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African American Women's Perceptions of Self-Value in the Transition to Natural Hair

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Tekeilla Darden

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

African American Women's Perceptions of Self-Value in the Transition to Natural Hair

by

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MS, Walden University, 2012

BS, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

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Abstract

Scholars have reported on the upsurge of African American women wearing their kinky, or natural, hair and the issues surrounding their choices. The wearing of natural African American hair has not been fully accepted in mainstream society. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how African American women understand self-value in the process of wearing their natural hair. The ethnic and racial identity model, critical race theory, and the strong Black woman collection were the conceptual frameworks used to connect identity, race and racism, and a collective vulnerability to the African American woman's hair journey. The study included 9 women who identified as being African American and as having transitioned to wearing their natural hair. The study was an integrative phenomenological analysis using in-depth interviews to explore subjective experiences to garner information about how African American women perceive self-value during, or after, transitioning to wearing natural hair. Data were coded with the participant's own words to formulate themes. According to study findings, participants experienced a succession of expanded self-values that began with values of self-awareness into values of self-love, values of self-confidence, and values of community. Psychologists could benefit from addressing the value of hair to African American women when considering cultural implications and formulating case conceptualization. These discussions address the acceptance of the natural traits to include hair of African American women and add a positive narrative with the goals of creating positive social change.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my newborn baby daughter, Taya Darden. May she grow up in a world where all of her is loved, accepted, and respected.

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I would first like to acknowledge God, for without Him, nothing is possible.

Attaining a doctoral degree has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Kinks, an often negatively regarded word in U.S. society, is also used to define the texture of African American women's hair. There are many variations of the word kink. Kinks include a mental or physical peculiarity, a small problem or flaw, or an imperfection likely to cause difficulties in the operation of something (Miriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, n.d.). A kink is also defined as a short tight twist or curl caused by something doubling upon itself (Miriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, n.d.). This definition describes the texture of African American hair, but the meaning has become more than just a word in U.S. culture. African American hair is more than a short twist or curls, and more than an object of appearance, because it is a part of the self. African Americans transition to wearing natural hair when they decide to transition from relaxed or chemically altered hair to wearing their hair in the natural texture at the onset of new hair growth (Ellington, 2014). This process has been captured in a collective movement termed the Natural Hair Movement (Robinson, 2011). The issues related to the Natural Hair Movement can be attributed to self-value. Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks, and Araiza (2016) found a significant, positive correlation between a high internal locus of control and increased likelihood of wearing hair in a natural state. The relationship between self-values and transitioning to natural hair is important to scholarly research, because it aides in better understanding African American women and their identity.

In this chapter, I introduce the background of the natural hair movement and African American women's hair history in the United States, identify the problem, purpose, and conceptual framework and introduce the research questions that guide this study. I describe the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and

delimitations, limitations, and significance. Last, I conclude with a summary of this chapter.

Background

U.S. scholars have discussed the significance of hair for the African American culture. There is an abundant amount of literature on African American hair history. The Natural Hair Movement has roots in many issues stemming from slavery to present day. Some have attributed African American women with natural hair to a political issue, because there was a time during the 1960s human rights political climate when natural hair was an emblem for Black power (Robinson, 2011). However, the hair-self, or the voice of the African American women wearing their hair naturally, has been more than a political statement. Although discussions ranging from slavery, politics, and socialization have been attributed to the African American woman's hair story, the Natural Hair Movement is connected by many cultural and psychological facets.

Within the last few years, African American women have embraced their natural hair. Scholars have speculated about the reasons behind going natural (Oyedemi, 2016). Researchers have examined the psychological and physiological factors influencing African American women's choices to wearing natural hair from the perspective of the African American women (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Raynor, 2009). Robinson (2011) argued that African American women's hair continues to be viewed as a threat to the Eurocentric standards of beauty. Johnson, Godsil, McFarlane, Tropp, and Goff (2017) examined the explicit and implicit attitudes toward African American women's hair from employers and found that the majority of employers, of varying races and genders, held biases toward women of color who wore their natural hair. These biases toward women

wearing their natural hair reflects on what African American women are faced with on a daily basis. Although many women have and are currently changing their appearance for acceptance in society (Johnson et al., 2017), those who have embraced wearing their natural hair are finding out their choices are often accompanied with the need to explain their decisions.

African Americans have been socialized in European American standards. As a result of the standards in U.S. society, and around many parts of the world, kinky hair is believed to be less desirable than having straighter hair. Wearing naturally kinky African hair does not align with the mainstream ideologies of beauty (Versey, 2014). Opie and Phillips (2015) claimed that African American women who desire to wear their natural hair often fear negative evaluation. This negative evaluation may come from many different sources, such as employers, coworkers, peers, and the general public (Opie & Phillips, 2015). This fear affects African American woman's decision to view their own natural hair as a significant and important component to their self. Additionally, this fear may have been established through historical lenses.

Scholars have addressed the natural hair phenomenon by looking at different psychological factors, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Ellington (2015) found that many African American women have turned to social media to garner support and find others like them embracing the natural hair journey. The search for support in social media forms supports the reason behind why studying the transition to natural hair and self-value in African American women is important. Ellington discussed that researchers should capture the natural hair journey in African American women's voices to understand the psychological, societal, and physical struggles and factors of wearing

natural hair. Hammond (2017) researched the phenomenon of transitioning qualitatively and found that individuals expressed psychological struggles that encouraged a shift in their identity development. Hammond concluded that further research should explore clarifying if individuals have similar or dissimilar experiences from those in the study. Garrin and Marcketti (2018) claimed that exploration into comparing reasoning and meanings behind wearing natural hair would be beneficial.

Problem Statement

U.S. news has reported on the upsurge of African American women wearing their kinky or natural hair and the issues surrounding their choices. The hair story of African American women has been captured in how they decide to style their natural hair, the implicit and explicit attitudes of African American women wearing their natural hair, and the penalties of wearing natural hair (De Sa Dias, Baby, Kaneko, & Robles Velasco, 2007; Opie & Phillips, 2015). African American women who have decided to wear their natural hair encounter both positive and negative reactions about their hair. Natural hair has not been fully accepted in mainstream society (Ellington, 2015). The lack of acceptance of a naturally occurring trait has been found to create psychological struggles (Opie & Phillips, 2015). Ellis-Hervey et al. (2016) examined how African American women internalize beauty and wearing of hair through examining locus of control and self-esteem. Ellis-Hervey et al. found a significant relationship between locus of control and increased likelihood of wearing natural hair. However, Ellis-Hervey et al. stated that African American women who wore their natural hair may be less inclined to worry about other's perceptions of them. In this study, I strove to fill in the gap in the literature

by qualitatively addressing women's experiences through understanding their perception of self-value in their transition to wearing natural hair.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how African American women understand self-value in the process of wearing their natural hair. I explored experiences of self-value for those African American women who have transitioned to wearing natural hair and those who are in the process of transitioning to natural hair. While seeking to understand the transitional process, the study included themes of how this process interacts with self-value. There is an abundant amount of research on the values of self (Bardi, Buchanan, Goodwin, Slabu, & Robinson, 2014; Skeggs, 2014). For the purpose of this discussion, self-value was defined as the intrinsic values cultivated by extrinsic properties. Values often remain stable over a person's life; however, when values are changed, they are found to be meaningful (Bardi et al., 2014). The changes and the meanings of values vary by the individual, group, and culture. The meaning can also be regarded differently by the in-group and out-group ideals. The objectives of this study were to provide a foundation about the concepts of self-value and the history of African American women and their hair journey in U.S. society.

Research Questions

The research questions proposed for this current study were the following:

RQ1: How did African American women perceive their self-value?

RQ2: How did African American women perceive their self-value in wearing, or the transition to wearing, their natural hair?

RQ3: How were self-values defined prior to transitioning to wearing natural hair?

Framework

The three conceptual models used for this research were the ethnic and racial identity (ERI), the critical race theory, and the strong Black woman collection (SBWC). One of the first models of racial identity was introduced as the Nigrescence model (Cross, 1991), which considers how individuals become aware of the self over time in relation to others and the world. It was later modified to reflect ethnic and racial identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) as this newer perspective argues that ERI is a central component to the normative development of minorities. This framework was used to understand components essential to identity formation for African American women.

The critical race theory refers to the everyday forms of racial microaggressions people of color encounter in many settings (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). This theory draws from a large literature base in ethnic and psychological studies, sociology, and law (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The critical race theory was used throughout this paper to connect African American women and their experiences through the intersection of race and racism.

The SBWC is used to connect past experiences, debunk stereotypical ideals to what the strength Black woman means, and focus on collective experiences of African American women to strengthen the voice of the community (Davis, 2015). The SBWC was used to provide guidance into the exploration of how women of color come to understand self-value as it relates to wearing their natural hair as a collective experience. ERI, critical race theory, and SBWC relate to the research questions in the attempt to understand self-value in transitioning to natural hair. Additionally, each theory is defined

and applied in Chapter 2 to understand the organization of researching the transition to natural hair in African American women.

Nature of the Study

This study was an interpretative phenomenological qualitative study approach. I conducted a qualitative study to answer the research questions, which consider the lived experiences of the population being researched. A subjective experience garners more unknown information about how African American women perceive self-value during or after transitioning to wearing natural hair. This study was an in-depth exploration into African American women, their voices, and what they felt was important to share about their hair stories and self-value. This study contributed to an understanding about the psychological experiences of African American women who go against the mainstream ideologies.

The data collection used for this study included an in-depth interview with adult African American women, ages 18 and over, who identify as having transitioned, or were in the process of transitioning, to wearing natural hair. The participant selection process consisted of contacting natural hair salons and natural hair community groups through the use of social media. I used this data collection method due to the appropriateness and accessibility to this population. My committee and I developed the interview protocol (see Appendix A). The participants' recounts of defining their self-value while transitioning to natural hair was a part of the seldomly seen meanings and understandings of this phenomenon that define the purpose of phenomenological research (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The participants engaged in an interpretative activity, and my role as an

active researcher was to translate their meanings in a way that was comprehensible to the audience.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the process of transitioning referred to a transition of wearing a person's hair in a relaxed, or chemically enhanced state, by cutting off (the big chop) or growing out new growth of naturally textured hair (Ellington, 2014). In much of the literature, self-value was interchangeable between self-esteem, self-worth, and self-efficacy, which all reflect the processes of what is valuable to a person's own world (Idowu, Hassan, Azimi, & Baba, 2016). The definition of self-value, for the purpose of this study, referred to how valuable a woman perceives herself to be to her surroundings. This concept was used to understand what level of importance the natural hair movement meant to women involved in transitioning or wearing their hair naturally. Ellis-Hervey et al. (2016) argued that educators and practitioners would benefit from understanding the importance of transitioning to wearing natural hair as it related to the struggles of fitting in for African American women.

Assumptions

I assumed that I would have access to participants in the state of Texas for the face-to-face participation portion and participants for face-to-face through the use of Internet-based video services. This assumption was necessary because I wished to conduct face-to-face in-depth interviews. I also assumed that all women who agreed to participate were available to complete the interview in its entirety. Last, I assumed that there would be direct to access women who identify as African American and have transitioned, or were in the process of transitioning, to wearing natural hair.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I focused on African American women who understood and experienced the process of transitioning to wearing natural hair. For the purpose of this study, individuals who did not identify as African American women, and who had not gone through the process of transitioning, were not included. Additionally, scholars have used feminist theories, such as the Afrocentric feminist theory, Black feminist, or postfeminist, to describe the phenomenon of the natural hair movement (Bennett-Alexander & Harrison, 2016; Brooks & McNair, 2015; Ellington, 2015). These theories were not used for this study because the purpose of this study was not to highlight cultural history in feminine beauty in Western perspectives, as this phenomenon has been discussed (Bennett-Alexander & Harrison, 2016; Brooks & McNair, 2015; Ellington, 2015). Rather, I focused on perceptions of self-value grounded in identity, racism, and collectivism. Due to the phenomenological qualitative design of this study, the results were not expected to be generalizable. Therefore, the results were limited to this population.

Limitations

Limitations for an interview design can give rise to problems, such as completing the interview in its entirety and obtaining objective facts about the phenomenon (Flick, 2009). I initially anticipated the limitations of this study would be personal biases, or my efforts to minimize any attitudes, feelings, or personal meanings into the design, and the interview protocol, because it was designed by the myself. I documented my efforts of minimizing any bias by creating a narrative, or positionality statement, which is a reflection of how the themes identified relate to the existing literature (Pietkiewicz &

Smith, 2014). The narrative account, or positionality statement, engages several levels of interpretation, theoretical viewpoints, and any new insights (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Significance

I sought to provide a deeper exploration into African American women, their voices, and what they feel is important to share about their hair stories and self-value. I hoped to contribute an understanding about the psychological experiences of African American women who go against the mainstream ideologies. This research also supported professional practice by creating an understanding of the internal and external processes this new-found transition, acceptance, and value of self adds to these women's lived experiences. Psychologists, and other helping professionals, could benefit from addressing the value of hair to African American women as the professionals are formulating case conceptualization. Although this discussion was not about the standard beauty ideals, it was an opportunity to help African American women redefine what beauty means to them. The potential outcomes of these discussions about the natural hair movement set out to positively illuminate self-acceptance issues, cumulative effects from slavery and the new world views of those who are transitioning to wearing their hair naturally. The kind of positive social change these discussions create may improve the ideals about African American women's standards of beauty and to normalize the appearance of their natural traits in this society.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction into African American women and their hair struggles. I connected the psychological lens through which African American women make meaning of their self-value to the role of hair in their lives. The design for

this current research was conducted as an interpretative phenomenological approach, which allowed me to detail those meanings as an active observer. This chapter also provided a brief review of the literature on African American women and their hair journeys.

In Chapter 2, an in-depth review of the literature detailing the historical, cultural, and psychological aspects of African American women and their hair is presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Many scholars have discussed the significance of hair for the African American culture in the United States. The literature on African American hair has been multifaceted. Discussions ranging from slavery, politics, and socialization have been attributed to the African American woman's hair story (Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Thompson, 2009; Wanzo, 2015).

In this literature review, I discuss the cultural significance of African hair prior to the slavery era through postera slavery, highlight the psychological issues African American women have faced in connection with their hair, and detail the theories that provide a framework for exploring how African American women understand self-value in the process of transitioning to wearing their natural hair. This chapter also provides discussions on the current status of African American women and their hair journeys. Last, conclusions related to the research and limitations are summarized as the basis for carrying out this study. The chapter begins with facets of the historical, traditional, and racial meanings of African American hair from pre and postslavery in the United States. I outline the relevance of hair to African American women, including identity formation, representation, and psychological factors with the self and perception.

I used the Walden Library databases and ProQuest search engines for this study. The key terms included *African American hair*, *natural hair*, *experiences of African American women*, *self-value*, and *perception*. Both quantitative and qualitative research articles were selected to support this literature review. Although some early articles were used, attention was given to make sure the literature was as current as possible.

African Hair Culture in America

African hair texture is unique and diverse. Byrd and Tharps (2014) hypothesized that qualities of African hair were an adaptive trait developed in response to the hot temperatures produced by the sun. This adaption process can also be seen in melanin, which is the major determinant of skin color. An increase in melanin produces darker skin tone and is considered an adaptive response to protect against many harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation (Vashi, Maymone, & Kundu, 2016). Byrd and Tharps theorized the adaption of hair formation serves as a protective factor to protect scalps in the same way melanin protects skin from constant sun exposure.

Preslavery Era

Prior to the transatlantic slave trade, African hair was a significant feature of African culture. Africans' virgin, unprocessed, natural hair was often observed as symbols of pride, art, spirituality, and community (Patton, 2006; Sieber & Herreman, 2000). The distinctive and diverse texture of African hair has been molded into many forms. Although much of African history has been lost to the world, historians have found evidence dating back from the 15th century of elaborate African textured hairstyles both in mummified bodies and sculptures (Patton, 2006). These creative styles were also value driven. Hair styles also provided a sense of community and communication in African culture. Differences between males and females, ages, and tribes held significant value for cultural traditions (Sieber & Herreman, 2000). Many examples of the cultural traditions can be seen throughout African tribal history. The Yoruba people from West Africa have a history of wearing such styles (Sieber & Herreman, 2000). For example, priests and royal messengers would often don a style called Osu, an ornate round patch of

braided hair in the middle of the head and participate in a spiritual wrestling tradition during annual festivals (Lawal, 2008). A person in mourning could be described as having deliberately abandoned the upkeep of his or her hair (Sieber & Herreman, 2000).

There were also geographical differences in hairstyles. In some parts of Africa, hairstyles symbolized status and identity (Patton, 2006). In other parts, hair was depicted as certain figures, such as the wolf or the Mandingo (Patton, 2006). Pride could be seen in the ways Africans adorned their hair with combs, shells, and other ornaments. Hair was represented differently in the mating habits across different regions. For example, single women of the Wolof tribe in Senegal shaved a portion of their hair to signify availability (Bryd & Tharps, 2014).

Slavery

Struggles pertaining to the plight of African American women's hair is as old as the United States itself. Many facets of psychological suffering for the African American person is attributed to slavery (Johnson, 2008). Although any discussion of slavery is multifaceted and complex. There have been many who have argued for ending the Black narrative as the consequences of slavery is at the forefront of African American people's stories (Johnson, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the exploration into slavery is limited to the history of African American hair in the United States.

When Europeans first began their trade on the West Coast of Africa, they were met with Africans wearing various forms of hairstyles like locks, plaits, and twists (Bryd & Tharps, 2014). However, when the first African slaves were brought to New America, their language, culture, and hair traditions began to disappear (Bryd & Tharps, 2014). They were forced to work in the fields under the hot sun and had no time to care about

their appearances (Randle, 2015). The only hair care products available to African slaves were bacon grease, butter, and kerosene (Patton, 2006). For many other African women, they were left without any resources to maintain their hair (Randle, 2015). As a part of the dehumanizing of African slaves, European Americans called African hair wool (Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016). African hair was seen as not real, unattractive, and a confirmation of their inferiority (Thompson, 2009). This dehumanization of African hair created a culture that viewed differences in African people as not only bad and wrong, but also to be feared and disliked.

Many generational stories cite how African slaves were divided based on physical appearance. When Africans had children by their slave owners, their children had lighter skin and straighter hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Although these children were still considered slaves, they were noticeably treated by being allowed to work, and sometimes live, within the slave master's home (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Lighter skin and straighter hair started to mean more opportunity for a better way of living. Thus, the phenomenon of the lighter skin and "good hair" versus the darker skin and "bad hair" division was born (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). The notion of bad hair was African hair in its purest form (Byrd & Tharps, 2014).

The African slave narrative was further narrowed by commerciality. European American slave masters reinforced the good-haired light skin power structure by auctioning off lighter skinned, straighter haired house slaves almost five times more than field slaves (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). This was meant to demonstrate good haired Africans as being more valuable than those with the kinky hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). The

attention to the lighter-skinned features during these processes further separated Africans in the United States.

Postslavery and Politics

African American struggles, such as segregation, denial of voting rights, and acceptance continued well after slavery ended. Hair texture became a part of racism that African Americans faced in the United States (Pyke, 2010). Advertisements to African American women encouraged Eurocentric beauty. For example, in the attempt to show African American women's natural hair as undesirable, some companies would advertise by placing side-by-side photos of how women should look and portray rags to riches scenarios (Thompson, 2009). Further claims were made in some advertisements suggesting African American women who lightened their skin and straightened their hair were doing it for the good of the community (Thompson, 2009). Additionally, Jim Crow laws from the late 1870s through the mid-1960s reinforced the social construction and the normative meanings of differences (i.e. African American or European American) ingrained in African American women during this era (Higginbotham, 1992). These laws, advertisements, and political climate of the United States during the Jim Crow era led to many politically charged movements involving African American people.

In the 1960s and 1970s, some African American women dropped the hot combs and chemical straighteners and opted for a hair pick, a comb with long teeth, which was used to pick out the natural textures of their hair and form an afro. This movement was known as the Black is beautiful social movement and was also known as a politically charged statement expressing Black pride (Camp, 2015). Hair was used as a strategy for resistance and emblems of power for African American people (Bellinger, 2007). The

afro was worn by a small minority of African American cosmopolitan women to reclaim the natural texture as a symbol of good and as a way to be empowering (Walker, 2000). The women who participated in this movement felt they could not represent a proper appreciation of African culture with straightened hair (Ebron, 1999). By contrast, many women who did not participate shared a different idea of respectability and continued to uphold straight hair as a symbol of acceptable beauty (Ebron, 1999). Marcus Garvey, a prominent nationalist and leader of the Pan-African movement, proclaimed African American women should opt not to remove the kinks from their hair, but the kinks from their minds (Patton, 2006). Natural textures of African American hair became a symbol for a political statement. Wearing natural hair became a declaration of Black pride (Rooks, 1996). In the 1980s and 1990s, natural hair began to take on a negative connotation (Rooks, 1996). Subsequently, fewer African American women wore natural hairstyles (Rooks, 1996). African American women who wore their natural hair banded them to one side of the political debate during this era.

Theoretical Frameworks

The current study was grounded in three theories. Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research connect parts of a paradigm and provide a lens through which to view the story (Anfara & Mertz, 2014). Each theory used in this study can be applied to viewing perception of self-value in the transition to natural hair in African American women. The first theory, which has been modified throughout the years, is ethnic and racial identity development. This theory is discussed in relation to normative development of ethnic and racial identities. The second theoretical foundation is critical race theory, which was used to examine the experiences of race and racism and how they

intersect with African American women transitioning or wearing their natural hair. The third theoretical framework, the strong Black woman collective, was used to establish a foundation of strategies African American women use to resist racial and gendered oppression.

Racial Identity Development

Many studies have been conducted on racial identity formation (Cross, 1991). One of the prominent conceptual frameworks on African American identity is the model of racial identity, formally known as the cross model of psychological Nigrescence (Smith, 1991). This model considers how individuals became aware of the self over time, in relation to others and the world (Cross, 1991). Smith (1991) argued that Cross' original model focused primarily on oppression, rather than the broader aspects of development across the lifespan. Smith also argued there was not a developmental basis to analyze identity. Smith expanded on Cross' model to include ethnic identity development. Newer perspectives support the notion of ethnic and racial identity (ERI) as being a central component to the normative development of minorities (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). ERI, during young adulthood, suggests a continuation of processes that were salient during adolescence (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Umaña-Taylor et al. argued that the process of ERI during young adulthood involves greater flexibility, exploration, and reflection.

For African Americans, hair texture and length has been as important as skin color to ERI development (Robinson, 2011). Robinson (2011) stated that African American women's appearance was often placed on the low end of the beauty spectrum. However, Robinson argued African American females' hair is more than a beauty identifier; it is an intersection between race and gender. Hair struggles begin in

childhood. According to Robinson, women recalled how old they were when they first realized there was something different with their hair and when they longed for longer, straighter hair. One woman spoke about placing headbands with blankets attached to the top of her head, to mimic long flowing hair when she was 8-years-old (Robinson, 2011). Young, pretty African American girls with bouncing straight hair were used on many boxes to sell home relaxers to both parents and children in order to make “life much easier” (Robinson, 2011).

Critical Race Theory

The critical race theory was another conceptual framework I used to understand the African American experience. This theory draws from a large literature base in ethnic studies, sociology, and law (Solorzano et al., 2000). It consists of the intersection between race and racism and the dominant ideology (Solorzano et al., 2000). Critical race theorists argue how the idea of color blindness, or not seeing color, is more harmful to people of color because this notion avoids, neglects, and denies racial atrocities (Edwards, 2017; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Color blind racism is a form of racial microaggressions that people of color experience daily (Edwards, 2017; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Racial microaggressions are the subtle forms of racism people of color encounter in many settings (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Racial microaggressions also devalue the essence of African American identities. For example, a school’s policy stating students are not allowed to wear braids, twists, and plaits, all of which are common African styles, is a form of a racial microaggression. Similarly, jokingly calling an African American girl with natural hair “nappy” is also a form of racial microaggression (Cabrera, 2014).

Strong Black Woman Collective

The SBWC perspective analyzes racial-gendered oppression and validates African American womanhood through communal communication (Davis, 2015). This theory is grounded in the ideal of the strong African American woman in U.S. society, which celebrates strength, resilience, and self-sufficiency and resists oppression within the refuge of the community (Davis, 2015). This theory also emphasizes focusing on the collective aspect of a woman's strength instead of the problematic assumption about strength in African American women, which impedes sharing vulnerability and emotionality (Davis, 2015). The SBW narrative has been documented in the United States as an aspiration and burden to African American women (Etowa, Beagan, Eghan, & Bernard, 2017). One of the characteristics of this perceived role is to be emotionally contained, or devoid of emotional sensitivity (Nelson, Cardemil, & Adeoye, 2016). The SBWC perspective focuses on a collective experience in advocacy; whereas, the independent SBW stereotype may lead to negative effects on mental health (West, Donovan, & Daniel, 2016).

At the center of communal communication within this theory is the attention given to the lived experiences of African American women and the language of communities in which they participate (Davis, 2015). Language is an aspect of group identity and manages the day-to-day realities of what it means to be both African American and a woman (Davis, 2018). The SBWC explains the collective shift in advocating for comfortability and vulnerability in the transition to natural hair.

African Hair and Identity in America

Hair defines African American women's beauty and identity. Similar to the preslavery era, hair styling after slavery ended became an indicator of beauty, status, power, and beliefs in U.S. society (Bellinger, 2007). However, unlike the preslavery era, African hair did not represent any of these positive qualities. As a consequence of slavery, many African Americans adopted European American, or Eurocentric, standards of beauty. An emotional connection developed between status of African American women in the United States and their hair (Thompson, 2009).

Internalization

African American women have multiple intersections of oppression to include sexual objectification, racist events, and gendered racism (Carr, Szymanski, Taha, West, & Kaslow, 2014). African American women feel pressured to work within and internalize beauty paradigms to achieve what is deemed beautiful in society (Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016). Majali, Coetzee, and Rau (2017) referenced internalization of racism over Eurocentric beauty standards and hair being a factor of self-identification. Racist events make individuals feel alienated and entrapped, which results in low self-esteem and self-worth (Carr et al., 2014). Lewallen et. al. (2015) relayed how African American women have continuously had a higher level of baseline dissatisfaction with their hair compared to European American women. Internalization is reinforced because, despite best efforts, African American women still do not fit into Eurocentric standards of beauty (Majali et al., 2017).

Ashe (1995) wrote about the plight of being an African American woman during the 1990s being more affected by the prejudicial consequences of darker skin and kinkier

hair in America than African American men. Neal and Wilson (1989) argued that this disparity exists because there is a greater emphasis placed on the physical attractiveness of women. Araújo, Meira, and Almeida (2016) examined qualities of online physical attractiveness. They found that negative perceptions of Black women in various countries outweighed the number of negative stereotypes of other races of women by nearly eighty-six percent. Tighter curls and frizz, and everything else kinks have to offer, were more than undesirable features. These features were negative representations of beauty in America. This made it difficult for many African American women to internalize the hair they were born with as good. Those African American women who relaxed and weaved their hair to resemble styles their like European American women counterparts were often viewed as well-adjusted (Dione-Rosado, 2003; Ellis-Hervey et al., 2016). Similarly, these women also gave the impression they had healthier hair (Bellinger, 2007). Hair, one of the easiest of features to manipulate, was a vehicle for African American women to achieve Western standards of beauty.

Socialization

There have been social and cultural conflicts which have been attributed to African Americans. Perspectives formed during the slavery era have continued to linger in the consciousness of present day African Americans (Wanzo, 2015). Racism, or the beliefs, attitudes, and system of advantage based on race, is an inescapable aspect of American culture, assumes misinformation about the disadvantaged race and can include both intragroup and intergroup racism (Black, Johnson, & VanHoose, 2015). For example, these assumptions and misinformation about African American women wearing their hair naturally as their politic preference toward Black power can be seen during the

ideas during the 1960s and 1970s (Camp, 2015). For African American women, Eurocentric hairstyles were often unspoken prerequisites to entering the workplace, certain schools or social groups beyond those with a shared culture (Bellinger, 2007; Patton, 2006).

Genetics is responsible for the natural assignment of the hair and skin color of humans. A person can change these characteristics through a myriad of cosmetic enhancements. African American hair comes in many different textures. Many women of color desired to use methods to get rid of their kinks. Among the materials African American women used to achieve the societal standards of beauty were the hot comb and a chemical straightener. In the 1960s, Madame C.J. Walker received a patent for the hot, or pressing comb (Thompson, 2009). The hot comb was used by placing the metal end of the comb onto a hot stove and heating it to a desired temperature where it was hot enough to get rid of the kinks. Madame C.J. Walker also invented a hair softener, which accompanied the hot comb (Patton, 2006). Both these methods were used to straighten the kinky texture. A permanent chemical hair straightener was not introduced until the 1960s by George E. Johnson (Thompson, 2009). This chemical straighter, also known as a relaxer, was a more expedient way to straighten African hair because it required fewer trips to the salon. Thus, the hot comb became a less popular tool as more African American women opted for convenience (McMichael, 2003). The hair weave, or hair extension, shortly followed (Thompson, 2009). African American women now had all the tools to assimilate.

Psychology of African American Women and Hair

The psychology of African American women and hair is an important aspect to understanding the lived experiences of the perception of self-value in the transition to wearing natural hair. Perceived racism can contribute to mental health stress and health disparities (Hall & Fields, 2015). Hall and Fields (2015) stated perceived experiences of racism can be generated by microaggressions, which are subtle verbal or nonverbal forms of racism such as stereotyping persons, deliberative ignoring and other insults. African American people believe microaggressions, which include negative remarks about African American women's natural hair, are increasing in America (Hall & Fields, 2015). This section highlights findings in research which discuss the psychological factors involved in with African American women who wear their natural hair.

Psychological Factors

While not always attributed to hair, having any feature which one cannot always control, without undergoing surgery or manipulation, can have effects on one's mental health. Research shows there can be oppressive and destructive consequences of placing a significant emphasis on beauty (Singh & Singh, 2011). Some African American women who walk out of their home with natural hair have heard they are being brave, as if to say courage is needed in order to wear one's own hair naturally (White, 2005). Past research has shown psychological suffering to be an undesired, but natural process of a human's fundamental mental experiences (Hussey, Barnes-Holmes, & Barnes-Holmes, 2015). For many African American women, a part of this process has been to feel psychological pain is a part of being a 'strong Black woman'. They often suffer in silence (Ward & Heidrich, 2009). Johnson and Bankhead (2014) argued the contradiction between beauty and

straightening hair, and naturalness and being themselves, continues to remain a struggle because of the deeply rooted ideals which have existed for many generations.

Internalized Racism

The internalization of oppression on African American women and their hair is a hidden form of racial oppression. This internalization can have significant psychological effects. Internalized racial oppression (IRO) is comprised of an intersection of multiple systems of subjugation (Pyke, 2010). IRO is self-blame for this oppression and negative evaluation of in-groups (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003). It is not a cultural or biological characteristic, nor is it a weakness (Pyke, 2010). The negative associations of African American women's level of physical attractiveness has continually served as a process of IRO (Parmer, Arnold, Natt, & Janson, 2004). Hair texture, an attractiveness feature with what African American women are evaluated on, is a representation of IRO. It has been discussed how African Americans hair texture was a dehumanizing factor in this country. African hair was further oppressed by societal ideals of beauty. African Americans then went through an external process to fix what was wrong with them. However, for these women, with every new growth of hair came a reminder of their true nature, and a deep-rooted signifier of being something less than human (Parmer et al., 2004). Acknowledging racism's hidden injuries, like that of African American women and their struggles with their hair, can contribute to shifting internal blame to the structure of inequality in our society (Pyke, 2010).

The effects can be external, as well as internal. Many African American women are affected by their choices to wear their natural hair in their professional settings. Opie and Phillips (2015) identified the ways in which women are penalized in the workplace.

More specifically, the authors explored stereotypical congruent behaviors in women and examined the ways in which evaluators responded to both European American and African American women's display of dominance and hairstyles (Opie & Phillips, 2015). The authors compared Eurocentric hair, or good hair, to Afrocentric hair and found that evaluators in their study gave those who wore Afrocentric hair higher ratings for dominance and lower ratings for professionalism.

The Self and African American Hair

Hair, both style and texture, plays a significant role both in self-identification and in the social class system. A natural divide formed between the self and the social context. Thompson (2009) described this divide in defining three oppositional binaries that have been at the center of the African American hair debate. The three oppositional binaries are: the good and bad hair debate, natural or unnatural divide, and the authentic versus the inauthentic Black person.

Good or Bad Hair

The first binary, the good hair and bad hair discussion, endorsed the separation of African American culture (Thompson, 2009). The good and bad hair discussion is linked to the light skin/ dark skin divide, which adds to the issues of colorism, conflict, and continuity among social and cultural norms. This separation is further endorsed through debates about physical attractiveness. There have been many studies conducted about the physical appearance of women and the preferences of their differences among Black, White, Hispanic and Asian men and women (Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen, & Wu, 1995; Swami, Furnham, & Joshi, 2008). In many of the studies, lighter skin toned women were considered the most attractive (Swami et al., 2008), and those with shorter

or tighter hair was viewed as part of the least desirable features (Cunningham et al., 1995). For example, Cunningham et al. (1995) explored attractiveness of women based on their hair features. Cunningham et al. found that greater width and longer hair length to be associated with higher attractiveness ratings by both Black and White judges.

Natural or Unnatural Hair

The second oppositional binary, the natural or unnatural hair discussion, also divides African American women into two different groups. Depending on what side of the spectrum a woman falls on, the debate leads to discussions of what one deems as right or wrong. On the unnatural side, women with relaxed or straightened hair, are judged to be culturally unaware and attempting to “whiten the self” (Tate, 2007). Women with relaxed or straightened hair are seen as trying to sustain a standard of beauty which is not meant for them (White, 2005). On the natural side, women who don their natural hair are judged to be politically aware (Tate, 2007), but not necessarily feminine (White, 2005). These women struggle against redefining normative beauty.

Authentic or Inauthentic Black

The natural or unnatural divide leads into the third oppositional binary, which is the authentic versus the inauthentic Black (Thompson, 2009). An inauthentic Black person is seen as a person who alienates one’s self from his or her own cultural background, or one who subscribes to the European ideologies alone (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2009). Ashe (1995) discussed whether the choice of one’s hair automatically signifies the alliance of one side over the other. The authentic versus inauthentic debate translates into whether one is culturally proud or culturally alienated. Similarly, it may be considered as a form of self-hatred or self-pride (Bellinger, 2007). Ashe (1995) suggested

evidence leads more to African Americans wanting to fit in, rather than being inauthentic to their culture, even if this is done subconsciously.

Each oppositional binary reflects tangible struggles African American women face daily. However, each oppositional binary only presents the extreme, right or left, end points. For example, the “either or” presentation of the dualistic arguments eliminate the voices of women who may wear their hair naturally but do so not because they are making a statement of African pride. Similarly, those arguments eliminate the voices of women who have perceived “good hair” and internally desire the kinkier texture that graces the head of their mothers, sisters or friends. Simultaneously, natural hair may be a symbol of pride, a negative connotation, and/or a political statement.

African Hair and the Social Environment

There are many facets of one’s social environment that play a role in internal psychological processes. Hair has always carried social meanings (Majali et al., 2017). Thus, hair also plays an important role in one’s social environment. From a psychological lens, this section focuses on what Americans see, as it relates to the representation of African American women’s hair, what role the manipulation of hair can produce on physical health, and how hair plays a role in romantic relationships.

Media Representation

In the United States, despite attempts at assimilation to Eurocentric standards of beauty, African American women still receive a smaller proportional amount of attention in the media as their European American counterparts (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brian, 1999; Ukoha et al., 2001). Media, which includes television, magazines, films and other forms of media, has been criticized by many for how certain people, places and things are

portrayed (Elasmar et al., 1999; Ukoha et al., 2001). Historically, African American women have been portrayed in the media as: (1) highly maternal, (2) seductive and sexually irresponsible, and (3) threatening and argumentative (West, 1995). African American women with darker skin and kinkier hair in the media have regularly been portrayed as the latter (West, 1995).

In psychological terms, there have been many cross-cultural studies which have found people associate self-worth, or self-value, with attractiveness (Rich & Cash, 1993). In this regard, media representation added to the ideals of who was valued in this society. Media influences grooming habits as it highlights preferred aesthetics (Robinson, 2011). Humans all over the world also have a long history of trying to change their physical appearances, including the appearance of their hair (De Sa Dias et al., 2007). However, standard beauty, or physical attractiveness, is comprised of skin color, hair, and facial features (Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, & Ward, 1987). Rich and Cash (1993) examined hair color depiction in media and found a disproportional tendency to portray European women with blond hair. This is in spite of black being the dominant hair color in the world (Ukoha et al., 2011).

Attempts at fitting in without reward can produce negative psychological effects (Crutchfield & Webb, 2018). Therefore, during the era of new found freedom, many African American women sought to be accepted in other ways. There were many times when African Americans went back to wearing their natural hair. Beyond the political climate of the 1960s and 70s, some African American women wore blown-out natural hair, not in response to politics, but to complement the prized volume trend of the 1980s, among other distinct styles and colors, or hair weaves (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1987).

Processed and chemically straightened hair took away the volume needed to achieve some of the styles which were popular during this period. However, these styles were an attempt to be within the standards of beauty, since assimilation was more dominant during this era (Patton, 2006).

Physical Health

African Americans have often begun manipulating their hair in various styles at a young age. Subsequently, as a part of the manipulation process beginning in youth, many African Americans have been exposed to chemicals through their scalps for many years. Many have debated whether exposure to chemicals for any amount of time, like the ones in chemical straighteners, should be a choice for women's overall physical health. Ellis-Hervey et. al. (2016) argued that choices around African American women's hair plays a role in their physical health by impacting the structure of their hair. The chemical treatments primarily contained sodium, potassium, lithium and guanidine hydroxides (McMichael, 2003). Potential problems with these chemicals include scalp burn, irritation, increased fragility of the hair shaft and possible scarring alopecia (McMichael, 2003). Wright, Gathers, Kapke, Johnson, and Joseph (2011) examined hair care and styling practices with a sample of African American girls in metropolitan Detroit, Michigan. Wright et al. (2011) found that cornrows and chemical relaxers were significantly associated with an increased risk for traction alopecia. Lewallen et. al. (2015) discussed how the traumatic hair care practices of thermal and chemical hair straightening have been associated with other scalp disorders, such as central centrifugal cicatricial alopecia and chemical alopecia.

Romantic Relationships

Not all African American women straightened their hair to be like European American women. Some of those women wanted to be attractive and appealing to potential romantic partners. Patton (2006) argued the straightening of African American hair was more of an effort to be modern and accepted as beautiful, than it was to be White. Past studies have shown, women with straighter hair were more likely to be approached by men, because their “good hair” was more closely linked to sexual desirability (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). Cunningham et al. (1995) suggested that Eurocentric features dominated higher attractiveness ratings among both Black and White men. Lighter-skinned and straighter-haired women were also more likely to have spouses, who tend to have more education and obtained higher career status than darker-skinned, kinkier-haired women (Wade, 1996). African American women attempted to assimilate not only to be accepted in the society, but also to be accepted by the men they desired.

Self-Value and Perception

The concept of self-value has many layers. This is also true of self-perception. Self-value is a mixture of concept and affect, goes beyond being an end product of a process, and is a tool to affect behavior and desired outcomes (Adkins & Erickson, 2009). Idowu et al. (2016) argued there is a sufficient amount of research suggesting self-value is an indispensable tool to succeeding in life. Self-perception is about knowing one’s own mind through observing self-behavior and the circumstances this behavior takes place (Dico, 2017). When psychological differences are pitted against each other, like self-value and perception, people report greater discontinuity (Strohming, Knobe, &

Newman, 2017). Thus, when they are in sync discontinuity lessens. This section examines the concepts of self-value and self-perception and explore the intersection between these factors.

Self-Value

Self-value represents the individuals' psychological reality and their perceptions and understanding of themselves, significant others and the world (Idowu et al., 2016; Munson & McIntyre, 1978). Self-value is a combination of connection to others, self-respect, and self-perseverance (Idowu et al., 2016). Self-value has been presented and encompasses many of forms of the self: self-interest, identity, esteem, construal and efficacy. There have also been many theorists who have proposed different models of self-value, such as the aesthetic, prosthetic, reflexive, and the possessed self (Skeggs, 2014).

The aesthetic model of self-value refers to the process of accruing self, or a project to be achieved (Skeggs, 2014). In this model, natural hair is the physical end product one wishes to achieve in order to increase an outwardly positive self. The second model of self-value is prosthetic, which refers to a symbolic form of seeing objects as generating transcendent exchange-value (Skeggs, 2014). In this model, one transitions to natural hair to produce positive interactions. Reflexive self is the third model of self-value and encompasses the first two models. However, instead of outwardly looking in, it is an inwardly reflective process to understand and reflect on the risks of those objects surrounding the self (Skeggs, 2014). The transition to natural hair in this model would be an emotional process which requires awareness of the physical and mental processes. The last model of self-value, the possessed individual, relates more to a non-self concept. This

model describes the self as having no real existence and only perspectival appearance (Skeggs, 2014). Therefore, the power for this concept does not lie within the self but is formed in the individuals' surroundings. In this model, natural hair is not formed by any awareness of self but formed out of perception of societal ideas of what natural hair means.

Skeggs (2014) follows Pierre Bourdieu's, a social theorist, argument regarding self-value as an enhancement of personhood derived from culture as an exchange between values in some activities, practices and dispositions. Norwood (2018) argued the process of going natural decolonizes the mind and body, occurs gradually, and births a new unknown self.

Self-Perception

Identity is formed through how individuals view themselves in the world they live in. Therefore, the idea about value as an exchangeable property between the outside world and one's own internal world suggests a continual inward-outward cycle of what shapes the self. Similarly, self-value expands based on experiences. The process of transitioning to natural hair, in this case, is the project one undertakes. The undetermined end-product is what this study endeavors to understand.

There have been recent debates about there being more to African Americans' aesthetics than the consequences of racialization and achievement of Eurocentric beauty. The new natural hair movement demonstrates a positive goal toward unity, acceptance and an authentic standard of beauty. Hair valuations have been deemed to be bad for African American women, because of how these practices devalue the common hair texture of African people (Robinson, 2011). The concept of the natural hair movement

can be defined as a relational dynamic. Jordan (2013) discussed a relational dynamic of resilience which moves beyond psychological suffering and explores the mutual empathic involvement, relational confidence, and relational awareness. Rosenthal (2004) maintained hair holds an extraordinary position in mediating the natural and the cultural sense of self and defines the essence of individuality and personhood. The exploration into the personhood and individuality may best be explained by the women themselves. Ellis-Hervey et al. (2016) created a quantitative study about hair and self-perception. The researchers found that African American women who wore their hair in its natural state, were less inclined to worry about how others perceive and compare them (Ellis-Harvey et. al., 2016).

Synthesis of Research Findings and Research Gap

The literature review on the significance of African American women and natural hair was helpful in providing context for this study. Research findings included historical significance, identity formation, cultural representation, and psychological factors as they related to African American hair. The impact of these findings allowed the researcher to see the relevance of hair for African American women. Three frameworks were discussed: ethnic and racial identity (ERI), critical race theory, and the strong Black woman collective. Using all three theories as guidance, the transition to natural hair can be seen as a part of typical ethnic identity development, an intersection between understanding race and racism, and a collective experience to accepting a natural part of Black womanhood (Davis, 2015; Solorzano et al., 2000; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Factors of general acceptance, identify formation, and psychological struggles emerged as major themes in the transition to African American women wearing their natural hair

(Ellington, 2015; Garrin & Marcketti, 2018; Opie & Phillips, 2015). Ellington (2015), Garrin and Marcketti (2018), and Opie and Phillips (2015) all explored the experiences of African American women's wearing natural hair and concluded that further research should explore clarifying if individuals have similar or dissimilar psychological experiences and comparing reasoning and meanings they ascribed to their transition to wearing natural hair.

Summary

This chapter began with the significant historical and cultural values of African American women and natural hair. The discussion of the cultural significance, identity formation, representation, and psychological factors created an overall understanding of the relevance of hair to African American women. These ideals were found in both quantitative and qualitative research articles. A review of the theoretical frameworks for this study were also provided. The conceptual models of racial identity development, critical race theory, and the strong Black woman collection helped to guide the discussions for how women of color come to understand the psychology process of self-value as it relates to wearing their natural hair. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design and methodological approach for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In the previous chapters, I discussed the relevance of African American women's hair to their identity, which included historical and cultural significance, internalization, and psychological struggles. I also discussed the need to know more about the psychological process of how African American women define their own process of transition to wearing their natural hair. In this chapter, I present the purpose, research design and rationale, methodology (to include the role of the researcher, participant selection, interview approach, and data analysis plan), and ethical considerations.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how African American women understand self-value in the process of wearing their natural hair. I focused on the perceptions of self-value for those African American women who have transitioned and are in the process of transitioning to natural hair. In seeking to understand the transitional process, the study included themes of how this process interacts with self-value.

Research Design and Rationale

First in this section, I present the research questions that guided the study. Second, I discuss the rationale for research design selection and disclose the process for not selecting other methods. Third, I address the role of the researcher in a phenomenological qualitative research and discuss ways to minimize researcher bias.

Research Questions

RQ1: How did African American women perceive their self-value?

RQ2: How did African American women perceive their self-value in wearing, or the transition to wearing, their natural hair?

RQ3: How were self-values defined prior to transitioning to wearing natural hair?

It was determined that the most appropriate design for this qualitative study was to use in-depth interview questions involving common experiences related to these research questions. The interview approach to this research allows for extending intellectual and emotional reach to view a process which is seldomly seen through any other type of research (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The participants' recounts of their experiences with defining their self-value while transitioning to natural hair was a part of the seldomly seen meanings and understandings of this phenomenon. In the interviews, I engaged in an interpretative activity, in which meaning was translated in a way that is comprehensible to the audience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

In an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the focus is on individuals' perceptions and discussions about object and events (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The fundamental principles of IPA are a mixture of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Phenomenology concerns giving voice to the individual's experience (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hermeneutics concerns a person's need to comprehend the mind set and language of an individual's experiences (Freeman, 2008). Last, idiography concerns exploring every single case before producing general statements (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that the process of phenomenology allows for an individual's preconceptions and phenomena to be a voice for themselves. The participants' voice is translated by the researcher to make sense of their personal world (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). For this type of study, the

focus is not so much on the size of the sample used, but on the participants' accounts (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

For this study, I determined that the best method to guide the research questions was to conduct an interpretative phenomenological qualitative approach to study how African American women perceive self-value as they transition to wearing their natural hair. An IPA fits the purpose and scope of this study. I did not choose to conduct this study using other approaches because my role as the researcher was an active role.

Role of the Researcher

My role of the researcher in this study was as an observer-participant. In qualitative research the researcher makes certain assumptions and serves as an instrument (Flick, 2009). The active role of the researcher in IPA means the researcher influences the extent of how participants' experiences and personal world are accessed (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Embedded in this approach is using an axiology, which considers the role of values in research (Lewis, 2015). I am an African American woman. Additionally, I have a personal connection with my own journey in transitioning to wearing my natural hair. In using an axiology approach, the research is value-laden and biases will be present, as the researcher positions his or her self in the study (Lewis, 2015). In Chapter 5, I discuss my interpretation of the process, participants' meanings, and the values shaping the narrative. To identify potential participants, collect and analyze the data, I attempted to collaborate with natural hair salons and natural hair community groups. I am affiliated with some natural hair community groups, but I do not hold any prominent positions outside of being a member. My collaboration with these community groups was limited to social media interaction, such as the use of Instagram pages, Facebook groups,

and natural hair salon owners for directing those interested in participating to contact me directly.

Methodology

First in this section, I present the participant selection and participation criterion to identifying the process of transitioning to natural hair. Second, I explain the data collection method and the rationale for choosing this approach for this study. Third, I describe the process I used for data analysis. Finally, I discuss the issues of trustworthiness used for this study.

Participant Selection

The population for participant selection consisted of adult women 18 and over who identify as being African American. The self-identification process also included whether the participant has transitioned, or were currently in the process of transitioning, to wearing natural hair. The sampling strategy was purposive sampling because I focused on the intensity with which features (natural hair), processes (transitioning), and experiences (perceived self-values) are given or assumed (Flick, 2009). I set out to gather anywhere between eight to 12 participants for this study. The rationale for this range number was determined by the goal of IPA, which is to give full attention and appreciation to each participant's account (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Additionally, using a large sample would have been inappropriate in IPA design, as the goal is to produce an in-depth examination, rather than a theory to be generalized for an entire population (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Instrumentation

The data collection method consisted of in-depth individual interviews. My dissertation committee and I developed the interview protocol (see Appendix A for protocol). Content validity was established during the committee process review. I recruited participants by contacting several natural hair salons and natural hair community groups. I employed a sampling method to search for natural hair salons using the Yelp.com search engine and social media platforms, Instagram and Facebook groups, to search natural hair community groups. During my initial search, the phrase African American natural hair salon in my search area produced approximately 28 results. I identified and narrowed my search down to salons with services predominantly catered to caring for natural hair, and excluded those who provided other services, such as offering chemical relaxers. Additionally, I sought out social media natural hair groups on Instagram and Facebook from which I looked for possible participants: (a) Natural Hair Love LLC and (b) Curly Nikki LLC were the two groups from these platforms identified from the search. I used these identified sources for participant recruitment was because all organizations listed report service for women who wear their hair naturally. The only role of the salons and online communities was to post flyers. No letter of cooperation was needed. The participants were recruited based on the criteria above and contacted after they expressed interest through e-mail or direct phone calls.

The collection of the data took place by using Internet-based video and voice services FaceTime and Skype. All participants were free to determine where they would like to conduct their face-to-face online interactive interview based on their comfortability and privacy of their environment. The data collection events occurred

during a one-time interview with each participant. Each participant was told to plan for a possible 30-minute second interview, if deemed beneficial for a follow-up. I conducted all of the 1-hour interviews over the course of 1 week. Although the follow-up procedure was outlined in the informed consent to discuss a possibly follow-up interview, no follow-up was needed in this study. All data were collected via a face-to-Internet service. Both the Internet-based face-to-face services Skype and FaceTime were used as the method to collect data. The interview was recorded through the use of a standard voice recorder. I conducted a transcript review with the participants to verify participants' statements. Additionally, there was a debriefing statement read to each participant as a part of exiting the study. A thank you gift valued at 10 dollars was given to each participant during their interview. Most Skype or Facetime participants opted to receive their thank you gift through the electronic mail and one via physical mail. Last, the participants were offered a summary page after completion of the study.

Data Analysis Plan

This phenomenological qualitative study with interviews was designed to explore how African American women understand self-value in the process of wearing their natural hair. In the process of interviewing, there were no discrepant cases or emergence of questions with later participants. Therefore, I did not need to employ the follow-up procedure to capture any additional interview questions with any of the participants. The analysis of data, using IPA, aims to give evidence of the participants' meanings of the phenomena, while simultaneously documenting the researcher's meaning making (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In the transcription process, I set out to connect data specific to the research questions. In addition, my process of transcribing the data was to

look through a psychological lens, apply psychological concepts for understanding perceptions of self-value, and seek relationships and clustering themes for African American women who have or who were in currently transitioning to natural hair (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The plan established, based on this method, was to use the participant's own words to formulate themes. In Chapter 4, the coding process used for this study is detailed.

Trustworthiness

One way I established credibility in this study was with the inclusion process. I made sure each participant currently considered herself to wear natural hair and verified she has gone through the natural hair transition process. I also employed a transcript review by each participant. Because I transcribed the interview, in addition to recording, I wanted to make sure the participants verify if the steps in the data collection process captured their true statements and were accurate.

I used social media as one method of the participant selection process, which allowed for transferability due to a broader reach to potential participants. This aided in producing participants with a range of experiences. However, transferability may not have reached beyond African American women who have transitioned, or were currently transitioning, to wearing their natural hair.

The dependability of this study comes from both the transcription review from the participants and from my committee. The plan was to use the transcription review primarily to make sure I captured the participants' responses and experiences. I planned to use my committee to review and analyze my interpretation of the data to avoid the possibility of influencing the data with any personal biases.

I addressed confirmability by applying the ERI, critical race theory, and SBWC perspectives to the participants' experiences with transitioning and perceptions of self-value. I did this to explore if the participants' experiences aligned with these frameworks for stronger confirmability. Additionally, I established intracoder reliability by using the participants' own words in theme formulating, rather than my own, in order to minimize bias.

Ethical Considerations

To gain access to participants, I contacted salon owners and governing members for the online natural hair community organizations. In the IPA method, it is important researchers pay attention to how participants are being affected by the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I took precautions to ensure I did not have any professional or personal affiliations with any of the participants selected to limit the possibility of any biases. No data collection involved any current or past work places, or participants with which I have any supervisory or instructor relationships. All data were analyzed by myself. Participant information was concealed and kept confidential. An informed consent detailing confidentiality was reviewed, discussed, and signed by the participants (see Appendix C for the informed consent). A plan was established for request of early withdrawal from the interview had any of the participants refused to participate. My goal was to address this by destroying any of the participants' unused data and accessing other participants until I achieved data saturation. However, no participants refused to participate or withdrew from the interviews early. All participants were informed both verbally and through the informed consent that their data will be kept confidential for 5 years, as required by the university, and then to be destroyed thereafter.

Summary

In the beginning of this chapter, I presented the research questions on understanding African American woman's perceptions of their self-value as it relates to the process of transitioning to wearing natural hair. I discussed the rationale for conducting an IPA, as my role of the researcher was an active role. I highlighted the participant selection process, which helped identify participants who have gone through the transitioning process or are in the process of transitioning. I detailed the interview approach, data analysis plan, and trustworthiness of this study. I described the focus of these processes were to ensure all designs and methods related to the problem being research and the research questions. Additionally, I related the analysis to the theoretical frameworks used to guide this study. In Chapter 4, I report the results based on the procedures outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results and Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how African American women understand self-value in the process of wearing their natural hair. I focused on the perceptions of self-value for those African American women who have or are in the process of transitioning to wearing their natural hair. An in-depth interview was used to identify and make meaning of themes through participants' shared experiences. I gained a better understanding of self-values from those who experienced the natural hair transition process. Moreover, I gained insight into value-laden meanings of self by the participants' experiences. This chapter details the coding procedures, participant demographics, setting, and thematic findings. All of the thematic findings were gathered from participants' in-depth interviews and grouped into larger units.

Participant Demographics

Individuals for this study volunteered to participate and describe their experiences of self-value in the process of transitioning. A total of 12 interested individuals responded via e-mail. After an eligibility e-mail to each volunteer, three individuals did not follow up. There were no other volunteers who were screened out. To maintain anonymity, each participant for this study was given a pseudonym. There was a total of nine women who identified as being African American. All of the nine women identified as having transitioned from chemically processed hair to wearing their natural hair. The age range of the participants was between 18-55 years. One woman reported she transitioned within the last year. Three women reported that they transitioned within the last 2-5 years. Two women reported that they transitioned within the last 6-9 years. Last, three women

reported that they transitioned more than 10 years ago. The following table lists each of the participants characteristics by pseudonym.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Participant Pseudonym	Age Category	Age Relaxed Hair	Years Natural
Aaliyah	26-35	5-years-old	9
Brianna	18-25	8-years-old	1
Ciara	18-25	6-years-old	6
Danielle	26-35	10-years-old	16
Erica	18-25	3-years-old	4
Fantasia	18-25	4-years-old	4.5
Gabrielle	46-55	10-years-old	23
Hailey	46-55	27-years-old	10+
Imani	26-35	6-years-old	5

Setting

All participants volunteered to meet face-to-face via online video message services. The services used for this study were FaceTime and Skype. All of the participants chose a setting in the comfort and privacy of their own environment. Participants were not screened or recruited from any particular region; therefore, the participants' personal locations were not disclosed. In addition, participants did not disclose any organizational affiliations or connections to where they received the

volunteer information from; therefore, an analysis of which organizations each participant came from was not established.

Data Collection

Eight of the participants conducted their interview via the video service FaceTime, and one participant opted to use the online video service Skype. Each participant was only interviewed once within a 1-hour timeframe. Each participant was told to plan for a possible 30-minute second interview; however, it was determined a second interview was not needed. Each 1-hour interview was conducted over the course of 1 week. Data were recorded through the use of my personal computer-embedded voice recorder, rather than a standard hand-held voice recorder. There were no unusual circumstances encountered during data collection.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis plan, it was detailed that the participant's own words would be used to formulate themes. In order to accomplish this, the coding consisted of a few processes. The first cycle of coding consisted of two parts. The first part was comprised of searching for words commonly used among each participant. In addition, the words commonly sought out were those closely related to psychological concepts. The second part of the first cycle of coding involved the use of value coding, which is the application of codes reflecting a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, and representing his or her perspectives or worldview (Saldaña, 2015). Last, in the second cycle of coding, or final stage, I used a focused coding method to categorize the data. Focused coding is used to develop the categories out of the first round of coding without distraction, and it gives the researchers a better handle on the outlining of hierarchical categories and

subcategories (Saldaña, 2015). The focus coding method allowed for the final stage of coding psychological concepts and values as they related to the research questions.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I transcribed each interview. To establish credibility, each participant was given a copy of her transcript. This was done so participants could verify if their statements were captured and were accurate. Each participant was also given a chance to rectify any statements that did not capture her true sentiments; however, each participant verified her statements to be accurate. Transferability was achieved through the use of social media as the primary method of the participant selection process, which allowed for a broader reach of the participants and their experiences. For dependability, I used my committee to review and analyze my interpretation of the data to avoid the possibility of influencing the data with any personal biases. In addition, confirmability was established during the coding process where participants' direct words were used in order to minimize any research bias.

Results

There were three research questions addressed in this phenomenological research study: (a) How did African American women perceive their self-value? (b) How did African American women perceive their self-value in wearing or the transition to wearing, their natural hair? and (c) How were self-values defined prior to transitioning to wearing natural hair? These questions were used to inform the interview categories and sub questions that were asked of each participant. The data were arranged into categories that build upon the former based on significant statements.

Thematic Findings

Each theme in this section has been constructed from each of the nine participants' statements and organized by order of significance. In Table 2, the main themes are listed in order to show succession of values in throughout the process of transitioning.

Table 2

Thematic Findings

Themes	Subthemes
1) Value of Self-Awareness	A) Damage B) Curiosity C) Hair Matters D) Maintenance
2) Value of Self-Love	A) Appreciation B) Embracing C) Hair Love
3) Value of Self-Confidence	A) Comfortability B) Speaking Up
4) Value of Community	A) Empowerment B) Creating Legacy C) Values in Society

Below, is a description of each of the five themes and subthemes identified in the data from the research and interview questions and as described by the participants.

Theme 1: Value of self-awareness. The value of self-awareness was the first overarching theme that emerged from the participants' statements. The participants shared experiences of their values of self-awareness from prior to transition and throughout their natural hair journey. Values of self-awareness emerged in many forms from all of the participants' views about their natural hair journey when discussing the reasons why they decided to transition.

Brianna reflected on the differences between her self-value from prior to her natural hair transition to now. She shared, "I feel like I'm more like self-aware." Brianna was not alone in this sentiment. When discussing her perception of self-value from prior to her transition, Aaliyah stated, "I felt sorry for myself. I felt sorry it took me all these years for me to hit my 20s to really know me." When asked about any changes in her self-value from prior to transitioning to natural hair to now, Hailey stated, "I'm much more aware of my hair as I, you know, gotten older." Ciara also shared, "I think I pay more attention to my hair now. Like I'm more - I just connected and am more in tune with my hair." Last, Fantasia thought a lot about her self-values during the process of transitioning. She explained, "During my transition I started to think of it as, you know, really figuring out who it is that I am. You know? The real me without all the relaxers and everything."

The following subthemes emerged from the sentiments expressed on the value of self-awareness in the decision to transitioning to natural hair.

Damage. Experiences with hair damage was a significant problem identified from participants about their self-awareness as it related to the decision to transition. Prior to her transition, Fantasia realized, "I did start to see a thinning of my hair when I was

relaxed.” Fantasia and Aaliyah both had this realization prior to transitioning. Aaliyah stated, “I had was just coming out of a perm and then that time period it did a lot of damage to my hair.” Brianna’s was 8-years-old when she first received her chemical relaxer. It was not until last year when she became aware of the years of damage she had been doing to her hair with the chemical. She shared, “My hair was damaged from like the chemicals like from starting so early so like my hair like fell out.” Hailey found value in self-awareness when she decided a change in hair care would be healthier, both physically and psychologically.

Hailey stated:

You know obviously I want my hair...I think that it's really important especially now as I'm getting older and that's why reasons for the transition because of the ability to identify the damage that it was causing. The weakening of my hair and in some cases even breakage or falling out. You come to terms with ok I'm older I don't want to get to a point where all of my hair is gone and now I trying to find something to do you know. You want to try to do what you can to keep your hair for as long as you can.

Curiosity. Three of the nine participants had never seen their natural hair pattern, due to having had their hair chemically relaxed from a young age. Erica was 3-years-old when someone in her life made the decision to chemically relax her hair. She expressed, “I was curious about what my hair looked like without adding any chemicals and also it burns if left on there too long.” Fantasia was 4-years-old when her hair was relaxed. Her curiosity was a major factor in her decision to transition to wearing her natural hair.

Fantasia voiced:

I didn't even know what natural hair was until I've seen other girls you know with curly hair and everything. Like what is this? I figured I wanted to learn what it was all about and how to get my hair like that.

When Gabrielle found out what her natural hair could do, she decided to stop getting her hair relaxed altogether. She shared, “I realized that my texture on its own wasn’t really hard to handle, so at some point I just didn’t do another touch up.”

Hair matters. When asked about how valuable was hair to their personal identity prior to their transition, five out of the nine participants stated that their hair was very valuable. However, when asked about how valuable was hair to their personal identity during and after their transition, eight out of the nine participants stated their hair became more valuable. Additionally, their natural hair became a factor in how each of the participants defined values as it related to their whole selves. All of the participants expressed that they realized hair mattered when they were younger, and five participants explained this realization had psychological implications for them. Aaliyah explained how she became aware hair mattered at a young age. Aaliyah said:

I can remember you know getting teased about my hair that it wasn’t long enough, you know like it was nappy...I remember being very young that it was an issue. Like if it didn’t look right, it was a problem in society.

Danielle shared she had an idea about what she wanted her hair to be when she was a young girl. Danielle stated:

I remember I did always like having long hair. There are many photos of me after I got my hair done where I'm like really like feeling myself as a kid. So, I knew long hair was important and having pretty hair was important. I don't know if I

ever connected it to like natural relaxed or whatever, but I knew I liked when my hair was long and acted like I'm cute.

Erica looked to her peers and realized she wanted a shared experience. She relayed, "I asked my mom to get my hair permed [in fifth grade]. So around that time I noticed that hair was important." Fantasia shared she realized hair mattered but not necessarily the hair that grew naturally from her scalp. She said, "I would probably say [hair mattered] all of my life, but it was like this different type of hair that really mattered. I didn't realize natural hair mattered until like four years ago, but [hair] was always important." Imani connected her realization of hair matters to her attraction to the opposite sex. Imani relayed:

I would say I first realized it mattered when I first started having crushes on boys...So, let me give you a little background. I went to school in predominantly white spaces my entire life. So, what was in amongst the boys were Eurocentric features. And when I had my first crush the boys are who I had a crush on he seemed to like white girls and not just white girls, but Latino girls, Indian girls, and I had to really think about it. I was like well what do they have in common with each other that's not common with Black girls and it seemed to be hair.

That's what it seemed to be, and it wasn't just with my first crush, it was just a common theme where I went to school.

After this realization of her experiences as a child with hair matters, Imani proclaimed, "I just got tired of feeling pressure to be something that I'm not...I felt like the main influencer was just not caring anymore what anybody thought about my hair."

When asked about any surprises in the transition as it relates to self-values and hair matters, Aaliyah expressed, “The part that surprised me...I had to check my values, my self-esteem.” Imani added, “my hair has always meant something to me and what surprised me is when I transitioned it meant something to me all the more.”

Maintenance. Maintaining relaxed hair also presented many struggles for some of the participants. In discussing prior self-values and the decision to transition, Imani stated, “It was just too much maintenance. It was just too much upkeep of unnatural hair. At the end of the day all this flat ironing of the hair. Then if you sweat your hair no longer is in place.” Aaliyah exclaimed, “I think the time aspect of how long it took for my hair to be done and ‘oh my gosh you better do something with that head!’” She further explained, “I will get a perm. I would have to get a touch-up. At least if I were to keep that style of three weeks, well I like to keep up with all that was just financially straining.” Ciara shared, “I was going to college and so I realized that I would be away from my hairdresser. I obviously wasn't going to just be with roots and looking crazy.” For Danielle maintaining her relaxed hair meant she was often going to the shop. Danielle relayed:

I personally I don't do hair. When I have my hair just at home it was always a ponytail. It was always brushed back. At one point I cut it kind of got cut into a pageboy and I would just put a part in it smooth it over. I never did my own hair. I would always go to the shop. My mom always went to the shop.

Theme 2: Value of self-love. Values of self-love emerged as the next theme and extended from participants new found self-awareness in their transition to their natural

hair journey. When asked about her current self-values, Erica expressed, “I think I have more self-love for myself now than I did before I transitioned.”

After Fantasia’s transition to wearing her natural hair, she valued her loving herself through this process. Additionally, this type of self-love is one she had not experienced before and wants to share this feeling. Fantasia stated:

It's me. It's what grows out of my scalp. I would love for other people to see that. People can look at me and be like ‘Oh my hair looks like that too.’ I feel beautiful. I look good with my natural self.

Appreciation. Within valuing self-love there came a greater sense of appreciation for some of the participants. Hailey stated. “Well I think different then you know you take taking care of your total self. I spend time trying to make sure that I'm taking care of my hair.” Imani also shared she has more positive experiences with her hair. Imani relayed:

I have a very loving a very warm a very deep understanding with my hair that I don't think I had before. I just think that I would neglect it. I think before transitioning it was just something to put away. It just wasn't a part [of me]. It wasn't supposed to be a part of me. But now that I've transitioned, and I've learned to love and enjoy and embrace my hair, I'm not complete without my hair. So, I absolutely have a great relationship with my hair now.

For Erica, self-love and appreciation for her natural hair came after fully transitioning. Erica relayed:

The best part was seeing how my face shines when I had less hair. So, I've always had a certain length of hair and my face I think my face is pretty round. I used to

feel very uncomfortable with my hair being that short but looking back at pictures I think I was happier then. Also, I was able to appreciate myself in those moments.

Erica also shared how her self-love and appreciation allowed her to stop comparing herself to others. Erica stated:

I might look at somebody else's hair like well why can't my hair do the same thing. If you learn what works for your hair and what doesn't work for you, it is like you won't have that competition. So, I think I had more self-love for myself to realize like this might not work for me but something else will.

Embracing. For some of this transition process, self-love encompasses embracing the whole self. Brianna explained, “I've been embracing like my natural hair. So, I feel proud of it because at first I was like ashamed to like keep it out.” Imani also expressed similar sentiments. She stated, “The best part about transitioning was letting go. Honestly letting go. So many thoughts about what others would think about myself or would think about me. Just let it go and appreciate what God naturally gave me.” Fantasia also included embracing her hair as a part of her self-values. Fantasia voiced:

I guess it goes back to the whole embracing, you know, just learning new things I thought that I knew what I valued in myself. This is what I was capable of doing. But it kind of opens the door to a whole new thing. Like this is a new me. I'm just learning in the process of learning that it's okay to do that, you know the return seeing you as yourself. Of course, you know you get backlash like what are you doing why are you doing this? I'm just embracing me.

Hair love. As an extension of appreciating and embracing their whole self, all of the participants shared sentiments of their new love for their natural hair. While, much of the process in the beginning for some of the participants was not easy, sentiments of self-love and hair love echoed through many of the clients perceived outcomes in their transitions. Danielle exclaimed, “I love it. It's very much a part of me.” Similar sentiments were also shared by Aaliyah who said, “I love it. I’m so proud of it,” and Imani who stated, “I love my [hair] I wouldn't trade it for the world.”

Theme 3: Value of self-confidence. For many of the participants, values of self-love preceded values of self-confidence in their transition to natural hair. Ciara shared after her transition her personal confidence increased. She relayed that for her this process was about, “Gaining the confidence to just be myself and I guess just embracing my identity as a Black woman as well.” Aaliyah’s confidence also grew. Aaliyah explained:

I just wear my hair how I want it, and as long as my compass is good, it's good. That's how I navigate it, because you're not going to please everybody. Especially people have been brainwashed for so long. Like, Black people are bad in general, or the perception of a Black person isn't high...It is what comes with the territory of my dark skin and my natural hair. They don't have to tell me I'm cute, you know. I don't care. I know I’m cute.

In the same realm of dealing with other’s opinions, Imani shared, “I got to a point where I didn't care what anybody thought, and I didn't care really what I thought, because I felt like it was healthy for me to go back to myself.” Danielle’s confidence grew not

only after experiencing the value of self-love, but after receiving external validation.

Danielle expressed:

I remember going into work, I worked at Urban Outfitters, and one of my co-workers, she was a very like free spirit person and she had like a half-shaved head blonde hair tattoos the whole thing. I came in and I was smiling. I can feel it right now. Smiling a lot. I was like hey and she's like 'Oh my god I like this.' She's like, 'It's like you feel like you. Don't you? You feel like you!' and I was like yeah 'I do.' So that was like, it was just a really cool feeling. It was both internal and it was confirmed by somebody else. Like they can see it too. It was cool.

Brianna's shared her level of confidence did not rely on her hair. She relayed, "I've always been confident. I came from like a loving background. My parents are like always 'You're beautiful no matter what nobody thinks.' I don't think like my hair defines me." Gabrielle voiced similar sentiments and added her confidence in transitioning was due to something other than someone else's opinion of her. She exclaimed, "From my perspective God didn't make any junk." Hailey expressed her hair did not define her confidence; however, she expressed having her hair in the way she wanted to present it helped her confidence. Hailey relayed:

I might be able to have somebody else that you know could fix it and make it look great or what have you, but I need to be able to do it for myself to make myself feel confident. I'm confident that if nobody else is around I can do me I still feel good about how it looks now.

Comfortability. Self-confidence during the transitioning process has seeped into other aspects of the participants' lives. Ciara relayed, "I feel comfortable. I feel settled."

Danielle's confidence grew through each phase of her natural hair transition, as she also experienced the difference between wearing her natural curls and wearing her natural hair in locs. Danielle relayed:

I remember when I first got my big chop. Of course, I had those kinds of weird hesitant responses, but I felt good. When I got my locs, again it's like the outer response versus my own. I felt good I was like okay this is cool like shake my head and stuff.

Erica shared that throughout her natural hair transition, and after her expanded self-values, her level of comfortability increased. Erica stated:

I used to wear makeup every day like in college when I was getting used to it. Right now I don't have anything on my face. So, I'm getting more comfortable with just accepting myself if my hair isn't done if I didn't do anything to it and if I'm doing things in my face.

Speaking up. Increased values of self-confidence meant the ability to speak up for some of the participants in a way they could not before. Aaliyah stated:

I mean hair is just always is important it just always is. For some reason everybody looks at your hair. I feel this is important because it represents me in this world and I take up space here. I belong here too, and you need to change your ideas of beauty standards to fit mine, because I'm here too. Not I need to curtail to you, as far as if my hair needs to be less kinkier or straight or whatever. No, you need to change your ideas of beauty standards away from European Eurocentric to inclusive, including mine, that might be beautiful too.

Ciara shared her confidence extended to speaking up in her career choices. She said, “So I wear my afro to job interviews because this is who I am and if you feel like that's not professional then this isn't the job for me.” Aaliyah shared her confidence allowed her to not only speak up for herself, but for those other girls and women who have decided to wear their natural hair. Aaliyah stated, “The message I'm saying now. Make space you know or learn how to deal with your hair. Not ‘Oh your hair is such a burden.’ You know? I grew up with those messages.”

Theme 4: Value of community. The last theme which emerged from all of the stages of perceived self-values for the participants was a value of community. For many of the participants, the value of community grew out of being confident enough to walk in their true selves. Danielle shared she would have liked to experience a greater value in community with others during her transition. Danielle stated:

I went through high school and I went through my first experience in college with no like no YouTube tutorials. I didn't know what products to use I didn't know I was supposed to be oil in my hair everyday... I had a little fro. I wasn't supposed to be getting my hair wet every day, like get in the shower and picking it out...It was not the best for my hair. Had I had some community to go to I would have known that.

Two of the participants discussed the importance of the natural hair movement and how they went to the online community for support in beginning their transition process. Imani said, “I just realized with the natural hair movement you started seeing natural hair Youtubers you started seeing more images and magazines and things like

that.” Others had friends who discussed the natural hair movement and inspired them to find support within this community. Erica shared:

I think [my friend] was probably the first person who actually had her hair like natural, natural. Other than that, I know I'm looking at [YouTube] videos all the time and I was getting tired of my hair like growing to a certain length and not doing anything else.

Empowerment. Empowerment extends beyond the self. All of the participants relayed their desire to share advice as a part of their value in community. Imani shared:

I definitely encourage any Black woman that has not seen their natural self and has not walked confidently...I encourage them to do [transition] because you do not understand liberation. You do not understand freedom until you are 100% comfortable with yourself. I'm talking in school spaces, and workspaces, at the family dinner, the whole nine. So, you are totally comfortable with being yourself in your natural state you will not understand what freedom is like.

Hailey relayed, “I think it's inspirational for a lot of people who have seen the transition. I have people who ask questions who you know potentially may want to go natural themselves and have asked ‘How did the process go?’” Gabrielle was very expressive in her desire for sharing this statement about why she feels others should transition to their natural hair. Gabrielle exclaimed:

I need you to stop going to the salon. I need you to stop perming your hair...because all of these things that you're doing for the sake of beauty, and I love pampering just as much as the next person, it's killing you. You don't have the genetic precursors for these diseases.

Fantasia shared, “It's a journey. Your hair changes every now and then, but you learn something about your hair all the time...Everybody's hair is different. Everyone's going to do something different. It's your own unique thing that you have going.”

Creating legacy. Imani relayed she finds value in community and creating positive legacies. Imani shared:

I am a therapist, so I work with younger children. It's important for me as a Black woman to teach children, especially Black children, that hey you can wear your hair natural. You can love it. You can be a professional. You could do whatever you want to do and your hair it's not going to stop you.

She further stated that she empowers her youth to love themselves and to go for what they want in this world. Hailey is hopeful that her experiences with understanding self-values in the transition, and those shared experiences that others may have, extend to future generations. Hailey expressed:

I'm grateful now that we are more receptive of who we are and what our hair looks like. So that we're not pass that on or continue to the pass that on to the younger generations that are coming. They should know that it's their choice. It shouldn't be forced upon them to have their hair look straight or a certain way. It should be the choice that they're allowed to make and at an age that they're allowed to make it at.

Fantasia also shared similar sentiments. She expressed, “It's all about you taking the time to learn yourself and learn your hair...A woman going down and having children you don't want to pass down that type of you know negativity to your children.” Gabrielle

summed up her experiences with self-value as one in which she shares knowledge and creates positive experiences for her own children. Gabrielle relayed:

As far as value probably the most value that I placed on [hair] was being able to you know instill something into my daughter's. You know, teach them about the risks and the dangers of exposure to certain chemicals and petrochemicals. Things that are synthesized and how these things basically invade your circulatory system, your neurologic system, your gastrointestinal system. So, for me you know that was the value. The hope that I, you know between research and education, instill something into my girls, so that they can in turn pass it on to their girls.

Values in society. Participants were asked about navigating perceptions of Black hair expression in the United States. The sentiment about making space for everyone was widely shared among each of them. Gabrielle shared, “We are still coming up against brick walls in our education institutions. They’re attacking our children and their writing our schools’ policies. Makes it seem like it is some sort of a crime to have braids, locs, or cornrows.” Aaliyah stated, “It's hard. It's still is hard. It still is a lot of people you have to teach how to do it. I mean how to accept us and our natural hair.” Ciara shared, “I think it's perceived as a radical statement. It's perceived as something that's political. It's perceived as unprofessional. It's also perceived as empowering. It’s kind of like a contradiction. It shows strength, it shows resistance, it shows beauty uniqueness.”

Danielle relayed:

I have all the thoughts about that because it's just hair. I feel like it's a combination of not knowing enough about Black hair and believing these

perceptions of Black hair that were told to you by people who didn't know enough about Black hair. Then they fold into dress codes and you know personality or stereotypes... You have all this misinformation about what I wear on my head and you're, you're using that to do things that could possibly hurt me, keep me from working, keep me from going spaces.

Erica expressed her ideas about the perceptions of Black hair expression in the United States. She relayed, "I think people are still trying to accept it and sometimes people view it as like something that can get you down. They talk about you or talk about your hair." Erica also shares she navigates Black hair expression by knowing her values when it comes to the perception of Black hair expression. Erica stated:

I like to view it as me being strong and being confident instead of letting you know the negative things they say affect me... I stand strong on who I am because before I had another image of what my hair should look like. This is what my hair was going to look like. I just try not to fold into what society thinks I should look like and create my own way of what I feel like fits me best.

Other participants expressed their experiences have been mixed with how they are personally perceived. Brianna shared:

I don't feel like I need the societal structures definition of good hair or Black hair. But I feel like with my own definition of good hair, I feel like it doesn't matter what your hair is as long as you're taking care of it... I feel like I got good hair.

Brianna further stated, "When I leave out my natural hair like more people compliment me than when I'm wearing weaves and stuff. And probably because weave -

it's like normal to them. When they see my hair in its natural state they always come like 'Oh my god I like the hair is versatile. I can never do something like that with my hair.'

Thematic Summary

The participants revealed perceptions of self-value effectively when describing their experiences in the transition process. Participants had many ways of displaying what they found value in. However, in the evaluation of the findings, and in making meaning of the participants' statements, all of the participants relayed an overall increase or expanded definition of their self-values in the process of transitioning. A query of the data showed there were more positive sentiments shared of their journey than negative statements. Imani sums up much of the shared experiences by stating, "Oh I value myself for who I am and what I am a whole lot more."

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore how African American women come to understand self-value in the process of transitioning to wearing their natural hair. Nine participants met the selected criteria of this study and participated in sharing their common phenomenon. The research questions and interview questions were used as a guide for the participants to describe their experiences and help the researcher to elicit and probe for meaning making of the experience. The raw data were analyzed by using a phenomenological technique comprised of value and focused coding methods. The findings from the themes were supported by the participants' responses, as the themes which emerged were presented in detail in the participant's own voices. The demographics of the participants were diverse in when each participants' hair was first chemically relaxed, to the age they each decided to transition, and to what

motivated them in the process. While the participants' responses were multifaceted, all of the participants shared a commonality in how their values were expanded.

In Chapter 5, the discussion includes an interpretation of the findings using the theoretical frameworks for this study. The discussion also details the limitations of the study and includes the researcher's positionality statement. Following the limitations of this study are recommendations for future research, which detail the cultural, social, and clinical implications of the findings. Last, a summary of the overall study concludes the discussion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

I explored the perceptions of self-values in African American women who have transitioned to wearing their natural hair through a psychological lens. I followed up on past research, identified a gap, and formulated research questions relevant to understanding this phenomenon. This chapter begins with a review of previous chapters. Next, an interpretation of the findings incorporating how the results connect with the theoretical frameworks used for this study is discussed. After the discussion of the findings, limitations of the study are shared and followed-up by my positionality statement. Next, the recommendations for future research are shared based on the outcomes of this study. After recommendations are discussed, the cultural, social, and clinical implications are considered as they relate to the findings. Last, this chapter concludes with a summary of the overall study.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of self-values in African American women who have transitioned to, or were in the process of transitioning to, wearing their natural hair. Scholars have highlighted the significance of African American women and natural hair from historical implications (Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Patton, 2006; Sieber & Herreman, 2000), societal and internal ideals and implications (Carr et al., 2014; Majali et al., 2017; Wanzo, 2015), and psychological struggles and health implications (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2009; Robinson, 2011; Thompson, 2009). Researchers indicated how hair played a role in African American women's identity formation and cultural representation (Davis, 2015; Solorzano et al., 2000; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

Three frameworks, the ethnic and racial identity (ERI), critical race theory, and the SBWC, acted as guides into the typical ethnic identity development, intersection between understanding race and racism, and a collective experience of African American womanhood (Davis, 2015; Solorzano et al., 2000; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). These are further discussed under the interpretation of the findings. Some of the past emerging themes focused on factors of general acceptance, identity formation, and psychological struggles in wearing natural hair for African American women (Ellington, 2015; Garrin & Marcketti, 2018; Opie & Phillips, 2015). These themes, as identified by Ellington (2015), Garrin and Marcketti (2018), and Opie and Phillips (2015), all assisted with further direction for this research.

Interpretation of the Findings

For this study, nine participants volunteered and were identified as African American women who have transitioned or were in the process of transitioning to natural hair. The participants' subjective experiences were solicited to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. During this exploration, I also aimed to understand self-values as defined by the participants prior to, during, and after their transition process by using a phenomenological qualitative approach.

The participants' experiences were vast and diverse in each of their transition processes. However, in all of the participants' stories, there were commonalities in their outcomes and in their perceptions of self-value. The succession in which their values expanded were voiced in a similar pattern. This began with a value of self-awareness and extended into a value of self-love. This value of self-love allowed many of them to grow their values of self-confidence and in their beliefs in the importance of the values of

community for the natural hair transition. Although some values, such as in the domains of self-love and self-confidence, were a part of the participants' self-values prior to their transition, the transition process itself expanded the definition of these values in their lives. The participants did not set out with the intention of changing their values in this process.

Theoretical Findings

The theoretical frameworks used for this study were the ethnic and racial identity theory, the critical race theory, and the SBWC. The first theory, the ethnic and racial identity theory, postulates that individuals become aware of the self over time in relation to others and the world (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). All of the participants spoke about a greater sense of self-awareness in the process of the transition. As a part of their discovery in the transition process, five of the participants discussed how they became aware of how hair was not as valuable to their development prior to their transition, because their hair type was not valued in society. In addition, as a part of their normative development with their values and where hair is considered, they grew up not understanding what was normal for African American girls. Three of the participants voiced curiosity of what they really would look like in their transition, as they were accustomed to valuing what others in society valued in esthetics and had never seen their full selves before.

The critical race theory was used to examine the experiences of race and racism and the intersections with African American women wearing their natural hair. This theory references the everyday forms of racial microaggressions that people of color encounter in many settings (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Participants spoke about

African American hair expression in the United States. Some expressed and experienced positive interactions with their hair. These experiences, such as compliments received, were valued in expressing self-confidence and the value of hair as a part of their identity. However, most of the participants acknowledged there are still African American hair struggles for many in public spaces, such as in the work place and in schools. In expressing these struggles, a sense of greater self-confidence helped the participants navigate these concerns in their personal lives. Also, participants expressed their experiences in moving away from society's expectations of what was an acceptable presentation of African American hair. The intersection with the racism reference came in the form of participants' statements of the expectations that African American hair in its natural state was not good enough to be considered presentable.

The SBWC was used to establish a foundation of strategies African American women use to resist racial and gendered oppression (Davis, 2015). During the in-depth interview sessions, there were no questions asked of the participants about community values. However, all participants discussed the value of the collective experience, which is a concept emphasized by the SBWC. For all of the participants, community support and offering advice to create legacy or empower others in transitioning to their natural hair was instrumental in their testimonies. One participant shared how she began her natural hair journey before the natural hair movement was defined. She also spoke about wishing this was a part of her development of values during her own transition. Other participants spoke about the significance of this natural hair movement and community during their transition.

The SBWC also celebrates strength, resiliency, and self-sufficiency while resisting oppression within the refuge of the community (Davis, 2015). The participants expressed a desire to support those in the natural hair community and those transitioning to wearing natural hair through offering advice geared toward acceptance and strategies in resisting oppression. The participants also conveyed that they now incorporated personal values of creating a legacy. Desires to create an environment where African American youth can grow into a world where part of their personal identity is not interwoven with one standard of beauty were a common sentiment among the participants.

Limitations of the Study

There were some unavoidable limitations for this study. One of the first limitations was within the method used for this study, as phenomenological qualitative designs are not generalizable. Phenomenological research requires the researcher to interpret and make meaning of the phenomenon as described by the participants' accounts and understand their life experiences (Lien, Pauleen, Kuo, & Wang, 2014). This design did not include systematic sampling, triangulation, or constant comparison, which are criteria for validity and generalizability (Leung, 2015). This study was designed around a population in a particular context. The results from this study have not been duplicated or compared to any other similar study in order to generalize the findings.

The second possible limitation was with the collection method. Although I took precaution in making sure the questions asked could be understood by the population served, interpretation of the questions by each participant may have affected the way in which they responded. Additionally, open-ended questions were used to obtain

information about perceived experiences from each participant. This could have presented issues with subjectivity about the importance of certain moments in a participants' life over the other. For example, the in-depth interview asked participants to consider values prior to their transition. Issues with selective memory could be a factor in verifying reported data. The implication of this limitation is the inability to confirm accuracy of participants' statements. One way to have addressed this limitation would have been to include a longitudinal component from the onset of a woman's transition to wearing natural hair.

A third possible limitation to this study was with participant selection. The participants in this study were not separated by age. Age differences and generational values may have represented completely unique experiences. For example, those in the age range of 46-55 alluded to seeing differences in the younger generation as compared to their own generation. Similarly, this study did not have a limitation on the length of time between when a participant reported she last chemically straightened her hair to when she began transitioning to wearing natural hair. For instance, there were notable differences between participants who transitioned fewer than 3 years ago to those who transitioned to wearing their natural more than 8 years ago. The implication of this limitation is with the degree of varied responses received. It is unknown from this study if some attributes of the results would exist or be different for those who transitioned within a 3-year time frame to those who had transitioned more than 4 or 5 years ago.

The last possible limitation of this study is with me. As an African American woman, I also transitioned to wearing my natural hair in 2009, and I shared many similarities with the participants. It is possible that these similarities between the

participants and I affected the way in which they responded to the interview questions. Additionally, limitations with researcher bias could have affected the way in which the questions were solicited and the way in which connotations, both negative and positive, or statements were selected or discarded.

In order to ensure the researcher's unbiased analysis, careful consideration to these concerns were addressed through each stage of the development process. The method of utilizing participants' words during the coding stage and theme selection was used to reduce my bias. Second, participants reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. Last, I kept a positionality statement to minimize any attitudes, feelings or personal meanings into the analysis.

Researcher's Positionality Statement

As the researcher in this study, I have a unique challenge in minimizing bias. I am a 34-year-old African American woman who underwent the natural hair transition process nine years ago. I took care in the discussions with the participants to not share any part of my own natural hair transition journey prior to their interviews in order to remain neutral while asking the interview questions. I found doing this was best, because I did not want the participants to see their story in mine and skew the way they detailed their personal experiences. My beliefs about this phenomenon are similar to the findings. Therefore, in order to minimize any influence about my beliefs, I made sure the participants' statements were central to theme development. Similarly, my personal interaction with this phenomenon differed from the participants' experiences. I made careful effort to remove my personal experiences during the coding process. My hopes for this study were to understand self-values and if the natural hair transition influenced

any personal changes within each participant. I also did not set any expectations while trying to understand and make meaning of this phenomenon, as another way to minimize my bias.

Recommendations

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored how African American women came to understand self-value in the process of transitioning to wearing their natural hair. In the process of meaning making, the researcher found many of the sentiments of the participants were optimistic about the transition process as a whole. In addition, the participants voiced there were more positive outcomes as a result of their transition. This may lead one to speculate this would be the outcome for many who undergo the natural hair transition process. Future research may look into differences between positive and negative sentiments for those women who have undergone transitioning to wearing their natural hair. Future research may also look into differences between age and the perceptions of self-values of African American women who have transitioned to natural hair. For instance, this may allow for a deeper understanding into what values may look like in the transition at different stages in one's life. Additionally, this was a qualitative inquiry into this phenomenon. Future research may also look into duplicating this study in a quantitative study and focus on changes of self-value. Last, future research may look into a longitudinal study where participants' experiences are captured from the onset of their transition to wearing their natural hair. A longitudinal study may assist with the issues of selective memory and the inability to confirm accuracy between past and present values, as these were a limitation of this study.

Implications

With an increase of more African American women wearing their natural hair comes cultural implications for not only the women transitioning, but for those working with this population. Additionally, the findings from this study contribute to an understanding about the processes of personal identity and values in society when one transitions to wearing natural hair. While, past research has found that natural hair has not been fully accepted in mainstream society (Ellington, 2015), the findings from this research suggest things are slowly changing. What this change means is still forming for many of those within and around the community. Past research also found that the lack of acceptance of African American women wearing their natural hair has created many psychological struggles (Opie & Phillips, 2015). Findings from this study confirmed that, while there are still struggles in the society as a whole for the participants, they navigate perceptions of Black hair expression in the United States by not allowing ideals about their hair to distract, influence or deter them from wearing their hair in its natural state. Other cultural implications include an increased awareness to bring about the value of transitioning to wearing natural hair for African American women to the community at large.

Clinical Implications

Findings from this study may have some clinical implications for psychologists. To begin, the stages of value-laden beliefs and principles throughout the transition process provide a deeper understanding of the African American natural hair movement phenomenon. While it is important to understand this phenomenon for the psychological

processes of thinking about or going through this transition, it is also not a linear experience for African American women.

In considering treatment and case conceptualization, providers should consider the importance of each client's personal experience with the transition in addition to the other intersections of her personal and cultural identities. Understanding this process as a cultural intersection of personal identity can help in understanding what clients may value and what they may be psychologically struggling with. While many of the participants in this study shared positive experiences about the outcomes in their values, this may not be true of every participant. Similarly, not every African American woman, as evidenced through some of the participants, considered this transition process to be a major transformation in their personal identity. Rather, the transition process may be an expansion on values that were already significant in their clients' lives.

The transition to wearing natural hair can change a client psychologically, as the conception of self-awareness brings about certain beliefs, feelings and possible behaviors from their past interactions with their hair and acceptance in society. In addition, as many of the participants in this study alluded to, not everyone's natural is the same. The definition of what is it to be natural for the purposes of this study is to stop utilizing chemical straighteners or other processes that permanently change the pattern of one's natural hair. However, this does not include those women who consider themselves natural, but choose to style their hair with wigs, braids or weaves. This presents, as some of the participants shared, certain struggles around defining someone as being "natural" or not.

Last, findings from this study provide a deeper level of understanding of the social impact of societal values on African American women. The implications for the woman transitioning to wearing her natural hair when there are perceived struggles of Black hair expression in the United States can present internal conflict. For instance, maintaining work or considering career prospects may create conflict with this part of the woman's identity. Similarly, conflict can exist if wearing natural hair presents struggles in maintaining or forming relationships both romantic or platonic.

Social Change Implications

In addition to the cultural and clinical implications, the researcher embarked on creating positive social change. This study accomplishes social change by adding to the literature a positive outlook about the recent ideals about overall acceptance and understanding of this population of African American women and their experience in the United States. Sharing their experiences helps to improve the overall ideals about African American women's values and standards of beauty. Additionally, it helps to normalize the appearance of their natural traits in this society without making it about anything other than what they value in their selves. The findings of this study support the efforts I set out to accomplish in trying to create positive social change.

Conclusion

I set out to understand a growing phenomenon of African American women transitioning to wearing their natural hair. I began with identifying the gap, which comprised of the need to identify specific psychological factors, such as the values of wearing natural hair, meaning making, and reasoning for transitioning to natural hair. I then highlighted past research to include emergence of the natural hair movement, the

historical implications of African Americans and Black hair in the United States, the socialization and internalization processes related to African American women, and the psychological factors included in the decision to wear or not wear their natural hair. Included in this research was the identification of past theoretical frameworks, which were used as a foundation to support this research.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of self-values in African American women who have transitioned to wearing their natural hair. Findings from this study suggest the transition to natural hair has the ability to positively change and expand values of the self. The participants' expressed values of self-awareness in their overall lives and set out to make positive changes through first breaking unhealthy hair habits. In doing so, the participants developed a deeper sense of the values that self-love brings into their lives. Last, positive outcomes in a greater sense of self-confidence allowed participants to speak up about their values in creating, maintaining and supporting community.

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Appendix A: Value in Transition to Natural Hair Interview Questions

1. Describe your decision to transition to natural hair.
 - a. How long have you been natural?
 - b. When in your life did you first realize hair mattered?
 - c. What major factors influenced your decision to transition?
2. What did you perceive to be valuable to your self (i.e. self-worth, self-esteem) prior to transitioning to your natural hair?
 - a. How did you make sense of your personal identity prior to transitioning?
 - b. How valuable was hair to your personal identity?
 - c. What kind of interactions did you have with your hair?
3. What did you perceive to be valuable to your self (i.e. self-worth, self-esteem) in your journey to transitioning to natural hair?
 - a. Have you noticed any major changes from prior to transitioning to your natural hair?
 - b. How valuable is hair to your personal identity? What is the best part of being natural? Worst?
 - c. What kind of relationship do you have with your hair?
 - d. Throughout the process of transitioning, were there any good parts? Bad parts?
 - e. Was there anything during the transition that surprised you as it relates to self-value?
4. How do you believe Black hair expression is currently perceived in the United States?

- a. How do you navigate the perception of Black Hair expression in the United States?
 - b. How did family/ significant others perceive your process of transitioning?
5. What is your level of satisfaction with your transition?
 - a. What is your level of satisfaction with your hair?
6. Is there any other information you would like to share regarding your transition process or any aspects you think should be included on this topic?