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African American Women's Experience of Wearing Natural Textured Hair

Tammy White-Jolivette
Walden University

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Walden University

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Tammy White-Jolivette

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

African American Women's Experience of Wearing Natural Textured Hair

by

Tammy White-Jolivette

MA, Walden University, 2019

BS, University of Phoenix, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

African American women's (AAW's) experiences of wearing natural textured hair are underrepresented in the literature. This issue, and hair discrimination more broadly, is a form of social injustice that underscores the cultural and social significance of natural hair as a symbol of heritage, identity, and resilience in African American communities. Guided by social comparison and self-concept theories, the purpose of this study was to examine how wearing natural hair influences AAW's self-perception. The research question was: How do AAW describe their experiences of wearing natural textured hair? The qualitative method featured interpretative phenomenological analysis. Data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews with a purposive sampling of six AAW aged 18 and older who wore their natural hair at least 75% of the time over 6 months. Data analysis revealed eight themes: natural hair journey, impacts of texture comparisons on self-image, influence of others' acceptance, impact of beauty standards, balancing of beauty standards, identity shaped by self-perception, authenticity as a pathway to well-being, and balancing of mental well-being with cultural expectations. Findings enhance the literature by highlighting the resilience of AAW in navigating hair discrimination and its effects on self-perception, and suggest the need for inclusive policies and support systems. This study's insights may contribute to positive social change by fostering cultural understanding and resilience within African American communities. This will foster acceptance of natural hair and empower African Americans through informing development of such educational efforts as school workshops on its cultural and historical significance, reducing bias, and building pride.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to you, Mom (엄마): I love and appreciate you deeply. Thank you for your hard work and dedication, which have shaped who I am today. Your belief in me has been a constant source of encouragement. To my beloved partner, thank you for your love, laughter, and steadfast support, which sustained me through countless hours of research and writing. To my sons, who inspire me daily and for whom I strive to build a legacy of love and excellence. My deepest gratitude also goes to my dissertation committee for their rigorous guidance and invaluable insights, which were instrumental in completing this journey. Each of you has profoundly impacted this work, and I am truly grateful for your contributions to my academic and personal growth.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The number of African American women (AAW) wearing their natural hair has increased over the years (Darden, 2019). This increase has been identified in a collective movement termed the “natural hair movement” (C. L. Robinson, 2011). “Natural hair” or “Black hair” is identified as natural textured hair or Afrocentric hair, and the terms are used interchangeably (Hemmings, 2020). According to Perry et al. (2017), the natural hair movement in the 21st century involves embracing of natural hair textures by African American men and women. Darden (2019) explained that there has been an influx of views, opinions, and standards on how AAW natural hair should be worn because of the natural hair movement.

The existence of hair discrimination became prevalent due to the natural hair movement (Palmer, 2004). Hair discrimination is a type of unjustified prejudicial distinction toward a certain hair texture, and it is a type of social injustice that affects people of African descent who have Afro-textured hair (Lee & Nambudiri, 2021). I researched the relationship between hair discrimination and psychological conflict by addressing AAW’s experience when wearing their natural textured hair. According to Böhmet et al. (2020), *psychological conflict* refers to behavioral conflict, dissociative disorders, psychological disturbance, or psychological distress. Psychological conflict is identified as a situation in which an individual is motivated to engage in two or more mutually exclusive or incompatible activities. An individual may be subjected to the pressures of the groups to which they belong. The demands of the roles they must play are often experienced as personal conflict (Böhm et al., 2020).

An example of psychological conflict as it relates to AAW with their hair is when an AAW desires to wear her natural textured hair and she engages in negative self-talk. This negative self-talk can encourage an individual to pick hair styles based on her chances for entrance and advancement into the institutions of the dominant culture rather than her own choice (Jones, 2020). Another example of negative self-talk would be based on beauty standards. According to Mbilishaka et al. (2020), an AAW chooses not to wear her natural textured hair because she identifies her hair to be ugly or unprofessional in accordance with the Eurocentric beauty standards. These psychological conflicts can be described as mental and emotional challenges that AAW have in wearing their natural textured hair (Scott-Ward et al., 2021).

Hair discrimination merits further scholarly research. Opie and Phillips (2015) explained that AAW have experienced being reprimanded and fired and receiving low pay, which has created apprehension about wearing their natural textured hair. In the current study I explored the lived experiences of AAW when wearing their textured hair. The findings of this study may bring awareness of the psychological struggles and mental barriers associated with discrimination against AAW in wearing their textured hair. This awareness may create opportunities for therapy and support groups for AAW in their journey to wearing their natural textured hair. Chapter 1 contains background information the problem and purpose statements; the research question; the theoretical foundation for the study; the nature of the study; definitions; the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the research; and a summary.

Background

According to Johnson et al. (2014) and Byrd and Tharps (2001), hair has played a significant role in African American culture and has been a focal point in their history. Many African American academic scholars have examined the significance of hair (e.g., Banks, 2000; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Mercer, 1994; Rooks, 1996; Thompson, 2009). Hair can be perceived as part of a person's identity. According to Thompson et al. (2009), identity can include a person's unique style, traits, abilities, and interests. AAW's identity has been rejected by American culture (Thompson, 2009). Dawson et al. (2019) described a person's identity through the use of questions such as "Who am I; How do I feel about myself; How do I fit in?" (p.391). According to Cross (1991), an individual's identity can also be viewed as socially constructed. An example of this is when an individual modifies their self-conceptions and self-perceptions based on standards that are not their own, such as AAW's acceptance of acculturating to Eurocentric standards (see also Dawson et al., 2019). Pressures that AAWs feel in wearing their natural textured hair may lead them to modify their self-conceptions and self-perceptions based on Eurocentric standards.

The number of AAW wearing their natural textured hair has increased over the last 10 years and continues to grow (Dawson et al., 2019). AAWs are embracing their natural textured hair and wearing it naturally. Going natural for AAWs indicates a sense of freedom and has been recognized as a symbolic representation of "Black self-love and Black power" (Dawson et al., 2019, p.23). According to Sandberg et al. (2020) and Jeffries and Jeffries (2014), the increasing number of AAW who wear their natural

textured hair in the United States has led to greater awareness of hair discrimination.

Researchers have used different theories to explore the decision of AAW/Black women to wear their natural textured hair (e.g. Darden, 2019; Dawson et al., 2019; Hemming, 2020; Lee & Nambudiri, 2021; Thompson, 2009).

I drew from self-concept and social comparison theories. The methodology for this study featured interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The combination of social comparison theory, self-concept theory, and IPA allowed me to explore participating AAWs' experiences, feelings, and self-perceptions when wearing their natural hair. Despite extensive research literature on AAW experiences in wearing their natural textured hair (e.g. Darden, 2019; Dawson et al., 2019; Hemming, 2020; Lee & Nambudiri, 2021; Thompson, 2009), there has been little to no research, based on my review of the literature, on AAW's experiences of wearing their textured hair and the emotional and psychological impact of hair discrimination. I addressed this gap in the literature by examining the experiences that AAW have when wearing their natural textured hair. Hair discrimination is an aspect of racism and has psychologically affected African American people, particularly AAW (D. E. Robinson & Robison, 2020). This study was needed to explore hair discrimination in AAW when wearing their natural textured hair due to the impact it is having on AAW. According to Jones (2020), AAW and African American girls are labeled as "ghetto" or "loud" when wearing their natural textured hair, which is an insult to cultural identity. Such characterizations are detrimental to how AAW are viewed in society and how they view themselves.

Problem Statement

Although there is qualitative research available on hair discrimination(e.g. Darden, 2019; Dawson et al., 2019; Hemming, 2020; Lee & Nambudiri, 2021; Thompson, 2009), the voices of AAW on this topic are not well represented in the literature. Hair discrimination can be perceived as a social injustice affecting AAW, one that has been characterized by the unfair regulation and insulting of people based on the appearance of their hair. According to D. E. Robinson and Robison (2020), race discrimination and hair discrimination generally affect a person's access to money, capital, generational wealth, jobs, and educational opportunities. In the United States, there has been an increase in the number of AAW wearing their natural textured hair (Darden, 2019). Black or natural hair is described as textured hair or Afrocentric hair (Hemmings, 2020). However, when AAW wear their natural textured hair they can experience social ostracization and be viewed as unprofessional and unattractive in terms of Eurocentric cultural norms (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). Hair for AAW is a social structure that represents family or community, hierarchy, well-being, and economic survival (Oyedemi, 2016).

The wearing of natural textured hair by AAW has been associated with making political statements (Essien & Wood, 2020). According to Opie and Phillips (2015), AAW feel oppressed by the standard of Eurocentric hairstyle and can be perceived as rebellious when moving to natural hairstyles. Natural textured hair or Black hair has been viewed in a negative historical context and has been framed as bad and ugly (Essien & Wood, 2020). The lack of acceptance in the United States of AAW wearing their natural

textured hair has been found to create psychological struggles for AAW (Opie & Phillips, 2015). For example, there have been AAW employees whose supervisors have reprimanded them because their natural textured hair was deemed unprofessional (Opie & Phillips, 2015). Some AAW have experienced penalties for wearing their natural textured hair (De Sa Dias et al., 2007). Supervisors have demanded that AAW either fix their hair or at least put it into a ponytail to look more professional (Hemmings, 2020). Receiving a reprimand when wearing their natural textured hair can have an influence on how AAW wear their hair and how they perceive themselves. The action of reprimanding is an example of hair discrimination, which is an unjust or prejudicial treatment (De Sa Dias et al., 2007).

Hair has been a crucial part of African American cultural identity, and there is evidence of mental and emotional damage due to hair discrimination (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Norwood, 2018). Hair discrimination is primarily felt by AAW, whose hair is naturally a different texture and style than the hair of other races (Garrin & Marcketti, 2018). According to Johnson and Bankhead (2014), there has been a consistent rejection of African Americans' identities, which includes their hair. According to Thompson (2009), AAW have felt dissatisfied, insecure, or uncomfortable with wearing their natural textured hair. In a survey by Johnson and Bankhead (2014), 78% of AAW respondents said they commonly experienced discrimination with taunting, teasing, or ridicule for wearing their natural textured hair. According to Winfield et al. (2019), these experiences precipitate injustice, mental barriers, and psychological distress for AAW.

Johnson and Bankhead (2014) used their own Hair Esteem Scale, which they adapted from Rosenberg's (1979) Self-Esteem Scale. They used the Hair Esteem Scale to examine how hair esteem relates to self-esteem and discrimination experiences of Black women. Johnson and Bankhead found that AAW who wore their natural textured hair generally felt better about themselves and this led to greater life and academic success. In another quantitative study, Ellis-Hervey (2016) utilized the Rotter's (1954) locus of control and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale to measure AAW's self-esteem and self-perception. The findings showed no significant correlation between self-esteem and the choice of hairstyles among AAW.

Although quantitative and qualitative studies have been conducted on the injustices and conflicts AAWs experience when wearing their natural textured hair (Banks, 2000; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Dawson et al., 2019; Rogers et al. 2021; Sims, 2020), there is limited qualitative research on the psychological and emotional conflicts AAWs experience, based on my review of the literature. I conducted an IPA qualitative study to examine the psychological and emotional implications hair discrimination has on AAW when wearing their natural textured hair. The lack of qualitative research in identifying the relationship between hair discrimination, psychological implications, and AAW experiences when wearing their natural textured hair comprises a gap in the current literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the relationship between hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and how AAW describe their experiences of

wearing their natural textured hair. I used the IPA method to generate relevant knowledge pertinent to the clinical context regarding how AAW feel and view themselves. The experiences that participating AAW shared regarding wearing their natural textured hair enabled me to identify common themes of AAW's experiences, emotions, and self-perception in wearing their natural textured hair. In addition, this study gave voice to AAW's experiences, emotions, and self-perceptions with wearing their natural hair.

Research Question

How do AAW describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair?

Theoretical Foundation

The two theories that served as the framework of this study were social comparison theory and self-concept theory. Social comparison theory involves how a person comes to know themselves by evaluating their attitudes, abilities, and traits in comparison with others in the course of everyday social interactions (Festinger, 1954). Self-concept theory addresses the way a person identifies with who they are, such as their personality, behavior traits, skills, and attitudes (Bem, 1972; see also Roger, 1946).

Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory suggests that one's sense of confidence and self-worth may be influenced by their perceptions of others being superior and better (Festinger, 1954). When AAW are exposed to European hair (straight hair) as a standard for beauty, they are pressured to conform to mainstream standards and resistance to align to their own hair choices (Hemmings, 2020). The theory of social comparison provided a lens for examining the negative psychological impact of AAW's exposure to straight European

hair. I also I used the theory to explore the experiences of AAW in wearing their textured hair. Gender studies researchers have used the theory in examine physical attractiveness and self-esteem (D. E. Robinson& Robison, 2020). According to Festinger (1954), individuals engage in social comparison to establish a measurement to make accurate evaluations of themselves.

Social comparison theory consists of two main components: upward comparison and downward comparison. Upward comparison occurs when an individual compares themselves to others who seem to be better off; this could result in the individual feeling a sense of inferiority leading to negative emotions (Festinger, 1954). Downward comparison occurs when an individual compares themselves to others who feel threatened or have low self-esteem. The individual uses this comparison to elevate their self-esteem (Festinger, 1954). I used both components of the social comparison theory in the current study because the effect of social comparisons (upward or downward) depends on the individual (Festinger, 1954). The theory was applied to examine how AAW engage in upward or downward comparisons related to their experiences, emotions, and self-perception, offering valuable insight into their hair choices. The theory was used to identify how AAW engage in upward or downward comparisons related to their experiences, feelings, and self-perception, offering valuable insight into their hair choices. Allowing participants to share their personal knowledge from their experiences in wearing their natural textured hair is supported by both self-concept and social comparison theories as a framework for this IPA study.

Self-Concept Theory

Self-concept theory illustrates how individuals form beliefs about themselves and accept these beliefs as truth based on their personal experience (Rogers, 1959). I used self-concept theory to explore AAW's interpersonal beliefs about themselves when wearing their natural textured hair. This theory suggests that self-concept is a one-dimensional construct that measures an individual's actual self-concept and explains their self-perception (Rogers, 1961). However, there are three core aspects of self: self-image, self-worth, and ideal self. Self-image is the view an individual has about themselves (Rogers, 1961). Self-worth is how an individual values themselves (Rogers, 1961). Ideal self is when an individual wishes that they were someone else (Rogers, 1961). According to Rogers (1961), people must be fully honest with themselves in line with their personal discovery. Self-concept theory provides a framework that conceptualizes a belief system that an individual has about their personal experience, which is not necessarily aligned with reality (Rogers, 1961). The self-concept theory supported my exploration of how AAW's self-image, self-worth, and ideal of self are affected in wearing their natural textured hair. According to Jones (2020), AAW are affected based on their experiences, feelings, and self-perceptions when wearing their natural textured hair. I further discuss self-concept and social comparison theories in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The research design for this study was qualitative in the IPA tradition, which typically includes a combination of idiographic, psychological, and interpretative elements (Alase, 2017). I used IPA to explore the experiences of AAW when wearing

their natural textured hair. The IPA approach, combined with the theoretical framework of social comparison theory and self-concept theory, provided an understanding of AAW's perspectives and experiences when wearing their natural textured hair. By using a qualitative interview approach, I was able to reveal how AAW deconstruct their experiences, how they feel, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they give to their experiences.

The data collection for this study consisted of interviews with six AAW. I interviewed AAW who wore their natural textured hair. According to Polkinghorne (1989), a phenomenological researcher should interview between five and 10 participants who have experienced similar events (phenomenon) to capture and interpret their experience. The current study's selection criteria required that participants wear their natural textured hair at least 75% of the time over a 6-month period. The intent was to explore and identify the participating AAWs' experiences, feelings, and self-perception when wearing their natural textured hair.

I collected data from participants on a virtual platform, using interview questions designed to answer the research question. The data were analyzed thematically in the IPA tradition. Researchers commonly use thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in overarching statements or themes (Lochmiller, 2021). When analyzing the data, I focused on similarities in the repeated patterns of the data set for interpretation of meaning. I sought to provide the participants the opportunity to tell their stories, to speak freely, and to respond reflectively to the interview questions I asked. The gathered data were

analyzed to identify AAW's experiences, feelings, and self-perception in wearing their natural textured hair.

Definitions

Key terms used in the study are defined as follows:

African American Women (AAW): American women who self-identify as Black, whose national origin of birth is the United States, and whose ancestors were subjugated and victims of the American slave trade (Hughes, 2021).

Create a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural Hair Act (Crown Act): According to the California Fair Employment and Housing Act of 1959 and the California Education Code, a state law that prohibits discrimination based on hairstyle and hair texture by extending protection; other states and cities have also approved such legislation (The Crown Act, 2022)

Hair discrimination: Discrimination based on natural hair texture, which is a type of social injustice that affects people of African descent who have Afro-textured hair (Lee & Nambudiri, 2021). Hair discrimination is also defined by a system that prioritizes the skin, hair, and bodies of people who have been racialized as White over those who have been racialized as Black (D. E. Robinson & Robison, 2020).

Natural hair movement: The embracing of natural hair textures by African American men and women in the 20th century (Perry, 2017).

Natural textured hair: Hair or Afrocentric hair that is worn by people of African descent (Hemmings, 2020).

Psychological conflict: A situation that occurs when an individual is motivated to engage in two or more mutually exclusive or incompatible activities that result in behavioral conflict, dissociative disorders, psychological disturbance, or psychological distress (Böhmet al.,2020).

Assumptions

One assumption I had was that all participants would be honest and truthful in sharing how they felt about wearing their natural textured hair. A second assumption was that all participants would provide open and truthful accounts of their experience with hair discrimination. The third assumption was that the research question would effectively address the purpose of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was AAW who identified as having a challenge in fully embracing wearing their natural textured hair. I used social comparison and self-concept theories. I considered of using Black feminist and Afrocentric feminist theories (Bennett-Alexander & Harrison, 2016). However, I opted against using these theories because I did not intend in this study to give attention to cultural history of feminine beauty from Western standards as this phenomenon has already been discussed (Bennett-Alexander & Harrison, 2016). Rather, my focus was on identifying AAWs' experiences, feelings, and self-perception when wearing their natural textured hair. The sample size for this research was six AAW who predominantly wore their natural textured hair for at least 75% of the time over a period of 6-months. Due to the IPA approach, the results of this study may be limited to this sample.

Limitations

An IPA research design has various limitations that affect the interpretation of results. One limitation is that a participant's interpretation or belief about a topic could create inconsistencies in the interview results. An IPA researcher relies on voluntary participants, meaning their perspectives may differ from those who were not part of the study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This reliance on self-selected participants can limit the findings, as the views and experiences of non-participants may offer different insights that are not captured in the research. This would be another limitation in that I as the researcher only decoded the perspective of the participants in this study. Their responses were based on their own perspective and understanding. I focused solely on AAW who wore their natural textured hair at least 75% of the time throughout a 6-month period. This method may limit the transferability of findings due to specific participant selection criteria. The participants represent merely a portion of a broader population. Another possible limitation is that participating AAW might not have been able to explain what it means to wear their natural textured hair. Wearing their natural textured hair means wearing their hair in its natural state. I addressed this issue by providing examples and explanations of what wearing natural textured hair looks like and what it means. This was done by presenting pictures of other AAW wearing their natural textured hair.

There are also limitations as it relates to the dependability and transferability of IPA research. Transferability is concerned with the extent to which the study's findings that can be useful and applied to another research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is the stability of data that enables a future researcher to reproduce the work and

possibility achieve the same or different result (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I planned to gather in-depth information from participants about their natural hair experiences and the relationship of these experiences to their mental health. I also intended to facilitate data collection for researchers interested in replicating this study. I strove to have my research findings be consistent and reproducible to ensure that other researchers can replicate and benefit from my research. This could lead the way for further research and present opportunity to either extend or continue the current study.

Biases that I have as the researcher stem from my being an AAW who has been licensed cosmetologist and experienced for over 20 years servicing AAW who wear their natural textured hair. I have also been wearing my natural textured hair for over 10 years. My personal experience and work with AAW who wear their natural textured hair has given me knowledge and insight that could have influenced the outcome of the study. Because I did not want my position to influence what participants said or thought, I used a semi structured interview guide aligned with my research question. I generated interview questions to answer the research question from a social comparison and self-concept theory perspective. Not all personal biases could be eliminated from this research; however, I kept a reflective journal to record assumptions that I thought could potentially influence the study. According to Watt (2007), a researcher should record their assumptions to avoid potentially influencing their study.

Significance

The intention of the research was to provide insight into AAW's subjective experiences, opinions, and motivations in wearing their natural textured hair. AAW are

increasingly wearing their natural textured hair, and are also being ridiculed for their choice (Bennett-Alexander & Harrison, 2016). This research may be significant to the field of clinical psychology in that the study may increase awareness of hair discrimination and explain AAW's experiences in relation to such discrimination. To explore the study topic, I strove to allow the participants to freely express their feelings, experiences, and thoughts regarding wearing their natural textured hair. The gap in literature was the lack of qualitative studies representing AAW's voices on this topic. The findings in this research would encapsulate the meaning of AAW's lived experiences in wearing their natural textured hair. The results of this may give clinicians insight into the lived experience of AAW when wearing their natural textured hair and the psychological implications due to hair discrimination.

The findings may also bring awareness of the psychological struggles and mental barriers associated with discrimination on AAW in wearing their natural textured hair. This research may provide AAW insight and awareness of how hair discrimination is reflected in their self-perception. The findings from this research may foster social change by encouraging programmers, coaches, therapists, and service providers to be more aware of AAW culture. The study may reinforce the importance of trained clinicians being knowledgeable of AAW culture as it relates to AAW's natural textured hair. This research also has the potential to spark positive change in both the hair industry and education by increasing awareness of cultural diversity and inclusivity and by encouraging integration of multicultural perspectives and hair care practices into

curricula. Such efforts may promote the empowerment of AAW or the African American community.

Summary

The natural hair movement continues to grow and is construed as a culture change. Culture change is the modification of a society through innovation, invention, discovery, or contact with other societies (Oreg & Sverdilk, 2018). This movement has been influential to many AAW. However, AAW continue to be judged, criticized, and penalized for wearing their natural textured hair (McWhorter, 2021). Despite growing awareness, there is a gap in research exploring the emotional and psychological impact of hair discrimination on AAW,(McWhorter, 2021). Therefore, more research is needed to further examine this topic. In Chapter 1, I introduced the problem of hair discrimination. The background literature on AAW's hair and the significance of the research was explained. In stating the problem, I explained the gap in qualitative studies representing AAW's voice. I also stated the purpose of the study, which addressed hair discrimination as a social injustice impacting many AAW, and the research question I sought to answer. The theoretical framework was established as social comparison theory (Festinger,1954) and self-concept theory (Rogers, 1959). I described the nature of the study, which involved IPA. The interview process, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study were explained. In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature related to key concepts of the study. The chapter also includes information on the literature search strategy and more details on the theoretical foundation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a gap in the current literature from a lack of qualitative research into the relationship between hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and the experiences of AAW wearing their natural textured hair. Researchers have found evidence of AAW experiencing mental and emotional damage due to hair discrimination (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Norwood, 2018). Natural hair or textured hair has a negative historical context and has been framed as bad or ugly (Essien & Wood, 2020). According to Opie and Phillips (2015), the lack of acceptance AAW experience when wearing their natural textured hair in the United States can cause psychological difficulties for these women. According to Mbilishaka et al. (2020), AAW's hair and their choices to wear natural textured hair are a crucial part of their identities, yet they continue to experience ridicule and discrimination.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the relationship between hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and how AAW describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair. To better understand the lived experiences of this population, I reviewed current research on this population and related topics. In Chapter 2, I discussed my literature search strategy along with the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework. I also presented the literature review related to key concepts in this study-

Literature Search Strategy

I used the Walden University library to search EBSCO databases, Google Scholar, Google, Encyclopedias and Handbooks, and Test and Measures. PsycINFO,

PsycEXTRA, PsycCRITIQUE, PsycARTICLES, SAGE Premier, and SocioINDEX with Full Text, ERIC, SAGE Encyclopedias, SAGE Research Methods Online, Social Sciences Citation Index, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest Central. Many of the articles I found came from PsycCRITIQUE, PsycARTICLES, SAGE Premier, and SocioINDEX with Full Text. In identifying useful literature, I used a combination of key search terms: *African American, Black Americans, Blacks, natural hair, textured hair, Black hair, curly hair, self-esteem, self-concept, self-worth, self-evaluation, self-perception, self-identity*, and the *CROWN Act*. Specific books, such as those by Byrd and Tharps (2001), DeGruy (2017), and Wanzer (2023), were used as overviews to suggest areas of exploration within the literature.

The focus of the literature review was on qualitative research articles published between 2019 and 2023. Older literature, published between 2013 and 2019, on natural textured hair was also used to establish a historical context and trace the evolution of societal attitudes, beauty standards, and cultural perceptions over time. This literature was essential to understand the historical implications of Eurocentric beauty ideals, discriminatory practices, and social expectations regarding natural textured hair. By examining older works, I was able to uncover the roots of prevailing stereotypes and biases, which provided a foundation for understanding the challenges faced by individuals with natural textured hair today. Older literature provided an in-depth and comprehensive illustration of the continuity or shifts in societal attitudes toward natural hair over different eras. Nonetheless, the lack of studies into the relationships between self-concept theory, body image, and hair was a key restriction of the literature search.

Despite extensive searches in several academic databases, I found limited articles on self-concept theory related to body image, hair, textured hair, Black hair, and natural hair.

Theoretical Foundation

The framework of this study is based in self-concept theory (Rogers, 1961) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). Both theories were used to explore and effectively review the lived experiences of AAW wearing their natural textured hair. Rogers (1961) used a humanistic approach to create self-concept theory, which is focused on a person's perception of themselves holistically. This theory originated from Rogers's (1961) client-centered therapy, which detailed his therapeutic strategy and provided important ideas about self-concept. Festinger (1954) was inspired to create social comparison theory based on curiosity into how people evaluate their own thoughts and skills when there are no objective standards available. According to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, individuals judge their own worth by contrasting it with that of others. Following is a discussion of Rogers's and Festinger's theories, ideas, propositions, and presumptions.

Self-Concept Theory

The self-concept theory, which was developed in 1961 by humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers, asserts that how individuals perceive and comprehend themselves has an important influence on how they evaluate the outside world and their role in it. Self-concept is significantly impacted by external appearance, which includes body image and hair. Several studies have been conducted using self-concept theory. Research has indicated that self-concept is linked closely with perceptions of an

individual's body and hair. Young men and women, ages 17–28, were found to have concerns of their self-concept regarding their body image and others according to Syeda et al. (2022). Participants were studied and measured in exploratory sequential design using Rogers's self-concept as a framework (Syeda et al., 2022). The researchers found that the university students' body image perceptions differed considerably among men and women, as did their self-concept. According to Syeda et al. (2022), the scale used in the research was a successful measurement supporting past research. The female participants internalized their bodies as objects, while the men's satisfaction of self-concept were based on physical activity.

Halliwell and Dittmar (2003) also used Rogers's self-concept theory when they examined how views of hair among men and women affected their self-concept. The researchers found that participants' opinions of their hair had an impact on their overall perception of self-worth and self-concept (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2003). Capodilupo and Kim (2014) investigated how racial and gender identity impact the experiences of AAW with their bodies and hair. The researchers' narrative data revealed that societal standards for beauty impact individual's self-concept, which in turn influences how they perceive their body and hair. This evidence suggests an intricate connection between hair, body image, and self-concept. These researchers focused on how participants' views about their physical appearance, in particular their bodies and hair, can impact their emotional and mental wellness and how they see themselves. The existing research into these topics is, however, limited, which further demonstrates the gap in the literature that this study helped to fill.

Theoretical Propositions

Self-concept theory was a part of the theoretical foundation for this study. Self-concept theory, according to Rogers (1961), is adaptable and a process of active development that is influenced by social situations in addition to one's own motivation for self-discovery. It is comprised of three components: self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self. Based on Rogers (1961) theory, a variety of factors have an impact on our actions, skills, and personality traits, which in turn affect how we perceive ourselves. The proposition with self-concept theory includes congruence. A person who is psychologically healthy has a congruence between their real selves and their experiences, without any conditions of worth (Rogers, 1959). This results in a favorable self-concept of one's own value. When a person experiences incongruence, it signals that their sense of self and sense of value are inconsistent, which makes them defensive (Rogers, 1959). According to Rogers (1959), anxiety may be brought on by a discrepancy between reality and self-perception.

Theoretical Assumptions

Self-concept theory places a strong emphasis on the viewpoint and personal experiences of the individual. According to Rogers (1959), each person has a personal self-concept that is developed by their own experiences, convictions, and perceptions. In self-concept theory, people try to have their experiences and self-concept match appropriately. People may feel uncomfortable or anxious when their self-concept and their experiences diverge, which motivates them to make things consistent again (Rogers, 1961). The self-concept theory's fundamental assumptions offer a thorough explanation of

how people view themselves and how these views affect their actions and relationships with others.

Social Comparison Theory

According to Festinger's social comparison theory (1954), people judge their own worth by comparing it to that of others. This theory provides insights into how individuals view themselves in comparison to others in terms of physical appearance and has been frequently used in body image and hair-related studies. The social comparison theory has been used in regard to body image and hair, and the following is a description of relevant studies. Fardouly et al. (2015) found that accessing social media increased appearance comparison, which predicted a lower degree of body image satisfaction. The findings of this study revealed that young women who invested more time on Facebook tended to exhibit increased body dissatisfaction, concerns regarding weight, and a tendency to compare themselves with others. This illustrates the influence of Festinger's social comparison theory, wherein individuals assess their appearance by comparing it to images they encounter on social media platforms.

Thompson (2009) also drew from Festinger's social comparison theory. Thompson explored how social comparison affected AAW's satisfaction with their hair. The findings revealed that women who made frequent comparisons with others in society reported lower levels of happiness with their hair. A mixed-methods study revealed that participants that were showed manipulated photographs of women with straight or perfect hair, expressed more hair dissatisfaction (Betz et al., 2019). Social comparisons, as people compared their hair to the examples given, had a significant impact on the feeling

of dissatisfaction. Research on body image and hair has effectively used the social comparison theory. The concept describes how people make societal comparisons, which may affect how they see themselves psychologically, lead to feelings of inadequacy, and diminish their sense of self-worth. The findings of the studies reviewed above demonstrate the significance of social comparisons in influencing self-perception and happiness with appearance, shedding light on the intricacies of body image and hair perceptions in diverse circumstances.

Theoretical Propositions

According to Festinger's social comparison theory (1954), individuals assess their own worth by evaluating how they measure up against others. The proposition of this theory consists of three components: upward social comparison, downward social comparison, and lateral social comparison. By comparing oneself to someone who is deemed to be superior to oneself, upward social comparison serves the purposes of self-evaluation and self-enhancement (Festinger, 1954). According to Festinger (1954), comparing oneself critically to someone is known as a downward social comparison. Lateral social comparison is the act of contrasting oneself with a person who is regarded as being somewhat similar to oneself.

Theoretical Assumptions

The premise of Festinger's thesis is that people have a natural desire to authentically assess themselves. To better comprehend their own characteristics, they try to grasp their skills, attitudes, and ideas, as well as compare themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). Social comparisons are assumed to have a substantial influence on how

highly someone views themselves. Depending on the results of the comparison process, making comparisons to others might affect one's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. In general, Festinger's social comparison theory sheds light on how people assess themselves in relation to others and how these comparisons affect their perceptions of themselves, their self-concept, and their psychological health.

By addressing the gaps in the literature, the integration of self-concept theory and social comparison theory in an IPA study of AAW's experiences with wearing textured hair advances previous research. While separate studies have looked at either self-concept or social comparison, this method enables a more thorough understanding of how these theories overlap and affect one another in the context of hair experiences. Combining self-concept and social comparison theories provides insight into how AAW who have natural textured hair manage their identity and identify empowerment. Individual experiences of resiliency, acceptance of oneself, and satisfaction in loving one's natural hair may be highlighted through the IPA study.

Rationale for the Selection of Both Theories

The rationale for the choice of self-concept theory and social comparison theory is that they provide a strong basis and comprehensive understanding of AAW's perceptions and behaviors for an IPA study on their experiences with wearing their natural textured hair. For an IPA study on AAW's experiences with wearing their natural textured hair, the self-concept theory and the social comparison theory are both pertinent and complementing frameworks. These theories provide insightful understandings of how people construct their identities, view themselves, and make comparisons with others,

particularly in the context of societal norms and ideals of beauty. The self-concept theory describes the way individuals perceive themselves (Rogers, 1959). Understanding AAW's experiences depends on how they perceive themselves, especially with regard to their hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). According to Byrd and Tharps (2001), hair has a crucial role in defining one's identity, especially for AAW, and has a significant influence on how they view themselves. Social comparison theory is identified as a gauge when people determine their own value by how they measure up to other people (Festinger, 1954). This comparison could potentially have a significant impact on the decisions and viewpoints of AAW regarding their hair. According to Webb et al. (2014), social comparisons of hair, particularly those who are impacted by Eurocentric beauty standards, can have a detrimental impact on one's self-esteem and perception of one's body because they are deeply intertwined with cultural identity.

Literature Review Related to the Key Concepts

This section examines the key concepts relevant to addressing the research question, What are the experiences of wearing natural textured hair for AAW? These concepts include hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and the experiences of AAW in wearing their natural textured hair. The literature studies explore themes related to my subject, such as qualitative, quantitative research, and concepts to the study. Bennett-Alexander and Harrison (2016), Capodilupo and Kim (2014), Ellis-Hervey et al. (2016), Greene (2017), Harris and Davis (2023), Lewis (2013), Majali et al. (2017), Mbilishaka (2018), Mbilishaka et al. (2020), O'Brien-Richardson (2019), L. L. Smith (2022), and Summers et al. (2022) are among the key sources that support these concepts: hair

discrimination, psychological conflict, and the experiences of AAW in wearing their natural textured hair.

Hair Discrimination

The experiences of AAW who wear their textured hair can be closely related to hair discrimination. Hair discrimination is a type of social injustice that involves treating someone unfairly and shaming them because of the way their hair looks (Bennett-Alexander & Harrison, 2016). Bennett-Alexander and Harrison (2016) explained that natural textured hair, like all hair, is an immutable trait made flexible by societal rules that enforce an "acceptable" standard of beauty that was never intended to contain or represent AAW. The researchers also addressed the societal challenges of hair discrimination that AAW face as a result of their decision to wear their natural textured hair.

Hair discrimination, often known as "hair bias" or "hairstyle discrimination," is a kind of prejudice that targets people based on protective hairstyles or natural hair textures that are frequently connected to particular racial or ethnic groups. Protective hairstyles protect the ends of the hair from damage, breakage, and environmental stresses. These styles are often minimal manipulation that frequently include braids, twists, or updos to keep the ends of the hair nestled away and protected. Protective styles may promote growth of hair and general hair health through decreasing exposure to potentially damaging substances (Byrd&Tharps, 2001). These particular racial or ethnic groups tend to be of African descent. Their natural hair textures and styles may not conform to conventional Eurocentric standards and thus result in prejudice and discrimination.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed racial discrimination in several contexts, including employment and education. There has been some debate over whether the Act's provisions completely cover hair discrimination. The Act expressly forbids discrimination based on national origin, racial or ethnic origin, or color of skin. The question of whether hair discrimination falls under the purview of racial discrimination has been a source of confusion for courts and legal interpretations. Hair discrimination has been identified and labeled as hair penalties, aesthetic trauma, hair shaming, hair bias, and hair harassment (Mbilishaka et al., 2020). According to the Association of Black Psychologists (2019), hair discrimination is classified as an "esthetic trauma," emphasizing the serious mental health consequences.

All of these labels describe and depict the racial phenotype of hair. Mbilishaka et al. (2020) explained a study that shared about an instrument designed to address the measurement of unconscious beliefs that shape racial discrimination and stereotypes relating to hair. The Hair Implicit Bias Test (McGill et al., 2017) shows participants pictures of a single Black lady wearing wigs with various hair types. Following that, participants must quickly associate these visuals with either positive or negative terms. According to this study, "an immediate association between straight hairstyles displayed positive words and tightly curled hair displayed negative words, which suggested an underlying bias against certain hair textures" (McGill et al., 2017, p. 5). Harris and Davis (2023) stated that textured or natural hair is discriminated against in corporate organizations and causes exclusions that prevent textured hair styles from entering the workplace.

In another study, Mbilishaka et al. (2020) used a narrative approach with a sample of 90 African American community members and captured their memories of hair discrimination using the guided hair autobiography (GHA) method. This study's main goal was to classify first-hand accounts of hair discrimination in Black American communities. This classification is intended to help with the creation of anti-discrimination laws and mental health procedures. The researcher's approach to identifying hair discrimination was to use GHA (Mbilishaka, 2018). The GHA prompt encourages the formation of major, self-defining hair-related narratives. The narrative structures spanning the whole dataset gathered from the GHA were the main focus of analysis in this study on hair discrimination. The strength of the research was that it captured detailed personal experiences and emotions related to the topic. Sadness emerged as the most common emotional response, and emotional reactions were present in over 50% of the narratives addressing hair prejudice. Among emotional responses, shame and humiliation, which are conscious feelings, were more common than anger (Mbilishaka et al., 2020). This study's innovative approach as the first qualitative psychology study to explore the significance of hair and the circumstances and responses surrounding hair discrimination involving both men and women of African origin is one of its key strengths (Mibilishaka et al., 2022). However, the study's narrative scope has a limitation; it could have been more thorough if participants had been directly encouraged by the research tool to describe their experiences with hair discrimination, whether through a definition offered by the researcher or descriptions articulated by the participant themselves.

Harris and Davis (2023) carried out a qualitative phenomenological study that explored the lived experience of racial hair discrimination among Black women in corporate America. Intersectionality and phenomenology were used as a framework in the study to analyze the numerous interweaving influences of factors for racial discrimination and sexism. Intersectionality theory refers to the study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and the associated systems of oppression, dominance, or discrimination (Harris & Davis, 2023). The theory implies that there are different types of oppression, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism, that do not function separately but rather intersect and overlap, resulting in distinct and multidimensional systems of inequalities (Crenshaw, 2010).

The broader examination of hair discrimination as a form of racism highlights a wide array of potential controversies. This includes the acknowledgement that societal norms and internal biases may influence biases against particular hair types or styles. Merely attributing this solely to racism may overlook the intricate interplay of ingrained biases and cultural standards in these situations. I chose hair discrimination as a key concept for this study because of the research indicating that hair discrimination causes a range of emotional reactions in African American communities, and sadness appeared as the most common emotion. According to Mbilishaka et al. (2020), these emotional reactions recorded in participant narratives were found to dramatically lower people's self-esteem, leading to emotionally upsetting interactions that may affect participants' perceptions of themselves and their identities.

Psychological Conflict

AAW's hair is a psychological variable that is culturally valid and emotionally stratified (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016). For women of African descent, hair symbolizes internalized mental processes and should be taken into account in psychological theory (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016). Hair has been used as a sign of racial inclusion or exclusion throughout American history (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Mbilishaka (2020) stated that two AAW participants in her research shared their experiences when wearing their natural hair. They felt their textured hair was ugly, dissatisfying, embarrassing, and shameful and caused internalized self-hatred and insecurities. Harris and Davis (2023) stated that AAW endure psychological stresses because of the pressure to change the style of their natural hair for their workplace. These psychological stressors have been associated with depression, anxiety, and levels of low self-esteem and negative self-identity, which activate and increase the stress response system, according to O'Brien-Richardson, 2019.

AAW may internalize these psychological stressors as detrimental prejudices correlated with their natural textured hair, which impacts their perceptions of beauty and themselves (L. L. Smith, 2022). When AAW internalize harmful prejudices, it can result in internalized racial oppression. Internalized racial oppression is defined as internalized self-hatred and alien-self disorder (Akbar, 1991). According to L. L. Smith (2022), mental health practitioners and clinicians actively recognize, evaluate, and intervene to alleviate psychological distress linked to internalized racial oppression, encompassing issues related to hair. The acknowledgment of internalized racial oppression, coupled

with considerations of colorism and natural textured hair, contributes an additional layer to comprehending the experiences and internalization processes within AAW.

The pervasive expectation for AAW to conform their natural hair to corporate norms raises concerns. According to Harris and Davis (2023), AAWs embracing their natural textured hair in corporate settings often face racism and microaggressions, leading to mental distress, internalized racism, and self-esteem challenges. According to the Association of Black Psychologists (2019), the psychological distress resulting from hair prejudice is comparable to the detrimental health impacts of other well-documented traumas and traumatic experiences. Its classification as a trauma with serious mental health effects establishes this equivalence.

According to Mbilishaka (2018), U.S. race-based frameworks explicitly devalue Black aesthetics, the texture, length, and style of this population's hair, and are frequently used as an evaluation instrument for their attractiveness, self-esteem, and self-worth. Thompson (2009) stated that AAW spend more time than other racial and gender groups considering the significance of their hair, conversing about hair, and grooming hair. Hair has been used as a sign of racial inclusion or exclusion throughout American history (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Given its relationship with negative psychological and cultural-historical circumstances, AAW's experiences of hair needs to be further investigated. Probing this issue can potentially give valuable insight into how social standards and historical prejudice affect AAW's self-perception and well-being. By undertaking comprehensive study, researchers may be able to better understand and manage the complicated relationship between hair, identity, and psychological health in AAW.

African American Women's Experience of Wearing Natural Textured Hair

According to Harris and Davis (2023), the intersectionality method is useful for addressing the various experiences Black women have had with factors of racial discrimination and gender. It captures Black women's experiences with several sorts of prejudice at the same time, as well as elements of the women's identities. This technique has a shortcoming in that it requires a more detailed knowledge of the confluence of gender and racial hair discrimination against Black female leaders.

According to O'Brien-Richardson (2019), the hair of AAW and girls has historically served as a tool for systemic violence and harassment against Black individuals, particularly AAW, subjecting them to social penalties and stigmatization based on their hair. L. L. Smith (2022) noted that choosing natural textured hair significantly influenced the work lives and choices of AAW. These women grappled with decisions about how to present themselves, expressing concerns that styling their hair in specific ways might adversely affect their chances for advancement and opportunities. Greene (2017) states that AAW who refused to comply with Eurocentric standards faced adverse performance assessments, were passed over for professional progression possibilities, or were fired, a phenomenon known as microaggression.

Microaggressions are brief, everyday conversations that transmit derogatory messages to members of specific groups: race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or ability (Bennett-Alexander & Harrison, 2016). Microaggressions are frequently encountered by AAW who opt to wear their natural hair texture, resulting in an increase in emotional expense and an internal struggle for success and lower productivity (Harris & Davis,

2023). The decision to wear their natural textured hair has exposed AAW to internalized racial oppression, impacting their confidence, undermining their sense of self-worth, and hindering their ability to engage with others, particularly those from similar racial and ethnic backgrounds (J. A. Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter had an introduction, a literature search strategy, a theoretical foundation, a literature review related to key concepts, a summary, and a conclusion. The literature on the three concepts was reviewed: hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and AAW's experience in wearing their natural textured hair. The literature research revealed many themes that provided insight into multiple characteristics of natural textured hair in the context of racial and hair discrimination. These themes revealed the complex interaction of cultural, societal, and individual factors that impact perceptions and prejudices associated with different hair textures in the context of race and discrimination. The literature review revealed information about unconscious hair bias and attitudes toward natural textured hair. Some research used methods such as the Hair Implicit Bias Test to investigate people's views of natural textured hair, suggesting subconscious links between certain hair types and positive or negative judgments. This awareness helps us recognize the complex nature of natural textured hair bias. The research studied how people with natural, Black, or textured hair deal with hair prejudice, delving into the complex relationships between cultural influences, social attitudes, and personal opinions.

This study emphasizes the interweaving of hair-related prejudices with wider social concerns about racial prejudice and discrimination. Existing research on the issue suggests that both hair discrimination and racial prejudice have adversely affected AAW in various ways: professional implications, educational challenges, social and emotional impact, and identity and social expression. The implications have been reported in several aspects of their lives, including societal, professional, and personal domains. The implications consisted of cooperation exclusions, school policies, psychological well-being, and cultural identity. However, there is a significant lack of information regarding the possible unfavorable psychological impact that various types of prejudicial views may have on AAW.

While the current body of literature recognizes the tangible consequences in terms of societal bias and professional challenges, the less tangible but equally important psychosocial effects, such as emotional well-being, self-esteem, and mental health, remain unexplored. Addressing this gap lead to a more comprehensive knowledge of the entire impact of hair and racial prejudice on people's lives. Hair and racial discrimination can be detrimental because of the intrinsic link between self-perception and self-concept (Rogers, 1961) and the inclination to compare oneself to others and social comparison theory (Festinger's, 1954). Discrimination can lead to negative psychological effects such as low self-esteem, increased stress, anxiety, sadness, and a negative perception of self-worth (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016). Furthermore, continuous exposure to these forms of discrimination can lead to more severe psychological consequences, such as racial battle fatigue, a term used to describe the psychological

distress and physical symptoms that Black people, for example, may experience as a result of daily microaggressions and discrimination (Mbilishaka et al., 2020).

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the relationship between hair discrimination, psychological conflicts, and how AAW describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair. The IPA used in the study generated knowledge of AAW's self-perception, how they feel, and their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair. In this chapter, I presented the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection, interview approach, instrumentation, data analysis plan, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and summary.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question for this study was, How do AAW describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair? I used the research question to guide my exploration of the association between hair discrimination and psychological conflicts as it relates to how AAW describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair. The qualitative approach that was used in this study is IPA. The design of an IPA focuses on an individual's perception with a flexible participant-oriented view and discussion about his or her experiences with things (Alase, 2017). According to Alase (2017), the fundamentals of IPA are developed from phenomenological, hermeneutic, and idiographic ideas. As per Husserl (1982), phenomenology entails a detailed exploration of an individual's lived experiences. The experience is composed of specific data gathered by individuals without established classifications. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation (Heidegger, 1999). Using hermeneutics, the researcher engages in

interpreting participant experiences, simultaneously exploring and understanding the participant's lived experience. Given the goal of examining AAW's lived experiences with wearing their natural textured hair, IPA is the ideal approach for this study.

Role of the Researcher

According to Creswell (2013), an IPA researcher's role and responsibility is to investigate and interpret the impact of the research subject matter on the lived experiences of the research participants. Understanding the dynamics of the participants' experiences helps to capture the true essence of their lived experiences. In my active role as an IPA researcher, I collected data through in-depth interviews and analyze the data. According to Alase (2017), an IPA researcher is equipped with all the necessities to conduct a rich and thorough research study, including setting aside their biases, judgments, and preconceived ideas about the issues being investigated and interpreting the impact of the research subject matter on the lived experience of the research participants.

In addition, Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenological researchers may acknowledge what they already know about a topic; however, they are open to learning more of that information. Because I have had my own experience as an AAW wearing my natural textured hair, I acknowledged what I already know about the topic, put my perspective aside, and use this opportunity to investigate and interpret AAW's lived experiences in wearing their natural textured hair. I have been a cosmetologist, hair educator, and natural hair specialist for over 20 years and have worked with clients of all hair types. I am the CEO and owner of The Texture of Me, a multifaceted initiative

designed to raise awareness about biases, discrimination, and mental health challenges associated with natural textured hair. Through a holistic approach encompassing education; personal narratives; resource provision; support networks; diversity, equity, and inclusion/skill-building endeavors; community engagement; collaborative efforts; and advocacy, The Texture of Me seeks to empower individuals and foster a society where biases and discrimination related to natural textured hair are dismantled and everyone is celebrated for their unique beauty and identity. This study has increased my understanding, knowledge, and sensitivity to the numerous problems, decisions, and issues confronting AAW who wear their natural textured hair. As the researcher, I asked insightful questions of participants with the objective of collecting data directly from their personal experiences and perceptions. Participants in this study were recruited through a designated Facebook community.

Bracketing is a tool utilized by researchers in (IPA). According to Creswell (2013), in phenomenological research, bracketing allows researchers to approach the study with an open mind, suspending personal interpretations or judgments that can impact the interpretation of participants' experiences. I used bracketing to temporarily set aside my own perspectives, allowing for a more effective engagement with the participants' lived experiences and delving deeper into the inherent meanings within their experiences. Following each interview with participants, I recorded my emotions, behaviors, and overall impressions in my reflective journal. Researchers have the option to utilize a reflective journal during the study process to document their thoughts,

feelings, and biases. This practice helps to identify and acknowledge personal biases that may influence the research (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

Methodology

In this section, I discussed the reasoning behind participant selection, the type of instrumentation used, and the researcher-developed instruments used in the study. I expanded on the precise processes implemented for recruitment, detailing the strategies used to invite participants, the criteria for their inclusion, and any measures taken to assure their informed consent. I also offered a full summary of the protocols that govern participant involvement, outlining the actions taken to support their participation and cooperation throughout the data gathering process. Finally, the section included information on the data collection methods I used to obtain and record pertinent information in a systematic manner.

Participation Selection Logic

AAW, who predominantly wear their natural textured hair for at least 75% of the time over a period of 6-months, made up the study. AAW who predominantly wear their natural textured hair for at least 75% of the time over a period of 6-months, would involve them wearing hairstyles from afros, curls, twists, braids, locs, to any other naturally textured hair styles. These participants are 18 years of age and older and wear their natural textured hair. The sample size consisted of six participants. Although the study was guided by data saturation and allowed for the recruitment of additional participants if necessary, saturation was achieved with the initial six respondents. According to J. A. Smith and Fieldsend (2021), a sample size of three to six participants

were be sufficient and is acknowledged as the most conducive to a successful outcome. IPA research is conducted with relatively small sample sizes. Sample sizes are usually small in qualitative research because gathering participants' experiences and their ideas can provide a thick and rich description for transferability (J. A. Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). I used purposive sampling to recruit participants. Appendix A contains the social media invitation and Appendices B and C the screening eligibility and demographics forms, respectively. According to Patterson (2002), purposive sampling provides information-rich insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalization. In purposive sampling, the researcher uses their discretion to determine the number of participants needed to reach data saturation and participants who match a particular criterion or who have experienced the same event.

When data analysis results show that no new codes or themes are emerging, it means that saturation has been reached, and this could possibly have an impact on sample size, according to J. A. Smith and Fieldsend (2021). Saturation is defined as the point in a study at which no new relevant information is forthcoming while there is an increase in the number of people being interviewed (Galvin, 2015). The relationship between saturation and sample size refers to an indication that data is beginning to repeat or be redundant (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). According to Rudestam and Newton (2007), data collection should stop when saturation has occurred. Because IPA research methods generate a significant of data, a small sample size is suggested (Alase, 2017).

Instrumentation

For the data collection, I used a researcher-produced semi structured interview questionnaire (see Appendix D) and visual and audio recording. Semi structured interviews consist of questions that allow the researcher to focus on the topic of interest while exploring relevant ideas (J. A. Smith & Fieldsend, 2021, p. 52), such as lived experiences, perceptions and meanings, emotional responses, hair journeys and decisions, identity and self-concept, and challenges and obstacles. The interview focused on questions that tap into the experiences of AAW wearing their textured hair.

The combination of social comparison and self-concept theory gave a useful context for analyzing the participants' responses. Interviews with participants involved attentive listening and spontaneously inquiring for more information at certain points, aiming to gain a deep understanding of the participants' stories. The interview protocol included the research's title, time, date, location, interviewer, the interviewee's pseudonyms, and a brief study summary. Data collection continued until data saturation is reached, meaning no new themes or insights emerge from the data. Saturation ensures that the data gathering tools effectively address the research questions and provide a thorough grasp of the study issue (J. A. Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). According to J. A. Smith and Fieldsend (2021), achieving a state of information saturation ensures that the data collection methods effectively answer the research questions and that no more data is necessary. The semi structured interview questions were as follows:

1. When did you start to wear your natural textured hair or start your natural hair journey?

2. Have you ever observed yourself comparing the texture of your hair with that of others? How has this impacted your self-image and self-esteem?
3. What feelings do you have about the texture of your own hair, and what determines those feelings? How has this impacted you?
4. Have you ever had the impression that your textured hair was not as appealing or desired as other hair types? If that was true, how did it impact you?
5. How do you balance the need to adhere to prevailing beauty standards with the desire to embrace your natural textured hair? Do you rely on any coping mechanisms or support networks to embrace your natural textured hair?
6. How does your natural hair texture influence your sense of identity and self-perception? If it does, in what ways?
7. Does the acceptance or rejection of your textured hair by others influence your self-esteem and sense of worth? If so in what ways?
8. Do you think embracing your naturally textured hair has made you feel more authentic about yourself? Has this affected your general happiness and well-being? If so, how?
9. Do you find it challenging to balance your personal mental well-being and acceptance with cultural expectations and standards regarding hair? Do you have any methods or beliefs that enable you to maintain your own mental well-being regardless of outside influences?

Researcher-Developed Instruments

Appendix B contains the form I used to screen the eligibility of prospective participants. Appendix C contains the form I used to capture fundamental demographic information about the participants. This gave a better understanding of their characteristics and provided context for interpreting their experiences and perspectives. The six AAW participants predominantly wore their natural textured hair for at least 75% of the time over a period of 6 months. I recruited the participants from a dedicated Facebook group tailored to supporting AAW with natural textured hair. IPA aims for data saturation, and valuable insights can still be obtained with a smaller sample size. IPA focuses on the in-depth analysis of individual experiences. Appendix D is the interview protocol I followed. One-on-one interviews allow the researcher to ask open-ended questions (Pitkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

In this qualitative IPA study, I was the primary instrument for gaining a better understanding of the participants' lived experiences with naturally textured hair. This was accomplished by employing active listening and utilizing rapport-building techniques. As the researcher, I aim to create a supportive and conducive environment for participants to openly share their narratives. Establishing trust is critical to ensuring the credibility and richness of the data acquired. The screening approach was intended to ensure the inclusion of participants who are relevant to the study subject and have relevant experience with natural textured hair. Appendix D contains thorough information on the interview methods, which guide the researcher in conducting organized and insightful interviews that generate nuanced replies from participants. Appendix A has the social

media invitation I used to recruit participants; it includes important information about the study's aims and how interested individuals might participate in the study. The consent form covered the terms of participation, confidentiality agreements, and participant rights. These documents ensured transparency and ethical conduct throughout the research process, fostering a sense of trust and collaboration between the researcher and the participants.

The next section provides a detailed overview of the process involved in developing interview questions. This includes an exploration of the numerous sources of inspiration that influenced the development of the questions, demonstrating how distinct scholarly literature, practical experiences, and expert views were included in the formulation process. Furthermore, it discussed the iterative method used to modify and adjust the questions to better correspond with the study's unique intentions and the different demographics of the participants. In addition, the paragraph addressed the procedures used to guarantee that the interview questions are not only relevant but also sensitive and appropriate to the study's participants' particular characteristics and backgrounds.

The interview questions reflect my own personal experiences and observations related to the AAW wearing their natural textured hair. J. A. Smith and Fieldsend (2021) claimed that IPA recognizes the value of the researcher's subjectivity and how their personal experiences may contribute to the research. For instance, when I made the decision to "go natural" and wear my hair that way, I saw a variety of levels of cognitive processes that made me feel uneasy about my decision. I was interested in finding out

whether other AAW had similar experiences. After questioning my clients and other hair stylists with natural hair about their transition to natural hair, I discovered that many had the same experiences. I considered this a chance to conduct some research. I read research articles that related to my topics, such as: AAW's perceptions of self-value in the transition to natural hair; My hair is not like yours; workplace hair grooming policies for AAW as racial stereotyping in violation of Title VII; and African American personal presentation: psychology of hair and self-perception. The viewpoints of clients and stylists with natural textured hair were considered while creating interview questions using the framework of social comparison and self-concept theory. I was curious as to whether and how cultural beauty standards and comparisons to others would affect how they perceived themselves and their self-esteem.

The content validity was established in the development of the interview questions, the protocol, and the demographics, by describing how each was generated, revised, and finalized in the research. IPA refers to how accurately the collected and analyzed data conveys the experiences and viewpoints of the respondents or themes under study (J. A. Smith & Nizza, 2022). To establish content validity, the theoretical framework of combining self-concept and social comparison theories were used to direct the research and ensure alignment with relevant concepts and terminology.

To ensure that data collection adequately answers the research question, it is critical to maintain alignment between the collected data and the research objectives. This alignment ensures that the data gathered is relevant and useful in answering the research question within the IPA framework (J. A. Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Therefore,

alignment is an essential component in determining the sufficiency of data collection for addressing the research question. The data collection tools, such as the demographic questionnaire and interview protocol, have been deliberately constructed in accordance with the research question. This instrument is designed to encourage an in-depth evaluation of participants' experiences and perspectives, with the goal of eliciting comprehensive, specific, and nuanced responses.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

J. A. Smith's et al. (2009) IPA methodology would be most suitable for this research in that it provided a comprehensive, in-depth, first-person description of the participant's experiences. The first step is approval, which is to obtain permission from the Institutional Review Board before beginning recruiting to verify the study follows ethical criteria. The following step is establishing the participant's criteria, which are outlined with specific selections in detail: AAW aged 18 to 50, individuals who predominantly wear their natural textured hair for at least 75% of the time over a period of 6-months, participation in in-depth interviews, and establishment of recruitment channels. The recruitment channels were from a dedicated Facebook group focused in supporting AAW with natural textured hair. A social media invitation was sent via Facebook. Informed consent was also provided with explanations of the procedure in detail, participant rights, confidentiality, and a readily available and understandable informed consent form for participants to review and sign. There was also confirmation and follow-up of the responses to the questions and indications of interest in order to

schedule interviews with eligible participants. Then participants were thanked for their contribution.

The following step was screening, which was done with a consent form that includes the research's title, scheduled interview time and date, interviewee, pseudonyms, and a brief research description. After that, the data was collected from the respondents. Semi structured interviews were used to capture the richness and complexity of the participants' experiences, addressing the research question, "What are AAW's experiences when wearing their natural textured hair?" Open-ended questions explored sensory perceptions and personal interpretations related to wearing natural hair.

Data collection was conducted using Zoom recording, with audio recording as a backup. In the role of the sole data collector, I established direct connections with participants, obtaining the necessary data through conducting interviews and observations. It allows me to establish rapport with respondents, ask follow-up questions, and actively engage them in the conversation in order to capture the intricacies of their experiences. Each participant took part in an in-depth interview during this one-time data collection session. The information from this one interaction is suitable for exploring respondents' opinions and experiences. The duration of data collection was expected to range from 60 to 90 min per participant. For the accuracy of the data collection, there were two forms of recording used: one was a computer recorder, and the other was a interview recording. The transcription of the recording was done through Zoom.

The initial recruitment through a dedicated Facebook group supporting AAW with natural textured hair yielded a sufficient number of participants, which eliminated

the need for additional recruitment. Member checking, a subquality process, was initiated after the interviews were completed. A summary was sent to participants for their review, and gratitude was expressed through thank-you cards for their participation. Following transcription of the interviews, the subsequent step entails conducting a meticulous analysis of the transcripts, involving repeated readings to identify meaningful units of text, significant themes, patterns, and connections within the data.

NVivo 10 (<http://www.qsrinternational.com/>) was the primary tool for the collection of data. This complex program is developed for qualitative data analysis, allowing for the methodical organization and study of data gathered via interviews, surveys, and computer recordings. I inputted and rigorously evaluated the qualitative data using NVivo, providing for a thorough comprehension of the participants' perspectives. Furthermore, as the researcher, I practiced reflexivity throughout the data collection. This entails critically reflecting on my own preconceptions, biases, and assumptions, which may impact data interpretation. By documenting these reflections and sustaining continued reflexivity, I preserved the research's integrity and rigor.

Data Analysis Plan

This data analysis outline incorporates the principles of IPA at each step. The process begins with familiarization, where a deep understanding of participants' experiences is developed by immersing oneself in interview transcripts through repeated readings (Pitkicwicz & Smith, 2014). The subsequent step involves initial coding, achieved by highlighting relevant transcript portions and developing codes that reflect emerging data patterns (Pitkicwicz & Smith, 2014). Once the process is complete, I

integrated and synthesized the refined themes to develop a cohesive understanding of the phenomenon. This includes exploring relationships between the themes and determining their contribution to the overall narrative. Each theme is defined and named based on its meaning and context, ensuring accurate descriptions.

The IPA analysis process, as outlined in *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, and Research* (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, pp. 72–93), involves exploring relationships between themes to understand their contribution to the overall narrative. Each theme was carefully defined and named to reflect its meaning and context, ensuring accurate and insightful descriptions (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The analysis was then documented to include highlighted themes, supporting data, and conclusions drawn from the research (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). To organize the data, NVivo 10, a computer-based qualitative data analysis software, was utilized (<http://www.qsrinternational.com/>). After NVivo analysis, two critical follow-up processes—member checking and reflexivity—was used. Member checking assures the accuracy and creditability of participants' opinions by giving a summary of their interview transcript for confirmation. This collaborative method increases the trustworthiness of the study's conclusions.

IPA guidelines offer flexibility in the data analysis plan, encouraging researchers to be creative in reaching their objectives (Pitkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The analytic method, from participant selection to data interpretation, follows Alase's (2017) methodology. Discrepant cases are not discarded but examined with attention, addressing any disparities through member checking and reflective practice. The aim is to reduce discrepancies by actively engaging participants in the validation process and regularly

reflecting on the researcher's viewpoints through a reflective diary, providing a comprehensive and contextually rich understanding of the researched phenomenon.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In IPA, the concept of trustworthiness is utilized to describe the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study findings (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). It is crucial to make sure that the study is carried out with consistency and transparency and that the results are trustworthy and relevant. Implementing an array of strategies ensures that the interpretations depend solely on the experiences of the respondents and are not biased by the researchers' personal assumptions. According to Polit and Beck(2014), in qualitative research, trustworthiness establishes a level of confidence in the data by checking the accuracy, validity, and method used to ensure the quality of the study. There are four criteria that are used to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research, which are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

According to Polit and Beck(2014), credibility refers to the internal validity of qualitative research, which ensures the accuracy of the data collected. Credibility is essential for efficiently conveying participant experiences in IPA research. For the purpose of establishing credibility, I used a variety of approaches, including member checks, saturation, and reflexivity. Sharing the results with the participants involves member checks to confirm interpretations and guarantee accuracy. By conducting interviews and accumulating data until no new themes or ideas arise, I achieved data

saturation. This thorough approach enhances the confirmability of the study's findings, especially when it aligns with credibility (J. A. Smith & Nizza, 2022). Reflexivity is also essential for IPA researchers to maintain credibility (J. A. Smith & Nizza, 2022). I am going to carefully assess the potential influence of my biases, assumptions, and prejudices on my perception of the provided evidence. To ensure transparency, I kept a reflective journal to document my biases, increase self-awareness, and actively seek to eliminate assumptions. By staying inside the "bracket zone" and suspending preconceptions, I was able to undertake more objective and reliable evaluations. Finally, my objective is to provide trustworthy interpretations and themes that accurately reflect participants' experiences, increasing the credibility, confirmability, and dependability of the study findings (J. A. Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

Transferability

In IPA, the term *transferability* refers to how broadly the results of research may be applied to other situations or populations (J. A. Smith & Nizza, 2022). This involves assessing the extent to which the study's findings can be applied beyond specific participants and situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A detailed and comprehensive depiction of the research setting, participants, data collection methods, and analytical approaches was provided to illustrate transferability. By providing detailed information, readers can evaluate the extent to which the research findings may be relevant and beneficial in diverse circumstances or contexts beyond the initial study (Creswell, 2013).

Dependability

Dependability is the stability of the research data over time and relates to reliability in quantitative research (Creswell, 2013). The two essential components of dependability in research are audit trails and triangulation, according to J. A. Smith and Nizza (2022). An audit trail of the research process enables fellow researchers to replicate and validate the findings, thereby enhancing the overall dependability of the study. According to J. A. Smith and Nizza, triangulation comprises cross-checking and comparing several sources of data or interpretations for the purpose of having an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Triangulation in IPA research contributes to the rigor, validity, and reliability of the findings, resulting in a more thorough and nuanced knowledge of the lived experiences and phenomena being studied. In a research setting, researchers establish credibility and dependability through several key practices: reflexivity, bracketing, member checking, peer debriefing, audit trail, saturation, and trustworthiness. I used audit trails in this research to maintain detailed documentation of the analytical process, including notes on coding decisions, emerging themes, and any changes made during data analysis. I used triangulation by collecting data from interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a measure of objectivity in IPA research. It contributes to ensuring the reliability and trustworthiness of the study's findings, ensuring that they are not influenced by the researcher's biases or assumptions (J. A. Smith & Nizza, 2022). Reflexivity serves as a method to achieve confirmability in the study. As the researcher, I

continuously reflected on my own biases and assumptions throughout the research process by maintaining a reflexive journal. I used a journal to document my assumptions and biases toward the data. Providing comprehensive descriptions of the research's methods and techniques, as well as indicating how the data were gathered and processed, are additional methods to demonstrate confirmability (Creswell, 2013).

Intra- and Intercoder Reliability

In IPA research, both intra- and intercoder metrics are used to assess the consistency and agreement in coding and theme development among researchers or multiple coders involved in the analytical process (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). For this study, I used intra coder metrics to evaluate the consistency of my coding and interpretation over time. Intra coder refers to the level of agreement or consistency exhibited by the same coder when coding a dataset at different points in time (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The intra coder helps to ensure that the coding process is consistent, stable, and not influenced by external variables or the coder's changing interpretations.

After completing the initial coding process, the data was revisited before finalizing the analysis. This step, as outlined by J. A. Smith et al. (2009), serves as a final check for consistency and helps to identify any potential drift in the interpretation or application of codes over time.

Ethical Procedures

To uphold ethical standards and maintain the integrity of the study, I obtained permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (approval no.06-12-24-0705529). As emphasized by Creswell (2013), it is very important for researchers to

protect participants, foster mutual trust, and safeguard the rights and welfare of all involved parties. An institutional review board's main objectives are to make sure participants welfare, protection, and safety are adhered to as they participate in the research study. As the researcher, I upheld participants' rights by following these principles in accordance with those of the National Institutes of Health's guidelines for the protection of human subjects(National Institutes of Health, n.d.).

Ethical Concerns Related to Recruitment

Invitation by Facebook notice was issued but participation is volunteer without direct solicitation. This research poses minimal risk to participants, and I am committed to upholding ethical standards, respecting participant perspectives, and enhancing the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings. This approach fosters a collaborative approach to data analysis, recognizing the importance of individuals as active participants in interpreting their own experiences. In general, minimal-risk research focuses on non-invasive, non-sensitive themes. At this point, participants were informed about the research procedure and their rights. Participants already had a thorough knowledge of the nature and goal of the study.

The participant were emailed a consent form. It was a digital copy (PDF) of the consent form. The participant print, signed, and stated "I consent," scanned, and return the signed form via email.

To address the ethical concerns relating to data collection, several steps were put into place. All interview responses were captured verbatim using visual and audio techniques to safeguard participants' identities and privacy. NVivo 10, a program

renowned for its capacity to gather, arrange, and analyze qualitative data from interviews and recordings. Participants were informed about the researcher-participant interaction. Maintaining respect and ethical communication between the researcher and participants is essential. Each participant got a pseudonym, which helped preserve their identity throughout the research and further assure confidentiality.

Debriefing is not usually an absolute necessity in IPA research, although it is typically regarded as a desirable ethical practice. Per J. A. Smith and Nizza (2022), debriefing involves providing participants with an opportunity to express their experiences, thoughts, and any concerns they may have regarding the research process after its completion. The ethical necessity of debriefing in IPA research is determined by several factors, including the nature of the research, the degree of vulnerability of the participants, and the research institution's or ethics committee's unique ethical norms and regulations.

Following the publication of the research, all data obtained during the study are safely kept in a theft-proof safe for at least 5 years. In order to avoid any potential violation of confidentiality or privacy, after the 5th year, as a responsible researcher, I shall permanently delete all data from my computer and safely discard any physical copies (J. A. Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). According to J. A. Smith and Fieldsend (2021), this action is essential for protecting participant data and upholding their rights. By abiding by these ethical guidelines and procedures, I conducted the IPA study in a way that respects the rights and welfare of the participants.

Ethical Concerns Related to Data Collection

According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), ethical concerns in data collection include misrepresentation and biases, as incorrect data recording, transcription, or interpretation can result in misleading outcomes. These distortions may not only have an impact on our understanding of the data, but they may also affect possible policy or practice changes based on inaccurate information. It is important that accurate interpretation is captured (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). As stated by J. A. Smith and Fieldsend (2021), to safeguard participants' autonomy and the right to an informed decision on their participation in the research, this ethical principle is vital.

The need for informed consent increases in IPA research since participants frequently discuss sensitive and private experiences. I fully informed the participants about the purpose and use of the study, as well as any possible consequences of their involvement. Participants were made aware that they are free to leave the research whenever they choose to without incurring any penalties. Researcher-participant relationships are strengthened when informed permission is obtained (J. A. Smith & Fieldsend., 2021). This complies with ethical norms, respects participants' rights, and promotes open communication between the two parties.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the relationship between hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and how AAW describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair. I used IPA in the study and generated knowledge relevant for the clinical context of AAWs' self-perception, how they feel, and their world

view of themselves in these experiences. The target population is AAW who wear natural, textured hair. The research sample size were six participants. In Chapter 4, I presented the findings. The chapter also includes discussion of the setting, participant demographics, data collection, and data analysis; evidence of reliability; and a summary. The goal and research topics were briefly discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the relationship between hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and how AAW described their experiences of wearing natural textured hair. The existing gap in the literature was the limited presentation of lived experience research on the topic contributing to understanding of AAW's perspectives. This study sought to address that gap by offering deeper insights into how hair discrimination and psychological conflict influenced self-perception and identity of AAW. Chapter 4 includes an introduction, followed by sections on the study setting, participant demographics, data collection, and data analysis, informed by IPA (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, pp. 72–93). This chapter provides evidence of trustworthiness by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. It presents the results in relation to the research questions and concludes with a summary emphasizing the key findings.

Setting

The participants, AAW aged 24 to 52, took part in interviews conducted in July 2024 over Zoom at scheduled times that were mutually agreed upon. During the interviews, the participants were eager and enthusiastic about sharing their experiences and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss this topic. All participants consented to participate in the research and conveyed gratitude for being included. There were no historical circumstances or events that influenced the participants or their experiences at the time of the study. No external factors influenced my interpretation,

ensuring that the data collection and analysis remained unbiased and were accurately reflected in the study results.

Demographics

The six participants were AAW from the ages of 18 to 50 who reported predominantly wearing their natural textured hair for at least 75% of the time over a period of 6 months. Their professions were business owner, hair stylist, sexologist, nurse, real estate broker, and media expert. This population volunteered based on the premise of the study, the lived experiences of wearing natural textured hair. Though demographic details of relationship status and income range were collected, these were not reported, being that they were considered unessential data for this qualitative research on the participants' lived experiences with natural textured hair. Table 1 includes a summary of the participant demographic characteristics that were collected.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Participant (P)	Age	Level of education	Profession
P1	52	Master's degree	Real estate broker
P2	24	Vocational certificate	Hairstylist
P3	47	Bachelor of Science in Nursing	Nurse
P4	36	PhD	Business owner
P5	48	Master's degree	Sexologist
P6	45	Bachelor of arts degree	Media expert

Data Collection

I collected data from six participants by conducting semi structured, open-ended interviews. Each interview, conducted via Zoom, lasted approximately 60 min. The sessions were recorded visually and audibly using Zoom's features, with automatic

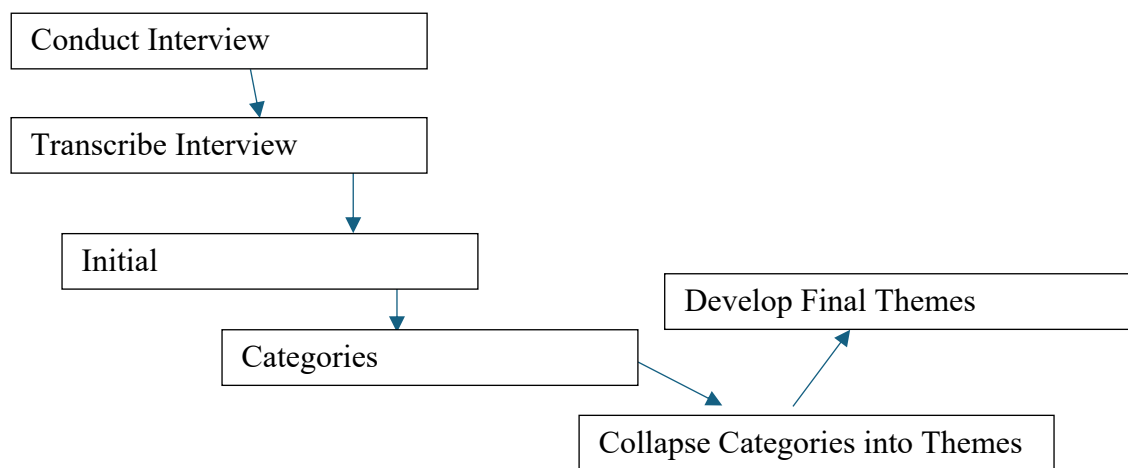
transcription enabled. All data collection followed the original plan from Chapter 3, with no variations. The Zoom program occasionally added extra words to respondents' comments, causing some sentences to be unclear. This was corrected by reviewing the transcripts alongside the original recordings on my computer to correct any inaccuracies. Each interview was a single session, and there were no unusual circumstances during data collection.

Data Analysis

In this section, I provide an overview of the data analysis process within the IPA framework (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Illustrating the progression from interviews to theme development, Figure 1 visually represents the steps taken throughout the analysis, aiding in understanding the systematic approach employed to derive meaningful insights from the participants' experience. No discrepant data were identified during the analysis, and all participant experiences aligned with the identified themes.

Figure 1

Process of Theme Development From Interviews to Theme Development



Transcribed Interviews to Codes

In conducting interviews, participants' narratives were gathered, with transcription of these interviews to ensure a detailed record for analysis. During initial coding, I focused on capturing relevant information by labeling segments with categories like "empowerment" or "self-identity" to summarize key points. This stage was characterized by an openness to the participants' experiences, aiming to discover emerging themes. I developed these initial codes by analyzing the participant transcripts to identify recurring patterns and key elements related to their natural hair journeys. Each code was derived from specific experiences and reflections expressed by the participants. I focused on personal experiences, such as events or moments that triggered each participant's natural hair journey, including comments from a spouse, personal preferences, or damaging hair treatments. P3 stated, "I started in 2002 after my husband's comment spurred me to shave my head, marking a rebellious and liberating act." P4 shared, "I began in 2011, influenced by personal preference and manageability concerns." P1 expressed, "I transitioned starting around 10 years ago, fully embracing natural curls by 2016 after a damaging hair treatment."

I also noted external influences, such as the impact of family, societal norms, and cultural shifts on the participants' decisions and perceptions about their natural hair. Additionally, I identified instances where participants compared their hair texture to others, whether within their families or in society, and how these comparisons shaped their self-image. To understand the impact on self-esteem, I identified statements that reflected whether participants' natural hair journey influenced their sense of self-worth,

either positively or negatively. I developed codes by examining participants' initial perceptions of their natural hair, capturing their early thoughts and feelings, and tracing changes in attitudes over time. I also analyzed how societal views on natural hair affected participants' self-acceptance.

Further, I observed how participants navigated tensions between societal expectations and personal preferences, adapting their styles or routines to maintain their natural hair, and identified coping strategies they used to handle societal pressure, such as wigs, protective styles, or leveraging their expertise as hair specialists. I also noted how participants began to integrate their natural hair into their sense of self. I examined the role of external validation in their natural hair journeys, including how acceptance or rejection by others affected their self-esteem. I considered the impact of maintaining natural hair on psychological health, noting both struggles and growth in mental stability and confidence. Finally, I explored how participants navigated cultural expectations and societal pressures related to their hair, including conflicts between these expectations and their personal well-being. By distilling these experiences into clear codes, I captured the diverse yet interconnected aspects of each participant's journey with their natural hair.

The identified codes are shown in Table 2.

Codes to Categories

I developed the categories by analyzing the codes from the participant transcripts to identify patterns and connections among their natural hair journeys. Each category was formed by grouping related codes that emerged from the participants' specific experiences and reflections. For example, to create the personal milestones category, I

combined codes, personal experience and triggering events, that referred to key moments or events in the participants' lives that triggered their decision to embrace natural hair, such as personal preferences or pivotal comments from others. In illustration of this, P2 shared, "I initiated my journey in 2017 with a big chop from relaxed hair, influenced by family and societal norms."

The cultural and social influences category includes codes, external influences, family and societal norms, and cultural shifts. These codes reflected the impact of family members, societal norms, and broader cultural trends, on participants' decisions and perceptions about their hair. P2 stated, "I balanced cultural expectations with personal identity, finding empowerment and mental well-being through my expertise and self-acceptance." P4 shared, "I managed my mental well-being by prioritizing my personal preference and finding confidence in my natural hair journey."

Family and societal comparisons included codes, comparison with others, observations within family and societal standards, captured how participants compared their hair texture to others within their families or in society, influencing their self-image. P6 stated, "I compared my hair to societal ideals of beauty, which initially led to self-doubt and desire for different hair". I formed the self-esteem outcomes category by grouping codes, impact on self-esteem and positive or negative effects, that dealt with the ways participants' natural hair experiences affected their self-esteem, either positively or negatively. The societal influence category arose from codes, initial perceptions and early feelings about natural hair, the reflected participants' perceptions of societal views on natural hair and how these perceptions impacted their sense of self-acceptance. I

developed the personal growth category by looking at codes, evolving attitudes and changes over time they tracked changes in participants' attitudes and feelings toward their natural hair, from initial discomfort to eventual pride. This category led to influence of others acceptance.

The category of external judgments validation was formed by combining codes external validation, seeing validation, acceptance from others regarding their natural hair, related to participants' experiences with external opinions and feedback on their hair. The category self-perception shift included codes reflecting changes in participants' self-image over time. This category was formed by codes, societal perception and how society views natural hair. P1 said she "felt pressure to conform to beauty standards but found confidence as natural hair became more accepted." The adaptation strategies category emerged from codes describing how participants adapted their hair care routines or styles to balance societal expectations with personal preferences. P1 stated, "I struggled with balancing my professional image with my natural hair by finding empowerment in embracing my identity." P6, shared "I transitioned from conforming to societal expectations to embracing my natural hair's uniqueness and authenticity."

The emotional coping category grouped together codes that illustrated how participants managed their emotional responses to societal pressure, including the strategies they used to maintain resilience. The categories were derived from the codes of personal acceptance, levels of acceptance and pride, balancing acts, and methods to navigate societal and personal standards. P5, expressed that "I experienced difficulty balancing societal beauty standards with my natural hair, often feeling unsupported by

family and hair stylists. I believe that having natural textured hair education and support would made a huge difference in my life ."Identity symbols encompassed categories related to how participants integrated their natural hair into their sense of self, making it a significant part of their identity. It consisted of codes, coping strategies, technique for dealing with societal pressure, identity integration, incorporating natural hair into self-identity. P6, expressed "I recognized my hair as a communication tool and embraced its natural state, contributing to self-love and acceptance."

To create the categories of self-esteem and emotional well-being I combined codes, happiness, emotional well-being and joy. The category of self-esteem showed the impact of participants' confidence and self-image. P2 stated, "I found happiness and authenticity through my natural hair journey, integrating it into my personal and professional life positively". The emotional well-being category included codes reflecting feelings of joy and authenticity tied to embracing natural hair. The emotional resistance and societal pressures category captured codes, mental well-being, psychological health and stability, which related to the conflict between personal satisfaction and societal expectations. P1, shared , "I gained happiness and authenticity through embracing my natural hair, overcoming past insecurities and societal pressures." P5 expressed , "Embracing my natural hair has made me feel more authentic and happier. I enjoy my hair's natural texture and feel a sense of pride."

Finally, the mental health strategies category was formed by identifying codes, cultural expectations and societal pressures related to hair, described the psychological approaches participants used to handle the stress and societal expectations surrounding

their hair, capturing both the challenges and the growth in mental stability and confidence. P1 stated, "I overcame cultural pressures by embracing my natural hair's beauty and cultural significance, improving mental well-being." P2, expressed, "I balanced cultural expectations with personal identity, finding empowerment and mental well-being through my expertise and self-acceptance." Through the process described above, I organized the codes into categories that encapsulated the complex interplay of personal experiences, social dynamics, emotional responses, and identity formation in the participants' natural hair journeys.

Categories to Themes

From the categories, eight themes emerged: natural hair journey, impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image, influence of others' acceptance, impact of beauty standards, balancing of beauty standards, identity shaped by self-perception, authenticity as a pathway to well-being, and balancing of mental well-being with cultural expectations. The theme of natural hair journey encompassed the categories of personal milestones and cultural and social influences, as reflected in participants' diverse motivations for transitioning to natural hair. P3 stated, "I began my journey in 2002 because of a desire for authenticity and rebellion against my husband's dismissive comment," while P6 shared, "I started my natural hair journey in 2011 for practical reasons." Similarly, P1 reflected, "I transitioned a decade ago, fully embracing my curls by 2016 after a hair treatment mishap."

Impact of hair texture and comparisons of self-image theme emerged from the categories, family and societal comparisons and self-esteem outcomes, as participants

expressed the struggle of comparing their natural hair to others, often leading to a negative self-image. P3 indicated, "I compared my hair to others within my mixed-heritage family and desired straight hair, impacting my self-esteem negatively initially." P4 mentioned, "I envied looser curls due to manageability but acknowledged my hair's impact on self-esteem."

Influence of others' acceptance theme was developed from examining the interplay between social influence and personal growth, highlighting how external validation judgments impacted self-esteem and self-perception. It reflected how participants' self-esteem and self-perception were shaped by external opinions, whether positive or negative, and how acceptance or rejection by others influenced their decisions about their natural hair. P3 voiced, "I initially was impacted by negative comments and teasing, but grew more confident through self-care and community support." P5 said, "I think Black men should avoid making negative comments about Black women's hair because those remarks can be really hurtful. When others show positive acceptance, it has such a powerful impact on my self-esteem."

Impact of beauty standards theme was formed by combining the categories of external judgments, validation and self-perception shift. The impact of beauty standards encapsulates how societal beauty standards and cultural expectations affected participants' self-perception and how they navigated societal pressures to conform to these ideals. P1 mentioned, "I used to feel a lot of pressure to conform to beauty standards, but as natural hair started to become more accepted, I gained confidence."

P2 voiced, "With current trends embracing natural hair, I've found acceptance and been able to move past the older beauty standards.

Balancing beauty standards was developed by integrating the categories of adaptation, strategies, and emotional coping. This theme represented the strategies participants used to balance societal expectations and personal preferences, such as using protective styles, wigs, or finding emotional coping mechanisms to manage external pressures. "P2 asserted, "As a natural textured hair specialist, I've leaned on my expertise, which has helped me build confidence and take pride in both my work and personal identity." P5 specified, "I've struggled to balance societal beauty standards with my natural hair, often feeling like I didn't have enough support from my family or hair stylists. This really shows how much we need better education and support in this area".

The theme of identity shaped by self-perception, emerged from synthesizing the category identity symbols. It captured how participants' natural hair became a significant part of their identities and how their perceptions of themselves evolved over time, often from discomfort or shame to pride and acceptance. P1 explained, "I see my natural hair as a true reflection of my identity. It represents authenticity and holds deep cultural significance for me." P6 voiced, "I view my natural hair as a way to communicate who I am. Embracing its natural state has helped me foster self-love and acceptance."

Authenticity as a pathway to well-being was developed from the categories of self-esteem and emotional well-being. This theme highlighted how embracing natural hair contributed to participants' emotional health, authenticity, and overall sense of well-being, reflecting their journey toward self-acceptance and joy. P3 expressed, "I felt proud

and authentic with my natural hair, which contributed to my overall happiness and well-being." P1 voiced, "Embracing my natural hair brought me happiness and authenticity, helping me overcome insecurities and societal pressures I faced in the past."

P6 stated, "Accepting my natural hair has boosted my self-esteem and well-being, and I now see it as an essential part of my identity." P2 expressed "Through my natural hair journey, I've found happiness and authenticity, which have positively influenced both my personal and professional life." P5 asserted, "Wearing my natural hair has made me feel more authentic and happy. I take pride in its texture and truly enjoy it."

Connected to the theme of balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations, P1 shared, "I overcame cultural pressures by embracing my natural hair's beauty and cultural significance, improving my mental well-being,". This theme consisted of the categories emotional resistance and societal pressures and mental health strategies. P4 stated, "I've managed my mental well-being by focusing on what works for me and building confidence through my natural hair journey." P1 voiced, "By embracing the beauty and cultural significance of my natural hair, I was able to overcome cultural pressures and improve my mental well-being." These quotes reflect so many aspects of the participants' experiences. By further synthesizing the codes that emerged from the participant transcripts to categories the core aspects of their natural hair journeys were captured. Each theme represents a broader narrative drawn from multiple categories, emphasizing the interconnected and overlapping nature of the participants' experiences.

All six participants contributed to each of the codes, which lead to each category, and formed the eight themes identified in this study. Naming the themes provided a structured analysis of participants' experiences with natural textured hair. Each theme captured essential aspects of personal journeys, societal influences, resilience, empowerment, and personal growth. This structured approach enhanced understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding natural hair acceptance and self-perception, offering valuable insights into individual experiences and strategies for navigating societal norms. The themes I identified were: natural hair journey; impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image; influence of others' acceptance; impact of beauty standards; balancing beauty standards; identity shaped by self-perception; authenticity as a pathway to well-being; balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations. These are represented in Table 2 and discussed in the Results section.

I utilized J. A. Smith's (2009) approach to IPA, which provided a structured framework for organizing and analyzing qualitative data. Following transcription, data were cleaned in comparison with audio recordings. Next, I familiarized myself with the data content by reading and re-reading the transcripts to immerse myself fully. Following that, I conducted initial coding, reading through interview transcripts or field notes to identify significant segments of words, phrases, or ideas relevant to the research question. During this phase, I highlighted these segments and assigned labels or categories, to represent emotions, actions, or patterns. My goal was to explore the data broadly, allowing a wide range of potential themes to emerge without narrowing them too quickly. Last, I organized the related codes into categories, treating each code independently and

exploring their relationships. This process allowed me to identify patterns and collapse the codes appropriately.

Table 2*Codes, Categories, and Themes*

Code	Category	Theme
Personal experience triggering events	Personal milestones	Natural hair journey
External influence, family, societal norms, cultural shifts	Cultural and social influences	
Comparison with others, observations within family and societal standards	Family and societal comparisons	Impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image
Impact on self-esteem positive or negative effects	Self-esteem outcomes	
Initial perceptions, early feelings about natural hair	Societal influence	Influence of others' acceptance
Evolving attitudes: changes over time	Personal growth	
External validation: seeking validation or acceptance from others regarding their natural hair	External judgments Validation Self-perception shift	Impact of beauty standards
Societal perception, how society views natural hair		
Personal acceptance, level of acceptance and pride	Adaptation strategies Emotional coping	Balancing beauty standards
Balancing acts, methods to navigate societal and personal standards		
Coping strategies, techniques for dealing with societal pressure		
Identity integration	Identity symbols	Identity shaped by self-perception
Incorporating natural hair into self-identity		
Happiness, emotional well-being and joy	Self-esteem, emotional well-being	Authenticity as a pathway to well-being
Mental well-being, psychological health and stability	Emotional resistance and societal pressures	Balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations
Cultural expectations, societal pressures related to hair	Mental health strategies	

As shown in Table 2, establishment of codes provided organization for categories that then served as the building blocks for developing themes, allowing for a structured and comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences. To develop a comprehensive understanding, I systematically documented the findings established by the data. The key results were outlined using participant quotes to highlight the core insights and experiences. NVivo software was used to manage and code large volumes of qualitative data efficiently, which facilitated the identification of themes and patterns and ensured an accurate representation of participants' lived experiences. Member checking of the data was used to verify the accuracy and credibility of information in interview transcripts. Reflexivity was also employed throughout the process, allowing me to remain conscious of potential biases, assumptions, and personal influences. This reflective practice ensured that my interpretations stayed true to the participants' voices, protecting an authentic engagement with the data.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in the study, I focused on several key criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, each of which were discussed below. I emphasized consistency and transparency throughout the research process to enhance the reliability of the results. By carefully implementing strategies to ensure that interpretations were based solely on participants' experiences, I strove to avoid introducing bias from my own assumptions. According to Polit and Beck(2014), establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research involves validating data accuracy and

ensuring the quality of methods used. This approach helped build confidence in the study's findings and maintain its relevance and reliability.

Credibility

Credibility was essential for conveying participant experiences in IPA research. According to Polit and Beck (2014), credibility referred to the internal validity of qualitative research, ensuring the accuracy of the collected data. To establish credibility, I used approaches such as member checks, saturation, and reflexivity. Member checks involved sharing transcripts with participants to confirm interpretations and guarantee accuracy, which I did. I conducted interviews and accumulated data until no new themes or ideas arose, reflecting data saturation. Reflexivity was crucial for maintaining credibility; I kept a reflective journal to document biases, increase self-awareness, and eliminate assumptions. My objective was to provide trustworthy interpretations that accurately reflected participants' experiences, enhancing the credibility, confirmability, and dependability of the study findings.

Transferability

I assessed transferability by examining the extent to which the study's findings could be applied or extended to other contexts, populations, or settings, beyond the specific participants involved in this research. To achieve this, I offered a thorough and comprehensive description of various aspects of the study, including the research setting, characteristics of the participants such as levels of education and profession, data collection methods, and the analytical approaches used. This level of detail aimed to provide a clear picture of the study's environment and conditions, allowing readers to

make informed judgments about how the findings could be relevant and applicable to different situations or groups.

By providing contextual information, such as the demographics and backgrounds of the participants, the cultural and social dynamics of the setting, and the specific methodologies used to gather and interpret data, I sought to give readers a transparent view of the research process. This transparency helps in assessment of whether the insights gained in this study could be meaningful in other contexts (Creswell, 2013). For example, readers could compare their own settings or experiences to the ones described in the study to determine if similar patterns or conclusions might emerge. Ultimately, my goal was to enhance the usability of the study by ensuring that its findings were not confined to a narrow set of circumstances but can be thoughtfully considered and potentially applied to broader situations or different populations, thereby increasing the overall value and impact of the research.

Dependability

The two essential components of dependability in this research were audit trails and triangulation (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Dependability refers to the stability of the research data over time, similar to reliability in quantitative research (Creswell, 2013). An audit trail of the research allows fellow researchers to replicate and validate the findings, thereby enhancing the study's overall dependability. According to J. A. Smith et al. (2009), triangulation involves cross-checking and comparing several data sources or interpretations to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Triangulation strengthened the rigor, validity, and reliability of the findings of this study,

leading to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the participants' lived experiences and the phenomena being studied. To ensure accuracy, I recorded the interviews using Zoom and audio recording tools, fully capturing each session. I cross-checked the audio recordings by listening to them at least three times and thoroughly reviewed the automatically generated transcripts multiple times, making necessary edits for accuracy. I also took detailed notes during the interviews, probing for data at various times to capture a range of contexts.

To further verify the findings, I employed member checking by sending the transcripts to the participants for their review and confirmation. All participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts without requesting any changes, ensuring that their narratives were accurately represented. In addition, I maintained a comprehensive audit trail, documenting each step of the research process, including data collection, coding, analysis, and interpretation. This detailed record allowed for transparency and accountability, enabling others to trace the research decisions and validate the study's findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability was a measure of objectivity in IPA research, ensuring the reliability and trustworthiness of the study's findings by minimizing the influence of the researcher's biases or assumptions (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Reflexivity served as a method to achieve confirmability in the study. As the researcher, I continually reflected on my own biases and assumptions throughout the research process by maintaining a reflexive journal. I used the journal to document my assumptions and biases toward the

data. I utilized a records maintenance plan and audit trail throughout the study, diligently taking notes and referencing the transcripts during both the analytical and writing phases. Providing comprehensive descriptions of the research methods and techniques, as well as indicating how the data were gathered and processed, were additional methods used to demonstrate confirmability.

Intra- and Intercoder Reliability

For this study, I used intracoder metrics to assess the consistency of my coding and interpretation over time. Intracoder metrics assess how consistently and reliably a single coder applies codes to qualitative data over time. J. A. Smith et al. (2009) noted that both intra- and intercoder metrics are crucial for evaluating consistency and agreement in coding and theme development among researchers or multiple coders. Intracoder metrics measure the agreement or consistency of the same coder across different points in time. This method ensured that the coding process remained consistent, stable, and unaffected by external variables or shifting interpretations. After the initial coding, I revisited the data before finalizing the analysis. This step, as described by J. A. Smith et al., provided a final check for consistency and helped detect any potential drift in the interpretation or application of codes over time.

Results

The research question was, How do AAW describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair? Themes generated from analysis of the data were: natural hair journey; impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image; influence of others' acceptance; impact of beauty standards; balancing beauty standards; identity shaped by

self-perception; authenticity as a pathway to well-being; balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations. The interviews revealed diverse journeys toward embracing natural textured hair among AAW.

Natural Hair Journey

The starting points in the natural hair journey for each participant were influenced by various personal experiences and external factors, which prompted them to embrace their natural hair texture. These motivations included comments from others and cultural shifts. P3 shared, "My natural hair journey was due to a comment from my husband" indicating that her transition was initially triggered by an external remark. P6 stated, "I transitioned in 1998, inspired by cultural shifts and personal reflections on beauty standards" suggesting that broader cultural dynamics and personal reflections influenced her decision to go natural. P2 stated, "I initiated my journey in 2017 with a big chop from relaxed hair, influenced by family and societal norms." Family support and shifting societal attitudes towards natural hair influenced P2's decision. P5 said, "I started around 20 years ago, stopped relaxers before moving to South Korea. I initially used braids for practicality, transitioned to fully natural hair without flat ironing or braiding for the past 2 years, and recently fully embraced my natural hair. Each participant's journey was influenced by both internal motivations and external factors, such as cultural shifts and family influences. These experiences shaped their decisions to embrace their natural hair, reflecting how such decisions are connected to cultural identity, societal norms, and personal experiences.

Impact of Hair Texture Comparisons on Self-Image

The theme of impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image highlighted the emotional challenges participants faced related to societal beauty standards. Many participants reported the impact that comparing their natural hair textures to others, especially in contrast to societal preferences for straight hair or looser curls, had a negative effect on their self-esteem resulting in feelings of inadequacy and disempowerment. P3 noted, "I compared my hair to others within my mixed-heritage family and desired straight hair, impacting my self-esteem negatively initially." P1 similarly stated, "I compared my frizzier hair to peers, faced teasing, impacting my self-esteem but found pride in my identity later." These accounts show how comparisons to different hair types and experiences of external teasing affected participants' self-esteem and self-image during their formative years. P4 expressed, "I envied looser curls due to manageability but acknowledged my hair's impact on self-esteem."

P5 and P6 both reflected on how comparing their tightly coiled hair to looser curls, or comparing their hair to societal ideals of beauty, had a negative impact on their self-image. P6 mentioned that "Initially this comparison led me to self-doubt and desire for different hair." P5 added, "I often compared my hair texture to others, leading to feelings of disempowerment and frustration, which negatively impacted my self-esteem." These accounts illustrate how the comparison of natural hair to accepted beauty standards led to negative self-esteem outcomes for participants. Overall, participants expressed that comparisons to Eurocentric beauty standards were associated with lowered self-esteem and struggles with self-worth. While some participants eventually embraced their natural

hair, the process of achieving positive self-acceptance involved navigating societal expectations and reconciling them with their authentic identity.

Influence of Others' Acceptance

According to the participants, the acceptance or rejection of natural textured hair by others significantly influenced their self-esteem and self-perception. The positive feedback from family, friends, or broader communities influenced and reinforced participants' decisions to embrace their natural hair, boosting their confidence and well-being. Conversely, negative comments or societal pressures often influenced the feelings of insecurity, causing some participants to question their choice to wear their hair naturally.

P3 shared, "Initially, I felt my natural hair wasn't pretty but learned to appreciate its beauty through proper care." This illustrates how positive reinforcement and care practices helped transform her perception of her natural hair, overcoming initial negative impressions. Similarly, P1 stated, "I gained happiness and authenticity by overcoming societal pressures and focused on self-acceptance." showing how moving beyond negative societal views enabled her to feel more connected to her authentic self.

The impact of external influences was also evident in P2's journey, as she noted, "I gained confidence, which influenced my work and expertise." This statement reflected how positive external acceptance directly enhanced her sense of professional identity and competence. P3 also highlighted, "I was impacted by negative comments, however, grew confident through support." underscoring the power of community and positive reinforcement in shaping a stronger, more resilient self-image despite negative feedback.

P4 added, "Loved my hair but found maintenance time-consuming, impacting my feelings about my hair texture." This suggested that although she loved her natural hair, the challenges related to maintenance could affect her feelings of self-acceptance, especially when faced with external expectations around appearance. P6 similarly described her evolving experience, "I Initially questioned societal beauty standards but now I view my hair as an asset and part of my identity." indicating how societal acceptance shaped her journey towards embracing her natural hair as a positive aspect of her identity.

Impact of Beauty Standards

Initially, the participants stated the feelings about their natural hair texture were often negative due to societal conditioning of beauty standards that favored smoother and straight hair type. Over time, as participants learned to care for their natural hair properly and found community support, their feelings became more positive, leading to increased self-acceptance and pride. P1 stated, "I grew to love and appreciate my natural textured hair". P6 stated, "I questioned beauty standards, now see my hair as an asset". As for the impact of beauty standards, the participants frequently shared they felt that their natural textured hair was not as desirable or appealing as other hair types, which affected their confidence and sense of attractiveness. P2 acknowledged that, "I faced negative comments which impacted my view of my hair. This also impacted my natural hair journey. However, it also included the journey to overcoming these standards".

Balancing of Beauty Standards

Balancing personal preferences with beauty standards was a common experience for the participants. They used various coping mechanisms to address challenges related to societal norms and beauty standards that often favored straight hair over natural textures. These strategies included using protective styles, affirmations, and seeking support from online communities and family members with similar experiences. P3 shared, "I used different styles for various settings, adapting my routine to balance beauty standards and professional expectations with personal pride." P4 stated, "I prioritized my personal preference over societal norms, using wigs and protective styles for convenience." P5 described her experience: "I experienced difficulty balancing societal beauty standards with my natural hair, often feeling unsupported by family and hairstylists. Highlights the need for better education and support."

P1 explained, "I struggled with balancing professional image with natural hair, finding empowerment in embracing my identity." P6 shared, "Transitioned from conforming to societal expectations to embracing my natural hair's uniqueness and authenticity." P2 stated, "I relied on my expertise as a curly hair specialist, finding confidence and pride in my work and personal identity." The participants employed coping mechanisms such as protective styles, affirmations, and community support to navigate the balance between societal expectations and personal identity, maintaining their natural hair while adapting to external pressures.

Identity Shaped by Self-Perception

The theme of identity shaped by self-perception describes how participants embracing their natural hair texture influenced their sense of self. Embracing their natural hair was a process linked to positive self-perception, self-acceptance, authenticity, and cultural pride, ultimately leading to greater confidence and a positive self-image. P3 stated, "I embraced my natural hair's uniqueness, feeling proud and confident as I learned to care for it." P4 expressed, "I found vibrancy in my natural hair's versatility, integrating it into my identity despite occasional use of protective styles." P1 described, "My natural hair is a reflection of my identity and my self-perception. I see my natural hair as a symbol of my identity, appreciating its authenticity and cultural significance." P6 shared, "I recognized my hair as a communication tool and embraced its natural state, contributing to self-love and acceptance."

P2 echoed a similar sentiment, stating, "I fostered self-love and confidence through my natural hair journey, influencing my positive self-image, positive self-perception, and identity." P5 reflected on the influence of embracing her natural hair on her authenticity, stating, "I embraced my natural hair, and it has made me feel more authentic and prouder of my identity. I acknowledge that earlier attempts to change my hair affected my sense of self." The participants described how embracing their natural textured hair contributed significantly to their self-perception, further illustrating that identity is deeply shaped by how individuals perceive themselves, and this shift in self-perception can enhance a sense of cultural pride and authenticity.

Authenticity as a Pathway to Well-Being

When discussing authenticity as a pathway to well-being, participants consistently described how embracing their natural textured hair helped them feel more aligned with their true selves. By wearing their natural hair, they expressed a sense of pride, healthy well-being, and authenticity that positively influenced their happiness, self-esteem, and overall outlook on life. P5 shared, "I initially felt discontent and resentment toward my hair, frequently wishing it was different. Over time, began to love and feel proud of my hair's natural texture." She further elaborated, "This authenticity positively impacted my overall happiness and well-being, which continues to contribute to a more positive outlook on life." P1 noted, "I gained pride in my natural hair over time despite initial negative perceptions and teasing." P6 also stated, "I found happiness and authenticity, which helped me overcome insecurities and improve my well-being." P2 described, "I started with unfamiliarity but grew to love and appreciate my natural curls, finding pride and confidence in my work." The participants' journey of embracing natural hair contributed to their authenticity as a pathway to well-being.

Balancing of Mental Well-Being With Cultural Expectations

Participants shared their experiences of navigating the challenges of balancing emotional resistance with societal and cultural expectations around their hair. Many described a journey of self-discovery, where the act of embracing their natural hair became a powerful statement of self-empowerment and defiance against imposed beauty standards. Their strategies to maintain this balance included education, advocacy, and personal empowerment, which allowed them to connect more deeply with their identity

and culture. The theme of balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations emerged as participants discussed how their natural hair reflects their cultural identity and contributes to their sense of mental well-being. P1 highlighted the connection between personal pride and cultural heritage, stating, "I embraced my natural hair beauty and its cultural significance."

P1's response reflects the theme of balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations, where natural hair is seen as an extension of cultural identity rather than just a personal style choice. P6 echoed this sentiment, emphasizing, "I prioritized my culture and found true confidence in myself," showing how cultural prioritization strengthened her self-esteem and emotional health. The theme of balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations was consistent across participants who embraced their natural hair as a form of emotional resistance to societal pressures. P3's experience reflects this, sharing, "I started in 2002 after my husband's comment spurred me to shave my head, marking a rebellious and liberating act." For P3, this act of defiance against societal standards became a liberating moment, where community support played a crucial role in her acceptance and pride in her natural hair.

Education and support were key factors that contributed to the theme of balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations. P5 highlighted the emotional toll of navigating societal standards, stating, "Better education and support could have helped maintain emotional wellness during my hair journey." This underscored the necessity of having resources and guidance available for those grappling with the intersection of hair and identity. It pointed to the need for stylists, educators, mental health professionals, and

communities to offer support that not only addressed aesthetics but also considered the emotional and mental dimensions of hair care. By fostering a more holistic approach, individuals could better navigate the challenges of aligning cultural expectations with their personal well-being.

Treatment of Discrepancies

A thorough analysis was conducted, covering every stage of the research, from participant selection to data analysis. Each participant was interviewed once, and member checking was used to ensure the findings accurately reflected their experiences. No discrepancies were found, as the participants' perspectives were clearly communicated and consistent with the data. This confirmed the reliability of the data and enhanced the credibility of the study's results.

Summary

In summary, the interviews revealed the transformative experiences of AAW embracing their natural textured hair. Each woman's journey toward self-acceptance and empowerment was marked by personal growth and resilience, driven by various motivations from cultural influences to personal preferences. Despite initial challenges like negative comparisons and societal pressures, the participants evolved from self-doubt to self-empowerment. They learned to celebrate their natural hair, balancing societal expectations with personal pride and community support. The study revealed several key themes: starting the natural hair journey, impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image, influence of others' acceptance, impact of beauty standards, balancing beauty

standards, identity shaped by self-perception, authenticity as a pathway to well-being, and balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations.

Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive summary of the study, including key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The study's results were interpreted, limitations were discussed, and the implications of the findings were outlined. Additionally, recommendations for future research and practical applications were offered, concluding with an overview of the study's significance and contributions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand the experiences, feelings, and self-perception of AAW when wearing their natural textured hair. Using a qualitative research design in the IPA tradition, the study involved interviewing six AAW who have worn their natural hair at least 75% of the time over a 6-month period. The IPA approach, combined with social comparison and self-concept theories, provided a framework for interpreting the participants' perspectives. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in the data, allowing for a deeper understanding of how these women deconstruct their experiences and the meaning they attribute to their natural textured hair.

The key findings from this research reveal that AAW experience a transformative journey toward self-acceptance and identity empowerment when wearing their natural textured hair. Participants reported initial challenges, including negative self-perceptions and societal pressures, but over time, they shifted toward self-empowerment, finding pride and confidence in their natural hair. The study highlighted the significant impact of natural hair on self-identity and well-being, with many participants experiencing increased authenticity and happiness as they embraced their natural textures. These findings underscore the complex and evolving relationship AAW have with their natural hair, marked by resilience and personal growth.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I discussed the key findings that reveal how hair discrimination emotionally and psychologically impacts AAW. I described how the findings confirmed, disconfirmed, and extended knowledge of the discipline compared to what has been found in peer-reviewed literature. I then provided theoretical interpretations by aligning Festinger's social comparison theory and Rogers' self-concept theory to the themes that emerged from the data. Next, I addressed the study's limitations of trustworthiness, describe recommendations for future studies, and explored the implications for future research, focusing on how the findings can drive positive social change, methodological advancements, and theoretical developments. I concluded by summarizing the key insights and highlighting the importance of addressing hair discrimination to foster individual empowerment and societal equity.

The key findings confirm, disconfirm, and extend key concepts related to the experiences of AAW wearing their natural textured hair, offering a more comprehensive understanding of these interconnected issues. These findings interact dynamically with the concepts of hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and the lived experiences of AAW, enriching our understanding of these complex and multifaceted issues. The data analysis indicated 8 themes: natural hair journey; impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image; influence of others' acceptance; impact of beauty standards; balancing beauty standards; identity shaped by self-perception; authenticity as a pathway to well-being; balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations. I have categorized the topics of hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and the experiences of AAW wearing natural

textured hair into confirming, disconfirming, and extending sections to provide a clearer comparison based on the peer-reviewed literature.

Hair Discrimination

The literature confirms that hair discrimination is a prevalent and significant issue for AAW. Studies by Bennett-Alexander et al. (2016) and Harris and Davis (2023) demonstrated that AAW were subjected to unfair treatment and prejudice based on their natural hair textures. This discrimination is evident in various settings, such as workplaces, where natural hair textures are often stigmatized. The Hair Implicit Bias Test (McGill et al., 2017) further corroborates these findings by showing that natural textures are more likely to be associated with negative attributes compared to straight hair. This underscores the deep-rooted societal and racial biases that underpin hair discrimination.

While the findings confirm the existence of hair discrimination, they also suggest that the issue may be more complex than initially understood. For example, although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 addresses racial discrimination, there is ongoing debate about whether it adequately covers hair discrimination. This reflects a legal and societal ambiguity about the extent to which hair discrimination falls under racial discrimination protections (Bennett-Alexander et al., 2016).

The literature expands the understanding of hair discrimination by revealing its nuanced impacts. For instance, Mbilishaka et al. (2020) and Harris and Davis (2023) offered detailed accounts of how hair discrimination not only manifested as overt prejudice but also resulted in significant emotional distress. This included feelings of sadness and shame, which were not extensively covered in earlier research. By

highlighting these emotional responses, the findings enrich the understanding of how hair discrimination affects AAW, moving beyond the surface-level prejudices to include the emotional and psychological ramifications.

Psychological Conflict

The literature confirms that AAW experience significant psychological conflict related to their natural hair textures. Capodilupo et al. (2014) and Ellis-Hervey et al. (2016) argued that hair served as a symbol of internalized mental processes and identity issues for AAW. Studies by Mbilishaka et al. (2020) and O'Brien-Richardson (2019) confirmed that this psychological conflict could lead to stress, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem, aligning with the concept of internalized self-hatred and psychological distress. These findings underscore the deep psychological impact of hair-related discrimination and internalization processes.

The findings do not fundamentally disconfirm the notion of psychological conflict but suggest that existing frameworks may need to integrate additional variables. For instance, while Capodilupo et al. (2014) and Ellis-Hervey et al. (2016) discussed hair as a psychological symbol, with the added dimension of workplace discrimination, Greene (2017) challenged simpler interpretations of psychological conflict. This suggests that current frameworks might be insufficient in capturing the full range of psychological impacts related to hair discrimination.

The findings extend the concept of psychological conflict by incorporating the intersecting factors of race, gender, and workplace pressures. Harris and Davis (2023) and L. L. Smith (2022) explored how these intersecting factors exacerbated psychological

conflicts, offering a more nuanced perspective on how discrimination affected AAW's mental health and self-concept. This expanded view provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding psychological conflict and how it is influenced by multiple layers of discrimination and societal expectations.

African American Women's Experiences of Wearing Natural Textured Hair

The literature confirms that AAW's experiences with their natural textured hair are fraught with significant challenges related to both discrimination and psychological conflict. Harris and Davis (2023) and O'Brien-Richardson (2019) provided evidence that AAW faced substantial social penalties and internal struggles due to their choice to wear natural hairstyles. These experiences impacted their professional and personal lives, reinforcing the concept that wearing natural textured hair often involved navigating complex social and psychological hurdles.

The findings do not significantly disconfirm previous understandings but suggest that the interplay between individual experiences and broader societal norms is more complex. The intersectionality approach discussed by Harris and Davis (2023), introduces additional layers of discrimination that challenge simplistic narratives about AAW's experiences. This approach reveals that the experiences of AAW are influenced by a range of intersecting factors, including race, gender, and professional context, which complicates the understanding of their experiences.

The findings extend the understanding of AAW's experiences by highlighting the role of microaggressions and internalized racial oppression. L. L. Smith (2022) discussed how everyday microaggressions and internalized prejudices shaped AAW's experiences

and self-perception. This deeper exploration into microaggressions and internalized racial oppression offers a broader view of the systemic issues affecting AAW, revealing how these experiences are intertwined with broader social dynamics and cultural norms. This research also contributes new qualitative data to conversations and academic discussions on topics such as racial identity, hair discrimination, cultural identity, and social justice on the intersection of race, beauty standards, and personal identity by capturing the detailed lived experiences of AAW with natural textured hair. Through methodologies like GHA, developed by Mbilishaka et al. (2020), personal accounts of hair discrimination are classified to deepen the understanding of how such experiences shape identity and self-concept among AAW.

To clarify, I did not use the GHA method in my research. The reference to GHA pertains to the work of Mbilishaka et al. (2020), who utilized this approach to provide valuable insights into the intersection of hair discrimination, identity, and self-concept among AAW. While my study aligns with this broader area of research, it employs IPA to explore these themes through the lived experiences of participants, focusing on their narratives without adopting GHA as a framework. This approach aligns with my findings by demonstrating the importance of qualitative methodologies in capturing personal narratives of hair discrimination, ultimately enhancing the understanding of how these experiences influence identity and self-concept among AAW.

The study brings to light emotional responses, particularly sadness, shame, and humiliation, associated with hair discrimination, which were not extensively detailed in previous studies. P3 stated “Hair discrimination impacted my self-esteem because it

influenced me to feel ashamed and negative about my hair”. P1 stated “I compared my hair to my peers and faced teasing and felt ashamed and humiliated which impacted my self-esteem”. P4 stated “I felt ashamed and discomfort with my hair because of how the public views my hair, and feel discriminated.”

According to Garrin and Marcketti (2018), previous research emphasized the role of societal beauty standards in influencing hair-related discrimination. This study adds nuance to the understanding by focusing on the personal and internalized impacts of these standards, particularly how they manifest in psychological conflicts and emotional responses. Internalized beauty standards, for example, influence how an AAW raised with Eurocentric beauty ideals may view her natural hair as less attractive, leading to anxiety about wearing it professionally and internal conflict between her self-image and societal expectations, psychological conflict and self-esteem. An AAW might feel pressured to conform her natural hair to corporate norms, leading to self-doubt and emotional distress. This highlights the psychological impact of balancing cultural identity with professional expectations, and emotional responses to discrimination. An individual might face workplace discrimination for her natural hair, resulting in feelings of sadness and shame.

This study also broadens the scope of emotional considerations by examining the intersectionality of race, gender, and workplace discrimination, offering a more complex picture of how AAW navigate their identities in various social contexts. P3 stated, “ I feel compelled to straighten my natural hair for important meetings or job interviews, fearing that wearing my hair in its natural state might be perceived as ‘unprofessional’ or

‘unacceptable’”. P6 stated, “I embrace my natural texture, it has strengthened my sense of cultural identity and solidarity with other AAW, despite the negative reactions I sometimes encounter”. P5 stated, "I've found solace in joining a support group where I can talk about my experiences. It helps to know I'm not alone and that there are ways to handle the stress." P2 stated, “I often feel like I have to hide my natural hair at work to fit in. It's exhausting trying to balance my pride in my heritage with the pressure to conform." P6 stated, "Embracing my natural hair is a form of resistance. It's my way of saying that I won't let societal standards define my worth."

Analysis and Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

Natural hair journey; impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image; influence of others' acceptance; impact of beauty standards; balancing beauty standards; identity shaped by self-perception; authenticity as a pathway to well-being; balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations, are the themes which emerged from the data.

Analyzing the research findings through Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory and Rogers' (1959) self-concept theory revealed that Festinger's theory highlights how individuals gauge their worth by comparing themselves to others when objective standards are lacking. For AAW with natural textured hair, this often involves comparisons with Eurocentric beauty norms, which emphasize straight hair.

Festinger's Social Comparison Theory

The study's findings illustrate how natural hair journey and impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image can lead to significant psychological conflict for AAW who

perceive their natural hair as deviating from societal norms. These negative social comparisons often result in feelings of inadequacy, aligning with Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, which posits that individuals evaluate their worth by comparing themselves to others, especially when objective standards are lacking. For instance, P3 reflected on her early natural hair journey, stating, "During my early natural hair journey, I compared my hair texture to others in my family and felt that my hair wasn't 'pretty' enough. This led to feelings of shame and sadness." Similarly, P4 expressed, "My tightly coiled hair made me envious of looser curls, which lowered my self-esteem. The shrinkage of my hair only added to the distress." P1 noted, "Childhood teasing about my frizzier hair really hurt my self-esteem and pushed me to conform to straight-hair beauty norms for acceptance." These experiences highlight the impact of beauty standards on identity shaped by self-perception.

The internalization of societal standards that devalue natural textured hair leads to emotional responses of sadness, shame, and humiliation, reflecting Festinger's theory. The participants' struggles with balancing beauty standards and seeking others' acceptance underscore the psychological conflict between their self-image and societal expectations. Despite these challenges, as AAW work towards balancing mental well-being with cultural expectations, they may gradually embrace authenticity. P2 stated, "By adjusting how I view myself, I learned to align societal expectations with my personal identity, which positively influenced my overall well-being." This shift from conflict to alignment demonstrates how navigating societal pressures can lead to a more authentic self-perception and improved well-being. In summary, the study emphasizes the

significant role of social comparison and beauty standards in shaping the psychological experiences of AAW. The themes of natural hair journey, impact of hair texture comparisons on self-image, and balancing beauty standards, reveal how these factors influence self-esteem, identity, and overall well-being.

Rogers's Self-Concept Theory

Rogers' (1959) self-concept theory emphasizes the crucial roles of self-image, ideal self, and self-esteem in shaping an individual's overall self-concept. According to Rogers, psychological distress arises when there is a significant discrepancy between how one perceives oneself (self-image) and how one wishes to be seen (ideal self). The study's findings suggest that hair discrimination contributes to a negative self-concept among AAW by stigmatizing their natural hair. This stigma creates a disconnect between their self-image (having natural textured hair) and their ideal self, influenced by societal pressures to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards. Consequently, feelings of shame, sadness, and humiliation emerge, adversely affecting their self-esteem and overall self-concept.

The study's findings illustrate the relevance of Rogers' (1959) Self-Concept Theory in understanding the psychological impact of hair discrimination on AAW. It reveals that this discrimination creates a gap between AAW's self-image and ideal self, leading to significant psychological distress. The same quotes in the previous section of Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, provided a framework to Rogers' (1954) self-concept theory. The study's findings illustrate the relevance of Rogers' (1959) self-concept theory in understanding the psychological impact of hair discrimination on

AAW. It reveals that this discrimination creates a gap between AAW's self-image and ideal self, leading to significant psychological distress.

P3's statement shows the impact of this gap, where the participant initially felt shame and sadness due to their perception of their hair being "not pretty enough." Over time, as they learned to appreciate their natural hair, the gap between their self-image and ideal self narrowed, leading to improved self-esteem. P4's quote highlights how constant comparisons to looser curls and societal beauty standards led to lower self-esteem, showing the internal conflict between self-image and how others viewed them. As P4 transitioned to embracing their natural hair, they experienced a shift in perspective, reflecting how aligning self-image with the ideal self contributes to improved self-esteem and self-acceptance. P1 describes the pressure to conform to straight-hair beauty norms due to teasing, which initially negatively impacted their self-image.

However, the eventual embrace of their natural hair reflects a reconciliation of their self-image and ideal self, as Rogers' theory suggests that self-acceptance leads to greater psychological well-being. P2's quote reflects how societal pressures initially caused a disconnect between their self-image and ideal self. Over time, however, they aligned their personal identity with societal expectations, resulting in a more positive self-perception and enhanced well-being, demonstrating how congruence between self-image and ideal self is central to Rogers' theory.

P5 shares a similar journey, noting that societal standards made them feel less desirable, but as they grew to appreciate their natural hair, they felt more authentic and proud. This transformation indicates a shift toward congruence between self-image and

ideal self, which is a key component of Rogers' theory in achieving psychological well-being. In summary, the study supports Rogers' proposition that a mismatch between self-image and ideal self, intensified by societal beauty standards, can cause considerable psychological distress. The participants' experiences highlight how societal pressures and personal comparisons impact self-esteem and overall self-concept, emphasizing the role of social comparison in shaping the psychological experiences of AAW facing hair discrimination.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study lies in its phenomenological approach, which can introduce researcher bias and affect the interpretation of data. This limitation can occur because a phenomenological approach relies heavily on the researcher's subjective interpretation, which may unintentionally introduce bias. To address the possibility of developing subjective interpretations, I employed strategies such as reflexive journaling and member checking, following J. A. Smith's (2009) IPA guidelines to ensure accuracy and minimize bias. A second limitation involved the small sample size and limited geographical diversity, with only six participants of varied backgrounds and education. The small, regionally limited sample size means the findings may not fully represent the broader population. Despite this, the findings are likely transferable to individuals or groups sharing similar characteristics or experiences. Specifically, the findings may apply to AAW facing hair discrimination in various social and professional settings, especially those navigating similar cultural, social, and emotional challenges. These insights could

also be useful for mental health professionals, educators, and advocates supporting individuals impacted by hair-related discrimination and its psychological effects.

The analysis process aligns with what I presented in Chapter 1, addressing researcher bias and the strategies used to minimize it, including reflexive journaling and member checking. Additionally, Chapter 1 notes the limitations of sample size and participant selection, suggesting these as opportunities for future studies to replicate and expand with broader populations. Another limitation mentioned in Chapter 1 is of the sample size and participant selection criteria, highlighting the potential lack of transferability due to the focus on AAW who wear their natural hair at least 75% of the time. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the research limitations are viewed as opportunities for future studies, highlighting the importance of replicating the research and expanding it to include broader populations.

Recommendations

Building on the strengths and limitations of the current study, several recommendations for further research are proposed. Expanding the sample size and diversity would enhance the transferability of findings, incorporating participants from various geographic locations, educational backgrounds, and experiences with hair discrimination. Future studies should use a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data (like surveys measuring the prevalence and impact of hair discrimination) with qualitative data (such as interviews exploring personal experiences and coping strategies). This combination allows for a deeper understanding by providing both statistical trends and detailed, personal insights. The integration of both types of data

offered a more complete picture of how hair discrimination affects individuals, blending broad patterns with nuanced, real-life experiences.

For longitudinal research on how hair discrimination impacts individuals over time and how coping mechanisms develop, a suitable sample would include a diverse group of AAW across different ages, professions, and socio-economic backgrounds to provide a broad perspective. It would also involve long-term participants who have experienced hair discrimination and are committed to participating over an extended period. Quantitative research of individuals who have not faced hair discrimination would offer a comparison point. Engaging participants from community organizations or support groups focused on hair discrimination would further enrich the study. These approaches would help ensure a thorough exploration of how hair discrimination affects individuals and how coping strategies evolve.

Additionally, exploring intersectionality in greater depth would elucidate how race, gender, and other social identities intersect to influence experiences of hair discrimination. Research can also focus on evaluating the effectiveness of intervention strategies to mitigate the psychological impacts of hair discrimination, providing practical support mechanisms. Finally, enhancing methodological rigor through techniques such as peer debriefing and data triangulation would address concerns about researcher bias and strengthen the credibility of findings. According to J. A. Smith (2009) peer debriefing is a qualitative research technique where a researcher discusses their findings and methodological processes with a peer or colleague who is not directly involved in the research project. This process helps to ensure that the research is rigorously examined

from multiple perspectives and that any potential biases or assumptions are identified and addressed (J. A. Smith, 2009) .These recommendations aim to build on the current study's insights and contribute to a deeper and more actionable understanding of hair discrimination and its psychological effects.

Implications

The research on hair discrimination and its psychological impacts has the potential to drive positive social change at the individual level by fostering greater self-awareness and resilience among those affected. Shedding light on the emotional and psychological challenges faced by individuals with natural textured hair empowers them to recognize and validate their experiences. The findings achieved this through highlighting the emotional and psychological challenges experienced by individuals with natural textured hair, thereby validating their experiences. Individuals similar to my sample may access these findings through various channels: academic publications, conference presentations, online platforms like ResearchGate and Google Scholar, webinars, and media summaries. These avenues ensure that the insights are disseminated widely, enabling those affected to recognize and validate their own experiences. This enhanced understanding can lead to improved self-acceptance and confidence, as individuals come to terms with the biases they face and develop strategies to cope with them. Additionally, increased awareness of the personal impacts of hair discrimination can encourage individuals to seek support, whether through counseling, community resources, or advocacy, thereby enhancing their overall well-being and sense of empowerment.

I will ensure my research is accessible through several key channels. By publishing in academic journals or online platforms, visibility in specialized fields are gained. Presenting at conferences and workshops provide direct engagement, while online platforms like ResearchGate and Google Scholar offer widespread access. Hosting webinars and online presentations while facilitating remote engagement, and collaborating with organizations can help disseminate my findings through their networks. Additionally, summarizing my research in popular media broaden its reach. Ultimately, this research can inspire individuals to challenge discriminatory practices, advocate for more inclusive beauty standards, and contribute to a more supportive and equitable environment for all.

The methodological implications of this research highlight the importance of incorporating qualitative approaches, such as phenomenological and interpretive methods, to capture the nuanced experiences of individuals affected by hair discrimination. Future researchers should continue to refine these methods and consider integrating mixed-methods approaches to provide a more comprehensive view of the psychological impacts. Theoretically, this research contributes to and expands existing theories on social comparison and self-concept. It enhances our understanding of how societal standards influence personal identity and self-perception, particularly among AAW with natural textured hair. Using Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory as part the study's theoretical framework, the findings illustrate how individuals evaluate themselves against societal norms, leading to psychological conflicts. The study also builds on Rogers' (1959) self-concept theory by demonstrating how hair discrimination

affects self-esteem and self-worth. These theoretical insights can inform future studies and interventions aimed at addressing the psychological effects of hair discrimination and promoting a more inclusive understanding of identity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the relationship between hair discrimination, psychological conflict, and how AAW describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair. Utilizing the IPA method, the study aimed to provide insights into AAW's self-perception, feelings, and self-view in these contexts. In examining the shared experiences of these women, the research identified common themes related to their emotions and self-perception. Additionally, the study amplified AAW's voices, shedding light on the impact of hair discrimination for their psychological well-being and self-concept.

The key takeaway from this research is that hair discrimination profoundly affects the psychological health and self-concept of AAW with natural textured hair. The study's findings reveal the deep emotional consequences of societal biases and highlights the intersection of race, gender, and personal identity, underscoring the urgent need for increased awareness, supportive interventions, and inclusive policies. Addressing these issues promotes individual empowerment and resilience and contributes to broader social change, fostering a more equitable and affirming society for all.

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Appendix A: Social Media Invitation

Interviewer seeks African American women, who predominantly wear their natural textured hair for at least 75% of the time over a period of 6-months.

There is a new study about the experiences of African American women when wearing their natural textured hair. AAW who predominantly wear their natural textured hair for at least 75% of the time over a period of 6-months would involve them wearing hairstyles from afros, curls, twists, braids, locs, to any other naturally textured hair styles. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences when wearing your natural textured hair.

About the study:

- One 60–90-minutes zoom interview that will be recorded.
- You would receive a “Thank You” card.
- To protect your privacy, the published study would use pseudonym.
- **Volunteers must meet these requirements:**
 - ✓ 18 years old and older
 - ✓ African American women
 - ✓ Predominantly wear your natural textured hair for at least 75% of the time over a period of 6-months. Example wear your natural textured hair for five out of seven days. This 75% frequency illustrates the regularity with which participants in this study choose to embrace their natural hair textures, serving as a key criterion for their inclusion in the research.

This interview is part of a doctoral study by Tammy Jolivette, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will be arranged.

Please message Tammy Jolivette privately to let them know of your interest or

contact

Tammy Jolivette

[telephone number redacted]

Appendix B: Screening Eligibility

The following is a screening eligibility interview guide to select participants for the research, “African American Women’s Experience of Wearing Natural Textured Hair” question, which is: How do African American Women describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair?

- Do you identify as an African American woman?
- Do you have natural textured hair that has been worn that way for at 75% of the time within 6-months?
- Would you be willing to have a one-on-one interview about your experiences with natural hair? The interview would last to about 60-90 minutes and be recorded through Zoom and the computer for backup.
- Would you consent to the transcription and analysis of your interview as part of a research project?

Appendix C: Demographics

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Place of Interview: _____

Questions:

What is your age?

What is your profession ?

What is your relationship status?

What is your level of education?

What is your income range?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for Qualitative Exploration of Wearing Hair in African American Women: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Place of Interview: _____

Research Question: How do African American Women describe their experiences of wearing their natural textured hair?

Interview Questions

1. When did you start to wear your natural textured hair or start your natural hair journey?
2. Have you ever observed yourself comparing the texture of your hair with that of others? How has this impacted your self-image and self-esteem?
3. What feelings do you have about the texture of your own hair, and what determines those feelings? How has this impacted you?
4. Have you ever had the impression that your textured hair was not as appealing or desired as other hair types? If that was true, how did it impact you?
5. How do you balance the need to adhere to prevailing beauty standards with the desire to embrace your natural textured hair? Do you rely on any coping mechanisms or support networks to embrace your natural textured hair?

6. How does your natural hair texture influence your sense of identity and self-perception? If it does, in what ways?
7. Does the acceptance or rejection of your textured hair by others influence your self-esteem and sense of worth? If so in what ways?
8. Do you think embracing your naturally textured hair has made you feel more authentic about yourself? Has this affected your general happiness and well-being? If so, how?
9. Do you find it challenging to balance your personal mental well-being and acceptance with cultural expectations and standards regarding hair? Do you have any methods or beliefs that enable you to maintain your own mental well-being regardless of outside influences?

“Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses to the questions are confidential. Do you have any questions?”