



What the Hair!

Black Hair as a vehicle for
Communicative and Cultural Expression

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Introduction

Black hair holds significant historical and cultural importance, shaping the identities and experiences of black individuals. The pervasive discrimination against black hair manifests in various settings, such as workplaces and schools, where natural hairstyles are deemed unprofessional. This discriminatory attitude not only infringes upon individuals' rights to express themselves freely but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces Eurocentric beauty standards. The proposed research aims to demonstrate that the appropriation and discrimination of black hair even within the black community extend far beyond individual experiences to reflect deeper issues of cultural erasure and systemic racism. It emphasizes the urgent need for societal recognition, respect, and protection of black hair as a vital aspect of personal identity and cultural heritage.

Project Description

Overview

Black hair has a rich history rooted in Africa, where it was used to convey marital status, tribal affiliation, and social rank (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). However, during the era of slavery, black individuals experienced oppression and the suppression of their cultural identity through the forced concealment or shaving of their hair. Despite these challenges, black people resisted by utilizing intricate hairstyles as a form of communication, and even after the abolition of slavery, they embraced their natural hair as a symbol of resistance.

This research will investigate the multifaceted nature of black hair, its historical significance, and its evolution into a form of body art and self-expression. It will explore how black hair serves as a vehicle for communication, conveying messages about identity, social status, and cultural beliefs. By examining its role in communication, especially during slavery, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural complexities and challenges faced by black communities. The paper will also examine the challenges of discrimination and appropriation faced by black individuals, highlighting the need for inclusivity and cultural appreciation.

Research Methodology

To achieve these objectives, I will conduct a thorough review of literature. Scholarly articles, books, and credible online sources will be utilized to gather information on the historical, cultural, and social aspects of black hair. Additionally, case studies, anecdotal experiences, Ted Talks and news articles will be examined to provide real-life examples of discrimination and debates surrounding black hair. The research will also incorporate visual representations, such as photographs and illustrations, to enhance understanding and visual appeal.

Data to be collected

To facilitate this research, the following data will be collected:

- Statistics on instances of racial profiling and discrimination based on black hair in educational and professional settings.
- Case studies of legal cases and policy changes related to black hair discrimination.
- Historical records detailing the evolution of black hair practices and styles across different time periods and cultural contexts.

Proposed Research Questions

The thought paper will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. How has the perception and significance of black hair evolved throughout history, from indigenous African cultures to the modern diaspora?
2. How has the historical context of black hair influenced its role as a means of communication and cultural expression? In what ways does black hair serve as a form of communication?
3. How do cultural appropriation and the commodification of black hair impact its significance as a medium for communicative and cultural expression?
4. What are the challenges of discrimination and appropriation faced by individuals with black hair, and how do they impact self-identity and cultural heritage?

Fields of Study

To investigate the research questions and delve deeper into the topic, this paper will draw upon interdisciplinary fields, including:

- History: Examining the historical significance of black hair and its role in different cultures and time periods.
- Sociology: Analyzing the social implications of black hair, including its impact on identity formation, self-esteem, and cultural representation.
- Communication Studies: Exploring how black hair functions as a communicative tool, conveying messages about individuality, cultural heritage, and social belonging.
- Critical Race Theory: Examining the systemic challenges faced by black individuals, including discrimination and appropriation of black hair, and the broader implications on social justice and equality.
- Anthropology: Exploring the cultural significance of black hair within diverse communities, studying the rituals, symbolism, and cultural practices associated with hair across different societies and regions.

Potential Sources

The references listed below are preliminary and subject to change as the research progresses:

- Byrd, A. & Tharps, L. (2001). *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Deloach, Chante. (2006). *Naked: Black Women Bare All About their Skin, Hair, Hips, Lips, and Other Parts*. New York, The Penguin Group, 2005. 54. 733-734. 10.1007/s11199-006-9039-6.
- Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks, and Araiza. 2016. "African American Personal Presentation: Psychology of Hair and Self-Perception." *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 47, No. 8 (November): 869-882.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26174232>
- Hamilton, A. (2021). *Untangling discrimination: the crown act and protecting black hair*. *University of Cincinnati Law Review*, 89(2), 483-508.
- Lukate, J. (2018). *The psychology of Black hair* | Johanna Lukate | TEDxCambridgeUniversity. Ted.com; TED Talks. https://www.ted.com/talks/johanna_lukate_the_psychology_of_black_hair
- Mallory, M. (2020). "When the sun of cultural beauty rises, the competent mind remains resilient!" *The Journey of title vii and the story of natural hair*. *Southern University Law Review*, 47(2), 315-346.

Conclusion

In conclusion, black hair has a deep-rooted history and serves as a powerful tool for communicative and cultural expression. This research aims to explore the journey of black hair from its historical significance to its present-day challenges and triumphs to highlight the power and complexity of black hair as a form of communication and self-expression. By understanding the cultural significance and struggles associated with black hair, we can contribute to fostering a more inclusive society that values and celebrates diverse expressions of cultural identity.