

Research Article

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“Unmanageable”: Exploring Black Girlhood, Storytelling, and Ideas of Beauty

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Abstract: This article explores how Black women use storytelling to construct their Black girlhood on the axes of Black hair and beauty politics. The study includes a discourse analysis of a series of focus groups with a student organization dedicated to Black women’s natural hair at a midwestern predominantly white institution. I ask: How do young Black women use storytelling as a tool to construct, recall, and (re) negotiate their childhood experiences of hair and beauty politics? I explore the ways these women use storytelling to articulate how their Black girlhood was in part shaped by encounters with hair politics and constructions of beauty. These “hair moments” that they recall reveal complex negotiations of standards of beauty. I analyze three themes that emerge from these conversations: (1) shared experiences around play, imagination, and relationship to images of mainstream beauty; (2) family as a social unit that socializes Black girls around beauty; and (3) adolescence, prom, and contested notions of appropriate “formal” adornment. These themes among these young women illustrate shared experiences, negotiation/critique, and meaning making around concepts of beauty. This study contributes to conversations around beauty culture, Black hair politics, and the burgeoning field of Black girlhood studies. Through understanding how Black women reflect on their girlhood experiences of the politics of hair and beauty, we can better understand the inner experiences of Black girls, and the complexities of how they come to know and understand their bodies.

Keywords: Black women, girlhood, beauty, natural hair, coming-of-age

Introduction

In September 2019, fast fashion giant H&M came under fire on social media for its portrayal of a young, dark skinned Black girl’s “messy” bun hairstyle. Some argued the photo was a careless, racially insensitive portrayal (Fasanella). Others argued that the girl’s hair styling was a simple representation of a Black girl with naturally kinky tightly coiled hair texture, and we as the public should be more accepting of Black hair in this state (Reese). My interest is less about who is “right” or “wrong” in this conversation and more about what the conversation itself teaches Black girls about how to understand their hair and bodies in relationship to a larger social and political landscape. This conversation on social media platforms is just one commonplace example of the ways that Black girls’ hair is policed and hyper-scrutinized.

For Black women and girls, hair has always been a generative space for constructing meanings of identity (Banks, Byrd and Tharps, Craig, Gill, Jacobs-Huey, Lake, Patton, Rooks, Rowe). Within this context, language serves as a tool to co-construct meanings of beauty for and among Black women. In the case of Black hair, beauty, and Black women’s experiences, understanding language use can provide insight into

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these nuanced experiences. As anthropologist Lanita Jacobs-Huey maintains, “Black women’s hair care remains deeply indebted to language for its accomplishment” (Jacobs-Huey 5). For Black women, hair has always been critical to their lived experiences (Banks, Byrd and Tharps, Craig, Gill, Jacobs-Huey, Lake, Patton, Rooks, Rowe). It provides a way for them to connect and communicate with other Black women, such as in physical spaces like beauty salons. It provides a space for embodied forms of self-expression, i.e., through stylization of cornrows, braids, wigs, and sew-in extensions. Black girls are socialized into Black womanhood through the hair practices taught to them by their mothers, aunts, sisters, and grandmothers. Meanwhile, Black hair has also been politicized within a larger colonial, patriarchal, and White supremacist landscape. Here, Black female hair is hyper-scrutinized and held to longstanding and narrow Eurocentric standards of beauty that privilege straighter hair and loose, wavy curl patterns – known colloquially and intra-racially as “good hair.”

This article explores how discourse functions as a tool to socialize Black girls into Black womanhood at the nexus of hair and beauty politics. The study includes a discourse analysis of a series of focus groups with a student organization about Black women’s natural hair at a midwestern predominantly white institution. I ask the research question: How do young Black women use storytelling as a tool to construct, recall, and (re)negotiate their childhood experiences of hair and beauty politics? I detail the ways these young women articulate how their Black girlhood was in part shaped by encounters with hair politics and constructions of beauty. These “hair moments” that they recall orally reveal complex negotiations of normative standards of beauty.

Led by theories of embodied Black feminist epistemology, I analyze three themes that emerge from these conversations: (1) shared experiences around play, imagination, and relationship to images of beauty; (2) family as a social unit that socializes Black girls around beauty; and (3) adolescence, prom, and contested notions of appropriate “formal” adornment. These discursive themes among these young women illustrate shared experiences, negotiation/critique, and meaning making around larger concepts of beauty.

I do not suggest that these women share a monolithic experience or uniform understandings of hair and beauty politics. However, I do suggest that there is often overlap in their experiencing of beauty because, as Black feminist theory maintains, they actively negotiate and enact agency within interlocking systems of oppression (Collins, Collins and Bilge, Crenshaw, Davis, hooks, Lorde, Wallace). While several studies have considered Black women, beauty, and hair, very little work has considered how Black women participants of the contemporary natural hair movement reflect back on their girlhood. Ultimately, I maintain that storytelling is used to share, negotiate, and make meaning of hair and beauty politics in a dialectical, inter-generational relationship between Black women and girls. This study contributes to conversations around beauty culture, Black hair politics, and the burgeoning field of Black girlhood studies. Through understanding how Black women reflect on their girlhood experiences of the politics of hair and beauty, we can better understand the experiences of Black girls and the complexities of how they come to know and understand their bodies.

Literature Review

Blackness, Beauty, and Hair Politics

Since modernity, engendered in part by colonialism, slavery, and discrimination, Eurocentrism and anti-Black racism interact in order to denigrate what are viewed as phenotypically “Black” features (Mercer, Patton, Rooks, Russell-Cole et al., Tate). Regarding concepts of beauty, the result of this interaction is a privileging of features associated with whiteness – pale skin, long and straight hair, thin angular noses, and thin bodies. Meanwhile, dark skin, kinky hair textures, large lips, large round noses, and large/curvy bodies are often denigrated. Ideas of “Eurocentric” or “White supremacist” beauty standards have been

theorized in order to understand the ways that mainstream beauty standards have socio-historically privileged these corporeal features most closely linked to whiteness (Byrd and Tharps, Hunter, Lake). An idealizing of these Eurocentric beauty ideals has been documented across populations of people of color, and across the African diaspora, throughout time and space.

One way that this privileging of the Eurocentric has been argued to manifest is the notion of “colorism.” Robinson defines colorism as “a system of privileges, benefitting Blacks and other people of color with phenol-typical features commonly found among Whites, particularly lighter skin color and straighter hair textures” (Robinson 362). Robinson suggests that colorism and the aforementioned kinds of hair hierarchies are intrinsically linked. Indeed, historically, “tests” were done to determine if Black people’s skin was light enough or their hair was “good” enough to be accepted in certain social spaces. While evaluations like the “brown paper bag test” functioned to police skin tones, evaluations like the “comb test” concurrently policed hair textures (Byrd and Tharps). Obiagele Lake’s work depicts advertisements for products as far back as the 1880s that promised to make “kinky hair grow long and wavy” (Lake 54).

As Black feminist theory reminds us, it is imperative that we think about systems such as race and gender together, as they constantly co-construct and inform each other (Collins, Collins and Bilge, Crenshaw, Davis, hooks, Lorde, Wallace). Accordingly, Margaret Hunter argues: “Because race and gender can only be understood together, it follows that there must be a gender component to colorism itself. Light skin, in addition to being high status, is also regarded as more feminine, refined, or delicate” (Hunter 3). In a world where qualities such as beauty, femininity, and delicacy are often socially rewarded in women, these socially constructed standards of beauty ideals may have material stakes.

In the face of this epistemological context, Black feminist scholars such as Janell Hobson have argued for the specificity of Black women’s experiences as well as the potentiality for Black women to reclaim ownership of both their bodies and their understandings of beauty. Hobson argues Black women have historically been erased or othered (i.e., hypersexualized, made “grotesque”) within the landscape of beauty. For Hobson, Black women have by necessity carved out spaces to reclaim and recover “beauty” for themselves, such as in the films of Black director Julie Dash – of *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) acclaim. Black women consistently expanded and complicated ideas of beauty, by maintaining that women of color have a unique relationship to beauty, one that is shaped by more than blanket experiences of sexism and misogyny. Instead, specificity is necessary, because notions of beauty are defined and shaped by interlocking and intersecting systems of oppression.

The work of Maxine Leeds Craig argues that it is most helpful to understand Black women’s experiences through multiple standards of beauty, which are contextual, movable, and varied. She states:

I suggest that we look at beauty as a gendered, racialized, and contested symbolic resource. Since beauty is contested, at any given moment there will be multiple standards of beauty in circulation. By thinking about competing beauty standards and their uses by men and women in particular social locations, we can ask about the local power relations at work in discourses and practices of beauty and examine the penalties or pleasures they produce. (160)

Craig uses the term “negotiate” to demonstrate that at any given historical context, Black women navigate a complex set of expectations which may involve region, race, gender, class, political orientation, color, and more. As Craig pushes back against the idea of a singular, Eurocentric standard of beauty that Black women are measured up against, she and other beauty scholars of color continue the work of interrogating entrenched assumptions that have existed within beauty literature. Work such as Craig’s complicates a tendency of analysis on beauty to fall into binaries and dichotomies that mark the ways that beauty culture is either “good” or “bad” for women. Black women in particular find themselves uniquely situated within this landscape, as they may be situated in binaries that are uniquely raced, gendered, and classed. Black women navigate a complex landscape in terms of the ways their hair and beauty practices are politicized.

While many studies have considered this complex landscape, very little work has documented Black women participants in the contemporary natural hair community’s reflecting back on their childhood through the lens of beauty. The current study pulls together the context of the contemporary natural hair movement, as well as storytelling and memory, to reveal nuances of how Black women understand beauty in relationship to their childhood.

Studying Black Girlhood and Questions of Beauty

Black girls in particular have had their hair politicized in unique ways, and the navigating of these politics may be impactful in shaping their girlhood (Blake et al., “Beyond ‘Good Hair,’” Byrd and Tharps, Dove, Fasanella, Lattimore, Reese). bell hooks writes eloquently about the ways that hair and beauty rituals served as a space for shared experiences of Black girlhood, as a rite of passage into Black womanhood. She writes that braids were seminal in shaping her Black girlhood, while getting her hair straightened ushered her into Black womanhood. She states:

Before we reach the appropriate age we wear braids, plaits that are symbols of our innocence, our youth, our childhood. Then we are comforted by the parting hands that comb and braid, comforted by the intimacy and bliss. There is a deeper intimacy in the kitchen on Saturdays when hair is pressed. (“Straightening Our Hair” 112)

She also writes:

It was connected solely with rites of initiation into womanhood. To arrive at that point where one’s hair could be straightened was to move from being perceived as child (whose hair could be neatly combed and braided) to being almost a woman. It was this moment of transition my sisters and I longed for. Hair pressing was a ritual of black women’s culture of intimacy. (“Straightening Our Hair” 111)

As per hooks’s words, hair for Black girls can sometimes be a space of connection, intimacy, community, and comfort intra-racially. However, socially, Black girls’ hair and bodies may also be hyper-scrutinized and policed in specific ways, especially in school settings. Activists and Black feminist scholars have agitated on behalf of the dire needs of Black girls regarding their experiences with hyper-policing and schooling. Scholar Kristie Dotson reminds us “Black feminist theory, in general, has many aims. One of these aims to address the pervasive ignorance that exists around the lives, experiences, and plights of cis- and trans* Black women, girls, and gender-non-conforming people” (Dotson 49). The 2015 report “Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected” by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Priscella Ocen, and Jyoti Nanda published by the African American Policy Forum reframes contemporary conversations around policing and education, by centering Black girls and young women, rather than Black boys and young men. According to this report, Black girls are six times as likely to be suspended from school than White girls, a ratio greater than Black boys to their White counterparts. Monique Morris’s 2015 book *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* also attends to these issues. Not only are Black girls more likely to be suspended, but findings suggest that these suspensions are stratified by skin tone. When controlling for a number of factors, Blake et al. found that African American female adolescents with darker complexions were almost twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as their White female peers – this finding was not found for African American female students with lighter skin complexions (Blake et al., “The Role of Colorism”).

Indeed, scholars such as Carter Andrews highlight the ways that Black girls are uniquely situated and oppressed within K-12 education. The ideological construction of White femininity as innocent, more lady-like, most beautiful, and an idealized form of femininity often operates to the detriment of Black girls in schools (Carter Andrews et al.). Black girls are more likely to be viewed as adults, and by being perceived as more adult-like in schools, Black girls experience disproportionate exclusionary discipline outcomes (Epstin et al.). Zero tolerance policies disproportionality affect girls of color (Blake et al., Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews), and discipline practices and Black girls’ reason for discipline referrals differ significantly from White and Hispanic girls (Blake et al., “Unmasking the Inequitable Discipline”). Black girls’ bodies themselves have also been understood as more “dangerous” compared to their non-Black counterparts (Evans-Winters).

Relatedly, the policing of hair texture and hairstyling has been a site of tension for Black children, specifically Black girls, at schools. A 2017 *NPR* piece called “When Black Hair Violates the Dress Code” details the ways in which Black girls’ hair is often deemed “distracting” and in need of “fixing” by authority figures at schools. Teacher education scholar Dorinda Carter Andrews is quoted in the piece questioning

these codes, asking: “What does a headdress have to do with learning and success?” (Lattimore). The piece reads: “Black girls are often seen as being loud or aggressive and are overly disciplined because of that stigma. Andrews finds that leads to low self-esteem and underperformance in school for these students” (Lattimore).

Incidentally, even celebrity Black girls have been unable to escape the hyper-scrutinizing and policing of their hair. Consider the case of Blue Ivy Carter, the daughter of superstar Beyoncé Knowles-Carter. In 2014, Beyoncé and husband Sean Carter were being criticized online for the appearance of Blue Ivy’s hair, which often stuck straight out of her head in an afro. The Knowles-Carters’ critics would have preferred that Blue’s hair was straightened, permed, smoothed down, plaited, or otherwise contained and made smaller. One woman went as far as to create a Change.org petition requesting that Blue Ivy’s parents “properly” comb her hair. While likely created as an unkind joke, the petition ultimately garnered over 5,000 signatures (Moss). As Sonita R. Moss argues, the moment revealed the unique nature of racialized sexism, and the ways in which even Beyoncé cannot escape the hyper-scrutiny and demonization of “bad Black mothers” that Black women have faced for many years.

While the aforementioned work unpacks the unique experiences of Black girlhood in relationship to embodiment and oppression, virtually no studies have documented how Black women as a product of the contemporary natural hair community recall and understand their Black girlhood through the lens of beauty. This article builds on conversation with the recent contributions to the field of Black girlhood studies, highlighting the nuances of how body and beauty politics are felt, recalled, and understood.

The Contemporary Natural Hair Movement

The term natural was first used within Black beauty culture in the 50s and 60s, to describe a short afro style. Today, to be “natural” or identify as part of the “natural hair movement” is uniquely situated in a new media, twenty-first century context. Beginning in the late 2000s, a critical mass of Black women in the United States created their own internet-based “natural hair movement” (Byrd and Tharps, Ellington, Ford, Gill, Lemieux, Muther, Phelps-Ward and Laura, “Rooted,” Saro-Wiwa). These women made the conscious decision to stop chemically straightening their hair via “relaxers” and “transition” into wearing their hair “natural,” without chemical processing or straightening. According to historian Tiffany Gill, hair “relaxers” [chemical hair straighteners] accounted for only 21% of Black haircare sales in 2013, a 26% decrease since 2011 (Gill). From 2008 to 2013, chemical hair relaxer sales decreased from \$206 million to \$152 million, and from 2008 to 2013, there was a steady growth in all Black hair care products except chemical relaxers (Muther). As Byrd and Tharps note, “Through this online community, a culture developed. It went by the Twitter handle #teamnatural and had its own vocabulary to describe styles and grooming techniques” (Byrd and Tharps 182).

For *New York Times* writer Zina Saro-Wiwa, “this movement is characterized by self-discovery and health” (Saro-Wiwa). For some Black women, the journey from chemically relaxed hair to natural styles can be incredibly powerful and emotional. I define the “natural hair movement” as an internet-based cultural moment (from about 2006 to the present) in which a critical mass of Black women actively has made the decision to stop chemically straightening their hair via “relaxers,” in favor of a variety of hair styles (extensions or not) that mimic or display a more kinky, curly, or “natural” hair texture (“Rooted”). I consider all of the corresponding blogs/bloggers, web tutorials, products and online product reviews, advice books, physical spaces (i.e., natural hair “meet-ups,” mixers, salons), Twitter accounts, Tumblr accounts, Facebook profiles, artwork, and spaces for “selfies” (self-portraits) to fall under the umbrella of this “natural hair movement.” I define “natural hair” as a woman of color’s hair that is un-straightened through either heat or chemical processing. When I discuss one’s “natural hair texture,” I am referring to kinky, coily, or curly un-straightened hair, most often growing straight from a woman of color’s head. I offer these definitions now for the sake of clarity, while recognizing that all the aforementioned terms are unstable, contested, and subjective – within both the internet sphere and communities more broadly.

Because the contemporary natural hair movement is a relatively recent phenomenon, there is still much to be gleaned from scholarship around its scope and impact on women of color's use of social media and new media; understandings and representations of Black beauty; and Black women's embodied experiences, memories, and negotiations of this terrain. My research, including the current research article, contributes to these developing conversations.

Black Feminist Epistemology and Storytelling

Drawing on Black feminist epistemology, this project also assumes that there is immense value in privileging the knowledges, voices, and experiences of Black women in these spaces as authorities and authors of their own hair and bodies (Bobo, Collins, Henderson). Black women's knowledges make up the majority of what we know as the contemporary natural hair movement – their organizing of physical and online spaces, researching product ingredients and hair health, and their experimenting with styles and length. The research within the academy has been traditionally positioned as the “expert,” and many studies of beauty standards are often “top down” – focusing on ideals being sold through major locations of power such as images in popular magazine ads, national beauty pageants, or the appearance of runway models (Collins). However, this project prioritizes the narratives of Black women participants. I am interested in the ways they resist, critique, negotiate, and respond to beauty standards disseminated from these locations of power.

This prioritizing aligns with many Black feminist ways of thinking about knowledge production. As Patricia Hill Collins notes:

The suppression of Black women's efforts for self-definition in traditional sites of knowledge production has led African-American women to use alternative sites such as music, literature, daily conversations, and everyday behavior as important locations for articulating the core themes of Black feminist consciousness. (Collins 202)

Natural hair-based spaces, and these women's hair practices, are examples of “alternative sites of knowledge production” through “daily conversations” and “everyday behavior.” While not spaces free from conflict or oppression, spaces like these natural hair organizations provide alternative avenues for knowledge production where Black women can negotiate hair and body politics among themselves on their own terms.

In this article, I also consider the stories Black women tell about their girlhood through the lens of Black feminist storytelling. Storytelling is crucial for our understandings of Black women's subjectivities, and it can serve as a tool for producing knowledge. Black feminist writers have considered the ways that narrative and storytelling do this kind of work. Alice Walker writes about the urgency of Black women's stories. She states: “Through the years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories – like her life – must be recorded” (Walker 240). This idea of Black women's stories as urgent, both in how they are spoken and how they are recorded, is important for understanding Black feminist storytelling. Walker also speaks to the communicative nature of Black women's stories, as they are shared from Black woman to woman – in this case, from mother to daughter.

Quoting this passage from Walker, language scholar April Baker-Bell offers the concept of *Black feminist–womanist storytelling* that is relevant for understanding the exchange of narratives in this chapter. While Baker-Bell situates Black feminist–womanist storytelling by way of her own autoethnography, she offers a way of weaving together “the African American female language and literacy tradition,” “Black feminist/womanist theories,” and “storytelling” in order to “create an approach that provides Black women with a method for *collecting* our stories, *writing* our stories, *analyzing* our stories, and *theorizing* our stories at the same time as *healing* from them” (Baker-Bell 531). Black feminist and womanist theories offer a way of gathering, analyzing, and healing from Black women's narratives specifically.

Black women have also mobilized storytelling about their experiences through language as a way to affirm their self-concept and dignity. As writer and novelist Paule Marshall notes, this kind of storytelling about experiences can serve as “therapy” among Black women, as she witnessed her mother and her

mother's friends exchanging tales through discourse. Marshall maintains that this exchange "restored them to a sense of themselves and reaffirmed their self-worth." Specifically, Marshall notes that there is something cathartic about a good storytelling session. In the face of experiencing oppression, it can provide both a release of emotions, as well as an affirmation of ones' experiences. Marshall says:

Through language they were able to overcome the humiliations of the workday. But more than therapy, that freewheeling, wide-ranging, exuberant talk functioned as an outlet for the tremendous creative energy they possessed. They were women in whom the need for self-expression was strong, and since language was the only vehicle readily available to them they made of it an art form that—in keeping with the African tradition in which art and life are one—was an integral part of their lives. ... And their talk was a refuge. (Marshall 629)

While many studies have considered this complex landscape, very little work has documented Black women participants in the contemporary natural hair community's reflecting back on their childhood through the lens of beauty. The current study pulls together the context of the contemporary natural hair movement, as well as storytelling and memory, to reveal nuances of how Black women understand beauty in relationship to their childhood.

Here, Marshall lays bare that Black women recounting stories among each other around their embodied experiences as Black women is useful in at least three ways. First, it provides an outlet to express oneself – both creatively through the art of linguistic Black oral tradition and emotively as a tool of catharsis. Second, storytelling of these experiences helps to affirm that they are "real" and valid. Finally, the storytelling provides a "refuge," a space of comfort, safety, affirmation, and retreat. Within these discursive spaces, Black women can feel confident speaking their individualized truth, knowing there is a good chance that they may be understood, affirmed, and recognized.

As Robin M. Boylorn reminds us, Black feminist storytelling allows us to understand how Black women make sense of their lives. Boylorn's work on the stories and narratives of rural Black women demonstrates how storytelling from a Black feminist perspective can serve as a tool for insight into the embodied lived experiences of Black women. Boylorn uses theories of "Black feminist thought," "intersectionality," "womanism," and "muted group theory" to characterize the positioning and lived experiences of "Black women" (Boylorn 4–7). For Boylorn, Black women's stories expand the ways that they are represented, by revealing the ways that they "cope and resist" with these forms of oppression. She notes: "The narratives I have shared acknowledge the nuances and complexities of rural black experiences. I sought to expand, not limit, the representations. I was committed to showing the women in my study as women with problems, not problem women." By gathering and sharing Black women's stories, Boylorn aims for storytelling to shift from "problem women" to "women with problems." That is to say, while these rural Black women face problems that may sit at the intersections of various forms of oppression, these problems do not define and shape their entire being. Moreover, they actively "cope and resist" in this context.

Within the current study, in the case of Black women's relationships to normative hair and beauty standards, their relationship to these systems as "problems" do not define and shape their entire beings. They actively negotiate, critique, cope with, and resist these systems. By understanding Black girlhood through the storytelling of various narratives, we can begin to understand the diverse ways that Black girls and women do this work. Their discourse and storytelling reveal the affective complexities within these narratives of coping and resistance.

Methodology

Context

This study took place at a large university in the Midwestern US in Spring of 2016. The data were collected from focus groups. The pool of participants was gathered from the general membership body of a natural hair-based registered student organization called "CurlyGirls" (pseudonym) on a predominantly White

campus. According to its constitution, one of the organization's central missions is to "bring awareness to healthy hair care that is culturally diverse." Organizations like CurlyGirls have developed on and off college campuses since the beginning of the natural hair movement in the late 2000s. The vast majority of CurlyGirls' membership identify as Black women. Because I was interested in shared experiences among young Black women's constructing of their childhood through storytelling, focus groups fit best for this work. The conversational, small group nature of the focus groups allowed the young women to speak freely among themselves – building on each other's ideas and dialoguing through moments of dissimilarity.

From February to April of 2016, I conducted three monthly focus groups with five to eight members of the CurlyGirls organization. The same members repeatedly participated in the sessions, though every single member was unable to attend every single time (hence the five-to-eight-person range). A couple of students discontinued along the way; however, I maintained a core group of the same women. The active president of CurlyGirls announced my study via both an e-mail to the general body and an announcement to the general body during a meeting. In order to incentivize participation, participants who attended all three focus groups received a \$10 gift card to Starbucks. Each session lasted an hour.

At the beginning of the first session, the participants completed consent forms, and at the end of the last session, they completed an exit survey. The three focus groups occurred directly after meetings of the larger CurlyGirls group. Each of the focus groups had a specific topic, and these topics were pulled from my previous work on representations within natural hair and negotiations of standards of beauty. In order to guide discussion, I used a combination of YouTube clips, questions, and images on PowerPoint slides.

Participants

At the time of study, all of the participants attended the same university. The majority of the students were undergraduates, while one student was a Master's student. All of the participants were active members of CurlyGirls. With the exception of one participant, all of the participants self-reported falling within the age range of 18–21. Eighty percent of the participants who completed the exit survey hailed from the state's largest and predominantly Black metropolis, which is about 80 miles away from the university's campus.

Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted three focus groups with CurlyGirls. I audio recorded each focus group. I took notes during the focus groups, jotting down particular ideas that struck me as important, as well as noting participants' nonverbal communication behaviors. The participants also completed brief written exit surveys after the final session. Taken together, the audio recordings, field notes, and exit surveys allowed me to capture a rich and layered account of the conversations.

I performed discourse analysis of the participants' use of language and storytelling during the study. In order to best understand how the participants constructed their own childhood through stories, I analyzed the data in three phrases. I considered which comments speak to the major themes I was interested in within the context of Black girlhood, hair, and beauty politics – shared experiences, negotiation, and meaning making. Finally, I attempted to describe and interpret how the use of these stories might reveal something about Black women's subjectivities.

Researcher Positionality

My then ongoing role as the graduate adviser for CurlyGirls presented me with a unique opportunity to serve as both researcher and insider throughout my focus groups. At the time of the focus groups, I had served as

graduate adviser for the student organization for nearly a year. I had known four of the participants before the focus group and consider one of them a friend. Like all of the participants, I am also a Black woman. My familiarity with the young women afforded them a certain level of comfort with me, and this familiarity enabled me to analyze the given discourse in particular culturally specific ways.

Indeed, my relationships with the participants were not limited to only the roles of “researcher” and “participant,” so the line between my roles as a researcher and as a graduate adviser was a bit blurry, at times, as well. Green’s idea of “double dutch methodology” provided a way for me to think about my role as a researcher, as well as my relationship to my participants and my work. Green uses the analogy of “double dutch” to speak to the fluidity of these relationships – you find a certain rhythm and just go with whatever is being given to you. The fluidity and flexibility that inform double dutch methodology proved useful for my own focus groups.

Discourse Analysis

A discourse analysis allows researchers to examine what is both hidden and visible within communication, texts, or language (McDougal). According to Teun Avan Dijk, discourse analysis allows us to study texts, not just in their form and meaning, but also as complex social practices, structures, and hierarchies of interaction – existing within context, society, and culture (van Dijk). Moreover, this project also engages critical discourse analysis, in recognizing relationships between discourse and power with larger social structures (van Dijk). Discourse analysis involves a reading of texts, which takes into account power dynamics, social context, and the functionality of the given text. David Kirkland’s notion of “ethnography of discourse” is useful because it combines the methods of critical ethnography and discourse analysis in order to take seriously the context – particularly the cultural context – that the discourse exists within. Through ethnography of discourse, I understand that I am not simply analyzing the discourse itself, but the function and significance of the words within a larger, culturally specific context. This article assumes that discourses occur in a particular cultural context, which is critical in interpreting the meaning of the stories.

Images of Beauty in Black Girlhood

Throughout the focus groups, the Black women participants had shared experiences around play, fantasy, and relationship to mainstream images of idealized beauty. The women in this focus group immediately, vocally, and viscerally responded in agreement to certain ideas, shared experiences, or terminology that they all seemed to be previously familiar with as Black women. The fact that these women reacted similarly and in unison to specific kinds of stories or phrases – without the stories or phrases needing to be explained further in any sort of way – illustrates the shared, embodied experiences of these Black women around hair politics and beauty culture.

For example, during one focus group, the participants began discussing their girlhood and the ways they understood their own hair and beauty during that time. They were speaking about not seeing themselves or their hair represented in the dolls, fairy tales, and stories they knew as children. Instead, long flowing hair was the standard for beauty and femininity. One participant named Marsha¹ mentioned that as a child, she would put a bed sheet on her head and playfully pretend that it was her own long, flowing hair. Almost immediately, other young women in the group began chiming in in agreement, holding matching childhood memories:

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

Marsha: I literally as a child I walked around with the sheet on my head, like –

KR (researcher): Mhm (in agreement).

Several others, overlapping: Yesssss. Ooohhh, yeahhhh (*loud laughter*).

Another Participant: (indistinct) ... keep the towel!

Marsha: You know, yea, I was going through that, so ... If I ... like, when I see the natural hair Barbies of today, I say ‘Why didn’t they have this when I had that?’ ... Because – I kid you not – I would have *never* permed my hair. The only reason I permed my hair because I got teased in elementary school a lot because they kept calling my hair nappy-headed ... They were cruel growing up, when I was growing up.

Here, Marsha spoke of being a Black girl and using a sheet to pretend she had long, flowing hair. She “walked around” with the sheet, suggesting that part of the pretending was about movement, and the billowy nature of the hair – perhaps similar to movies or hair commercials. This context for “pretending” did not need to be explained to the other Black women in the focus group; they immediately understood. Though it is difficult to distinguish in the recording the overlapping sounds of agreement, another participant subsequently can be heard mentioning the word “towel.” I take this to mean that she used a towel instead of a sheet for pretending. A few moments later, on the recording, another participant, Sandra, also verbally confirmed that she too “did do the sheet thing with [her] hair.”

Through storytelling, Marsha made connections between beauty ideals depicted in the fairytales, dolls, and filmic representations she consumed as a child as well as teasing that she experienced throughout her childhood. Marsha suggested this combination of pressure from media and her peers caused her to want to relax her hair. As with countless other Black women, the language of “nappy” was weaponized against her in ways that were “cruel growing up.” Today, Marsha still grapples with these ideals that have marked her body since her youth; however, CurlyGirls has provided her a space to work through some of these experiences. In evoking the story about the “sheet on [her] head,” the agreement by the other participants suggested a sort of processing together, as well as an overlapping experience around this sort of youthful merging of play, imagining, and longing.

Childhood, Family, and Beauty

Throughout the focus groups, the young women participants relayed varying shared experiences around Black girlhood through storytelling. One theme was the significance of familial relationships in shaping understandings of hair and beauty. Several women reported that their relationships to their mothers or sisters impacted their understandings of beauty. For example, Roxy first learned the meaning of “good” hair – and that she did not seem to have it – through the women in her family. She states:

Roxy: I know me growing up...I would hear that [‘good hair’] with really, like, ‘high yellow’ little girls walkin’ around with their hair in two ponytails ... Women in my family would be like ‘*Oh, she has some good hair!*’ And I would be like ‘*What does that mean? Okay. I don’t look like that, is my hair still good?*’”

Here, the language of “good” is made legible onto Roxy’s own body. Intra-racially, Black hair has been socio-historically bifurcated into poles of “good” and “bad” hair. “Good” hair is often defined as hair with a wavier or loosely curled texture, while “bad” or “nappy” hair is kinkier and afro textured (Banks, Byrd and Tharps, Rooks, Robinson). Kobena Mercer notes, “Good” hair, when used to describe hair on a Black person’s head, means hair that looks European, straight, not too curly, not that kinky. And, more importantly, the given attributes of our hair are often referred to by descriptions such as “woolly,” “tough,” or more to the point, just plain old “nigger hair” (Mercer 101). The good hair/bad hair dichotomy is also linked to questions of maintenance, as some Black women feel that bad hair needs to be straightened and styled, while good hair is more ready-to-wear (Robinson). As Tracey Owens Patton notes, this hierarchy of hair textures “does not come solely from the African American community but also from the Euro American community, which promotes the acceptable standard of beauty” (Patton 39).

Meanwhile, the contemporary natural hair movement has opened up spaces of possibility in terms of representations and expectations around the kinds of hair that can be considered beautiful. Since the late mid to late 2000s – around 2006 on – a critical mass of women decided to cease chemically straightening their hair via “relaxers” in favor of more natural hair styles.² A plethora of new natural hair products found their way to the shelves of chain retailers like Target, Walmart, and CVS. Representations in pop culture of new natural hair icons like Solange Knowles, Viola Davis, and Tracee Ellis Ross solidified that natural hair could be trendy and “beautiful.” Meanwhile, social media forums and YouTube provided spaces for everyday Black women to connect and share space over hair. However, the natural hair movement has also at times arguably reaffirmed the hierarchy of “good hair,” perhaps in part due to its proliferation of the “hair typing” chart.

The natural hair typing system was first printed in a 1998 book called *Andre Talks Hair* by Oprah Winfrey’s hair stylist Andre Walker. Byrd and Tharps describe hair typing as,

The numerical system [that] goes from one through four with A, B, and C variations. The straighter the hair, the lower the letter and number. Most Black women fall somewhere between 3B and 4C, though there are many, like Smith, who argue that a substantial amount of natural hair sites spend a lot of time focused on the threes. (Byrd and Tharps 190)

Curlier textures are “3s”; more kinky textures are “4s.” The “kinkiest hair” is often classified as “4C.” These designations can have pragmatic use, as they can help members of the natural hair community find others with similar hair textures. However, Yaba Blay argues, “It is no different than talking about ‘grades’ of hair. When we talk about the politics of beauty, it is aligned with and reflective of White power and White supremacy. And this exists in the natural hair community” (Byrd and Tharps 191). It is also important to note that Walker’s initial hair typing system did not include the kinkiest hair textures, that is, the “4C.” It is assumed that at some point within the discourse of the natural hair community, 4C was created and added to chart illustrations (Byrd). Walker himself has made controversial statements about kinky hair in the past, including his stating: “I always recommend embracing your natural texture. Kinky hair can have limited styling options; that’s the only hair type that I suggest altering with professional relaxing” (Byrd). As hair texture socio-historically named as “good,” the coveted “3” hair types are often associated with bi-racial or multi-racial people (Lemieux).

Robinson makes key these links by connecting “good” and “bad” hair to the concept of colorism. Indeed, Roxy’s own young body is compared to another “high yellow” (a colloquial, intra-racial adjective meaning “very light skinned”) girl. Roxy knows her own hair does not look like this girl’s, so she asks of herself, “*Is my hair still good?*” While Patton notes that hierarchies of hair texture do not “come solely from the African American community,” Roxy’s story reveals that at times Black girls most intimate community members – family and family friends – are among the first to overtly teach these hierarchies and norms. The older women in Roxy’s family, having been raised in a social context with comparable (if not more punitive and limited) beauty standards, pass the beauty ideals down for a young Roxy as inheritance.

Meanwhile, participant Anna recalls her mother struggling to style and maintain her daughter’s hair – a problem many busy moms of Black girls may have. Anna recalls her hair in its natural state being framed as a problem, which resulted in her mother’s eventual decision to chemically straighten her hair. Anna reports continuing to chemically straighten, or “perm,” her hair until the age of about 16. Anna reports, “*All I knew growing up was that my mama would perm my hair because it was ‘unmanageable.’*” This use of “unmanageable” speaks to the ways that Anna’s hair was conceptualized as something that needs to be tackled, put in line, or controlled. Ultimately, several participants recalled that their mothers or older women in their lives perpetuated ideals that made them feel at times ambivalent about their own hair during girlhood. While bell hooks notes that women in families can engender hair-related feelings of community and intimacy, the

² For a more thorough overview of this phenomenon, see: Tiffany M. Gill, “#Teamnatural: Black Hair and the Politics of Community in Digital Media.” *Journal of Contemporary African Art*, Number 37, no. November (2015): 18. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10757163-3339739>; Chelsea M.E. Johnson, *Each New Curl Howling a War Cry: Black Women and Embodied Racial Formation* (Forthcoming, New York University Press).

stories from the participants also suggest that older women in families can engender other complex (and at times negative) hair-related feelings.

However, it is important to note that Anna, like many of the women in the focus groups, never demonizes or attacks her mother for framing her young hair in this way. Instead, the tone is more empathetic – perhaps because young women like Anna today have gone through the process of “going natural.” Therefore, they know what it requires to learn how to do their hair in its thickest, kinkiest, most natural state. To then how to complete this same level of aesthetic labor as a working mother on a small, squirmy, “tender-headed” young girl? Perhaps this lens, along with more sophisticated knowledge around norms of beauty and professionalism, allows the young women to understand in hindsight the struggles that their mothers went through to care for and style their hair as girls.

Meanwhile, participant Marsha’s reflections add in the nuances of geographic region, as she locates her own socialization to a southern Blackness. She states: “*I guess it’s from my upbringing from living in the south – We always caught up on hair texture.*” Here, Marsha also connects her struggles around having “good hair” and the “right” hair texture to deeply embedded ideals from her childhood. Indeed, many regions in the south have histories of enslavement and Jim Crow segregation that have given way to color-coded language such as terms like “*high yellow*,” “*quadroon*,” “*red bone*,” and “*mulatto*” – all of which are loaded terms that speak to various constructions of light complexions and mixed-race ancestry.

In this focus groups, sisters and sisterhood also proved to be a crucial familial site of negotiations of hair and beauty ideals. For several participants, their own hair and beauty were compared to their sisters during childhood – for “better” or for “worse.” For example, participant Lexi recalls that her sister’s hair was evaluated more negatively than her own. She had “good” hair, while her sister had “bad” hair. The loaded word “nappy” – a historically negative term used intra-rationally to describe kinkier/afro-textured hair³ – was weaponized against Lexi’s sister. This teasing led Lexi’s sister to get into physical fights with her peers. Lexi states:

Lexi: Growing up ... I would see my older sister get into fights all the time, because people would call her hair nappy and compare her to me ... And then *she* would compare her hair to *me* ... When she wouldn’t wear the weave, she would get picked on ... And she didn’t play that. So, she would *fight* ... When she came in the house crying, because they were calling her hair ‘nappy’ ... *I was like, that’s a horrible thing.*

In recalling this story, Lexi recalls feeling conflicted by the profound unfairness of a society that deemed her sister’s hair inferior. While she may not have had language for it as a child, Lexi witnessed first-hand the ways that anti-Black beauty standards were mapped onto her sister’s naturally growing hair texture. Seeing her sister come home “crying” after “getting picked on” by other children left her feeling conflicted about her own hair. The impact of these memories still holds for Lexi, as she calls these times “horrible” during the focus group.

In another example, participant Chloe recalls her hair being negatively compared to her sister’s hair, as her sister was thought to have “good hair.”

Chloe: When I was younger, I always thought my sister had what they would call ‘good hair’ ... It would be easier for my mom to do her hair, she would just sit there and struggle to do mine. ... It was kinda like, ‘Why didn’t I get that?’ Now it’s just like, I don’t compare my hair to hers ... Now I’m kinda over it.

In this passage, Chloe’s hair texture is by default compared to her sister’s. Even at a young age, Chloe was able to surmise that her sister’s hair was the “good” hair that was praised socially, and her own hair was not. Again, her mother’s framing of her hair impacts her self-concept, as her mother seemed to struggle to do her own hair – not her sister’s. However, like many young women in the natural hair organization, Chloe now speaks with much more peace and self-acceptance around her hair. She notes, “Now it’s just like, I

³ “Nappy” is contested and has been reclaimed by some. The phrase “happy to be nappy” has been used intra-rationally for many years, as a way to articulate a subversive understanding of “nappy hair.” Scholar bell hooks published a children’s picture book in 1999 called *Happy to Be Nappy*, illustrated by Chris Raschka.

don't compare my hair to hers ... Now I'm kinda over it." Certainly, the natural hair movement – as well as spaces like *CurlyGirls* – have provided discursive spaces for Chloe to work through some of these feelings and interrogate some of these ideals.

Black Girl Adolescence, Prom, and Beauty

For many of the young women in the focus group, prom was evoked as a major point of their Black girlhood and adolescence, particularly as it relates to hair and beauty. The promenade, or the prom, is a landmark high-school dance. Typically, the prom is primarily offered for upperclassmen (juniors and seniors in 11th or 12th grade) to attend – signaling maturity and moving from one stage of life to another. As Amy L. Best notes:

The prom is an iconic event in American culture, one that is consistently drawn upon in contemporary media to show the triumphs and travails of youth. Along with high school graduation, the prom is often heralded as one of the most important experiences in high school, perhaps even of all adolescence. Images of the prom as a coming-of-age rite permeate our culture. (Best 2)

Prom as an event is an extension of a high school – it is financed, planned, and hosted by some combination of faculty members, administrators, and students. Like all aspects of school, prom is also an agent of socialization; it is a space where students are learning about the world and about themselves. And as Ann A. Ferguson reminds us: "Institutional norms and procedures in the field of education are used to maintain a racial order" (Ferguson 19). Historically, prom is a space that teaches and affirms what is "normal" versus what is "deviant" in terms of heterosexuality versus same-sex pairings;⁴ gender identity and expression; race and interracial coupling; beauty standards; size, shape, and weight; dress codes; class; and notions of what garments and adornment are properly "formal" enough for the occasion (Best). As Ann L. Best argues:

Proms can offer tremendous insight into how kids engage in the cultural politics of their worlds. These examples also demonstrate that proms are not experienced uniformly among youth; historically specific relations of race and socially constituted sexual and gender practices impact in profound ways the meanings kids attach to this event and how they narrate their prom experiences. (3)

The prom hinges on formal attire – it is typically formal to semi-formal in dress. Young girls may spend hours on finding the "perfect" dress, layering make up, and – of course – styling their hair. Meanwhile, conversations around the "formality" of Black natural hair have existed for many generations within the Black community. Closely linked to notions of "professionalism," as previously discussed with school dress codes, some Black hair styles have been thought to be more appropriate in "professional" or "formal" spaces than others. Historically, some middle- to upper-class Black women who invested in respectability as a tool for racial uplift linked straightened hair to formal and professional attire (White). Many Black women and girls recall getting their hair straightened for special occasions like Easter Sunday at church, graduation, picture day, or music recitals (Byrd and Tharps).

In February of 2012, this conversation around the "formal" nature of natural hair reemerged, as actress Viola Davis's natural hair debut caused a buzz online and on television. The then 47-year-old actress wore her own natural, very short, and golden-brown afro on the red carpet of the *Essence Black Women* in Hollywood celebratory Oscar's luncheon. Black women everywhere voiced their support of the look and Davis's choice to deviate from the straight hairstyles and long extensions typical of Black women (and most

⁴ The 2020 hit Netflix musical comedy film *Prom*, based on the 2018 Broadway musical of the same name, tells the story of female student Emma Nolan (Jo Ellen Pellman) who wants to take another girl to the dance, defying traditional beliefs and their principal.

women) at formal red-carpet events. “As a woman with an afro, I applauded her, and thought she looked stunning,” wrote the editor of website *Madame Noire* (MF Editor). The moment solidified Davis’s place as an icon with the contemporary natural movement.

However, not everyone supported Davis’s decision to wear her natural afro. Many questioned whether afros/natural hair could be formal enough for a Hollywood red-carpet event. The array of reactions reflects the ambivalence many Black women face by their colleagues, significant others, coworkers, and family members after “going natural,” particularly when it comes to formal events. The ambivalence also reflects the sorted and complex ways beauty standards and social norms are mapped onto Black women and girls’ bodies, by way of hair politics. When it comes to the prom, the young women participants connected over their memories of their loved ones’ ambivalence to natural hair styles.

Participant Jordan recalls her aunt’s lukewarm response to her own visions of wearing natural hair to the prom. Jordan states:

Jordan: I went natural like my senior year of high school ... And, I got a lot of feedback from family as far as my decision to go natural. I got a lot of talks about what I was going to do for prom Like, my aunt actually pulled me aside and had a conversation like, ‘Um, so, what styles are you thinking about for prom?’ And I showed her some cute updos – some really cute natural updos. And she was like, ‘Hmmm ... How bout we not do that? That’s not, like, put together ... Looks a little nappy.’ And she used the word nappy. And initially, I was really turned off to it. But I still wore my hair natural for prom, like, I was not ‘bout to go straighten my hair ... But, I think, after being hurt by the word ... I just kinda made it my own. If you think it’s nappy ... Well, I love it!

Here, the response from Jordan’s family to the idea of her wearing her hair natural to the prom mirrors the mixed responses to Viola Davis’s short afro on the red carpet. Jordan’s aunt also leverages the word “nappy” as a descriptor for why a natural hairstyle won’t work for prom. She says that natural hair may not look “put together” enough for prom, and she suggests Jordan goes with a different option. Ultimately, Jordan recalls that she followed her instincts and decided to wear a natural hairstyle, noting “I was not ‘bout to go straighten my hair.” She reframes the use of the word “nappy,” stating that now she “loves” her hair texture.

Another participant, Sam, also echoes the notion that wearing natural hair to prom was frowned upon – even virtually unthinkable – at her high school. She states, “When I went to prom, wearing my natural hair to prom was like uncalled for ... It was not even an option. I didn’t even think of it as an option ... I never saw that – never saw a girl wear her natural hair. And if it was her natural hair it was permed; it was pressed.” Sam goes on to state how it “warms [her] heart” to hear other participants (who were perhaps slightly younger than her) talk about wearing natural hair styles to prom, because it was so unthinkable at her high school.

For Sam, this development seems to signal progress in terms of the widening of what is acceptable for how Black girls may consider themselves beautiful at such a momentous and formal event such as prom. This perceived progress – the opening up of space for possibilities in terms of Black girls wearing natural hair to the prom – is by no means trivial. Amy L. Best emphasizes the significance of the beauty preparation and choice of adornment for many girls at prom, noting: “More than just a set of frivolous practices of primping, these are fertile sites of identity negotiation and construction, where girls are making sense of what it means to be women in a culture that treats the surface of the body as the consummate canvas on which to express the feminine self.” For the young women in the focus groups, prom was indeed a space where they negotiation, constructed, and made sense of what it means to be a Black-girl-soon-to-be-Black-woman.

Conclusion

Future Directions

Future studies of Black women’s hair require us to expand our understandings of gender identity, gender expression, and queerness. I am interested in grappling with constructions of Black femininity and Black femme identity, considering how looking to these notions of gender expression may allow us to rethink

hegemonic understandings of femininity and beauty. Across time and space, Black queer people – and Black queer femmes in particular – have forced us to question, grapple with, and subvert our understandings of what it means to be femme/feminine.

As scholars such as Spillers and bell hooks have argued, Black women have never been afforded full access into the categories of womanhood and femininity (“Ain’t I A Woman?”; Spillers). If femininity and beauty are defined by lighter skin, longer hair, thin bodies, and specific features, where does the absence of these phenotypical markers leave Black women? And how have Black queer and trans femmes sought to build and remake alternative understandings of what femininity is and can look like? If we accept that the current standards of femininity and beauty often exclude Black women (while also profiting from their likeness), what might it look like to build something new? The exploration of the intersections of hair and beauty politics, queerness, and transness could take us at least a few important places.

For example, Trans women have specific relationships to beauty and femininity that exist within a larger cisnormative society. Pointing to these kinds of spaces of possibility is beginning to mold more current understandings of how we can understand *all* Black women and femmes’ relationships to hair and beauty culture in a more nuanced way.

Concluding Thoughts

My work on Black women, standards of beauty, and articulations of natural hair has revealed to me the relevance of Black girlhood in how women understand their hair, their bodies, and beauty today. When Beyoncé Knowles-Carter sings in her 2016 Black feminist anthem “Formation,” “I like my baby hair with baby hair and afros/I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils,” the moment is not only a nod to and subversion of Black women’s specific experiencing of Eurocentric standards of beauty, but it is also a direct “clapback” at critics who lambasted Beyoncé for the appearance of her 4-year-old daughter, Blue Ivy’s hair.

Behind the headlines and mainstream narratives, what does it look like for Black girls to internalize, negotiate, critique, and resist normative beauty standards? Where does their learning around these constructions occur, and how do they think through them? This study’s goal is to begin to explore these questions. This study is vital connective tissue for Black/girlhood studies, beauty studies, and the study of hair politics – all in the context of the established contemporary natural hair movement.

Ultimately, I argue the “hair moments” revealed through these Black women’s storytelling of their Black girlhood reveal complex negotiations of normative standards of beauty and body politics. Led by theories of embodied Black feminist epistemology, I have analyzed three themes that emerge from these conversations: (1) shared experiences around play, imagination, and relationship to images of beauty; (2) family as a social unit that socializes Black girls around beauty; and (3) adolescence, prom, and contested notions of appropriate “formal” adornment. Each of these themes among the young women participants illustrate shared experiences, negotiation/critique, and meaning making around larger concepts of beauty.

I do not argue that these women share a monolithic experience or uniform understandings of hair and beauty politics. However, I do suggest that there is often overlap in their experiencing of beauty because, as Black feminist theory maintains, they actively negotiate and enact agency within interlocking systems of oppression. The analysis in this study demonstrates the potentiality at the intersection of Black feminism, beauty studies, and Black girls’ studies. Surely, some Black girls love their springy, thick curls. Of course, other Black girls look in the mirror and wish to have totally different hair. Still others – perhaps most – may oscillate through these two extremes from day to day, moment to moment. And still others are often completely ambivalent, and they do not care about their hair at all. Continuing to explore the diversity and multiplicity of young Black girls’ experiences may very well reveal the future(s) of Black beauty culture.

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