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For Colored Girls Who Considered Natural when the Perm was Enuf: A Cultural Examination of the Political Significance of Natural Hair YouTube Influencers

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FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO CONSIDERED NATURAL WHEN THE PERM WAS
ENUF: A CULTURAL EXAMINATION OF THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF
NATURAL HAIR YOUTUBE INFLUENCERS

by

Randrika C. Henderson

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Communication
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the discourse between natural hair YouTube vloggers and audiences' interactions with two popular YouTube channels, Jasmine Brown and The Chic Natural. This study uses hooks' (2003) oppositional gaze as a theoretical framework that centers on media representation of Black women and the inability to produce images that mirrors Black women's spectatorship (hooks, 2003). This study investigates how hegemonic and aversive racist ideologies (often represented in Western beauty standards) are encoded and decoded in Black women's mediated spaces. This cultural and critical semiotic analysis explores two research questions: how hegemonic structures exist during the interactions between influencers and audiences and how meanings are derived in content using Stuart Hall's (1980) examination of preferred, negotiated, and oppositional meanings. The readings in this study found that YouTube vloggers' videos showed viewers how to manipulate natural hair into straight hair, to use natural hair products, and to style hair in convenient ways. The study found that hegemonic ideologies of colorism and aversive racism were present in the video content that was often designed to sell products used language that reinforces Western beauty standards with a dominant focus on the aesthetic of hairstyles. This study adds to the body of critical and cultural research about race and media. It heightens the awareness of social constructs of Western beauty in a society that thrives through the media and capitalism and provides research that focuses on Black women's experiences in media representation.

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First, I would like to thank God for giving me the strength to finish what I started. Throughout this journey, I have leaned on Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” New King James Version. Also, I would like to greatly appreciate my committee chair, Dr. Christopher Campbell. He has been a great advocate and the highest example of an educator during my enrollment at the university. Also, I would like to thank my committee members for their support and commitment to fostering scholastic rigor during this progress. Also, I would like to thank all my educators who have poured my passion for knowledge and taught me perseverance.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to several people who have impacted my life. First, I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Cassandra Brown. At a young age, she instilled the value of education in me and my sisters. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my uncle, Dr. Mark G. Henderson. Uncle G, thank you for your support and constantly pushing me towards excellence. I pray that I will continue to make you proud and always push myself to higher heights. Second, this document is for all the little colored girls in the world who have been taught to hate the skin and body God gave them. For all the black girls and women who are told that they are not enough, this is for you and us.

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CHAPTER I – Introduction

The Post-Reconstruction era (1877-1920) reflected a time when Blacks experienced significant hardships. While Black men had just gained the right to vote discrimination during the confederacy oppression continued in educational institutions, workforce (trade unions), transportation through the creation of stereotypes, and legal discrimination (Jim Crow, Plessy v. Ferguson) exists. These systems of oppression treated Blacks as inferior and created roadblocks to Blacks' societal success while the United States refashioned itself into a superpower (Dandridge, 2019).

However, the Black middle class soon started to rise, or as W.E.B. Dubois described The Talented Tenth (which Dubois only described as men), and Josephine Washington, a Post- Reconstruction writer focused on the gender and racial aspect of Blacks rising above adversity, desired to promote change for Blacks. Using Negro conferences, problems about Blacks' advancements in society were addressed, and a focus on these meetings included Blacks empowering of one's self, access to land, being considered middle class, and gaining employment during this era (Dandridge, 2019).

Securing economic wealth through gainful employment would hopefully create a system of equality for Blacks that had yet to exist. This was a time when 'standards' of professionalism were dictated by White America. To meet those standards, the 'straightening' of Black people's hair became the 'standard' to look presentable and gain employment. Madame C.J. Walker, the first Black millionaire, gained substantial financial success from assisting individuals in the Black community to submit to the Caucasian ideology of beauty by creating the straightening comb (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). According to Freeman (2014), in 1906, the Walker business started. Walker's

constant advertisements in papers informed customers of competitor Annie Turbo's product disadvantages. After a short time, Walker had established credibility with weekly promotions and was commonly known as Madam C.J. Walker amongst other beauticians and the industry (Freeman, 2014). According to Rooks (1996), as cited in Ashe (2001), "Madame C.J. Walker became the first female millionaire selling skin-lightening and hair straightening products before her death in 1918; Black periodicals have carefully constructed and displayed representations of Black women to exploit that purchasing interest and power" (p. 67).

Furthermore, the natural hair movement in the U.S. had two stages. The first appearance of Black women wearing natural hair was during the 1950-60s. During this time, the term natural hair was heard in reference to black power movement and/or my black is beautiful movement (Walker, 2000). The afro was used as a political statement during this time of activism was a huge cornerstone in the Black community. Kelley (1997) stated that the afro had been the compelling symbol of political activism in society. The meaning of the afro shifted in the middle of the 1960s and was slowly seen being worn by Blacks.

However, the popularity and use of the afro soon declined. The afro lost the association of a political reference and its connection to Black nationalism. As Kelley (1997) wrote, "The masculinization of the Afro in the aftermath of its depoliticization contributed to a backlash against Black women with natural hair. The age of Angela Davis and an Afro-coifed Pam Grier (the diva of blaxploitation films) was over" (p. 347). Ellington (2015) stated that "during the Civil Rights Movement and Power

Movements in the 1960s, hair norms shifted to cultural pride and rebellion against dominant ideals” (p. 22).

The appearance of the natural hair movement, Blacks’ activism of natural hair through social media websites and the presence of Black hair-centered films, television shows, and social media provided a necessary exploration of media representation of natural hair. More specifically, the Crown Act of 2020 advocated for the dismissal of racial discrimination against natural hairstyles in educational and work environments. The Crown Act, which was created by The Crown Coalition is awaiting Senate approval, seven states have banned hair discrimination (Tannenbaum, 2020). Dove Crown’s research was conducted during a six-month time span that focused on Black women's hair discrimination experiences in professional settings. Black women's hairstyles had a greater probability of being considered inappropriate and/or unprofessional than any other race in the United States (Tannenbaum, 2020).

Specifically, the natural hair movement's re-emergence has spread widely throughout the world, resulting in a considerable decrease in hair relaxer revenue. Simply put, the natural hair movement represents a time when some Black women reject hair relaxers and cultivate a love for natural hair textures (Kenney, 2016). While the contemporary natural hair movement exists in political and legal spaces, it thrives and survives through media. Particularly, the natural hair movement resurfaced with the usability of social media outlets by users (Wilkerson, 2017). The media is the driving force for the natural hair movement (Rowe, 2015).

Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram have created a social interaction catalyst concerning natural hair. These social media communities educate Black women on what

to purchase, how to style, and ways to nurture natural Black hair. Furthermore, the widespread use of social media websites has added information about natural hair and produced social activism strategies. These factors have increased the media content of natural hair. According to Wilkerson (2017), "Without social media, the natural hair movement may never have reached the scale seen today" (p. 59). These increases include hair product advertisements, television shows, and cinema representations of natural hair.

Additionally, natural hair scholars have presented a large bulk of knowledge concerning the usefulness and/or the role media plays in being a catalyst for the contemporary natural hair movement. For example, Ellington (2014) explored social networking for Black women who embrace natural hair. Ellington (2014) explored why and how Black women use social networking sites as a tool to gain information and find support when trying to style natural hair. The author found participants used social networking sites to gather information and support when making natural hair decisions, close kins were not supportive of natural hair transitions, and media sites were a catalyst of support for Black women (Ellington, 2014).

Another study explored natural hair and YouTube creators' content on natural hair (Jackson, 2017). The author argued that Black women must depend on media outlets to represent them. Digital platforms are being used increasingly to educate Black women about the maintenance of natural hair, and these tools create a positive attitude towards natural hair (Jackson, 2017,) The author explored Black women's perspectives on natural hair by conducting a content analysis of YouTube videos. This content analysis included ten natural hair videos.

The results indicated that Black women have “a positive narrative about natural hair” (Jackson, 2017, p. 52). Most of the YouTube content included “personal stories and emotional appeals” that related to Black women who have natural hair (Jackson, 2017, p. 52). Currently, YouTube is flooded with natural hair tutorials for Black women. For example, Tate (2016) argued that Black women had used online resources to develop a place to engage and learn about natural hairstyles. Tate (2016) explored five popular YouTube videos created by Black women. The author's central argument was that natural hair YouTube vloggers use a digital home space to uplift and educate Black women about natural hair care (Tate, 2016). Cultural critic bell hooks explained that home space represents a space where Black women can heal from past traumatic inflictions of racism (hooks, 1990). The author found that Black women publish content to have discursive interactions about hair transitions and encourage one another to embrace natural hair (Tate, 2016).

The purpose of this study was to explore the progressiveness of natural hair representations in spaces where Black women engage on YouTube. This study analyzed the discourse between natural hair YouTube influencers and audiences' engagement. Simply put, this study focused on Black hair and its existence on social media. Two popular YouTube channel natural hair bloggers were chosen for this research; Jasmine Brown and The Chic Natural. The study explored the representation of discursive interaction of Black women concerning natural hair and explored how ideologies of Black hair exist in this community. Exploring this culturally centered topic through the culture's lens is vital. Black hair styles are culturally specific and it is a form of Black representation worthy of investigation.

One of America's most famous plays, *For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Was Enuff*, written by Notage Shange, centered on the voices and perspectives of Black women (Shange, 1997). Similarly, this study examines the space and the voice of Black women as it relates to Black hair. Previous scholars have noted that YouTube is a space where Black women engage in the topic of natural Black hair. However, this study focused on how Western beauty standards exist within the conversations of Black women and natural hair.

Recent studies have concluded that natural hair and social media website interactions have allowed Black women to learn how to style and embrace natural hair (Ellington, 2014; Jackson, 2017). Also, studies have shown how tools of information about the maintenance of natural hair were transferred using media outlets such as Facebook and YouTube (Ellington, 2014; Tate, 2016). However, the political and economic role Black women play in producing and consuming natural hair content is worthy of critique. Specifically, Stuart Hall (1997), a leading critical and cultural scholar, argued that media representation was a complex construct because of the notion of difference. Hall (1997a) argued that representation in the media is grounded in various meanings that create and/or recreate different meanings from a text.

In Hall's seminal essay, "Encoding/Decoding," he examines how media messages are produced and then interpreted by audience members. Hall's (1980) theoretical concept of media production centers on individuals being the source and receiver of discursive meanings in media. Most importantly, Hall (1980) categorized three levels in which audiences decode discourse: preferred, negotiated, and oppositional. Preferred meaning evaluates the viewers' interpretation of media content

on a denotative level. The denotative level was described as the audience's understanding of the text from face value. The negotiated meaning deals with when audiences have an awareness of the formulation of the connotation of the text but agree with the encoded interpretation of the text. Last, the oppositional meaning deals with viewers' rejection of the connotative meaning of the text and interpretation from a contrary perspective (Hall, 1980). Therefore, natural hair YouTube content could be seen as a positive representation of Blackness; however, other meanings could exist. These other meanings could be grounded in hegemonic concepts. For example, Black women who consume and produce natural hair content could be increasing the inclusion or representation and/or the image of natural hair while still enforcing Western and hegemonic ideals of beauty.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a critical analysis of natural Black hair representation on social media websites through the lens of Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory. Previous Black hair scholars have noted the benefits of Black hair representation on social media. Simultaneously, the media serves as a vehicle to educate and allow Black women to embrace natural hairstyles; however, this does not mean Western beauty ideals are not operating within Black women's conversations about natural hair. If Western beauty ideals still exist in the conversations about natural hair on social media websites, the same hegemonic structures that the movement seeks to dismantle and reject are still operating. Furthermore, a textual analysis of existing Facebook support groups and YouTube natural hair vloggers is an appropriate area of critique of the dominant power.

Littlefield (2008) explained that the mass media often creates and reinforces depictions of Black women that disfavor them. Media successfully produces and maintains content that is stereotypical. Simply put, the existence of stereotypes is embedded in the United States' fabric (Devine & Elliot, 1995). Society operates in levels of hegemony and mass media creates and reinforces stereotypical images of Black hair. While the contemporary natural hair movement is thriving through social media, it is appropriate to conduct a critical analysis of the existence of Black hair content. The activism and existence of the contemporary natural hair movement may be enhanced through the production of self-regulated media and users' social interaction; however, do ideologies of White supremacy and/or Western society beauty standard still exist in the social media content?

Social media websites like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and natural hair blogs have been a catalyst that gave Black women social acceptance to love their natural hair (Wilkerson, 2017). In Ellington's (2014) article, "Social Networking Sties: A Support System for African American Women Wearing Natural Hair," she explored how African American women use social networking sites as a tool to gain knowledge and support for styling their natural hair. Ellington's (2014) qualitative study included 17 natural hair women who participated in a focus group. Various things were found in this focus group, such as participants' use of SNS (social networking sites) to gather information and support about their natural hair, family members' unsupportiveness of participants who embraced/styled natural hair, and media sites cultivated a support system for natural hair women (Ellington, 2014).

Previous literature and studies have shown that Black women faced challenges embracing natural hair. Media outlets are heavily used for natural-haired Black women because of unsupportive acceptance for family members and friends. Kenney (2016) stated the natural hair movement is spreading widely across the world; in the last years, revenue from hair relaxers has declined 26 percent. The natural hair movement is causing Black women to stop using hair relaxers and cultivate a love for their natural hair (Kenney, 2016). Furthermore, Wilkerson (2017) claimed that social media had played a powerful role in assisting Black women in feeling comfortable about transitioning to natural hair. Social media websites such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and natural hair movement blogs have cultivated an image of social acceptance of Black natural hair. These media tools have created a community of people who have come together to share information about hair products and help one another feel secure in embracing natural hair (Wilkerson, 2017).

As Wilkerson (2017) observed, “Without social media, the natural hair movement may never have reached the scale seen today” (p. 59). One study revealed that 70 percent of African-American women who were surveyed concerning their hair rituals and/or maintenance had natural hair (Mintel, 2013). It is important to know that “during the 1980s and 90s, it would have been uncommon to see many Black women wearing their hair naturally” (Mintel, 2013, p. 3). According to Wanjiru (2017), some aspects of the natural hair movement started in the 2000s. Black women in the United States started to accept their naturally textured hair. A few African American women decided to stop using chemicals that changed their hair texture and advocated that other Black women should join them.

According to Ramasubramaniam and Murphy (2014), the term mass media purposefully identifies the ability of media channels to expand and expose content to a large majority of the population because of media producers/practitioners' goal to keep society aware of things that are not easily known to society such as other groups' traditions and way of life. According to Singh and Pandey (2017), various forms of media often represent a mirror of the world and/or the world's view. These forms of media can include computerized or published content that often works as a form of information and entertainment. Media has developed into a source of daily consumption for individuals that often represent society's views and posts. More so, new media forms have emerged that have altered and/or increased the usability of mass media for both producers and audience members. For instance, the most traditional form of mass media has been the invention of print/newspapers, radio, and television. However, other types of media have changed the way mass media operates (Ito et al., 2009).

Lippmann (1922) argued the images media places in society's cognitive makeup function as stereotypical notions that could impact individuals' interactions with people and form prejudices about others. Boulding (1956) argued that individuals maintain ideas cognitively about society, and more of those thoughts are influenced by the content in media (Boulding, 1956).

The theoretical frameworks for this study are Roland Barthes' description of myths and Stewart Hall's Encoding/Decoding. Barthes' concept of mythologies informed the analysis section of this textual analysis (Chandler, 2007). Hodge (2003) described semiotic criticism as those that deal with the concepts of signs. Signs are defined in this context as anything that can constitute meaning. Storey (2018) stated that

semiotic criticism is the examination of linguists' meanings. Scholars such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Will Wright have shaped and created concepts of semiotics (Storey, 2018). Most importantly, Ferdinand de Saussure is the main developer of the semiotic diagram (Storey, 2018).

Saussure created the model, which is the concept that language consist of the signifier, signified, and sign (Storey, 2018). Furthermore, Roland Barthes, a structuralism scholar, developed the concept of mythologies (Storey, 2018). Barthes believed that the language model included secondary and primary significations, which are connotative and denotative meanings in language (Storey, 2018). Barthes' premise for adding this perspective to Ferdinand de Saussure's model was to highlight how connotative and denotative linguistic meaning is regulated and maintained in language through media texts (Storey, 2018). Barthes' myth perspective is important to discuss because of the connection with Stuart Hall's (1980) "Encoding/Decoding" perspective, the methodology for this textual analysis.

According to Campbell (2016), "Stuart Hall has described a process of decoding the myths embedded in media representations. He suggests three levels of analysis, beginning with the preferred meaning - that which was intended by the producer - and moving on to negotiated and oppositional reading of the same message" (p. 49). In this study, Hall's (1980) analytical approach was used to analyze the two YouTube channels. Hall (1980) claimed that the preferred meaning concept focuses on media viewers' interpretation on a denotative level. In other words, the face-value meaning of a text is what Hall referred to as preferred meaning (Hall, 1980). Next, the negotiated meaning is when audience viewers have knowledge about the constructed meaning of texts, but

decide to accept the encoded meaning (Hall, 1980). The oppositional meaning is when media watchers understand the meaning of a text and decide to interpret the text from a contrary perspective (Hall, 1980). The primary research questions that this study examined were: What meanings can be derived from Hall's Encoding/Decoding preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings of natural hair YouTube influencers? How are hegemonic ideologies (colorism and aversive racism) present during mediated interaction between natural hair YouTube influencers and audience comments?

This study used a semiotic critical analysis that focused on signs, which often create meanings through connotations and denotations (Storey, 2018). Semiotic criticism deals with "the study of signs. Not signs as we normally think of signs, but signs in a much broader context that includes anything capable of standing for or representing a separate meaning" (Hodge, 2003, para. 1). Two natural hair YouTube channels were examined through Hall's Encoding & Decoding process. In a Huffington Post blog subscriber: Jasmine Brown (24.1 million subscribers) and The Chic Natural (1.84 subscribers) were chosen.

Chapter two includes a review of literature and methodological approach. The literature review consists of a historical discussion of the origins and sociological constructs of Black hair in Western society, media representations and Blacks use of media through the lens of advocacy, and scholarship that focuses on contemporary racism and the natural hair movement. Most importantly, chapter two sought to discover the literature gaps concerning the critical and cultural representation of Black hair and the use of social media. Also, this chapter includes a description of the semiotic critique of texts. Specifically, an overview of Stewart Hall's Encoding/Decoding (Hall, 1980)

theoretical concept and bell hooks' oppositional gaze (hooks, 2003) were used and discussed as the theoretical frameworks for this study.

Chapters three and four offer the analyses of the natural hair videos. Chapter three examined the page of YouTube vlogger, Jasmine Brown. Brown's video content and users' content were analyzed through the theoretical frameworks to answer the two research questions. Chapter four offered an analysis of The Chic Natural's YouTube page to answer the two research questions., chapter five summarized the findings of the study. This chapter discussed the meaning of these findings, the limitations of study, and proposed a future research concept.

CHAPTER II - Literature Review and Methodology

Contemporary Racism

This section discusses the origins and fundamental concepts of contemporary racism. Myrdal (1944) argued in his book, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, that Western society had a complicated relationship between the ideas of freedom, justice, the regular system of inequity, and bias about race. The concept of racism is "the grouping of people based on physical appearance for social discrimination-is deeply rooted in many societies, particularly in Western Europe and North America" (Perry, 2007, p.2). Also, Perry (2007) noted that a sophisticated dialogue about racism and the Mendelian's argument of racism from a genetic perspective did not manifest until the 1900s.

Perry (2007) explained that society might not have traces or evidence of who were the first humans to exist on the earth; however, the originality and the continuous outbreaks of racism very apparent and accessible. The author argued that the vital understanding of ongoing racism deals with individuals who take advantage of the construct. This ideology works best for individuals who are superior because of the ability to maximize power to gain benefits. Racists, discriminatory thoughts, and actions in society have disrupted the day-to-day functions of individuals in holistic ways (Janzen, 1994; Van Dijk, 1987; Vora & Vora, 2002).

Systems of racism impact individuals when applying for housing and educational admissions. Also, systems of racism impact individuals through poverty and crime. Racism is a systematic practice that disenfranchises Blacks and other people of color while sustaining White power (Vora & Vora, 2002). Sedler (1979) discussed

that racist roots started in slavery, and progressed to legislation, worker recruitment, redlining, unfunded educational institutions, and societal stagnation Racism is a systematic tool used in government and is sustained by the support of powerful and financial entities. Blacks' rebellion against explicit racism in society has made little progress. Structured racism has sought to devalue the function of Blacks by causing racial disadvantages in crucial stages of development. According to Sedler (1979), "low educational attainment in turn has a severe detrimental impact, when the children become adults, on their economic status, social mobility, political involvement, and other indicia of social wellbeing" (p.136).

However, racism is not a social construct that is limited to Western society. Dunn et al. (2004) explained that racism is present in Australia. According to Dunn et al. (2004),

two main types of racism have been recognized: "old racism" and "new racism:" The first of these, highlighting inferiority, prevailed from the time of Federation in 1901 until the early 1970s and the end of the White Australia policy. Second, "old racism" was largely supplanted by a "new racism." Thus, ethnic minorities are no longer viewed as inferior; instead, they are differentiated as threats to "social cohesion" and "national unity." (Dunn et al., 2004, p. 410).

Furthermore, a discussion of Western history must be elaborated on before undertaking contemporary racism (Christian, 2019). Society must consider the southern hemisphere's deprivation, Western customs in other cultures, and widespread Western colonialism throughout the world (Christian, 2019). Europeans took credit for the land's

independence that the Native Americans, Blacks, Arabs, and Asian people earned (Fannon, 1963). To explore and understand racism and contemporary racism, an individual must understand the operation of institutions, economics, and states. These were the key channels that connect the foundations of racism to contemporary racism in society (Christian, 2019).

The economic system was the concept of economic growth, which included employment guidelines and financial obligations (taxes), which regulate the production of capital (Christian, 2019). Hall (1980) stated that society should explore the historical development of racism and capitalism. Last, Christian (2019) discussed the functionality of institutional states, which operated and existed to stop the mobility of different ethnicities. For example, religious ideologies, media outlets, the justice system, and academic institutions are systems that perpetuate and sustain a uniformity rooted in the acceptance of Whiteness that is often valued in high regard. The acceptance of Whiteness was often maintained by what society valued, such as money, politics, and social status. These White environments thrive from the regulation of White superiority (Christian, 2019).

Types of Contemporary Racism

Dovidio et al. (2017) discussed the forms of contemporary racism and provided empirical evidence of the ideology. The authors explained that this type of racism was subtle in nature and had four types of intellectual roots: modern, aversive, ambivalent, and symbolic (Dovidio et al., 2017). The symbolic racism theory was created to explain discrimination (Sears & Henry, 2005). Essentially, Whites do not embrace overt racism; however, the form of racism has been altered, but the presence of racism has

not (Sears et al., 2000). The authors wrote, "Symbolic racism involves four basic belief components that reflect the confluence of politically conservative, individualistic values and early acquired negative racial effect, that typically emerges in adolescence before many other socio-political beliefs" (Dovidio et al., 2017, p. 268). Some examples of symbolic racism phrases were: racism happened a long time ago; Blacks were to blame for lack of success because of poor work ethic; Blacks want too much, and this group has benefited more than its value. (Sears & Henry, 2005).

According to Gaertner and Dovidio (2005), the term aversive racism was developed by Joel Kovel's (1970) work. Kovel (1970) explained the difference between dominative racism and aversive racism. Dominative racism was defined as a discriminatory, hatred or explicit racism, such as bigotry and treatment of Blacks during the United States' slave trade (Kovel, 1970). However, Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) argued that aversive racism could be seen when Whites are sensitive about Blacks' inhumane and historical treatment. These individuals embrace the need for racial equality while unknowingly having biased thoughts about Blacks (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005).

Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) examined how aversive racism worked by an explanation in a real-world application. The authors conducted a study that explored the difference between Whites helping Blacks during an emergency when individuals were present and non-present. This experiment included Whites and Blacks calling individuals to assist during car trouble. The researchers found that Whites were more inclined to work with White individuals called during an emergency than Blacks (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005).

According to Dovidio et al. (2017), modern racism theory developed from symbolic racism theory's foundation but disagreed that racism is influenced by bias. The symbolic racism theory proposed that bias was formed because of Blacks' fear; however, modern racism argues that the foundation of bias is connected to Whites' fears of Blacks and other things. The influence of exposure to biased concepts or thoughts about Blacks during Whites' childhood could be one reason for bias and discriminatory ideas about Blacks (McConahay, 1986). Second, ambivalence is a form of contemporary racism that deals with Whites who possess negative and positive biases about Blacks. Third, aversive racism posits that that discrimination and racism are subtle; however, these individuals perceive that these behaviors are not racist. The previous section discussed the origins and nuances of racism. This study focuses on Black women's natural hair media representation. An appropriate examination of mass media is provided to better explain the role of natural hair in the Black community.

Contemporary Mass Media

Media have a profound effect on society in subtle and unsubtle ways. There are many effects of media and media production in a democratic society. The indirect effect looms large in the public debate (Leveson Inquiry, 2012). Media are powerful tools that impact individuals' day-to-day lives in different ways. These impacts vary in politics, capitalism, and social dialogue (Leveson Inquiry, 2012). Parikka (2013) explained that one definition of media is not necessarily crucial. However, studies focus on removing the boundaries of how individuals comprehend media and urge growth in the field of media studies (Parikka, 2013).

The earliest form of media was print; newspapers were distributed to the elite individuals in society. Newspapers were used to deliver information about things that were going on in society. In the 1780s, the United States moved to the Press Era, which involved newspapers' bias based on political party affiliation. By the 1840s, popular newspapers were created, and a more sophisticated approach to newspapers, such as journalistic standards, was imposed in print media. Second, the development of the radio emerged. In the 1920s, the beginning of news being transferred through radio was present in society. Powerful companies such as CBS and NBC started. In 1940, a good percentage of Americans had a radio and used it daily. Soon, the popularity of television started to become very prominent in the United States. Television was a strong focus that changed the normalcy of United States entertainment.

According to Lumen.com, television combined the concepts of newspaper and radio into a visual form of media. World War II influenced individuals to purchase television because of the desire to know current information from President Roosevelt. He conducted the first television broadcast in 1939 at the World's Fair. In the 1950s, various television shows were being developed, and marketers started to consume and take up airtime for television. Since the powerful television era, a new form of media was developed, often called "new media." New media included the internet in 2000 and the rapid growth of social media websites and digital news outlets, making news easily accessible to individuals online. This type of media transformation included individuals being able to download and get a customized saturation of news and entertainment content, and the development of citizen journalism followed. Citizens had the ability, through the internet and smartphones, to record and upload content on popular sites

such as Facebook and YouTube (Lumen Learning, 2020). For example, the 24-hour news cycle has made it challenging for newspapers to stay popular. For instance, free online blogs and access to different news sources such as social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) have made it very hard to revamp newspapers or decrease citizen journalism (Lumen Learning, 2020).

This evolution of media outlets in the United States has collectively changed society. Smeltzer and Rae (2014) explored how new and old media were used when citizens showed appreciation for a fallen and respected leader, Jack Layton, through media. The authors explored how powerful and traditional news sources were used to communicate and/or control the story behind Canada's powerful leader. The individuals who participated in citizen journalism decided to post the leader on social media pages and write chalk messages at Toronto's City Hall, shortly after the news about his death circulated.

Smeltzer and Rae (2014) explained how social media (new media) could be powerful and promote positive activism despite social media cons. The use of chalk messages and images represented everyone, regardless of power or status in society, accessibility to express ideas and admiration to the respected leader (Smeltzer & Rae, 2014). As society grows and new and old media co-exist, the idea of media representation becomes essential to media consumers and/or participants' social interactions.

Social Media

Kietzmann et al. (2011) explained the origins of social media. Kietzmann et al (2011) stated that

social media includes mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms in which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

Given the tremendous exposure of social media in the popular press today, we are doing an altogether new communication landscape (p. 241).

The authors explained that social media has emerged as a dominant media source of individuals in society. Kietzmann et al.'s (2011) article focused on describing what social media is and the forms that encompass it, including recognition, dialogue, sharing, relation, and categories. This study's significance was that a decisive shift in social media and individual participation in social media created expectancy. There were questions for large corporations because a power shift happened concerning public relations and marketing individuals (Kietzmann et al., 2011). More specially, users can impact companies' brands through social media. The calls for companies to try to learn about social media and become interactive with this new type of social interaction. The authors provided several building blocks that demonstrated how companies could identify and appropriately use communicative techniques to understand social media users' interaction (Kietzmann et al., 2011)

The concept of identity deals with users' input of personal identities on social media profiles. However, it is vital to understand intentionally and unintentionally

identifiable content on social media. Second, users participate in conversation heavily on social media, and corporations have found a balance between interacting with users because it often communicates that organizations care about individuals' experiences with products. Third, users' willingness to share or interact on social media depends on the platform. Presence deals with users' ability to social interactions with other users. Relationships indicate that users may have things in common that encourage social interaction. Reputation includes the credibility of social media users and content. The likeness of users' content is often indicated through viewership and likes. Last, groups are the way users create communications within the larger social media application. Social media platforms give users the ability to assign relationship status to users and create extended groups that have open, closed, and request membership only. In all, Kietzmann et al. (2011) found that social media has challenged corporations to change the way employers interact and sell products to consumers. Consumers do not merely desire to be passive but interactive. This includes corporations' needs to understand, allow discourse, and react to consumers, and this happens with corporations understanding and using social media functions (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Media Representation and Black Hair

Media in the United States have evolved not just in the sense of societal behavior but in social constructs. For instance, the development of Cultural Studies in the 1950s-1960s in the Contemporary Cultural Studies program at Birmingham University provided a foundation to study of popular culture. Most importantly, Stuart Hall pioneered the evolution of the intellectual enhancement of media representation (Gere, 2015). Hall (1997a) argued that representation was not a simple ideology because of the

inclusion of viewers' perceptions and/or differences; this approach offers a means to examine the meanings of Black hair styles.

Black hair has more meaning than just a connection to a Black's woman body. Hair has a meaningful and cultural symbolic connotation in society (Mercer, 1987). Thompson (2009) stated that hair is an influential tool that changes individuals and how they are perceived by other people. According to Tate (2016), during the 1800s, a surge of rejection of White beauty standards and Black hair existed through types of hairstyles in the diaspora. Also, according to Barnett (2016), the purpose of Black women's hair straighteners was to disconnect any resemblance to natural hair to reflect White characteristics; this often communicates levels of self-hate. These ideas were developed through ideas of racism and/or White supremacist perspectives in society. Donaldson (2012) connected economic stability as a critical factor that explains why Black women conform to straightening hair. More so, conforming to these standards lessens the perception of rebelling against Whites and prominent media images. Abdullah (1998) and Thompson (2009) argued that Black women who style hair in its natural state were perceived to have hair that is not presentable, unethical, and inappropriate in the workplace. Furthermore, hair social constructs exist within White supremacy and standards of beauty characteristics because of the devaluing of Blacks' traits and natural appearance (Collins, 2004; Tate, 2016).

The Black media and/or press, formed during the 1900's, was nourished and established from the perspectives of abolition. Simply put, Black media stems from the idea that this press is oppositional because it articulates the Black voice and or experiences (Nie & Waltenburg, 2017). According to O'Kelly, (1982), the publications

of Black newspapers were highly associated with and/or included perspectives of Black protests. O’Kelly’s (1982) article examined the evolution of the Black press and content located in the articles about protests from the original date of publication in 1827 to World War II (O’Kelly, 1982). The author discovered that holistically the Black press included content that overall caters to and/or focuses on Black activism. The Black press provided liberating perspectives on the treatment of African Americans in Western society, particularly the U.S. Currently, the organizations still publish content that is centered on Black activist perspectives, maintain a relationship with organizers, and have a strong presence of Black protest and heritage (O’Kelly, 1982). Furthermore, other scholars have examined the role of the Black press and explored the frames this type of media used in discourses. In other words, the Black press is a significant counterpoint and counterpart to the White, mainstream press (Huspek, 2004, p. 218). Furthermore, other studies have proven that the Black press uses dialogue in different ways when creating a conversation about political and social views in journalism (Browne et al., 2016; Jacobs, 1996). This statement was evident in a study that explored different frames in newspapers that contain conversations about immigration.

According to Browne et al.’s (2016) study, “Different game, different frame? Black Counter Discourses and Depictions of Immigration in Atlanta's African-American and Mainstream Press,” discourse was framed differently in Black newspapers. Specifically, the study found that the frames of immigration in two newspapers, the *Atlanta Daily World* (Black newspaper) and *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (non-Black newspaper), were different. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

newspaper framed people who immigrated through a lens of not obeying the law, while the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* framed the conversation of immigration through the lens of illegal profiling and city officials' actions (Browne et al., 2016).

Another study examined the media coverage of the Rodney King case (Jacobs, 1996). The author explained that King was speeding in Los Angeles, California on March 3, 1991, when King was stopped by several LAPD police officers, where he was brutally abused by three police officers while the other police watched. This situation was recorded on camera by George Holliday, who was offered a monetary reward for the video by a Los Angeles news station. When the video tape was released, a public outcry followed and led to riots and protests in California (Jacobs, 1996).

Jacobs' (1996) study examined newspaper coverage of Blacks' newspapers and popular/headline newspapers of the Rodney King crisis and found that Los Angeles Times (headline newspaper) discussed the uprising as rooted in division and political acts that showed city leaders as approachable and civil. However, the Los Angeles Sentinel (Black press) focused on the topic of race discrimination and the systematic injustices and called for unity amongst Blacks to achieve and demand equality (Jacobs, 1996). Another study that examined the use of media for Blacks was the article "Bearing Witness while Black: Theorizing African American Mobile Journalism after Ferguson" by Richardson (2017). Richardson (2017) explored Blacks' uses of mobile techniques as a form of Black journalism in current and popular society. Specifically, this study examined the instances where Blacks used technology to counteract the injustices and racism that happened in the community.

Richardson (2017) noted that this was used during the Ferguson, Missouri protest. This protest centered on the killing of an unarmed Black teenager, Michael Brown, who was killed by a White police officer. Also, this type of protest emerged because of the killing of Freddy Grey by police officers in Baltimore, Maryland. Richardson (2017) referred to this type of activism as mobile journalism who are Black and interact strategies as journalists. Like the foundation of the Black press, Blacks used sousveillance-style journalism to protest the powerful structures in society. As Black media have evolved throughout the years from newspapers to social media, an exploration into another social movement that protests racial injustices is the natural hair movement. Sengupta (2006) conducted a comparative analysis of how three women of different ethnicities were depicted in a magazine advertisement. The three ethnicities of the three women were Black, East Asian, and White. The author found that Black women were more represented in terms of fashion, and East Asian women were represented more in content involving computers. More so, Sengupta (2006) showed that Eurocentric beauty ideas were presented, and Black women were represented in a more sexual way.

However, in another study by Humphrey and Schuman (1984), during the 1950's Blacks were not shown in magazine advertisements. The Blacks who had lighter skin complexion were often represented in media because darker skin Blacks were not considered acceptable. Previous studies of Black hair in magazines include Zinkhan et al.'s (1990) study that explored magazines to examine the increased representation of Black people in advertising from the time 1967-1986. A quantitative analysis was used to explore this phenomenon. The researchers found Black representation was increasing

in TV commercials but slowly in magazines. Colfax and Sternberg (1972) conducted a content analysis from 1965 to 1970 that examined how Blacks were being represented in magazine ads. The study revealed that Blacks were mainly seen in the magazine's advertisements as working-class individuals, associated in backgrounds that displayed attributions of poverty, and Black women were shown as being single and with children.

Baker (2005) conducted a comparative study that examined the representation of women in Vogue and Cosmopolitan magazines and discovered that White females were present in White magazines and Black females were largely present in Black magazines. Leslie (1995) explored magazine representations of Blacks from 1957 to 1989 and discovered that images of Blacks who had natural hairstyles increased and a decline of images that showed Blacks with straight hair. This study included the first wave of Blacks embracing natural hair. Hazell and Clarke (2008) conducted a quantitative and qualitative content analysis that focused on two African American magazines, Jet and Essence, in a one-year time span. Specifically, the scholars examined the representation of Blacks in magazine ads. The authors found that Blacks were depicted both negatively and positively in these magazines. The author argued that the numeric presence of Blacks was not necessarily the most important force as it relates to past studies; however, they argued that the value and substance of the portrayal of these individuals are important as well.

Akinro and Mbunyuza-Memani (2019) examined African women 's beauty portrayals in magazines from 2010 to 2015. The authors found that the images of African women depicted in the study were not diverse in their representations and

showed African women parallel to Eurocentric beauty standards. For example, the authors found that African women did not have diverse skin complexation, hair texture or bodily representation. The authors stated that “while some of the magazines such as New African Woman pride themselves in breaking the limitations of stereotypical representations of African women and beauty, they still define beauty according to Eurocentric or “western” standards of flowing hair, light skin and a thin body” (Akinro & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2019, p. 320).

Last, Gilchrist and Thompson (2012) explored how Black hair in magazines affects Black women’s perception of their hair and what this group deems and/or views as beautiful and/or acceptable hair. The authors found that magazine advertisements have an impact on Black women’s ideas of self-beautiful, and these magazines impact how women nourish their hair. The article argued that the media play a considerable role in informing societal perceptions.

Black Hair, Colorism, & Hair Texture

The civil rights activist, Malcolm X, addressed skin tone in the Black community and Western society in one of his speeches entitled, *Who Taught You To Hate Yourself?* He asked these questions

Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair?

Who taught you to hate the color of your skin to such that
you bleach to get like the white man? Who taught you to
hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips?

(Malcolm X, 1962, para 1)

He asked these three critical questions in his 1962 speech in Los Angeles during a funeral service for Roland Stroke, killed by a police officer, who was killed by a police officer (Malcom X, 1962). Malcolm X presented the audience with a series of rhetorical questions about self-hate that has been propagated by Whites (Malcolm X, 1962). The three questions allude to the existence of colorism, texturism, and featurism that are present in the Black community due to the existence of Western beauty ideologies. In W.E.B. DuBois' book, *The Souls of Black Folks*, he also discussed the conflict created by the color line (DuBois, 1903). Sears and Savalei (2006) explained that the color line included three prototypes: assimilation, discriminatory legal policies, and multiculturalism. This blockage restricted Blacks from assimilating into society, which often stopped most Blacks' ability to progress in society and gain status. Assimilation was derived from the concept that individuals who immigrated must conform to the Anglo-Saxon and European customs. The second prototype is the concept that Blacks experienced discrimination through the government; however, during the 1960s-70s, the legal policies of the color line ended. The third prototype was a color line that included more than Black people. This color line included individuals such as Asians and Latinos (Sears & Savalei, 2006).

Several scholars have discussed the implications of colorism in the Black community. For example, the Black community's skin complexion was described on a scale from lighter to darker, which often creates a variation in skin complexion desirability (Keith et al., 2010; Maddox & Gray, 2002; Thompson & Keith, 2001). The literature shows that light-skinned Blacks experience fewer limitations than dark-skinned Blacks in Western society and intercultural spaces (Bowman et al., 2004;

Gullickson, 2005; Jones, 2000). The intercultural distinction of the word colorism was developed by Alice Walker in the late 1900s (Russell et al., 1993). Darker skin tone is perceived as negative in society, and this ideology works to disenfranchise people of African descent.

The impact of colorism is far more present or worse for Black women because of gender. For example, standards and pressures of beauty, relationships, and economic status are confounding factors that impact Black women who have a darker skin complexion in distinctive ways (Brown et al., 2003; Hill, 2002; Snider & Rosenberg, 2006). Hill (2002) argued that colorism is instilled in individuals in childhood, impacting the mental or perceptual view of darker skin girls. According to Gasman and Abiola (2016), “Colorism is a form of discrimination, based on skin tone, that generally privileges lighter-skinned Black and penalizes darker-festations, and damaging results” (p.39).

Researchers have found that from the 1940’s to the 1970’s that lighter skinned women with European attributes were considered more physically attractive than dark-skinned women (Dansby, 1980; Marks, 1943; Martin, 1964; Parrish, 1944; Walker, 1983). Light-skinned individuals were perceived to be more accomplished, popular, and smarter. Also, these individuals were perceived to have higher self-esteem and self-worth (Cash, 1981). Scholars from various disciplines such as psychology and sociology have discovered that women are affected by skin tone bias more often than men (Hunter, 2007; Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Keith & Herring, 1991; Neal & Wilson, 1989).

According to Hernton (1965), light-skinned Black women have high physical and social desirability because of the White standard of beauty. Neal (1988) conducted a study using Black participants to explore indicators of physical attractiveness as it pertains to facial features. She discovered that women with darker skin tones were deemed less attractive and that women with Caucasian features were seen not only as being more attractive but more successful and happier with their careers and personal love lives (Neal, 1988). According to Steele (as cited in Hill, 2002; Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Hunter, 1990; Hunter, 2005, 2007), “Lighter skinned Blacks are more likely to have higher-status occupations, higher incomes, more years of schooling, live in better neighborhoods, and marry higher status individuals than their darker skinned counterparts” (Hill, 2002; Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Hunter, 2005, 2007, p.56).

Steele (2016) conducted a study that explored colorism in a predominantly Black television show that celebrates Black culture and used textual analysis methodology and the Black feminist approach to analyze the characters’ media representation in the television (Steele, 2016). This study offers an effective, structured example model for study, and Steele (2016) offered a foundational review of the literature regarding colorism, beauty, and socioeconomic status, and found that emerging phenotypic differences played a dividing role during slavery and that slaves with lighter skin often received better treatment than their darker counterparts.

The Contemporary Natural Hair Movement

According to Rowe (2015), the contemporary natural hair movement has taken place along with the advent of the internet. This increase in the attention of Black women embracing their natural hair started in the late 2000s throughout Western

society. This included an increase in information about the wellness of natural hair. During this period, society has seen an increase in the viewership of Black women styling their natural hair, which denotatively means that these women must stop altering the hair texture through straightening combs and/or relaxers, and this is reflected in the media advertisements as well (Healy, 2011; Thomas, 2013).

According to Henderson (2015), the natural hair movement is described as a stage when Black women rejected the use of chemicals to change the hair texture from course to straight hair. These chemicals and products included harmful components for Black women's hair. The natural hair movement had two phases; the first stage was during the 1960 and 1970's and is highly associated with the Black Power, Black Panther, and My Black Beautiful movement (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Wanjiru, 2017). Gramsci (1971) explained the concept of hegemony, which describes how a subtle political and economic power system functions in Western society. Hegemony posits that society is often influenced by the elites and these individuals create social constructs of society through various means (Gramsci, 1971). An example of the impact of hegemonic structure on Black hair was during the Black Power Movement of the 1960s, which involved advocating for justice and equality and against the racist structures of Jim Crow and police brutality. During this time, Blacks wore afros, natural hair, which became a political and/or social statement. This hairstyle was worn by individuals in the Black community that aimed to push society's awareness of self-love and worthiness of Blacks; however, hegemonic forces talked about the afro as being associated with Blacks being militant, claiming that the hair looked ungroomed, and it attributed their style to the Black Panthers party (Jere-Malanda, 2008).

According to Johnson and Bankhead (2014), the natural movement has been around since the 1960's and 70's, but resurfaced and existed through the 2000's, and was present in the 2015's. However, during the 2000's, the natural hair movement was a little more distinctive than the past movement in 1960's and 70's. Current women with natural hair embrace this type of hairstyling in absence of a political stance (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014).

The natural hair movement encompasses a lot of notions and/or ideologies. According to Nimocks (2015), "The natural hair movement has not just addressed the need for women to be educated on hair and personal care products but has also provided both a virtual and physical space for women to feel comfortable talking about their health outside the context of skin and hair products" (p. 9). Other scholars have stated that Black women's choices to transition from relaxed hair to natural reflected a variety of reasons, including hair wellness, texture, supportiveness, and economic (Thomas, 2013).

More specifically, Wilkerson (2017) noted that the natural hair movement signifies in many parts of the world that the embracing of natural hair has met with considerable admiration in the Black community. The author says that the movement has changed society: "Due to the changing beauty standards in the U.S. as reflected in mainstream media, the prevalence of social media in communication, and the ability of Black women to redefine and reassert their own standards of beauty, the natural movement has gained momentum in recent years changing what it means to wear natural hair and what it means to be beautiful" (Wilkerson, 2017, p.57).

In Wilkerson (2017)'s article, "The Natural Hair Movement Continuum," she argued social media websites had played a major role in helping Black women to have the resources and knowledge needed to change their hair from relaxed to natural hair. These websites were Facebook, Instagram, YouTube; they have created a space where Black women can feel comfortable and learn about the different products and ways to style their hair. Furthermore, Robinson (2011) wanted to discover if there was any connection amongst the following variables: Black women's ideas of beauty, hair texture, and race. The author found that the participants in the study viewed good and bad hair under the premise of how much an individual hair needs to be straightened (Robinson, 2011). For example, if a Black woman's hair is kinky and needs to be straightened a lot to have a straight look, then her hair is bad.

Another study by Ellington (2014) explored how Black women used social media to get information and encouragement when transitioning to natural hair. The scholar noticed within the data that Black women did not receive support from family members about embracing their natural hair, so social media websites were used as a medium for support and knowledge. Third, similar findings were discovered by Tate (2016) that Black women had used online resources to develop a specific place for them to engage in information about natural hair, such as YouTube videos.

Furthermore, the author examined five popular YouTube videos that were created by Black women and found that these Black women publish content about their hair transitions and encourage Black women to embrace their hair (Tate, 2016). Another scholar examined YouTube natural hair videos content but especially discovered that Black women who have natural hair use the internet to show natural hair women

“detangling, shampooing, moisturizing, and styling their tightly coiled hair on camera” (Tate, 2016, p.156). Specifically, the scholar explored how social media websites were tools that Black women used to counteract the idea and/or social requirement of having straight hair in the community.

Literature has shown that the Contemporary Natural Hair Movement has used the internet as a medium to do several things and has worked as a tool to counteract hegemonic and racist notions in society about Black women's aesthetics. According to Byrd and Tharps (2011), “By 2013, there were thousands of blogs and Black hair. Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube also have countless pages and channels dedicated to discussing its significance, care, versatility” (Byrd & Tharps, 2011). The Twitter hashtag “#teamnatural” became common vocabulary that other Black women used to connect throughout several mediums (Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

The Oppositional Gaze

Bell hooks' notion of the “oppositional gaze” highlights the courage of Blacks to reflect and look at stereotypical media representations while creating agency environments. She argues that Blacks should expose the power and discriminatory systems that produce media content for and about Blacks. Specifically, she calls on Black women to reconstruct a new image. Stuart Hall argued that the critical examination of racist representations creates agency for Blacks to look at and reconstruct the media gaze (hooks, 2003). According to hooks (2003), “Agency spaces exist for Black people where we can both interrogate the Other's gaze and look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The gaze has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally” (p., 95).

The existence of Black cinema represents the function of the oppositional gaze. Primarily, this gaze rejected the representation of popular media content that reinforced a racist power structure. According to hooks (2013), "It was the oppositional Black gaze that responded to these looking relations by developing independent Black cinema. Black viewers of mainstream cinema and television could chart the progress of political movements for racial equality via the construction of images and did so" (p. 95). Hooks' (2003) theoretical perspective centered on Black women not being equally represented in media, primarily not being allowed to look or create an image that reflected the Black female spectatorship concept. Hooks' (2003) theoretical concept condemned both the male gaze, which reflects the male ego, and the feminine gaze, which reflected the notion that females were only seen as sex objects that hold and sustain patriarchy's ideologies. She argued that these ideologies support White supremacy and capitalist ideas in society.

Previous scholars have expanded the work of hooks' oppositional gaze through several inquiries. For instance, Jacobs' (2016) argued that "Black girls' development of a critical lens and analytic skills are tied to images in the media and central to their positive development" (p.225). Jacobs' (2016) study revealed that exposure to class content that integrates Black feminism and critical media literacy could enhance Black female youth's critical thinking skills. Second, Smith's (2014) article, *Guest Editor's Introduction: Visual Culture and Race*, explored the interconnections between visual culture and critical culture, looking at the structure of race in the United States. The author connects how the visual representation of culture in each era of the United States (such as slavery and the Great Migration) to the current popular culture (Jacobs, 2016).

Hooks' oppositional gaze can serve as a useful theoretical lens to critique Black women's discourse about natural hair on social media websites. Hooks' theory offers a two-dimensional scope of the Black female spectatorship of the natural hair movement and agency through social media (hooks, 2003). The work of hooks and others who have examined contemporary racism and colorism will inform this study's analysis of hegemonic ideologies that surface during mediated interactions among YouTube influencers and audiences.

Methodology

The methodological approach for this study was a cultural and critical semiotic analysis. According to Zhou and Sloan (2015), critical and cultural methods explore media content that is embedded in culture and power constructs. Cultural and critical studies operate at a subjective level and deal with critical scholars' interpretation of cultural texts (Zhou & Sloan, 2015). These methods vary. Researchers can examine or explore texts through many different lenses (Zhou & Sloan, 2015). Researchers who use this method can examine texts through discourse, narrative, rhetorical, generic, auteur, and semiotic analysis (Zhuo & Sloan, 2015). Specifically, this study uses a semiotic analysis to explore the phenomena. Semiotic criticism is "the study of signs. Not signs as we normally think of signs, but signs in a much broader context that includes anything capable of standing for or representing a separate meaning" (Hodge, 2003, para 1).

Semiotic criticism is the critique of linguistic meanings. Influential scholars who played a huge role in the development and expansion of semiotic criticism are Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Roland Barthes (Storey, 2018).

Ferdinand de Saussure is a vital contributor to semiotic criticism. He developed the linguistic model, which is the idea that language has two parts signifiers and signified. (Chandler, 2007; Storey, 2018). Claude Levi-Strauss used semiotic criticism to explore systems in society. Strauss pinpoints “manners, modes of dress, aesthetic activity and other forms of cultural and social practices as analogous to systems of language.” (Storey, 2018, p.119).

Semiotic criticism is utilized in the mass media field with textual analysis methodology because semiotics scholars explore media texts holistically, looking at connotative and denotative meanings (Chandler, 2007). Such criticism is used in mass media analysis through perspectives of encoding and decoding, the hegemony of ideologies, myths, and codes (Storey, 2013). Mass media scholars’ approach to semiotics criticism often centers on the analysis of socio-economic structures and dominant ideology in mass media messages.

Ferdinand de Saussure developed the core concepts of semiotic analysis, which were signifier, signified, and the sign. Saussure demonstrated that language was constructed by the things society can connect (Storey, 2013). Second, Saussure developed the concept of connotation and denotation as high operatives in semiotic criticism. Denotation and connotation are the meanings society perceive or obtains when viewing content messages (Storey, 2013). These derived meanings are categorized under schools of thought of structuralism and post-structuralism. Structuralism perspectives claim that the meaning of language is structured in a certain pattern. Post-structuralism perspectives claim that meaning is unknown, and the meaning of language is an ever-changing cycle of interpretations (Storey, 2018).

Roland Barthes' contribution to semiotics influenced individuals to view semiotics as a cultural approach ideology (Chandler, 2007). Barthes focuses on mythologies, which expands Saussure's linguistic model. Barthes' contribution to semiotics involved his conceptualization of connotation (secondary significations) and denotation (primary significations), which shows how connotative meaning and denotative meaning can be produced in myths for society's consumption (Storey, 2018). Furthermore, the scholarship and critique of semiotics are present in many fields of study, but the focus of this study is social media.

Methods of Analysis

Encoding/Decoding examines how media messages are produced and interpreted by audience members. Hall's (1980) theoretical concept of media production centers on individuals being the source and receiver of discursive meanings when consuming media. Most importantly, Hall (1980) categorized three ways audiences encode and decode discourse: preferred, negotiated, and oppositional (Hall, 1980). Preferred meaning evaluates viewers' interpretation of media content on a denotative level. The denotative level was described as the audience's understanding of the text from face value. The negotiated meaning surfaces when audiences have an awareness of the formulation of the connotation of the text but agree with the encoded interpretation of the text. Last, the oppositional meaning deals with viewers' rejection of the denotative meaning of the text and interpret it from a contrary perspective (Hall, 1980).

Many scholars have used Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding (1980) to explore critical and cultural phenomena in popular culture. Alsultany (2016) explored media representation of Muslims and Arabs in Hollywood. Alsultany (2016) discovered that

media producers reinforced racist narratives of this popular culture being religiously. Campbell's (2016)'s *Stuart Hall and the Politics of Signification* centered on how the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown was created to protest the racist narrative of Blacks being identified as violent and/or unlawful citizens. Campbell (2016) argued that the findings of critical scholars such as Hall and Barthes's were present in the media users' protest.

Campbell et al. (2014), in *Media in Society*, argued that "society should understand how media content and/or media producers create powerful symbols and codes that exist as the building blocks of human social discourse. Social discourses reflect the values, beliefs, and ideas that are part of the culture, including the work of those who produce media content" (p. 222). Specifically, dominant ideologies, hegemonic power, and narratives in media content have a major role in the production and upkeep of stereotypes, sexism, social status, and sexuality frames in the media (Campbell et al., 2014).

Campbell et al. (2014) echoed and added to the body of critical and cultural work of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theoretical concept (Hall, 1980). According to Campbell et al. (2014), "Stuart Hall has described a process of decoding the myths embedded in media representations. He suggested three levels of analysis, beginning with the preferred meaning- that which was intended by the producer - and moving on to negotiated and oppositional reading of the same message" (p.49). Hall's (1980) "Encoding/Decoding" analysis -- preferred, oppositional, and negotiated meanings -- will be used to analyze videos and users' comments of natural hair YouTube influencers.

Data Collection

The procedures for collecting data included the selection of popular natural hair influencers, the time frame, and video viewership. Specially, two natural hair YouTube influencers' videos and comments were analyzed. Rodriquez (2020) described the top eleven YouTube channels for natural hair. Two of the top YouTube channels that had the most subscribers were chosen: Jasmine Brown (24.1 million subscribers) and The Chic Natural (1.84 subscribers). Ten videos were chosen for analysis (5 from each influencer). The videos chosen were based on the following criterion: they contained natural hair terminology; they were published between 2015-2020; and they had at least 2 million views. The YouTube's influencers' videos and comments were used as data for analysis, primarily through bell hooks' notion of the oppositional gaze.

CHAPTER III – Analysis of Jasmine Brown’s YouTube Vlog

Preferred Readings

This section of the study discusses the analysis of YouTube vloggers' videos and users' comments on videos to critically critique the dominant reading through the lens of Hall's (1997) Encoding/Decoding, Barthes' Myths (Barthes, 1972), and hegemonic ideologies of colorism and aversive racism that are present in the videos. Hooks' oppositional gaze especially guides the focus of this investigation. This study seeks to explore representation from the lens and/or space of Black women. This space can be seen through YouTube discussions of natural hair. This study included an analysis of 10 natural hair videos. The videos chosen were based on the following criterion: they contained natural hair terminology; they were published between 2015-2020; and they were seen by at least 2 million views. This chapter examines Jasmine Brown's vlog by, first, identifying the preferred/dominant meaning, then providing negotiated and oppositional analyses. The five videos chosen for Jasmine were *Straight/Natural Dyed Hair, Silky Smooth W/One Swipe, My Wash, and Go Routine+ Defined Curls/Natural Hair, Does it Work? Hair Brush Straightener on Natural Hair + Giveaway (closed), How to: Dutch Braid/Inverted French Braids on Natural Hair, and Curly to Straight Hair-No Frizz* (New 2018) tutorial video.

The first video was titled *Straightening /Natural Dyed Hair Silky Smooth W/One Swipe*. This video had 2,023,300 million views and 1, 696 comments (Brown, 2019), and the title included natural hair terminology (i.e., natural hair, curls, Bantu knots, wash-n-go). Jasmine Brown's preferred reading of this video includes the idea that she is presenting a simple way to style natural hair in a fast and effective way to take her

naturally curly hair into a silky straight look. This technique is supported in previous literature, as natural hair scholars have argued that YouTube videos are used as a space for Black women to learn how to style hair (Jackson, 2017). She notes that her followers highly request these videos. The video content focused on describing to followers how these hairstyles are obtainable. Products are introduced in the video and/or listed in the video description and website links to inform audiences about which products do what for the desired hairstyle. For example, this video's description included this information:

BEST STRAIGHTENING HAIR PRODUCTS:

Blow dryer (mine's a Dyson, but any kind works just stretch and brush out at same time Chi Iron Guard: <https://bit.ly/2kvkRjc>

Chill Karatin Silk Infusion <https://bit.ly/2kazaJC>

Bio Ionic 10X Straightener: <https://bit.ly/2kfOi8I> Denman

Straightening Brush: <https://bit.ly/2lQEySx>

The listed products are what Jasmine used in the video to style her hair. These products are shown to viewers, explained, and demonstrated for the watchers to see. Furthermore, the natural hair vlogger listed more information so that viewers can socially connect and/or stay connected and purchase Jasmine Brown-brand eyelashes (Brown, 2019). In the video description, Jasmine informs the audience that her products can be purchased at Ultra, Walmart, and Target, with the hyperlink provided for each company. Jasmine Brown's video's preferred meaning of *Straight/Natural Dyed Hair Silky Smooth W/One Swipe* was that this video showed an effective way to achieve a straighten hair style. This effectiveness straighten hair style is obtained when audiences use these products

Next, Jasmine's video *My Wash and Go Routine! + Defined Curls/Natural Hair* will be discussed. This video was chosen because it met the criterion for selection to be critiqued. The video had 2,784,063 views and 2, 227 comments. Six products were mentioned because these were the things that the followers needed to obtain the defined curl look. Most importantly, the receivers' preferred reading of Jasmine's *My Wash and Go Routine! + Defined* have several different responses to the YouTube Vlogger's YouTube Content (Brown, 2017).

Jasmine's video's preferred meaning for the *My Wash and Go Routine + Defined Curls* was to show viewers with a curly hair texture how to apply a wash and go. Specifically, the video's description stated

Here is my HIGHLY requested wash and go routine
For all my curly boys and girls! plus how to get drained
I hope y'all enjoy this video and this video helps tons of you
and your washing goes! this is my GO-TO! and all of my go
to favorite products! I'll have my products listed below!
LOVE YALL.

The third video for analysis and critique is Jasmine Brown's *Does it work? Hair Brush Straightener on Natural Hair + Giveaway (closes)*. This video met the criterion with natural hair terminology in the title, being published between 2015- 2020, and having 3, 710, 214 million views and 5, 218 comments. This section will discuss the preferred meaning of Jasmine's video and the comments. One preferred meaning of this video was available in the description of the YouTube section. The video description included Jasmine's social and/or social media connections such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook,

Snapchat, and professional site for booking needs. Also, Jasmine offered giveaway prices for this video and listed the criterion for selecting the winner. Jasmine's rules included that the candidates must be subscribed and follow her YouTube channel and the Hair Luxury Shop and type an email address to enter this contest (Brown, 2016).

Jasmine's preferred reading in this video included the idea that she is trying a new brush that will take her curly natural hair to a straight state. Additionally, Jasmine communicated to viewers that this was her first time using this product. Through Stuart Hall's (2001) concept of denotation, we can see that Jasmine is sending a communicated message through mediated channels with individuals through ways of "reality" and infrastructure (Hall, 2001). Simply put, Jasmine was selling a natural hair product to her target audience members by trying the product. The implied meaning of this video can be that Jasmine is operating as a credible source for this product.

More specifically, Jasmine can be trusted and has a large audience and the skills to sell this product. Additionally, in the video, Jasmine admits that the brush is not working, and she does several things: she turns up the heat on the brush and pulls out her flat iron. The implied meaning of this text is that Jasmine has no knowledge of this product and is just as apprehensive about this product as the viewers; however, at the end of the video, Jasmine admits that the brush straightener worked better than she thought, despite the need to brush her hair more than once. She discussed that this was because of her hair texture and restated the brush's effectiveness by stating that with the assistance of the brush, her regular time to straighten her hair was cut in half (Brown, 2016).

The fourth video for analysis is Jasmine Brown's *How to: Dutch Braid/Inverted French Braids on Natural Hair* video. This video met the criterion: the video had natural hair terms in the title, it was published in the year 2015, and it had 3,179,547 million views and 2,205 thousand comments. The comments that were chosen for critique were the top comments. First, a discussion of Jasmine's preferred reading will be discussed, and the receivers' comments will be highlighted for analysis. Jasmine's first preferred reading was present in YouTube's description text. The description stated that Jasmine's purpose for this video was to provide an easy and helpful tutorial that shows her audience how to braid natural hair with two strands. Jasmine explains that she wears this style as a convenient way to not deal with her big natural hair (Brown, 2015). Second, another meaning of this video deals, as stated in earlier video analyses, products are mentioned to provide in the YouTube's description box.

The description of the products deals with "popular" natural hair products such as Argan Oil, hair gel, and curl crème products (Brown, 2015). Next, Jasmine's video includes some denotative meanings. In the video, Jasmine showed her audience how to do this style; however, noticeable phrases were presented when describing a particular product. Jasmine started with the phrase "Black people brush," which caused a level of discourse in the comments, which will be discussed later. However, this phrase could communicate that Jasmine is aware that this part of her channel caters to Black individuals.

The fifth video for analysis is Jasmine Brown's *Curly to Straight Hair-No Frizz* (New 2018). This video met the criterion: the video had natural hair terms in the title, it was published between the years 2015-2018, and it had 5,630, 829 views and 6,147

comments (Brown, 2018). This section will discuss Jasmine's denotative meaning of the video and the commenters' meaning derived from the video. The first denotative meaning from this video, such as others, was found in YouTube's video description. It stated,

Hey everyone! I haven't straightened my hair in over a year! So I
decided to do so today and film it for y'all! the transformation tho!
and THE LENGTH CHECK WOW! check it out and I hope you all enjoy (:

From the text above, the preferred meaning of this video is to simply see the growth of her hair in its straightened state. In the video, such as in the others, Jasmine introduces the products and applies the products. More specifically, the products are mentioned in the description; however, Jasmine links a song in the description in this video. Simply put, the face-value meaning of this video is to demonstrate how to make one's hair from a natural state to a straight state using products, what Stuart Hall (1997) would describe as infrastructure. The infrastructure shown in this video can be described as the lighting (a professional look), the showing of the products at the beginning of the video, the products' information in the description, and the music that fades in and out to create a space of relatability and normalcy.

In summary, Jasmine's five videos for preferred reading have a current theme of unintentionally reinforcing ideas of Western beauty and creating myths through connotative and denotative signification by advertising products, through the use of music, and through the infrastructure of her videos. More so, some of Jasmine's videos do not align with the sense-making of being a natural hair vlogger. For example, some of her more famous (most views and comments) are videos where she is straightening

her hair (Brown, 2018). This preferred meaning is highly complex and brings debate to Jasmine's purpose in creating these videos. At face value, Jasmine is providing information to women on how to get a desirable straightened hair look. More so, she is providing her audience with knowledge about the best straightening hair products and promoting her products (eyelashes) that are on sale in corporate companies such as Target, Ultra, and Walmart.

As we will see in the negotiated and oppositional analyses, hegemonic ideologies of colorism and aversive racism were present in the YouTube influencer's content and audiences' engagement in several ways. First, one of the core reasons for this video was to show users how to make naturally curly hair look straight. The idea of colorism is still present because Jasmine is endorsing and/or perpetuating the idea that straight hair is the desirable look. The idea that Black women should alter the naturally curly to get a good straight still reinforce ideologies of colorism.

Negotiated Readings

This section discusses the negotiated readings for Jasmine Brown's five videos. In the first, *Straight/Natural Dyed Hair, Silky Smooth W/One Swipe/*, its denotative meaning from viewers is different from Jasmine's based on individuals' responses from the video. From this video, only top comments were chosen as content to analyze. Some comments questioned the health of natural hair, such as Jasmine Brown's use of a blonde product in her hair in the video. A thread comments included viewers reading the text from the perspective of how well Jasmine put the blonde dye in her hair instead of an efficient way to straighten natural hair.

For example, a user named BlackGirlLovesAnime6 commented, “That dye job was executed so well. It looks natural” (Brown, 2019). This comment received 4, 000 thousand likes and 8 comments. Below is a thread of comments that involve the audience responding to Jasmine’s coloring her natural hair blonde. This conversation shows a negotiation of Jasmine’s content as it relates to the health of natural hair:



Nicole Flowers

1 year ago (edited)

Krissy His daughter her videos are ... dated, you know? She’s had her hair dyed like this for 5 months if you look at her video where she went from jet black to this color.

REPLY



Nicole Flowers

1 year ago

Krissy His daughter im not a regular subscriber either ... it took 2 seconds. And whose worked up I don’t know how you read that through a screen but okay 🙄

5

REPLY



Nicole Flowers

1 year ago (edited)

Krissy His daughter i didn’t go above and beyond. As I stated it took about 2 seconds to answer your question. Just as you said your comment wasn’t out of aggression ... yet here you are jumping to conclusions about mine. If you sensed malice in my comment that was through your own fault. Also, if you look back when you asked your question,

“how long is a while” that was directed at another user ... not i. so I’m not sure where you saw me speak with such confidence and act as a spokesperson for the YouTuber. You’re being defensive because you asked a question that could have been answered through your own research. Judging by the way you type, you may be older than i and not well versed in using the internet. Which is nothing to be upset about.

Show less

4

REPLY



Raven YouDontNeedToKnowMyLastName

1 year ago

@Krissy Hisdaughter about five months or 4 months I’m not exactly sure but its been a while she had her hair dyed before too, but she changed it back to her natural color she also didn’t bleach it, but that’s normal most people who dye their hair with no bleach gets no damage at all.

REPLY



Raven YouDontNeedToKnowMyLastName

1 year ago

@Krissy Hisdaughter no problem love 💕

The conversation implies that new meaning was created. As Hall (1997) observed, while messages are sent through mediated channels by the sender to the receiver, it does not mean that another meaning cannot be recreated. For example, in this discussion, the topic of hair health emerges. The definition of natural is constructed by Black women

with the appliance of heat to style hair. Second, the discussion offers an idea of what constitutes natural hair and/or the normal within this community for natural hair.

Most importantly, throughout the responses, viewers focused on commenting about Jasmine's hairstyle, such as "her hair is beautiful," and "she looks like superstar Beyonce'" (Brown, 2019). A good number of commenters stated that Jasmine's hair was beautiful or that it looked good. In its denotative meaning, the term beautiful means "having qualities of beauty: exciting aesthetic pleasure" (Merriam Webster, 2021). Roland Barthes, a critical and cultural scholar, argued that denotation (primary significations) and connotation (secondary significations) could exist in different ways in society to produce consumption (Storey, 2018). The negotiated meaning of this video includes the idea that some viewers agreed that Jasmine was not fully representing this idea of natural hair because of her decision to dye her hair blonde, which questioned the health of the hair. Levels of negotiation are in the viewers' comments.

Audience responses to Jasmine Brown's second video, *My Wash and Go Routine + Defined Curls/Natured Hair. Does It Work?* also reflected levels of negotiation. The purpose of the video was to provide viewers with information about the products she used. Jasmine introduced each product. They were Carlos Daughter Almond Milk sulfate-free shampoo & restoring conditioner and Argan Oil Morocco Combing and Detangle for hair (Brown, 2017). Second, Jasmine's preferred reading in the video was that viewers should purchase the products and follow the steps to achieve the look of a defined curly hairstyle (Brown, 2017).

Hall (1997) considered how individuals consume mediated messages. Jasmine Brown's followers are referred to as receivers of the natural hair YouTube content. When considering YouTube content and Hall (1997)'s notion of the preferred reading, we can see that some receivers responded differently to the media content being delivered in this video. Jasmine's video comments showed that receivers of the content valued and/or needed the tutorial and desired to obtain that hairstyle presented in the video.

Some of the comments were, "how is her hair so smooth and silky? mine is the complete opposite" and "omg hair goals I defused my natural curly hair today, and the front looked kind of good, but the back looked so frizzy, and I didn't have any time to fix it, so I had to go to school like that." These comments describe how receivers understand the video content and how the messaging in the video is user-specific to Jasmine's target audience. For example, Jasmine's video title includes the term defined curls. It is important to consider that the comments that were considered (top comments) did not entirely include women with curly hair textures (Brown, 2017).

Jasmine Brown's third video, *Hairbrush Straightener on Natural hair + GivewayClosed*, has room for negotiation in its readings as well. This section discusses the receiver's denotative meaning of Jasmine's *Does it Work* video. First, some commenters derived meaning from the text centered on how-to follow-up questions. For example, some commenters asked questions such as how Jasmine manages to trim split ends and knots, how keep the hair straight, and refer to the health and beauty of the hair (Brown, 2016). Next, some commenters responded to the video to communicate how

beautiful Jasmine's hair was and follow-up questions about the hair products and the purchase of the hair straighter brush (Brown, 2016).

Third, some commenters explained that Jasmine's hair texture is similar and that exposure to this video was beneficial. Receiver's comments about how Jasmine managed her hair are parallel to similar natural hair scholarship and studies. Natural hair scholars have argued that Black women use YouTube and other social sites to be informed and embrace the journey of styling natural hair (Ellington, 2014; Jackson, 2017; Tate, 2016; Wilkerson, 2017). Second, the commenters reinforced the ideas discussed earlier in the text that align with European-centric beauty standards in Western society.

Jasmine Brown's fourth video, *How to Dutch Braid/Intervened French Braids on natural*, had some room for negotiation. In the beginning of the video, Jasmine did a quick disclaimer that any hair type could do this hairstyle. However, Jasmine considers not limiting her following or subscribing numbers based on one target audience. When considering advertising and mass media, the sender is trying to send a message to a broad but defined audience. The sender's goal might be to sell a product and/or gain capital (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). Therefore, the denotative messages must be easily relatable to all audiences. In Jasmine's case, this idea is present and exists in a complex way. For example, Jasmine is a natural hair vlogger, a biracial woman, and produces content showing individuals how to style natural hair. However, when considering selected videos for analysis, Jasmine did not mention the natural hair movement or make any comments that would indicate her knowledge of Western beauty or the contextual factors about the contemporary natural hair movement.

However, in this video, she stated one Black community's specific phrase, baby hairs. She explains in the video that Black would achieve 'baby hairs' with a toothbrush, not a hairbrush. This is the only reference that Jasmine makes that is specific to the Black community. However, Jasmine creates videos styling natural hair. Jasmine focus seems not be primary race and/or natural hair movement related. Specifically, my critique is that Jasmine strategically produces natural hair content in a way that pleases the Black natural hair community while considering the more significant market and her own company (Lushes). She appears to be catering to YouTube's economic needs of getting people going to the sites, increasing advertisers, and selling products.

The preferred text has multiple meanings. First, Jasmine wanted to show her audience how to style natural hair in a two-strand braid. Second, Jasmine wanted to consider other political factors such as YouTube, her bottom line, and other markers. Third, Jasmine presented the styling of her hair like Black women's focus or oriented goal of appearance. For example, Jasmine referred to burling the bottom of the hair to get a defined curl, and she mentioned the importance of slicking back the baby hairs. This language is particular to Black women, and it also enforces Western beauty standards (curly texture hair or appearance) (Tate, 2016).

In Jasmine Brown's fifth video, *Curly to Straight Hair-No-Frizz* (New 2018), negotiation was minimal. Furthermore, in the previous videos that were analyzed, commenters showed an interest in the songs that Jasmine decided to play. Therefore, it can be argued that this is another strategic way to cater to the needs of views and gain some subscribers and views to her channel.

In summary, the negotiated readings of Jasmine Brown's five videos focus on Jasmine's overall display of intentions of producing this content. In these videos, Jasmine sells products, advertises her eyelashes, uses language that supports Western beauty standards, and does not provide educational content about natural hair and/or the natural hair movements. More specifically, the audience requests follow-up questions that focus on the reality of how to style natural hair, such as handling split needs, knots, keeping the hair straight, the health of the hair, and how aesthetic pleasuring the hair looks.

Second, hegemonic ideologies of colorism and aversive racism were present in the YouTube influencers' content and/or audience engagement in several ways. Hegemonic ideologies can be seen operating in of some Jasmine's videos when she advertises products to her audience through written and visual communication. The YouTube influencers motivate to provide audiences with a good dye product for blonde hair but lack the focus on the health of the hair can be seen as the influence desire to profit from this popular culture and/or social movement. Specifically, Jasmine's video content highly benefits the cosmetic industry rather than educating Black women about natural hair and/or the natural hair movement. Colorism and aversive exist in negotiated ways in these videos in several ways. First, Jasmine's selection of blonde hair for a YouTube channel that focuses on natural hair and/or a space for Black women reinforces notions of Western beauty standards. Last, Jasmine's videos focus on the look of natural hair.

Oppositional Readings

This section considers the oppositional readings of the vlog posts, including Brown's first video, *Straight/Natural Dyed Hair, Silky Smooth W/One Swipe*. While the definition of beauty was not directly stated in the user's comments, the critique of the language used can be derived from an indication that Jasmine Brown's hair, smooth, straight, and altered from its natural state, is beautiful. The meaning of the term beauty is constituted by the achievement goal of silky and straight hair, which is parallel to European and/or Western beauty standards (Tate, 2016). In this video, Jasmine serves as a natural hair vlogger; however, she participated in a systematic practice that the natural hair community seeks to dismantle and/or dismiss in the Black community, as seen in user comments such as "umm, this is the prettiest girl I've ever seen in my life or "I want curly hair so that I can straighten them so satisfying omg." From Hall's preferred reading perspective, there are two readings of this text.

First, Jasmine's video helps viewers obtain a silky straight look hairstyle and provides users with the necessary products (commercialized) to obtain a look that is parallel to the dominant society's acceptance of beauty that goes against natural hair movement's values. Second, the user's preferred reading of Jasmine's video assists users who are natural style is that she is helping users who are natural still style hair in a way that is beautiful or pleasurable or simply looks good. Also, viewers' readings of the text acknowledge Jasmine's message of hair health in parts related to heat and color damage.

After Jasmine Brown's second video, *My Wash and Go Routine + Defined Curls/Natural Hair Does It Work?*, one commenter pointed out the unnecessary need for products, especially the Denman brush advertised in Jasmine's video. This brush was used to make women's natural hair more defined to obtain a curly look (Jackson, 2017). Other commenters, such as "YOUR CURLS ARE PERFECT" and a statement from a Black woman's comment, included:

I just cut all my hair off and I'm going natural for a while so I decided to follow this video after watching it when you first put up you inspired me to do this thank you.

These comments are like previous comments which ascribe to Western beauty ideals, notions of hegemony, and enforce ideologies of colorism in the Black community. Colorism is a word that Alice Walker created in the 1900s (Russell et al., 1993). Walker explained that darker skin tone was perceived as negative and/or unacceptance in society; particularly, this concept functions to disenfranchise individuals of African descent (Jasmine, 2017). The consequences of colorism can be more damaging for Black women because of gender and body image politics (Brown et al., 2003; Hill, 2002; Snider & Rosenberg, 2006).

Mark Hill (2002)'s article, "Skin Color and the Perception of Attractiveness among African Americans: Genders make a Difference," explained that colorism was indoctrinated into individuals' minds during childhood, impacting the cognitive understanding and/or perception of girls with darker skin complexion. According to Wilder and Cain (2011), "Skin tone along with other correlated characteristics such as hair texture and facial features has more bearing in the lives of women" (p.581). In the

Black community, hair texture can be included in the notion of colorism because it impacts the lives of Black women due to Western standards or hegemonic perceptions of beauty.

This critique can be supported by previous studies that argued that Western society had excluded cultural communities, enacted slavery, assimilated stolen physical territories, and created ethical hardships (Bhambra, 2013; Jalata, 2008; Mara, 1999; Reddock, 2014). More so, like other videos' comments, the discussion about going natural for reasons such as to dismantle a racist system of oppression against Black women for embracing natural hair was not a dominant theme in the comments for this video (Brown, 2017).

In Jasmine Brown's third video, *Does it Work? Hair Brush Straighten on Natural hair + Giveaway (closes)*, the meaning of the statements above can be further examined in several simple ways. Jasmine's audience consists of a multiracial and multiple gender population. The products included in this video catered to this idea of Western beauty and hegemony, a dominant view of society made by the ruling class (Gramsci, 2009; Tate, 2016). The complexity of this product and Jasmine's audience is that Jasmine is a natural hair YouTube vlogger. It can be assumed that Jasmine understands both the intercultural requirement of beauty as it relates to being a Black and/or the widespread or intentional progressive shift in the Black community from relaxed to natural hair.

The idea that natural hair is what this group of Black women is moving to while existing in figuring out how to style natural hair confuses the true intent and its denotative meaning. It can be argued that Jasmine is still enforcing these beauty standards, or those beauty standards are being recreated or co-created in the context of

natural hair (Hall, 1997). Simply put, the same idea that Black women's hair should be straight, curly, or defined supports the idea that the appearance of the kinky or afro-ish texture is terrible, not wanted, or not presentable. Therefore, this is the same ideology that exists and/or fuels the need for the current re-emergence of the natural hair movement. Also, we can see how YouTube acts as a gatekeeper (Nee, 2015) for allowing this content and providing vloggers YouTube music to play in these videos.

The core meaning of this video and/or others previously discussed is that if the hair is natural or relaxed, weaved, or braided, it must look presentable. The idea and/or definition of presentable is centered, or it exists in understanding hegemony (dominant culture). Barnett (2016) argued that the use of hair straighteners for Black women deals with the idea that one must delete any resemblance to the natural hair to align with European appearances. Unfortunately, this ideology and/or behavior exists through the lens of self-hate developed and reinforced through notions of racism and White supremacy in society. So, at face value, the meaning of this video can exist in a way to serve and inform Black women on how to still straighten their natural hair without the use of a “relaxer” while still having natural hair and/or be considered as a member in the natural hair community.

Jasmine Brown’s fourth video, *How to Dutch Braid/Interverted French Braids on Natural Hair*, can also be viewed from an oppositional perspective by examining receivers’ comments. Comments from this video varied. For example, some receiver’s comments concerned how the hair looked (pretty and/or beautiful), some compared their hair to Jasmine’s, others commented on the title or artist’s music playing in the

background, and others ended the debate over the phrase “Black people brush”.

YouTube commenters arrived at different meanings of Jasmine's phrase:



LaKeidra Ramsey

5 years ago

Everybody calls the soft or hard bristle brushes black people brushes and then the paddle brushes are called white people brushes. I don't know why you're getting so much hate because you said that, people just love to find something to talk about. Why should it matter how you said certain things? It was about the braids, not your vocabulary. Your video was great, and the braids were very pretty whether they're "cornrows", "Dutch braids", or "French braids," they're beautiful!



Nugget

5 years ago

I don't see that much hate lol. I didn't get offended, but some little comments about black people started to get on my nerves. Like the "black people use toothbrushes" This is the second video I've watched of hers does she usually say things like that?



Dame Lia Sorelle

5 years ago

I've never heard anyone call those brushes that.

The different bristles are for different uses. It has nothing to do with race, and its annoying when people label basic products as such. In the comments above, it is evident that a different meaning of text at the face value level have occurred.

One commenter advocated for Jasmine's how-to preferred meaning of the text. This means that the individual understood the content in a simplistic way of understanding. Simply put, the focus of the video is about the styling of the hair, not Jasmine's verbal messaging. However, the other comments reject that notion and discuss other meanings of the text that deal with race. These commenters could be communicating that Jasmine's comment was offensive and upheld thoughts of stereotyping about the community she is seeking to inform. These comments critique and expand the oppositional reading of this video.

Second, some commenters compared their hair or the experience of styling their hair with Jasmine. For example, a receiver stated that "I can only imagine how long that will take me, cause girl, my hair be in some tight curls (laughing emoji) you are so lucky your hair texture is gorgeous!" (Brown, 2015). This comment reinforces an

interesting concept. The user compares her own hair to Jasmine's hair texture and communicates a level of preference for Jasmine's hair texture.

Jasmine's hair texture is accepted under the Western beauty standard, and this comment can communicate that the receiver's desire to buy products shown in this video or use how-to methods to style her hair is not supporting or reinforcing the reason for the natural hair movement; instead, it is simply reinforcing the same beauty standards just through the language messaging or perception of natural hair. This idea is a similar critique presented in the previous video for Jasmine Brown's natural hair video. In the next section, Jasmine Brown's last natural hair video critiqued will be offered and elaborated on.

Jasmine Brown's fifth video, *Curly to Straight Hair –NO Frizz* (New 2018), could also be read in an oppositional manner. In this video's description box, Jasmine gave the audience information on products used in the video, details about buying her personal products, social media outlets (Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat), and her personal and/or professional booking information. In the video, Jasmine shows a picture on the right with long and straight hair and a picture to the left with long and frizzed hair. According to Thompson (2009), "The juxtaposition of in-group comparisons and interactive social processes also provide valuable insight into the pressures to conform to mainstream standards of long, flowing, and straight hair" (p. 839). Simply put, some of these comments reinforced the idea of comparison through Jasmine's showing of achieving a straight and long hair look. In this video, Jasmine shows the viewers how to get a straight look without the frizz. The idea is that bone straight hair is desirable. Some of the viewers' comments included a comparison to

Jasmine's hair and/or comments that confirmed ideologies of confirming the Western beauty standards.

For example, a commenter stated, "Am I the only own who feels more confident with straightened hair?? I respect everyone' opinions (smile face)". Another commenter stated, "her hair just laughed at mine (crying emoji)." The oppositional reading for these videos is like the others. Also, some of the viewers focused on hair length. For instance, "I personally wear my shoulder length hair straight because it's the only way to get a comb through it but thanks for the compliment (heart emoji)." This comment could reinforce the idea that this video tutorial does not provide a how-to strategy for dealing with natural hair that is not like Western beauty standards.

In summary, Jasmine's five videos include several levels of oppositional reading. The YouTube influencer's work embraces the commercialization of products; reinforces the notion of hair being beauty without defining and/or challenging the meaning of beauty as it relates to hair in Western society; and supports the idea of texturism and/or the notion that defined curls are desirable. Second, Jasmine never discusses reasons for going natural and/or the dismantling of racist systems of oppression against Black women with natural hair that does not fit into the standard Western beauty. Jasmine's media content supports the financial benefits of the natural hair movements, as well as YouTube, the financially driven gatekeeper. The mediated channel (YouTube) provides a way for Jasmine, a natural hair influencer, to reach an audience, advertise products, and bring user and/or media traffic to her website. Third, Jasmine's products are not audience-centered. Ironically, this channel includes a multiracial and gendered population. Furthermore, this complicates the idea that natural

hair YouTube channels are a way for Black women to have a space to exist and engage about things that are relevant to this community.

Last, hegemonic ideologies of colorism and aversive racism are evident through the oppositional reading of these five videos in several ways. For example, the creation of a video that centers on advertising an item to women to make their hair look straighter is colorism. Aversive colorism exists within the reading of the content in several ways. While overt racists use terms such as nappy, kinky, and bad hair, those terms are not used to motivate these women to use this product, reinforcing the notion that this is beauty is racist. When audience comments support the idea that Jasmine's hair looks presentable or beautiful when it is in a straight state, it reflects the presence of aversive colorism. Most importantly, Jasmine's desire to inform audiences about where these products and her products can be found shifts the focus from natural hair advocacy to the kinds of advertising mythology that concerned Barthes (1972).

CHAPTER IV – Analysis of The Chic Natural’s YouTube Vlogs

Preferred Reading

This section discusses The Chic Natural’s five videos through preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings. Furthermore, an exploration of the hegemonic ideologies of colorism and aversive racism located in the texts is examined as well. The chosen five videos met the following criterion: contained natural hair terminology, published between 2015-2020, and having at least 2 million views. Five videos were taken from natural hair YouTube vlogger The Chic Natural entitled: *How to Crochet Faux Locs (No Cornrows, No Wrapping free party)*; *How to: My 3-minute \$30 Curly Diva Hair*; *Easy 15-Min Knotted Curly Style, Natural Hair*; *Wash Day Routine (Start to Finish)*; and *Easy No-Heat Blowout on Natural Hair*). These videos will be analyzed through the lens of Stewart Hall's Encoding/Decoding and Barthes' description of cultural myths (Barthes, 1972; Hall, 1997).

The first Natural Chic video for critique is *How to: Crochet Faux Locs (No Cornrows, No Wrapping free-part)*. The Chic Natural 's first preferred meaning comes from her YouTube's description. The natural hair vloggers stated that the purpose of the video was to show viewers how to obtain locs without the need to cornrow (braid hair to the scalp) for this style. In the description, The Chic Natural communicated the used items, such as the five packs of hair and the tools needed to crochet the hair. Furthermore, The Chic Natural provides a step-by-step way in the comments to assist followers in achieving this hairstyle. Also, the YouTube vlogger put a link in the description video for the top that she was wearing. Second, the preferred reading of the

text is that The Chic Natural is simply showing her followers how to obtain a loc style at a low cost and within a limited amount of time (The Chic Natural, 2017).

The Chic Natural's second video is entitled *How to: My 3 minute \$30 Curly Diva Hair!* This video met the criterion for critique; it had a natural hair term in the title, it had over 2 million views, and it was published during 2015-2019 (The Chic Natural, 2016).

This video had 3, 759.177 million views and 1, 425 thousand comments. The Chic Natural's first preferred meaning of the video was in YouTube's description. The purpose of the video was to show viewers how to style their hair in a wig, which was an accessible style and monetarily affordable. Also, the natural hair vlogger included descriptions of the products and music. The denotative meaning is that she wanted the receivers to have easy access to the products and music in the video. In the video, the natural hair vlogger explained that one of the goals of this video was that the style "looked" natural. Simply put, the purpose of this video is for natural hair women to conveniently and affordably style their hair with hair that looks presentable and reinforce the idea of tight or wavy curls (The Chic Natural, 2016).

The Chic Natural's third video is entitled *Easy 15 Min Knotted Curly Style*. This video met the criterion for critique; it had a natural hair term in the title, it had over 2 million views, and it was published during 2015-2019 (The Chic Natural, 2018). This video had 3,241,544 views and 2,461 comments. The preferred reading of this video is like the previous video. The natural hair vlogger presented a video to users so that they could easily style their hair in a wig style. The second video focused on wigs rather than natural hair. It can be argued that The Chic Natural's focus is on the convenient style of natural hair. The idea that the natural hair vlogger spends less time focusing on

the health of the hair but the appearance of the hair from the lens of convenience is problematic and has subtle connotative meanings based on the look of the hair, not the health, knowledge, and care (The Chic Natural, 2018).

The Chic Natural's fourth video is entitled *How to Crochet Box Braids (looks like the real thing free-parting!)*. This video follows the criterion of this study. This video had 5 million views, 1, 112 comments, was published June 15, 2016, and contained natural hair terminology in the title. The video content included similar details such as the other videos. In the YouTube description box, the influencer informed the audience where to purchase her product. The product that she put in the description was the hair that she used to do the style. Also, the influencer mentioned where to find her on other social websites. The biography stated, "where to find me," and she listed her Instagram and Snapchat contact information. The preferred meaning of this video was presented in the influencer's video description

Hey my lovelies! Today I'm here with a tutorial on how I did my crochet box braids. I used just under 7 packs of 24" small crochet box braid hair for this and it took me about 2.5 hours to do (not including cornrowing my hair). I left out my front edges and did single plaits there so that the style looks undetectable, and the parting looks natural. Hope you like!

This description communicates a simple preferred meaning that the purpose of this video is to just show the audience how to style their hair in a crocket hair style. Also in the description, the influencer said that she left the front edges, which caters to the target audience and/or the way this culture styles hair. Second, the influencer stated that

the style looks “natural,” which means on a basic reading of a text, the hair looks natural, but it is a false perception or reality. A reading of the text could be that the influencer is endorsing a concept of convenience to this natural hair target audience. This last video from this influencer is entitled *Easy No- Heat Blow Out on Natural Hair*. This video had 2,158, 350 views, 2, 426 comments, and it was published 2018. In the YouTube description box, the influencer listed the products that were used in the video. The products were Love Beauty & Planet coconut oil shampoo, conditioner, and oil. Also, the influencer listed a detangling brush and elastic bands. She placed where the YouTube community could get in contact with her through other social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat.

The preferred readings of the five The Chic Natural videos identified content that included the YouTube influencer showing viewers how to style natural hair in a quick and low-cost way. More specifically, the Chic Natural shows viewers how to style their hair using products that she is advertising in the video. For example, most of these videos include the influencer showing the audience how to crochet hair or a wig, while putting the information to purchase that product in the YouTube description box. Next, we will look beyond the videos’ preferred meanings. In the five videos, some of The Chic Natural’s hegemonic ideologies of colorism and aversive racism are present in that they help the audience style hair in a way that looks natural but is not necessarily natural. In the preferred reading of these videos’ hegemonic ideas that presentable or nice hairstyles are achieved when viewers use products (extension hair) that have tight or wavy curls are perpetuating the idea of colorism. Hegemonic ideologies are present in the advertising of these products, such as crochet hair, crocket needle, and wig hair.

The influencer is selling and advertising products, not trying to educate women about natural hair and/or racist ideologies of hair textures.

Negotiated Reading

In the next section, negotiated readings of The Chic Natural's commenters are evaluated. In the YouTube Influencer's first video, *How to: Crochet Faux Locs (No Cornrows, No Wrapping Free-Part)*, the negotiated reading can be seen in the users' comments. Some of the users' comments on the video centered on the idea that this tutorial on how to crochet hair was unrealistic, but at the same time, it was helpful. Some women commented that achieving this hairstyle would be time-consuming and that achieving the hairstyle was not as easy as seen in the video. Also, some users wanted more information, such as how to take this style down. The negotiation of this reading exists within the spectrum that while the video provided a how-to approach to styling natural hair, it still exists in a mediated fashion and/or infrastructure of media production.

For example, the video is 5 minutes and 17 seconds. Achieving this type of hairstyle at this amount is unrealistic. More so, in this tutorial, information, such as the history of the hairstyle is not offered, but the purchasing of these products, attractive backgrounds, background music, and lighting are key concepts that cause huge negotiation for the preferred meaning of this video was stated in the description box. Unfortunately, users' comments work as evidence of the negotiated meaning of this video;



Pinned by TheChicNatural

Diamond Graham

4 years ago

How would you take them out ?

REPLY

View 19 replies from TheChicNatural and others



Kimberly Cherrell

4 years ago

Holy Shit! The patience this would take is unthinkable BUT it's sooooo beautiful

😓😓😓😓. I may try it on someone else's hair soon



Michaela Banks

1 year ago

I've watched this video so many times, and still can't get my hair through the Loc

🔪🔪🔪 she makes it look so easy... mine was a mess 🔪🔪🔪



JillyMae

2 years ago

Hey Kim! I used your method and people are going nuts over my hair! I'm a makeup

artist and they're trying to convert me to a hairstylist 😂😂. Thank you so much!



Sakinah B.

1 year ago

I saw this video when I first started my natural hair journey and thought it was super cute and a great tutorial! Now two years later I watched again so I can try on my own hair 🙌



Naturally Dea

3 years ago

I followed this video and it came out great however! This being my first time it took me 4-5 hours just to do 2 rows. I ended up just crocheting the back



hairbug

4 years ago

This would take me until 2030 to finish 😂😂



Jada Mack

2 years ago

I just knew in my heart that I could do this....but I failed miserably



Stephanie Reneé DeRamus

4 years ago

This looks great Kim! If I start doing this today then I may finish by my birthday... IN

AUGUST 😊



Jahyra Lewis-Totton

3 years ago

You made this look so simple 🤔 🤔 I definitely screwed my head up trying to do this!



loulouella

4 years ago (edited)

Lord knows I would need the entire weekend off to do this lol.

These comments present a negotiated reading that maybe this tutorial is not as realistic as the influencer is making it look or that the YouTube influencer needs to spend more time showing the audience how “to do” the hairstyles. Moreso, some of the comments suggest that the women lack the know-how on styling natural hair and/or achieving these styles.

The Chic Natural’s second video, *How to: My 3 Minute \$30 Curly Diva Hair*, had less room for negotiation. This video had small instances of negotiated reading in the users’ comments and influencer’s video. First, one user explained that she thought the video would be about having to handle one’s natural curls, but the video focused on a wig. She further explained that her hair looked like this wig and asked for validation to wear it. Another user stated that while the wig looks great on the influencer, it would not look the same way on her, and one other user stated that there was an error in the

actual product. These users' comments reveal some negotiation on the reading of the video's production. Also, users' comments included how great this product looked on the influencer, and not necessarily the value and/or quality of the product. The focus on the YouTube influencer's looks and the way she wears the product, had little to do with the selling of the product and providing knowledge to the audience about natural hair; it is simply commercializing the selling of natural hair products.

For example, the YouTube influencer understands and/or sends double messaging when creating this how-to video. The Chic Natural's core focus is not just natural hair, but her makeup is done, her video background is aesthetically pleasing, and the background music is smoothing. This perspective is also supported in the comments provided below regarding how the YouTube influencer looks:



Yari

5 years ago

\$30 curly wigs looks magical on you - \$30 curly wigs make me look like the neighborhood crackhead



Such_a_Delight

5 years ago

I thought this was going to be a tutorial on how to tame natural curls, but it's a wig.

However, that wig looks like how my natural hair looks. It drives me crazy keeping my curls frizz free every day. I change shampoos and conditioners and constantly look for and buy every product that promises to keep my curls nice. Frequently, I throw it back

in a messy bun because I don't want to deal with it. Is it possible that I could.... buy this wig that looks like my hair, braid my own hair and wear the wig??? No one would know...except for you people who read this. I won't have to fight with my own hair. That would free up a lot of my time. I think I just had an epiphany!



Temeka Kail

5 years ago

I love this look on you. Absolutely gorgeous!!!Quick question: The wig shown on the site(I clicked on the link) has a very tight part. Did you have to pluck the part to make it look more natural or did it come exactly as shown in the video? Thanks for your response in advance!



TumorenitaCici R

4 years ago

So gorgeous wow learned a lot, I always wondered how wigs really worked, thank you so much for sharing



Miriam Shelton

4 years ago

I'm convinced! I love it and I can do it! Girl, it looks Fabulous on you! You go !



Wave Nation

5 years ago

This looks so good and so natural! Definitely giving me some inspiration...!



The audience's comments illustrate that the intentions and/or perception of The Chic Natural are starting to be negotiated. The description of the video can lead some audience to believe that the influencer is styling her natural hair; however, it is a wig. Also, the above comments show that the audience is responding to how this desired hairstyle looks natural and/or beautiful.

The Chic Natural's third video, *Easy 15 Min Knotted Curly Style*, also showed that comments reflected a level of negotiated meaning. The video has a similar negotiated meaning as the previous videos. Some users were subtly communicating that these videos were not fulfilling their expectations when doing "how-to's" on natural hair. The core negotiated reading among commenters is that added hair and/or wigs are the focal point in this video. Specifically, the natural hair influencer is not styling her natural hair, but alterations such as added hair to create these natural hair how-to videos. In essence, the influencer is negotiating between selling a natural hair product and an aesthetically selling product and showing users how to achieve the hair style in an easy way.

The negotiated reading of this text is very complex. While she is producing knowledge about how to style their natural hair, she excludes the "natural hair" part. The care for natural hair is not essential in this video. The Chic Natural is simply caught between selling a product under the idea of natural hair and showing the

audience how to do so in these tutorial videos. Below, I have provided some comments of the users' comments as it relates to what is stated above. The audience made this negotiation because the hairstyles are pleasant and/or cute and simply look amazing:



vickeyj.

3 years ago

Tell me why..... i clicked on this video thinking i was about to watch her do the actual curls 😂😂😂😂 im dead but that hair style is really pretty 😍



Cristina Martinez

2 years ago

That's not a 15 minute hairstyle I need for this 3 hours 😂😂😂😂👉❤️



Marie

3 years ago

I clicked thinking I'm going to learn how to curl my hair in 15 minutes 😂



vickeyj.

3 years ago

Tell me why..... i clicked on this video thinking i was about to watch her do the actual curls 😂😂😂😂 im dead but that hair style is really pretty 😍



Kimbo_no_slice

2 years ago

I'm definitely doing this but with all of my natural hair



Kay Baylaa

3 years ago

"The part doesn't have to be perfect" Yet it's perfect & looks better then mine 🙄

Sheena Watson

3 years ago

You make everything look so easy and effortless 😍 I love your channel for the simple

fact that I can learn from you! 1B/30 I hope I win 🙏



Tiffany and Co.

2 years ago

That moment when you see her put on a wig. 🤔🤔 it's cute though.



Shaniqua Newbold

3 years ago

It's not fair how perfect you are 😔

REPLY



They Heart Rae

3 years ago

That is super cute. I've been searching for ways to incorporate wigs into my hair routine,

since I'm not the best at blending my hair with extensions. Also 1b 🤔



Whitney Tippy

3 years ago

I just want to take time to appreciate you. You have no idea how badly I needed a

hairstyle that works for my hair and this is it. This has change the game for me. Thank

you girl!!!! I couldn't even sleep last night thinking about this hairstyle.

REPLY



Sharron C

3 years ago (edited)

YESSSSSSSSSS....YOU SLAYED THAT 🏆🏆🏆🏆🏆 I really thought you curled

your entire head 😂😂😂

REPLY



Giana B

3 years ago

Omg I love this! Totally thought it was your real hair from the pic. It looks amazing

♡♡♡ I'd love to try this in 1B! 🍷

REPLY



Jiovone Whitson

3 years ago

😍😍 Absolutely LOVE this style. I think I will try small bantu knots all in the back and let them sit for a day and a half then unravel them for the curly effect like the wig first. If it doesn't come out good then I'll just purchase a wig which will be my first lol.

REPLY



BiTE SiZE BAЯBiE

3 years ago

LEMME TRY IT, IT'S GONNA TURN OUT 🗨️🗨️🗨️🗨️🗨️ 😊😊 WOW, I'M

ALWAYS AMAZED @ HOW LONG KIM'S HAIR HAS GOTTEN! 😍😍😍😍👏

REPLY



Diamand Aliyah

3 years ago

I did this style but instead of using a wig, I just used perm rods in my actual hair and it turned out super cute. Thanks for the idea 😍❤️

REPLY

M

Maria Pagan

2 years ago

I simply love you you're so bright and cheerful!

In the comments above, the focus on the appearance of the hair is very heavy. These comments suggest a colorist's notion when dealing with the appearance of beauty. Terms are used such as beauty, cute, pretty, perfect, etc. These comments are dominant as it relates to the descriptions of the hairstyle that is styled in the video. However, this hairstyle did consist of tight and wavy curls.

The Chic Natural's fourth video, *Easy-No-Heat Blow Out on Natural Hair*, has levels of negotiated meaning reflected in the comments. In this video, a negotiated discussion in this video addressed hair texture. Some of the comments included women responding to the hair texture that the YouTube Influencer said that she was in her video. In the last two previous videos, a common negotiated level for The Chic Natural is the unrealistic visual approach to achieving these hairstyles. Some users' comments expressed that parts of her videos were negotiated. Some of the users' negotiated to try this style because they did not feel like it would come out the way the Influencer's style did since the women had different hair textures. While her hairstyle video was cute to viewers, some mentioned the apprehension of doing this hairstyle because of hair texture. Unfortunately, The Chic Natural did not educate the audience on the way a different hair texture would impact this hairstyle. However, she explained the products

that were used and other things that were presented in this video. Below, I have provided the comments to support this analysis:



Seasoned Queen

3 years ago

everyone talks about water moisturizing the hair and it does play a part in

detangling....but am i the only one who experiences extreme shrinkage the minute water touches my hair???

5.3K

REPLY

View 16 replies



Katithi Musyimi

2 years ago

If this is 4c hair I am definitely a 5f

4.2K

REPLY

View 102 replies



Chelsie Jones

3 years ago (edited)

What kinda witchcraft is that? How the hell are the parts that straight?

4.9K

REPLY

View 10 replies



ThePltsweet

3 years ago

Which 4c hair school did your hair attend because it's definitely not the one mine attended.

4K

REPLY

[View 12 replies](#)



Ciara F

3 years ago

I just tried this. I was skeptical at first since I have really coarse 4c hair almost nothing working for me. This method helped my fro a lot. I got to see my fro's length for the first time

2.3K

REPLY

[View reply](#)



Bree' Dennis

3 years ago

She makes her 4c look like it's a breeze 🙄🙄

3.3K

REPLY

[View reply](#)



Growing Pains

3 years ago

My tender headed behind just nodding along like "hm, yes I see 🙄"

1.1K

REPLY

View 6 replies



Lydia Moo

3 years ago

I did this and I got the most perfect, accidental braidout. I just let it be after that.

REPLY

View reply



Bunmi Omisore

3 years ago

How did she part her hair THAT NEAT with HER NAILS!!????

1.4K

REPLY

View 5 replies



Simple Eye

2 years ago

I've watched a lot of stretching tutorials, and this is the only one I feel confident trying.

It's simple, easy, and fairly low maintenance. I don't care for the banding ones, too many bands and seems like it might unduly stress and dry out hair. I love how this girl uses minimal products on her 4c hair and it's fabulous! Goes to show that maybe our hair may actually thrive better when it can breath!

285

REPLY



Saniyah

2 years ago

Crazy how this actually works 🤔 I tried it on my hair and I'm shook... one step forward to my journey

188

REPLY



Avrilb Brown

3 years ago

them stiletto nails making perfect parts and no snags

370

REPLY



Mom1st24

2 years ago

This was so satisfying lol! Veganism has to be the reason your hair is sooo healthy and lustrous! I may join you on that journey one of these days...

39

REPLY



Sparkling Chelle

3 years ago (edited)

Her finger parts are straighter than my parts and I use a comb 😂😂😂

2K

REPLY

View 13 replies



prvb3110wmn

2 years ago

This was THE BEST heatless stretch video I've seen so far! Thanks!

95

REPLY



Hellnogizmo

3 years ago

I felt like somebody just needed to ask if anyone else noticed how beautiful this woman is? Them brown eyes are poppin honey! Your hair is so beautiful. Don't mind me.. my white ass just found out about the wonderful world of African American hair care products. (I have low/medium porosity hair. It is super thin and dry 9/10. <3 I can't even part my hair this good with a comb and 5 mirrors.. Lol.

256

REPLY



Feyisayo Shittu

2 years ago

Even a robot couldn't part my hair that straight 😂😂
152

REPLY



Dorena Dann

2 years ago

First off I want to start off saying that my hair looked nothing like hers when done. It did not look like hers because she, and I do not have the same hair type. With that being said I was very pleased with my end results. I followed the steps exactly, and my hair although not straight in the end, but was very curly like crochet hair that I would normally purchase. My hair was full, and moisturized. In the past I have done twist outs with very disappointing results. O will continue to follow these steps to achieve a very natural curly look. My hair did not shrink up like it normally would, and only look like a short afro. Keep in mind that we all have different hair types however, following these steps will definitely give you great results in the end. 😊 Thank you for this easy to follow video. I have struggled with my hair for years trying to achieve a look a was happy with.

346

REPLY

View reply



Charm D

3 years ago

Who's hair is never dry by the next morning? 🙄

3.3K

REPLY

View 3 replies



lannah biggs

2 years ago (edited)

OMG just tried this method for detangling I have my hair drying right now and that was such an easy and pain-free detangling plus I'm tender headed so I love thanks 💖💖💖
super helpful

REPLY



Nash

2 years ago

Because of you and this method my 4c hair has grown so much. Thank you so much!

69

REPLY



Voleta Chapman

2 years ago

Love this. 12 years natural and no heat has touched my hair. I love this alternative to blow outs. I don't know what my hair looks like stretched I'm excited!

11

REPLY



Chineye Emenogu

1 year ago

The fact that she can do this with 4c hair is amazing. This is finally going to be the easier way for me to detangle my hair.

These comments show that this YouTube Influencer does not include different hair textures in her display of showing the audience how to style their natural hair. The video spends more time reinforcing ideologies of curly hair and/or uploading content that is appealing to beauty standards; these standards often exclude Black women. As the women mentioned in the comments, there needed to be consideration of women with 4c hair texture and/or kinky hair since it represents most hair textures of people of African descent in terms of natural hair.

In Chic Natural 's fifth video, *How to Crochet Box Braids look like the real thing free- party*, a variety of negotiation by viewers was also found. A minimal level of negotiation was present for this video. A small level of negotiation exists within the advertising of the hair and the crochet product. The Chic Natural is participating in an economic and/or political process through the lens of natural hair. The Chic Natural presents very to-the-point videos that encourage Black women to add extension hair into their natural hairstyle. This hair is usually longer and/or appears more pleasant when styled, such as Box Braids as shown in the video. In the comments below, users are more impressed by the less expensive and time-consuming hairstyle, and this influencer provides her targeted audience with tools (crochet tool and type of braiding hair) to achieve this task. The videos are less about providing information about the history, evolution, health, and maintenance of natural hair, but are about how to get a pleasant and/or gorgeous hairstyle with the right hair products and tools. The comments listed below show some of the feedback from The Chic Natural tutorials:



AMATEUR DECORATING LIKE A PRO

5 years ago

This is gorgeous! Just stunning!

REPLY



Homemade Version

4 years ago (edited)

your hair looks really great. But I'm so scared to install crochet braids for a second time after the huge damage I had the first time. The lady did my cornrows so tight but since I didn't had experience with crochet braids I thought it ought to be so, and the result was a deep wound on my hair scalp. so my advice don't let everyone touch your hair try to DIY as much as possible.

113

REPLY

View 2 replies



STEAMING RICE

5 years ago (edited)

One thing's for sure, learning to do your hair saves you time and money. Thanks for sharing.

396

REPLY

View reply



ProxQueen91 Gameplays

2 years ago

I just did it turned out great. Used 7 packs of hair, only cost me 50 bucks 🤑👍

106

REPLY



Mom The Ebayer a.k.a. Angel Williams

4 years ago

I'm SOLD!! I'm going to get my hair today. Thank you!

57

REPLY

View 2 replies



Trias Mchenry

5 years ago

Black women are so creative when it comes to hair 😁! I live for it

583

REPLY



AllPurposeDorian

5 years ago

I do the single box braids around the entire perimeter so that it looks super

natural

220

REPLY



Mye Westbrook

5 years ago

Can anyone say talented? I love the simplicity of this style without the time it truly takes to sit for box braids! Kudos...you did that!!!!

27

REPLY

[View reply](#)



Tina White

5 years ago

you look stunning! you have so many options with your beautiful hair! you can wear wigs and it looks realistic, weaves, crochets, braid it, wear an Afro, straighten it...I am honestly about all the creative options you have with your hair!! I am quite limited with my thin caucasian hair when it comes to Styles. no weaves, no crochets, no today blond tomorrow black ... I am working with it and try to make wigs as realistic looking as possible but I really hope all of you fabulous Ladies embrace your fantastic hair!! have a blessed day!

REPLY



Queen Me

5 years ago

Funny this comes up on PAYDAY! 😂 I'm about to go to the Chinese store ret NA! 😂

1K

REPLY

[View 13 replies](#)



Leah Hendrix

4 years ago

I never have to wait almost 2 days EVER AGAIN 🙌🙌🙌

38

REPLY



Adrianna DollHouse

4 years ago

This looks stunning!💕 I had this for a month and a half but what I recommend is to dip them in boiling hot water because they tend to unravel at times.

7

REPLY



Shellzsofab

5 years ago

I'm so happy I saw this video cause I've been wondering what to do with my hair for Summer. And seeing that I have nail extensions on and can't braid with them this is a great alternative, thanks a lot @TheChicNatural

2

REPLY



Rose Tasha Maurrasse

1 year ago

I'm still following this concept 💕😁 4 years later

12

REPLY

View 2 replies



yaa a

5 years ago

Black women are really magicians.I love it

83

REPLY



I neva change

5 years ago

Ummmm Yesssss !! This gives me life that I can have braids again and still have edges

! Them shop will rip your mess out 😊! Thanks so much !!💕?

26

REPLY



Black Beauty Trucker

2 years ago

You're the reason why I know how to install "braided" crochet hair 😊 thank you 💕

17

REPLY



S BG

1 year ago

3 years ago, but just blessed me now. Doing mine on Saturday. Hair & hooks arrive

Friday. Thank you!

9

REPLY



Dr. Gloria Walker

5 years ago

Love it! Your hair looks just like the individual braids. You're a gifted Queen. Thank you for this tutorial.

1

REPLY



Ki Solace

5 years ago

I'm never going to the Braiding shop again after seeing this! 🙄🙄

713

REPLY

View reply



Melenated Nellie

5 years ago (edited)

so beautiful!!!! thank you for this. truly is a public service announcement for women who have no idea what to do, like me. 😊

21

REPLY



Lisa

3 years ago

I had no idea this is how this was achieved. Educating myself! Love watching and love the braids they look beautiful!

6

REPLY

[View reply](#)



The Slayologist

5 years ago (edited)

Wow, I never knew you could crochet box braids....my beautician will be missing me!

Thanks for sharing!

37

REPLY



Daphney Calixte

5 years ago

love it can't wait to try this at home. so beautiful

4

REPLY

[View reply](#)



Stephanie Reneé DeRamus

5 years ago

I've never been a fan of box braids but once again, you've executed this style

FLAWLESSLY. These look great Kim!

64

REPLY



MyNameIs V

5 years ago

I'm 41 and I am so amazed at how far latch hook/crochet braids has come. When they came out with these though, I said I would never again do individuals again! I've done latch hook on both my daughters hair this year; havanna twists, and jamaican bounce. Done in less than 2 hrs each time. Love it!

51

REPLY



Aimee Graves

5 years ago

Hey Now! Another Easy Summer Natural Hair Protective Style that I can hang with & spend less than \$40's on!!! YEESSSSSS!!! I JUST completed this exact look TODAY while watching the Superrrrr long BET Awards & was finished (SNAP) Just like THAT!!! THANKS AGAIN to THEE CHICNATURAL for being Brave enough to share you content & creativity with the world! I for one greatly appreciate it sincerely! And I'm sure thousands more agree! I will Continue to support you & future endeavors! ~Aimee

Some of these comments are feedback about how the hair looks, the affordable cost, and the effectiveness of the how-to. These things may be great things to know about; however, they lack information about the healthiness of the product, education on hair texture, and buying these products from stores that benefit the community, and the

natural hair movement is not mentioned in the audience feedback and in the sender's content.

In summary, negotiated readings from the five videos reflect multiple meanings. First, the YouTube influencer focuses on how to style natural hair with the addition of tight and/or wavy added hair. Second, the YouTube influencer does not include content in her video that benefits women with different hair texture other than curly or wavy hair texture. This reinforces notions of hegemonic colorists and aversive colorism. Specifically, hegemonic ideologies can be seen when the influencer advertises products such as wigs, box braids hair, crocket hair, etc. Last, misleading framing of the title to get audiences to click on the video are pervasive in this natural hair influencer's channel.

Oppositional Reading

The Chic Natural's first video, *How to: Crochet Faux Locs (No Cornrows, No Wrapping free-part)*, lends itself to multiple oppositional readings. First, the YouTube comments questioned the realistic approach to The Chic Natural's simple method of crocheting and thanked her for doing the video. For example, some individuals responded.



Pinned by TheChicNatural

Diamond Graham

4 years ago

How would you take them out ?



Kimberly Cherrell

4 years ago

Holy Shit! The patience this would take is unthinkable BUT it's sooooo beautiful

😓😍😍😍. I may try it on someone else's hair soon



Jada Mack

2 years ago

I just knew in my heart that I could do this....but I failed miserably



Michaela banks

1 year ago

I've watched this video so many times, and still can't get my hair through the Loc

👉👉👉 she makes it look so easy... mines was a mess 🤔🤔🤔



hairbug1985

4 years ago

This would take me until 2030 to finish 😓😓😓



Saige Campbell

1 year ago

How the heck do you fit the crochet needle through? I'm sitting here stressed cause they won't fit through my locs

K

Kayla Taylor

6 months ago

I tried this and now I can't get my braided hair through the locs 🤔 and I look crazy 😞

A

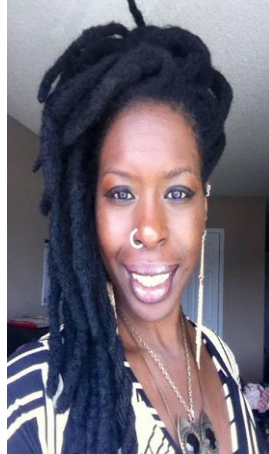
Anisah Abdullah

1 year ago

Sounds easy enough... my arms hurt already 🤯 and I'm out of patience 😂😂😂

41

The comments communicate that the obtainability of this style and the way The Chic Natural presented the video is not realistic in terms of how-to videos. It can be argued that this video was created on the merit of doing styles that are pretty and/or look good to generate views, comments, and subscribers. Also, The Chic Natural's choice of texture for the locs is problematic as well, especially, the texture of hair that The Chic Natural chose to do this style with what is perceived as a highly presentable type loc hair for this hairstyle. For example, a kinkier or afro texture hair extension loc could have been used for this style, but it was not. Some examples are included below from a Google search.



These pictures above are locs with a kinky or afro texture, the complete opposite in Chic Natural's video. Furthermore, an idea of perceived acceptability was reinforced with users' comments to the curly and fine texture loc as beautiful/pretty. This idea can be further seen when a receiver of the content stated that:



JillyMae

2 years ago

Hey Kim! I used your method, and people are going nuts over my hair! I'm a makeup artist, and they're trying to convert me to a hairstylist 😊😊. Thank you so much!

Overall, the oppositional meaning of this video is like the other previous videos mentioned in this critique. The preferred meaning of the video is simply to give a how-to tutorial on crocheting; however, ideals of European beauty are subtly and/or at face value are operating in the messaging of the video (The Chic Natural, 2017).

In response to The Chic Natural's second video, a discussion of the commenters' response to the video is provided. Western beauty ideals are endorsed in subtle and/or

unintentional ways. The receivers confirm this dialogue through words such as pretty and beautiful (The Chic Natural, 2016). Comments that communicated stockiness about the video content reveals the complex purpose of this group or target audience content and supports the argument made earlier that natural hair through mediated spaces such as YouTube still reinforces Western beauty ideals and recreates and/or co-creates these beauty standards in the natural community.

It is essential to mention that these videos are not educating Black women about natural hair but hairstyles (the appearances of the hair). However, spreading knowledge that dismantles the system of thoughts about Western beauty and its impacts on Black women is not enforced. Therefore, natural hair vloggers do not exist as advocates for eliminating systems of thoughts that disadvantage and privilege a system that thrives off the Black beauty market. Simply put, YouTube, the natural hair videos, and vloggers are simply participating in political signification.

Like the other videos discussed, notions of Western beauty standards were presented based on the terminology (connotative and denotative) of the terms pretty, beautiful, and elegant (The Chic Natural, 2018). However, a new discourse pattern in this mediated content has arrived for the Chic Natural page. She has used a public relations and marketing strategy to pull viewers into watching her videos for the past videos. The Chic Natural is aware of the ideals in the Black community about the presentation of hair. Therefore, surprise and curly or defined hair texture wigs are used to get natural hair individuals to watch this content (The Chic Natural, 2018).

The Chic Natural's fourth video, *How to Crochet Box Braids (looks like the real thing free- party)*, also has levels of oppositional meanings. This video content focuses on the

concept of convenience and strategically pulling viewers in to watch content. For example, the Crochet box braids are a hairstyle that hides the individual's real's hair and inputs someone else's hair (store-purchased hair). The influencer communicated that the finished look of a person's hair in this style should look a certain way. This phrase can denote a standard of looking at the hair, which is neat and/or put together.

The influencer caters her message to a certain audience and understands this audience's needs. Particularly, the audience needs to have convenience when styling their natural hair. Also, the influencer understands that the cost of time is very important when styling natural hair. Therefore, the title communicated that this video would tell the audience how to obtain quickly and effectively a nice and/or neat look with their natural hair (with the use of other hair). From the preferred meaning of the text, one can infer that the natural hair movement is not about dismantling western beauty standards in society. However, the motive for this is some natural hair content to advertise products and/or show this group of women how to style their natural hair in a convenient and a less time-consuming way. This could mean that introducing these women to beauty cosmetics that can effectively decrease the time of style and achieve a standard look are ways to deal with the styling of natural hair. Simply put, this video includes ways to style natural hair by covering the hair with store-purchased hair. This store-purchased hair supports notions of texturism and/or beauty standards. More so, The Chic Natural has a strategic way of communicating to viewers by emphasizing simplicity, convenience, and nice-looking hair. The Chic Natural does not inform audience members on how to style their real natural hair and/or have conversations about managing the different hair textures with certain styles.

The Chic Natural's fifth video, *Easy-No-Heat Blow Out on Natural Hair*, also can be viewed through and oppositional lens. As in the previous reading of the texts for The Chic Natural, the subtle presence of Western beauty standards is present in the video. However, the concept of texturizing was introduced. In the YouTube influencer's how-to videos, she has a pattern of presenting an easy approach to getting these desired hairstyles. However, users responded to her hair texture. The YouTube influencer stated that her hair texture was different than some users agreed with. Therefore, this caused great confusion regarding how a women's hair would look if she got this desired hairstyle. At the core of this discussion is texturized hair, which is a response to Western beauty standards, particularly in the Black community. Questioning if this hairstyle would be appropriate was presented because even though Black women have moved to embrace natural hair, the systematic ideological beauty and attractiveness have not been addressed and taught in popular culture. However, the media is simply the catalyst for companies in power to use this movement to continue the market of Black hair, while Black women are the face agents for this political economy.

Oppositional readings for the five videos offer several meanings. It can be argued that the focus of most of these videos is to sell products through the strategy of convivence (quick styling), affordable cost (less expensive products), and aesthetically appealing hairstyles (Western standards of beauty). When considering the production of these videos, there is a lack of content that focuses on education about natural hair and/or Black hair, the complexities of hair textures, ingredients in products that can be damaging to hair, and a healthy dialogue about racist systems of thoughts about pretty, good, and/or cute hair being the achievable look in this community. The oppositional

reading of these videos is layered and complex because the videos seek to inform Black women about styling their natural hair, but it does not educate Black women. The focus of these videos is centered on the selling of products and viewership from audience members through catchy video titles that encourage this audience to click on the video. Simply put, the oppositional reading of these videos reveals the hegemonic colorism and aversive racism operating within the YouTube Influencers' content lack of consideration of the diversity of different hair textures that differs from Western standards of beauty notions. The focus on selling the products through the tutorial how-to allows the influencer and the gatekeeper (YouTube) to benefit from the user traffic, media engagement, and product endorsement of this natural hair channel.

Chapter V - Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the hegemonic and subtle racism in natural hair on YouTube influencers' content. This study adds to the body of research that focuses on Black hair and media through a critical lens. While our society is increasingly becoming more aware of the importance of representations in media, deconstructing ideologies or thoughts of power is highly preemptive. For example, the widespread use and access to social media have in some ways given minority groups, in particular Black women, some power and access. Therefore, Black women have created and operated in media spaces where the community needs are attained and knowledge about hairstyles is achieved. However, dispensing how-to tutorial videos about Black hair does not dismantle western beauty standards. This study critically explored the discourse about natural hair between natural hair vloggers and audiences.

This study is critical because it encourages society to look beyond the need to have a space or representation and to be aware of subtle constructs and notions of power. These constructs are racist, colorist and support texturism. The same hegemonic ideas that the community sought to dismantle through embracing natural hair are the same structures being reinforced and constructed by Black women through YouTube. This natural hair re-emergence in popular culture is similar to the Post- Reconstruction Era and the emergence of Madam C.J. Walker. Societal and economic needs exist. For example, Walker's entrepreneurial strategies and YouTube natural hair vloggers capitalize on entrenched beauty practices or social acceptance in this community. Natural hair exists within the complex parameters of economic politicizing, woke popular culture, and legislation.

Furthermore, previous scholars have noted the importance and use of social media applications for Black women to learn how to style natural hair (Ellington, 2014; Tate, 2016). However, a lack of deconstructing the ideologies of beauty has enabled the same racist notion the movement advocate against to be enforced as a digital structural force. This was a huge gap in the literature. A keen focus on the construction of language through a feminist lens and other critical scholars' lenses was necessary. Notions of colorism persist in dialogue about Black hair and produced content. Simply put, loose, tight, and ways curls are symbolic of Whiteness.

This section will discuss the findings of the two research questions, the limits of the study, and recommendations for future research. The questions were: What meanings can be derived from Hall's Encoding/Decoding preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings of natural hair YouTube Influencers and audiences, and how are hegemonic

ideologies (colorism and aversive racism) present during mediated interactions of YouTube Influencers and audiences? First, Chapter Three discussed Hall's Encoding/Decoding's three readings, hegemonic colorists and aversive racism in the YouTube influencers' video content and audience engagement.

This section discusses the preferred readings gathered from Jasmine Brown's top five videos that were published between 2015-and 2019 and had at least two million views. First, a dominant reading from most of her videos included showing audiences (a) how to manipulate naturally curly hair into straight hair, (b) the usefulness or the effectiveness of natural hair products such as shampoos, conditions, hairbrushes, and hair dye and, and (c) how to quickly style hair with convenient hairstyles such as Wash and Gos and braids.

Jasmine's preferred readings included hegemonic ideologies of colorism and aversive racism in several ways. First, the YouTube influencer showed audiences how to make naturally curly hair look straight. This reinforces colorists' ideologies. Previous literature shows that the altering of one's hair to look straighter and/or wavier is a western beauty standard. Next, Jasmine Brown's videos reveal aversive racism and/or subtle racism by choosing products that seek to define curls and eliminate frizz. Defined curls reinforce the idea that kinky, loose, and/or hair texture associated with people of African descent is inappropriate. Similar to Akinro and Mbunyuza-Memani's (2019) study findings, which explored African women's portrayal of beauty in magazines and found that those images of African images showed similar traits that reinforced Western beauty ideals of beauty, this study reveals similar findings.

Second, negotiated readings of Jasmine Brown's vlog found that Jasmine's content served as a way to (a) sell and advertise products instead of conducting tutorial videos for the natural hair community, (b) increase subscribers and other social media following and promote personal products such as lashes, (c) use language and/or reinforced concepts of Western beauty standards through product use and hairstyle tutorials, and (d) provide tutorials centered on the aesthetic look of natural hair while neglecting video content on the hair health.

While Nimocks (2019) argued that the natural hair movement provides a space for women to learn about hair maintenance and products, this study furthers that finding. These two channels provided hair tutorial videos that provided information to women on styling hair; however, informing women about hair products seemed too dominant. Showing women how to style natural hair through western beauty standards is especially problematic because audiences have a space to learn and discuss natural hair; however, that space highlights advertising and reinforces beauty standards. For example, vloggers would provide information about the products used in the video description while using that product in the tutorial video to show the audience the product's usefulness. Second, the previous readings discussed all reinforce hegemonic ideologies of colorism and are reinforced through means of aversive racism. Jasmine Brown is a natural hair YouTube creator who has a large following. Jasmine's channel is created to show audiences how to style natural hair. However, some of the languages and products used are not diverse. Most of these hairstyles focus on making natural hair appear straighter, wavier, and/or less African decent as possible. Most importantly, these videos have received the most views.

Furthermore, YouTube (a third party) operates as a gatekeeper for this YouTube channel. Most of Jasmine's videos encourage audiences to follow, subscribe, and/or comment on the videos. Simply put, a negotiated reading of these videos reflects the notion of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). The more the audience engages in Jasmine Brown's content, the more engagement YouTube receives. Therefore, Jasmine Brown's content becomes representative of what is viewed and commented on more. The negotiation findings for Jasmine's videos are highly hegemonic-centered and reflect aversive racism.

Last, the oppositional readings of Jasmine Brown's five videos included several concepts. Jasmine Brown's channel is categorized as a natural hair channel that aims to assist individuals on how to style natural hair; however, other meanings are derived from the reading of the video content and interaction with YouTube users.

Oppositional readings of the videos reflected (a) reinforcement of Western beauty standards, (b) the commercialization of natural hair products, (c) exploitation of the uprising of the natural hair movement, and (d) a centering on audience engagement and increasing social media following. Second, hegemonic colorism and aversive racism exist in the reading and content that Jasmine produces for this channel. Also, Jasmine's interaction with the audience centers on the audience following the page, participating in product giveaways, and booking appointments. Capitalism serves as the basis for the dominant oppositional reading for Jasmine's Brown videos.

Next, a discussion of The Chic Natural's Encoding/Decoding readings and hegemonic colorists, and aversive racism is presented. First, the preferred reading of The Chic Natural's five videos had several levels of evaluation. The Chic Natural

video content mainly (a) provided audiences with low-cost ways to manage hair, (b) showed audiences how to style hair with the product(s), and (c) used description boxes to provide information about buying products used videos and personal social media following pages. Hegemonic colorism and aversive racism were present in the chosen videos in several ways. First, the YouTube influencer created how-to videos that included hairstyles that looked natural but involved adding hair. The items often included a wig (tight or wavy curls) and box braids.

This is a hegemonic structure that reinforces the idea of a woman's physical appearance, particularly her hair, as being presentable and/or appropriate. However, what is considered presentable and beautiful still operates through the structural lens of Western beauty standards and colorist ideologies. Gilchrist and Thompson's (2019) study focused on perceptions of good hair in magazines about Black women. The authors found that magazines' images impact what is considered beautiful and hair styling choices. Like this study, audience members commented on the hair styling videos with language that included the term beautiful. Most importantly, most of these hairstyles are parallel to Western beauty standards (these how-to- tutorial videos had hairstyles that were either straight, curly/wavy, or added in hair that is curly/wavy) wholly hair textures. Considering the linguists' focus of this study, the term beautiful has not been reconstructed or subtracted from Western beauty standards ideals.

Second, the negotiated reading of The Chic Natural's five videos included found (a) videos included hairstyles that included tight or wavy curls, (b) misleading information in the video title to increase viewership clicks, and (c) video content that is not diverse for women with different hair textures (kinky and/or woolly). Also,

hegemonic colorism and aversive racism are present in these videos when the influencer engages less with audiences as it relates to answering questions and/or responding; however, information about products and social media following are always available.

The Chic Natural does slightly engage with the audience; however, it is not as pervasive as the content sharing of product information for purchase and short and catchy titles to get audiences to click on the video. The hegemonic negotiated readings are pervasive. The Chic Natural has many subscribers, views, and comments.

Ellington's (2007) study discovered that social media function as a support system for Black women who embrace natural hair styling. Notably, due to a lack of support from family, these women use social media websites as ways to be informed and find support about natural hair. Social media have opened a space for Black women to be educated and embrace natural hair. Similarly, these videos focus on tutorials or showing the audience how to style natural hair; however, with the integration of natural hair products and the benefits of YouTube engagements, this channel operates advocacy or education for natural hair is one the only focus.

Last, the oppositional reading of The Chic Natural's five videos has several categories. They (a) strategically sell natural hair products, (b) show a more convenient and cost-efficient way to style natural hair, (c) produce video content focusing on achieving hairstyles that are aesthetically appealing through the structure of Western standards of beauty, (d) focus less on advocacy to dismantles racists ideologies about hair, and (e) lack information about the health of the products to audience's hair.

Also, The Chic Natural's videos reinforce hegemonic colorism and thrive through aversive racism. The use of YouTube has provided a hegemonic structure for The Chic Natural to gain capital from the natural hair movement. The videos are used to promote the influencer's social presence, increase engagement for YouTube, and advertise natural hair products to audience members in this community. YouTube creates a space for Black women to be educated about how to style natural hair; however, a hegemonic structure still exists in the conversation about Black hair. While space is available, that space still consists of the power structure that strives through capitalists' structures.

Jasmine Brown and The Chic Natural are YouTube influences who are pioneers in creating natural hair content that Black women use to gain information about styling natural hair due to slavery and Western beauty standards. More so, the same ideologies that the natural hair movement seeks to dismantle are being enforced to sell products, increase user traffic, and build influencers' social media following and personal products.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study include the following: (a) the small number of videos that were analyzed, (b) the small number of natural hair influencers' channels, and (c) the limited time frames for the selection of videos. First, a richer analysis could have been gathered by increasing the number of videos per natural hair channel. This increase in video accessibility would either reveal more content that supports the above findings and/or provide diverse readings of YouTube content based on hairstyle tutorials. Most importantly, the increase in video selection would provide researchers

the opportunity to make connections as communicative patterns become more apparent.

Second, increasing the number of natural hair influencers in the study would provide a more diverse range of representations of Black women. A lack of diverse Black women's skin tone and/or hair texture was present in this study. Natural hair YouTube influencers with kinkier hair textures would offer different content for analysis. This would increase the representation of Black women and better enhance the Black feminist theoretical lens that operates in this study.

Last, increasing the time frame of video selection would add a richer understanding of the purpose, need, and usefulness of natural hair channels due to Covid-19, which dramatically increased the use of new technology, for example, expanding the time frame for the study would provide more information about how hegemonic structures were used during a sensitive time for hair care for Black women due to Covid policy procedures. The increase in time frame could also provide additional opportunities to analyze the natural hair movement.

Future Research

A future research study could examine the psychological impact of natural hair on YouTube influencers' content on Black women. This study explored racism and/or aversive racism in deeper aspects. Exploring media like Instagram and YouTube as tools of influence and exploration of cultural and social movement impacts on Black women's psychological disposition would add to the body of research. Specially, the focus on Black women's cognitive health and strategic advertising could emerge and impact empirical findings for the well-being of this community.

For example, Black women seek out, explore, and engage in Black hair content regularly. Some natural hair advertising content can maintain colorist hegemonic and aversive racism ideologies and address how and/or does this impact the health of Black women's self-esteem. Connecting critical feminist study and psychological advertising would future enhance the usefulness and application of this study. Most importantly, the 24/7 access to social media websites such as YouTube and Instagram warrants an investigation or inquiry as it relates to the natural hair movement and natural hair.

Implications

Study findings help educate society about the importance of social constructs like Western beauty standards and the media's role in our society, which is often the vehicle of hegemony. This study is a critical observation that provokes a wider awareness about race and individuals' media content exposure and participation. Above all, the study offers evidence that Black women who style and embrace natural hair can continue the path to achieving true equality by being aware of subtle systematic doors of racism in everyday content. More so, when Black women understand the broader perspective of Black hair, effective social change can also happen. The broader perspective is that Black hair is valuable to people in different ways. For example, while advocacy for the end of hair discrimination is a prevalent issue in a racially woke, natural-haired, and academically aware society, capitalism drives its existence in the general public.

Second, this study has new theoretical implications for critical studies. Hooks' (2003) oppositional gaze theory served as an appropriate framework for exploring

Black women who style and embrace natural and natural hair YouTube vloggers.

Simply put, this study explored the space Black women created and examined natural hair through this society's gaze. This examination discovered that Black women's gaze might need liberation as well. Hegemonic structures like advertising and social constructs like Western beauty standards are too prevalent in this community's gaze.

Last, a practical implication of this study deals with Black women creating a power shift in natural hair conversation and production. Exploring this topic through a critical lens makes practical implications easily obtainable. This critical critique has discovered that advertising and social media play a massive role in the presence of this reemergence of natural hair in popular culture. Therefore, creating spaces of conversations between natural hair community advocates and beauty companies about refusing to reinforce Western beauty ideas through hair products would be a practical way to further the spark the ending of hair discrimination like texturism and colorism. These products would include ingredients that activate or define curls, eliminate frizz, or alter hair's natural state.

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