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

Abstract
The Black Pride and Power Movements of the 1960s and 1970s changed the aesthetic of the larger African American community, promoting self-affirmation and reclaiming African pride. As individuals engaged in the movement, they began to internalize new meanings and understandings of themselves, leading to self-transformation and collective identity that promoted the specific political ideology and agenda of the group. In this research, the lived experiences of African American women who were emerging adults (ages 18–25) during the Civil Rights Movement from 1960 to 1974 were examined, through in-depth interviews, to understand their experiences with wearing natural hairstyles during this time. Seven participants highlighted how wearing natural hair was used in the three dimensions of collective identity formation: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation. Participants' counterhegemonic use of appearance constructed, created, and negotiated a collective identity that was aligned with demonstration for racial equality of African Americans.

Keywords
cultural values, dress, ethnicity, gender, hair, social identity, social values, women, pride, activism

Disciplines
Family, Life Course, and Society | Fashion Design | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts | Gender and Sexuality

Comments
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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

changing their physical features, particularly those of skin color and hair texture, to follow mainstream values (Gill, 2001; Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd, 2014). Adherence to these aesthetics was largely upheld by African Americans and the Black beauty industry until the early 1960s (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). During the 1960s, styles such as the afro were used as a point of liberation from White-dominated beauty culture. The use of hair and appearance that physically and metaphorically linked African Americans to Africa facilitated a counter-hegemonic process, which helped redefine cultural aesthetics both within and outside of the Black community (Mercer, 1991).

While research regarding the use of African-inspired textiles, garments, and symbols during the Civil Rights era is rich, there is less examination of African American's daily experiences during this time. An important element of appearance, African American hair has held a long history of cultural pride and significance (Rooks, 1996). Because African American hair holds a strong relationship to cultural meanings and societal values, it provides an opportunity to examine the larger society's effect on a wearer's decisions and behaviors (Walker, 2007). Specifically, the researchers sought to understand how African American women perceived their hair choices in creating and negotiating their collective identity during the Civil Rights and Black Pride Movements.

The position of African American women as members of two marginalized groups, both racial and gender oppressed identities within dominant society, offers "a powerful lens through which to evaluate society and a base from which to change it" (Brooks, 2007, p. 63). Examining the lived experiences of African American women's everyday choices is not widely covered within historical contexts of political engagement. Although the political aspects of the Civil Rights Movement and some of the powerful figures involved, such as Angela Davis, an early

1970's icon of Black female militancy, and "epitome of a Black woman gone bad," have been researched extensively; the understanding of the movement's broader impact and the role of African American women has not (Johnson, 2012, p. 18). Furthermore, the use of appearance as a symbol of societal change, demonstrates the importance of dress behaviors in our society. As a remedy to the misrepresentation and exclusion of African American women, this research offers an opportunity to learn from seven women's stories to help inform the history of the period and the people who lived within it.

Literature Review

Culture and Collective Identity

The examination of contemporary social movements through new social movement theory, explores the social, psychological, and cultural foundations of movements (Whittier, 1997). Moving beyond large-scale, conventional movements, such as labor disputes in the early twentieth century, new social movement theory includes the everyday actions of individuals, particularly those with similar ideals and goals (Hunt & Benford, 2004). These individuals often informally arrange into groups that hold many shared ideals. Through action, the "members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" form which helps to create a collective identity (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, p. 105). As individuals engage in the social movement, they internalize new meanings and understandings of themselves, often marked by appearance, creating a collective identity based on the group's political ideology and agenda (Whittier, 1997).

Collective identity serves to connect the individual with the larger social movement. Whittier (1997) discusses social movements as "clusters of organizations, overlapping networks, and individuals that share goals and are bound together by a collective identity and cultural events" (p. 761). Individuals can mold their identities to fit within a collective identity (Hunt &

Benford, 2004). The construction of a political version of self can align with a collective vision, thus the ideology behind the movement is promoted and put into action. Together, like-minded individuals can work in opposition of the dominant viewpoint and internalize collective values that push the movement forward (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998). Individuals that form into a collective are created, developed, and changed throughout the course of the movement, reflecting the thoughts and activism of the group (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). As politics and structures shift, opportunities are presented for new groups of people to create change in society.

For the African American community, Civil Rights reforms from 1954 to 1965 sparked what would become the Black Power Movement from 1966 to 1974 (Wilson, 2013). Imagery of the Civil Rights Movement began to shift from efforts pursued by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to those put forth by Black Nationalists, such as the Black Panther Party. The rhetoric of the movement widened in scope from non-violent aspirations for equality and integration to more militant demands for equity and separation. A key leader in the movement Stokely Carmichael became a pro-Black activist in the Power Movement, popularizing the phrase, “Black Power” (Walker, 2007). In addition to the more radical political stance, a moderate sentiment of “Black is Beautiful” was widely adopted and became heavily popularized both within and outside of African American communities (Freeland, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In this way the Black Power Movement differed from the initial non-violent approach to the Civil Rights Movement. This example provides evidence of how, through collective action, the stage was set for new groups of individuals to move the cause forward (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998).

In contemporary movements the collective’s action is rooted in “cultural symbols [that] emerge and serve as representations and conduits for the social movement ideas and 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).

100 **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.

Eventually, the progress of the movement and commonness of the hairstyle transitioned the afro from overtly political to a fashionable trend (Mercer, 1991).

Collective Construction

Taylor and Whittier (1992) identify three factors that create collective identity in social movements: 1) boundaries to differentiate the challenging group from the dominant; 2) developed consciousness that presents and defines the challenging group's social position; and 3) negotiation of meaning, symbols, and actions used by the challenging group to resist and reconstruct dominant systems. Each factor of collective identity creation is "analytically distinct," but occurs simultaneously and in connection, as the individual develops a political position and their collective identity within a group is formed (Hunt & Benford, 2004, p. 442). Boundaries mark differences between the collective and the dominant. Through activism and organization, the collective redefines the boundaries of marginality as a site for resistance (hooks, 1991; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Consciousness within the group and its members is created as they visualize shared values, missions, and beliefs that resist dominant ways of thinking, knowing, and doing. Movement goals and activities are justified through this common set of interests. Throughout the construction of the collective identity, negotiations of everyday politically-based actions are carried out to undermine the dominant and advocate for justice (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Lastly, actions of negotiation can include challenging the norm, overcoming self-hatred, and demanding fair treatment (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998).

The Black Pride and Power Movements politicized the everyday lives of Black people and their objectification by dominant power, drawing attention to the boundaries between Black and White positions in society (Kuumba & Ajanaku, 1998; Mercer, 1991). The embrace of a pro-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,

Midwestern University and surrounding community that fit the study population. Through snowball sampling, prospective interviewees were contacted by email or phone to participate. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling concentrated the participants' experiences, which was appropriate for the scope of this research.

"Place Table 1 about here."

A total of seven women who were between the ages of 18 and 25 years old during the years 1960-1974 participated in the study. Over half of the participants (n=4) had attained a Doctorate degree, with the remainder (n=3) earning a Master's. Six of the participants, held a professional career in higher education. At the time of the study, three of the participants (43%) were retired. Participants lived or were originally from the Pacific, North and Southeast, and Midwest regions, with only one growing up within close distance to the university community where the study took place. Each of the participants moved to the university community for career or educational advancement of themselves or their spouses.

Data Collection

Participants completed an in-depth three-part, semi-structured interview series. Each interview concentrated on the themes of: 1) hair history throughout their lives (i.e., "tell me about your hair history from childhood to now."); 2) details of experiences during the Civil Rights Movement years 1960-74, (i.e., "how did you wear your hair during 1960-74?"); and 3) meaning of hairstyle choices in the participant's life (i.e., "how have you come to understand your hair in your life?"). This interview format allowed both the researcher and the participant "to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning" (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). The goal of this research was to give voice to the lived experiences of 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.

Though appearance was not at the forefront of Beth’s activist agenda, she knew that wearing an afro was a part of the challenge to racial equality and enjoyed the ability to participate in an everyday action that moved the cause forward.

Another element that the participants pointed to as making them think about their position as Black women was the imagery of Angela Davis and her afro. Ruth explained how Angela’s look gained in popularity and acceptance,

> When Angela Davis came out with this beautiful look that was ok. [It was like] oh, that is so cool… And we loved Angela Davis’s look. We were all enamored with Angela Davis…. I thought it was cool looking. And I did buy into the Black is Beautiful at the time. I liked feeling like, ok, this is my nappy hair… And everybody would mistake us for Angela Davis. And at the time, I didn't think I looked anything like Angela Davis except for this big hair.

Like Ruth, other participants discussed a sense of excitement and fascination with Angela Davis, specifically during her highly publicized criminal charges and trial. Ellen described, “I identified with her from the time I saw the poster. And I identified with her as a more militant person.” Davis’ militancy became a symbol of the Black Power Movement and as Donna explains, “[people] were wearing that style as a way to say ‘I’m Black, I’m beautiful, I’m not going to emulate the oppressor.’”

The image of Angela Davis, although shown negatively in news outlets of the time, came to visually symbolize a pure form of Black as beautiful while exuding activism. Ellen found that because of her on-campus activism she was seen as militant,

> The White people at [my university] told me that I was an activist, told me I was militant. Whenever I would talk to the deans or talk about what I thought we needed as students, I was coming out of [a mindset] this is what other people get and so why can't we have it?

Ellen's explanation of being perceived as militant was appearance related and she describes her internalization: "[We] kept it (hair) braided because we were militant. I don't think we were militant but that's what they started calling us." In this way, the use of visual resistance helped to facilitate the oppositional tool and the sense of a collective identity as a resistor.

Many elements informed the participants about the significance and shared goals of the movement, from reading texts and learning about African American history, exchanging ideas with others, and representation of Black women in the media. Social and political struggles of society and the Black community in general, were ever present and formative in their raised awareness. However, their increased consciousness was not only internal, it was also exhibited through their hair. The women's appearance practices were impacted by their learning and the varied imagery of Black women, specifically Angela Davis, which were then perceived by those they interacted with. Donna encapsulated this idea,

> It was like that was what the Black Power Movement kind of 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.

The women and their peers' critical understandings helped to develop "a collective oppositional consciousness that channel[ed] women into a variety of actions geared toward personal, social, 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.

This study supports the formation of collective identity constructed through boundaries between Black and White beauty ideals; critical self- and societal evaluation; and acts of negotiation that shifted meanings and ideologies of the political climate they experienced. The African American women's experiences with wearing natural hairstyles during the 1960s and 1970s Civil Rights and Black Pride/Power Movements represent that time period, but on the other hand, as Buckland (2000) points out fashion is not so easily compartmentalized into strict start and end dates. The Afrocentric hairstyles were appropriate for the heightened moment of the movement or roles and identities they held, however, once they shifted in their life stages, hair returned to more hegemonic styles. This study examined the impact of appearance in the formation of collective identity within a movement as well as expanded on the experiences of shifting hair to fit professional roles and societal expectation of the time.

The research explored seven women's experiences who were highly-educated and located within the same Mid-Western region. The women were purposely recruited for their specific age range, which was useful in the study, but limited the participant's experiences. Variation of participants from other backgrounds (i.e., socioeconomic status, education level, age) as well as different geographic areas may have presented other emergent themes to the data.

Just as in the 1960s and 1970s, hair continues to be a strong cultural component in the African American community. The wearing of natural hairstyles in current times has changed in definition and style, but carries forward challenging ideas of power, beauty, and human rights. Afrocentric hairstyles worn during the Civil Rights Movement have been resurrected by individuals active in new movements, such as Black Lives Matter. The popularity and symbolism surrounding natural hairstyles in the past now offers African American women the 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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