptance for embodying an appearance that prized "whiteness" and conceptualized "blackness" as being inferior and wrong. "Good hair" soon became associated with "whiteness" while "bad hair" became associated with "blackness".

The roots of "good" and "bad" hair is very important for understanding the significance of expressing natural hair within the present. As women have started to grow out their natural hair textures, the next step involves breaking the psychological chains that were socialized to Black women since they were young girls. Part of that resocialization process was redefining what one's hair meant to everyone, while also redefining how hair would be represented and seen by the world. The Natural Hair Movement has certainly challenged prior perceptions around African American hair by rearticulating the meanings of what "good" and "bad" hair could be. If "good" hair was once used to connotate Whiteness, then a possible goal of the movement involves decentering Whiteness and re-centering blackness as the ideal beauty standard desire for African American women "going natural". Although the dichotomy between "good" and "bad" hair holds prejudicial understandings about African American hair, it is necessary to address how those two terms have shaped how hair is understood within the Black community. Acknowledging its history is important in changing the narrative for how Black hair can be described in the present. These terms are currently still in use today however the overall understandings and meanings of them have started to progressively change as more women join the Natural Hair Movement.

Role of Colorism within the Natural Hair Movement

Issues surrounding Hair and Beauty for Black women have everything to do with race. Skin tone (with class, gender, and race) shapes our attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and choices (Wilder 2015: 2). For Black women within the 21st century, racism and colorism remains a part of everyday life. Especially when considering the politics that surround African American's women's hair care, maintenance, and texture. Wilder defines colorism as the unequal treatment and discrimination of individuals belonging to the same racial or ethnic minority group based upon differences in physical features-most notably skin complexion (color), but also facial features and hair texture (2015:6). Although racism and colorism have been used interchangeably, each form of bias is different, despite sharing similar qualities, manifestations, and consequences. "Among Black folk in the United States, colorism is a form of institutionalized racism that promotes bias and favor for light skin, European features and 'good hair'" (Wilder, 2015: 6). Since colorism has its roots within the enslavement of African Americans, colorism certainly plays a role within how natural hair is perceived within American society. This colorist behavior has played out visually within films, television, social media, and even within literature. The color stratification became noticeable when African hair textures were being ranked through a hierarchal hair typing system.

An article published on *Curl Centric's* website examines the differences in hair types, as well as documenting the most popularly known hair typing systems encircling the natural hair community. The hair typing system most widely used is known as the "Andre Walker Hair Typing System". This system rates hair strands through a numerical system ranging from 1 as 'Straight', 2 as 'Wavy', 3 as 'Curly' and 4 as the "Kinky"

(Kenneth 2011). Although Andre Walker debunked the "good hair" debate by stating that "everyone has good hair regardless of ethnicity, many critics have noted that his system is "hierarchical" and ironically places "kinky" hair at the bottom of the list. Most women who possess the type 4 hair is most often found within the African American community. Since this system has been around, people have updated the list to be more inclusive towards kinkier hair types by updating the list to include 3C and 4C. Before, the system only categorized hair types with A and B for individuals with curly and kinky hair types, however since many found the categories to be discriminatory, the introduction of a third category was created by members within the natural hair community.

Although the Natural Hair Movement is making progress towards encouraging the empowerment of Black and African American women, there are still a few kinks which have not quite been overcome or straightened out. The good hair/ bad hair complex was believed to have faded since more African American women were embracing their natural hair, however women and men are continuing the practice of establishing which type of natural hair texture was good and which type of natural hair was bad. To make matters worse, the hair shaming was taking place systematically within the media and within everyday conversations. Natural Hair was becoming more noteworthy within mainstream culture, however the natural hair type which was being hailed by many was the 3C curls. In commercials, Hollywood films, and within television series, if a Black woman was featured with natural hair it would contain the curl pattern for 3C hair type. Once again, good hair was being displayed as large, bouncy define curls while 4C hair was being seen visually as ugly, undefined, dry, and undesired. "If their hair wasn't straight, it's a very particular type of curly look that's meant to represent natural hair. It's

another way for the arbiters of mainstream beauty to divide our community" (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Social media significant reinforced this stereotype by Instagram and Twitter feeds becoming filled with images of women who possessed this hair type.

Scholars Who Have Addressed Hair and Black Women

When capturing the experience of race, there are many resources to seek out that discuss the lived experiences of facing racism within the Black community. A topic that is recently coming to the fore is how the intersections of race and gender have produced different life experiences for Black women. One of those topics that is increasingly being explored is the issue of hair and how it is worn on an everyday basis. When considering how hair is something that usually falls within an aesthetic display, the significance of hair among Black women has proven to be a subject that has affected the lived experiences of Black women in a positive and negative way. Exploring how the appearance, shape, or texture of hair has impacted Black women differently is central to the understanding of how Black hair has been perceived, stereotyped, and viewed by the majority population of American society. Some of the most insightful literature to examine these intersections were the ones written by women who intertwined their own hair experiences with the politicization of Black hair. Addressing previous scholarship that has been written on the topic of African American hair is important for identifying how discussions of Black hair have evolved in the 21st century. With the progression of the Natural Hair Movement, new ideas and understandings for how Black women relate to their hair every day is growing by challenging how society once dictated how Black hair was seen by Black women defining and self-cultivating how Black hair should be embraced and love from within.

In 1996, Noliwe Rooks analyzed the relationship between ideologies of race and beauty conventions among African American women throughout the 20th century. In *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*, the narrative aimed to further understand how discourses on Black pride were articulated by writers and speakers (Rooks 1996:14). By focusing on the Progressive Era from 1890 to the 1920s, Rooks increased the understanding behind hair politicization by analyzing what influenced the choices African American women made when creating a look of representation through their hair. Examining the rise of Madam C.J. Walker as a central figure who helped to change the narrative around Black hair expectations during that time, was very important when considering the formulation of a new Black beauty standard.

Madam C.J. Walker popularized the straightening comb by advertising to Black women how hair straightening would increase their economic opportunities. Hair alteration was encouraged as a means of survival and as a way to cultivate Black beauty. By rearticulating how race and gender intersected within beauty advertisements for black women, Rooks reveals that hair alteration was not always done to mimic the Eurocentric beauty standard. It may have influenced hair style choices, but the products produced by Madam C.J. Walker and future Black entrepreneurs gave Black women hair products that was specially formulated for their hair and worked to produce healthy results. By promoting healthy hair options, the advertisements in the 20th century were another means for how beauty was defined for Black women during that era.

> "Taken as a whole, this work juxtaposes the representation of African American women's bodies with self-representations, heightening our understandings of various social positions and their role in structuring the ideological meanings that undergird our understanding of African

American women of both the Progressive Era and today" (Rooks 1996:20).

By Rooks capturing how ideologies of beauty and race intertwined to formulate how hair became a large part of black womanhood, additional scholarship by Ingrid Banks furthered the conversation about how significant hair is within everyday life.

In *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness* (2000), Banks asserts that hair in the Black community matters because of the difference in how hair shapes experiences for men and women. In American society what is considered desirable and undesirable can be based on one's hair texture. Desirability is measured against Eurocentric beauty standards, which include long and straight hair without kinks (Banks 2002). The meanings attached to hair disproportionately affect women more negatively than it does men. Banks continues to explore the significance of Black hair by illustrating how hair shapes black women's ideas about race, gender, class, sexuality, images of beauty, and power. One of the key issues that is highlighted within the study is how Black women are socialized at a young age that their hair is a marker of difference.

> "When little girls are young, they are baptized into the ritual of styling hair as straight, so their hair can be "acceptable" in public. This has been subconsciously teaching younger girls to view their hair as "unacceptable" or "bad" within the eyes of mainstream society. And since society does not accept the appearance of Black hair in its natural state, neither should Black women. This type of pressure has been used to conform Black women into straightening or adopting a longer, looser, or straighter protective style within the 21st century" (Banks 2000:23).

By young girls becoming instilled with seeing straight hair as "better" than natural hair, it is already suggesting that the way they look or were born naturally will never be accepted by society because of the generational ritual of getting their hair "done". In the early 20th century, straightening hair could be interpreted as a survival technique. Yet by the 1990s

hair decisions and styling norms were being redefined as choices of empowerment, economic opportunity, and the ability to have a choice in how the hair was to be styled (Rooks 1996 and Banks 2000).

Part of understanding the Natural Hair Movement today is being able to identify the initial connections to when Black women first started to wear their hair un-straightened. In *Ain't I a Beauty Queen: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race*, Maxine Leeds Craig examines how consciousness and racial identity were rearticulated during the 1960s and 1970s in the establishment of Black beauty pageants. Her book begins by describing the history of African American beauty contests and continues through the emergence of a new standard of beauty that found common expression in the words "black is beautiful". In the 1960s, Craig documents the practice of racial identity in everyday life by examining the period from the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement to the fragmentation of African American activism in the black power politics of the early 1970s. The changes that ensued in the publicly available images of beauty, in practices of self-presentation, and in the meaning of the word and identity "black"; affected the lives of all African American women (Craig 2002:16-18).

Attempting to piece together exactly how hair fits within a wider historical narrative, *Hair Story: Untangling The Roots of Black Hair in America* provides a detailed story of the various moments where hair has been political, popular, or detrimental within the Black community. Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps address the long history of how the politics of hair is connected to the styling traditions and identification techniques from West Africa in the 1400s. The story continues by discussing the legacy and trauma that has related to Black hair since the establishment of plantation slavery within the 18th

and 19th century (Byrd and Tharps 2014). The 2014 revised version continues into the 21st century by discussing the reemergence of natural hair and natural hair styles among Black women. It dives into how the embracing of natural hair textures by African American women challenges the cultural norm of predominantly wearing straight or smooth textured styles. Natural hair within the new century engages the conversation around how women have had to face against the western beauty standards that imposed itself upon the Black population since the 18th century. It mainly discusses how understandings of hair was shaped by the political climate of the United States while also depicting how the experience of being Black shaped cultural perceptions intragroup towards hair (Byrd and Tharps 2014). The extensive research conducted by Byrd and Tharps aided in having a historical resource that covered reemerging topics of hair straightening, good vs. bad hair, and how the psychological traumas from the past are still present today with the Black psyche.

The sources are key in gaining an insightful view into how hair is imbibed with sociocultural meanings while also being a racial signifier of difference that impacted the Black experience. The topic of how hair shapes the livelihoods of Black women is very expansive and is difficult to narrow down into explaining why a physical characteristic such as hair matters so much. By examining the roots and origins of how the subject of hair came to be, it consistently ties back into the legacy of slavery. The trauma within the Black community from slavery was expressed in diverse ways that included institutional, psychological, emotional, and spiritual. The conversation surrounding how exactly that hair became politicized and part of an everyday struggle will be addressed within the next section.

In this thesis, I aim to address the complexities that arise over the lived realities of Black women and hairstyling. Throughout the literature review, key scholars have written about the intersectional marginalization that many women experience due to the prominence and chosen styles of choice. Citing prior written works about Black hair will cultivate further understanding about the inner nuances that have been produced by larger structural systems of oppression within U.S. society. The construction of Black womanhood is very diverse when examining individual experiences, yet a key unifier are how the interlocking systems of race, gender, class, and sexuality change how one may be viewed based on their appearance. Black womanhood has consistently been devalued largely through appearances and I aim to answer within this thesis how the appearance of hair has factored into this practice.

CHAPTER THREE:
NAVIGATING THE FIELD IN SOUTH CAROLINA

In the summer of 2018, I planned and implemented a three to four-month field study to explore how Black women participated in, thought about, and perceived the expression of natural hair in the current 21st century. I wanted to understand how natural hair styles have become apart of Black hair culture. While examining the impact of how natural hair expression was empowering Black women to embrace their curls. From June to September, I collected using qualitative methods that involved observation, interviewing, informal conversations, and engaging in conversations with various women to gain a better understanding about how societal norms influence their daily hair choices. The purpose of this study is to address cultural questions surrounding why the expression of natural hair is significant and what it describes about the everyday concerns of black hair culture. In this chapter, I aim to address the central research questions guiding my thesis fieldwork, while also detailing the exact methods and research strategy I used to implement my qualitative data approach.

The central questions that I aim to answer for this project are: 1) What were the societal and cultural beliefs that kept African American women from wearing their natural hair textures? 2) How does the expression of natural hair in the 21st century connect with the Black Power movements of the late 20th century? 3) How is Afrocentric theory being conceptualized and expressed by African American women through Black hairstyles? 4) How are the negative stereotypes about African American hair textures

being challenged in the 21st century? 5) How are Black women and the broader Black community empowering women through self-identification and acceptance of natural hair? Answering the key research questions, I will frame the analysis of the data collected during fieldwork. The following sections will walk through the step by step process I used to complete the field study in 2018.

Before the reemergence of natural hair, many Black women felt that wearing their natural hair texture in some spaces were discouraged. Because the appearance of straightened hair was preferred and deemed more appropriate within American society. The recent embrasure of natural hair textures within the Black community, has initiated many questions surrounding why the expression of Black hair within its natural state was deemed inappropriate before the 21st century. In seeking to understand the significance and key meaning of the expression of natural hair among African American women, I used qualitative approaches to aid in examination and the recovery of new data in the conversation around hair. I chose qualitative methods because of the sensitive subject matter that could be discussed regarding hair.

The subject of hair within the Black community can be very intimate and a controversial topic. Any conversations about hair would have to be done with meticulous consideration for each participant. A qualitative approach would allow for participants to feel comfortable within their own environment and within a created safe space during discussion groups. With qualitative methods being composed of empirical evidence from participants, each participant would feel free to discuss their opinions and experiences. Covering various topics about how antiblackness permeates their individual hair choices, what their interpretations are about the reemergence of natural hair, and their feelings

surrounding Black hair culture within the 21ˢᵗ century. By using a qualitative framework, the approach helped with fostering relationships between participants when navigating and recruiting for potential women to participate.

Black Hair in the South East

The main location chosen for the summer field study was Columbia, South Carolina. Columbia is South Carolina's most populous city, the state capital, the county seat of Richland County, and the site of the University of South Carolina's main campus (SCIWAY 2019). Once a small, unpaved town situated next to the Congaree River, Columbia has become the central hub of life within the Palmetto State. Apart from its clustered cities of Charleston, Greenville, and Columbia; the state of South Carolina remains very rural outside of and in between the populated city regions. Columbia sits within the middle of the state, where accessing the Blue Ridge mountains of the Appalachian chain or the low country beaches are both within a two to three-hour drive. Columbia became the capital of South Carolina in 1786 when the prior legislatures decided that the city of Charleston's geographic position made it difficult for residents living within the Up country to travel to the Low country or feel adequately represented. After increased tensions between planters in the low country and small farmers in the upcountry, the decision was made to move the capital inland to the location along the Congaree River of what is now Columbia.

Historically, South Carolina includes a long history dating back to its colonial founding in the late 17ᵗʰ century. Embedded within its history is its large involvement within the Transatlantic Slave Trade. A large portion of the enslaved Africans that were imported into the colonial U.S. passed through Charleston, SC (O'Malley 2014). South

Carolina imported thousands of enslaved Africans to support their economy of rice, cotton, and tobacco. West Africans were highly sought out because of their agricultural knowledge and skills in cultivating rice within coastal regions. Because of the high importation of enslaved Africans to meet economic demands, the population of enslaved Africans significantly outnumbered White South Carolinians by the 1800s. Due to the increased presence of West Africans within the low country and surrounding regions, the culture instilled within the people resulted in influencing and becoming embedded within South Carolina's culture today.

During the enslavement of Africans and African Americans, South Carolina adopted some of the harshest laws and codes to limit the livelihoods of many Black individuals. These restrictions were in direct result of White Americans being outnumbered by their African American counterparts. This majority was proven quickly during Reconstruction when the South Carolina legislature was comprised of majority African Americans from 1865 to 1873. With the outnumbering of White South Carolinians by Black South Carolinians, the limitations placed upon the Black population contributed and facilitated the growing fear of any person who identified with African descent. Out of this fear and the legacy of enslavement, led towards the creation of cultural intolerance towards any individual who appeared to be or participated within Black culture. It was this intolerance and prejudice that occurs within current society towards Black individuals who embody their blackness within their appearance (Craig 2002).

Considering the legacy of slavery and how it influenced the perceptions surrounding the genetic and phenotypic expression of African genes. Understanding how

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those cultural perceptions have been reproduced over the generations is what factored

into the decision of choosing Columbia, SC and the Palmetto state as a site for

conducting research on Black hair. Prior ethnographic studies have been done within Los

Angeles and around a California campus (Banks 2000 and Jacobs-Huey 2007), I wanted

to view the perceptions of Black hair and the larger Natural Hair Movement within South

Carolina. Examining the historical roots of how hair is viewed within South Carolina and

the larger South is very significant into providing a broader perspective of how Black

women identify or view their hair within the southern region of the United States.

Although Columbia is a city, it fits within the scope of a "southern city" in that it was

historically influenced by the social, political, economic, and spiritual which shaped the

landscape of the state and its people. According to U.S. Census Data, Richland County's

population is comprised of 47.9% Black, 42.6% White non-Hispanic or Latino, 5.6%

Hispanic or Latino, 2.9% Asian, and 2.3% identifying as two races or more (e.g. U.S.

Census Bureau 2018). With Richland county consisting of a predominantly Black

population, Columbia appeared to be a great location to gain a multivocal perspective

towards how hair is viewed, understood, styled, and discussed within the Black

community.

Qualitative Approaches: Interviewing

For this method, I conducted one-on-one interviews with participants who

volunteered or expressed interest in participating within the study. Interviewing is one of

the main techniques for qualitative analysis that allows for the researcher to build

interpersonal rapport between themselves and the community. It is also a method to get to

know key informants or participants better. An interview can range between being

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informal to formal from the style of questions, location or environment, and content that is discussed. The interviews took place throughout June to September mainly during the evenings and on weekends or by the availability of the participant. This method was chosen because of the sensitive content that may be asked surrounding the daily practices of styling hair among African American women. Because of its conversational style and the simplicity of getting to know individuals, the interview provides a way for researchers to connect with their participants interpersonally. It also allows for the researcher to gain an understanding and greater insight into how multiple people handle a structural cultural issue such as hair and the perceptions surrounding its appearance within society.

The interviews employed were designed in a mostly structured and semi structured basis. Structured/Semi-structured interviews were given to highlight key topics that were pinpointed to explore for the research study. All interviews were 45 to 60 minutes in length. Before each interview, I described its purpose and how it would fit within the larger frame of the research thesis. After briefly describing the study, participants were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. This document was given as an added reassurance that all conversations that occurred during the interview would be kept between the interviewer and the participant. All interviews that were conducted were recorded and participant consent was gained before each recorded session. The recorded data of each session was used to ease the transcription and analysis of the interview after the data collection period.

Each participant was given the exact same set of questions that were asked during each session. 34 total questions were included within the questionnaire, however not all 34 were asked during all interviews. This was due to many of the participants engaging

within dialogue about some of the content that was included within the questionnaire. The questions were sectioned into four areas that covered the following key areas for the thesis: 1) Introduction of Participant, 2) Historical Framing/Perceptions/Stereotype of African hair textures, 3) Natural Hair Movement, and 4) Empowerment, Community, Sisterhood Networks. These four topics were chosen as key areas of the thesis to learn more from African American women in the community regarding hair and to also gain better insight into how members viewed their own hair. Some of the interviews conducted took on a semi structured nature by some of the questions or probe techniques were tailored toward each individual participant and their hair experiences. The guided questions were used to aid in facilitating the interview but was not followed rigidly to allow conversational flow between the researcher and participant.

A few interview techniques that were employed were the "Long-Question" and "Uh-huh/Head Nod". Using the "Long-Question" technique allowed for the first longer sentence to create a comfortable and neutral context for the respondent to answer (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2017). It also provided more context to the question if the content asked was unfamiliar. An example of this would be: "Considering all the pressure and stress that has surrounded the maintenance and care of kinkier/tighter hair textures, what do you think the significance of the "Big Chop" is? This question allows for a slower buildup to the main point which provides more context and time for the participant to respond when they follow up with an answer. The "Big Chop" is a significant change for Black women who choose this method for growing back their natural hair and can symbolize an intense emotional experience. The first part of the sentence acknowledges some of the reasons some women may choose to Big Chop, but it

also includes terms that can be generally applied without speaking for any of the participants and their individual stressors of their hair maintenance. Long questions are great to employ during interviews, especially when discussing sensitive topics that could make people uncomfortable. The "Uh-huh/Head Nodding" technique has been used by researchers to increase the participation of respondents during interviews. The natural model of an interview will follow a pattern of the interviewer asking a question, with the interviewee answering the question and possibly not elaborating on their answers. Using the "Uh-Huh" technique will encourage a participant to continue with their narrative while also continuing the natural flow of conversation (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2017). In addition to the technique, saying small words or nodding your head during an interview displays that the interviewer is actively engaged and listening to everyone in an interview. Continuing with words of encouragement or affirmation are small ways for the interviewer to express their engagement while still facilitating the interview process.

Other things to be aware of within Semi-Structured to Structured Interviews are the Deference Effect and the possible presence of a Third Party. The "Deference Effect" occurs when interviewees are telling you what they think you want to know in order not to offend you. This can happen when there are differences in race, gender, ethnicity, and age between an interviewer and an informant (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2017). Many of the participants within the study were older and ranging between the ages of 27 to 53. Because of the higher range of older persons, it is possible that during interviews some respondents were providing answers that they thought the researcher wanted to hear or would add to the research. This can cause concern because it may appear as if participants are not providing their true opinions out of fear of not producing the

information that the researcher may be seeking. The "Third-Party-Present" can occur when a spouse, partner, close friend, or family member sits in on an interview. Since interviews are usually conducted one-on-one, the presence of the other person may change the responses that a participant may give if they were alone. A few of the interviews had the same person sit in the room of their interview, which led to interaction or confirmation of facts and short moments of the interviewee owning up to something that the third person knew was not being discussed at first.

Focus Groups

For this method, I aimed to host discussion groups where African American women could attend and have an in-depth conversation with other women about their thoughts and opinions surrounding the politicization of Black hair. The Focus Group method allowed a small to medium size group of participants to join within a "focused" discussion circle which covered a specific topic or issue surrounding hair. A Focus Group can also range from being informal to formal through the number of attendants and the relationships between those who attend. During June to September, the focus groups were scheduled on Thursday evenings or Saturday mornings to attempt to accommodate multiple people's work schedules during the week. Five Focus Groups were scheduled, with one "Make Up" focus group session in case one needed to be rescheduled. Conducting focus groups were chosen because of the nature of hair usually being a topic that frequently comes up within the daily interactions of Black women. Because of its lived reality, nearly all Black women share commonalities over the experience of feeling stressed or pressured to wear their hair a certain way. Due to this shared experience, hosting a focus group to discuss hair was in line with the similarity of how Black women

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discuss their lived realities with each other within certain spaces. Just as an interview, a Focus group allowed for the researcher to observe and facilitate a discussion among multiple Black women and to gain better insight into how women discuss hair in relation to their gender, race, class, socioeconomics, and age.

All Focus Groups would last between 60 to 90 minutes. The total length of a session would be determined by the number of people who were present and how engaged each participant was within the topics covered. Before each participant attended, the purpose of the study was included within the introductory email to make each participant aware of how their voluntary participation would be included within the project. Once the participant had accepted their invitation and selected which date or time worked best for them, the meeting place was sent out to confirm their involvement within the study. To protect the privacy of each participant and create an environment of confidentiality, the location of the focus group was not given out until all voluntary persons had confirmed the date and time. This was to ensure the confidentiality of space and for each person involved to feel that they were in a safe space to discuss their opinions freely. Before each focus group session, every participant was given a folder that included their participant number, invitation to participate letter, and a confidentiality agreement form. The invitation to participate letter included information about the research study as well as necessary contact numbers for the University of South Carolina Office of Research & Compliance along with contact info for the principal investigator and the faculty research advisor overseeing the completion of fieldwork. I also described the focus group's purpose and how it would fit within the larger frame of the research thesis.

After briefly describing the study, participants were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. This document was given as an added reassurance that all conversations would be kept between the researcher and other participants within the room. Since focus groups involve multiple people, confidentiality is hard to guarantee however each participant was asked to keep any personal information that was discussed within the room private and to not discuss private information outside of the focus group location. All focus groups conducted was recorded and participant consent was asked before continuing within each session. The recorded data of each session was used to ease the transcription and analysis of the discussion group after the data collection period. Each participant was given the exact same set of questions that were asked during each session. 34 total questions were included within the questionnaire, however not all 34 were asked during all interviews. Potentially, only half of the questions were asked due to the flow of conversation picking up once the questions reached more "hot topics" regarding hair practices. The questions were sectioned into four areas that covered the following key areas for the thesis: 1) Introduction of Participant, 2) Historical Framing, Perceptions, Stereotype of African hair textures, 3) Natural Hair Movement, and 4) Empowerment, Community, Sisterhood Networks. These four topics were chosen as key areas of the thesis to learn more from African American women in the community regarding hair and to also gain better insight into how members viewed their own hair. The goal of each focus group session was to stimulate conversation and information that may not appear within two-person interactions. It also encourages participants to explore similarities and differences of opinions in a way that would not happen within a one-on-one interview (Bernard, Wutich, Ryan 2017).

A few considerations for Focus Groups that should be kept in mind are limitations and potential relationships between participants. Although focus groups are a great method for gaining better cultural insight for a specific topic within a community, a limitation is it may not be the best method for understanding a distribution of responses in a group (Bernard, Wutich, Ryan 2017). Employing this method is intended to generate discussion, however you will always have individuals who will tend to dominate, and some will literally sink into the background of conversation. This can create a discrepancy within data results and may influence the conversation to display that one opinion is echoed by all, when it is possible that all opinions are not being expressed due to the possibility of participants being more introverted.

Another aspect to be aware of is the prior connections or relationships that could be present within some participants. Individuals who are more familiar with each other may abbreviate or "assume" knowledge between themselves and others who share certain cultural, racial, or gender backgrounds. This possibility is something to be aware of because of what is explicitly being said, may not be what is explicitly being implied within conversation. These social and cultural cues are necessary aspects that researchers should be highly aware of when conducting qualitative data. Another limitation within the study is preserving confidentiality of informants or participants during each session. Since focus groups are conducted within a group setting, it is hard for the researcher to ensure the privacy of all participants outside the data collection space. This issue of privacy was restated at the beginning of each session by the researcher emphasizing how all answers spoken about within the space should be respected and not shared beyond the walls of the data site.

Participant Observation

This method can be one of the most ethically challenging techniques that involves experiencing the lives of the people you are studying while also learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion to analyze what daily life may explain about one's culture (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2017). Using participant observation within an ethnographic study is a great tool because it puts you where the "action" is and allows for the researcher to observe behavior in a "natural" context. Participant observation was used during the field study to collect data at Hair Festivals and observing a Black hair salon specializing in natural hair. While employing this method, it is important for the researcher to be able to recall key interactions and significant moments within the day to write them down later as fieldnotes. As one of the most rewarding methods that can be employed within the field, it also has a few limitations that many researchers should be aware of before entering the field. Overall the method was very beneficial to the study and allowed for the researcher to view how natural hair was being expressed and openly celebrated within public spaces.

During the months of May to September, I visited three hair festivals that were in major cities or surrounding cities of South Carolina (Columbia SC, Charleston SC, and Charlotte NC) and one in Brooklyn, New York (Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2). The decision to visit hair festivals was chosen because of how the coalescence of Black women in an enthusiastic environment may provide insight into how women are increasingly empowering each other through celebratory techniques of encouraging the expression of natural hair. Tagged as "natural hair festivals", these places involve individual black women joining together to showcase the range of hair textures, styles, and even products

that are used to cultivate healthy hair. Visiting these hair festivals became necessary because of aiming to further understand how the expression of natural hair is celebrated, how women are learning to visually display or wear it, and how Black women are being empowered by other Black women within their communities. The hair festival as a site is a place where Black women can embrace and relish within the beauty of their hair without the external pressures to devalue their hair into what society deems "more appropriate". Instead a hair festival offered multiple products and opportunities where women could learn more about what makes their natural hair special and unique from other diverse ethnic groups within the U.S. The hair festival became a place that showcased the development of homemade hair products specifically tailored for Black hair, hair accessories, and more vendors that catered to the potential needs and desires of the African American woman. Viewing this type of environment in person was very important for my research because of how Black women as individual actors are aiding the Natural Hair movement through individual and collective action that can be shown and expressed at Hair festivals (Bayat 2005 and Kurzman 2008).

Another location where I employed this method was within a Black hair salon that included stylists who specialized in catering to natural hair. In the past the Black hair salon was viewed as a place where women would visit to have their hair styled or "done" which would provide them to gain access to social acceptance or secure economic opportunity. Getting hair "done" was a way to symbolize the hair being straightened or pressed to fit in. Due to the nature of Black women "needing" to get their hair done frequently to maintain their straightened hairstyles, the salon became a place where people would communion in addition to getting their hair done. Understood as a gendered

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place, the Black hair salon has been marked as a haven or place for Black women to feel comfortable outside of their private sphere at home. A place where Black women gather to communicate, learn, participate and discuss issues or culture of womanhood and how its impacted by larger society. Because of the historical meaning within the Black salon, it is important to view how natural hair is styled within the hair salon in the 21st century. The types of methods employed to collect data included observation, informal interviews, and written field notes. Being present and able to observe how hair was being styled within the salon was very informative and provided context for how natural hair could be maintained within the hair salon.

Since visiting multiple hair festivals and a Black hair salon within the Southeast Carolina region, I was able to examine the differences between each festival as well as hair styling practices within the shop. The characteristics of hair festivals varied from what is offered to the aspects of hair culture that was displayed. After careful observation, it would appear at first glance that the Natural hair movement is centered on the Black woman however there were tables or vendors present that would cater to the hair needs of the African American man. This was very interesting and highlights further questions that will need to be examined within the future. Considering geographic and accessibility to resources, each festival ranged from small to large. These factors were influenced by media advertising and the collective following or awareness behind each organization. Regarding the hair salon, the space is still primarily gendered with the dominance of women however the masculine equivalent still reigns today in the formation of the Barbershop. Just as in the past, the cosmetologist is still viewed as someone who has a

larger knowledge about the dynamics of hair and is continually entrusted as the point person for deciding what is best for an individual to obtain optimal hair health.

A few limitations of participant observation included weariness of an observing researcher, the amount of people attending hair festivals, and selecting which data is helpful and data that is not helpful. With many women attending hair festivals, the high number of traffic limited being able to decipher the types of vendors that Black women seek out when visiting hair festivals. As consumers, the products or services being offered were in abundance which allowed for individuals to gather any of them based off their needs, wants, or personal interests. However, this led to a slight limitation with not being able to decipher an exact answer for what Black women may gain from being at hair festivals. One way to help minimize this issue was by conducting informal interviews, however the limit only reveals what an individual may expect and not reveal what the collective thinks. This allowed for further exploration of what the movement means to each individual than solely trying to frame a perspective for the collective. Because of the range or variety of perspectives and experiences with caring for Black hair, there will never be one clear cut answer for each research question. The lived experience can change based off one's social category, intersecting social realities, and one's conceptualization of the self. Because of the versatility and diversity within Black women, one singular answer cannot define or explain everyone's experience.

> "*While observing within the hair salon, I noticed that many of the women were curious about what I was doing and what types of answers I was seeking by being within the salon. It is expected for people to have questions, however I picked up that many women were curious for why I chose their salon as I had never been there before. And since I had chosen this salon, what was it that I was hoping to observe or learn while observing within the salon. In preparing for some women to feel weary*

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about me doing research on hair, I arrived prepared with information regarding my thesis. However, whenever I arrived at the salon and had met with the owner, she disregarded my information and said that it wasn't necessary because she understood" (Tiffany Peacock, August 4th, 2018).

Conducting a study on Black hair has its limitations because of how research in the past took advantage of African American research subjects. During the 20th century, the Tuskegee Syphilis study conducted a long-term study of how untreated syphilis affected the human body by observing African American men over six decades. None of the men within the study knew that they had been unethically injected or diagnosed with Syphilis. They were also kept from receiving penicillin when it was approved to cure the infection (Washington 2006). Tuskegee only being one example, displays some of the reasons for why there is an increased level of mistrust within the Black community towards researchers. Because of this mistrust, it was important to remember to respect participants' privacy when requested. It was also always important to remain transparent about the observation process and research.

Selection Criteria

Since this study focuses on the experiences of Black women and their hair, the intended population for this study consisted of any individual woman who identified as Black or African American. The population also was required to live or have stayed within South Carolina for a significant time period. To be eligible for this study each participant had to be at least 18 years or older and able to participate within a focus group or one-on-one interview. If an individual did not meet these requirements, then they would be ineligible for participating within the summer study. Including the requirement of being an individual who identified as a "Black woman" was very central because of

the unique lived experience of regularly facing intersectional oppressions at the same time. Due to this lived social reality, it is key to collect data from Black women directly and not indirectly (Spouse, Children, Coworkers, Supervisors, etc.) because of how the woman dealt with her hair journey personally. The participant did not have to be solely natural. They could have any type of hairstyle that they desired because this thesis aims to understand how the reemergence of natural hair fits into the larger versatility of black hair culture.

To gain participation from potential women, I first contacted individuals within my own social networks. Contact was initiated through phone calls, text messages, or through word of mouth. By connecting through the social network first, it allowed for the women to feel comfortable speaking with me about the study and sharing their personal hair journey. Some participants contacted other persons who may have been interested in participating which is known as the "Snowball" effect. The second way that participants were recruited was through advertisement with flyers. These flyers were hung around or taken to key places within Columbia where African American women frequently visit. Locations included hair salons, churches, school campuses, and community centers. The flyer included a summary of the intended research study with contact information for interested persons to contact the principle investigator of the project.

Ethical Considerations

Before executing research during the Summer fieldwork study, there are a few ethical considerations to adhere to regarding working with African American populations. African Americans are categorized as "vulnerable persons" by 45 CFR 46.102 (Protection of Human Subjects 2009) which are "considered to be individuals

who may be less able to protect themselves and their interests relative to other persons in each setting or situation". African Americans and minorities are protected by the Department of Health and Human Services because of how minority populations have been treated unethically within the past during experimental, behavioral, and social science research. These laws are put in place to protect populations identified as vulnerable from exploitation happening again.

As a researcher, one of the most important aspects of collecting personal data is ensuring the privacy and safety of the individual. Each time that a participant is interviewed or participates within a focus group, they need to have the confidentiality form explained to them and the purpose of the research study. Also, the population under study needs to know where the results of the research will be going and who will be benefiting from the obtained data. Participants also need to know that their participation is completely voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time during the data collection process. Agreements between the participants and researchers about confidentiality need to be discussed on how much personal identifying information the participants may allow for the project, or to completely remain anonymous. Researchers must ultimately remember to keep everything obtained within the data collection process (although focus groups cannot be ensured privacy) is kept completely confidential and secured in a way that only the researcher can access the data.

Another consideration that played out during the summer fieldwork was my role in the study as a researcher observing within my home community. As an African American woman, I chose as my field site Columbia, SC which is a location that I consider as my own community. As an insider within the community, there were

moments when my "insiderness" was questioned because of the conflicting roles of my

positionality, accountability, and voice (Jacobs-Huey 2002). A term known as native

anthropology, has been used to describe the work conducted by scholars of color who

were born within non-western regions and were trained within Western institutions for

education. In the past this designation was given to anthropologists who were a part of

the "indigenous" community that they ended up studying, however it can also be applied

towards ethnic minority groups within the U.S (Jacobs-Huey 2002). Because of my

positionality as a researcher within my community, daily encounters between community

members was quickly viewed with apprehension once they were approached about

participating within my research on Black hair. The way that I naturally speak may

signify educational or class differences to potential participants that may give the

perception that my intentions for learning more about the relationship of Black women

and their hair as suspicious. It was within these moments where I had to remember to

consider my positionality because of the negative relationship that social sciences have

gained with the Black population through historical unethical practices.

Identified as "communicative competence", this is the ability to use and interpret

home speech varieties appropriately across various cultural contexts. The ability to do

this will play a significant role in the researcher's ability to enter a community and

develop a rapport with research participants (Jacobs-Huey 2002). Jacobs-Huey discusses

how she negotiated her identity as an insider by including the linguistic patterns of

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in her conversations with potential

participants. This method was employed to aid in gaining the trust of community

members because Jacobs-Huey admits:

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"…I have learned that while my status as a native anthropologist can serve to my advantage, it by no means guarantees my acceptance as a trustworthy researcher in African American communities" (2002:794).

Being able to express "cultural competence" or speaking the language will lead towards trust being built within the community towards local anthropologists. Although expressing "cultural competence" shows commonality in identity, as an individual whose linguistic patterns do not match all AAVE word choices, attempting to "speak the language" would have raised issues of authenticity. I am a Black woman, however my blackness has frequently within the past been questioned due to the sound of my voice. It would have been very inauthentic if I started to express more AAVE when that is not the regular way that I speak. However, this conflict between authenticity and cultural competence played out when attempting to engage participants within the research project. Because of the way that I speak, I was met with skepticism in how I intended to approach understanding Black hair among Black women.

Lastly, a major ethical concern is how the stories and opinions of participants would be represented within the research project? One of my aims within this project is to display the expression and celebration of natural hair reemerging within the 21st century. As an individual within the community of Black hair culture, I feel a large responsibility to represent the implications of Black hair within society without creating an unchanged narrative featuring an inferiority complex. Because of how Black populations have been represented in past social science research, some of the participants shared concerns about how their perspectives would be portrayed within the written report of the project (Jacobs-Huey 2002). Worried about how their speech, word choice, or opinions would be interpreted within an academic environment; I assured each

participant that no one except the researcher would be able to connect responses to names and that all information shared was protected. Due to these concerns, it is even more imperative to provide key context for all responses and the complexity of the politicization of Black hair. To continue good ethical practice within the field, being transparent about the fieldwork and project results will also be utilized.

Figure 3.1: Curl Fest Main Stage. Photo taken by Tiffany Peacock. 28 July 2019.

Figure 3.2: Curl Fest Entrance. Photo taken by Tiffany Peacock. 28 July 2019.

CHAPTER FOUR:
ANALYSIS

After completing the summer field study, 16 total participants were involved within an interview or a focus group. I conducted 9 total interviews and facilitated 2 focus groups. Each woman who participated within the study represented a diverse spectrum of characteristics and perspectives within the Black community. Aspects that were documented included current hairstyle, age, job title, location, and ethnic/racial identifier. The characteristics about everyone was documented to provide a holistic picture for understanding each woman and how their demographics may influence their hair choices and opinions about hair. Many of the women who participated were full-time professional workers and full-time students at the graduate or undergraduate level. The differing perspectives added a lot of value and insight into what some Black women think about the current expression of natural hair. To further understand some of the comments that were expressed in the interviews or focus groups, the data was organized by the key themes interpreted within this thesis: Historical/Political Notions of Hair, the Natural Hair Movement, and Empowerment. After examining the data collected from the study, the following sections will provide some of the main commentary or conversations from the interview or discussion sessions. The commentary will depict what African American and Black women in the U.S. think about the current expression of natural hair.

Historical and Political Notions of Hair

Throughout history, African American hair was embedded with social meanings that affected the lived experience of many African American women in the U.S. These social meanings were used to describe an individual's personality, characteristics, and assumed behavior. Due to these preconceived notions, it would affect how a person was treated socially by others within society. Hair that was "kinky" or thought of as "nappy", was deemed as socially unacceptable to be worn in public spaces. The beliefs about "kinky" hair textures are rooted within the Transatlantic Slave Trade, when the phenotypic traits and features of enslaved Africans were devalued to aid in the legitimatization of African bondage. The width of the nose, the darker color of skin, kinkier texture of hair, size of lips, and body size were labeled as traits of inferiority (Byrd and Tharps 2014; Menand 2002; White and White 1995). Juxtaposed against the appearance and features of European descendants, anyone who genetically inherited African genes were ranked as the lowest among the social hierarchy (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Due to the stigmatization of phenotypic traits, African Americans had to alter their natural appearances to blend into society for upward social mobility. African American women specifically altered their hair texture from kinky to a straighter or "smoother" appearance. If Black women adopted a hairstyle that minimized the physical features of their ancestors, then they could possibly escape the denigration of their womanhood by society.

African American Presentation of Self

In the past, altering the self to conform was an action that opened opportunities for Black women to succeed economically and socially. Identifying this trend as the

"Presentation of Self", it stems from the close analysis of Ervin Goffman's perspective on the actions of everyday performance that individual social actors may engage in (Goffman 1959). This performance is regulated by each social actor to maintain a "frontal" appearance of who the individual believes society wants them to be. Because of the societal pressures to fit in with the dominant culture within the U.S., African American women have created their own "presentation of self" to aid in conforming to the dominant standard of appearance (Goffman 1959). Some of the older participants within the study discussed this trend while discussing the various hairstyles they had adopted throughout their lifetime.

> **Anna:** Well I think a long time ago women pressed their hair, they started pressing their hair in the slavery days because they wanted to look White. They thought that would give them prestige and that's what I thought. And the women who worked in the house with the White woman, of course their hair was always fixed better than the woman who worked in the field… So of course, their hair was semi-straight and they could fix it like the White women. And I think that as time went on and women wanted to move into the workplace—a different work place than being in the white women's kitchen—they pressed their hair and they went to college. They were told how to dress and how to prepare for the outside world. So that's where it started. They would press their hair. Their parents would start pressing little girls' hair to make them look like when the schools got integrated. To make them look like their classmates. And it just escalated from that. And I think over the years, women began to realize that all that heat on their hair—that pressin and the relaxin—was bad for their hair. But all I'm saying, I think that where the black woman came from has a lot to do with how she treated her hair. Especially in America…we were emulating our masters. So, when we went to our workplace, we continued to do that even as we grew away from slavery. It took us a while to learn that we were beautiful, with our hair instead of pressing our hair.

Anna, who is 74, reflected on her time when she attended college in the mid-20th century. While she was in school, the way that she looked mattered because of the

importance of preserving a neat public appearance. Describing how the routine of styling hair and how the maintenance of the performance was taught, her comment displays how straightening hair became a social expectation for young Black women to adhere to. The expectation of how a Black woman was supposed to look was passed down to the next generation when women started pressing their daughters' hair. Tying Anna's connections to the impact of slavery, the manipulation of appearance began on the plantation. Straight hair was viewed as the appearance of "prestige" and therefore became the standard to follow (Banks 2000; Craig 2002). The action of straightening hair was continually performed and retaught, so African Americans could access social mobility for their selves and the next generation.

Candace, a chief human resources director, shared her perspective about how she asserted her image when engaging within the workplace and her everyday life. Candace is Anna's daughter and has worked within human resources for over twenty years. To Candace, being "well-manicured" or "well groomed" includes how an individual gets dressed in the morning. The act of maintaining a front, includes how one presents themselves in their everyday encounters (Goffman 1959). If someone is not presenting their best self, then they may receive a negative perception because their appearance is not communicating that they are "well-groomed".

> **Candace:** … Other's definition of professionalism or when you look at the definition of professionalism. For me, it's not just the clothes you wear. It's not just the way you speak or the way you carry yourself. It also has to do with, whether you're well groomed. So, a person can have on a suit but not take baths and they're going to be perceived negatively. So, a person who has on a suit, but doesn't take the time to make sure that they are well-manicured whether it's taking a bath, combing their hair...going to be perceived negatively. There's nothing wrong with natural hair it's all about how you style it.

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Tiffany: Mhmm. It's wanting your hair to have its best look.

Candace: Yes! I mean you take your natural hair and you can have just about any style you want to have. But it's about making sure that you as a person are well groomed. Even though there's a "Natural Hair Movement", I have seen African American women whose hair was not well groomed. And maybe it's because they didn't know how to take care of it, or care for it. That would cause me to pause to think: "She needs to do something with her hair". But I think that is becoming more of an every now and then thing, because again there is so much information. So many YouTube videos, so many products on the market today to help you manage and maintain your hair in just about any manner that you wish to do so.

In the first excerpt, Candace details how she believes that perceptions about one's person can be made. To thwart negative aspects being communicated about an individual's personhood, maintaining good hygiene and taking the extra steps for possessing a neater appearance. This is important because it displays how judgements can be passed about someone before they speak. Specifically contextualizing the workplace, Candace mentions the notions behind wearing a suit. She explicitly states how wearing a suit or dressing well, is not enough. Meaning it is not about what suit a person wears, but how they wear the suit. A person will still have to "comb their hair" or "bathe" to ensure that they are presenting a good image to anyone they interact with.

In the second excerpt, Candace speaks further about how maintaining your appearance extends with the styling of natural hair. Candace is 52 and was also socialized with values that believed maintaining the "Presentation of Self" is important (Goffman 1959). Learning this value from her mother Anna, Candace also supports the embodiment of being groomed through the choices an individual makes regarding their clothing and hair. To her, wearing natural hair should also reflect an appearance that it is "well

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groomed". She also believes that with the amount of information on the internet and within stores, that there is no reason for Black women to not know how to take care of their hair. Although education about managing kinky and curly hair textures are increasing on the internet, some women may not be able to access the same types of resources for hair. Choices on what types of hair styles, products, and styling tools are chosen based off what is available or what is affordable for their lifestyle.

Although Candace supports putting on your best appearance to thwart negative impressions, something to note is all women may not have access to the same resources as everyone. The stratification of resources is one aspect in how intersections of oppression impact the livelihoods of individuals. Based on one's race, gender, income, or region may dictate the types of hair products and hair styling that is accessible. Even the type of job a woman has can influence an individual's choice. Candace as a high-ranking human resource officer, may be allowed more freedom in the styling of her hair versus another woman who may just be starting their career. The hair styles of choice may differ depending on their environment within the workplace. The access to specific resources for survival that permits one's success can be understood as "cultural capital". Cultural capital is the accumulation of knowledge, behaviors, or skills that elevate one's social standing within society (Bourdieu 1977). The accessibility of cultural capital was used a way to reinforce class barriers for those who did not have access. This relates to maintaining natural hair in terms of whether individuals can access the same resources to maintain their natural hair or hair in general. This is also important regarding Candace's comment because of how every woman may not have the same access as other women to maintain their best, well-groomed appearance.

The last part is significant because Candace discusses her internal biases against women who appear to be "un groomed". Although maintaining the "Presentation of Self" was key in the 20th century, to be "well groomed" can vary from one woman to the next. Before, being well groomed implied straightening or smoothing kinkier hair textures (Craig 2002). Yet currently as more Afrocentric and natural hair styles have become more popular, what constitutes being "well groomed" has significantly changed. Well-groomed in the sense of maintaining a presentation of self is still prevalent, however the distinctions of what that presentation and how it should be represented is currently changing under the Natural Hair Movement. Since Black women had to adapt their appearances to fit in during the past, many women in the older generation still hold the values of self-presentation that were instilled in as young women.

The Continued Presence of "Good" and "Bad" Hair

In conversations discussing how Black women should always uphold a positive self-presentation, two words continued to pop out that were used to determine whether a woman represented herself well or not. Deeply embedded within conversations surrounding Black hair, many individuals consistently compare their hair and discuss hair through the polarized dichotomy of "good" and "bad". "Good" and "bad" have been used to denote whether an individual's hair was acceptable or unacceptable to be worn within society. In the 20th century, "good" hair was placated as the ideal because of the various opportunities available due to straightening hair. "Bad" hair was viewed as un-straightened hair in its natural state and equated with markers of blackness (Banks 2000; Byrd and Tharps 2014; Simmons 2009) The other side to the presentation of self is that it masked certain aspects of blackness for Black women to visibly assimilate into the

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Eurocentric beauty standard. Through this masking of self to assert the performed image, notions of "good" or "bad" became tied into the African American "Presentation of Self" for women to adhere to. This connection was made when utterances surrounding "good" grooming were discussed in relation to hair styling (Goffman 1959).

Because of the prevalence of "good" and "bad" hair within conversations and interviews about hair, one of the things I sought to understand was how the expression of natural hair was changing the perceptions around ideologies of good or bad hair. Asking the questions: "Do you think that past understandings of "good" or "bad" hair continues to shape how certain hair textures are perceived? Or do you believe that "good" or "bad" hair has evolved into different or new meanings when discussing hair?" I aimed to further explore the impact of the movement and its influence in hair styling practices of natural hair. Focusing on how the two terms remain within conversations about Black hair, the responses to these questions were interesting and gave insight into how the embedded perceptions are changing.

> **Flora:** "I think it's gotten better. Now that I will say. Is it there? Yes. Has it gotten better? Most definitely. And it's gotten better because of technology. We have Twitter. We have Instagram. We have Facebook. We have, you know, we have so many different things. And now we even see newscasters with natural hair! So yes, it's gotten better. Is it still there? It's always going to be there. Just like, probably racism, it'll always be there in some way, shape, or form. Just not as prevalent…"

Flora was born and raised in New Jersey and relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina about 9 years ago. She is a licensed cosmetologist who specializes with natural hair and has been working with curly hair textures for over 25 years. Through her personal experience with hair and styling hair for her clients, Dahlia believes that notions of "good" or "bad" is changing however they are still prevalent within society.

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Connecting to the continued presence of racism, she believes that with time it will get better, yet the underlying perceptions will remain within American society. With the medium of social media, people who engage with these apps are increasingly viewing natural hair and Black hair styles in positive perspectives.

Dominique was born in Lexington, South Carolina and currently lives within Columbia, SC. Currently she is an event promoter and host who spends time with her grandchildren when she's not working. Being born and raised within the South, Dominque offered an interesting perspective about the status of "good" and "bad" hair.

> **Dominique:** "Um…no—it's still the same. I mean it's still the same all the way from slavery. If you have "good" hair, then you're considered to be better than someone whose hair is a little bit kinkier. And the perception is still the same. It's going to have to be a mental change in order to change that."

If one was just looking at the external picture surrounding the Natural Hair movement, it would give the impression that natural hair had changed the perceptions that used to describe Black hair. However, this comment sheds insight into how deeply embedded the notions of hair are within our culture and within the individual's mind. Dominique said that for change to occur in how hair is perceived, it will have to be "mental" change. Flora did not explicitly use this phrase, however she stated that the notions of "good" or "bad" hair will remain prevalent and never truly go away. The potential reasoning behind this is because of how far ideologies of hair and race have permeated our psychological understandings of individual difference. This reflects the continued practices and socialization that is reproduced intergenerationally. Until these notions have been eliminated from our everyday livelihoods and conversations, they will continue to be

present within our society. Even with the emergence of natural hair, the ideologies of "good" and "bad" hair continue to take shape in differing aspects of Black hair culture.

Agreeing with Dominique, Danielle discusses how the media plays a role in the reproduction of "good" and "bad" hair by describing a few methods that are used. Just like social media apps, the media can utilize images and film to display messages regarding cultural expectations for audiences.

> **Danielle:** (sighs). I think that the "good" and "bad" hair stereotype does still exist because when you look at magazines or when you look at TV or you look at movies. If a woman is natural, we still have yet to see a huge presence of—I will say 4C hair. We can do kinky hair—so we see a lot of loose curls, you know. Just something long and hanging and curly and that being natural. And you still see that (represented) on commercials. You still see that everywhere and I feel like even though, we as Black women accept that all-natural hair is good, there is this underlying tone that there are certain hair types that are more accepted than others. And I feel like that kind of shapes how Black women see their hair. Like I've literally heard from other Black women "Oh everybody can't be natural—"

> **Tiffany:** Yeah… I've heard that too.

> **Danielle:** I don't understand what that means. Everybody has their own hair growing out of their heads. So, if you know how to take care of it, that's your hair! If it looks nice, that's the way it looks. It's not supposed to look like everybody else's hair. It's your hair. What was the second part of that question?

> **Tiffany:** The second question was: Do you believe that "good" or "bad" hair has evolved into different or new meanings when discussing hair today?

> **Danielle:** Hmph. Again, I think it boils down to hair type. Like not so much "good" and "bad", this hair is more acceptable—this hair still isn't growing. Now I've seen more kinky coarse hair types on the TV lately and out and about. But for the most part it still feels like that loose curl texture is the "best" texture right now.

The prevalence of the "good" or "bad" hair dichotomy has cultivated the discrimination of specific hair textures. Danielle talks about how 4C hair texture is not highlighted or showcased to the same degree as other hair types. 4C is a hair type classification of "kinky" to coily textures from the "Andre Walker Hair Typing" system. One of the most well-known hair typing systems, it is used to categorize hair by the appearance and texture of one's hair strand (Kenneth 2011). Listing hair types by their shape, it ranges from Type 1 to Type 4. Type 1 is Straight, Type 2 is Wavy, Type 3 is Curly, and Type 4 is Coily. Many African American women in the U.S. fall within the Type 3 and 4 range for tighter curl patterns. The Andre Walker hair typing system further classifies sub categories into letters such as A, B, or C (Kenneth 2011). Type 4C hair can be described as hair that looks like tiny corkscrews and appears as less defined than Type 4A or 4B. Due to Type 4C hair resembling tighter coils and growing up within an "Afro", its reception within the Natural Hair Movement has not been widely celebrated (Figure 4.4). The Andre Walker hair typing system may be the most well-known, however it has received criticism for its apparent hierarchical ordering of straight hair at the top and coily hair at the bottom. Reflecting older historical patterns of how Black hair was classified within the past, some women have stopped using this system to describe their hair and used alternative methods. Despite its hierarchical nature, hair typing became widely practiced as many women were learning how to take care of their hair.

The systematic classification of hair types connects back to how phenotypes were used by scientists to categorize races. The act of classifying humans furthered the type of treatment an individual would receive within society. Hair typing charts are similarly working to organize hair and working as a structure of ranking one's texture on a

hierarchical scale. This also connects back to how one's blackness was ranked and categorized through the classification of races. The hierarchal structure of hair types has facilitated the discriminatory behavior based off one's hair texture.

Hair texture discrimination in the Natural Hair Movement can be attributed to the embedded beliefs about "good" or "bad" hair. In addition to referring to the hair typing system, Danielle also speaks about how looser curl patterns have been positioned as "the ideal" in comparison with tighter curl patterns. Flora speaks about how social media platforms are increasing the presence of diverse hair textures through sharing, posting, and accumulated likes. However, Danielle's point about loose curl patterns being better point out how the pictures that are liked, posted, or shared the most tend to be photos that favor a looser curl pattern or texture. This trend is also noticed by the specific men and women who have been labeled as the "leaders" or prominent faces of the Natural Hair Movement. Examining their curl patterns may reflect the prevalence of the preferred natural hair "type" among women who have joined the movement.

Further evidence of how "good" and "bad" has created the prevalence of hair texture discrimination is the desire to create "well defined" natural hair styles. As more women are learning how to take care of their hair, another aspect includes many women aiming to create hairstyles such as "twist outs", "wash n gos", and "the high puff". To recreate some of these hair styles, there is a desired look to be achieved that involves increasing the definition of curls. The more defined the curls are, the more accepted the natural curl pattern is accepted. This confirms the comments by Danielle in how women with natural 4C hair textures are not as readily accepted. Due to the internalized messages about hair definition, some women with 4C hair textures will either seek out mediums to

increase definition or they will opt for a protective style that gives them a more "acceptable" look.

The response given by Dominique reflect her own personal experience and how her beliefs about hair have shaped her worldview. Everyone's values are formed from how hair and beauty practices were socialized throughout their life. Although Dominique's comment may seem off putting, her comment reveals an unpopular truth about how "good" and "bad" hair is still pervasive within our society. One of the ways the dichotomy is still present is through the perception of a "well groomed" appearance, the prizing of looser curl textures, and through the emphasis of possessing defined curls. The comments above confirm the historicization of hair labeled as "acceptable" or "unacceptable". The Natural Hair Movement is increasing the diversity in natural hair textures and how hair is received by society, however the politicization of hair has shifted into new methods of marginalization for specific hair types.

Experience of Wearing Hair Natural in the 21st Century

In this section, participants will discuss the experience of wearing natural hair within their everyday lives. The rise of a Natural Hair Movement influenced many Black women to make the individual choice to "go natural" and join the collective effort of women to embrace their natural curls. This decision was not an easy one as many women were socialized to alter or adopt straight hair styles. Becoming initiated in the early 2000s, the Natural Hair Movement has been happening for over eighteen years and shows zero signs of slowing down anytime soon. The questions posed within this section surrounds what the embrasure of natural hair means to each individual woman and how it is changing how they see themselves and other Black women within society.

What Does It Mean To Be Natural?

The Natural Hair Movement is symbolized by African American and Black women unapologetically wearing their natural hair textures. In addition to the presence of curls and coils, becoming natural took on further meanings than a hair style. As the years continue, becoming natural has spread into clothing, skin care products, and the types of food that is ingested into the body. What "natural" means to one person may differ to the next person. This variation in perspectives is important because it portrays how "going natural" has impacted the daily livelihoods of the Black community and other communities within the U.S. and the world. Considering its impact in haircare, I asked participants "What does it mean to natural?". The following comments include the individual perspectives that will help in conceptualizing how the definition of natural has changed since the first emergence in the 1960s.

> **Tiffany:** How would you describe someone being natural? What does it mean to be natural to you?

> **Flora:** Oh, most definitely. Uh…being natural just means being chemically free. Now there are exceptions. There are people who are natural but prefer color. But tech…technically they are not natural, they have color. Natural just means, there are no chemicals in the hair. That's all that means.

Flora believes that to be natural involves being chemically free but recognizes that the definition has variation. Especially when considering color treated as chemically altered. As a cosmetologist, Flora is trained with professional understanding for maintaining optimal hair health. To her, being natural is chemically free without any kind of chemical processing including color. Before going natural implied the ceasing of hair straightening, however the definition has evolved for her to include not using any type of

chemicals on the hair. Yet, receiving the service of adding color to natural hair has started to contest the definition of natural indicating the nonuse of any chemical within regular hair care.

Kaylynn further supports how "going natural" is undertaken to live a healthier lifestyle. Citing one of the suspected dangers of using chemical relaxers for a lifetime, Kaylynn discusses the importance of embracing a healthier hair care routine.

> **Kaylynn:** Mm…I think more conscious of the health. I mean, the—I've even heard that people who do autopsies like when their peeling on the older black woman; they see like they have a green color—
>
> **Tiffany:** [says incredulously] Yes! I've read about that!
>
> **Kaylynn:** --And it's from the relaxer! So, it's not healthy! Like it's not a health—And then you know the old school people there like, still getting their perms every month! If you don't know any better, you'll continue to do so. Just thinking about it, I think 'I used to do that?'

In the early 2000s, a rumored study was posted to the internet that stated that a life time of using chemical relaxers would result in the formation of a green layer under the scalp. This layer was believed to have been discovered during the autopsies of two older Black women, where the presence of a green layer under the scalp was shocking and provided further emphasis to the dangers of using chemical relaxers. This study or article was never proven, however the article brought up questions that had never been fully answered from scientific research. What are the lifelong effects of using chemical relaxer treatments? How have the effects affected human bodies internally? External effects including alopecia, premature balding, and hair damage are the most commonly cited symptoms, yet internal symptoms have never been confirmed through a comprehensive study. Although the dangers of chemical relaxers are becoming widely known, many

women are still receiving chemical relaxers. Questioning of why these treatments are still

occurring, one must consider how deeply embedded maintaining straight hair is within

Black women's psyche. For some women, they have been relaxing their hair for so long

that it has become a part of their hair care ritual.

"Going natural" includes the process of embracing a characteristic that is unique

to African descendants. A characteristic that was once suggested as something to be

ashamed of, the natural coily and curly texture is being celebrated as an aspect that makes

Black women unique from other women across the globe. The uniqueness of Black hair

is something to be embraced, to be celebrated, and to have pride within how it

distinguishes Black people across the globe. Candace simply defined what "natural" has

meant for her.

Candace: Embracing your true self and true ethnicity.

The expression of natural hair is significant because Black women are showing pride and

embracing their true selves. The ritual of using heat or chemicals to alter hair, led towards

the formation of a separate external identity that Black women took on when entering the

public sphere. Once believed that hair within its natural state should only be worn within

the house, natural hair is becoming apart of the external identity where it was once

considered separate from the presentation of self. It is being embraced as a true aspect of

the individual while also being proud of hair as a unifier and definer of their Blackness.

> **Danielle:** To me being natural is…well first it starts in the mind. You have
> to get focused and determined and understand that your hair is not going
> to be like everybody else's hair. So even if you try to find somebody with
> your hair texture and your hair…like your hair texture, or the way your
> hair- It's just not going to be like everybody else's hair! So, you have to
> learn to treat your hair the way um your hair wants to be treated. Then
> that-then that starts the getting to know yourself. I feel like being *natural*

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not only is keeping your hair chemical free, being natural is to be accepting yourself as you are. Um as you, you know. As you were born to be. You're the person who you um… were born to be and the hair that you have growing on your head, you accept it and you learn how to treat it. You learn how to take care of it.

To initiate a change, it will have to come from within. Danielle says it must start within the mind before the embrasure of your hair texture can take place externally. This speaks to the process of getting to know and to truly understand your hair, before expecting anyone else to. Once someone has fully accepted their true self as they were born, then it will not matter if another person accepts you or not. That is true love for one's self and true love for one's blackness, by embodying and exuberating racial pride through natural hair (Asante 2003).

Being "natural" has many definitions and is conceptualized in uniquely diverse ways. To adopt natural hair is a personal choice that is made through the individual's free will. However once that decision is made, it becomes a process that is dealt with daily. Natural can mean abstaining from all chemicals or it could mean wearing natural hair with color. Natural also represents a process of becoming more of your true self through pride within your race or your ethnicity. The expression of natural hair is expanding the definitions of what "natural" means, however it is expressing the diversity of how each woman becomes "natural". This next section will examine the process and experience that some women navigate as they are learning to embrace their hair. While also demonstrating that the journey of becoming natural is not homogenous and is unique to each individual person.

Becoming "Natural" is a Process

Before natural hair reemerged, straight hair was socialized as the ideal hair standard to achieve. This ideal was socialized intergenerationally to provide Black women with a better chance of succeeding within society. Due to reproduced socializations, the process of becoming natural involves a daily struggle of loving the hair that grows out from the scalp. For many years the styling ritual included styling and caring for the hair in similar methods with non-black women to preserve the smooth hair texture. As more women embraced their natural hair, the methods of maintaining hair health changed into an entirely new routine. In addition, with learning to accept the unique hair texture, women also had to relearn hair styling practices that would benefit their hair. This section will describe the varying responses of Black women towards the process or journey of becoming natural. Key topics discussed included the decision to go natural, texture acceptance, and learning what techniques do or do not benefit hair health.

Tiffany: Okay. So, if you decided to go natural, why did you?

Candace: I wanted to allow my hair the opportunity to rest without chemicals and to basically see what my growth would be if I did not use chemicals for a while. This is the second time that I've done that, I recall that the last time that I did it my hair texture changed in that it became softer and more manageable to the point where I can often style it and it looks like I have a relaxer even though I don't have one. And because I learned that...I never could grow my hair past a certain point with the relaxer and my hair-I had a lot of breakage when I had relaxers. It was almost like stress and relaxers just didn't mix. So, my hair would be fine, with relaxers but I went through a period where I was under a lot of stress and my hair would just fall out.

Tiffany: So, you said that this is your second time being on a "natural journey". How would you compare the first time trying and then now the second time trying to become natural?

Candace: The first time I tried it, there were not a lot of natural hair care products on the market. And not a lot of literature or YouTube videos about caring for natural hair. And I learned that I did not care for my hair properly the first time.

Tiffany: Mhmm. What year was that? Because you said there weren't a lot of natural hair care products?

Candace: I want to say it was…probably 20…12. 2011-2012. Let's say 2012.

Candace is currently on her second attempt in becoming natural. The first time she started going natural in 2012, she noticed the immediate change in the feel of her hair's texture. Comparing it to the look and feel of a relaxer, Candace learned that she did not need to get a relaxer to achieve the desired appearance for her hair. This is an important realization because in the past, it was understood while young that your hair was not acceptable until it was "done" (Banks 2000; Byrd and Tharps 2014; Craig 2002; Jacobs-Huey 2007; and Rooks 1996). Citing stress and hair damage as the propellers towards going natural, not having access to resources on natural hair led Candace back to receiving chemical relaxer treatments. The products that were available were not specialized or tailored to natural hair. Within the last five years, many Black entrepreneurs have started to fill the gaps in stores to accommodate the rising Black consumers are seeking out healthier products for their hair. Now entering her second attempt, Candace feels that she is better able to care for her hair with the larger amount of resources in stores and located on the internet.

In recent years, the number of specialized products for natural hair have increased significantly. The availability of products may have also influenced more women to go natural or adopt more natural hair styles. As previously stated, the types of natural hair

products may not be accessible in everyone's region. A lot of products today are

cultivated with less preservatives and more organic ingredients. Some of these products

are only sold online or at hair festivals with Black entrepreneurs.

> **Tiffany:** How exactly would you describe your hair? Thinking about the texture, the appearance, the overall feeling or even expression of it?

> **Danielle:** I feel like my hair is very coarse. I feel like it is kinky and coily, and I feel like it is soft, and it is… it's typically manageable. You know when I decide to do it and its washed and cleaned. I feel like it's very temperamental, like it does what it wants but its happy when you keep it moisturized.

> **Tiffany:** And…before you were natural, how long had you chemically relaxed your hair?

> **Danielle:** Hmm, probably for… [long pause] …probably for like 20 years.

> **Tiffany:** So, what brought on your decision to go natural?

> **Danielle:** Well I moved to Charleston for my first job and it was you know just me, and I didn't know anyone. So, I would travel back to Columbia to get my hair done. And when I you know, down there I figured well I can't go up to Columbia all the time. And you know I don't really trust anybody down here. And I said "Well, I can sit here and let my hair be damaged or I can start taking care of my own hair". And that's when I decided to try going natural to kind of figure out how to take care of my own hair. And what products worked best for my hair.

Describing her hair with personality traits, this displays how intimate a woman's

relationship is with her hair. Likening to one's conceptualization of self-identity, Danielle

describes her hair as "temperamental" unless it is regularly moisturized. One of the first

realizations of becoming natural is learning that curly and coily hair needs to always stay

hydrated and moisturized. This simple instruction was in complete odds with how Black

hair was instructed to be maintained in the past. Before, once the hair was pressed or

chemically straightened, Black women were encouraged to abstain from any activities that would bring water in contact with their hair (Banks 2000; Rooks 1996). One of the biggest aspects in becoming natural is learning how to keep your hair moisturized. Danielle says that her hair is "happy when its moisturized" just like any person would be if they were in their optimal health.

Her decision to go natural stemmed from not being able to find a trustworthy stylist in the Charleston area. Moving to Charleston due to a job opportunity, the drive to Columbia from Charleston is about 1 hour and 30 minutes away and proved to be too much just to get her hair done. A second reason were the differences in climate between the two cities. Charleston is in the low country of South Carolina and closer to the Atlantic Ocean which created an increased humid environment in comparison with Columbia. Due to the distance from a reliable stylist and climate, Danielle decided to embrace her natural hair by learning to take care of it herself. Just like Candace, Danielle experiences trial and error in hair products to find the best one for her hair texture and hair personality.

Anna also went through experimenting with different hair products and feels as if she has found a hair regimen that works for her. Talking in detail about the types of products she has used, Anna also provides a great description about the thought process that goes into figuring out what works and what doesn't work for her hair.

> **Anna:** So, what I started doing more of was experimental things. First, I stopped mixing products, you know I was using Pantene, Pantene always been good for my hair. And it still is! Then I went from Pantene to Just Nutritive and I would mix it. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with Pantene, I'm not saying there's anything wrong with Just Nutritive. But you can't mix them, not in the same period. If you wash your hair with Pantene, you got to use Pantene products. If you use Just Nutritive, you

got to use Just Nutritive. Otherwise, it'll itch. It'll-I don't know, it just sticks on your scalp. And the other thing is what I was doing wrong is too is, the reason why I think it was so scaly is because I thought that everyday just because it was dry, I had to put something on it. But then I kept reading about hair, reading about hair, and I came to realize that oils and creams lock the dryness on the scalp. And the way to get the dryness out of your hair is to put moisture on it. And its saying, that if I don't put leave in on it- and I put water on it every day twice a day- and if it get to itching too much, I'll go downstairs and pat oil on it. I'll go downstairs and brush water on it. And uh since I've been doing that, my hair started to grow and it's not nearly as itchy.

Part of the experience of learning about hair is finding products that will work. An available abundance of hair products may be confusing to anyone starting out on the journey of building a hair care regimen. Anna discusses how she learned the importance of adding moisture into her hair care routine. Before she believed that using oils and creams frequently was enough to keep the hair shaft hydrated, however discovered that moisturizing the hair with water keeps the scalp from itching. Socialized myths of hair, such as abstaining from water, must be unlearned when finding a hair regimen that works (Davis-Sivasothy 2011). This is very significant in the process of becoming natural.

The two hair brands that Anna discusses using for her hair are Pantene and Just Nutritive. Pantene hair care, which is owned by Proctor & Gamble, is available within most general grocery stores. The Gold Series by Pantene has been advertised specifically for African American women to "increase strength and moisture for relaxed, natural, or transitioning hair" (Pantene 2019). Just Nutritive is a hair care brand that can be ordered online. Just Nutritive advertises itself as a brand that uses "natural, cruel free ingredients to provide beautiful hair and skin" (Just Nutritive 2019). Both products have been marketed as a healthier alternative for women with natural hair, however one of the significant factors in adhering to a good hair regimen is using products from the same

line. By using the same product line, it ensures that they will work the way that they were designed for an individual's hair (Davis-Sivasothy 2011). Anna states that she used to use Pantene, however she has started using Just Nutritive due to needing more moisture and hydration for her scalp.

Anna also learned that mixing different products from different product lines together would cause her scalp to itch. This itch is a result of the scalp's pH balance becoming unbalanced. The scalp is naturally acidic with a pH averaging around 5. In a hair care regimen, the shampoo is responsible for cleansing the scalp and has an acidic composition. Shampoo will bring the pH level of the scalp lower to a 2 or 3, while a conditioner will bring the scalp back to a more neutral pH level. Conditioner has a basic composition, which is why it is important to always condition the hair after cleansing the scalp, so that hydration and moisture can be replaced within the hair shaft (Davis-Sivasothy 2011). Using products within the same brand will allow for the chemicals to cooperate correctly. However, if you use products from different brands, the designed chemical structures will not cooperate and may lead to an unbalanced scalp that is felt through scalp irritation such as itching.

Another aspect to consider is the selection and type of hair products that are available to consumers in specific locations. If you shop in grocery or large general stores regularly, Pantene can commonly be found within the shampoo and conditioning aisles. However, gaining access to hair products with more natural ingredients, the consumer must shop online or seek out places where these specialized products are sold. Products that use more "natural" ingredients tend to be pricier for the quality of ingredients that are included. "Natural" ingredients include the absence of harmful preservatives, conditioner

fillers, parabens, sulfates, mineral oils, silicones, and artificial dyes. Cultivated as a higher quality hair product, the marketing of "natural" or healthier hair products tend to be more expensive than hair products found within general grocery stores.

The accessibility to specific types of hair products can depict how individuals with higher incomes may be able to regularly purchase higher quality products. Yet this trend may not accurately describe the types of hair products that some women may invest in. Although hair products and accessories may be outside of one's normal price range, some women will invest their money into higher quality brands for maintaining a healthier hair regimen. The pattern in buying hair products depends on the individual's personal choice, hair needs, and available funds for selecting their desired hair care. If an individual is not able to access or afford the higher price of hair products, then they will have to buy options that are more affordable. Depending on how the products take to their hair, this could then influence the choice in hair styling such as a protective style or wearing hair shorter to fit within their life style.

Anna admits that both brands of Pantene and Just Nutritive work well for her hair, however the former brand can commonly be found anywhere while the latter must be ordered off line. The accessibility displays the levels of commitment that Black women have become or must negotiate when finding the best products for their hair or their life style. After discovering which products work and do not work, Anna describes her current wash day routine.

> **Anna:** Yesterday I washed my hair when I got back home. First, I put a prewash on it. I put prewash on it, and I start doing somethings and I pat it, felt it, and I forgot to put the cap over it. So it got dry. So I just went in there and put some water on it and woke it up and put the cap over it. And got under the dryer for about 15 minutes and then I got in the shower and pulled all my clothes off and got in the shower. And washed my hair.

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When I go in the shower to wash my hair, I first had to wash the prewash out. Then I had to wash my hair. I take a comb in there after I get finished washing it. I comb to make sure all the gook is out of it and then I rinse it again. And I put the conditioner on and massage it for a couple of minutes and then I rinse it out. Because I didn't feel like I needed to get back under the dryer for a deep conditioning cause I did it prior to washing it. So that's what I did.

A key aspect that was highlighted included how having the correct resources can make or break the hair journey. If you have access to a good support system with specialized hair products included, then the journey may not be as difficult. However, if specialized natural hair products with healthier ingredients are not available, the individual will have to learn to work with what they have or order off line. The process of becoming natural is truly a journey. There is not a singular or "correct" path for each woman who joins the movement to take. The journey for each woman is personal in how one must truly learn how to care for, love, and accept their hair texture for what it is. The process of becoming natural is certainly not easy as many of the participants have described above. Continuing the discussion of becoming natural, the next section will cover what each woman believes are the central goals of the Natural Hair Movement. Although the decision to join is individual, once the transition to natural is complete the collective actions of continuing the journey may reveal how the goals have been shaped by the collective actors of Black women with natural hair.

Goals of the Natural Hair Movement

When Black women started "going natural", one of the most visible changes from the movement was to stop wearing or altering hair to look straight. Since the movement has grown within the Black community in the U.S., on social media, and into the entertainment industry; I wanted to discover what each participant thought were the goals

of the Natural Hair Movement. As stated within the section above, becoming natural does

not stop once the relaxed or straightened ends are gone. The transition to becoming

natural continually occurs for the rest of the participants life. Since each woman who has

natural hair became part of a collective movement, I wanted to hear from their own

experiences what they believed the Natural Hair Movement was achieving or hoping to

achieve by encouraging African descendants to embrace their natural hair textures.

> **Flora:** For some people, I think its just identity. They want to be heard!
> Look, I'm a Black woman and you're expecting me to do this. No! I can't
> do that! And no, I can't look like that! Accept me for who I am… I think
> people are tired of being other people. And that's what it breaks down to. I
> think that if their tired-if you want to wear weave, go ahead! That's great!
> I'm not knocking that. But let's not make it our identity. And I think that's
> what the end goal is. Whether people realize it or not. Because there are
> some people that don't realize that. And when they talk to me, I'm like but
> your goal is to just be you. And I think that's the goal. People just want to
> be themselves. They don't wanna put on that mask anymore. They don't
> want to put the weave in. If they want to, they can! That's the option for
> them. But they shouldn't have to be told that you have to, to be told you
> look beautiful.

Agreeing with one of the dominant discourses within the movement, Flora asserts

that a few goals of the Natural Hair Movement is to express one's blackness and to

become a more unique and honest representation of yourself. The movement has allowed

Black women to have an option in the type of hair style that they want to wear. Citing

weave, which is a type of protective hair styling, Flora makes the distinction between

wearing protective hair styling as a style and not as one's identity. This is interesting

because in the past, straight hair became a large part of Black women's identity as

women were seeking to gain access towards more socioeconomic opportunities. Yet as

natural hair continues to emerge, and more Black women are embracing their hair, other

hair styles are being relegated as choices. This comment from Flora expresses that natural

hair is replacing straight hair as an indicator of one's identity. She believes that the end

goal of the movement is for natural hair to represent the identity of Black women and for

Black women to be truly embraced as they are without having to "put on the mask" to be

beautiful. And to be accepted as who Black women were born to be.

> **Anna:** I'll put it like this. I like it myself the wash and go. You have your
> hair and you take care of it and go about your business. I think the goal for
> some women is just to see how much hair they can get on their head.
> Because for years and years and years, Black women was told their hair
> don't grow. But see, now Black women know that their hair do grow, and
> they can grow past a point. So…if you treat your hair decent. You get hair,
> it don't make any difference if its kinky or whatever but you still have
> hair. But uh I think that's the goal. The goal is to have healthy hair and as
> much as possible.

Discussing the perceived myths of Black hair, Anna believes the goal of the

Natural Hair Movement is for some women to see how long their hair can grow. One of

the myths of Black hair was that African descendants were not able to grow their hair as

long as other Americans. These myths were supported by racial caricatures which

projected discriminatory images of African Americans in a ridiculing manner. Black

women were depicted with head wraps covering their hair or depicted as standing on ends

and straight out from the scalp (Riggs 1987). Another way this myth was supported by

how Black people were portrayed on television or within movies as realistic characters.

Black actors and actresses within predominantly White entertainment would often be

shown with chemically or heat altered hair, close cropped styles, or with protective

styling such as braids, twists, weaves, or wigs. Black women primarily adopting these

styles in the media or in real life, built the collective perception that Black hair could not

grow or that Black women did not have real hair if it was long. The embracing of our

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natural curls and coils has allowed for that myth to become debunked. On platforms like Instagram, Black women are regularly sharing and posting media that portray Black women with long natural hair. As more women engage within the movement and share resources about natural hair, these actions will continue to change the discourse surrounding the perceptions and beliefs about African American hair.

In addition to debunking myths surrounding the perceptions of hair, Anna also believes that the goal is to have healthy hair. Although aligning with the belief in length as a determinate as healthy, one goal in embracing natural hair is to gain healthier hair by understanding how to take care of it. Part of reaching the goal of having healthier hair is embracing the hair that you have on your head. The actions that were taken within the past to fit in with the dominant ideal, has caused intergenerational hair damage that will continue if women do not accept or embrace the hair on their head. Although the embrasure of natural hair is increasing, there is still some evidence where the discrimination and unacceptance of Black hair is still deeply embedded within American culture and African American psyche.

> **Dominique:** I feel like the goal was just to kind of regain some type of self-respect and self-sanity, because hair in the black household is…sometimes more prevalent than food. Um so I think the whole movement was to try to gain something, you know, for us to have something. Something of the past because African America is being phased out. So, I think a lot of women said "You know what? This is something I can control".

The collective action of "going natural" is viewed by Dominique as regaining self-control due to African America being phased out. This is a very interesting point because of how the Natural Hair Movement is changing the narrative, discourse, and images of how Black Hair has been represented within the past. In addition to controlling

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the discourse, African American and Black women are controlling how Black womanhood is also being defined by Black women. In the first emergence of natural hair, Black women embraced Black Power and the beauty of their features by challenging the standard that Black hair had to be straight. They also challenged how Black women can be beautiful as they are with natural hair (Banks 2000; Craig 2002; Byrd and Tharps 2014). Black Power was conceptualized to help influence that self-control over the personal and external livelihoods of Black individuals. The embracing of Natural Hair shows how Black women are employing Black Power and embodying their racial identity through the expression and reemergence of their hair (Carmichael 1966).

The second point that Dominique stated was how she believed that "African America" is being phased out. "African America" as a term references all the African descendants in the Americas which includes the Caribbean, Latin America, and North America (Cite). The perception of African America being phased out may indicate how Black culture is being consumed and commodified through the global economy. As more and more people capitalize off their blackness, blackness is also being commodified, extracted, and placed onto bodies that do not self-identify as Black. Through this practice the producers of the culture, that is highly demanded and sought after, are the same people who are being relegated and discriminated against at the margins. Global consumers want to experience the culture and aesthetics produced by Black people, however they do not want to know or truly understand the Black experience which the aesthetics and cultural markers originate from. This connects to the current shifts within the Natural Hair Movement within the U.S. When the reemergence first appeared within the 21st century, the key social actors initiating this change were Black women. However,

as the movement has picked up and impacted the Hair & Beauty industry, the movement has become embraced by all women who have curly or coily hair. The commodification of natural hair will be discussed further in the discussion section to draw comparisons for how the Natural Hair movement is becoming commercialized within American society.

Another goal of the movement includes how natural hair is becoming more present and normalized within American society. Candace speaks about how natural hair is now being worn within professional environments where it was once conceived to not be the place for kinky or coily hair textures.

> **Candace:** Today I think with the "Natural Hair Movement" more and more African American women in the workplace are embracing their natural hair and ethnicity and are wearing their natural hair. They are not afraid to wear their natural hair. And…are seeing that because the "Natural Hair Movement" is becoming the norm, People are comfortable in their own skin, so to speak. People are comfortable with natural hair styles.

The embracing of natural hair has led to the increased confidence that Black women not only feel within their appearances, but within their overall self-esteem. The internalization of Eurocentric beauty ideals and practices created cultural standards that solidified straightened hair in place as the preferred representation of being professional. However as more women are publicly and internally embracing the beauty within their hair texture, the prevalence of natural hair at work will continue to increase as an extension of African American self-presentation (Ellis-Hervey et al. 2016).

The goals of the Natural Hair Movement are continually being shaped and developed by the collective activity of Black women. Uncovering further past the most prominent goal of the movement to reject Eurocentric hair, four important aspects were discussed as potential goals in natural hair expression. Flora discussed reclaiming the

identity and beauty in blackness. Listing the metaphor of Black women having to "put on the mask" once entering the public sphere in the U.S., the reclaiming of one's distinct blackness is being expressed through natural hair. The unique texture of coils and curls harken back to the collective African ancestors and symbolizes a badge of pride that is worn to display the resilience of black people within the U.S. A second goal from Anna stated the achievement of healthy and long hair as women learned how to take care of the hair. The maintenance of hair health is also simultaneously debunking perceived myths of how Black hair cannot grow or that Black women having long hair is not real. The expression of natural hair represents Black women seeking to regain self-respect, self-sanity, and self-control. Dominique asserted insightful responses for how Black women are reestablishing their identity through the actions of going natural and the cultivation of their own specialized hair products. Lastly, Candace details the goal of normalizing the presence of natural hair in everyday life and within professional environment. Each of these four goals are representative of their personal experience, however their perspectives provide further insight into how impactful the Natural Hair Movement is becoming within the everyday livelihoods of Black women within the U.S. Although the goals outlined within this section are personal and could be indicative of the individual's experience, the four goals could be relational to the wider populations' experience with natural hair.

<div align="center">**The Empowerment of Natural Hair**</div>

The reemergence and expression of natural hair within the 21st century emphasizes the collective action of empowerment that is being exuberated by Black women. The increased prevalence of natural hair within society is increasing the self-

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esteem and consciousness of Black women about their hair. The wearing of natural hair within natural hair styles is leading to the reframing of how natural hair is seen or viewed within society. Discussing how the perceptions and discourse of natural hair is being shaped, this section will examine how individual or collective actions by Black women is empowering more Black women to embrace their natural hair.

Hair Advice from Educational Resources

A large aspect of the movement includes the reeducation of how to take care of and maintain healthy hair. To help the community of women who are considering or currently transitioning to become natural, key methods have been established to help the process of becoming natural a little easier. Mediums such as online blogs, video logs, books, and the sharing of generational knowledge is being increased to further encourage women to accept their selves and to accept their hair in its natural state. Structured as educational resources, these methods can also be viewed to empower and uplift Black women. The first things learned about hair is usually taught within the home or from your family. I asked participants about where they sought out hair advice and the family were described as the first place where they learned about Black hair.

When Flora was growing up, her mom taught her how to shampoo and condition her hair. Understanding that her daughter had a different hair texture from hers, Flora's mom aimed to teach Flora how to care for her curlier hair texture.

> **Tiffany:** So how old were you whenever you started styling and maintaining your own hair?

> **Flora:** Oh, I was young. I was 10! And I remember because my mom—I felt bad—My mom worked at that time, I think she was working two jobs. My mother worked two jobs, for seven days a week for 17 years. To make sure that we had food on the table, we can pay our rent and all those

things. So, I was 10 years old my mom showed me how to shampoo my hair. Uh basically she was like "Just get the scalp real good. The water will run down and it will get your hair. And don't worry about the hair, just get the scalp. She was ask—you know to this day, I look back and I look at science and she was actually right. So, I was 10 years old when I started styling my own hair and I didn't do much. I learned the pony tail and then I learned the two cornrows. That is my to go style to this day…

[Flora and Tiffany laugh together]

Flora: …a little top knot, or two pony tails and a little bun to the back. That's what I learned. And my mother was very adamant. Like, "you make sure to put a lot of conditioner on your hair or comb it through. Because your hair is not like mine and you need more conditioner" She goes "Make sure you do that, okay so when I come home it's not—if it's a mess, I'll fix it". And that's what I would do. And if it didn't come out right, she'll go it's easy to comb. She would put water in a water bottle. Spritz my hair and comb it through. And that's that's what- I do that with my clients to this day She made a very, she made it very easy for me for my hair. And didn't make a big deal about it. That was the good thing, yeah.

Tiffany: So, in the past you received the majority of your hair advice from your mom?

Flora: Yes!

Flora's experience in learning about her hair shows where most young girls first learn about their hair from a maternal figure. Through these first interactions the understandings about hair is socialized to the child at a young age. How the hair is cared for, styled, or maintained stays with the individual even when they began to style their own hair (Banks 2000). Flora started maintaining her hair at an early age because her mother was working two jobs to help make ends meet. Having an overall positive experience of learning about her hair, Flora understood early that the different textures of hair were a positive aspect and just represented extra care needed to be taken towards it.

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Unfortunately, everyone's experience is not as positive, and some women did not have

the chance to receive this knowledge from a maternal figure. Considering the variation in

experience, it is important to include the narrative of Flora because of the proven age at

when women start to learn the differences or characteristics of their hair (Banks 2000).

If maternal figures were not able to pass along information about how to style

hair, other resources have been established to aid in learning what works or does not

work for the hair. One of the biggest influences in sharing hair knowledge has become

established online and through social media networks. When the natural hair movement

first began, online discussion boards were created to help establish communities of

support for women who did not have support in their everyday lives. These online forums

initiated the communities that quickly formed on sites such as YouTube, Facebook,

Twitter, and Instagram. The earlier forums were aimed at individuals who had locs, but

the online resources of natural hair have expanded to manipulation styles such as twisting

and braiding (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Popularly known as YouTube vlogging, this

practice can be characterized as an individual posting "diary style" videos that will

visually show the practice of how to complete a hair style, product review, or washing

routine. Creating an online video library, the vlogging sources are easily accessible

through a few clicks away.

> **Tiffany:** So how do you feel about YouTube bloggers who do hair
> tutorials?
>
> **Candace:** I think it's wonderful! Because it's helping more and more
> people learn how to care for their natural hair. YouTube videos also talk
> about different products. What works, what doesn't work, what works
> well on this hair type, what works well on that hair type. So, I think part of
> African American women…becoming natural is not knowing how to care
> for our hair. "Okay, so now what?" But through the internet and YouTube

videos, we have a resource that we can always go to get ideas about different styles. To get ideas about the products we should use. To get ideas about what works, what doesn't work. So, I think that YouTube videos um and because of the internet today, women who have chosen to become natural have a resource that they can use to assist them on their journey.

Candace regularly accesses YouTube regularly to be able to visually see someone style or manage their hair. Because of its intense visual nature, vlogging quickly increased among young influencers because of consumers being able to actively engage with the information differently than reading about it. The vlog has become an online visual manual that can be played, repeated, or paused while an individual is learning how to successfully complete the act. Candace also states that she believes hair tutorials have become popular because of Black women not knowing what to do for our hair, so vlogging fills the gaps by presenting a step by step video to make the process easier.

The increases in online connectivity would position YouTube as the main location to receive hair advice, however the practice of engaging in face to face conversations about hair still takes place among Black women. Danielle talks about gaining advice from her sister, using YouTube, and engaging in conversations with other Black women about hair.

> **Tiffany:** So, do you think that by…you kind of said that, the YouTube bloggers they provided guidance or advice for hair care. And then, did you solely rely on those YouTube tutorials? Or did you try self-tests or advice from family when going through your hair journey?

> **Danielle:** I did ask my sister what she used! And she taught me the LOC method! And so, I started with that. And then when I would go on YouTube and I would see people using other products, I would, I would decide "Hmm, do I want to try that? Do I not want to try that? Or oh, how did she get her puff to be so big?" And then you would watch and see how they do it. And then you try it on your hair and see if it works or you

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manipulate it until it does. So, I didn't rely solely on YouTube bloggers, but they helped a lot and you know of course talking to other women who are natural helped a lot too. And you know, see what they used. I mean if you feel so comfortable asking but I think that's the great thing about the Natural Hair Movement. Now that there are so many other women with natural hair, you feel more comfortable asking people what they are doing with their hair. Or what products they use. So, I just watched—I went to Target, and I was trying to get down the aisle. But there was like a black woman—two black women—standing there having a conversation about what they do with their hair. She was like "I love your hair! What do you do?" And they were just talking! Telling her "Use this. Use that." So that's extremely helpful and that's extremely, you know a good thing. To move the culture forward and to keep women encouraged about their hair and their hairstyles.

The LOC method stands for "Liquid Oil Cream" and is one of the two key step-by-step routines that are used when styling natural hair. The LOC or LCO methods are the first things women going natural will learn and are the first necessary styling routines to a healthy hair regimen. The LOC or LCO methods are one of the pivotal styling changes to how Black hair differs from non-Black women's hair care routines (Davis-Sivasothy 2011). The steps for each method will differ depending on one's hair needs, which explains the variability in using LOC or LCO. Using these methods ensures that the hair shaft is staying hydrated and moisturized for longer periods of time.

Danielle discussed how she sought out advice first from her sister, then watched hair tutorials, and also cited talking with other Black women about their hair practices. The Natural Hair Movement has expanded the discourse of hair care outside of the home or private sphere and into more public spaces. YouTube vlogging has become one of the top sources in getting information, while speaking to individual women is still one of the main options for receiving advice or guidance about hair (YouTube 2018). Hair discussions used to only occur within the "kitchen" and the beauty shop (Jacobs-Huey

2007). Now discussions are taking place within everyday conversations and even within

the hair care aisles of general stores such as Target. The increasing prevalence and

discussions about Black hair care within the U.S. has led towards the development of

increased consciousness about the understandings of hair. While also leading towards

increased empowerment of women being more open and honest about their hair

experiences and struggles of finding out how to best take care of their hair on an

everyday basis. This open honesty about the truths behind Black hair has allowed for

many women to embrace their curls, while also opening about how their hair journey has

been in their life.

In addition to the internet and social media becoming places where women can

seek out hair information, guidance in literature sources are also getting published.

Reference books on African American or Black hair are being published to provide

intricate details for how to care and manage the unique curl structure. Flora, who is a

licensed cosmetologist, has published her own reference book after receiving questions

from clients about adhering to healthy hair care regimens.

Tiffany: Where would you get your advice today?

Flora: Oh! That's my book! I wrote a book. It's called *The Book of Natural Hair: Questions and Answers From the Stylist's Perspective*. The reason why I wrote that is because of lot of it was…well all of it, were questions that my clients had throughout the years. And I had this little journal—I'm a "journaler" so I like to journal—because I like to do better for myself and learn about myself. And I kept this professional journal when I finished cosmetology school because they don't teach you everything in cosmetology school! They teach you the basics—which do help—if you go to school and not cut class. It does help. [laughs]

Tiffany: [laughs]

Flora: And so, I started journaling all these questions that people would have because I was a newbie and there were certain things that I didn't know. And as I was learning I was writing them down. And then when I moved—let me tell you I had this journal for *years*. And then when I moved to North Carolina, someone said to me "Wow you're so informational, you should write a book". And I was like "Oh yeah okay, I always wanted to write a book." It was always a goal of mine but I never thought about writing a reference book. And then when I did that, that's where I started putting everything together. Compiling everything…and that's where the book came from. It's actually the questions that my clients have had over the years and I answer them by putting them into chapter format. I would say however, there are certain things on YouTube that are informational. But go to a person who is a stylist. The reason being because if you go to someone who is a stylist, they actually have…they've dealt with more hair textures. If you watch a YouTuber (vlogger) who has only done their own hair—not that they aren't informational—but they're only informational about that one thing. So, I would say there are certain things on YouTube but try to find people who are stylists. Cause that's important. And then books because there's so much information in books that its unbelievable [laughs].

Flora discussed the reference book that she wrote as a source for women to turn to when learning about their hair. Her inspiration for writing this book were clients themselves and her passion for being a reference to other women. By authoring her own book, this allows for the advice and knowledge that she has gained to be available for women who are seeking to learn more about naturally curly or coily hair. By publishing or sharing this knowledge, Flora sought to write a book about natural hair that reinforced positive images and positive representation about curly, kinky, or coily hair textures. Knowing how African hair textures have been categorized within the past, she hopes that her reference book can also be an empowering resource that Black women use for learning or teaching others about their natural hair.

Flora also believes that everything about hair cannot be taught from various curriculums or from watching vloggers on YouTube. Flora supports receiving knowledge from licensed stylists because of their varied knowledge and experience from working with various hair textures throughout their careers. This point is very insightful because it expresses a limitation when seeking advice or guidance from one resource. She is critical of relying solely on YouTube vloggers as sources for information, however this brings out new issues since the movement has gained traction. One of these issues stemming from how cosmetologists who used to be the go-to source on hair, have now become sidelined by women who are self-describing how they care for their hair in a more relatable format. The natural hair movement has encouraged women to engage with multiple mediums of resources and attempting to figure out which information is helpful. The movement has also increased the amount of resources that are available which has created changes in how hair advice is received, sought out, and shared. These excerpts display that the best guidance can be learned from family, Black hair consumers, natural hair enthusiasts, cosmetologists, and vloggers. The amount of resources available are furthering empowering young girls and all women to embrace and celebrate their hair by adding to the collective knowledge about Black hair. As they embark further on their journey, each woman must find what works individually for them and their lifestyle.

In the commentary provided, the women offered significant insight into how the Natural Hair Movement is changing the perception and understandings of Black hair within the United States. Covering topics of the African American Presentation of Self, the legacy of good/bad hair, or the significance behind the term "natural"; everything discussed by participants allows for clarity in embedded nuances in relation to each

woman's hair experiences. The comments are not representative of the entire population; however, they provide further knowledge about how the stigmatization of hair affects the everyday livelihood of some Black women. Considering the key topics that were analyzed for this section, the next chapter will discuss the overall conclusions from the data. It will also consider how the theoretical frameworks of Afrocentricity, Social Movement Theory, and Intersectionality are central to the expression of natural hair within the Black community.
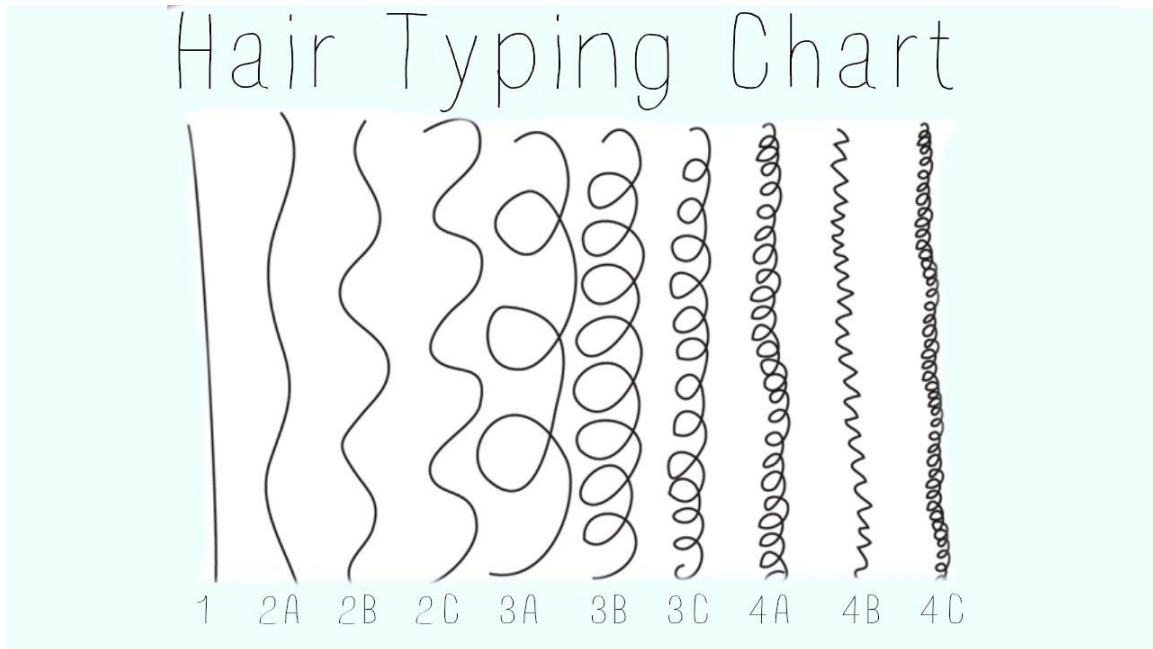
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CHAPTER FIVE:
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this study, I approached the reemergence of natural hair with key questions about what the expression of natural hair could indicate about Black women's formation of their identity. The initial questions about the underlying meanings of identity, political notions, the rising consciousness of a collective movement, and the empowerment of embodied symbols aimed to decipher how the action of embracing natural hair could indicate new meanings about Black hair that have changed within the 21st century. I wanted to understand why the reemergence of natural hair expression was very pivotal in the livelihoods of Black women in this current moment. This curiosity motivated me to pursue a study that could gain the empirical perspective of various women about their individual hair journey and how they place their selves within the larger Natural Hair Movement. In this section I hope to discuss some of the key findings from the study and what they may possibly entail about the progression of the movement and within the formation of a distinctly unique Black hair culture.

Socialization of Difference

Part of how Black hair has become understood within the United States has stemmed from how American culture has positioned the definition of beauty within the hair care industry. The cultural hegemony of beauty has frequently placed a Eurocentric ideal at the center where all other beauty ideals were framed in juxtaposition to the normalized standard. Once this practice became embedded within American culture, the

ideas produced by the Eurocentric beauty standard have become reproduced through each generation. One of the main themes extracted from responses of participants included the "socialization of difference". This theme considers how the differences of individuals are markers that become determinants for how people are understood and how people are treated within society. Skin color has historically been used as the primary marker of distinction for which the institutions of racism are based on. In addition to skin color, hair type and texture has become another marker of difference within American society that is socialized to Black women at a young age.

In the late 1990s, Ingrid Banks conducted a study that sought to determine why and how "hair matters" among Black women through interviews and focus groups. Banks ties the importance of hair within the Black community by examining the sociocultural understandings and meanings (Banks 2000). A major finding within the study was how hair first became understood as a marker of difference for women at young ages.

> "When little girls are young, they are baptized into the ritual of styling hair as straight, so their hair can be 'acceptable' in public. This has been subconsciously teaching younger girls to view their hair as 'unacceptable' or 'bad' within the eyes of mainstream society. And since society does not accept the appearance of Black hair in its natural state, neither should Black women" (Banks 2000:22-25).

This same evidence was found in this study among Black women within the southeastern Carolina region. When many of the women were young, they first started learning about their hair and the ritual of styling it or getting it "done". This practice of getting the hair done translated into getting the hair altered through a chemical or heating process. The actions in getting the hair styled closer to the Eurocentric standard expressed how difference has been marked and socialized for Black women intergenerationally and shaping their understandings of Black womanhood.

Further evidence for hair socialization was examined through how women internalized beliefs of Black hair within their everyday lives. Anna and Candace both discussed how they learned that maintaining a "well groomed" appearance would provide access to specific economic or social opportunities that would not be available otherwise. Instilled with the "African American Presentation of Self" this shows how Black women have not only learned how to work within the system but to also embody values that concern the African American community. Danielle also spoke about how hair texture discrimination is prevalent within the Natural Hair Movement. Many Black women are encouraging their sisters in the U.S. and across the diaspora to go natural however the internalization of "good" and "bad" hair becomes emphasized through the devaluing of 4C hair textures with the praising of looser curl patterns of Type 3 and 4A hair patterns. The actions taken by the community are socializing the current and younger generation for how their natural hair should be interpreted currently. The socialization of difference is very key because it lays the foundation for how Black hair was and will be interpreted within the future. Understanding hair characteristics, shape, and texture as something that "marks" blackness will provide further insight for how Black women have been socialized to cover these distinct characteristics. In addition to how the Natural Hair Movement is reimagining the way that blackness is being embraced and celebrated by Black women and the society.

Progressing Perspectives of Black Hair in the 21st Century

The current Natural Hair Movement is changing how natural hair is viewed and perceived within society. In the past, natural hair was stereotyped as a negative with straighter hair being viewed as a positive representation for Black womanhood. Many

social meanings were attributed to Black hair that characterized it as unkept, unprofessional, and not groomed. Because of these enculturated beliefs, Black women altered their hair to fit in with the dominant beauty standards. However as more women are adopting natural hair styles, natural hair is becoming further normalized and accepted within society. In the 21st century, the Natural Hair Movement has increased the hair styling options that women can have with natural hair. Whether worn within an Afro, twist out, braids, a wash-n-go, or in protective styling; the movement has made it possible for all African inspired hair styles to be accepted and celebrated within American society. The increased presence on social media, magazines, commercial advertisements, and in major films have pushed the boundaries of how natural hair can be represented within the public eye.

In the responses provided by participants, the changing perspectives about natural hair were discussed throughout the interviews and focus groups. The movement has highlighted how the concept of "natural" has varying definitions depending on the individual. "Natural" has become conceptualized as abstaining from using chemicals within the hair regimen but has also become applied to cultivating a more "natural" lifestyle. This natural lifestyle can apply to the types of food eaten, the products used in skin care, and even thinking about the types of clothes that a person may wear. Being "natural" has encompassed many forms that continues to shape the natural hair movement within the United States. In addition to the diverse definitions of "natural", the movement includes a process of a Black woman "becoming natural" through their hair care regimen. First having been socialized through altering the hair through heat or chemicals, many African American women are learning how to take care of their hair the

way it naturally grows. The process of accepting and appreciating natural hair as it is, is a continual process that many women will go through for the rest of their life. The choice to go natural is only the first step that is followed by the process of transitioning, caring for, and maintaining natural hair on a regular basis. This process can be very difficult as each woman is unlearning that Black women's hair should be styled within a straightened or smoothed state. This process of unlearning displays how the understandings and perspectives of hair are continually changing as more women are learning what makes their hair special and unique.

The normalization of natural hair can be viewed as one of the primary goals of the Natural Hair Movement. Natural hair is freely worn and expressed within everyday livelihoods and within professional workplaces. In addition to the normalization of natural hair, the very act of expressing and embracing natural hair through hair styling is empowering more women to do the same. As more women join the collective actions of wearing natural hair, this will continue to normalize the presence and beauty of natural hair being displayed. The movement is changing the prior known discourse around natural hair and changing the socialization of normalized hair styles for the younger generations of African American and Black women in the U.S.

Ideal Type of Natural Hair

Although the movement is centrally focused on encouraging Black women to embrace their curls, the disproportionate celebration of select curl types have become evident within the second decade of the Natural Hair Movement. Many of the natural curl patterns that are highly celebrated or highly visible tend to be textures that are looser and curlier than "coiler". Danielle spoke about the identification of an "ideal natural hair

type" that has become increasing prevalent through the media and on social media. Considering the women who have become labeled as the "natural hair gurus", their hair texture is widely celebrated and desired because of its look and length compared to the average woman. Bringing attention to how hair textures are discriminated against, Danielle also highlighted that hair textures categorized as "4C" do not get the same amount of attention as some Type 3 or Type 4A or 4B will. This recent trend has displayed how specific hair textures are more celebrated than others and has created a new standard of the "ideal natural hair type".

The standard of an ideal type has placed straighter or looser curl patterns in a desired positionality. Seeking to emulate these texture, natural hair styling has cultivated increased manipulation hair styles that will shape natural hair into a more defined style to appear more acceptable to society. Manipulated hair styles are created through styling or setting the hair for its desired result, instead of "letting it be". During the first emergence of natural hair, hair was worn as it was naturally, unmanipulated, and within an un-straightened style. Currently within the present, natural hair's most popular styling involves manipulated styling that can be represented through flexi rods, two-strand twist, braid out, or using hair gel to define the curl pattern. The desire for more definition highlights how past characterization of Black hair has not completely left the psyche of many Black women. And that the increased efforts in gaining definition expresses that the legacy of "good" or "bad" hair is still present within the everyday livelihoods and hair styling of Black women within the United States.

The Natural Hair Movement intended to be liberating for many African American women has brought up key questions for who the movement is intended to liberate? The

movement was intended for all Black women of African descent and across the diaspora to embrace their natural curls, yet women's hair that does not qualify as an ideal type are not receiving the same encouragement, celebration, or empowerment that other women are gaining from the movement. Because of these key recent trends, how this will affect the progress of the movement will be very interesting as the expression of natural hair continues into its third decade.

Black Power and the Natural Hair Movement

When the expression of natural hair first emerged during the 1960s, the emergence coincided with the current expression of racial pride through physical embodiment. Hair was worn within its natural state to visibly align their personal politics with their bodies (Craig 2002). The racial pride expressed during that period was empowered through the increased consciousness of the inherent power within African Americans. Symbolized through "Black Power", the pride in one's racial identity was embraced and emboldened to aid in the uplift of the Black community. The pride of "Black Power" as a collective quickly extended into having pride of the beauty within one's blackness through the "Black is Beautiful" movement. Empowering Black women to embrace their skin, facial features, and natural hair textures; the "Black is Beautiful" movement helped lay the foundation for the second reemergence of natural hair within the 21st century (Craig 2002; Byrd and Tharps 2014).

Chapter 1 discussed the connections and early foundations for the Natural Hair Movement in the 20th century to contextualize how natural hair expression has become conceptualized as its own distinct movement within the 21st century. Examining how the current movement is similar and dissimilar, the actions of individual and collective actors

have displayed how transitioning to natural involves a new manner in how racial pride is being exerted. During the interview with Candace, she offered a very insightful point about how the central aim of Natural Hair Movement is uniquely different from the past emergence.

> **Candace:** I think it's a different point in time. It might be similar in that day. People wore Afros. So, it's similar in that regard but I think now we're at a different point in time and I think it's more today about accepting and embracing who you are versus trying to make a statement. I don't think we do it today because we're trying to make a statement. I think we do it today because we want to do it today. And because we just want to be free to be ourselves…without judgement, criticism, or ridicule.

Candace does not believe that the current Natural Hair Movement is making a political statement with their hair in the same manner that a political statement was being made through hair during the Black Power Movement. Candace views natural hair expression as coming from a place of acceptance and embracing of hair. This is a very interesting point because it expresses the diverse opinions and beliefs in how the expression of natural hair holds different meanings to different women. It also is important in showing how the politics of hair and the historical perspectives about Black hair can be contrast among women due to age, socioeconomic status, nationality, and generation. The background provided within Chapter 1 discusses the historical connections between the two movements, however the internal feelings about what natural hair and its expression will differ depending on each woman's experience and hair journey.

A second aspect about the connection to the Natural Hair Movement is the symbol of the Afro. In the 1960s, the Afro became a visual and physical embodiment to express racial pride. Since many Black activists started to adopt Afros, the Afro became stigmatized within the American society and a symbol of militancy that should be feared

by all Americans. The stigmatization of the Afro fed into the marginalization of African American hair in an un-straightened style as inappropriate and wrong. The Afro continues to hold the visual representation of Black Power, however negative characteristics of militancy and "bad hair" continue to linger with it within the present.

> **Tiffany:** And do you feel that it's like more professional to wear your hair in one style versus another.

> **Danielle:** I would probably never go to work with a big Afro. [Laughs]

> **Tiffany:** Okay, why?

> **Danielle:** That's the limit. The reason why is it's just…to me when I wear my Afro, I feel free, I feel confident, I feel…and—I don't know. I just don't feel like the workplace is ready for that much *freedom*. I have my hair in a style coming down or I have my hair pulled back. To me it says, 'I'm here to work'. And then I keep my fun, freeing, like a little decorative thing til the weekend. Cause its just—I mean, I think about "What if I am being too distracting?" Which I feel like we shouldn't feel like that but at the same time, I am different. So, if I don't want to stick out *too much* (which is unfortunate) I just keep everything at bay and I just keep all the fun stuff until the weekend.

Danielle discusses how she feels that wearing a full Afro within the workplace is not acceptable and would be breaking a "limit" on acceptable natural hair styles to work. The Afro to her creates a sense of freedom and confidence that is not felt when adhering to the Eurocentric norm in styling hair. However, wearing hair in an Afro creates an exuberant feeling that has been interpreted by other women as the pride in one's uniqueness and Black identity. Despite the Afro representing the sense of personal freedom, Danielle has still internalized that the un-straightened or manipulated Afro, is not acceptable or is "too much" for the professional workplace.

Although many African American women are embracing their natural hair textures and expressing their natural hair through various natural hair styles; something to note are the types of natural hair styles that are being worn within the current movement. The popular natural hair styles are methods that are used to increase the definition of curls for the desire to have the most curl definition as possible. The increased emphasis on manipulated hair styles displays a continued stigmatization against the Afro and its unmanipulated visual representation. Natural hair that is not styled or displays defined curls is aligned with the connotation of "bad hair". Natural hair that can be style or have defined hair is aligned with the connotation of "good hair". This recent trend is very interesting because it supports the inquiry within the last section of their being an "Ideal Type of Natural Hair", while also further displaying the legacy of how "good" and "bad" hair has become internalized. To further support the internalization of "good" and "bad" hair, the desire for manipulated hairstyles and defined curls sheds more light on how Type 4C hair textures are stigmatized. The Afro of the 1960s is continually stigmatized, which portrays how hair textures or styles that resemble the Black Power symbol are categorized as "distracting" or "unacceptable" within American society.

The connections of the Black Power Movement and the Natural Hair Movement are very present within today's natural hair expression. The difference between the goals of both movements and the continued stigmatization of the Afro displays how those connections are still being understood by the community and by scholars. It is important to include competing narratives and perspectives of participants to represent a more accurate understanding of how each person places themselves within the Natural Hair Movement. The expression of natural hair is encouraging the empowerment of many

African American and Black women, which is key within understanding how "Black Power" is being manifest within the everyday livelihoods of Black women.

Afrocentricity, Intersectionality, and Social Movements

In the introduction, I outline three assertions to posit how African American women are engaging with each other collectively, while also leading change through their actions as individual agents. The three assertions were: 1) the reemergence of natural hair within the 21st century is challenging the perceptions, stereotypes, and politicization of Black hair within American society; 2) the expression of kinky, coily, or curly hairstyles is empowering Black women to embrace their hair texture in a new social & cultural movement. While also reclaiming African cultural symbols through racial identification; and 3) The Natural Hair Movement has led to the creation of a collective consciousness about Black hair that is changing how hair is perceived, represented, and displayed within American society. To help with examining how hair within the Black community holds political notions, three theoretical perspectives were engaged to analyze how hair styling effects the daily experiences of Black women within the U.S. Using a deductive approach, the three theoretical perspectives allowed for increased explanation for how exactly the actions of individual and collective women are continuing the progress of the Natural Hair Movement.

Afrocentricity

One of the key goals of the Natural Hair Movement in the 21st century involves Black women embracing and accepting their natural hair textures. The process of accepting natural hair was started through the re-centering of an Afrocentric perspective when valuing and defining beauty. Before natural hair expression emerged collectively,

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the accepted beauty ideal within the U.S. centered a Eurocentric norm. The Eurocentric beauty norm in the hair industry prized long, loose curls, and kink-free hair (Bryant 2013). The current reemergence of natural hair expresses that African American and Black women are no longer centering a beauty ideal that is based off the Eurocentric norm. To aid in the re-centering of an Afrocentric perspective, Black women who wear their hair naturally or in Afrocentric hair styles are challenging the perceptions, stereotypes, and politicization of Black hair within American society. These challenges are occurring within everyday hair expression, social media, the entertainment industry, and with the annual celebrations of hair festivals.

The reclaiming of natural hair as a unique identifier of Black identity, how individuals are approaching their everyday life has changed as they re-center Black and African cultural expressions with their identity as "Black". Many of the participants discussed how embracing their natural hair texture showed pride in one's identity but it also showed how women were accepting their Afrocentric beauty. Since Afrocentricity is a transforming agent, Black women are changing how they once viewed their hair through everyday actions. These actions include adopting natural hair styles, encouraging or empowering others, and sharing images and positive words to challenge the prior accepted perceptions of natural hair. One of the biggest components of re-centering Afrocentricity for one's self is how it changes the way that an individual sees society, but importantly how they see themselves.

> **Anna:** I think the only power that is, is self-esteem. You know, if you have your own self esteem you don't need nobody to build to you up. And you'll have the power to make your own self look the way you want to look. Every woman has their own style and they have to find it. And once you find it, you hold on to it. And that's where your power comes from. Your power comes from within.

The power of self-esteem and self-confidence is a large part of the driving agents behind the Natural Hair Movement. For Black women to see themselves as beautiful and to view their natural beauty as beautiful, raises their self esteem and causes the power of others attempts to define them to decrease. The power of believing in self-agency and collectively encouraging others to do the same, is driving the "Black Power" behind the Natural Hair Movement.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework designed to examine and explain the marginalized experience of Black women within the U.S. A theory that is significant to the understandings for how Black hair was understood within the past, allowed for analyzing how natural hair is continually stigmatized and perceived within society today. Using an intersectional lens towards embracing natural hair is very important in examining how the politics of hair can affect the lives of Black women when analyzing how one's race, gender, income, job, and class are a factor. Discussing these individual factors opened discussions about how each identifier plays out within each participant's everyday experience. Considering socioeconomic status and income, both factors have affected the types of hair products or hair resources that are available. A lot of information regarding care for natural hair have become available online. Yet if an individual does not have access to the internet, then finding good resources for managing hair will be difficult. Also, the types of hair products that are accessible will vary. Women who live in regions closer to major cities may have access to larger amounts and higher qualities of hair care items than women who live in less populous regions. Both

income and socioeconomic factors are very important to consider when women are selecting a hair style that is best for them.

Social Movements

The individual actions of Black women became a movement from the personal agency that was being exerted through the expression of natural hair. Social movements become possible when a collective body believes that they can bring about change. The actions of Black women to challenge the perception for how natural hair is viewed through the expression of natural hair is changing the narrative of how Black hair has been marginalized. Natural hair styling is appearing within the media, social media, and within the everyday realities of women across the U.S. The release of the major film *Black Panther* spotlighted natural hair through connections to the African continent and visually showed natural hair as beautiful and acceptable to be worn on screen and within everyday life. The involvement of natural hair within popular culture displays the magnitude for how embracing natural curls have evaded the psyche of Black women today.

Conclusion: What is the Future of the Natural Hair Movement?

The study conducted within Columbia, South Carolina provided unique and diverse perspectives about how the politics of hair has affected the daily livelihoods of some Black women in their everyday experience. A few limitations to consider for the study overall include the location and the total number of participants. The location of Columbia was chosen because of its unique history within South Carolina as a southern city and its position within the Southeast region. Columbia is the capital of South Carolina; however, it is not a major city such as Charlotte, N.C. or Atlanta, G.A. Since

the city is located within the Southeast, its central positioning within the state and short distances from other medium and larger cities made it a place of interest to study diverse perspectives. Because of its smaller size, a limitation of the study included only a small facet of perspectives for understanding how Black women face the lived realities of the politics of hair.

A second limitation included a small sample size of participants. The total number of participants for the study included sixteen total participants that ranged in ages between eighteen to eighty. In a qualitative study, a small number of participants is typical because of the specific nature of research methods used for data collection. Although a smaller number is typical in a qualitative study, a limitation is that the perspectives from participants are not representative of an entire population. The perspectives only provide a small perspective for how some women's hair journey within the Southeastern region of the United States. A small sample size was very helpful in gaining a better understanding for how individual women experienced hair styling practices. It also gave greater insight into how some women place their selves and their journeys within the Natural Hair Movement.

The current expression of natural hair within the 21st century will challenge prior conceptualization and politicization of Black hair. The results from this study will intend to further the conversation surrounding natural hair while displaying personal sentiments about the Natural Hair Movement. It will also provide initial perceptions about how the reemergence of natural hair is changing the beliefs, stereotypes, and perceptions that have been tied to African American hair throughout American society. The research aimed to start the process of answering questions how natural hair is changing the dynamics of

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Black hair styling within the U.S., while also detailing the versatility within Black hair culture. Questions about the politicization of hair that were not answered from this study could be explored within future research. The complexity about how socioeconomic status and ability to financially maintain specific hair styles or style maintenance was mentioned within the data, however an in-depth study could provide further insight into how income may or may not change the decisions regarding hair styling practices. Also, possibly delving into how hair products specialized for natural hair and using cleaner ingredients are changing the marketing for all hair products.

Additional information for the knowledge of how intersectional marginalization affects Black women, only provided a regional perspective within the United States. Future research could explore a study within the United States that is multi cited within different cities. This could provide a larger representation for how significant hair is within the Black community and among Black women as well. Further research could also be explored through an extensive study within another community, cultural context, and country within the African Diaspora. The data within this thesis provided context from a U.S. perspective, however it would be interesting to see how racialization and systems of oppression create the complex livelihoods of personal presentation and body politics among women. The increased research in how hair within the Black community changes the livelihoods of individuals would showcase how women are actively empowering and raising the consciousness of the community through their individual agency.

EPILOGUE

In the summer of 2012, I stood in the mirror looking at my reflection…I stood there looking at myself and became frustrated. I had just washed my hair and yet so much hair was sitting around my feet in shed piles. I washed my hair the same way as my hair stylist did in the salon, yet my outcomes were not the same. Looking at the amount of hair on the floor, it was then that I decided to go natural. Up to that point, I had received chemical relaxers for almost ten years. For ten years, I was accustomed to the routine of going to the hair salon every two weeks to get my hair done. Getting my hair done meant sitting in the hair salon for two to three hours to get a wash and set. Or sometimes four hours when I endured the treatment for a chemical relaxer. After years of undergoing the ritual of relaxers and always becoming unsatisfied with the health of my hair, I decided to go natural. After making this extremely personal decision, I unknowingly joined the collective movement of women to go natural at 17.

Making my decision to go natural was not easy. I was inspired to join the movement by my hairstylist, Kayla, and from a classmate within my school. Every two weeks when I would visit the salon, Kayla would share how free she felt since taking the plunge of getting the Big Chop. She talked about how the stress of trying to keep her hair straight was gone and that she felt a sense of renewed confidence in her self-esteem and within her spirit. A new feeling of excitement and curiosity set in as Kayla described her steps in learning how to care of her natural hair. She told me about the LOC method and the importance of keeping our hair moisturized. She made it sound easy and not hard to

manage. My classmate also inspired me because of the versatile hairstyles she wore that showed her super defined curls. I was in awe because it looked so good! I constantly had questions, thinking how would my hair look if I went natural? Would my hair be pretty too? Would my hair grow fast? In that moment looking at myself in the mirror, I thought about all the conversations I had with Kayla about embracing natural hair. I thought about all the times I detested sitting in the chair watching the chemical be applied to my roots. I asked myself "What do you have to lose?"

At the start of my senior year in high school, I was transitioning in secret. I did not feel brave enough to do the Big Chop. I was not ready to face the opinions, judgements, or looks from my classmates. I was also on the varsity cheerleading team where I felt pressured to maintain my straight hair. I wondered what would my teammates think if I went natural? Would I still be able to wear the sleek hairstyles like my teammates? Moving into our competitive cheerleading season, I had been transitioning for four months. I was used to working with my new growth up to month four due to stretching out the time in between relaxers. Transitioning was going well until it was time to prepare for the competitive cheer season. Every fall, we would compete every Saturday during the month of October and half of November. On those days, everyone on the team was expected to look the same. Same hair style. Same make up. Same uniform look. As an African American woman on a predominantly White cheerleading team, looking "exactly the same" required that I needed to match the Eurocentric beauty standard of my teammates.

When my hair was relaxed, styling my hair for cheerleading was never an issue because the chemical permanently straightened the follicles. Since I was transitioning, the

new growth had already started becoming more pronounced and caused my straight ends to become raised from the scalp. The hair requirement for our first competition was that our hair needed to be worn half-up, half-down…which is easy to style if your hair was straight. Still barely knowing how to care for my transitioning hair, I worried about my hair not being able to fit in or look how it should. I did not want to get it straightened with heat because the high temperature would cause my hair to break at the line of new growth and relaxed ends. Feeling anxious about my hair not fitting in, I reluctantly told my mom to set up an appointment to get my hair re-relaxed. The relaxer was scheduled on October 1st, 2012. That would be the last time that I would ever relaxed my hair.

Since that moment of deciding to go natural and the date of my last relaxer, I have not regretted my decision once. The journey of staying natural involves many personal struggles of accepting my hair, while also being a testament to the growth of self-love I now feel for myself and my aspirations. I have never felt so liberated and confident within myself and who I am as a person. The transition to natural hair allowed me to consider who I was as an individual and as a Black woman. In learning more about how to care for my hair, I have learned more about myself as a person and how becoming natural has affected my life through my health, nutrition, and body.

What spurred my interest in doing research on Black women is how empowered I feel when reading literature describing how we navigate and survive the challenges that we face on an everyday basis. I wanted to learn more about how African American and Black women in the U.S. dealt with the daily pressures to conform to the Eurocentric beauty ideal. I wanted to learn how those ideals had become internalized and was struggled with through the styling of Black hair. By thinking about my own hair journey,

it fueled my curiosity how other women struggled with the embracing of their natural hair and the lived reality of wearing it. I wanted to understand and examine the connections for how natural hair was reemerging within the present and what the current movement suggest about the future of Black hair. Because of these curiosities, I aimed to explore how I could research the unique oppression of Black women while also adding to the literature about a subject that is deeply personal to all women of the African Diaspora. As I grow as a scholar, woman, and examiner of race; I hope that I can continue to uncover the daily nuances of Black women and the beautiful culture of the Black community.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Profession	Hair Style	Location
Flora	46	Latina	Stylist/Cosmetologist	Natural	Charlotte. NC
Candace	52	African American	Chief Human Resources Director	Natural	Lexington, SC
Anna	75	Black	Retired	Natural	Lexington, SC
Danielle	26	Black	Communications	Natural	Lexington, SC
Kaylynn		Black	Lead Resident Nurse	Natural/Pressed	Lexington, SC
Ebony	28	Black		Natural	Charlotte, SC
Monique	42	Black	Medical Billing Specialist	Weave	Charlotte, SC
Michelle	50	Black	Insurance Collector	Natural w/ Weave	Charlotte, SC
Dominque	43	Black	Promoter Model	Chemically Relaxed	Columbia, SC
Tasha	23	African American	Graduate Student	Natural	Raleigh, NC
Ember	23	Black	Graduate Student	Natural	Columbia, SC
Darla	22	African American	College Student (Senior)	Locs	Columbia, SC
Khaliah	21	Black	College Student	Natural	Columbia, SC
Jada	21	Black	College Student (Senior)	Natural	Columbia, SC
Kelly	20	African American	College Student (Junior)	Natural	Columbia, SC
Frazier	21	African American	College Student/Pharmacy Sales	Natural	Columbia, SC

APPENDIX B: SUMMER FIELDWORK SCHEDULE

May 6th-12th -Complete Survey/Questionnaire -IRB Approval -Design Fliers	13th-19th -Focus Group Schedule/Format -Secure Focus Group Space -Schedule Interviews	20th-26th -Data Collection Prep	27th-June 2nd -Data Collection Prep - **Saturday/Sunday Interviews**
June: 3rd- 9th -Focus Group 1 June 7th- Thursday -Type Field Notes -Analyze Data -**Saturday/Sunday Interviews**	10th-16th -Focus Group 2 June 14th-Thursday -Type Field Notes -Analyze Data - **Saturday/Sunday Interviews**	17th-21st -Data Analyzation -Transcribing Data -Data Observation	25th-30th -Focus Group 3 June 28th-Thursday -Type Field Notes -Attend Charleston Hair Expo **June 30th**
July: 1st-7th -Observation of Hair Stores, Beauty Supply Stores - Transcribing/Analysis -**Saturday/Sunday Interviews**	8th-14th -Focus Group 4 July 12th-Thursday -Type Field Notes - **Saturday/Sunday Interviews**	15th-21st -Focus Group 5 July 19th-Thursday -Type Field Notes - **Saturday/Sunday Interviews**	22-28th -Focus Group Make up July 26th-Thursday -Type Field Notes -**Curl Fest 2018 July 28th Brooklyn, New York**
August: 7/29-8/4 -Transcribing Focus Groups/Interviews	5th-11th -Data Analysis -Thematic Analysis -Coding Data -Reduction Analysis	12th-18th -Data Analysis -Thematic Analysis -Coding Data -Reduction Analysis	19th-25th -Final Data Analysis -Classes Begin on August 23rd -Prepare for After Field Work Presentation!

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Introduction:
1. Tell me your name, age, ethnicity, profession, and how long you have been "natural".
2. How would you describe your hair?
3. How long have you been natural? Or how long have you had your hair chemically relaxed?
4. How would you describe "natural hair"?
5. If you decided to go natural, why did you?
6. If you have relaxed hair, have you considered going natural?
7. What does it mean to be "natural"?
8. How old were you when you started styling and maintaining your own hair?
9. Do you wear protective styling? If yes, which styles do you choose to wear? And What reactions have you gotten in response for wearing that particular style?

Historical Framing/Perceptions/Stereotype of African hair textures
10. Do you think that past understandings of "good" or "bad" hair continues to shape how certain hair textures are perceived? Or do you believe that "good" or "bad" hair has evolved into different/new meanings when discussing hair?
11. Have you ever felt that someone made a preconceived perception about you as an individual based off the way your hair looked?
12. How do you feel about working in a professional setting with natural hair?
13. How has natural hair been stereotyped? And do you think that it is still stereotyped today?
14. What are some of the perceptions surrounding wearing our hair natural? From the past and perceptions currently shaping the present?
15. What do you think about the representation of Black women within the media and on reality television? How does it make you feel?
16. How do you feel about women being discriminated in the workplace because of their hair styles?
17. Do you believe that African hair textures or kinkier hair textures were given social meanings to indicate an aspect about an individual?

Natural Hair Movement
18. How has the significance of hair straightening changed within the 21st century? In the past it represented assimilation or social advantage. How do you think it has changed in the present or does it still hold similar meanings?
19. Considering all the pressure and stress that has surrounded the maintenance and care of kinkier hair textures, what do you think the significance is of the "Big Chop"?

20. How do you feel about the Natural Hair Movement? And what do you think are the goals of the Natural Hair Movement?
21. Do you identify as Black or as African American? And Why?
22. What do you think were the societal or cultural influences that kept women from wearing their hair naturally within the United States before the 21st century?
23. Do you think that the wearing of our hair naturally ties back to the Black Power movements in the 1960s and 1970s?
24. How do you feel about YouTube bloggers who do hair tutorials?
25. Do you think that they helped provide guidance or advice for hair care? Or did you solely rely on self-tests or advice from family?
26. Was your family supportive of your choice to go natural? Or are they supportive of your choice to continue relaxing or chemically straightening your hair?
27. Do you think colorism plays a role within the Natural Hair Movement or hair texture acceptance?
28. Do you think that the Eurocentric beauty standard holds a role or is shaping how Black hair is perceived by society?

Empowerment/Community/Sisterhood Networks
29. How do you think that Black women are empowering each other within the Black hair community?
30. In what ways if any do you empower others to embrace their hair texture?
31. When you have daughters of your own, how will you style their hair? Or what will you teach them about African American hair?
32. Do you discuss hair care practices with women who identify as non-Black?
33. What advice would you give you someone who recently started their hair journey or is learning how to truly understand their hair texture?
34. Do you think there is power in self-defining an Afrocentric beauty standard? Or building a collective over the perception, representation, and display of Black hair styles?