

Perception, Politics and Personal Journey of Black Female Hair

African American Women Hair: Perception, Politics and Personal Journey of Black Female Hair

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Abstract

Throughout history the stigma and politics surrounding the way black women choose to showcase their natural hair has contributed to the diminishing of identities among many young women in their communities. This study will examine how African American women's hair may be negatively viewed by society and how some perceptions have driven appearance. Black hair is perceived by society as unprofessional and unclean. The fact of the matter remains that it is neither. Black hair is misunderstood among many including its own community. It is no secret that many can say that mass media and specifically television has led us to believe that there is an ideal standard of beauty established in society. For most African American women, that standard is impossible to attain without the discretion of their natural beauty. However, while this may be true, there are multiple contributing factors that may have also impacted to the diminishing of black natural hair.

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Framework of the Study

The study is based around a dual theory, which examines the historical context of this group, their present mindset, and how they are choosing to evolve as they move forward. As complicated as it sounds identity, and hair in African American is synchrony for Black women (Opie & Phillips, 2015). For many, this is a crucial part of how they merge ethnicity to beliefs, the pressure from media, workplaces and even in black households is a very challenge to overcome. Hair in African American culture is an intense journey that contributes significantly to both culture and character of many Black women around the world. The double consciousness, (Du Bois, 1968) Black women face spans within a mental struggle for example thoughts such as “That hair is a no-no girl!” “Will he like me if my hair is short and nappy?” “I feel like I am beautiful again with my extensions!” These are all verbiage that has been expressed by a lot of Black women. I chose this topic because these are statements that at one point or another in my life I myself and other African American women I have heard uttered, cried, and rejoicingly expressed. I have cut, colored, straighten, ripped, sewed, burned, and recently shaved my entire head off. Yes, I said shaved, and by far this was one time in my life I ever felt so free because this time it was such a liberating experience that changed my life forever. This euphoria yet redemptive experience set me on a deeper path to finding myself, now imagine the experiences of other African American women and their own revelations impacted on how they now identify.

Past-Historical Culture of Black Hair America

To comprehend how whiteness saturated the United States' social ideas of beauty and influence how African American women see their beauty one must understand the historical roots of these stereotypes. Black women have been long terrorized and haunted by white beauty standards but for it to become the ideal preference of beauty. To be established as the status quo

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whiteness first had to institute its dominance in America (Patton 2006). Since the beginnings of slavery in the United States, the holiness of white supremacy justified slavery by preserving the idea that Black people were distinctively inferior to white people from their genetic features such as the wider noses, darkly pigmented skin, wider body frames, and their coiled hair textures (Hill, 2002) deeming them a threat or heathens. As laborers in physically vigorous fieldwork, African American women were defeminized because of their looks while white women participated in little to no field labor. Fieldwork was seen as a masculine task, and white women were seen as fragile and womanly for such work (Patton 2006). This now presents a clear separation between the two women where as is seen less than from these chronological accounts which can result in low self-esteem and worth.

Present-State of Mind of African American Women

Ultimately, while there is great evidence of internalization of mainstream beauty ideals, African American women are still mutual on whether they believe stigma and race is the absolute reason for the devaluation of their self-value. Films such *Back to Natural*, *Scott-Ward*, *PHD* depicts this journey. As a result of white societal power, Black women are being racialized and are required to adapt to a European standard of cultural, social beliefs, and ways of philosophy to be recognized as equals. Though Black beauty exists within an American culture it is far from being accepted which causes many African American women to internalize somewhat failure or lack, in retrospective. A great deal of their natural selves is discouraged from their afro kinky hair types to their melanin skin tones for a white-dominated culture to prevail. During the conversations for the podcast with experts and professional black women, they discussed many factors of their hair journey. Ultimately most of them said they are now more confident in how they choose to display their natural selves proving that identity is based on individuality.

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Conclusion

It is something powerful to be said about a legacy, leaving a legacy is a way to contribute depth and value that will amount to immeasurable greatness. When a people or creed decides to build a legacy, they do so with intent and diligence and hope it will be inherited for generations to come. Many groups such as this group of young African American women have been forced to abandon parts of themselves which is integral for how their future generation identifies. Though it may not be the intention for their own culture to participate in this journey, it does not take away that from the fact that they may have done so. As a victim of this very experience of being told by my mother and family member that my natural hair and image needed to change it caused years of internal struggles.

The erasure of someone's identity is never ok and it does not matter who or what started it. What matters is that these demeaning traditions are exposed for the effects they cause. It is my goal that this paper ultimately is dissected and used as creative literature. I hope to use this as inspiration to story tell whether that is in children's books or create multiple podcasts that gives black women a platform to tell of their own experiences and journey in the hope to inspire change in our own culture. In both homes and classrooms, this vicious cycle of the attack on black hair and image must be stopped. This study could be vital in adding another context to scholarly resources that seek to eradicate discrimination among images.

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