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Natural Hair: A Content Analysis of Black hair style and texture on YouTube Videos

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ABSTRACT

Within a society, the dominant ideology about aesthetics is instilled in individuals at a very early age. Hegemonic standards concerning the subject of hair style and texture has been an ongoing debate in the Black community for decades. A content analysis of videos on the video-sharing website YouTube was conducted to examine perceptions on African American women's hair style, the relationship between the perceptions on hair style and gender, and the function of African American women's' hair styles as a status symbol. The sample consisted of 150 YouTube videos generated by using the keywords, "hair and Black women." Three research questions were proposed. The data revealed that characters either portrayed natural hair positively or presented arguments on both sides of the issue without taking an explicit position. Both males and females responded positively toward women who wore natural hair. There was no significant relationship between gender and tone or portrayals of natural hair. Lastly, the relationship between hairstyle and status symbols was not tested because of the limited data on education and occupation. The findings suggest that individuals have started to reject hegemonically defined standards concerning the issue of hair and redefine it based on personal preference.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The subject of hair seems to be a trivial manner, but for women in general and especially women of color, hair is a huge part of their entire being. Researchers have noted that hair has been an important symbol and issue for African Americans dating back to slavery. Thompson (2009) explains the derivation of hair issues in the African American community.

> During the 18th century, it was fashionable for White men of the upper class to wear wigs; in turn, slaves who worked in the "big house" also took to wearing wigs, while others shaped their own hair to look like a wig. In order to further distance Blacks from their cultural roots, and denigrate any attempts to hang on to such African hair traditions, during this period, European scientists began to categorize the appearance of Blacks in the New World, including hair and skin tone. Dominated by fair skinned and straight hair people, "African hair was deemed wholly unattractive and inferior by the Europeans. Many white people went so far as to insist that Blacks did not have real hair, preferring to classify it in a derogatory manner as "wool" (Byrd and Tharps p. 14). Further, once Black beauty was juxtaposed with White beauty, a socially stratified hierarchy began to take shape. (p. 834)

Since, at least the 18th century, society has put emphasis on hair texture. Unfortunately, in the 21st century this emphasis has grown more extreme. Brown-White (2005) speaks about a color caste system that was created during the slavery era. This system aids in the endorsement of a hierarchy, in turn this hierarchy implies that the more one's physical attributes are that of Europeans—i.e. lighter skin color, little to none ethnic features, and the longer and straighter an individual's hair—the greater one's social value. If the individual does not measure up to these

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guideline, this system then perpetuates the act of self-hatred, low self-esteem, and the internalization of racism. Throughout the years, hair has been viewed as a direct representation of who a person is personally as well as socially. The triviality of something as simple as the texture of one's hair has the potential to encompass the whole essence of an individual. Stereotyping behaviors and negative attitudes are reflected onto those that do not measure up to society's standard of normality, even when the issue concerns something like hair. Those that do not adhere to society's standards are stigmatized from society. When individuals belong to a stigmatized group it means that, "social categories about which others hold negative attitudes, stereotypes, and beliefs, or which, on average, receive disproportionately poor interpersonal or economic outcomes relative to members of the society at large because of discrimination against members of the social category" (Crocker & Major, 1989, p. 609).

From childhood people, especially females are exposed to social comparisons such as ultrathin ideals like Barbie dolls and action figures like Wonder Woman. At a very young age the society promotes thin body type characters, therefore it is highly likely that children grow up believing these messages that thin is popular and attractive and being bigger is not. For example, researchers found that early exposure to Barbie doll images increased a group of 5-6 years old girl's body dissatisfaction and also heightened their desire for a thinner body (Dittmar, Halliwell, & Ive, 2006). Women are bombarded with messages and pressures from society about thinness and facial attractiveness. Hair is also an attribute that is considered a predictor of physical attractiveness. It is possible that media images about hair styles and texture also shape young women's beliefs about what type of appearance is acceptable and attractive. Similar to the Barbie doll study, one of the head writers for the children show *Sesame Street* adopted an Ethiopian little girl. The little girl's parents noticed that as she played more and more with

Barbie dolls, she started comparing her hair to that of the Barbie doll, and in turn developed negative feelings about her own hair. In order to encourage his daughter's self-esteem, the writer wrote a song called "I Love my Hair." A Muppet that was designed to look like a little girl from African origin performed it on the show. The video went viral on YouTube, and the video response was especially positive in the African American community. Many individuals wished that *Sesame Street* had come up with this type of video years ago, so they could have grown up feeling confident about their hair (Davis & Hopper, 2010). Hair is a feature that influences individual satisfaction both negatively and positively based on society's standards.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hair and Hegemonic Ideology

The behaviors and attitudes of conforming to society's normality encompass hegemonic ideology. Hegemony can be defined as

> [A]n 'organizing principle', or world-view (or combination of such world-views), that is
>
> diffused by agencies of ideological control and socialization into every area of daily life.
>
> To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the broad masses, it
>
> becomes part of 'common sense.' (Boggs, 1976, p. 39)

This ideology is infused into individuals' value and belief systems, morals, attitudes and behaviors. Thus, hegemonic ideology is a very powerful and influential force. For example, African Americans have been exposed to a steady stream of messages featuring straight and long haired individuals on media outlets like television and magazines. As stated earlier, this occurs at a very early age in children's lives as they watch cartoons, children's programming, and read books. Thus, women in this race have internalized this particular idea and, in turn, have taken the necessary steps to achieve this look. When there is a discrepancy between what an individual sees in the media or even what she sees in her day to day life that is glorified by society and what she sees in the mirror, it is only human nature that that individual would want to confirm to society's standard in order to be accepted.

As stated earlier, dating back to the 18th century an individual's hair type was a pertinent element in relation to the esteem that he/she was held to in society. Slavery and discrimination were social issues that segregated African Americans from the majority of society while physical features like hair type and textured perpetuated these issues. In order for Black women to see

their beauty beyond their kinks and knots, Madame C.J. Walker created a hair care line that softened and straighten the hair. "In the twentieth century, the 1905 invention of Madame C. J. Walker's hair softener, which accompanied a hair-straightening comb, was the rage. Hair straightening was a way to challenge the predominant nineteenth-century belief that Black beauty was ugly" (Owens-Patton, 2006, p. 29). So, in order to combat the notion that elements of being Black were ugly, some Black women chose to include Madame C.J Walker's techniques and tools into their hair care regiment. Whether it was by these individuals' conscience or unconscious efforts, they were adopting the hegemonic ideas of the mainstream society. Madame C.J. Walker was a trailblazer in the hair care industry. She paved the way for the creation of other straightening techniques, instruments and products that are still used today. One of the major methods that African Americans utilize in order to obtain straight and silky hair is the chemical relaxer. The chemical relaxer was created by accident by Garrett A. Morgan in 1910. A chemical relaxer is an extremely strong chemical that was originally made with lye. Most, if not all, relaxers are not made with lye today. The chemicals that are in the relaxer were designed to change the basic structure of the hair shaft. The relaxer penetrates the cortical layer and relaxes or loosens the curl pattern (McClain, no date). This again is an example of a forced effort to conform to the ideology of the mainstream society, which has shaped the attitudes and behaviors of individuals in this community. This effort has additionally caused these individuals to assume a particular behavior in order to be perceived as normal or, in this case, beautiful. Hair straightening, whether it is by a hair-straightening comb or a chemical relaxer, has been a non-ending controversial subject in the African American community. This controversy has caused a discrepancy between what some African Americans deem acceptable and normal in society and others who have a different idea of what is normal.

Stigmas

There is a negative stigma associated with African American who straighten their hair as well as a negative stigma associated with individuals who choose to wear their hair naturally. One of the major stigmas associated with African Americans who straighten their hair is that these individuals are trying to be someone that they are not. Some believe that an authentic Black person should wear their hair naturally and avoid emulating White standards of beauty by straightening their hair. In addition, to some a Black person's hair that is straightened is considered unnatural and fake (Thompson, 2009). So, it is the deviation from what some African Americans and the majority of society consider to be the norm, like refraining from straightening one's hair, which has created the controversy that has stigmatized these individuals.

This particular stigma in the Black community came to a head in the 1960s and 1970s during the Black Empowerment Movement also known as the Black is Beautiful social movement. During this time period, influential leaders like Malcolm X publicly disdained hair straightening agents used by Black individuals. Malcolm X believed that, Black people who utilize hair straightening techniques are attempting to imitate European aesthetics, which in turn has caused these individuals to feel ashamed and devalue their own beauty. (Owens-Patton, 2006). Individuals who straightened their hair were viewed as traitors that lacked the true sense of their identity, which was their Blackness. African Americans who straightened their hair were disapproved of and condemned by other natural hair wearing African Americans, which created a social stigma. This social stigma may not be as extreme as it was in the 1960s and 1970s, but it is still very much present today. Often times both then and now, advocates for natural hair are associated with the Black Power Movement and liberation. For example, Nikki Giovanni, a famous author, poet and civil rights activist, wrote a piece called "Of Liberator" that deals with

the potential risk of African Americans straightening their hair. Bell (2008) summarizes a portion of Giovanni's piece in her graduate thesis paper.

> Blacks must wear their hair naturally in order to achieve liberation; hair is an integral part of the revolution. But on the other hand, she is equating straightened hair with a subordinate mindset or a "white mind." By linking natural hair with Black Power, Giovanni suggests that women with straightened hair are anti-liberationist. (p. 13)

Some would believe that the issues of liberation and ethnic pride go way beyond the simplicities of the texture of one's hair. Giovanni is an example of someone who refuses to adopt the hegemonic practice of straightening hair. These individuals that choose to straighten their hair are stigmatized because of the belief that changing the natural texture of one's hair is like changing one's natural skin tone. It is like disregarding and forgetting the long history of their lineage. It is like giving into the idea that all aspects of Blackness are ugly and rejecting part of your natural make-up. Often times, individuals who oppose hair straightening takes on the viewpoint of Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B DuBois who believed that Blacks that straightened their hair are "sell outs." Black people were demoralized, killed, beaten, tortured, and segregated, among other things by White supremacists, and the fact that Black people would want to then look like the very people that for years despised them by trying to achieve a straight haired look is ludicrous. Negative attitudes and stereotypes towards "unnaturals" are formed because of this idea.

Traditionally speaking long, straight, and luxurious hair has been the cultural norm and the staple of beauty characteristic. There are some individuals who choose to deviate from the cultural norms outlined by society and take a counter-hegemonic stance. Erving Goffman (1986) also speaks about these individuals in his book.

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Starting with the very general notion of a group of individuals who share some values and adhere to a set of social norms regarding conduct and regarding personal attributes, one can refer to any individual member who does not adhere to the norms as a deviator, and to his peculiarity as a deviation. (p. 141)Since the custom in our society is to have straight hair, African American individuals that have choose to maintain their natural hair are going against the grain of society's standards.

Natural Hair movement

  There has been a huge natural hair movement among African Americans. More and more women are choosing to stop processing their hair with chemical relaxer and wear their naturally curly, kinky, and/or nappy hair. Though hair may be viewed as a trivial topic, individuals often hold strong opinions about the subject.   A study conducted by Brown-White (2005) to investigate the politics of hair found that most women consciously decided to go on a natural hair journey. They decided to go natural in order to redefine themselves on their own terms. These women have decided to reject the traditional standards of beauty based on European aesthetic that are highly accepted by African-Americans. The natural hair journey not only changed attitudes toward hair, but also has shifted other ideologies about Black aesthetic. The study goes on to say that women who take the natural hair route may possibly be viewed as rebelling against society's standards while asserting alternative ideas about beauty.   Beauty is an issue that permeates our society. The media influences this ideology through the promotion of particular standards on beauty. The media has trained the mind of the audience to view the real world in such a manner that individuals believe that what is seen on television or in magazines should also be true in real life. Though most people recognize that the ideal, fantasy, or perfect images of beauty in the media do not mirror or primarily exist in the real world, people still consciously

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and unconsciously are influenced by the messages. Images of women with long and straight hair are predominant even in media that is geared toward African Americans or individuals with ethnic hair. A study done by Brown (1997) found that in the magazines *Ebony* and *Essence,* women with natural hair were under represented while images of women with long flowing hair were featured more. This could very well imply that women who wear their hair naturally do not meet the standard of beauty or are less beautiful than women who choose to straighten their hair.

Natural Hair Movement

Hair, like so many other matters in the African American community, carries a long history of social issues. So, the question is why Black women are deciding to challenge society's standard of beauty and risk being stigmatized by society. A study was conducted to understand why some women of color have made the bold decision to transform their appearance from the Eurocentric standards of beauty to wearing their hair in its natural state. The researcher found that,

> For ten of these fourteen women, the decision to wear natural hair was a process of re-negotiation and self-discovery. Wearing the hair natural created a sense of pride, strength and even reconnection with self. In the words of one, 'it was a decision to understand me', in order to feel 'more natural, real and truthful'. Permed hair is described as a disconnection between hair and identity. A 24-year-old graduate student, writes, 'I look in the mirror and like what I see. I think I am prettier and my hair is stronger. We are connected again, and it no longer seems out of place. I feel more complete'. Another woman adds, 'I feel like I am seeing myself for the first time since I was a baby'. Four women claimed that their natural hair had no effect on how they felt about themselves and had nothing to do with their self-image. A 26-year-old New York administrator wrote, 'I don't know if my hair changed the way I feel about myself, however, I do feel that my hair is consistent with the person that I am.' (Brown-White, 2005, p. 303)

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Therefore, a connection or a reconnection with oneself was the predominant reason that these women in this study and many women today are going natural. Some women have chosen to deviate from the norm and reconnect with their true self and reject the constant messages presenting one standard of beauty. This deviation has empowered these women and liberated them from what society sees as normal.

YouTube and Natural Hair

Much of the research that has been conducted on African Americans and the issues of hair and hair texture have been done via surveys and interviews (e.g. Bellinger, 2007; Brown-White, 2005; Thompson, 2009; Brown, 2000). Few studies have used content analysis to research this topic. As content analysis is less intrusive and could provide more objective understandings of the topic, this study will conduct a content analysis of YouTube videos on African American women's hair style. YouTube is a video-sharing website that enables individuals to create a platform where they can express their thoughts and opinions about virtually anything by simply uploading a video on the website. YouTube is a growing phenomenon that illustrates changes in how individuals communicate. Ruggiero (2000) claims some scholars see the Internet "as the ultimate in community building and enrichment, through which users can create relationships online in ways that have never been possible through traditional media" (p. 20). Similar to the social networking site Facebook, YouTube contains a community of people who are joined together by things such as demographics, common interest, and/or occupation. Users are able to form their own personal approaches to communication. The topic of hegemonic and counter hegemonic ideologies regarding Black hair on YouTube videos is a subject that has not been examined before in this regard. Since there has been "a boom in

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beauty products, websites, blogs and YouTube channels aimed at black women with natural hair," it is fitting to explore this topic (Ross, 2011, p. 1).

Research Questions

In the African American community, the issue of hair is a two-edged sword. There is a stigma associated with African American women who chemically straighten their hair or alter their hair to look more European. Straightening or altering one's hair in this way also known as the achieving "good hair." Good hair is defined as "hair which is long, straight, and has a silky feeling or when one has seemingly Caucasian hair" (Bellinger, 2007, p. 67). In contrast, there is also a stigma associated with those other women that choose to leave their hair in the natural state without chemical relaxers, weaves or wigs. It is important to note that most individuals that come from an African origin have naturally curly or kinky hair, which for decades has been shunned by society. So, in order to achieve hair that is more European also referred to as "good hair" in the African American community, individuals go through a number of processes in order to transform their hair into what is mainly seen on television and advertisements. This leads to the following research question,

> **RQ1**: Is natural hair of African American women perceived negatively or positively on YouTube videos?

One of the major concerns that women have regarding wearing their natural texture hair is the feedback that they will receive from men in their lives and men in general. When some African American women decide to go natural, they will do the big chop (BC). The big chop is when one cuts chemically straightened hair off in order to allow their natural textured hair to grow from the root (Davis-Sivasothy, 2011). Individuals big chop in order to avoid having to deal with or maintain two different textures of hair (curly/kinky and straight). This in turn leaves the

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individual with extremely short hair, which is a barrier that can make "going natural" more frightening and more of a commitment. Short hair is more of a cultural norm for men, so when a woman cuts her hair, especially in the African American community she is viewed as more masculine. In Brown-White's (2005) research study she found that,

> Most [African American naturals] felt that people made assumptions about them, about their 'sexuality' (they thought they were lesbians), 'militancy', 'Afrocentricity', and 'cultural politics'. Several women reported that they were 'taken more seriously', 'approached with caution', and found to be 'intimidating' by men and women as well as African Americans and others. (p. 304).

Hair for decades has been a characteristic that has made a woman a woman. So, when a woman cuts her hair and on top of that makes the bold decision to become natural, her femininity and sexuality becomes a question to society. Another woman in this same study gives her experience of the reaction she received when she went natural.

> I remember when I first cut my hair short and natural, I went back to visit the church in which I grew up and where my mother was still a member. Mr. Heath on three occasions would ask me as he shook his head in dismay, 'What did you do to your hair?' or 'Why would you do that to yourself?' Finally, he relinquished his dismay and said, 'Well, I guess you have everything else [in terms of looks] just no hair.' (p. 302)

 Natural hair plays a major role on how individuals are perceived, and in turn impacts interactions with others. Negative feedback from others especially from loved ones of the opposite sex can have a major impact on one's self-esteem. A recent article was posted by a popular natural hair blogger named Curly Nikki about a husband that wanted to leave his pregnant wife because she cut all her hair off and went natural. The wife stated that her husband,

"never wanted me to go natural. He doesn't like "nappy" hair. He likes straight hair" (Autumn, 2011, p.1). After intense discussion the couple came to a solution. The wife compromised by promising to wear her hair straight (with a straightening comb or flat iron) sometimes, while the husband compromised by not requiring his wife to chemically relax her hair. In looking at the whole perspective, one could very well question the love this man has for his wife if he was going to leave her because she wore her hair in its natural state. On the other hand, one could also argue that the stigma associated with African American women wearing their natural hair is just that strong, that the husband's response to his wife's hair was normal considering the situation. Since YouTube is a newer medium, it is interesting to ask if men on YouTube respond to African women wearing natural hair in ways different from the stereotyping way. Meanwhile, I am interested in how women view other women who wear their natural hair and thus to understand if there is a gender difference. Therefore, the next three research questions investigate how men and women on YouTube respond to women who wear their natural hair.

RQ2a: Do men on YouTube respond negatively or positively to women that wear their natural hair?

RQ2b: Do women on YouTube respond negatively or positively to other women that wear their natural hair?

RQ2c: Is the difference between men and women's response to women who wear their natural hair significant?

Because there is a stigma connected with natural hair, a common concern that has existed for some time now is that wearing one's hair natural will keep a person from securing a good job. Byrd and Tharps (2001) wrote that in the 1800s after slavery ended, hair was looked at as a

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predictor of what job an individual could get. In addition, if an individual wanted to become a member of the Negro elite, most individuals had to have "good hair." The majority of corporations or big companies are run by and in large part represented by society's white elite. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" is a popular saying that many African Americans have chosen to follow when it comes to working in corporate America. In the workplace they choose to wear their hair straight and long in order to abide by the customs of society for acceptance, promotion, and power. "Straight hair is still the North American norm and is often needed to secure employment for African American women. [N]atural hairstyles (i.e. dreadlocks and twists) are viewed as more radical hairstyles in the professional world" (Bellinger, 2007, pp. 65-66). Being professional in the business world is very important. Appearance is a huge factor in being professional and one's hair influences the way he/she is perceived and the way that individual is treated. In Brown-White's research study, when asked about natural hair in the workplace, an African American management consultant wrote:

> Some of my white associates felt that I was unapproachable based on their assumptions about my hair. I have heard comments about my being a nonconformist because I wasn't wearing my hair permed. By making a conscious decision not to change my hairstyle, I have felt the need to overcompensate in other ways to express who I am and to overcome stereotypes. (Brown-White, 2005, p.304)

This is a prime example of how this particular woman was seen as a rebel or a defiant because she decided not to conform to society's standards. Often, African American women believe that wearing their hair straight or unnatural makes them available for more incentives in the workplace. By appearing more European, it then gives the impression of similarity, which in turn opens up the flood gates of opportunity.

Rochelle Ritchie, a television reporter, is an example of how conformation to society's standard of beauty helped her excel her in the workplace. When Ritchie first started out in television, she was told that she needed to get extensions so that her hair could be long and flowing. Ritchie took the advice and ran with it. She continued to wear extensions and wigs thereafter. She stated that, "Almost immediately I began to move up the TV ladder" (WPTVnews, 2010). Ritchie eventually got tired of the wear and tear of all the manipulation that she was doing to her hair, so she decided to cut all her hair off on television and go natural. She later explained that one of the big concerns that she had in going natural was looking professional. She now feels that she is just as professional as she did when her hair was longer. In addition, other women in this news special that decided to go natural, stated that they feared the stigmas associated with natural hair but the decision to let go of the identity that was wrapped up into their hair and embrace accepting their authentic selves was gratifying (WPTVnews, 2010). Thus, the next research question asks whether the style and/or texture of one's hair indicate an African American woman's status.

RQ3: Is the style and/or texture of one's hair viewed as a status symbol on YouTube videos?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

A content analysis was conducted to answer the research questions. Videos on YouTube with contents on African American women's hair style were analyzed. Variables such as hair style, perceptions of hair style, and status symbol were coded. Statistical analysis was conducted on these variables.

<u>Research Sample</u>

The website YouTube was searched utilizing the keywords "hair and Black women." The results yielded over 40,000 videos from this search. Many of these videos pertained to the utilization of different hair care products and styling procedures, which were not relevant to this research, therefore not viewed or coded. Starting at the beginning of the list, I chose 150 videos most relevant to the research topic as sorted by YouTube to code. If the title of the video pertained to styling hair or hair care product, or the additional information located under the video explained that the video did not pertain to the research topic the video was partially watched to ensure that the video was not on topic and excluded from the study. All videos in the search were only watched and coded one time, regardless of how many times it showed up on the search results list.

<u>Measurement and coding</u>

A codebook was established. The unit of analysis was each entire video, including both the audio and visual elements of the video. The views, length of the video, months it had been on YouTube and how many likes and dislikes the video received were also coded.

The main character(s) in each video were coded. A main character was someone who appeared for at least 10 seconds in the video. Overall there were there were 238 main characters that were coded. The gender, race (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, or other), marital status (single, married, divorced, widow/widower, or can't tell), hair texture/hairstyle (Straight/ Curly,Kinky,Dreadlocked,Braids/Twist, or other) was coded for each main character.

The tone of the video was categorized on a character level and an overall video level. If the character(s) supported natural hair, he/she portrayed natural hair positively by: mentioning the healthy hair benefits of natural hair, mentioning the discovery, rediscovery, and/or sense of ethnic pride, encouraging others to adopt a natural hair care regiment, describing a new definition of aesthetics in natural hair, stating the adverse physical and emotional traumas of processes individuals go through to obtain straight, long, and/or "good hair." If the character(s) supports chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves, he/she portrays natural hair negatively by: mentioning that hair in its natural state is bad, ugly, and/or wrong, mentioning that straight hair is acceptable, good, and/or beautiful, promoting chemical relaxers and straightening hair, promoting the idea of conforming to society's standards of straight and/or long hair, describing the benefits and promotions of having straight hair. If all the character(s) in the video portrayed natural hair positively, then the overall tone of that video was coded as support for natural hair. If all character(s) in the video portrayed natural hair negatively, then the overall tone of the video was coded as support for chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves. Lastly, the video was coded as ambiguous if the video contained: both positive and negative views of having natural hair (Example: An individual's self and ethnic pride is increased by wearing her natural hair, but she gets demoted at her place of employment because of her hair), or a debate.

Next, status was measured by coding the level of education obtained by the character(s) and the character's occupation. If the character had a High School Diploma or below, Some College, Bachelor's Degree, Higher than bachelors, or Other, it was coded as such. The character(s) field of occupation was coded as being Unemployed, Self employed, Manager/professional, Manual worker, Clerical/sales, Service Industry, Retired, or Other. A value of 9999 was assigned to represent "not applicable" if the video did not mention a character's status.

Inter-coder Reliability

The coders were one additional trained African American graduate female besides me. I was the primary coder, coding the entire sample of videos. The second coder coded 20% of the sample. Reliability of the coding scheme was assessed by having the additional coder code 20% of the final sample of videos. Cohen's Kappa was conducted to calculate inter-colder reliability. The final reliability coefficients for the variables ranged between .80 and 1.0. See Table 1 for the reliability coefficient for each variable.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable measured. Chi-square analysis was conducted to test the relationship between variables such as gender and perceptions on African American women's hair style.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Video Profile

Although descriptive information regarding the videos, such as the number of views,

ratings, length, and months the video has been on YouTube was not directly relevant to this

research, these variables give a general overview of the nature of the samples of coded videos.

The views variable ranged from 52 to 943,711 views (M=30685.19, SD= 107476.48). The

average length in seconds was (M=399.33, SD=204.44), ranging from 63 to 1,139 seconds. The

average months the sample of 150 videos have been on YouTube was (M= 26.59, SD= 13.552),

ranging from 3 to 73 months. Lastly, it is important to note that some video producers have

disabled the feature of "liking" or "disliking" a video (n = 3, 2%). In regard to the "like"

variable, it ranged from 0 to 1889 (M=140.90, SD= 283.17). The "dislike" variable ranged from

0 to 446 (M=13.54, SD=43.23).

Again, the genre of videos the sample consisted of did not directly relate to the research

questions, but this information is interesting to look at in regard to the types of videos that were

on this research subject. All videos were coded by the type of presentation that was produced:

Television News Source, Television/Online/Documentary, Television Entertainment, Individual

Generated Videos and Forums. In large part, the majority of the videos coded were individual

generated videos (121, 80.7%), followed by Television/Online/Documentary (13, 8.7%),

Television Entertainment (6, 4.7%), Television News Source (1, 4.0%), and Forum (3, 2.0%).

Character #1 Profile

Character #1s were coded based on who appeared or spoke first in the video. The majority of character #1s were African American (130, 94.2%), followed by White (5, 3.6%), Other (2, 1.4%), and Asian (1, .7%) More than half were female (91, 65.5%), and (48, 34.5%) were male. Character #1s that reported being single were (20, 62.5%), married character #1s were (12, 37.5%) Mostly all had curly, kinky, dreadlocked, braided, or twisted hair (64, 71.9%), followed by character with straight hair (24, 27%), and one character in the "other" category (1, .7%)

Character #2 Profile

Similarly to character #1s, almost all character #2s' producers were African American (37, 92.5%), followed by White (1, 2.5%), Asian (, 2.5%), and Hispanic (1, 2.5%) . More than half were female (28, 70.0%) and (12, 30.0%) were male. Character #2s who reported being single were (6, 75.0%) married character #2s were (2, 25.0%) . Nearly half had curly, kinky, dreadlocked, braided, or twisted hair (13, 48.1%), followed by characters with straight hair (12, 44.4%), and characters in the "other" category (2, 7.4%).

Since there were only 40 characters 2s and even fewer character 3s, their data were not used for the main analyses addressing the research questions. That is, for the main analyses, I only used data on character 1 and overall video.

Research Question #1

RQ1 asked if natural hair is perceived negatively or positively on YouTube videos. Of the 150 videos, 84(60%) of character #1s supported natural hair, 48(34.3%) had an ambiguous stance, followed by 8(5.7%) of character1s who supported chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves. Therefore, in almost all of the videos, characters either portrayed natural hair positively or presented arguments on both sides of the issue without taking an explicit position. In addition,

the overall tone of the 150 video sample followed a similar pattern. The number that were in support of natural hair was 84 (56%), while 5(3.3%) supported chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves, and 61(40.7%) took an ambiguous stance. So, the majority of the videos portrayed natural hair positively.

Research Question #2

Among the 150 videos coded, 139 of character #1 had a valid value in both the gender and tone variable. There were 48 male characters, among whom 33(68.8%) supported natural hair, 4(8.3%) supported chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves, and 11(22.9%) took an ambiguous stance. In regard to RQ2a, men responded positively to women that wore their hair in its natural state. The 150 videos also included 91 female characters, among whom 50(54.9%) supported natural hair, 4(4.4%) supported chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves, and 37(40.7%) took an ambiguous stance. Considering RQ2b, similarly to the males' perspective, women also responded positively to women that wore their natural hair. To examine RQ2c a Chi-square analysis was carried out. The analysis suggested that there was no significant relationship between gender and tone or portrayals of natural hair ($X^2 = 4.71$, df = 2, p = .095). In essence, males and females had similar views toward natural hair.

Research Question #3

Concerning education, character #1s had 8 cases that had a valid value in both hair style and education. There were 2 characters wearing straight hair, among whom represented the group High School diploma or below and 1(50%) that represented some college 1(50%). There were 6 characters wearing curly, kinky, dreadlocked, braided, or twisted hair, among whom 0(0%) had High School diploma or below, 2(33.3%) had some college, 2(33.3%) had a Bachelor's degree, 1(16.7) had Bachelor's Degree or higher, and 1(16.7%) had the "other" forms

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of education There were 10 cases of character #1 that had a valid value in both the variables hair style and occupation. There were 3 characters wearing straight hair, among whom 2(66.7%) that were self-employed and 1(33.3%) that worked in Clerical/sales. Seven characters wore curly, kinky, dreadlocked, braided, or twisted hair, among whom 1(14.3%) was unemployed, 2(28.6%) was self-employed, 1(14.3%) was a Manager/professional, and 3(42.9%) that were in the service industry In response to RQ3, the vast majority of the videos that were coded, did not mention anything about educational level and or occupation. Because of the small sample obtained, no significant level was tested on the association between hairstyle and/or occupation.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

It is amazing the emphasis that society puts on the physical attributes of an individual, especially concerning hair style and texture. There were over 40,000 YouTube videos on this subject, and whether this emphasis is condemning natural hair wearers or uplifting natural hair wearers the vast amount of videos regarding this topic is overwhelming. This proves that this issue of black women and Black hair is hugely popular. The data revealed that the majority of males and females on YouTube videos respond positively to natural hair, while the other part of the majority respond ambiguously toward hair in general. This means that they presented an opinion on both sides of the argument.   It is also important to note that there was a very small number of individuals who supported straightened hair styles. One could conclude that the reason for the small number of supporters of straightened hair is that people tend not to discuss, debate or mention issues that society has categorized as normal. For example, most Americans are meat eaters, so eating meat has become a norm in society (Hamershlag, 2011). When searching the keywords "why people should be meat eaters" and "why people should be vegetarians," the meat eater search yielded fewer results (Youtube.com). Eating meat is deemed as a normal practice in society, therefore for some, extreme discussion about the matter maybe a little redundant. This also may be the case in this study, individuals are so accustom to the dominant ideas of society about hair that they feel that there is no need to address the subject. Males and females in essence had similar responses to women who wear their natural hair. In addition, the relationship between hair and status was examined. From the small sample obtained, the data suggest that there was no association between hair style and/or texture and educational or occupational level.

Implications

Hair in the African American community in times past has been viewed as either a blessing or a curse. Surprisingly, YouTube videos portray natural hair positively. Almost all the of videos coded on YouTube for this research featured an African American male or female. The results that this content analysis yielded suggested that more and more African Americans view their natural hair as a blessing, rather than a curse, thus opposing traditional hegemonic practices. Since the beginning of time there have been standards of normality that are set in society. These set of standards tells society what is acceptable, normal and right. The standards that are laid out by society play a vital role in shaping attitudes, behaviors, and perception of reality. In turn, cultural practices are influenced and then infused into our ideology. This research study is an example of how individuals in the African American community are developing counter hegemonic norms. The false consciousness that was once present has turned into a clear awareness of the force that dominates society causing there to be one standard of normality. There has been empirical research done on the internalization of societal messages and the effects that it has on women's self-esteem, body image and overall perception of self (Thompson & Stice, 2001; Ahern, Bennett, & Hetherington 2008, Stice, 2002). Though this research study is not on those topics, hair, just like thinness, is inclusive in what women deem important when it comes to aesthetics. In those studies, ethnic group identity seemed to have played a vital role in evaluating the susceptibility of adopting mainstream ideology, attitudes, and behaviors about self (Abrams, Allen, & Gray, 1993; Phan and Tylka, 2006). Identifying with one's ethnic group should be taught at an early age because of the premature overexposure to different images that have the potential to stunt the self-confidence of an individual, especially a little girl. Similar to the *Sesame Street* episode, "I love my hair", there is a popular children's

book called *Happy to be Nappy*. In the book the author, bell hooks, encourages little girls to be confident and to appreciate the beauty of natural hair (hooks, 1999). hooks portrays "Black hair as hopeful, joyful, and happy, hooks nurtures the self esteem of those who, historically and socially, have been positioned as the *other* and pushed to the outer margins of society" (Hopson, p. 34). Reinforcing certain ideologies like Black hair in its natural state is beautiful aides in counter acting negative stereotypes about hair.

Natural hair can be seen as a physical stance against dominant appearance norms. In Weitz's (2001) research study about power, women and hair, an African American woman explains that wearing her hair naturally,

> expresses my individuality as well as my value of my heritage and my pride in what is distinctly me, distinctly mine…I consider myself in a constant state of protest about the realities of cultural alienation, cultural marginalization, cultural invisibility, discrimination, injustice, all of that. And I feel that my hairstyle has always allowed me, since I started wearing it natural, to voice that nonverbally. (p. 680)

This is an example of how hair for Black individuals is not just simply hair. It truly has a, "profound implication for how African American women experience the world (Jacobs-Huey, p.3). In the previous example, we see that hair is not only an expression of culture and heritage, but a continual protest against inequalities and traditional norms in society. The videos coded on YouTube reveal that individuals are no longer allowing stereotypical messages concerning hair dictate their perceptions and beliefs. They are choosing to redefine aesthetics on their own terms.

The results from this content analysis imply that the stigmas that have been previously associated with women who wear their naturally curly, kinky, or nappy hair are now fading.

This research study provides evidence that African Americans have started to embrace natural hair. Though individuals from other races where included in this study, the sample was not big enough to get a thorough examination of the relationship between African American women's hair and individuals belonging to other racial groups. Many times people in general tend to be uncomfortable with what they do not understand, especially if it is not the standard in society like wearing natural hair. In a YouTube video a newly natural woman by the name of FreedomHair79 tells of her experience with a co-worker in the video. FreedomHair79 stated that she went to work after just cutting her chemical relaxer out of her hair and one of her Caucasian co-workers looked at her with disgust as soon as she walked in the door. The co-worker then exclaimed, "Why are you wearing that Afro, you African American! What are you doing moving on up to the Eastside (referencing the popular 1970s Black television program *The Jefferson's*)?" This is an example of a major stigma associated with natural hair; that the natural hair wearer is Afrocentric or an extremist when it comes to ethnic pride. Freedomhair79 later stated that her co-worker made her feel like she did not have a right to wear her hair in its natural state (FreedomHair79, 2010). The box that the fundamental nature and the acceptability of beauty have been put in has caused individuals to condemn anyone who goes against what is considered normal.

It is important to note that most would view the Caucasian co-worker's statement as racist. Cultural stigmas or stereotypes "can operate beneath the radar screen; they can persist even in individuals who consciously reject prejudice toward blacks" (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2005, p.7). So, stigmas can be so strong that an individual who is not racist or a person who does not practice discriminatory behavior can be unconscious of their behaviors or perceptions toward a certain group of people. Erving Goffman speaks about three types of stigmas, physical

deformities, blemishes of individual character, and tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion. Though the issue of hair type does not fit comfortably in any of the categories it is still a thing that carries stereotypes, preconceived notions and negative attitudes such as, mental illness and alcohol addiction—which are in the second category of stigmas that Goffman writes about in his book. In the case of this study, both natural and straight haired women have stigmas associated with them. African Americans that make a choice to get a chemical relaxer or wear their hair in a weave or wig have the potential to be viewed as self-hating, sell outs, fakes, or wannabes. African Americans that wear their natural hair have the potential to be viewed as, rebels, extremists, poor, uncivilized, or barbaric.

In large part, mostly all African American male and female individuals that were included in the sample had positive attitudes and perceptions toward natural hair. The attitudes toward chemically straightened hair, weaves and/or wigs was drastically different. This implies that both African American male and females are learning to embrace natural locks. The taboo phrase "nappy hair" was once used to reference the type of hair that African slaves had and to furthermore stigmatize Black hair (Williams, 2010). This study has revealed that "nappy hair" is no longer a taboo statement, but in some cases has turned into a term of endearment (Ohmynappyhair, 2009).

Similar to the 1970s Black is Beautiful movement; there is a Black Girls Rock and a Natural Girls Rock campaign that is very popular in the black community. Both campaigns promote the idea that there are no beauty standards and that beauty starts from the inside and beams outwardly (http://www.myblackisbeautiful.com/). Campaigns like these create an awareness that has the potential to lead to the abolishment of hegemonic beliefs about hair and stigmas relating to this issue. Domineering social practice even about hair style or texture has

the potential to lead to stigmas. Stigmatizations are a form of hate and discrimination no matter whether it is about hair, race, religion, or a deformity. Although we have come a long way since the 1800s, we still as a community have a long way to go, especially concerning the issue of hair.

Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations that should be acknowledged in this study. One of the differences between a survey or an interview and a content analysis is that in a survey or interview, a researcher can blatantly ask the respondent about their demographic information, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions. During this research, if the character on the YouTube video did not mention certain information such as if he/she was employed or achieved a certain level of education, it could not be measured. This meant that some variables have small sample sizes. Small sample sizes have the potential to make finding a significant relationship between variables difficult. In addition, most of the videos that were coded were individually generated videos. Possible future studies may use a larger sample size in order to yield more of a variety of the types of videos to be coded (i.e. television/online documentary, television news source). A larger sample would also racially diversify the sample for the study. Possible future studies may focus on individuals who are outside of the African American or African origin race. It would be interesting to get a large sample of other racial groups' perspective on hair and Black women. In addition, future studies may also look at different countries' perceptions on Black hair and measure those results and compare them to the results of individuals from the United States.

Table 1

*Intercoder Reliability Scores (*N = *30)*

Items	Cohen's Kappa
Video Tone	0.80
Media Type	1.0
Race1	0.82
Gender1	1.0
Martial1	0.90
Hair1	1.0
Character1 Tone	0.88
Race2	1.0
Gender2	1.0
Martial2	1.0
Hair2	1.0
Character 2 Tone	0.89
Education1	1.0
Position1	1.0
Education2	0.80
Position2	1.0

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APPENDICES

Codebook

Type of Video:
1. Television News Source
   (Example: Local/National/World News programs)
2. Television/Online/Documentary
   (Example: Independent Projects, Discovery Health, etc.)
3. Television Entertainment
   (Example: Talk Shows, Entertainment news programs, movies, etc.)
4. Individual Generated Videos
   (Example: Homemade videos, blogs, narratives)
5. Forum
   (Example: A meeting or gathering)

Main Characters (**Individuals that appear 10 or more seconds in the video**)
Main Character: #1
Main Character: #2
Main Character: #3

Main Characters' Demographics/ Physical Characteristics

Race
1. White
2. Black
3. Asian
4. Hispanic
5. Other/Can't tell

Gender
Male/Female 1/2

Marital Status:
1. Single
2. Married
3. Divorced
4. Widow/Widower
5. Can't tell

Womens'Hairstyle/Hair texture
Straight **0**
Curly,Kinky,Dreadlocked,Braids,Twist **1**
Other (i.e.bald) **2**

1. Supports Natural Hair
2. Supports chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves
3. Ambiguous

1. Supports Natural Hair: If the character portrays natural hair positively by
    1. Mentioning the healthy hair benefits of natural hair
    2. Mentioning the discovery, rediscovery, and/or sense of ethnic pride
    3. Encouraging others to adopt a natural hair care regiment
    4. Describing a new definition of aesthetics in natural hair
    5. Stating the adverse physical and emotional traumas of processes individuals go through to obtain straight, long, and/or "good hair."

2. Supports chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves: If the character portrays natural hair negatively by
    1. Mentioning that hair in its natural state is bad, ugly, and/or wrong
    2. Mentioning that straight hair is acceptable, good, and/or beautiful
    3. Promoting chemical relaxers and straightening hair
    4. Promoting the idea of conforming to society's standards of straight and/or long hair.
    5. Describing the benefits and promotions of having straight hair.

3. Ambiguous: If character mentions
    1. Both positive and negatives of having natural hair (Example: An individual's self and ethnic pride is increased by wearing her natural hair, but she gets demoted at her place of employment because of her hair)
    2. A debate
    3. Video presents arguments on both side of the issue without taking an explicit position.

Character #2 Tone
1. Supports Natural Hair: If the character portrays natural hair positively by
    1. Mentioning the healthy hair benefits of natural hair
    2. Mentioning the discovery, rediscovery, and/or sense of ethnic pride
    3. Encouraging others to adopt a natural hair care regiment
    4. Describing a new definition of aesthetics in natural hair
    5. Stating the adverse physical and emotional traumas of processes individuals go through to obtain straight, long, and/or "good hair."

2. Supports chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves: If the character portrays natural hair negatively by
    1. Mentioning that hair in its natural state is bad, ugly, and/or wrong
    2. Mentioning that straight hair is acceptable, good, and/or beautiful
    3. Promoting chemical relaxers and straightening hair
    4. Promoting the idea of conforming to society's standards of straight and/or long hair.

     5. Describing the benefits and promotions of having straight hair.

   3. Ambiguous: If character mentions
     1. Both positive and negatives of having natural hair (Example: An individual's self and ethnic pride is increased by wearing her natural hair, but she gets demoted at her place of employment because of her hair)
     2. A debate
     3. Video presents arguments on both side of the issue without taking an explicit position.

Overall Tone of video:
     1. Supports Natural Hair
     2. Supports chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves
     3. Ambiguous

1. Supports Natural Hair: All characters in the video portray natural hair positively
2. Supports chemically straightened hair/wigs/weaves: All characters in the video portray natural hair negatively
3. Ambiguous: If video contains
     1. Both positive and negatives of having natural hair
     2. A debate
     3. Video presents arguments on both side of the issue without taking an explicit position

Status

Education
1=High School Diploma or below
2=Some College
3=Bachelor's Degree
4=Higher than bachelors
5=Other

Occupation
1=Unemployed
2=Self employed
3=Manager/professional (professionals include for example teachers, doctors, lawyers, computer analyst)
4=Manual worker (e.g.factory worker, maid, janitor, construction housekeeper)
5=Clerical/sales (e.g.receptionist, secretary/e.g.customer service representative, sales associate)
6=Service Industry (e.g.food service, daycare provider, cosmetologist, military)
7=Retired
8=Other