1   **The Impact of Hair on African American Women's Collective Identity Formation**

2   During the Black Pride Movement, African Americans' newly adopted styles became a

3   visual symbol of resistance and represented a commitment to the racial equality movements of

4   the time. The Civil Rights Movement brought to the forefront enhanced interest and concern for

5   cultural elements of individuals and their communities (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Individuals

6   within the Black Pride and Black Power Movement used conscious, overt, and subtle actions to

7   construct a collective identity (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998; Mercer, 1991). Specifically, "a

8   diverse range of strategies and ideologies [that] were linked by the common tendencies towards

9   political, economic, and cultural liberation of people of African descent" (Kuumba & Ajanaku,

10   1998, p. 229). In this vein, the use of hair by African American women during the period can be

11   investigated as a form of activism, both visibly and symbolically. For African Americans,

12   historically and contemporarily, hair has acted as a "means of representing themselves and

13   negotiating their place in the world" (Jacobs-Huey, 2006, p. 4). Black hair is an expressive

14   element of appearance and the body that offers insights into the individual and the collective

15   culture.

16   Historically in the United States, a cultural preference for Eurocentric features deemed as

17   beautiful has dominated values of appearance. As race was often tied to biological aspects,

18   elements such as hair and skin were politicized and given negative or positive connotations and

19   meanings, which were often internalized socially and psychologically (Mercer, 1991). For

20   African Americans and other marginalized groups, adherence to dominant standards was often

21   employed to avoid persecution and to "fit in" thus attempting to increase social mobility

22   (Walker, 2007). African Americans implemented numerous strategies to move beyond the

23   prejudice, discrimination, and oppression they faced from the dominant society, including

24   changing their physical features, particularly those of skin color and hair texture, to follow

25   mainstream values (Gill, 2001; Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd, 2014). Adherence to these aesthetics

26   was largely upheld by African Americans and the Black beauty industry until the early 1960s

27   (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). During the 1960s, styles such as the afro were used as a point of

28   liberation from White-dominated beauty culture. The use of hair and appearance that physically

29   and metaphorically linked African Americans to Africa facilitated a counter-hegemonic process,

30   which helped redefine cultural aesthetics both within and outside of the Black community

31   (Mercer, 1991).

32   While research regarding the use of African-inspired textiles, garments, and symbols

33   during the Civil Rights era is rich, there is less examination of African American's daily

34   experiences during this time. An important element of appearance, African American hair has

35   held a long history of cultural pride and significance (Rooks, 1996). Because African American

36   hair holds a strong relationship to cultural meanings and societal values, it provides an

37   opportunity to examine the larger society's effect on a wearer's decisions and behaviors (Walker,

38   2007). Specifically, the researchers sought to understand how African American women

39   perceived their hair choices in creating and negotiating their collective identity during the Civil

40   Rights and Black Pride Movements.

41   The position of African American women as members of two marginalized groups, both

42   racial and gender oppressed identities within dominant society, offers "a powerful lens through

43   which to evaluate society and a base from which to change it" (Brooks, 2007, p. 63). Examining

44   the lived experiences of African American women's everyday choices is not widely covered

45   within historical contexts of political engagement. Although the political aspects of the Civil

46   Rights Movement and some of the powerful figures involved, such as Angela Davis, an early

47   1970's icon of Black female militancy, and "epitome of a Black woman gone bad," have been

48   researched extensively; the understanding of the movement's broader impact and the role of

49   African American women has not (Johnson, 2012, p. 18). Furthermore, the use of appearance as

50   a symbol of societal change, demonstrates the importance of dress behaviors in our society. As a

51   remedy to the misrepresentation and exclusion of African American women, this research offers

52   an opportunity to learn from seven women's stories to help inform the history of the period and

53   the people who lived within it.

Literature Review

Culture and Collective Identity

56   The examination of contemporary social movements through new social movement

57   theory, explores the social, psychological, and cultural foundations of movements (Whittier,

58   1997). Moving beyond large-scale, conventional movements, such as labor disputes in the early

59   twentieth century, new social movement theory includes the everyday actions of individuals,

60   particularly those with similar ideals and goals (Hunt & Benford, 2004). These individuals often

61   informally arrange into groups that hold many shared ideals. Through action, the "members'

62   common interests, experiences, and solidarity" form which helps to create a collective identity

63   (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, p. 105). As individuals engage in the social movement, they

64   internalize new meanings and understandings of themselves, often marked by appearance,

65   creating a collective identity based on the group's political ideology and agenda (Whittier, 1997).

66   Collective identity serves to connect the individual with the larger social movement.

67   Whittier (1997) discusses social movements as "clusters of organizations, overlapping networks,

68   and individuals that share goals and are bound together by a collective identity and cultural

69   events" (p. 761). Individuals can mold their identities to fit within a collective identity (Hunt &

70   Benford, 2004). The construction of a political version of self can align with a collective vision,

71   thus the ideology behind the movement is promoted and put into action. Together, like-minded

72   individuals can work in opposition of the dominant viewpoint and internalize collective values

73   that push the movement forward (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998). Individuals that form into a

74   collective are created, developed, and changed throughout the course of the movement, reflecting

75   the thoughts and activism of the group (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). As politics and structures shift,

76   opportunities are presented for new groups of people to create change in society.

77   For the African American community, Civil Rights reforms from 1954 to 1965 sparked

78   what would become the Black Power Movement from 1966 to 1974 (Wilson, 2013). Imagery of

79   the Civil Rights Movement began to shift from efforts pursued by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to

80   those put forth by Black Nationalists, such as the Black Panther Party. The rhetoric of the

81   movement widened in scope from non-violent aspirations for equality and integration to more

82   militant demands for equity and separation. A key leader in the movement Stokely Carmichael

83   became a pro-Black activist in the Power Movement, popularizing the phrase, "Black Power"

84   (Walker, 2007). In addition to the more radical political stance, a moderate sentiment of "Black

85   is Beautiful" was widely adopted and became heavily popularized both within and outside of

86   African American communities (Freeland, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In this way the Black Power

87   Movement differed from the initial non-violent approach to the Civil Rights Movement. This

88   example provides evidence of how, through collective action, the stage was set for new groups of

89   individuals to move the cause forward (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998).

90   In contemporary movements the collective's action is rooted in "cultural symbols [that]

91   emerge and serve as representations and conduits for the social movement ideas and

92   philosophies" (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998, p. 229). Culture holds a duality, in that it can help to

93   promote oppressive values, but can also be a source of resistance and liberation (hooks, 1991). A

94   culture of resistance is often used by those who are marginalized. This culture of resistance

95   operates under a set of combined values, beliefs, and practices that lessens the effects of

96   oppression and differentiates itself from dominant culture. The efforts of many African

97   Americans to distance themselves from White dominance in their beauty and appearance

98   practices presented a new way of combating racial inequality during the 1960s and 1970s

99   (Mercer, 1991).

African American Hair as Collective

101   The rejection of dominant culture is typically a beginning stage in a resistance movement

102   (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998). For groups that have been historically marginalized, oppositional

103   identity and appearance often mirrors their indigenous culture. For example, for African

104   Americans, negative stigma surrounding characteristically African physical features was used as

105   a divisive tool during slavery (Mercer, 1991; Sanders, 2011). In an effort to suppress Africaness

106   post-slavery, the Black beauty industry developed and centered on techniques and products that

107   emulated European-White beauty standards. As African Americans fought for equality and civil

108   rights, there was enhanced recognition of looking towards traditional African culture as a source

109   of pride and strength. In the Black Pride and Power Movements, African Americans rejected, in

110   part, White dominance and reclaimed African pride. The Black Pride stance held the idea that it

111   was important to embrace everything about being Black and the culture instead of trying to adopt

112   mainstream values, ideas, and traditions (Mercer, 1991). For that time, the natural, or afro, was

113   widely adopted and provided an example of "culturally contextualized everyday resistance"

114   (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998, p. 227).

115   The afro or natural style came to symbolize collective identities rooted in Black Pride and

116 other counterhegemonic efforts. For some, these natural hairstyles were used to signify ideals

117 related to racial equality and publicize individuals' political stance by linking their aesthetics to

118 African heritage. Eventually, the adoption of Black aesthetics was as much a part of the

119 movement as protesting or boycotting. It was the embrace of everything Black and the

120 reclaiming of African heritage (Byrd & Tharps, 2014).

121   Thus, the cultural expression of hair was incorporated into efforts for racial equality and

122 self-determination. Natural hair helped to inform the collective identity, assisting the

123 continuation of the larger equal rights movement (Mercer, 1991). Symbolically, for the African

124 American community as a whole, hair choices represented a resistance to hegemony and

125 commitment to racial equality. By 1969, the number of sympathizers of the Black Pride

126 Movement increased. The dialogue of Black Pride was the less extreme option to that of the

127 more radical Black Power, which denounced all forms of non-Black consumerism and capitalism

128 and became synonymous with the Black Panther Party. The aesthetics of the Party asserted that

129 by straightening hair and using skin lightening cream, Black culture was rejected out of shame

130 (Hohle, 2013). Because of its seemingly radical association, the afro was illustrative of a political

131 stance.

132   Pride in African heritage extended from learning native languages and histories, to taking

133 part in cultural aspects like dress and even food, which seemed less threatening than the

134 supposed violent Power Movement portrayed in the mass media (Walker, 2007). This was

135 evident in the evolution of acceptance of natural hairstyles as a popular modern style versus a

136 political expression. As the afro was more widely worn, it also became more commercialized

137 with beauty products to achieve the style, ad campaigns, and other popular culture usage.

138   Eventually, the progress of the movement and commonness of the hairstyle transitioned the afro

139   from overtly political to a fashionable trend (Mercer, 1991).

140   **Collective Construction**

141   Taylor and Whittier (1992) identify three factors that create collective identity in social

142   movements: 1) boundaries to differentiate the challenging group from the dominant; 2)

143   developed consciousness that presents and defines the challenging group's social position; and 3)

144   negotiation of meaning, symbols, and actions used by the challenging group to resist and

145   reconstruct dominant systems. Each factor of collective identity creation is "analytically

146   distinct," but occurs simultaneously and in connection, as the individual develops a political

147   position and their collective identity within a group is formed (Hunt & Benford, 2004, p. 442).

148   Boundaries mark differences between the collective and the dominant. Through activism and

149   organization, the collective redefines the boundaries of marginality as a site for resistance

150   (hooks, 1991; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Consciousness within the group and its members is

151   created as they visualize shared values, missions, and beliefs that resist dominant ways of

152   thinking, knowing, and doing. Movement goals and activities are justified through this common

153   set of interests. Throughout the construction of the collective identity, negotiations of everyday

154   politically-based actions are carried out to undermine the dominant and advocate for justice

155   (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Lastly, actions of negotiation can include challenging the norm,

156   overcoming self-hatred, and demanding fair treatment (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998).

157   The Black Pride and Power Movements politicized the everyday lives of Black people

158   and their objectification by dominant power, drawing attention to the boundaries between Black

159   and White positions in society (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998; Mercer, 1991). The embrace of a pro-

160   Black rhetoric and surrounding activism brought forth new values and perspectives in relation to

161   racial equality and ultimately increased awareness in the Black experience. The development of

162   the resistance was expanded by negotiating the use of everyday forms of activism to promote

163   civil rights.

164   As mentioned, movements during this particular period held easily observable practices

165   of presentation that exhibited collective ideology. For example, other appearance aspects that

166   were used to symbolize liberation and resistance by subcultures included hippies with long hair,

167   and leather worn by motorcycle club members and other rebellious youth groups (Mercer, 1991).

168   However, there is little scholarly examination of how intersectional identities held by individuals

169   within collective movements inform, impact and shape their appearance practices. By exploring

170   the individuals' experiences with appearance, specifically hair, as it relates to collective identity

171   display and the development of a shared ideology we gain a more in-depth understanding of

172   social movements and those involved.

173   **Methods**

174   **Participants**

175   A purposeful sampling method was used to recruit participants that met demographic

176   criteria of age (being between 18-25 years old during the years 1960-1974), gender (women),

177   and ethnicity (African American). The specific movement years of 1960-1974 were chosen to

178   highlight events of heightened activity from the sit-ins in North Carolina occurring in 1960 to the

179   popularization of the afro in the 1974 movie *Foxy Brown*. The perspectives of the women

180   constituted a political and generational cohort, where they experienced similar events and

181   perspectives of the movement at around the same age in their lives, sharing similar viewpoints on

182   the movement based on the context of the time period in which they lived (Whittier, 1997). Data

183   collection began with an initial participant, who provided potential women within a large,

184   Midwestern University and surrounding community that fit the study population. Through

185   snowball sampling, prospective interviewees were contacted by email or phone to participate.

186   Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling concentrated the participants' experiences, which

187   was appropriate for the scope of this research.

188   "Place Table 1 about here."

189   A total of seven women who were between the ages of 18 and 25 years old during the

190   years 1960-1974 participated in the study. Over half of the participants (n=4) had attained a

191   Doctorate degree, with the remainder (n=3) earning a Master's. Six of the participants, held a

192   professional career in higher education. At the time of the study, three of the participants (43%)

193   were retired. Participants lived or were originally from the Pacific, North and Southeast, and

194   Midwest regions, with only one growing up within close distance to the university community

195   where the study took place. Each of the participants moved to the university community for

196   career or educational advancement of themselves or their spouses.

197   **Data Collection**

198   Participants completed an in-depth three-part, semi-structured interview series. Each

199   interview concentrated on the themes of: 1) hair history throughout their lives (i.e., "tell me

200   about your hair history from childhood to now."); 2) details of experiences during the Civil

201   Rights Movement years 1960-74, (i.e., "how did you wear your hair during 1960-74?"); and 3)

202   meaning of hairstyle choices in the participant's life (i.e., "how have you come to understand

203   your hair in your life?"). This interview format allowed both the researcher and the participant

204   "to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning"

205   (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). The goal of this research was to give voice to the lived experiences of

206   African American women and their experiences with their hair. By focusing on the women's

207   stories, insight into the details of everyday experiences of the participants and their sense of self

208   was gained. The researchers attempted to remove personal bias by designing a study that allowed

209   the participants to speak freely of their experiences through a semi-structured interview.

210   Clarification of any misunderstandings in data analysis was resolved by allowing the women an

211   opportunity to review the transcriptions of the interviews, and using the participants' own words

212   to illustrate findings (Esterberg, 2002).

213   Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes, creating over 30 hours of recorded data.

214   No compensation was offered to participants in exchange for sharing their experiences.

215   Interviews took place in private locations throughout the university, participant homes, and local

216   businesses. The researchers invited participants to provide photographs that would illustrate their

217   hairstyles throughout their lives to guide the interview and discussion and in order to corroborate

218   the interview data. Participants were provided pseudonyms during interview transcription to

219   maintain confidentiality and anonymity in accordance with institutional review board approval.

220   **Data Analysis**

221   Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers and a paid transcriptionist. Each

222   transcript was analyzed and coded independently by the authors. Notes and themes were shared

223   among authors in regard to each transcript as well as in constant comparison to the whole set for

224   frequency, salience, and relationship to one another. The interpretation of the individual

225   experiences was examined through the "'situatedness' of each finite observer [or participant] in a

226   socio-political, historical context to challenge the plausibility of claims" from their perspective

227   (Hawkesworth, 1989, p. 536). The researchers then worked together to compare, contrast, and

228   evaluate emergent themes, in an iterative back-and-forth process (Spiggle, 1994). Significant

229   statements from each theme were extracted to help describe the participants' lived experiences.

230   The detailed, three-part interview structure helped to place participant comments in

231   context and provide internal consistency, as well as corroborating accounts across participants

232   and historical events. In addition, the goal of the research process was to understand how

233   participants made meaning of their experience, which is validated by the thought given to the

234   topic and what was true to them at that point in their life (Seidman, 2013). As an African

235   American woman, the researcher was able to develop a level of trust with the participants, in

236   addition to discerning specific accounts related to hair care, styles, and race-specific cultural

237   references. Discussions between researchers were used to provide another point of view and

238   differing perspective, as multiple analyzers will inherently bring different interpretations to the

239   data and help to diminish analysis rooted in assumptions and bias of a sole researcher (Saldana,

240   2013).

241   **Results**

242   Participants described key themes that were associated with the movements of the 1960s

243   and 1970s and shared ideas surrounding hair which expressed a collective identity. As mentioned

244   by the participants, the influence of the Black is Beautiful ideology as well as radical Black

245   activism helped to form a collective identity in their communities. Consciousness was raised as

246   alternative appearances were valued, in direct opposition to what had been historically defined as

247   less-than. Throughout the establishment of the collective and the larger movement, the

248   negotiation of meanings and symbols was implemented by the participants as actions of

249   everyday resistance related to Black Pride affirmation and redefined Black beauty. As the

250   participants moved into different life stages and the movement shifted to less active

251   demonstration, the use of their hair as an oppositional tool followed.

252

Boundaries: Black Love and Liberation

Boundaries are often created by dominant groups in social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of society, to differentiate those who belong and those who do not. As a resistance group begins to define itself, it does so in contrast to the dominant identity, affirming that which is unique to the collective's characteristics (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Boundary demarcation is a vital element of collective identity construction (Hunt & Benford, 2004). Participants discussed the popularization of Black as beautiful and corresponding emergence in Black culture that framed their challenge of dominant appearance standards as they adopted natural styles.

The presentation of Black Power ideology, which activated Black as beautiful and Black Pride was described positively by the women. Each of the participants recounted the impact of visualizing Black empowerment in popular media, which had not been present prior to the movement. Surrounded by images of Black people provided a new understanding of their race as "affirming," "empowering," and that felt like "home." Participants described the impact of musicians, activists, and "all of those things really kind of enhanced that, yes, we can do it just like everybody else and there's a feeling of self-worth" (Beth).

The surge in the celebration Black culture and appreciation helped to embrace African or Black characteristics that challenge of White norms. Donna explained,

That was what the Black Power Movement influenced. People were trying to find the

Black Power where Black is Beautiful. We're beautiful, we should shine that way. I think

that is where most of the motivation came from, for people to stop trying to fit in to a

White mode and to redefine ourselves…That style that 'we're going to wear our hair like

275   this. This is our way of expressing ourselves' and saying 'we're proud, we're Black and

276   we're proud' that was part of it too.

277 Wanda agreed,

278   It was ok to be Black again… just be ourselves, and not try to be or emulate something

279   that we had to compete with. It still had an underlining that you were beautiful. I mean,

280   you were. But it was more among your own color than it was worrying about outside of

281   your race.

282   The experiences shared by participants point to the popularization of Black culture and a

283 challenge to dominant ideals as successful in increasing self-love among the African American

284 community. Through their efforts, boundaries were created that did not follow traditional

285 characteristics of White features being good, and Black bad, but instead transformed the

286 separation to a positive Black self-image and negated the dominant portrayal of Black

287 subjectivity. By maintaining an oppositional identity to dominant society the participants

288 embraced their culture, their selves, and their appearance, which brought together a collective of

289 individuals.

290 **Consciousness for Liberation**

291   Raising an individual's consciousness serves the collective by understanding existing

292 barriers, as well as defining the group's struggle and resistance of the dominant. Participants

293 discussed a raised awareness due to: 1) expanded understanding of African American history and

294 social position within U.S. society; and 2) the changed imagery of Black women and its impact

295 on their personal thinking and actions.

296   The participants described the movement as a time of heightened activity and Black

297 Pride. One participant explained how she and her peers were becoming politically aligned with

298 the movement, "We were reading these books and thinking we were feminists and stuff. I read

299 this book, Stokely Carmichael's book….called *Black Power*. So, yeah, we were enamored with

300 all of these ideas" (Ruth). Part of the political awakening also came from learning about the

301 historical plight of African Americans that led the participants to seek social transformation.

302 Ellen began college as a history major and then added sociology; she explained, "I was going to

303 work as a social worker. I was driven. The history classes between the time and '70s for a

304 college student, they were very good." She went on to explain that learning about African

305 American history in college helped to frame her as an activist and inspired her quest for racial

306 equality on campus.

307   Beth found that she recognized the historical implications and the impact of the

308 movement,

309   I think all I really understood was that where we were in history, people had paid some

310   price for us to get here. So, I appreciated that and knew that it didn't just suddenly

311   happen. That there were these opportunities that were being made, that instead of looking

312   down upon being different, that we can celebrate being different. So, I understood that. I

313   understood some of the historical things that had happened and that I knew that even

314   though this was sort of a very, just a thing. Looks and all are not worth time…It's just not

315   the kind of thing that is important. I understood that this was still an outgrowth of the

316   [movement] even though the political agenda was much more important. That it was okay

317   for me to wear an afro and be affirmed for that. That these were political agendas with

318   some very direct outcomes that people were laying down their lives for. So, this was a

319   side benefit that I could celebrate it in this way.

320 Though appearance was not at the forefront of Beth's activist agenda, she knew that wearing an

321 afro was a part of the challenge to racial equality and enjoyed the ability to participate in an

322 everyday action that moved the cause forward.

323   Another element that the participants pointed to as making them think about their

324 position as Black women was the imagery of Angela Davis and her afro. Ruth explained how

325 Angela's look gained in popularity and acceptance,

326   When Angela Davis came out with this beautiful look that was ok. [It was like] oh, that is

327   so cool… And we loved Angela Davis's look. We were all enamored with Angela

328   Davis…. I thought it was cool looking. And I did buy into the Black is Beautiful at the

329   time. I liked feeling like, ok, this is my nappy hair… And everybody would mistake us

330   for Angela Davis. And at the time, I didn't think I looked anything like Angela Davis

331   except for this big hair.

332   Like Ruth, other participants discussed a sense of excitement and fascination with Angela

333 Davis, specifically during her highly publicized criminal charges and trial. Ellen described, "I

334 identified with her from the time I saw the poster. And I identified with her as a more militant

335 person." Davis' militancy became a symbol of the Black Power Movement and as Donna

336 explains, "[people] were wearing that style as a way to say 'I'm Black, I'm beautiful, I'm not

337 going to emulate the oppressor.'"

338   The image of Angela Davis, although shown negatively in news outlets of the time, came

339 to visually symbolize a pure form of Black as beautiful while exuding activism. Ellen found that

340 because of her on-campus activism she was seen as militant,

341   The White people at [my university] told me that I was an activist, told me I was militant.

342   Whenever I would talk to the deans or talk about what I thought we needed as students, I

343   was coming out of [a mindset] this is what other people get and so why can't we have it?

344 Ellen's explanation of being perceived as militant was appearance related and she describes her

345 internalization: "[We] kept it (hair) braided because we were militant. I don't think we were

346 militant but that's what they started calling us." In this way, the use of visual resistance helped to

347 facilitate the oppositional tool and the sense of a collective identity as a resistor.

348   Many elements informed the participants about the significance and shared goals of the

349 movement, from reading texts and learning about African American history, exchanging ideas

350 with others, and representation of Black women in the media. Social and political struggles of

351 society and the Black community in general, were ever present and formative in their raised

352 awareness. However, their increased consciousness was not only internal, it was also exhibited

353 through their hair. The women's appearance practices were impacted by their learning and the

354 varied imagery of Black women, specifically Angela Davis, which were then perceived by those

355 they interacted with. Donna encapsulated this idea,

356   It was like that was what the Black Power Movement kind of influenced. People were

357   trying to find the Black Power where Black is Beautiful. We're beautiful, we should shine

358   that way. I think that is where most of the motivation came from, for people to stop trying

359   to fit in to a White mode and to redefine ourselves.

360 The women and their peers' critical understandings helped to develop "a collective oppositional

361 consciousness that channel[ed] women into a variety of actions geared toward personal, social,

362 and political change" (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, p. 109). This was evident through personal

363   thoughts and changes to behavior, activism and appearance, which in turn were absorbed by the

364   larger community.

365   **Negotiation: Affirmation and Professionalism**

366   Everyday interactions between individuals work to negotiate meanings. The negotiations

367   establish dominant standards that are often reinforced by marginalized groups, cementing what is

368   appropriate (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959). Participants' membership in the collective followed

369   forms of negotiating through altered ways of thinking and acting in challenging dominant

370   representations. Freda explained,

371   Black women became to realize that you were just as pretty with an afro as if you do a

372   press and curl or perm. The idea was now that you don't have to do anything if you don't

373   want to. It was a personal choice… I think it had an impact from the standpoint that you

374   realized it was okay to be Black or African American or light complexioned or have good

375   hair. It all was okay. That era was, not only for me, but was a sense of coming into our

376   own.

377   For Freda, wearing an afro was a source of strength and defiance, in that she was able to do as

378   she pleased and feel affirmed. Cathy echoed,

379   I think I was impacted by the fact that there were some different choices that could be

380   made. I was coming out of high school and going into college when that was happening. I

381   benefited from what the new rules were. I think I benefited from viewing that I did not

382   need to wear my hair straight.

383   The women were able to use opportunity and choice as a form of everyday resistance,

384   which helped to make natural hair more accepted in larger society, while instantaneously

385   benefitting the women who wore the styles because they had the ability. The range of styles

386 available for African American women was discussed by Beth, who did not "go natural"

387 completely,

388   I didn't wear my hair natural a lot because I kept doing this kind of back and forth thing.

389   It wasn't like a natural that was always ready to pick out, so it was sort of a process thing.

390   I was never completely natural, so I created an afro from partly processed hair. It was not

391   truly all natural in that way because I wasn't really willing to completely commit. And, I

392   think it was partly because I didn't know. I liked my hair all these different ways, so I

393   didn't want to completely commit to natural because that would mean, because I didn't

394   know how to hot comb my hair, I would be just stuck with this natural and I didn't want

395   to be confined. So, instead I kind of created all these different styles, sort of knowing that

396   I could sort of do it using other products or other mechanical features like rollers and

397   things.

398 Beth's back-and-forth styling choices exhibited her ability and freedom to either challenge or

399 conform to hegemonic beauty standards.

400   The participants' negotiation of their hair was impacted through their generational cohort.

401 Being between the ages of 18 and 25 during the period of the movement, they experienced

402 similar life stages. As they found themselves in new settings and roles, their natural hairstyles

403 may have been the norm or an exception. Cathy explained how her environment and professional

404 position redefined her hair,

405   It was what happened coming to a predominately White environment, especially in the

406   Midwest. Probably in the south it would have been different…. I think it was trying to fit

407   in. It wasn't like there were a lot of you and you didn't need anybody trying to explain

408   what was going on with your hair…. When I went to work, I'm sure I went more with

409   pressed hair, probably because you were professional and I think in the workplace there

410   was still some of that, they didn't want someone coming in looking a certain way.

411   Cathy furthered that she did not want to look "out of place" and natural hair would be

412   unconducive to her work in predominantly White rural areas. On the other hand, Ruth, who

413   worked as a flight attendant for a major airline explained, "There was no problem [wearing an

414   afro]. All of this was so prevalent in the 70s that if they were going to hire Black people, they

415   were going to have an afro, you know?" The contrast of Cathy and Ruth's quotes highlighted

416   differences of positionality. Cathy avoided portraying resistance through her hair to uphold

417   professional expectations based on an educational setting in the Midwest. Ruth, however,

418   worked in the service industry and had contact with people all throughout the United States, and

419   felt the afro had become more widely accepted and was a reality for African Americans.

420   Elements of the women's appearance as it related to the movement changed when they

421   entered post-baccalaureate programs or professional positions. Wanda talked about the changes

422   in her hairstyle as part of her overall professional look, "as we transition out of college into

423   interviewing for grad school or the workforce, you can't just put a dress suit on, you have to

424   dress from your toe to your hair." Donna added that "professionals did not go to that style

425   because it was not in the general public's idea to be professional." The proper professional look

426   that had been adopted by society was still heavily influenced by hegemonic standards, which

427   impacted the women's appearance decisions. Freda explained getting her first professional job,

428   It was still during the time period that to get a job that paid well, there was just a certain

429   look that you had to have. Black females really did have to have straight hair or a style

430   that required that… I had short hair and it was curled. As they say, it was together… I

431   had my appearance, dressed the way they wanted me to from the top of my head to the

432   bottom of my toes. I needed that job. I maintained that style and I knew that if I did not

433   adhere to their standards, I wouldn't have a job.

434 Ellen offered the same sentiment about wanting to be taken seriously as a professional however,

435 she would change her hair after she were hired, while others like Freda would forego natural

436 styles altogether to be deemed acceptable and employable.

437   Personal transformations and expressive actions that the women participated in

438 negotiated the meaning of Black beauty throughout their lives. The wearing of the afro countered

439 negative symbols and redefined afros as a positive attribute of Black culture, while at the same

440 time serving as self-affirmation. However, as they aged and went through different life stages

441 and the movement progressed, their hair choices moved away from being a form of resistance.

442 The participants' negotiations reflected their activism at different points in their lives and

443 transformed to demonstrate alignment with the changed collectives' values as beginning

444 professionals. They discussed their use of negotiation through hairstyles when it came to their

445 environment, profession, and even their ability and flexibility to achieve certain styles.

446   **Conclusions**

447   Collective identities surrounding the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s involved

448 activism of individuals and groups fighting for understanding of diverse people and cultures

449 (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Specifically for African Americans, the power of collective identity

450 allowed an alternative visual aesthetic that represented an affirmation of Black as beautiful. An

451 embrace of African culture, natural hairstyles as an everyday form of resistance, challenged

452 White hegemonic beauty standards (Mercer, 1991). However, as the movement progressed and

453 individuals moved into different roles, life stages, and activism transitioned, hair also changed.

454   This study supports the formation of collective identity constructed through boundaries

455   between Black and White beauty ideals; critical self- and societal evaluation; and acts of

456   negotiation that shifted meanings and ideologies of the political climate they experienced. The

457   African American women's experiences with wearing natural hairstyles during the 1960s and

458   1970s Civil Rights and Black Pride/Power Movements represent that time period, but on the

459   other hand, as Buckland (2000) points out fashion is not so easily compartmentalized into strict

460   start and end dates. The Afrocentric hairstyles were appropriate for the heightened moment of

461   the movement or roles and identities they held, however, once they shifted in their life stages,

462   hair returned to more hegemonic styles. This study examined the impact of appearance in the

463   formation of collective identity within a movement as well as expanded on the experiences of

464   shifting hair to fit professional roles and societal expectation of the time.

465   The research explored seven women's experiences who were highly-educated and located

466   within the same Mid-Western region. The women were purposely recruited for their specific age

467   range, which was useful in the study, but limited the participant's experiences. Variation of

468   participants from other backgrounds (i.e., socioeconomic status, education level, age) as well as

469   different geographic areas may have presented other emergent themes to the data.

470   Just as in the 1960s and 1970s, hair continues to be a strong cultural component in the

471   African American community. The wearing of natural hairstyles in current times has changed in

472   definition and style, but carries forward challenging ideas of power, beauty, and human rights.

473   Afrocentric hairstyles worn during the Civil Rights Movement have been resurrected by

474   individuals active in new movements, such as Black Lives Matter. The popularity and

475   symbolism surrounding natural hairstyles in the past now offers African American women the

476   option to explore a variety of hairstyles with some being politically motivated and others based

477   solely on aesthetics. Although the initial natural movement lessened over time, it created a space

478   where a collective identity could thrive and act through a visible representation that challenged

479   dominant society for racial equality. The strongly assumed cultural implications present a

480   foundation for natural hair worn by African American women today. Future research could

481   compare the reasoning behind and meaning of natural hair worn today with women of different

482   generational cohorts.

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