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“I AM NOT MY HAIR! OR AM I? ”: BLACK WOMEN’S TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE IN THEIR SELF PERCEPTIONS OF ABROAD AND AT HOME.

by

YOLANDA CHAPMAN

Under the Direction of Cassandra White

ABSTRACT

The Black female body has been subject to cultural scripting in which Black women are deemed as the “other”. This representation of the Black female is played out in many ways such as through the racial and racist marking of her hair and skin color. In investigating Black women who have participated in a study abroad program, I found that this is one vehicle in which they have been exposed to other’s perspectives of the Eurocentric standards of beauty. In this paper, I have examined ways in which Black women are active agents in their own social scripting of their bodies. Through interviews, focus groups and participant observation, with 20 self identified Black women, the investigation began with a look at the African and European cultural influences on African American ideas about beauty, hair and identity. Initial discussions of participants’ experiences with hair at home and abroad led to broader dialogues about transformations in their concepts of gender, race, and identity.

INDEX WORDS: Study Abroad, Hair, Black, African-American, Women, Identity, Skin color, Beauty standards

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YOLANDA CHAPMAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master’s of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2007

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Georgia State University
December 2007

DEDICATION

To all Black women who aren't afraid to try out their wings

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This endeavor could not have been accomplished without the support, encouragement and love of so many individuals. First, I'd like to acknowledge my guiding force, God. Thank you for blessing me with the opportunity to understand your creation and granting me with the skills to apply that understanding. To Dr. Cassandra White, I cannot thank you enough. My time in Atlanta and at Georgia State has been such a life changing experience due to your support and friendship. You have truly become a close friend. I want to also thank my committee members, Dr.Emanuela Guano and Dr.Megan Sinnott for their words of wisdom and advice. To my participants, thank you for using your beautiful wings and allowing the wind of the oceans blow through your hair. Without your ambition to travel abroad and share your experiences with me, this project would not exist. To my sister: Thank you for making me want to be my best by viewing me worthy of admiration. Lastly and most importantly, to my mother: Thank you for instilling in me at a young age that anything is possible because "I am the head and not the tail." Your love and appreciation for life has caused me to be the woman I am today. Thank you for having faith in me. And thank you to all Black women who are not afraid of their beauty and power. May you never cease to amaze the world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGES
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction	1
Definition of broad terms /concepts	4
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY	5
Race in America	5
Creation of the category Black	6
Construction of the Black Female Body	7
Othering and double Consciousness	10
The Global Media and Study Abroad	11
Creation of the Black Beauty Culture	14
Africa and hair	14
400 Years without a comb	15
The “Black is Beautiful” Movement	17
The Black beauty market	18
African Americans and Hairstyles	20
Straightening	21
Natural	23
The Standard of Beauty	24
The beauty myths	25
Marker of femininity	26

Good and bad hair 27

Racial markers 29

Social and Cultural Capital 31

Resistance to the Beauty Myth 33

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS, METHODOLOGIES AND ETHICS 36

Participants 36

Racial and ethnic background 37

Educational background 37

Age 38

Hair type and skin color 38

Study abroad location 39

Truth Claims 39

Self-reflexivity 42

Intersectionality 44

Methods 45

Interviews 47

Focus Groups 51

Participant Observation 53

Ethics 54

Minimal harm 54

Issues with studying friends 55

I am not a native anthropologist! 56

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS:PERCEPTIONS OF HAIR IN A U.S. CONTEXT 60

The Black Female Identity 60

Checking the box: negotiating racial identity in the U.S. 61

Standard of Beauty 65

The standard of beauty is a myth! 65

Hair is important to women! 66

Hair othered: I can't be myself at work? 68

Redefining Good and Bad Hair 71

Definitions 71

I am not my hair!: resistance to the standard of beauty in the U.S. 76

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS: TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENTS ABROAD 83

Global Worldview: Creation of "worldmindedness" 83

I have always wanted to go abroad! 84

It's something the rich and white do! 85

I wanted to connect with my ethnicity! 89

Negotiating Blackness Abroad 90

Combating negative views of self:views of perceived racial identity 90

My hair gave me away!: hair as a racial marker abroad 92

American Status 95

My accent gave me away!: I am American? 95

I am privileged to be American. 97

Wait…I am still Black!?: Experiences with local racisms 98

I am Not My Hair or am I?: Reflections on Hair Identity Abroad 100

I'm still in love with me but just a little more! 100

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 103

Conclusion 103

Future Research 105

REFERENCES 107

APPENDIX A: Interview Questions 104

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form 116

APPENDIX C: Demographics of Characteristics of Respondents 119

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about Black women that have studied abroad and their experiences with cultural concepts of beauty as it relates to their hair. The discussion is focused on the pretravel perceptions, being different in the United States, and transformative moments while abroad. In this paper, I have used the discourse used by Black women who live in Atlanta to investigate Black female identity and body politics. In order to complete this task I conducted 20 interviews, 2 sets of 3 focus groups and participant observation with self identifying Black women that have participated in a study abroad program at Clark Atlanta University, Spelman College, Emory University, The Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) and Georgia State University. I was able to uncover their perceptions of their racial identity and worldview which was one factor that prompted them to study abroad, challenging and strengthening their identity as Black women by confronting their ideas about Black beauty.

Hair has served as a marker of their "womanness" and/or "gender" and racial identity (Black American) abroad and at home. The history of the U.S. can be understood through an analysis of the value placed on Black people's hair. The statement, "everything I know about American history, I learned from looking at Black people's hair" (Jones 1981:12) explains the value that American society has placed on hair. Since race has a strong socially constructed meaning and hair serves as a racial marker, power relations can be investigated through the study of hair. Through the study abroad experience of these Black women, I viewed there

travel as a transformative experience that changed their awareness of race, national identity and gender in the US context.

I was inspired to study Black women's hair identity through two personal experiences. The first was a popular song titled "I am not my hair" written by the artist India.Arie. The song, by this powerful Black soultress, has helped to change and challenge the view of Black women in the beauty and music industry in the U.S. India.Arie is a acoustic artist that is in the same genre as popular female artists, Lauren Hill and Erykah Badu. Through her positive lyrics her music inspires Black beauty, Black female empowerment and natural beauty. With songs like "I am not my hair" (2006) and "Brown skin" (2001), India.Arie's music helped inspire and support Black women who were embracing or wanted to embrace their skin and hair as an affirmation of their Blackness. I call this the "I love my hair, however it may look and my brown skin" movement.

Through her personal testimony in her song about her struggles with her hair, she furthered supported the "Black is Beautiful" movement by promoting self love and confidence for many Black women all over the United States. Through her song "I am not my hair", she encouraged Black women in the United States to not let their physical features such as their hair define who they are but yet let their character and soul define them. In her song she states, "its time for us to redefine who we be" by not letting it be our "crown and glory" or " determine our "integrity" but better yet be an expression of our creativity through embracing different styles like they did in Africa. This is one of Delia's favorite songs. In discussing the meaning of song with her, she states that the lyrics

> It's time for us to redefine who we be is critical in two ways. The first is that the need to redefine suggests that there was already a definition that was created for us but not necessarily by us and to our best interest. Secondly the fact that she used Black

> American vernacular in her use of the verb to be is splendid! It is very correct, especially when used by our redefined standards. India be doing it!

She was a descending voice from the mainstream that used this generally oppressive tool as vehicle to speak out a positive message about Black beauty. As a dark skinned woman with natural (chemical free) hair, she redefined and represented a successful resister of the Eurocentric standard of beauty that dominated Hollywood. On April 16, 2007, Arie was invited to be on an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* entitled "After Imus: Now What?" where she was praised for her work. This neo soul singer and artist is admired by Oprah and Black women all over the world for creating songs that celebrate their beauty and speak out against self hatred and assimilation.

My second inspiration was a study abroad panel I had participated on about minority experiences abroad. In questioning how physical features such as skin color and hair texture define a woman, I found it necessary to investigate how the myth of an ideal beauty standard affects Black women's identity. I specifically chose to investigate the perceptions of Black women who live and studied abroad in a college/university in Atlanta, Georgia. These Black women have been exposed to and have confronted the negative views of themselves through in the U.S. and abroad which in turn created a new way for them to conceptualize the world and their identity within it.

I have studied abroad three times to different locations and learned more about myself as a Black woman due to the different perceptions of my perceived identity and interaction with people that have been influenced by the White hegemonic structures which is spread through U.S. media. After studying in Brazil in 2006, I began working with the Georgia State study abroad office on their goal to increase minority participation in study abroad programs. I was

asked to participate on a panel discussion on minority student's experiences abroad. This panel was very important and differed from other study abroad sessions, in that it served as a platform in which perceptions of our racial identity as it relates to our experiences with local racisms were expressed, and benefits of going abroad. More interestingly, the subject of hair was of particular concern and interest. Audience members wanted to know how the Black female panelists would care for their hair abroad and panelists discussed their concerns and issues with hair maintenance abroad and their host families' othering of them through their hair. This discussion strengthened my understanding of the importance of hair to Black women in the U.S. who have gone abroad and how it serves as a racial marker abroad and a marker of difference in the United States.

DEFINITION OF BROAD TERMS/CONCEPTS

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Study Abroad: Study abroad is defined as a program outside the United States that students in a university participate in for academic credit hours. Studying abroad is the act of a student pursuing educational opportunities in a foreign country.

Woman: a biologically adult female human (sex); a person that socially identifies as a woman (gender).

Black: A term used for the culturally constructed racial category including people of African ancestry; also known as African-American, person of African descent.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

RACE IN AMERICA

Anthropologists have long worked to dispel the idea that race has a biological premise. In 1962, Frank Livingstone from the University of Michigan stated that "there are no races, there are only clines" (Brace 2005:4). Clines is a term that describes slow changes that result in the phenotypic similarities among people of a particular geographic region. Brace argues in his book, *Race is a Four Letter Word,* that race is a problematic category; he states "since selective pressures influence traits separately, human adaptive traits have distributions that are completely unrelated to each other…and in turn cannot be studied by "racial" distributions" (Brace 2005:6,7). The term "probable mutation effect" describes the process by which certain traits over time are weeded out due to various factors involving environment and lifestyle. With the birth of new evolutionary developments, such as human variation and probable mutation theories, the idea of race as a biological fact cannot be accepted. Brace delves further into why the idea of "race" as a biological construct is problematic. One reason is that the use of "race" to explain human variation implies there are different species. He asserts that "when it is finally realized that there is no coherent biological entity that corresponds with what people generally assume is meant by 'race', all those claims extolling or denigrating various aspects of racial worth will be deprived of any validity" (Brace 2005:9).

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) discusses the concept of race in a similar manner. In the anthropological statement on race, they claim to approach race as a cultural and socially constructed concept that was created to justify the domination, murder, and

enslavement of culturally and phenotypically different people. Thus among anthropologists the term “race” is described as a “cultural category, not a biological reality”. Despite the fact that there is no biological proof for race, the socio-political aspects continues to play a major role in society. Considering its cultural relevance, it is essential that I discuss the perceived and internalized ‘race’ of Black women in the United States as an aspect of their identity.

Creation of the category Black

The act of placing people into categories according to socially constructed categories, or so-called “races,” has its origins in European colonialism. The categorization of the worlds’ peoples into racial groups and the subsequent designation (using pseudoscience as a base) of certain races as “superior” or “inferior” to others provided a justification for colonialism, exploitation, and slavery of non-Westerners. The two main racial categories that are widely used to describe people of African descent and people of European ancestry in the United States are “Black” and “White.” These code words have been utilized in the United States as descriptive terms of these two groups of people. It is also important to note that this is a discussion about the United States, with is not interchangeable with America. The problem arises when these groups are considered to be concrete and culturally and biologically distinct. The idea of “Black” and “White” as being opposites was constructed during slavery in the United States. In order to create a distinction between those with power and the slaves, the power holders described themselves in terms of distinct physical traits using skin color as a determinant- “light v. dark” and “black v. white.” Although the racial category Black was created as an inferior opposite of White, Black has come to represent a major group in the United States with cultural influences from Africa. By the time North America outlawed the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, a distinct Black American culture had developed (Byrd and Tharps 2001:16).

These slaves that were forcefully taken from Africa, have come to be defined and define themselves in many ways. Bryd and Tharp argue that between 1964 and 1966, colored people and negroes "became" Black people (2001:51). Prior to the 1960's, the word Black only had negative connotations, but has since been embraced by many people of African ancestry in the United States. Wright argues that the Black race is not only socially constructed but legally enforced. Blacks in the United States are a legally created group through the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments (1985:11). Structurally, being Black in American society means occupying a racially defined status which indicated that Black group identity is clearly multidimensional (Demo and Hughes 1990:365). Blackness can never be permanently fixed in a place as a complete or static "thing" (Guerrero 1993:2).

CONSTRUCTION OF THE BLACK FEMALE BODY

The Black body is a social construct in which cultural and racial markers such as hair has served to affect the social identity of Black women the world over. Black western feminist scholars have viewed the Black female body as a foundation for discussing gender, race and power, but also as being both biologically and socially constructed (Banks 2000:13). Western literature supports this model as a valid way to investigate power relations and racial markers that are related to the Black female body (Hill Collins 2000, Roberts 1997). The Black female body is the site where power struggles are fought and discourses on race and gender continue to be played out (Caldwell 2004:18). Since the Black body has been culturally constructed by a racist and sexist society in the United States, "Black bodies, intellect, character, and culture are all [viewed as] inherently vulgar" (Roberts 1997:11).

In my research, the body of my participants was represented as a physical place where others conflicting perceptions were struggling to be represented. As a result of the many

conflicting representations that have been placed on Blackness, it is a site of perpetual contestation, struggle, and change (Guerrero 1993:3). As such, society's perceptions of these women's identity have affected how their bodies have been positioned in the modern world. As Black women, they were deemed the other and marked by their race and gender by the dominant society in the United States and local perceptions abroad.

Women's bodies have always been a site for public discourse, especially in relation to the standard of beauty. The reason for this focus stems from hegemonic perceptions of the ease with which the female body can be controlled and dominated. In American society, women have a second class status that has allowed their bodies to be subject to public display. Since women have been viewed as "docile bodies", the body serves as a site for power struggles (Foucault 1979, 1980 cited in Weitz 2001:668). These perceived power struggles are best exemplified when looking at the daily bodily disciplines for women (Weitz 2001:668). For example, the daily beauty regimens that go into doing their hair. For many Black women in the United States, going to the hair salon is a weekly ritual in which the body has been trained to follow. Since the social construction of femininity is stifling, women are disciplining their bodies to conform or resist to the standard of beauty.

It is not surprising that this body discipline is more common amongst women then men. In most patriarchal societies, women have been constructed in relation to men, as a biological opposite. Western women are perceived as polar opposites to men because of the physiological body being related to nature which is deemed by the dominant society as weakness. Feminist scholars argue that the rise of reason and science gave a new legitimacy to gender subordination (Ramazananoglu 2006:28). Dualistic thinking (men/women, culture/nature and black/white) has set the standard for how modern society has viewed women (Weitz 1998 cited in Weitz

2001:668). This view has treated the "body as matter to be studied like a machine" where women are objectified by men (Ramazananoglu 2006:28). This dualistic thinking that still exists today can explain why women's bodies and brains are and have been viewed as inferior.

These social and cultural ideas about women and inferiority are transmitted through the female body (Banks 2000:4). Dorothy Roberts has created a great framework for thinking about and discussing the construction and destruction of the Black female body. Roberts explains how the body of Black females has been controlled by racist ideologies of eugenicists. She uses the Margaret Sanger birth control movement as an example in which Black women were disproportionately sterilized because they were stereotyped as "jezebels" and "immoral Black women" in need of control (Roberts 1997:11).

Patricia Hill Collins argues that the creation of four socially and culturally constructed images of Black womanhood- mammies, matriarchs, welfare mothers and jezebels were created in the United States during slavery (Collins 2000:70). The label of the jezebel stemmed from the view of the African woman slave's body as fair game to inflict pain, ascribe negative opinions and indulge in sexual fantasies. They were raped by white slave owners because they were viewed as uncovered and unprotected property (Byrd and Solomon 2005: xii). Since the post-emancipation, Black women entered a society with bodies wrecked by captivity and disease, and sustained by poverty (Phillips 2004:4). During slavery, Black women were already deemed animalistic and today, the Black body is still viewed as a site of filth that has been subject to social/cultural scripting. Jezebel is still one of the controlling images that restricts and endangers the body of Black women in the United States. These negative images of the Black woman explain how the Black female body has been viewed negatively due to racism, sexism and

classism. Regardless, the bodies of Black women have written a “history” and a “herstory” in the United States (Byrd 2005:xii).

Othering and double consciousness

These stereotypical images of Black women were predicated on the 19th century ideology “the cult of true womanhood” in which White females in the United States defined their identity on the basis of who they were not rather than who they were (Collins 2000:71). Additionally, “Gender norms continue to buttress and perpetuate colonial hierarchies of gender, race, and class by constructing the social identities of White women as the standard of womanhood and female beauty, and the social” (Caldwell 2004:21). In labeling White women ‘real’ women, this was another racist form of identifying Black women as non human. As a result of the stereotypical images of the Black female body created during slavery, “Black women’s parts--- particularly our butts, hips, thighs, breasts, lips, skin and hair—are continuously overemphasized, fetishized, derided, “improved”, trend-spotted and otherwise objectified” (Byrd and Solomon 2005:1). This racist view of the Black body has affected the identity of Black women.

The dual othering, being othered as Black and as a female, has placed Black women in a subordinating positioning in both gender and racial hierarchies. Black women’s bodies have been ‘othered’ through their hair and have been a highly visible marker of their dual ‘otherness’ ” (Collins 2000:79, Caldwell 2004:18). Although men are othered as Black, they are not subject to dual otherness. Gender-based double standards of beauty have allowed Black men to have more options in terms of hair than their Black female counterparts (Jackson 2001:136). Though norms of masculinity can work as a barrier to allowing men to artistically style their hair in the United States, the hair of Black women places them in a restrictive racial and gender based position.

W.E.B DuBois referred to the feature of incorporating dual identities into African American cultural life as “double consciousness: a disjointed identity, partially imposed by racism, the “two-ness” of living between whiteness and Blackness, Africanness and Americanness, always seeing oneself through another’s vision, never feeling quite whole” (Du Bois 1990 cited in Copeland-Carson 2006:60). Black women have been faced with this intersectionality of oppression and have had to navigate a life of “in-between” status. Copeland-Carson says it best when she states that women have had to create a “kind of double vision: for our own survival we had to both see how the world might view us as “the Other,” while also seeing our own reality, self-worth and potential” (2006:59).

Black women have struggled to define themselves in positive terms as both Black and female. “Dealing with issues of beauty- particularly skin color, facial features, and hair texture- is one concrete example of how controlling images denigrate African American women” (Collins 2000:79). Hair then is a key site for investigating how “Black women’s identities are circumscribed by dominant discourses on race and gender” (Caldwell 2004:18). Since Black women have had to learn how to adapt to their sexist and racist environments, one survival strategy they created was “shifting”. Shifting is a mechanism in which these women deal with the social construction of their body. Black women “shift to accommodate differences in class, as well as gender and ethnicity” (Jones 2004:7). Shifting is the change of outward behavior, to adopt an alternate pose or voice or embellish a certain identity in order to satisfy others such as Whites or Black men (Jones 2004:7). Although the Black female identity can shift, it is still subject to ‘othering’ and social control by media images.

THE GLOBAL MEDIA AND STUDY ABROAD

The Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) states that globalization has led to the "internationally integrated production and consumption of goods, cultural products, and services in which local and national identities are challenged. More individuals are transnationally mobile and even larger numbers of people are globally-linked even without leaving their own localities" (AIEA 2007).

Globalization has made it so that ideas can flow more easily and quickly (Appadurai 1996:32). The flows of ideas and images created by the United States accounts for the "Americanization" of many locations such as Brazil, Spain, Kenya, and Mexico. Ideas such as the American beauty standard are all over the world and are conflicting with other cultural groups ideas of beauty such as those of Black women in the United States. These ideas are perpetuated through television, cinema and video technology and created by the intricate and overlapping set of Eurocolonial worlds (first Spanish and Portuguese, later English, French, and Dutch) that have set the basis for the traffic of ideas and images throughout the world, blurring the lines between realistic and fictional realities (Appadurai 1996).

This global reality is also caused by the increased intercultural exposure as a result of the increased popularity and number of study abroad and exchange programs in high schools and colleges (Thomlison 1991). Universities and organizations such as the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) and the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) are encouraging people especially college students to travel, work and study abroad.

Study abroad offices are selling their programs to students by promising that the cross cultural experience will broaden their international and intercultural awareness (Dolby

2004:150). Since globalization heightens the demand for international competence, international exposure is a necessity for students that desire to enter into the professional field after college. In order to create this global perspective, one will need to broaden their world scope which can be accomplished through studying abroad. Traditional experiences such as study abroad, are growing rapidly, while at the same time being re-evaluated (AIEA 2007).

As more people travel and students study abroad, they are being exposed to other worldviews and cultures. As many Black women go abroad, they will be exposed to how others view their racial identity. Attitudes towards Black women's hair, Black women's hair-styling practices, and their own complex and often ambiguous attitudes reveal the cultural scripting of Black female bodies, as well as efforts to transcend or defy this cultural scripting. The act of participating in a study abroad program for Black women situates them in place where their perception of self may differ from others' perceptions of Black women provided by the American media. As a result of the global flows of ideas, "more persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms" (Appadurai 1996:32). These mass media images from the U.S. have impacted how people in other countries view Black women from the U.S.

The experiences of Black women who have studied abroad are important because of the ways in which place and situation create particular responses to hair – both of these are directed at women in different cultural contexts, and as their responses to being "marked" in distinctive ways. Study abroad leads to the crossing of boundaries and the transformation of cultural scripts about hair as a signifier of black female bodies; it is therefore important to an exploration of how identities shift and transform in relation to shifting social contexts.

CREATION OF THE BLACK BEAUTY CULTURE

Africa and hair

Although hair is important to women in many cultures in different contexts it has been particularly meaningful to women of African descent because it has been "displayed as beautiful and decadent and used to display culture, beauty and spirituality" (Rosado 2004: 60). Hair has always been an important site of symbolic meaning. In the African Diaspora, "hair is even more important than skin color and language" (Rosado 2004: 60). Hair has always been important to African women because it has been used as a vehicle to express their creativity, personalities and social status.

Hair has been a determinant of a person's personality and lifestyle. Many scholars have agreed that hair can be a reflection of a person's political affiliation, social status, and sexuality (Rosado 2004: 61). Others such as Morrow, state that hairstyles are symbolic of age, occupation, clan and status (Banks 2000:7). In Africa, hair styles have been used to communicate marital status, age, religion, ethnicity, wealth and geographical origins (Rosado 2004: 60; Byrd and Tharps 2001:2).

In the early fifteenth century, hair functioned as a carrier of symbolic messages in most West African societies. Hair was an integral part of the language system in which different styles had strong social significances. For example in some cultures, a person's surname could be indicated through their specific hairstyles such as the Kuroma people of Nigeria who shaved their head with a single "tuft" left on top (Bryd and Tharps 2001:3). The hairstyles were often "elaborate works of art, showcasing braids, plaits, patterns shaved into the scalp, any combination of shells, flowers, beads, or strips of material woven into the hair" (Bryd and Tharps 2001:9).

400 years without a comb

Willie Morrow illustrated how people from Africa were forced to leave their homeland and stripped of their culture by being made to leave behind their belongings, including hair utensils (Morrow 1973). By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese began trading human cargo in North America, South America and the Caribbean. The Europeans began to exploit the West African city-states and for nearly four hundred years and an estimated twenty million Africans were captured and sold to European and Arabian slave traders (Bryd and Tharps 2001:10). The Africans endured foul, disgusting and inhumane conditions aboard ships during the Middle Passage which affected their mind and bodies (Peterson-Lewis 1993 cited in Wade 2006:2). Given the importance of hair to Africans, they were shocked by the treatment of their body and hair.

The Africans, partaking of traditions steeped in the art and science of highly specialized hair care, arrived in the western world with a scalp that was often infested with sores and hair that was matted and soiled with perspiration, blood, feces, urine and dirt (Peterson-Lewis 1993 cited in Wade 2006:2). Bryd and Tharps argue that slave traders would shave the Africans heads for what they claimed to be sanitary reasons, but really to erase the African's culture and alter the relationship between the African and his or her hair (2001:11). Given the inhumane conditions and inability to transport any of the necessary tools, the slaves had to be creative in order to upkeep their appearance (Wade 2006:2; Bryd and Tharps 2001:12, Morrow 1973).

When Africans first came to the New World, their hair grooming practices changed due to the different environment. Without the combs, herbal ointments, and palm oil used in Africa for hairdressing, those enslaved were forced to use common Western household products and equipment to achieve certain styles (Bryd and Tharps 2001:16). Cornmeal and kerosene were

used for scalp cleaners, coffee as a natural dye and butter used to condition the hair (Bryd and Tharps 2001:16). They not only had to find new ways to clean and groom their hair, but styling practices changed as a result of the hostile racist environment. Bryd and Tharp argue that the field slaves were not encouraged nor were given time to style their hair so they wore scarves to protect their heads from the sun; but for aesthetic and comfort purposes, Africans that worked in the house wore their hair similar to the White owners (2001:14). In the 1700's, the hair of slaves was undervalued and misunderstood. Their hair was described as like "wool" and compared to that of animals (Bryd and Tharps 2001:14). "White slave owners sought to pathologize African features like dark skin and kinky hair to further demoralize the slaves, especially the women" (Bryd and Tharps 2001:14).

In order to combat this, some slaves consciously refused to hide their hair, and would make "flamboyant hairstyles that beli[ed] any sense of shame or inferiority" (Bryd and Tharps 2001:16). Although Africans had difficulty maintaining their hair traditions, the meaning and significance of traditional hairstyles were not easily forgotten (Bryds and Tharp 2001:15). Thus similarities can be seen in the West African styles found today in African American communities (Wade 2006:1).

Today people of African descent in the United States identify as either African American and/or Black, still place great value on hair maintenance. Hair care rituals were a part of the complex survival strategies that Africans created during slavery and that Blacks continue to utilize today (Rodriguez 2004:64). Although all Black women in the United States do not have the same conceptions about beauty nor have the same texture of hair, hair has been a bonding experience of Black women due to its importance in the African culture. Regular hair care rituals of washing, drying, straightening or braiding are performed by Black women in the United States

today (Rodriguez 2004: 64). Hair can be viewed in terms of a rite of passage…signaling an entry into womanhood" (Wade 2006:1). Banks argues that hair is the basic, "natural symbol of the things people want to be…and it's social-cultural significance should not be underestimated" (2000:7). Although I agree that Hair is a natural feature, it is the cultural connotation that is associated to it, that makes it a symbol. These definitions of hair reveal the complex and global meaning of hair.

THE "BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL" MOVEMENT

In the mid-sixties, Black hair in the United States underwent its biggest change since Africans arrived in America (Bryd and Tharps 2001:51). Hair came to symbolize either a continued move toward integration in the American political system or a growing cry for Black power and nationalism. The "Black is Beautiful" movement taught Blacks that they needed a true sense of self and "Africaness" to counter "Whiteness". The "Black is Beautiful" movement was a cultural and social movement that started in late 1960's to promote pride in Blackness-features and culture (Goering 1972:231). The movement was founded upon the importance of truth, knowledge, beauty and accentuating positive connotations of the label "Black".

Some of the most prominent leaders of this movement, the Black Panthers, realized that Blacks were a minority living in a White society who needed a positive uplift. They started this "Black Power" movement to create a massive shift in the collective conscience which challenged the definition of African Americans, physically, politically, socially and stylistically (Rodriguez 2004: 64). The Black Power movement brought articulated and focused leadership to America. "It critiqued Black popular culture and demonstrated how our lives in the West had been marked by the slave trade and the dehumanizing effect of racism (Dash 2006:31). The Black liberation philosophy connotes "self-help, social and economic mobility, thrift, chastity and racial

solidarity and the accumulation of wealth after the Emancipation" (Phillips 2004:6). This movement is an essential part of the "Black is beautiful" movement in that it promoted a positive "Black" identity and self love and pride in African features (Bryd and Tharps 2001:51). As Phillips notes, the Black consciousness movement wanted to create a positive Black identity in a deeply racist society, turning the pejorative designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through the ideology of class differentiation, self-help and interdependence (Phillips 2004 cited in Gaines, 1996:3). Since many Whites considered the phrase "a beautiful Black woman" to be an oxymoron, Black Panthers promoted the idea that Black women are beautiful (Phillips 2004:6).

In the "Black is Beautiful" movement in the 1960's, hair became a key determinant in visually declaring Black Pride through embracing natural styles such as the afro and various braiding styles (Bryd and Tharp 2001:53). Although many Black women did not feel comfortable wearing their hair in these natural styles due to the racial stigma of Black hair in its natural state, the Black power/pride movement promoted the idea that Black hair in its natural state is beautiful (Phillips 2004:8; Bryd and Tharps 2001:53). Given the Eurocentric aesthetic standards that prevailed in the societies in the United States and societies of the African Diasporia, Iin order to combat these negative images and care for their Black hair, Blacks in the United States created a Black beauty culture in the early 1900's.

The Black beauty market

After two centuries in bondage, a self created system of Black hair care was created in the late 1800's with the birth of the Black hair-care boom (Bryd and Tharps 2001:16). During this time, the Black consumer market was created as a direct result of the disposable income that rising middle class Blacks had and used to buy cosmetics in order to achieve respect as the "New

Negro." "Black beauty culture in the United States emerged not only from Black women's desire to beautify their bodies but also from a need to address the socioeconomic and racial vagaries of Whiteness against their bodies" (Phillips 2004:4).

In the early 1900's, Black female community leaders and business women, Madame C.J. Walker and Ms. Anne Malone, created hair grooming practices to help with the maintenance of a healthy Black consciousness (Rodriguez 2004: 64). Unsatisfied with the products and methods available to care for and straighten Black people's hair, Anne Malone and Madame C.J. Walker created supplies and creams to help "beautify" Black hair. Malone wanted to "solve the hair problems, such as baldness and breakage, that many Black women of the time faced as a result of high-stress lifestyle, a nutritionally deficient diet, and inadequate hygiene" (Byrd and Tharps 2001:31). In order to do so, Malone created a product that she claimed would make Blacks hair grow and Walker fashioned a straightening method "shampoo-press-and-curl".

In the 1930's, when popular advertisements promoted beauty through skin bleaching, Malone encouraged women to "see themselves as African first" (Phillips 2004:8) Malone patented, manufactured and distributed beauty products under the name of "PORO" (Phillips 2004:4). Which is Mende a West African word meaning "devotional society" (Byrd and Tharps 2001:32). Byrd and Tharps find it interesting that Malone would name her products an African term when at the time Blacks in the United States were not looking for connections to Africa. Although Malone was trying to produce a company that was pro-Black, Bryd and Tharps argue that it was a contradiction that plays throughout the modern history of Black hair in which Black people would consider beautifying Black hair through making their hair appear "whiter" (Byrd and Tharps 2001:31).

Regardless of what the critics say, Malone helped herself and other Black women to socially and financially move up through creating a manufacturing hair-product firm and a beauty college specifically for Black women in which they sold products (Phillips 2004:4, Byrd and Tharps 2001:31). Although she reached her goal of enhancing the status of Black women and uplifting the Black community through her financial contributions, she only partially responded to the stigmatization and racism that was placed on hair associated with African descent. Malone endeavored to counteract white hegemony by encouraging Black women to view themselves as beautiful. Although hair straightening is a style choice for Black women in the United States, self hatred and assimilation are still very much a part of the reason that many Black people straightened their hair in the early 1900's and continue to do so today.

This is only one example of the many ways that Black people in the 1900's created a health and beauty consciousness through their hair. Today there are many different hair and beauty salons that tailor to the beauty needs and desires of Black people all over the United States. Atlanta along with other major cities including Detroit and Chicago are amongst the leaders in the Black hair care movement. In August of 2007, Atlanta hosted the Bronner Brother hair show, one of the most popular and largest public sessions on Black hair maintenance and displays of hairstyles. Black women spend over thousands of dollars and many hours on beautifying their hair in order to achieve social acceptance (Byrd and Solomon 2005:39).

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND HAIRSTYLES

Different hair styles were popular during different times. In the 1800's cornrows and plaits were very popular and in the late 1960's and early 70's, the afro and natural styles became popular with the "Black is Beautiful" and Black Power movements. The aesthetics of these different styles indicated class status, racial identity and gender. There was a diverse range of

meanings that African American women in the United States attached to their hair as a signifier of personhood (Jackson 2001: 135). The many ways that Black people wear their hair is a reflection of the personality and often a political statement. There were various choices of hairstyles for African Americans such as: dreadlocked, natural, curled, faded, braided, twisted, straightened, permed, crimped and cornrowed (Lester 2000:202). Although these styles are popular amongst Black women in the United States, the practice of 'straightening' the hair is highly contested in the Black community as an appropriate style option.

Straightening

The matter of straightened versus natural hair may have been an ideological or political issue for Black civic and political leaders and a symbol of success and opportunity for the elite (Byrd and Tharps 2001:44). Although Black leaders were in favor of the increased attention to grooming and appearance in the fight for social acceptance, many denounced hair straightening as an acceptable choice. They found it to be a pitiful attempt to emulate Whites and attributed their hair straightening to self-hatred and shame of their Black features (Byrd and Tharps 2001:37; Dash 2006:31). Even today, hair straightening practices have been thought to be an indication of racial self-hatred contradictory to Blackness (Jackson 2001:135).

"Conking" as a trend style from the early to mid-20th century was bitterly opposed by some members of the Black community for the message it conveyed about internalized diasporic inferiority. Conking was a chemical means of straightening African hair that became fashionable among Black entertainers such as Malcolm X, Nat King Cole, Fats Domino, and Josephine Baker (Dash 2006:30). The issue that many Black people had with chemical straightening was that the process was painful. The lye used in the treatment burns and even blisters the scalp (Dash 2006:30). Other scholars themselves felt that hair straightening is a sign of docility and

ritual of humiliation because of the painful acts of applying the chemicals to the hair and scalp (Badillo 2001:36).

In 1992, Spike Lee directed and Denzel Washington starred in the movie Malcolm X, which was a portrayal of the Black Nationalist. In his early life, Malcolm X was a pimp and Harlem hustler who was sentenced to prison for burglary. In one scene, Malcolm was "conking" his hair in the bathroom and was approached by a jail mate about the dangers and negative implications of chemicals for Black people. Although hair straightening was thought to be an act of self-hatred, many social scientists have found different interpretation of the straightening ritual. For example, Byrd and Tharps stated that anthropologists, Shane and Graham White, contend that hair straightening is just one of a long list of styling options for Black people and should not be viewed as an unconscious attempt to assimilate, but rather as a creative styling option (2001:40). Others also disagree that "conking" was an attempt to try to look "White." Craig argues, "straightening the hair rarely mirrored the looks of white counterparts… the self-hatred or the 'desire to be white' interpretation misses the various meaning that black people assign to straightened hair" (Banks 2000:10).

The many issues that some Black scholars and people have is not with the act of straightening but the way the hair is straightened. Black people have straightened their hair through chemicals such as relaxers, perms and texturizers and utensils such as hot/pressing combs and flat/straigteining irons. According to Goering "Blacks were never strongly in favor of being white" (1972: 235). The fact that they wear different hair styles such as straightened "does not mean that they want White hair. Straightened hair is just another hair style not an emulation of Whites" (Phillips 2004:8). These two methods of perming the hair with chemicals and

straightening it with a pressing comb are two popular hair styling options today amongst Black women in the United States.

Natural

Another popular hair styling option is called 'natural'. 'Natural' hair was considered "unstraightened Black hair that was not cut close. It was a less sculpted, less maintained version of the rounded, perfectly actualized Afro" (Dash 2006:30). In the 1960's, hair became a key determinant in visually declaring Black Pride and many Black women in the United States begun embracing their "Blackness" through natural styles such as the afro and various braiding styles (Bryd and Tharp 2001:53). Although many Black women did not feel comfortable wearing their hair in these natural styles due to the racial stigma of Black hair in its natural state, the Black power/pride movement promoted the idea that Black hair in its natural state is beautiful (Phillips 2004:8; Bryd and Tharp 2001:53).

The natural state of Black hair is defined in many ways in the United States. An Atlantan hairdresser described natural hair as "hair that is in its natural condition in which texture not form should be natural[i]." Natural hair and styles are very popular in Atlanta, therefore there are many natural hair salons. The stylist described natural hair as "no chemical that alters natural curl pattern" She said that, women can have "physical changes" such as color and use straightening techniques such as pressing and flat ironing and still be natural. Women who do not have natural hairstyles use chemicals that alter their natural curl pattern through perms, texturizers and jerri curls. Although most Black women do not wear their hair in the original state, they still wear natural hairstyles, meaning that they create cultural hairstyles that do not require heat and therefore do not alter the natural curl pattern. These styles include the afro and dredlocks which are not originally natural in that they are controlled hairstyles.

The Afro hairstyle was adopted by Afro-Americans as an outward affirmation of an empowering sense of black pride. Afros were one of the ways that unstraightened/"nappy" hair was celebrated and worn. The Afro is a style that draws on qualities intrinsic to curly African hair such as the coil of the hair and its capacity to grow in a thick mass (Dash 2006:30). Another popular natural style was dredlocks. This type of Rastafarian hairstyling came to prominence with the success of Bob Marley, a Rastafarian and wearer of dredlocks. The Rastafarian style of locking Black hair is a signifier of their view of the natural state of African physical and cultural attributes as beautiful. The word *dredlocks* signifies unholy people's fear of the dreadful power of the holy (Byrd & Tharps 2001:125 cited in Dash 2006:30). This meaning has come to be embraced by many Blacks in the United States as a unique styling technique that can only be properly utilized by African people. Although this style is pridefully embraced by many people of African ancestry, many Whites in the United States view dredlocks as unprofessional or undesirable (Lester 2000:201).

THE STANDARD OF BEAUTY

Thru media images perpetuated through magazines and the cosmetic industry, Black women have traditionally been defined as sexual, rather than beautiful (Caldwell 2004:21). This view was created during slavery when White slave owners sought to demean African features like dark skin and kinky hair to further demoralize the slaves, especially women (Bryd and Tharp 2001:14). This culture of White beauty attacked Blackness and the Black sense of beauty (Phillips 2004:4). In the 1700's, Black hair was described as "wool" and compared to animals (Bryd and Tharp 2001:14). Blacks have felt like outcasts because of the way the media has portrayed them. In the 1920's, newspaper advertisements constantly condemned the "Blackness" of Black women's skin (Phillips 2004:8). Black women also suffered attacks on

their sense of beauty, Blackness and self esteem by the cosmetic companies and White standard of beauty.

The White western view of beauty is known throughout the world. The blue-eyed, blonde, thin White women could not be considered beautiful without being compared to the Black women with classical African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair (Collins 2000:79). This view is exclusionary and racist, but provides insight into the intersection of race, gender, class and power through the standard of beauty (Caldwell 2004:18). The beauty standard has created dichotomies as binary opposites to distinguish African features from European features such as kinky and straight, long and short, dark and light , good and bad (Johnson 2004:65).

The beauty myths

Naomi Wolf, the author of the popular book, *The Beauty Myth*, states that the "beauty myth is a political weapon used to exert control over western women and that the value of what is and is not beautiful is an instrument of control and of disqualification" (Wolf 2002, cited in Badillo 2001:37). Consequently, western women are made to internalize ideas about beauty and aspire to unrealistic standards of beauty. Beauty has been constructed to favor those in power-Whites and has created an industry that is tailored around their physical features. Hair plays such an important role in our society because it is a valued physical characteristic and this value is portrayed through teen magazines, television shows and music videos that have made hair an important part of fashion and beauty (Wolf 2002:25).

Since most of the beautifying products and ideas about beauty are sold to young women, physical beauty has been an important goal for them. Women have been socialized to believe the myth that beautifying their body should be a priority in order to 'make it' in society.

In this sense, physical beauty denotes European features such as long, straight hair, a porcelain skin tone and a thin frame (Goering 1972:235). The Eurocentric notions of beauty are highly displayed as the ideal beauty that even Whites cannot attain. Although the media in the United States has created a notion that the body frames and hair textures of "Black" and "'White" women are completely different, there is no specific racialized physical features. Although women of African descent in the United States do tend to have a more curvaceous frame and curlier hair than White women in the United States, Black features cannot be essentualized. The goal of physical beauty can be reached by women through beautifying their hair. Although hair is important to men and women, physical beauty is more desired by and demanded of women in the West. The women in the United States are socialized to believe socio-cultural myths that place great importance on hair that adheres to gender and racial norms.

Marker of femininity

For women in the United States, hair is a marker of femininity. According to Banks, hair has always been an important physical attribute for women because it is very visible and public (2000:12). Hair has meaning everywhere but the values placed on it are different. As for western women, hair has become a part of their identity. Its importance has created a space in the world that women mostly occupy. Jones argues that the world of hair is a female domain that many men do not understand (1981:276). The amount of importance that the American society places on beauty for women, can affect their life chances such as job opportunities and marriage. Johnson has noted that hair carries serious weight in relationships with the opposite sex which causes women to believe their external features are more important than internal qualities (2004:66). As a result, women in the United States begin to invest in beauty products and spend a lot of money on 'getting their hair done', often make financial commitments in

which they spend $300-1,200 on their hair monthly (Rosado 2004: 60). It has also been duly noted that a woman's worth and beauty often comes from her hair (Badillo 2001:36) with Black women in America buying into the myth that they have to consume in order to attain the standard of beauty.

This unattainable Eurocentric standard of beauty is used by the cosmetic industry and fashion magazines to encourage all women influenced by westernized ideas of beauty that they need to indulge in consumer capitalism in order to feel good about themselves. Visual images are powerful in their promotion of an ideal female beauty through the material realm of consumer culture. Over one million copies of magazines such as *Vogue, Cosmopolitan, and Glamour*, are circulated by advertising which targets western women as the primary consumer in both modern and postmodern society (Barthel 1988 cited in Blair 1994:6).The companies capitalize on making women feel that they never look good enough. In doing this, the female is both an object and commodity of the male and female gaze in which women are the sexual fantasy of men and subject of critique and criticism of women. The female gaze can also be empowering through film and printing industry in that women can define and refine themselves as more women are becoming produces of the image of the "woman" (Blair1994:4). Although the pressures on black and white women are different due to cultural/racial differences, they are similar in that they are socialized to believe that they can never consume enough and that they will never be pretty enough. Even within the Black community in the United States the idea of beauty is subjective due to socialized local cultural/social beliefs.

Good and bad hair

The idea that there is such a thing as "good" and "bad" hair is a beauty myth. This beauty "myth has created limited and false images of women to women" (Wolf 2002:55). Focusing on

the hair aspect, straight hair has been promoted as the standard. In the fashion world, straight hair is assigned the highest value (Jones 1981: 30, 280). Some women feel pressured to purchase weaves/extensions in order to get long and straight hair and the most expensive hair to buy is the "French refined" or "European" hair (Jones 1981: 30, 274).

The idea of "good" and "bad" hair was created during the colonial era, therefore the concept of "good" and "bad" hair can be found throughout the African Diaspora. What is considered "good" and "bad" hair is determined by texture, length, and curl pattern and associated with race (Rosado 2004: 61). "Good" hair is perceived as the hair closest to white people's hair—long, straight, silky, bouncy, manageable, healthy, and shiny; while "bad" hair is short, matted, kinky, nappy, coarse, brittle and wooly" (Lester 2000:202; Rosado 2004: 61). The definitions of "good" and "bad" hair are a result of the favoring of lighter skinned slaves due to their physical resemblance to Whites (Bryd and Tharps 2001:16). As a result of racial mixing in America, those with lighter, whiter skin were considered to have "good" hair because their complexion and features resembled the slave masters (Lester 2000:202). "As the lighter-skinned, straighter-haired slaves- men and women- continued to carry favor with the Whites in power, a skin-shade, hair-texture hierarchy developed within the social structure of the slave community" (Bryd and Tharps 2001:19). Therefore, lighter skin and finer hair meant free status for slaves or a lighter labor load. The color complex within the African American community began with the favor of light skinned over dark skinned slaves (Russell 1992:11). The politics of hair parallels the politics of skin color.

"Black hair" and "White hair" are not types of hair but rather the texture of hair that has been racially contextualized. There are cultural associations to certain textures about ideas of Blackness and Whiteness. Since race does not predetermine a specific texture of hair, all people

have different textures of hair regardless of race. The association of bad hair with “Blacks” and good hair with “Whites” is a Eurocentric ideal stemming from slavery that placed social status on hair in the United States. In the United States as well as many countries such as Brazil, the concept of bad hair is associated with individuals who have Black or African ancestry (Caldwell 2004:18). ‘Bad’ hair was considered as something that should not be touched, lacking of and skimpy (Banks 2000:31).

In the two Black films, *400 year without a Comb* and *School Daze*, Willie Morrow and Spike Lee respectively discuss the internalization of self hatred of black features and the creation of the division in the Black community. Morrow shows how the favoring of the mixed children of slave women and masters created jealousy and envy between the light and dark skinned slaves (house and field slave). Spike Lee shows how this internalized self hatred created during slavery still exists in the mindsets of African American communities today. In the movie, Lee created two groups, the light skinned sorority called Gamma Rays and the Afrocentric dark skinned freedom fighter women. In order to bring light to the negative connotations of terms “good” and “bad” hair, he had these two groups sing a song called “Straight and Nappy”. The dark skinned women were called “jig a boo” and the light skinned “wanna-be’s.” In this artistic, comedic satire, Lee was able to articulate how hair has been used as a racial marker in the Black community in the United States.

Racial markers

Racial characteristics including hair type came to be associated with the arbitrary categories that were put forth during colonialism. “Biological evidence shows that the independent assortment of traits and racial features do not correspond to one or another race”

(Badillo 2006:35). There is more diversity within a ‘race’ than between them. The Black community alone has a wide variety of skin complexions, hair textures and facial differences.

Lewis R. Gordon's (1997) work on anti-Blackness provides significant insights into these processes. Gordon argues,

> In an anti-black world, race is only designated by those who signify racial identification. A clue to that identification is the notion of being colored. Not being colored signifies being white, and, as a consequence, being raceless, whereas being colored signifies being a race. Thus, although the human race is normatively white, racialized human beings, in other words, a subspecies of humanity, are nonwhite.... In effect, then, in the antiblack world there is but one race, and that race is black. Thus to be racialized is to be pushed "down" toward blackness, and to be deracialized is to be pushed "up" toward whiteness.
> (Gordon 1997:76 cited in Caldwell 2004:22)

Black identity was created in order to normalize Whiteness and ‘other’ Blackness. The body was used as a marker of ‘racial’ difference and a concrete sign of ‘racial’ superiority or inferiority (Nuttall 2000). Body parts such as hair were marked with racial inferiority as well. The hair of Black subjects was used as a symbol of their supposed degenerate, simple or savage presence (Dash 2006:28). Since hair was used as a justification of the subordination of Africans, curly and kinky hair immediately became a badge of racial inferiority (Banks 2000:7). The wooly hair of African slaves was deemed to represent a symbol of rebelliousness and therefore regarded them as inferior and dangerous (Jackson 2001:135). Curly hair has then become a symbolic weight and a social stigma for Blacks in the United States.

People all over the world have used hair as a way to racially categorize people and hair has served as “evidence” of a person’s race. For example Jones was often judged as being Black because her hair was curly (Jones 1981:29). Another woman recalled being called ‘bad’ by her family because she had ‘bad hair’ (Badillo 2001:35). Women’s bodies reflect popular attitudes about beauty that are riddled with racial undertones (Badillo 2001:36).

Practices of racialization center on categorizing individuals into bipolar categories of "Whiteness" and "Blackness". "These practices of racialization reflect a decidedly anti-Black bias, which privileges Whiteness as an unmarked and universal identity" (Caldwell 2004:22). Dalton argues that most White people do not see themselves in racial terms, therefore Whiteness has little meaning itself but only in relation to other races such as Black (Dalton,15 cited in Rothenberg 2005:15). Shone defines Whiteness as "the everyday, invisible, subtle, cultural and social practices, ideas and codes that discursively secure the power and privilege of European Americans, but that strategically remain unmarked, unnamed, and unmapped in contemporary society (1994:503). Some Whites in the United States have used the lens of Whiteness to privilege themselves enough to not see race, nor see themselves as racial or view racial incidents and the experiences of people of color as important, sensitive, rational or validated.

Whites in the United States believe in their ability to be colorblind and not see color or race in itself is a privilege that can only be held and attributed by their Whiteness. Many scholars such as, McIntosh, define white privilege as unearned privileges that people with white skin or those that can visibly identify as white have that puts them at an advantage. She also describes white privilege as "an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blankchecks." (McIntosh 1988)

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

Beauty functions as a particularly dense transfer point for relations of power (Nuttall 2000: 342). Beauty has been socially constructed to favor White features such as straight hair; thus this social preference for White hair has given power to those with straight hair. Those with straight hair or "White" hair are given access to certain valuable societies and social groups that deem this type of hair as a symbol of upper class status. "Good hair is a code word for

Caucasian or straight…. [H]aving good hair meant" having "more social capital… Bad hair is… a code word for African or kinky hair… which meant you had less social capital (Rosado 2004: 61). In this way, social capital is a key resource in which privilege is conferred. Women in the United States have been able to access social capital through their hair. Hair styles or hair that is associated with those of African descent is considered less desirable. Perms, weaves/extension and braids are consistently ranked as conservative and professional while natural styles such as dreadlocks, twists and knots were viewed as liberal. Deeming straight hair as good and course hair as bad, creates a racial hierarchy amongst different kinds of hair (Rosado 2004: 62). The privilege awarded to Blacks with "good" hair disempowers the multitextured and different hair textures of Black women. They are then at a distinct disadvantage because of its inequality.

Black women with straight hair can change their racial and class identity. The ideology of the aesthetic is a discourse of power, one that has played a far from negligible part in the consolidation of the bourgeoisie and its accrual of cultural capitol (Nuttall 2000:346). Hair serves as cultural capitol in which people with "good" hair have access to certain knowledge and skills. Cultural Gatekeepers are persons who define and create rules of inclusion and exclusion of certain groups of persons (Laureu and Horvat 1999:37). Gatekeepers such as employers for example, use criteria such as hair styles, to judge potential employees as capable, and "acceptable" for employment. As such, hair has the power to create and limit social and cultural mobility for Black women because it affects their perceived racial identity.

Beautifying hair according to the western standards of beauty, has benefits for women in the United States. Although the concept of beauty is relative and what is considered 'beautiful' in one community may not be considered elsewhere, even in the United States; the western standard of beauty has benefits for women who are measured by this standard. Being "beautiful"

allows for many opportunities and alleviates some stressors. Women are able to access social capital through their hair and certain women are socially rewarded for having straight hair, as it is connected with the dominant culture which translates into power and resources.

RESISTANCE TO THE BEAUTY MYTHS

Society in the U.S. has tried to police the manner in which Black people wear and alter their hair (Wade 2006:1). Byrd and Tharps developed the term "visual conformity" that described how Blacks had to shape their hair in ways to be presentable in White world (Rodriguez 2004: 64). All Black people did not conform but in the 1960's many were still confused on how to feel about their hair. They were unsure of how to respond because kinky hair in Africa served a positive personal and social function but in America caused emotional pain out of need to conform to White standards (Rodriguez 2004: 64). Although Black beauty today is still subject to negative images, Black women have found ways to resist these negative portrayals.

Resistance is loosely defined. Weitz suggests scholars such Stombler and Padavic (1997) and Scott (1990) have created different ways to measure resistance. One suggestion is to look at "the actor's assessment of their intent" and another suggests that only "actions that reject subordination" are resistance (Weitz 2001:664). Weitz suggests that these scholars not only look at how people reject subordination but also if or how they challenge the ideologies that support that subordination (2001:670). Weitz definition of resistance is helpful because it looks at people who resist against some form of domination and the actual ideology behind their resistance.

Black women have fought against negative ideologies about Black female beauty through the Black beauty culture. "Black women used beauty culture to sustain self worth, affirm their beauty and ensure their economic well-being" (Phillips 2004:4). The Black beauty culture

worked as a resistive and transformative cultural agent. Although there has been a generally negative discourse in regard to Black bodies (globally but of course especially in the US), Black women have resisted being contained/ stereotyped, and policed. Black hair itself is a symbol of resistance to oppression (Dash 2006:27).

Black women resist being 'othered' by confronting negative controlling images of Black womanhood (Collins 2000:79). Women wear their hair in certain styles that they find to be empowering (Wade 2006:1). The 1960's afro served as an expression of rebellion (Bryd and Tharps 2001:55). Bryd and Tharps found that some Black women who quit straightening their hair said that "I feel free, you break the chain that you used to carry in your head before" and feel that the act of not straightening their hair is an affirmation, a symbolic act of going over to the other faction (2001:55).

Authors who view women's resistance suggest that "we cannot understand the nature of power, accommodation, and resistance in women's lives without looking at women's daily bodily disciplines of femininity (Weitz 2001:668). Some women in the United States resist by adopting nontraditional or traditional gendered hairstyles. Traditional hairstyles are hair styles that comply with mainstream ideas about attractiveness (Weitz 2001:671). On the other hand, women using nontraditional methods seek power through wearing their hair in styles that do not comply with ideas about attractiveness in society for women. Hair styles such as short "butch, boyish" or dreadlocks challenge the ideologies that women's worth depends on looking as Euro-American as possible (Weitz 2001:670). This is good because it broadens the definition of attractiveness by embracing difference. "Women's rebellious hairstyles can allow them to distance themselves from the system that would subordinate them, to express their dissatisfaction, to identify like-minded others, and to challenge others to think about their own

actions and beliefs (Weitz 2001:670). Although thee was a “Black is Beautiful” movement and women resist to cultural norms about beauty, racialized ideas about hair still exists. The act of not straightening curly hair was considered to be rebellious (Badillo 2001:36). Nuttall states that Black hair styling and beauty is political (2000:342). Kelley states that for Black women, more so than black men, going ‘natural’ was a conscious rebellion against the standards of female beauty not just a valorization of Blackness (Banks 2000:9). Today, Black women use natural styles to feel beautiful as women and as Black.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS, METHODOLOGIES AND ETHICS

PARTICIPANTS

When pondering on my topic of research, I had to decide who I wanted to study. I decided that the people I would study would be Black women, including African-American and African women living in the U.S. The criteria for participating in this study was to self identify as “Black”, a “woman” and have participated in a study abroad program in a college/university in the state of Georgia. Since I am investigating Black women that have participated in a study abroad program in Georgia, all of my participants lived in Atlanta and were either current or past university students. I chose to study Black women who have studied abroad initially to investigate racial identity abroad but in discussing issues with friends and other study abroad participants, I became interested in hair as it related to beauty and identity.

Study abroad allows people to directly explore the concepts of intersectionaily and positionality i.e. the shifting states of identity. College students in the U.S. such as Black American women who have been socialized with American ideologies about their hair (race, gender, class ideologies), are temporarily placed in a foreign country through study abroad. It is important to investigate how these women's experiences with their hair weas impacted by their time in these countries even though they only traveled there for a short period of time and further, how they were perceived in these contexts by the local population. Throughout this paper, I will refer to them as participants. Feminists and anthropologists prefer to identify those who partake in the study as participants rather than subjects (Reinharz 1992:18). It is important to choose language that will oppose the subject/researcher dichotomy in order to break down social hierarchies. Regardless of my interpretation of their identity, I wanted to give them the

chance to identify themselves in order to make them active agents in their construction of self identification. (Appendix C, Table 1.1).

Racial and ethnic background

Most of the women identified as Black and refered to themselves as Black women during the interview, which was partially because I told them it was a study on Black women and in my questions refered to them as Black women. Nine of the women identified as Black, four as African American, one as Afro-Trinidadian/Afro-Caribbean, two a bi-racial (Black Hispanic and black Mexican), one as African American and Black, one as African, one did not want to racially identify but if she had to would choose African American and the other defined herself as a human.

Many of the women could not identify ethnically or just used Black, partially because they did not understand the term. When I asked the women about how they self-identified in terms of ethnicity, they would look puzzled. This idea of ethnicity is discussed later. Two could not give an answer and were confused by the meaning of the term, three said “Black”, one said “Black?”, four “African American”, two “Black American”, one responded “United States.” The other participants that gave an ethnic background, meaning that their parents were born outside the United states, had ease answering the question. They claimed: African (Nigerian), Jamaican American, Haitian, White/Black, Jamaican, Black/Hispanic, Afro-Trinidadian/Afro-Caribbean, Black/Panamanian Hispanic. They all are women of African descent that live in the United States that identify socially with the meaning of “Black”.

Educational background

All of the women were in colleges or college graduates of schools in Atlanta including Clark Atlanta University, Spelman College, Emory University, The Georgia Institute of

Technology (Georgia Tech) and Georgia State University. The majority of the participants were Georgia State students because I had access to many of these students via the study abroad office and prior personal relationships I had with certain participants. I utilized the snowballing technique to gain this sample. Thirteen people went to Georgia State, three Georgia Tech, one Emory and one Clark and two Spelman. Eleven were undergraduates (junior/senior status), six were graduates with their BA, one was a graduate with her BA and MA and two were currently in graduate school. Fifteen were/are majoring in the social sciences and the other five major/ed in computer science or business fields.

Age

Fifteen of the participants were between the ages of 21 and 23. The others were 24, 25, 26 and 39. This was the expected age pool due the fact that I was interviewing mainly undergraduate students. Since the population for this project is college students, all of the women are over the age of 18.

Hair type and skin color

The participants described their hair by texture, color, length and style. When asked to state their skin color they would all look at their arm and all answered shades of brown. In terms of skin color, six identified their skin color as brown and two said Chocolate/dark-skin. Other answers varied, for example as brown/caramello, tan, black, golden brown, tan/light-brown skin/fair skin, two- dark-brown, chocolate brown, medium brown, dark ebony, dark brown like coffee beans and red brown.

In terms of hair, two said “Multi-textured”, two said “dreads”, and other described their hair in various ways such as course, “tightly” curled, three thick, thin, very curly, three natural, curly, relaxed, straight, nappy/kinky, “kinky”, different, wavy curly, wavy, black and 3b4a. One

of the participants is a hairdresser so she described her hair using jargon that is used in the hair industry. 3b4a the way she classified her hair type and described her texture. Many of the participants had their own way of describing their hair and touched their hair as they were describing it. They also would describe my hair and discuss how my hair looked. The variety in these answers to skin color and hair description stem from the great variation that exists in Black hair and skin color and our need to reinvent and reclaim and rename ourselves.

Study abroad location

Four of the participants went to Brazil, two went to Central America-Guatemala, two went to parts in Mexico (Guadalajara and Guanajuato) and two went to Japan. The others went to: Sydney, Australia, Barbados, East Africa-Kenya, England, Dominican Republic, Malaysia and Singapore, South Africa-partly Johannesburg, Ecuador, India-mainly Chennai and Spain.

TRUTH CLAIMS

In the beginning stages of this project, I had to conceptualize how I wanted to present and analyze my data. I questioned, “How to acquire knowledge?, What knowledge am I trying to acquire and whose? And “What is the ‘truth’? ” I am comfortable in my realization that this will be a lifelong journey and that knowledge is sought through many forms from different people throughout my lifetime. Since I did not have a lifetime for this research, I settled with acquiring mixed/partial/temporary and multiple truths from myself and my participants. It has to be understood that people grow and their opinions change due to the situation- time questions are being asked, how I looked that day, where the conversations took place, how that person was feeling that day. Basically, views changes as people change which can be gradually or abruptly. Someone’s truth today does not necessarily remain their truth the next day. There is no ultimate truth with a capital T, yet a multiplicity of ‘truths’ (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:55).

The feminist method of believing what the participants say as the 'truth', helped me to understand the importance of believing my participants to disclose 'the truth' (Reinharz 1992:28). I decided to take what my participants said as their truths for that time in their lives, a kind of momentary truth. Since I acknowledge that communication is difficult, due people's inability to wholly communicate their viewpoints, I will not quote these women verbatim. Instead I chose to paraphrase their thoughts using certain words they used about their experiences. This issue with quoting directly is that it would be claiming that I am accurately portraying their thoughts exactly and that their ideas are stagnant and unchanging. Although I thought paraphrasing was a better method than using direct quotations, Maria disagreed. She felt that although she understood my point, the use of quotation marks when citing the thoughts of participants still will imply to the reader that it is the exact words of the participant which misrepresents the participant. Knowing this method and my interpretations are imperfect, I attempted to attain "truth" by allowing the participants to see my work, which I later discuss.

In asking my participants for their "truth" or perceptions of their experience abroad as it relates to identity, I asked myself and was asked by the participants the same questions. They were curious about my experience abroad as well as my experiences with my journey to natural hair. I found myself the focus of inquiry which caused me to ponder on these truths that I was looking for from Black women. I found that the idea of an objective observer is a myth because the knowledge I attained is relative to particular ways of thinking and how I organized and attached meaning to them (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:55).

I could not separate myself from my research nor could I objectively receive information from them without adding my own interpretation of their interpretation of their reality. As a researcher, especially as a Black female researcher, my participants viewed me under an

"intraracial microscope" (Jackson 2001:136). I realized that as I studied my participants, they observed me as well. Their interpretations of my identity and actions affected their actions and thoughts. Just my very presence complicated the situation and affected the information the participants were going to give me. For example, my participants were interested in my identity as a Black woman, including the aesthetics of my hair. Jackson stated "as a Black female researcher, her hairstyling practices and hair texture were implemented in the interviews and focus groups she conducted – her own hair even needing to be uncovered on occasion for true ethnographic rapport to emerge between social scientist and informant" (Jackson 2001:136). They wanted to get to know me and questioned, "who was this person?" asking them these personal questions. I had to consider how they would view me depending on the hairstyles I wore and how to discuss this with them. In order to make them feel comfortable and because I wanted to expose myself to them, I found myself in deep conversation with my participants about myself and I begun to straddle the line between a participant and researcher.

Indeed I realized that although, I wanted to break the power structure between the research and the participant, I still had ultimate power because I analyzed and wrote the paper. I had to recognize my agency and power as the 'researcher' (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:57). The best choice for me was to understand that I couldn't be objective but that I could be honest about my own biases and address them instead of suppressing them. In claiming objectivity, it would state that my findings were impartial and free from personal and political biases (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:28). In order to investigate the hair and body politics of these Black women in a respectful and honest manner, I had to be sure to consider their multiple identities, understand knowledge is subjective and be self reflexive in order to uncover these temporary truths. There is no objectivity or truth, just different viewpoints (Salzman 2002).

Self-reflexivity

Many Black female social scientists such as Copeland-Carson speak highly of the importance of being self reflexive (2006:80). Although there are critics, reflexivity has been called a "good thing" in anthropology (Salzman 2002:805). Since the term is used in different disciplines, there is some disagreement on its etymology. In the 1930's, the concept of reflexivity played a major role in the social psychology of George Herbert Mead. Mead defined reflexivity as "turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself" and the process that goes on between the persons mind and self (Salzman 2002:805). Salzman says "reflexivity is thus the constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher's own contribution/influence/shaping of intersubjective research and the consequent research findings" (Salzman 2002:806). For many people this definition identifies reflexivity simply as reflection however, I found it useful.

Salzman's definition helped me to reflect on how I influenced my research by my physical presence and biases and how I should situate myself in my text. Although I was aware of my influence over the respondents' answers to my questions due to prior relationships, location of the interviews and my hair style, I still had a hard time figuring out how to include myself in the text. Although I agree with many feminists and anthropologists that self-disclosure is important and makes findings richer, I also had to consider how it would affect the relationship between myself and the participants (Reinharz 1992:27). This is something that I will continue to think about. How do you include yourself in the text without dominating the findings? Anyone reading this thesis can be the judge of how I accomplished this task in this piece of work.

Ruby suggests that in order for the researchers to understand their participants, using reflexivity will demand more than thinking (Ruby 1985:466). He believes that we, as

anthropologists, have a particular angle of vision that limits what we can learn and know about others. Our age, gender, sex, or race can influence what and how we see things (Rosaldo 2004). This view of reflexivity was helpful in that it challenged me to better understand my worldview and how it is shaped by my identity as a 24 year old, college educated, 90% heterosexual, good humored Black female from Detroit. The way I conceptualize the world, the kind of information I retained and how I viewed my participants and what they said was all shaped by my identity. In knowing this, I have to state that this interpretation of my participant's views is only a re-interpretation of my partial subjective, temporary truths. Someone else could have interviewed the same women and used the same questions but gotten different answers and results due to their difference in our identities.

Postmodernists and feminists have both agreed that reflexivity was a great way to attain knowledge about their subjects. But in academia, 'feminists' such as Margaret Mead and Elsie Clews Parsons used reflexivity and other unconventional methods prior to the emergence of postmodernism or even feminism. Mascia-Lees states that the difference between feminist and postmodernists view of reflexivity is that feminists use self-reflexivity while postmodernists use self-critique (1989:19, 21). I used the feminist approach of self-reflexivity in order to place myself inside my project and self-critique instead of just critiquing my work at its conclusion.

Self-reflexivity has proven to be useful through the work of anthropologists such as Ruth Behar and Renato Rosaldo. In Ruth Behar's book, *Translated Woman:Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* and Rosaldo's article called *Grief and Headhunters Rage*. They were able to include personal experience in their work which gave them the ability to gain a critical eye and have deeper insight into their subjects. They used reflexivity in different ways to convey their feelings, understand their subjects and explain their findings. In being self-reflexive, I located

myself as the researcher and consider how I (with my biases) influenced my research. Feminists encourage self-disclosure and I found that expressing my thoughts was a good way to put women at ease, initiate "true dialogue", and allow participants to be "co-researchers" (Reinharz 1992:33).

Also in being self-reflexive, I looked at intersectionality. Intersectionality is discovering how race, gender and class operate together to create experiences of all groups. It helps people to better understand how multiple identities are interrelated and together configure the structure of society. Intersectionality is not just about race, class and gender but about discovering how they work in correlation with other factors such as abilty, age, ethnicity and sexual orientation to frame people's lives (Anderson and Collins 2004:15).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality became popular with the study of diversity (Anderson and Collins 2004:12). In the beginning, social scientists were studying the consequences of race, gender and class inequalities but now they seek to explore how multiple identities operate together in the lives of people to affect all aspects of human life (Anderson and Collins 2004:17). Intersectionality requires an analysis and criticism of existing systems of power and privilege. In being a curious feminist, I investigated inequalities/disadvantages that women faced but also celebrated their power and privilege. Intersectionality demands more than just acknowledging different cultures and looking at difference; it is about figuring out how to create a more just society. It brings new facts and perspectives to light, puts the experience of all groups in the US into a broader context, and breaks stereotypes and reveals institutionalisms (Anderson and Collins 2004:21). I brought new perspectives to the light through revealing the complex identities and views of a group of Black women.

Intersectionality is popular with Black feminists, feminists, cultural and media study disciplines. Donna Goldstein and Patricia Hill Collins both identify interestionality as the intersections of race, gender and class amongst other identities. Intersectionality provides a great framework for my work on Black women because it encouraged me to view them as complex beings with fluid and multiple identities. It has also allowed me to blur the lines and deconstruct what I or society believes a Black woman to be. The societal definition of Black as opposite of White is very limiting because it 'others' both communities and ignores their intra-group diversity. In the U.S., Black people have been socialized to think of themselves as the other and opposite to the norm.

Intersectionality encourages a look at discrimination and racism but also the privilege and agency of disenfranchised groups such a Black women. Black feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins in the United States has observed the dynamics of how race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect in ways that repeatedly marginalize women of African descent. The racial implication of hair and beauty on Black women should be highly investigated because of the intersections of race, gender and class. Literature about hair focuses on how race, gender, class, and sexuality affect ideas about Black women's identity and hair (Banks 2000:3).

METHODS

Methods are defined as "valid techniques for data collection and analysis" (Copeland-Carson 2006:76). I collected my data through conducting 20 interviews, 2 focus groups made up of three people each and participant observation. I conducted the interviews at locations that were convenient for the participants such as my apartment, their college campus or Georgia State University anthropology department. This allowed for a comfortable environment (Reinharz 1992:25). The average time for the interviews was an hour and the focus groups one and a half

hours. These methods helped me to get a wide range of knowledge about Black female identity and hair politics. Many authors of books such as *Hair Story* and *Hair Matters* have explored the history, style and meaning of Black hair through conducting both interviews and focus groups (Byrd and Tharps 2001:55).

Through using both methods, Banks was able to divulge and allow Black women to share their various opinions about hair textures, hairstyles, and hair care (Jackson 2001:135). Together, interviews, focus groups and participant observation allowed my participants to narrate their own stories. Feminists and anthropologists encourage the use of multiple methods. The use of multi-method research showed my commitment to thoroughness and my desire to produce multiple truths (Reinharz1992:197). Multi-methods allows for researchers to link past and present, "data gathering", action, and individual behavior with social frameworks (Reinharz 1992:198). Combining these methods allows researchers to search for understanding critical issues in women's lives such as hair (Reinharz 1992:201).

Since many times Black women are discussed in a negative or oppressive framework, I wanted to create a study and an environment in which Black women speak for themselves instead of being the subject of other's interpretations. Given the chance to speak, Black women will use their voices to speak out against and about social inequalities (Jones 2004:98). Women, especially women of color, should be allowed to use their own words to express their own feelings, thoughts and experiences. Black feminists such as Barbara Christian, bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins argue that people of color, especially "Black" women, have always theorized (and not given credit for it) and tried to make sense of their world, so I hoped this could be a beginning the display of this task. Only with the adversity of voices, can some "truth" be achieved (Copeland-Carson 2006:64, Christian 1988: 68). Creating spaces and fostering ways

for women to speak for themselves through interviews and focus groups is one vehicle to achieve the 'truth'. By 'truth' I mean I wanted the women to tell their various 'stories' or 'narratives' of their experiences.

Interviews

In deciding to use interviews as my method for collecting data on Black women and hair, I realized that I needed a definition of an interview. An interview can be classified as a conversation where the researcher listens to what people themselves tell about their reality and actively listens as they express their thoughts (Kvale 1996:1). Interviews will help the interviewer to understand the world from the interviewee's point of view and to uncover the meaning of people's experience (Kvale 1996:1).

Another way to describe an interview is like a construction site where knowledge is produced. The interview is "literally an *inter view"*, an exchange of words and viewpoints between two persons conversing about one topic or theme (Kvale 1996:1). In viewing an interview like a conversation, a research interview is more structured than a daily conversation because of the researcher's awareness of question forms, dynamics of relationship between the researcher and interviewee and critical attention to what is said (Kvale 1996:20). In order to conduct this type of interview, it must consist of open-ended questions.

I choose to conduct my interviews in a conversation-like style by creating an unstructured and semi-structured environment and questioning technique. I choose this feminist style because it allowed free interaction between myself and the participant by having a semi-structured interview guide. I had sixteen questions that I used to navigate me through the conversation which gave me flexibility in how and when I asked certain questions. This created in-depth interviews, which are open-ended interviews that follow a general script and cover a list

of various topics (Bernard 2002:203). Open-ended interviews were beneficial for my project in that they allowed the participants to giver intensive and in-depth answers to my questions (Reinharz 1992:18). This style allowed me to cover a range of issues and therefore gain rich data that allowed me to generate theory and attain a specific view of reality. Janice Raymonds states that it also maximizes discovery and description (Reinharz 1992:18). I was able to get the perspectives of the participants, of what Black women (including myself) think about hair and identity.

Usually Black women are 'othered' and are the subjects/objects of others interpretation, so this type of interview allowed them to speak for themselves. One way I accomplished this was by allowing my participants to choose their own pseudonyms (Reinharz 1992:20). In addition, in order to give them back some power and allow their voices to be heard, I gave all of the participants the choice of being a 'co-reseacher' (Reinharz 1992:33). Before the interviewing and as I was writing my final revisions of my thesis, I told the participants that I wanted them to critique my findings and review the accuracy of their personal stories and the general themes I created for my findings. This feminist approach allowed for mulitiple truths to be heard. I got six of my participants to review and/or read my work including Maria, Ann, Carmen, Delia, Patrice and Mary. The feedback from these respondents was insightful and enriching. For example, Maria and Delia were very helpful in critiquing my methodologies and portrayal of the participants. In having the participants be "co-researcher", I was able to correct mistakes. For example, Mary was helpful because she corrected certain words I used to describe her. Thanks to their feedback, I was able to correct certain errors and gain different perspective son my findings.

An issue with allowing the participants to review my work was that it put me in a position to be criticized. Researchers such as Banks were curious or even concerned about their

participant's perception of them (Banks 2000:164). Although I initially did not fear how I would perceived, I found it difficult to discuss my findings with them. Since I allowed them to analyze and critique how I conceptualized their views, Delia and Maria expressed some concern over my usage of quotes. They felt that I chose quotes to fit the already preconceived themes I had in my head and that my interpretations of their experiences was limited and misrepresented. Delia said that the way I heard and conceived their meanings of their experiences in some instances differed from what they meant. I explained this issue by stating that communication is difficult in itself and between my interpretations of their interpretations of their experiences; there is a chance that miscommunication and misinterpretation will occur.

Although they both enjoyed my interpretations of their reality and agreed with the way I constructed the finding, they told me to be careful how I word what they say because it affects the context in which they are portrayed. For example, Delia said that when she stated that, "when my hair is not done, I feel ugly", she really meant that she does not feel as "fly." I have to make sure to explain their quotes in order to not make their statements seem stagnant, bold and rash. As discussed earlier, Maria said I had to be aware of the vernacular I use when paraphrasing the participants which again is my interpretation. I told her that although I taped and then reviewed the interviews, the act of writing their quotes verbatim would still be subject to interpretation. Taking her suggestion into consideration, I tried to and will further work on using appropriate standard vernacular when discussing the thoughts of the participants. Since my goal is to include the participants as a part of the research, open-ended interviewing allowed them to play a great role in formulating and leading the project.

I choose opened-interviews rather than surveys, close-ended interviews or questionnaires not only because they allowed women to express their thoughts as "co-researchers" but it also

allowed them to describe certain aspects of their experiences instead of being subject to a few choices (Jackson 2001:135). It also created an intimate one-on-one dialogue (Jacobs-Huey 2004:30). Interviews create trust between the informant and researcher that cannot be reached in a group setting. This method "produces non-standardized information that allows researchers to make full use of differences amongst people" (Reinharz 1992:18,19). Unlike surveys, open-ended interviews allow access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories which is important to the study of those who often have had to categorize their feelings.

Interviews help the 'researcher' to develop a sense of connectedness with the participants and avoid alienation (Reinharz 1992:20). In order to define myself as a learner and listener, I attempted to conduct intensive interviewing (Reinharz 1992:30).

I wanted to get really deep with my interviewees but found it difficult with conducting twenty interviews. I wanted to do only ten but so many women responded and expressed their deep interest in participating in my project, I could not turn them down. In some ways, I felt like they needed the interview more than I did. For some participants such as Ruby and Vanessa, it served as a healing session that allowed them to be reflective, reflexive, open and honest about their struggles with racial identity and beauty with someone who could relate. Since I have studied abroad and am in the process of reviewing my identity as a Black women with natural hair, I was able to share my experiences with them and give them advice. The focus groups and "hair/study abroad party" were particularly helpful because these women were able to discuss these issues with other women and get a range of advice and support. Like bell hooks, I agree that "theory is a liberatory practice" in which I made sense of my own world and the world of my participants (bell hooks 1994:62). It was liberating and activist in that it was healing for myself and my participants.

Focus groups

Focus groups construct unity and expose individual as well as collective similarities and differences (Jacobs-Huey 2004:30). This method was useful in that it highlighted diversity within and across African American women's experiences and narratives. It created an opportunity to clarify and create a dialogue/discussion. It was also appealing because it created a safe environment where everyday talk and interaction could play out between myself and the participants (Jacobs-Huey 2004: 30). I had two focus groups in which three women came over to my house for a social gathering to discuss Black female body politics (in relation to hair identity) and their experiences abroad. I used the interview questions as a guide for the conversation, but opened the dialogue to questions the group wanted to discuss. A feminist view of focus groups allows sharing of ideas between the 'researcher' and 'participant'. It gave me a space to express my thoughts and participate in the conversation.

Also, since hair has been viewed as part of the scripted Black body and as a way of controlling the Black body, the focus groups allowed me to focus in on themes/shared experiences/thoughts of Black women that have studied abroad. To better understand how hair has been used as an empowerment tool for Black women, I got their testimonies. Focus groups also allowed me to see how my participants discussed identity and hair, privately (interviews) versus publically (focus group). I found that the interviews were useful in that women were more willing to reveal personal thoughts with me because they felt comfortable. I got very honest and thought provoking answers during the interviews whereas in the focus group, I got themed answers where comments were tailored by previous statements. This type of information helped me to gather themes and collective experiences the women had.

Another form of a focus group that I conducted was a “hair party” that was located at my apartment. The participants were very eager to meet the other Black women that went abroad. Vanessa who went to Mexico and had issues with her ‘bi-racial identity’, was ecstatic about the party because she wanted advice from other women who had gone through similar experiences. I had seven of the participants come to my apartment and we had shared pictures and food from our study abroad program, shared hair secrets and stories, discussed the interviews and issues facing Black women today. The party started at ten at night and people did not leave until two in the morning. Having a gathering of participants to discuss experiences is not unique. Ganz, a coordinator of a study abroad program at Spelman College, had post-departure meetings where she would invite returning study abroad participants to discuss their experiences with other students. She said they would talk for hours and really explore their experiences (Ganz 1991:31).

I got the idea of a “hair party” from The Urban Bush Women (UBW). UWA is a performance ensemble dedicated to exploring the use of cultural expression as a catalyst for social change that seeks to bring the untold and under-told histories and stories of disenfranchised people to light (UBA).They had a "Hair Stories" project where Jawole Willa Jo Zollar conducted dialogues called "hair parties.” This method of dance and talking to audience members creates an interactive environment. For my project, a “hair party” was more like a focus group or open group discussion. This method allowed for participants to engage in underlying issues of race, class and history via their own personal experiences (Banks 2000:70). It was another avenue to uncovering topics about women’s experiences with hair and identity that have been previously unexplored.

Participant observation

Another method called participant observation is an essential methodological tool used by anthropologists and other social scientists. Since it is helpful to observe human behavior in varied settings, it was necessary for me to partake in the lives of my participants. I used participant observation by gathering data through watching and studying the ordinary situations they enter and discussing it with them and interpreting the observations (Becker 1958: 652).

Agreeing with Kottak, I cannot detach myself as an objective or detached observer so therefore doing participant observation was inevitable (2002:35). Involving myself in the seemingly fundamental, basic and often taken-for-granted activities of my participants, helped me to become more aquatinted and get to know the them better. I participated in many activities such as going to the hair salon with some of the participants and allowing them to come with me. Since many six of them previously were my friends, it was apart of our previous relationship to do so. I would observe their behavior and interaction with their hairdresser. This was a great way to confirm certain things they discussed in the interview about who they were and how they cared for their hair. This gave me a first hand account to their stories.

I also attended workshops about hair, mediated my own study abroad workshops, attended hair shows at the biggest hair show, Bronner Brothers, in August; attended a study abroad conference in October (NAFSA) and made sure to converse in “hair talk” in public and private places such as various hair salons such as Too Groovey, Urbanbella, Celebrity Status and Naturi Beauty Concept, and other arenas such as the Georgia State University bus, cafeteria, restaurants, and my apartment participants. Many also felt comfortable calling me to discuss experiences they were currently having.

ETHICS

> Anthropologists may be thought of as experts in seeing double—looking at life from the outside in and, especially with the advent of reflexive approaches, from the inside out" but we still have issues with the "native" point of view. I think that I am aware of my limitations of getting the 'truth' as a researcher I cannot expect to get truth when anthropology as a field is a cultural product—detached scientific study of society and culture (Copeland-Carson 2006:64).

Minimal harm

In pondering on my methods, I began to think of the ethical dilemmas that arose when conducting my research. As a feminist anthropologist, my main concern was for the safety of my participants. The American Anthropology Association ethical guidelines state that it is my 'obligation' to protect the confidentiality of my participants and only expose them to 'minimal harm'. In my IRB, Minimal harm is described as "not exposed to any more harm than in a normal day of life". I have pondered on the question, "What is really protecting participants? What is minimal harm?" Although I am still reflecting on these questions, in completion of this research, I have begun to understand the meaning of "minimal harm". Minimal harm is not just about not exposing my participants to toxins or breaching confidentiality to protect the university.

I found that it is about being honest about my limitations as a researcher and making sure that I represent my participants in the way they feel is appropriate. I have the right to disagree with certain aspects of what they say, but I had to make sure to be clear what was my opinion and what was theirs. I felt the worst harm I could do to my participants was break their trust due to the fact that many of them were concerned with the international views of Black women and wanted to almost use this project to express and refute these negative images.

The AAA code is supposed to serve as a general guideline for making ethical choices in the field. I used it as a tool to engage in developing and maintaining an ethical framework. In certain instances, I had to decide for myself' "what is ethical?" For example, during an interview a participant was telling me an emotional story about her journey to self love and acceptance, I could have kept the tape rolling but I knew she was in a vulnerable state. I decided to cut off the tape and just talk to her like I would to a friend. We had a long conversation about Black identity and love. I deemed it as "unethical" to discuss personal aspects of her story and felt a need to protect her from what I deemed "minimal harm". The AAA recognizes that anthropologists are individuals with personalized morals and beliefs and that 'ethics' are culturally constructed. The purpose of the code is to foster discussion and education on how to generate and utilize knowledge and research in an ethical manner.

Studying friends

As stated previously, six of the participants are my close friends and others are women I connected with from school, my study abroad program to Brazil and people I met at hair shows. Since I had a previous relationship with and created a closeness after the interviews with most of my participants, the urgency to establish rapport was not an issue for me. I am aware of the benefits and limitations to studying friends. Some feminists encourage the creation of close relations before the interview (Reinharz 1992:26) in order to create familiarity with the participants. The positive aspects were that the interviews conducted with my friends were open ended and conversation like because of their comfort level with me. For example when I interviewed, Maria, a former classmate and close friend, I went to her house for the interview and it was a very inviting and comforting environment where we were both comfortable and at ease.

In contrast, I had a hard time getting them to see me as an academic and interviewer. They tended to leave out information because they assumed I already knew as their friend, and when I asked for clarification they would reply, “Oh, girl! I will see you this weekend!” As if I could get the information anytime or that the information was not important. They also would get off topic during the interviews such as the case with interviewing my newly found cousin, Delia. Another issue was with confidentiality. Since many of the participants were friends and shared stories about experiences abroad and with hair, they felt it was okay to ask me to see other participants answers to questions. This is an issue I had before with a previous project on identity that I did with a group of second generation Indian Americans at Georgia Tech. I had to explain to these participants that I signed an agreement not to disclose any information about the participants to anyone besides my advisor. I told them if they wanted to discuss the questions they would have to do so with their friends directly.

I am not a native anthropologist!

My other ethical dilemma is with my label as a “‘native’ anthropologist”. Although this term is no longer popularly used amongst anthropologists, academics and my friends have used this term to describe my role in my research. One person said, “You are studying Black women. Good for you! That shouldn’t be hard!” I have had many people assume that because I am a Black woman studying other Black women that my research will be easy due to my insider status that has accredited me native knowledge on Black women. Although in having friends as my participants, I understood that the my role as the research was blurred, I had a hard time conceptualizing my “insider status.” In being a member of the group of which I studied, I had to be honest about my insider/outsider and stranger/friend roles (Jarvie 1969:507).

The labels “native” and “insider” were used to describe anthropologists that study a culture that they are associated with racially/ethnically/nationally. My concern with the label “native” is that it places the participant and researcher in an ‘othering’ position. My participant would also be ‘othered’ because they would be placed as the distant native. As a Black female researcher, I am already ‘othered’ because of the racist and sexist view of my identity as a secondary and inferior status. Also I am a minority in my field as a Black female that does research on hair. The term “native anthropologist” is problematic in its assumption that an anthropologist has an authentic view about a group because they have a shared cultural identity (Narayan 1993:673).

My view was not authentic or pure but tailored by my biases and presumptions about my project outcomes and identity of the participants. Since I have my own worldview created by different socializing agents, I could not objectively receive information and analyze data purely. I do not believe that because I share the same ‘sex’ and ‘race’ with my participants, that I had an insider perspective to what all or these specific Black women think. Their identities were complex and ever changing just like mine. The way they self identified, in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, hair type and skin color, differed from each other. I accepted that I do not know everything about Black culture due to the multiple Black cultures that exist in the United States since I defined Black as including all people of African descent. In recognizing the limited knowledge I have about the Black culture and women, I did not take any knowledge I was given by the participants “as a given” but as a specific perspective or experience that may have similarities with the experiences of other Black women. Since I was having “woman-to-woman talk”, the information tended to be more conscious raising and collective (Reinharz 1992:23).

But also I had to acknowledge the bond that exists between Black women due to shared cultural experiences with hair. Banks felt that her status as a Black woman linked her to the group she studied (2000:162). Again this bond does not make me an expert on Black or female culture due to the complexities of people's identities. My identity as a Black woman is only two of my multiple identities that have the potential to bring me closer to the participants and in some cases cause a schism because my social status, education, current or past geographical location, and may play parts in dividing or uniting the group of women. My skin color as medium brown or as I call it "the color of burnt toast after you scrap off the burnt top" and natural hair styles connected me to my participants with similar features such as Amber and Delia. But also my natural hair disconnected me with participants such as Vanessa because she did not have similar experiences wit hair care that I did. In describing her views on "good" and "bad" hair, she labeled my hair as "bad". Knowing that she was unfamiliar with the politics of Black hair and maintenance, I did not take offense but noted that we would both learn from each others experiences. Also since I studied abroad before, I connected with the global awareness and frustration of having to combat negative stereotypes that most of the participants faced. In going to Brazil, I connected with and could relate to the experiences of Maria, Mary and Ann with their experiences with race. Also my identity as the researcher put me in a position where, regardless of my attempt to break, created a power differentiation.

Narayan discusses identities as fluid instead of fixed. A person's identity is complex and diverse due to its 'shifting' depending on time and location (Narayan 1993: 672). Certain identities are highlighted in certain situations and how someone is identified or indentifies changes over time. Different strands of identity such as nationality, class, sexual orientation and education level can affect the relationships anthropologists have with their subjects. "Even as

insiders or partial insiders, in some contexts we are closer, in others we are thrust apart" (Narayan 1993:674). Instead of agreeing with the binary of outsider/insider or native/real anthropologists, Narayan suggests that it would be better if we would "view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (Narayan 1993: 672).

Like Narayan, Banks, author of *Hair Matters*, discussed how her identity affected her research. The many ethical dilemmas Banks faced during and after her research gave me a framework to think about ethical issues that came up during my study. One interesting point Banks made was that her race and gender shaped her research interests and findings. Banks stated that "race location and assumed racial location shapes our knowledge as researchers as well as the knowledge of people we study" (2000:161). My racial identity and overall identity had prompted me to study Black women.

Although I have multiple, complex and changing identities, there were still expectations of objectivity. Banks said there were "expectations that I held as a Black female scientist…such as objectivity" (Banks 2000:161). Copeland-Carson claimed she never was able to occupy a "space of neutrality" due to her position as a Black woman (2006:56). As a Black woman, I was cognizant of how I view others and how I may be viewed by others.

Understanding the role I play as a researcher, I remained cognizant of my personal biases, chosen language, style of dress, etc and their affects on the participants and the outcome of the study. Although I have personal beliefs about Black woman and hair, intersectionality, and subjectivity concepts helped me to remain an ethical researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS OF HAIR IN A US CONTEXT

THE BLACK FEMALE IDENTITY

Checking the box: negotiating racial identity in the U.S.

My study is about a group of Black women in the United States and how they view certain aspects of their identity. In attempting to understand intersectionality and the complex and multilayered identity of Black women, I had to ask my participants how they identified racially and ethnically. My participants were very hesitant about answering the questions. They were not quick to label themselves but when they did, they made sure to explain their personal meaning behind their use of the term they used to identify racially. In answering how they identify their ethnicity, many had a hard time finding an answer due to their lack of familiarity and understanding of the meaning of the term.

In many anthropological, sociological and cultural studies classes, these terms are discussed as different. Only six out of twenty of the participants, Djenne, Danielle, Sheila, Ife, Amber and Ruby, defined themselves racially and ethnically using the same term. In discussing this issue of participants being confused by the term ethnicity, Maria explained that they discussed the term in an anthropology class and she came to the conclusion that "everyone has an ethnicity." If the Webster dictionary states that ethnicity is a " social construct referring to people of a particular cultural or geographical group that claim a common ancestry," she feels that if you agree with this definition, then ethnicity is just a "more appropriate word to use than race." The word "race" to her, is inappropriate because although it is a social reality it is also socially constructed, while ethnicity links people to a

cultural group. Although Maria disagrees, for some American could be an ethnicity, which no one identified as. Although there are many possible “ethnicities”, the fact that no one chose American was not because they do not view themselves as American but was because of their need to acknowledge their “race” or “ethnicity” they choose such as Black or African-American or how they identified their nationality.

The main people who had concrete answers for their ethnicity were Maria, Djenne, Ann, Vanessa, Patrice, Mary, Sue and Delia. I concluded that they strongly identified with an ethnicity due to the fact that they all have a parent that was born outside the United States. For example, Mary’s parents still live in Nigeria and she attended primary school in Nigeria, so she identifies strongly with the Nigerian ethnic cultural group. These participants identified strongly with an ethnicity because it provided them with an aspect of their culture that shaped their values, worldview, family structure, rituals and food they eat (Dalton cited in Rothenberg 2005:16).

Many of the other participants choose Black/African-American or Black American as their ethnicity due to their lack of cultural placement. They have cultural placement, being that they all grew up in a culture, but they are unsure of their cultural heritage. Maria commented on this findings stating that “Blacks in America have had a hard time connecting with an ethnicity because we don’t really have a strong connection with a cultural identity. Many of us just know it may be in West Africa.” Her point illustrates that the disconnection is a result of the slave trade which stripped African people of their heritage and has caused African Americans today to feel like they have a lost of history due to the lack of knowledge they have about their distinct African heritage.

As stated in the earlier chapter, nine of the participants racially identified as Black, four as African American, one as Afro-Trinidadian/Afro-Caribbean, two as bi-racial (Black Hispanic and Black Mexican), one as African American and Black, one as African, one did not want to racially identify but if had to would choose African American and the another defined herself as a human. This various list of ways that these Black women self identified shows the complexity and diversity amongst Black women in my sample. Black identity must be conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon, and it is important to recognize that being Black means different things to different segments of the Black population (Demo and Hughes 1990: 371).

Although all of the participants did not identify as Black or African American, they related to the use of the term. Many participants such as Ruby, Patrice, Sakeyna, Sue and Amber found the terms Black and African American to be separate. These participants felt that African American is the politically correct term that connects them to Africa while Black is a broad term used in the United States that describes a cultural group (mainly referring to skin color).

Amber states that African American is a "comprehensive term" and Gacc agreed that it is a "politically correct term from somebody that is Black." This part of the definition views the term as a word created to refer to Black people in the United States in a respectful and academic manner. Another part of this definition is that it has a historical connection to Africa. Ruby embraces the term African American because it acknowledges her African background and history. She said that African American is "a group of people with a connection to Africa." She felt that this term is not just politically correct but "culturally correct." Gacc and Amber would agree with this point that African American is a more "culturally correct" term than Black. Gacc defines Black as " of African origin." By this definition, Black would be very similar to African American in that it connects a group of people to Africa. Gacc's point in identifying as Black is

that African American (AA) and Black are similar terms with the only difference being that AA has been coined as ‘pc’. Although the word Black is popular and embraced by many people of African descent in America, the White media and political groups in the United States have coined this word as an appropriate academic term that can be used to describe Black people. The point of being ‘pc’ is to use specific language that would be inoffensive to “minority” or “disadvantaged” groups.

Other participant’s issues with the word Black was its broadness. Amber felt that it was “too plain” and “doesn’t show depth of who I am.” To Amber, African American is more appropriate term because it works as a “ bridge between my ancestry and struggle of my past.” Like Amber, Sakeyna uses the word Black to identify racially, because she stated that she has difficulty connecting to Africa. After reading over my thesis, Mary added that Black is a description of physical features. This is a common issue of feeling disconnected with African roots that African American/Black people in the United States face today in deciding how they view their racial/ethnic identity. Although we may have difficulty understanding our African roots as Black people and may be labeled only in terms of skin color, Patrice stated that Black people have a “shared experience through their physical appearance and common ancestry that links them together as a cultural group in the United States.”

This issue of identifying racially and ethnically stems from the pressure to “check the box.” In applications for jobs and scholarships, health forms, background checks, the United States census and research, people are asked to identify racially through checking the box from a list of words that are supposed to identify term in racial terms. Although many of the participants had an issue with identifying in racial/ethnic terms, Patrice, Vanessa and Lola has a particular issue with what they called “checking the box.”

When I asked Patrice how she identified racially she answered “human.” She said that, “I really don’t identify racially with any category.” Her strong identification with the Jamaican culture is due to the fact they she was born and attended much of her schooling in Jamaica, which socialized her thinking about race. Her mother would tell her that, “race doesn’t exist” and that she should not say the word race. In college she began to understand that race does not exist as a biological reality but that it has strong social meanings. Although she is bi-racial (Black Jamaican and White North American), she does not identify with the term “mixed” because her mom taught her it means “mixed up in the head.” Instead she currently embraces the terms bi-cultural or multicultural.

She exclaimed that in Jamaica race is different than in the U.S. because “everyone is Jamaican even though they may look differently.” She felt that Jamaicans common nationality made the race issue less important, it was more about “describing complexions.” Although skin color pigmentation would be a description of someone, that description would serve as a racial marker. She further explained, “I thought about it. Yea, I am Black but by other people’s standards and the history behind it.” Patrice was describing the need in the United States to categorize people racially and by doing so have categorized anyone with “one drop” of African ancestry in the United States as “Black.”

Another participant that felt that racial labeling was restrictive was Vanessa. She said that race was “something I struggled with my whole life.” Vanessa who is Mexican/Black American identified more with Mexican because her mother who is Mexican was around more and played a more important role in her life. Although she strongly identifies with both sides, she has often felt pressure from others to identify only as Black. She gave me examples of how at school in her younger years, a “playground kid told me I had to pick one” and that a “White teachers told

me, ‘You Black sweetie.” Although both her parents told her to be proud of and embrace her cultural heritages, others constantly downplayed her desire to do so. She exclaimed, “I don’t understand why people tell me to pick one.” Her reference to people’s desire to racially place her in one category stems from the socialized belief in the American culture that the category “Black” is fixed.

Lola refused to be put into the fixed category of Black. She said that she could not identify racially because it is a “social construct.” Lola brought up the idea that it is impossible to have someone identify who they are by racial standards, because race is a socially created term with real social meaning. Like Lola, Ife said that ‘”I don’t like to place myself into categories.” She agreed that race is a “social construct with hierarchy.” She felt that if she labeled herself racially as Black and Black has “negative connotations then it would consider me inferior in how race was constructed and the word.” Ife disregarded labels because she felt that all the words describing people of African decent in the United States were negative.

This pressure to self label according to racial categories was found restrictive, insufficient and oppressive by many of the participants. Although they rejected the labeling, they embraced the meaning and history of women of African descent in the United States. They all had powerful and positive descriptions of “what it means to be a Black woman.” Although they all self identified differently, they all related to the struggle and prestige of being a Black woman in the United States.

THE STANDARD OF BEAUTY

The standard of beauty is a myth

The participants were very aware with how the standard of beauty was created. In understanding that hair is an important part of the process of the beauty routine for themselves,

they were able to discuss their thoughts. Three participants in particular, Delia and Sakeyna discussed how the standard of beauty that supposedly included European features, including light skin and straight hair was forced on slaves and internalized today. Delia talked about the standard of beauty as a "tool" created by the colonizers and men to control the images and self esteem of women. She recognized that although they implanted the ideas in the heads of the African American community, it has been "maintained by ourselves now." This internalized belief in our physical inferiority was created through the value placed on "mixed kids hair" by the slave owners and later the slaves. Delia, being a hair dresser, understood the "shame" that many Blacks today and slaves had with their hair. She exclaimed that "in Africa… they had tools and recipes…but we got stripped of good hair." She referred to the fact that when slaves were forced to leave Africa, they also had to leave behind many of the tools they used for hair maintenance.

In the New World, they had to "cover their hair in the field" and " didn't have time to do hair…So the only image is a White woman, dressed nicely and hair groomed that is fanning herself by the field and drinking lemonade!" This White woman became the image of beauty. Sakeyna also added that in order to get a slave to be "subservient", he had to make "her think she isn't beautiful to get her- so say their hair is nappy." One way to break the spirit of the slaves was to label their natural features as inferior and unattractive. In knowing that this idea that Black features are not inferior and that we were socialized to think our hair is bad, why is hair so important?

Hair is important to women!

Although all of the participants agreed that hair was important to all women due to the value in physical beauty, ten of the participants spoke specifically about their socialization about

beauty and hair through their mothers. These participants expressed that hair is important to women but especially to Black women. Amber, Alexandria, Delia, and Sakeyna were told by their mothers that their hair was their "crown and glory". There mothers were telling them to take pride in the maintenance of their hair. The "crown" refers to highly valuing the hair and the virtue refers to understanding the value that hair has in their life. Sakeyna stated that her mother told her to treat her hair like the "bible." She was supposed to respect and care for her hair. She said this was a problem for her because she started to put too much value and worth in her hair. Ruby and Carmen agreed that Black women should care for their hair but should not hold it to such high regards that it affects their self esteem because it is "just hair." Carmen stated that women need to concentrate more on their character than outside appearance. She would rather have women question, "Are you a good person?" Carmen wears a low fade, very short natural hair cut, and considers herself to be apart of the "bald headed coalition" which she describes as a group for women with low or little hair. She considers her hair to "bond" her with other women with similar styles. She recognizes that hair is an "expression of self…used as a symbol of status today."

The "emotional investment" that Black women put into their hair is a result of socialization. Patrice and Danielle were both told by their mother that they "better take care of that hair." Patrice's grandmother told her it is important to keep her "beauty" (hair) nice and tidy. One participant brought up a good point about the importance of hair to Black women. Ruby stated that "Black people are the only group of people who make sure hair is done." She claims that this obsession with hair maintenance is due to our history as creative people and expression to define ourselves and "stand out." If hair is the "crown and glory" for Black women in the U.S., then we have to keep it looking good. However Ruby believes that if Black women buy

into this concept, then this is why “women on welfare have hair done every week- a priority.” The women established that hair is important to them but not a defining factor over who they are.

Hair identity is one of the many components of the multiple identities that are imbedded in Black women. Their fluid and shifting experiences in different cultural contexts contribute to their multiple identities. Historically, Black hair has been an extremely important marker of Black identity. One way the Black body has been controlled is through a constraint on the politics of hair. For decades, Black women have been discriminated against through their hair and in viewing this problem globally it gave me a broader and more accurate sense to what was occurring with these women.

Hair othered: I cant be myself at work?

A major issue or concern of the participants was the othering of their hair. They felt that they were the object of other’s interpretations about who they were. Their identity was constructed by other people views and not based on what they thought. One arena where they felt this issue played out is the work place. Sue who works in a professional setting in accounting discussed the pressure on her to wear her hair in certain styles. Since her field is “predominately white “she felt that it is a “culture she is not apart of.” They would discuss things such as “golf” that she did not take interest in and that made her feel like an outsider. She told me that she used to have a vibrant “red afro” and that “corporate America made me get rid of my afro.” Although this news saddened me, I had to understand the great pressure put on Black women in professional settings to seem unthreatening.

Styles such as the afro have a political history and meaning attached to them stemming from the “Black Power” and “Black is Beautiful” movements. To many Whites, some Blacks and other ethnic groups that do not identify with this type of hairstyle in the United States, the

afro is intimidating because it is a symbol of independence, resistance against white supremacy and Black self pride. She said that the red afro was a distraction at the workplace because "that's all they would look at." She was the Black girl with the red afro. The red afro became her identity at her job so she decided to cut it off and get it permed. She decided to "play the game" and assimilate but not everyone with an afro is political nor is everyone with a perm assimilating. Sue said that one day a Black co-worker came and told her about how he had to explain to a White co-worker why she had an afro. The White co-worker thought it was "too out there" and that it should be "neater." Although the Black male co-worker tried to explain to him that this style was "natural" and "she was born like that", his socialization as a white privileged man created his racist and controlling ideologies about beauty.

As a result, Sue felt that the stares and talk with her co-worker, were ways in which she was "not encouraged to be herself." Her self expression through her hair and therefore identity as a Black woman was deemed unacceptable by this white man standards. Sue realized that there will "always be messages that it is unacceptable to be Black." Another respondent, Alexandria talked about the "oppression" that many Black women she knew felt with wearing certain hair styles in the workplace. She said that her mother works for the government and that every woman there has the same hairstyle. Another interviewee, Ruby stated that in a professional setting that various hair styles can be worn. As a public school teacher at a Black school, she said that there are teachers with colored hair and locks and that it is acceptable "just as long as it's neat." This concept of neat can be dangerous because it is culturally constructed term in its application to hair. Sue's afro was neat to her but not to her co-workers.

Sue's co-worker idea of acceptable hairstyles in the work arena, although limited is not unique. In Rapunzels daughters, through using women stories about their hair, Weitz uncovers

the difficulties that many African American women have had with their hair in the workplace. She states that it is a problem when women's hair brings attention to their "minority ethnicity" and puts them at risk to lose status and respect in their place of work (2004:125). A recent incident that occurred in the United States was at a corporate presentation about work fashion. The women lawyers group at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton invited an editor or employee from *Glamour* magazine to make a presentation on "the do's and don'ts of corporate fashion." The first slide of "don'ts" on the power point was a Black woman with an afro. She stated "As for dreadlocks: How truly dreadful! The style maven said it was "shocking" that some people still think it "appropriate" to wear those hairstyles at the office. "No offense," she sniffed, but those "political" hairstyles really have to go" (Chen 2007).

This woman called natural black hair a "*Glamour* Don't." These comments quickly surfaced on the internet and Black woman all over were claiming to never buy a *Glamour* magazine again. The editor of the magazine stated that this employee "misrepresented" the magazine's core aesthetic values of believing "in the beauty of all women." They claimed to promote diversity because they have people on the magazine such as Mariah Carey who is of mixed heritage (Black and White). Based on this incident, it is clear that a Black woman or a woman with an unconventional hair style is unlikely to make it to the cover of *Glamour* magazine in this current era. This example is yet another example of the structural racism and symbolic violence that is inflicted on Black women through their hair style choices.

A few of my participants, Sue and Vanessa, expressed their concern over beauty standards control over Black beauty images. Sue stated that many popular Blacks in entertainment "look White." She feels that there is pressure put on Black celebrities to look a certain way—White—in order to appeal to a mass audience. Vanessa expressed that media

images are perpetuating the idea that to be a beautiful Black woman, you have to have European features. Vanessa used the example of Beyoncé's long weave. She stated that "it is indirect but the media says that if your hair is real, as in real Black hair, then it is bad and you got to get a weave or perm and that to be natural is being too eccentric, too proud." Sue's co-workers, the entertainment industry, the media and the Glamour representative restricting ideas about Black beauty are examples of the United States aesthetic cultural values and an example of symbolic violence against Black women and the Black community.

REDIFINING GOOD AND BAD HAIR

Definitions

In discussing Black women and hair, the concept of good and bad hair must be discussed. Although I asked the participant's specific questions about their ideas about good and bad hair, they brought up issues with the term early on in the interview when describing their hair (look at chart). They brought up people's perceptions of their hair and then their own perceptions. I found there was a difference between the way they described and viewed their hair and Black hair and how their hair is othered by peoples, especially Whites', perceptions. The participants had various ways in which they described the Eurocentric construction of the terms "good and "bad" hair.

Participants described the racist use of the word "good" hair as straight hair that is associated with people of European descent. Amber described good hair "as 'White' as you can go-straight!" She is describing straight in terms of a natural "White" style not something that can be attained by alternating the natural hair texture and type. For example by this definition of good hair being straight hair that Whites have, Black people could never have good hair regardless of their hair texture. Although, they would still be pressured by people that believing in this

definition to aspire to have “more good” hair through chemicals or straightening utensils. Another participant Delia stated that the concept of good hair refers to “European hair” that is straight, easy to comb and slicked down. Both of these definitions connect the idea of good hair to a group of people---Europeans, though people of European descent may have a variety of hair types.

Delia also points out that good hair need not only be straight but hair straight enough to comb through with ease. By this, good hair is not just hair that aesthetically looks straight but it’s being able to manage it with great ease. Although Black women with certain styles such as natural dreading (do not go to salon but allow the hair to naturally lock by not combing) do not have to put in the great effort, time and money that they do, the cultural importance and pressure for them to ‘upkeep’ their hair is substantial. Many Black women in the U.S., including some of my participants (Danielle, Ruby and Delia) spend money and time on going to the salon and buying hair care products. Although these Black women are placing effort into their hair maintenance, this does not mean they are aspiring to have “good” hair. Rather, they may be aspiring to an ideal for femininity in terms of style and appearance with in the U.S. context.

Sheila and Carmen both discuss the idea of good hair in terms of what you can do with it. Sheila said that it is that “just came out of bed but still cute hair” and Carmen said “anything that would be in a swimming pool- if can get in there anytime.” For example, picture this: a White woman, we will call her Sarah, wakes up in the morning and throws her hair into a ponytail, goes to a swim class and them combs it out and goes to class all within an hour and a half. This would not be the scenario for many of the participants such as Alexandria or Delia who keep their hair done regularly. I know when I get my hair done, that I won’t sleep well for trying to keep it in

place and I definitely would not go swimming because I would have to wash it and all my money would be wasted.

Although I understand Carmen and Sheila's description of "good" hair, I have to problematize their perceptions. Their view of the "other" contains myths about what most "White" women and also what Black women with "good" hair do in terms of their hair. The European straight hair that they are associating with Whites in the U.S. is not always easy to manage for White women in the United States. Like Black women, many "White" women put in time, effort and money into their hair as a result of the pressure to adhere to the beauty standard. Any woman that gets their hair done rather it is on a weekly basis or for special occasions may have the same concerns about messing up their hair, even if they have straight hair. Also with activities such as swimming, it takes time for most women rather they are concerned with their appearance or not, to wash and/or condition and comb through their hair.

Participants such as Patrice and Vanessa who supposedly hair "low maintenance" hair because it is "good" hair as a result of their racial mixture, still have concerns and put in effort with their hair. Leah washes her curly hair two to three times a week and it takes at least a half an hour to forty-five minutes to shampoo, condition and comb out her hair in the shower. She feels that she cannot just wake up and go. They are both good examples of the different issues that Black women face in regards to their hair because both of them are unfamiliar with the myth about Black women and swimming. This idea that only White women or people with non-Black or "tightly curled" hair can be carefree with their hair and do certain activities such as go swimming places restrictions on what Black women can do. It also perpetuates the idea that most Black women in the U.S. do not exercise for fear of messing up there hair. After reading my interpretation Maria responded that, "it is not their hair that prohibits them from certain

activities, but Black women's perceptions of their hair that do. Black women have a love/hate relationship with their hair in that it is a source of constant anxiety and burden as a result of generations of psychological conditioning about beauty and Blackness---also "Black" hair doesn't exist because Black people have such a wide range of hair textures as well as complexions."

Many of the participants such as Amber and Ruby agreed that bad hair, in the racist socially constructed sense, is nappy hair. Nappy hair, in the negative meaning, is associated with Africa and describes typical Black hair. Although many of the participants do not "endorse" or like this word, they used the word "nappy" to describe the severity of how the American racist society views Black beauty. Amber and Ruby had a similar definition of bad hair as nappy hair that is "course thick texture- tight curls." People who do not understand or have negative views about Black characteristics view and describe these tight curls as 'napps' in a derogatory way. The word in itself is not negative but the meaning attributed to it by Whites gives it a negative connotation. Amber says that this type of hair "couldn't blend in." This point illustrates the othering of Black hair- that it is so bad that it stands out from "normal" hair. Unlike European straight 'normal' hair, Delia describes the mainstream idea of bad hair as hair that you "can't do nothing with it, can't see the curl, kinky/nappy, just laugh at you kind of hair, has to have a perm!" In this statement Delia is mocking how ignorant Black people and even some White people talk about Black people's hair.She discusses how slaves and also today many old school hairdressers, describe black hair in this "bad" way.

Another way to describe bad hair is through gender expectations of beauty. Shiela said that "White people would say, anything that goes against gender." This would be claiming that

bad hair can be viewed as hair for each sex that doesn't match their gender. For example, a woman with a very low cut and a man with a long straight hair.

Although my interviewees were aware of how the U.S. society views good and bad hair in terms of race, they also created their own definitions. Since they did not universally agree with societal views, they have their on views on what is good and bad hair. In general, participants agreed that good hair is healthy hair that is well maintained and bad hair is unhealthy hair that is not styled. So the origin of their definition has to do with health and upkeep. Maria stated that "good and bad describes a condition, not texture. For example unkept hair would be bad and unhealthy, taken cared of hair would be good." Using this definition, anyone regardless of race can have bad hair including Whites. In order to really understand how Black women were redefining good and bad hair, I visited various salons and got my hair done. I asked hair dressers and clients their definitions of the terms. At one salon in particular, Too Groovey, one hair dresser described good hair as "strong and moisturized." She felt that curl pattern did not matter, which is different from the general definition that exists in the media and promoted by cosmetic industry. Like participants such as Maria, Amber, and Delia, this hairdresser said that good hair is "healthy from root to tip." Amber, Alexandria and Carmen felt that hair is good if you have hair. Amber stated to me that "somebody who hair ain't fallin' out has good hair." Alexandria agreed when she stated, good hair is good if you "take care of it." Carmen would take the definition of good hair even further by stating that "if you have hair", that is good.

Another way the participants such as Sakeyna, Vanessa, Sheila and a hairdresser, defined good hair is by styles. Good hair would be hair that is styled a certain way such as natural or anything that looks good on the individual that they put effort into. During my interview with Sakeyna, who wears has dreads, quickly answered "natural hair is good hair. Let it go Beyoncè.

Anything else is bad hair." Sakeyna discusses how Black celebrities such as Beyoncè wear weaves and cover their natural "good" hair. She described natural hair as unpermed and unstraightened hair. Another style that makes hair good is any style. Vanessa stated that hair is "cute if you put effort into it. If you keep it up, if looks good, looks good." By Vanessa's definition, any hair style that a person puts effort into is good. Sheila added that "good hair is something that naturally fits your face…relative to culture, race-what one race considers good-one wouldn't." By Sheila's definition good hair is relative to cultural standards and as long as it makes you "make feel good about your appearance", than it is good hair.

In contrast, Sheila described bad hair as hair that "doesn't look right…something about it doesn't sit right with you. The style doesn't fit them." Unlike the popular definition of bad hair, bad hair is hair that looks awkward on a person, which is subject of cultural and individual views. Amber and Delia both agree that bad hair is hair that isn't taken care of, broken off, mistreated, unpresentable. The participant's opinions about the racist and ignorant implications of the popular definition of good and bad hair reveal their desire to reject the beauty myth that Black hair is bad and that hair defines a woman's worth.

I am not my hair: resistance to the standard of beauty in the United States

Throughout the interviews, my participants described stories about resisting the standard of beauty by not allowing their hair to define them. They found ways to express themselves through their hair without letting it be a defining matter of their identity. They proved their ability and desire to resist through rejecting the labeling of their hair through the use of the terms good and bad hair and not accepting gender limitation on hair styles. To these Black women, it was about the ability to choose and really define who they want to be through their hair.

A common story that was told during the interviews to express the frustrations of hair overcoming their identity as Black women was their mother perming their hair early. Amber, Ruby, Alexandria, Carmen, Ann and Danielle all had their hair permed by their mothers at an early age. Ruby stated that "in kindergarten, I remember all my classmates had a perm. And I begged my mom for a perm. And she said no, but then got one in 4th grade." This is a similar experience that many Black women in the United States have in wanting a perm at a young age was because "everyone else is dong it" and it was normalized. This can be a result of the internalization of what is good hair. In asking the participants about why their mother permed their hair, many such as Carmen expressed that they did not have a choice. In reflecting on this issue, I came up with many reasons that many Black mothers in the U.S. perm their daughters hair at a young age such as manageability due to lack of time or education on how to do natural hair and aesthetics- internalizing the beauty standard or just doing what they know. Many Black mothers in the U.S. hairstyle choices for their daughters is a result of cultural socialization mediated by the family and U.S standards. The family's influence, tailored by African and U.S. values, has influenced why and how Black mothers do their children's hair.

The process of "getting your hair done" is a very familiar aspect of the Black beauty culture to the participants. I myself remember, sitting at my mother's knee in the kitchen and cringing as she styled and pressed my hair. Although my hair was never permed unlike many of the participants, I was an active agent in how I wanted my hair styled. At an early age I was obsessed with my hair and made sure that my mother styled it in neat ponytails everyday. In my recent reflections on my *need* to have my hair done regularly, I have discovered that I was a victim of the beauty industry. I attended a predominately white primary school and would be late to school often as a result of the time I spent on making sure my hair was perfect. I remember the

embarrassment, hurt and confusion I often felt because my White principal and students did not understand why my hair made me late for school.

The purpose of these stories about perming and hairstyling are not just about the pressure to ascribe to the standard of beauty at an early age, but about current resistance against the othering of Black hair hair. It is about being active agents in our choice to wear our hair as we see fit. For example, Danielle has always had a perm and has chosen to wear her hair this way today. Although women such as Danielle enjoy their permed hair, other participants such as Saykeyna reject this idea of Black women perming their hair.

Sakeyna said it causes "sores, burns your scalp out. Makes you almost psychotic." Although Sakeyna feels strong about her message to Black women which is "don't put white man chemicals in your hair", participants such as Sue believe that Black women "can be pro black and have straight hair." For some women such as Alexandria and Danielle, who complimented each other on their hair, their permed hair is a choice they have made that they feel makes them look beautiful. For other participants such as Amber, their choice was to cut out their perm and go "natural."

Amber said that she "took control over life February 4, 2005 when I went natural." For Amber, the act of going natural was not the rebellion but it was the fact that it was her decision that was the resistance. She says that she remembers the date because it was her "best friend's birthday and we had a conversation about taking control of our lives." She felt that she was letting too many people take control of her life. She felt that one way she could gain control over her life was through her hairstyle. This is when she decided to go natural and went to the salon and got her permed hair cut off. It was a "rebellious statement" that she was an "independent woman." She stated that this "was asserting myself as who I am choosing to be." As a Black

woman, Amber felt that she had to define herself and not let others dictate who she was or should look like. Since she felt that "hair has always been an expression of self", it was a natural decision for her to begin her independence and search for self with her hair.

Other participants that rejected other's opinion of them and their hair style are Djenne, Sewze and Carmen. All three participants wear low cut hair styles. This style of choice for these women was a conscious decision based on their desire to not have much hair. Carmen likes going to a barber for upkeep and finds her hairstyle freeing. She states while other Black women are complaining about messing up their hair, she did not worry about it. She stated "I'm happy I'm bald headed and when I see other baldheaded women, I say 'bald-headed coalition'." Carmen describes bald-headed coalition as a group for any women with very short hair styles. She says her lack of hair is "a great asset." When she studied abroad in Brazil, she could swim when she wanted to and did not have to worry about what it would do to her hair.

Although Carmen likes her hair, her family was initially very upset by her hairstyle choice. She told me that in her younger years, her sisters and her all had long straight hair. Then she decided she did not want that anymore and tried different curly styles and then decided to cut it all off. Even though, her parents are more accepting now and one of her sisters had locked her hair, other people she has meet in various locations, especially outside the city of Atlanta in suburbia such as Stone Mountain, do not care for her hair. Carmen stated that, "on the train, people would be looking like what the fuck…almost upset and frowning when looking at my hair." She expressed the disgust and surprisedment that that people felt when they looked at her due to her hair that they obviously disapproved of.

Carmen talked to me about how location affected how people viewed her hair. She said that in the city of Atlanta people were more accepting of her hair than in the outskirts. My

understanding of people's accepting or even embracing reactions to her in Atlanta are due to the fact that many Black women including Ethiopian, Eritrean, West African, Jamaican, and Trinidadian—mainly from areas in the U.S. such as New York, wear various natural hairstyles. Carmen added that the high concentration of Black women that are in college and in positions of power attributes to their exposure to diversity and confidence to try different styles. Being from the Midwest, I have never seen such as diverse group of natural hairstyles worn by Black women that I have seen in Atlanta. I have always wanted to go natural and since I have been in Atlanta, I have felt more confident to wear my hair in natural styles such as a less sculpted afro and twists.

Carmen and Sewze's hairstyles are considered to be unfeminine according to popular beliefs about hair in the U.S. Short cuts, especially very short cuts, is deemed to be only acceptable for men, especially in the Black community. So for women who wear this style, they are considered to be crossing the gender boundaries. Much like many of the participants, Djenne wore what hair style she liked regardless of other opinions. Djenne stated that "what people define as beauty…contrary to how society views beauty is how I wear my hair." Since Black hair is versatile, many of the participants such as Delia and Mary enjoy and celebrate different hair styles. Although hair is related to identity it does not consume it but is one part. Like Carmen, hairstyles change with personality and time. Although many people would consider Carmen's hair "bad" because it defied gender norms, she is okay with it because it is just hair and one style that she is embracing at this time. She said that she "may change my mind. It's just where I am right now."

In returning to the idea of good and bad hair, two of the participants who have been told they have good hair, mainly by other Black people, rejected the idea. Although to some this

may be seen as a compliment, Vanessa and Patrice found the label to be restricting and objectifying. Vanessa and Patrice both are bi-racial women that have been described as having good hair by people in their lives including other participants. At my hair and study abroad parties and focus group, participants such as Delia discussed how most people would say that they had good hair. The other participants would discuss Patrice and another participant, Vanessa, "mixed" look that allows her to blend in ethnically with other groups. Carmen calls the ability to racially blend in all communities as a "no nation" look. Patrice has soft loose light brown curls and Vanessa has thick wavy long brown hair. Both women love their hair but do not like the attention they get by it. They both expressed that men approach them because they like their hair.

Vanessa expressed her struggle with trying to fit into the Black community in her high school as a result of her long wavy hair. With confusion and pain in her eyes, she said that, "Black women treating me differently because of my hair and because I'm mixed. Since she did not have hair like the other Black girls in her high school, she did not use the same products or have the same issues with hair. She stated that because "I don't understand 100% and don't have that kind of hair which does not mean that I'm ignorant." In this case for Vanessa, her hair served as a racial marker of her bi-racial identity. Vanessa said expressed her anger towards men that approach her as a result of her hair. She said that, "they say they love my hair and touch on it. First question is, 'what are u?' Oh, that's cool." She expressed disappointment in men's objectifying her through her hair. She did not want to be "eye candy" but instead wanted a man to be interested in everything about her such as her Mexican culture not just her hair. She felt that her identity was much more than her hair. Although they both can attain social and cultural capital through their hair, they do not embrace the term as a positive description of their hair.

Like Patrice and Vanessa, many of the participants expressed that they “love” their hair. They find that it has created great self esteem for them and has served as a tool of self expression. Sakeyna said, “I love my hair and am comfortable with nappiness.” Being comfortable with hair style choices, regardless of others disapproval is something Djenne is familiar with. She said that cutting her hair was a “gutsy move” and “test of self esteem.” Since many of the women took pride in how they wore their hair, they always kept it done. Sakeyna, Ruby, Delia, Danielle, Alexandria, Gacc, and Ann go to a stylist on a regular basis. Even Sakeyna and Lola who both wear their hair covered for religious purposes, keep their hair done. Lola said that “ I wear my hair covered so people are curious.” They both said that they keep their hair well maintained regardless of the fact that others cannot see it. For example, in a later conversation with Sakeyna she informed me that she is taking down her locks. Although many people will not see her hair, it is still important for her to put time and effort into it.

For these Black women, it is not about other people’s perception but about how their hair makes me feel about themselves. Ruby and Delia both expressed the connection between self esteem and their hair. They said that they “feel good” when their hair is done. Ruby said she likes her hair best when it is “fresh from the salon” and Delia said that “if my hair isn’t done, feel ugly.” It is not about the texture or length of hair but about how you feel about it. Ife and Djenne both understood that it was about “confidence.” Many of the women enjoyed the versatility of their hair as a way to showcase identity and personality. Participants such as Patrice and Amber found their hair as a source of strength. Patrice expressed that “my curls make me feel like I have more life” and Amber said her fro makes her “feel strong.”

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS: TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENTS ABROAD

GLOBAL WORLDVIEW: CREATION OF "WORLDMINDEDNESS"

My participants have been influenced by various socialization agents such as the family, school, and media. They are all middle class, young Black college educated women who were born or spent much of their lives in the U.S. This status allowed all of them to study abroad and have transformative moments that impacted their worldview and identity. As a result, they have been exposed to different ways of life including various and conflicting ideologies about race, class and gender. As students that have studied abroad, this experience set them "off center" or out of their comfort zone which freed them to experience *themselves* in new ways (Ross 2007:1). Learning to understand the 'other' often involves a re-examination of one's own sense of identity in ways that are not readily available in the home environment. Students benefit by examining their own cultural identities as they relate to people in other cultures (Banks 1994 cited in Ross 2007:2). In pursuit of global consciousness, they may become self-conscious about their own worldviews, particularly in terms of cultural conceptions, unconscious logic, and hidden assumptions (Siberry & Kearns, 2005).

Study abroad programs are promising students that their experience abroad will help their students to learn more about themselves. Through experiencing another way of life, it can possibly can change one's thoughts of self and of the other (Byram and Feng 2006:1). The general purpose of students participating in a studying abroad program is to expose students to a different worldview and hopefully create a global perspective. Ross argues that "a rationale of many study abroad programs (SAPs), regardless of academic discipline, is the goal of improving students' global conscientiousness or 'worldmindness' through exposure to people,

cultures, and conditions unlike their own (Douglas and Jones-Rikker 2001 cited in Ross 2007:2). In being introduced to another culture, if they are open to change, their mindset and beliefs systems will possibly be challenged through their interaction with the 'other'. There is no global worldview yet a shift in the current ways that the participants conceptualized the world. There was a transformation by being exposed to an environment and culture different from their own.

Although traveling can expose people, especially other countries to American ideas on beauty, studying abroad for many college students puts them in the appropriate mindset to really get into investigation of and 'deep talking' with people of another culture. As tourists, people are less likely to think critically about another culture because their mind is on 'vacation' unless are probed to which is the case of college students studying abroad. Study abroad participants have to complete some sort of research project and take classes about their host culture in order to gain credit. In order to discuss and write about a culture some level of conscious thinking, analyzing and understanding has to take place. Although this is the publicized or 'written' purpose of a study abroad program, not all programs encourage critical thinking and self-reflexivity. All of the participants of this project participated in a study abroad program as a part of their undergraduate education.

I have always wanted to study abroad!

All of my participants expressed a strong desire to go abroad due to their outlook on life and global worldview. They all had a desire to "see what else was out there" and many already knew that "the U.S. is not the world." These Black women made a conscious decision and worked hard to make their desire to go abroad a reality. Carmen and Amber always had a great urge to travel abroad and for them study abroad was the perfect opportunity to fulfill this

dream. Amber who, had never been outside the United States, stated that she badly wanted to " explore horizons and different ways of life and how they connect to Africa." Carmen said she always had a "top ten list since I was a little girl of places wanted to go." This natural early desire to travel prompted these women to want to travel outside the U.S. Although no one in Carmen's family traveled, she still had a great desire to go abroad. She said, "I just knew this wasn't it." Her reference to "it" was to the U.S. culture she had been socialized by and that she wanted to experience something different.

One barrier and encourager for these Black women to study abroad was pre-exposure to traveling through their families. In going abroad, being something that they always wanted to do, they had to first think it was possible. Due to their positive associations with the abilities of Black women, they felt that "anything is possible" for them as Black women. They all talked about Black women being strong and powerful women. Ruby and Amber talked about the strength of Black women to "overcome adversity" and their "capacity to take on the world." They concluded that Black women are powerful and that they could do anything they put their mind to. Delia described Black women as "world leaders" who "run stuff." ' In her descriptions she used her mother as an example and referred to herself in this genre of strong Black women.

It's something the rich and White's do!

A view of the world is created through socialization through the media, family and school. Since all of my participants are college educated, this socially advantages and advances them above most of the population. By this I mean, it places them in a position to have their needs as well as many wants meet. Although some of the participants did not have a middle class upbringing such as Amber, they are now privileged in being educated which has value in the United States. Fifteen out of the twenty participants had traveled outside the United States before

studying abroad. Those that had never traveled outside the United States are Sakeyna, Gacc, Sue, Lola and Amber. There reasoning for never going abroad had to do with their mindset as children. Demo argues that the family context is one of the influential socialization setting because it serves to transmit values, norms, morals, and beliefs (Demo 1990:365). Since their family members did not have the resources to go abroad, they waited until college to go.

Amber was raised by her mother, who was a single parent. She explained that she never traveled abroad because it was not a "priority" to her mother. Her mother had too many important things to do such as pay the rent and not enough time to do it. It was not that her mother or the rest of her family did not want to travel but that they did not have the resources. When I asked if she felt Black people valued traveling, she responded, "Hell, naw. Black people don't travel." Although this is not necessarily true, it is true that many Black people believe that Black people do not travel. Amber attributed this not to a lack of desire but to "lack of information", " fear of leaving what we know" and misconception that it is "something that white people and rich people do." This idea that Black people do not travel because it is for the "white" and "rich", is not a misguided idea. "Typically, before the 1980s, study abroad programs were considered "luxuries" for many, and were mainly associated with the children of the wealthy. This was due, in part, to the high cost to participate in these programs, which were self funded (Simon 2007: 2). This idea that the act of studying abroad is something only the rich Whites can do affects Black people's drive to apply to a study abroad program at their colleges or universities.

Sheila wanted to go abroad for a long time but did not think it was possible. Although Sheila went on a study abroad program to Australia, she did not apply until later in college. Since Sheila saw that most of the people she talked to that went abroad did not look like her,

she was afraid to apply to a program because it would be too “challenging” which made her “insecure” about applying. Sheila’s barriers to applying were her mindset. She stated that not many Black people study abroad nor travel so therefore she believed that studying abroad was “something whites do” and “not something parents with three kids did.” Unlike Carmen and Amber, Sheila wanted to travel but had doubts in her head about the reality of completing such a task. Recognizing the “major factors” that deter Blacks from going abroad which coincide with the literature I found, she felt that “trying to tell my mom I am trying to go on a trip to wherever...jus ain’t happening.” She realized that “going abroad would have to be a delayed gratification” until college.

In looking at Black women's experiences with their hair in a global context, study abroad was one site to explore this phenomenon. Since African-American students represent a very small minority of the students that study abroad and there are many barriers that prevent Black people. These successful attempts to involve more minority students in studying abroad have exposed more Black students to international ideas about Black identity and beauty.

In reviewing the bulk of my participants that did have previous exposure to another country before their study abroad program, I found that they all had a characteristic in common. Delia, Ann, Vanessa, Patrice, Sue, Maria and Djenne all have a strong association with an ethnic background- i.e parent from a country outside the United States. For example, Maria, Djenne, Ann, Patrice and Sue all had parents who were born outside the United States so they went to go visit family. For Patrice, Sue, Mary and Djenne they all lived and attended some school in their parents homeland of Jamaica, Nigeria, Haiti and Trinidad so they revisited during college. For Maria, Vanessa and Delia, the mere fact that they had family or a parent that lived outside the United States, made them curious about other cultures and therefore

travel. In a later conversation I had with Maria, she stated that the "United States did not provide me with a sense of ethnic heritage. I always wanted to know where my dad was from." Her desire to connect to her Panamanian background and to learn more about her father's heritage moved her to travel abroad to Panama and was one of the many factors that sparked her desire to start traveling and study abroad. Maria not only studied abroad to Brazil but later attended the Semester at Sea program.

Shelly also traveled because she had a parent from outside the U.S. Since her her mother is from Jamaica, she traveled to Jamaica as a child. She went to Europe, Senegal and Gambia, in third, fourth and fifth grade because her parents had jobs there and enjoyed traveling. She also went to Jamaica and England to visit her family, Trinidad for carnival, San Juan, Puerto Rico for spring break, and then to Caracas, Venezuela for a conference last summer. Since she traveled so much, it was normalized and was "just apart of what she did." After telling Maria that I had concluded that fifteen out of twenty of the participants had traveled abroad in the past and that I attributed this to the fact that they have a strong connection with an ethnic background, she states "I can see this. It was the case for me initially."

Other participants, such as Vanessa, took advantage of her time off work and school to travel. Vanessa traveled to Europe for a trip her senior year of high school. She also traveled to Spain, France, Switzerland and Germany with some friends during this trip. Her initiative to take the trip was prompted by the fact that she said she was "raised very culturally aware, other cultures interested me." She spoke about how she identifies and is "curious" about her Mexican side because she was raised mainly by her mother. Her mother and father both instilled in her to be proud of her Black and Mexican side but her mother had greater influence.

He mother's insistence on the importance of family and culture made her want to understand and see the Mexican culture her mother told her about. Although these participants traveled abroad to get acquainted with family they had abroad and learn more about their culture, other participants studied abroad to try to find their roots.

I wanted to connect with my roots!

Participants such as Amber were not able to go abroad until they went to college. Amber's ability to get financial aid, academic credit, and participate in an internship allowed her to study abroad through an Emory program. This created a safe and inviting environment for Amber. Since part of Amber's desire to go to Africa stemmed from her desire to connect to her roots, the chance to be introduced to the Kenyans' way of life was most appropriate. Study abroad director, Miriama Ross found that Black students' motives to study abroad differed from white students. She states that, "they [Black students] are more likely to be seeking a personal experience that is about their own heritage and identities, stating, "I want to see my 'roots,' where my ancestors come from," "I want to find a stronger connection with my past" (Ross 2007:7).

Ross' investigation of her African American students experiences in Africa, led her to analyze racial identity. In her experience in going to Africa, Ross explains that "the first experience in Africa for African Americans can be both uplifting and shattering. There can be a dizzying roller coaster of often-conflicting emotions. Many of us go with the desire to find lost roots and added depth to identities made shallow and one-dimensional by the fog of slavery and its legacy" (Ross 2007: 4). Although Amber was previously aware that she would not be seen as an African, she was appreciative of going to Africa which helped her to learn more about herself.

In discussing the Black identity in a U.S. context with my participants, they found it important to mention the struggle that Black women endure in the United States. They talked about Black women as the "backbone of society" and "mother of the earth". Carmen, Delia, Betty and Sue wanted to see how these "queens" had impacted the world. They felt that their strength as Black women stemmed from their African roots and that is they are able to succeed in a racist, sexist and capitalist society that portrays Black women in negative ways.

Negotiating Blackness Abroad

Combating negative views of self: views of perceived racial identity

Although these participants had a positive view of Black women and identified strongly with their descriptions, they acknowledged their issues with others' perceptions. I asked them, "What does it men to you to be a Black woman?" and "How does mainstream American society and the locals in your host country view Black people?" In answering these questions, many of the participants talked about mass American media perceptions and the negative images that the locals had of Black women that they got from television in the United States.

In studying abroad, these participants had to face of the negative interpretations of the locals in their host program about Black female identity in the United States. The women were very aware of how their positive identification with Blackness conflicted with the mass American media ideas, but were disappointed to find the same views abroad. They felt that the characteristics of Black women they know were not properly portrayed by the American media and this had a negative effect on how they were viewed as Black women in the host country. Ed Guerrero discusses the way that Hollywood and the mass American media has gone about "framing Blackness" I a glorified, racist, sexist and violent manner that has created a fantasy construction of the Black person as the subordinate other and White as the sovereign norm

(Guerrero 1993:2,5). The stereotypical monotheistic images of Black people portrayed by the media are "blaxploitation"---the exploitation of Black people through the commercial cinema in the U.S. (Guerrero 1993:8).

During their stay abroad, many women expressed frustration in having to combat negative and degrading images of Black people, especially Black women, by the locals and even other Americans. They all agreed that the White students did not have to confront negative views of their race. Byrd and Solomon discuss their personal and other Black women's perceptions of self. They acknowledge that "it's always a shocker when you see yourself one way, but many people in the world view you very differently" (2005: xi).

Although these women described their identity in positive terms, they felt that the media in the United States negatively portray Black women as **"**jezebels and video hoes." Delia, Vanessa, Amber, Ruby and Carmen discussed their frustration with having people ask them about the television shows *Flava Flav* and *I Love New York*. Delia explained that since "we live in a European patriarchal society", Black women are deemed as "inferior." Vanessa attributes the inability of people in Guanajuato, Mexico to understand her identity as a reflection of how they view their own brown people. She stated that "that's the way it is there" so that is why they think Black women are inferior. The only thing that people outside the U.S. know about Black people is what they see on television which is "limited."

Amber was upset at the representation of Black women as "over sexed video hoes", "mothers of five' and "hoes on the stroll" portrayed through the American television. Ruby and Delia felt first hand the "severity of this image." Being abroad, they had to confront the negative views of not the 'distant other' but of themselves. Sheila who went to Australia and Delia who went to the Dominican Republic both had to combat negative views due to the strong media

images and lack of contact that the locals had with Black Americans. When these women were identified, they felt that their hair was a signifier of their race.

My hair gave me away!: Hair as a racial marker abroad

This statement, “my hair gave me away” was used by the participants many times when I asked them “Did the locals perceive you as Black? How did you know this?” Their hair served as a racial marker of their identity as the ‘other’. During their study abroad program, they had to face the views that the locals and other participants had about their hair. Patrice who went to Guadalajara, Mexico said that she blended in very well. She feels that her bi-racial background as Black Jamaican and White American has awarded her the ability to blend in various different settings. When Patrice told her friend that she was going to Mexico, her friend told her that the “only thing that would’ve given me away is my hair.” Since the “majority of people in Mexico don’t have curly hair,” my curly hair did make me look a little different but not necessarily Black. Patrice has really soft light brown curly hair, light skin and light greenish eyes.

For other participants such as Amber, Alexandria and Ruby, their hair served as a racial marker of their Black identity. When I asked Ruby if they knew she was Black, she responded “yes, because when I said I needed to my get hair done, she suggested her hair salon and they told me that didn’t do “really curly hair.” Ruby was frustrated because, when she studied abroad in Spain, she could not do her hair at home because she did not have the proper tools such as a blow-dryer. When she tried to explain to her house mom and her white classmates, she said they “couldn’t understand why I needed to wash and then dry my hair.” I could tell in Ruby’s voice that this was very disappointing that she had no one to relate to. She expressed desire to ‘just fit in.’ She told me that she “didn’t want to be the nappy headed Black girl but be the girl in class.” She did not want to be racially identifiable which she was through her hair. Although her dark

skin complexion also served as a marker of her Black identity, she said that she understood that she “can’t change skin color...but could change my hair.”

Ruby’s issue stemmed from being the only Black girl and student from Georgia State program to Spain in her class. Due to the fact that she was the only Atlantan, Black girl and she was already frustrated about getting her hair done, she just did not want to be noticed. It was not that she had self hatred for her hair but that she had difficulty being the center of attention. For example when she could not get her hair done, she decided to braid her hair in cornrows and the White students were like “that’s so amazing! how did you do that? that’s so amazing!” She “wanted it so badly for it to be straight…so wouldn’t draw attention.” It is hard to remain positive about your racial identity when others perceptions of it are negative. Ruby likes her hair but like me, gets upset and emotional when you cannot get it done. For many Black women such as Ruby, hair and self esteem is linked.

For several participants such as Amber, hair was not an issue that negatively affected their self esteem. Amber studied abroad in Kenya and expressed that her hair made her “culturally identifiable.” Her hair was a racial marker of her Blackness. She stated that women in Kenya wore perms and different braided styles such as micros and cornrows which are similar to the hairstyles of Black women in the U.S. Amber’s experience differed from Ruby’s because she was surrounded by people that looked like her, had similar textures and hair care rituals and therefore could identify with her. Amber’s along with Carmen’s and Sakeyna’s hair and dark skin tone did not make her stand out. Carmen who went to Brazil felt that she blended in very well like Patrice. Carmen stated that the presence of the Afro- Brazilians in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, Bahia made the experience of going to Brazil very comfortable. She felt that since Brazil has an African heritage and she is of African descent that she blended in very well. The

only way that she could have been viewed otherwise was by her hair. One major markers of difference in Brazil is the hair. In Brazil,

> As a key marker of racial difference, hair assumes a central role in the racial politics of everyday life in Brazil. Most Brazilians are keenly aware of the social and racial significance of gradations in hair texture and use this knowledge as a standard for categorizing individuals into racial and color groups. The racial implications of hair texture take on added significance for Black women, given the central role accorded to hair in racialized constructions of femininity and female beauty (Caldwell 2004:18).

Carmen felt that, "Since I don't have hair and am baldheaded and there was a lot of people that looked like me and my hair is cut really low…so people can't tell what it looks like." Carmen felt that her hair was not a racial marker of her Black (American) identity due to others inability to see the texture of her hair because of her lack of. Sakeyna who studied abroad in India had a similar experience. Since she is Muslim, she covers her head and hair. She stated that "they didn't know what I was because my hair was covered." Her dark skin and facial features blended in very well with hers so the only racial marker of difference could have been her hair. When I went to Tamil Nadu, India in 2003 for a study abroad program, I found that my hair was one of the markers of my racial identity as a Black American.

All of these participants have expressed that hair is a racial marker of the Black identity. They felt that the locals in their host location could identify them as Black if they saw their hair. Carmen felt that hair is the "most obvious" marker of African heritage. Alexandria found that in England (she was there for eleven months) due to the lack of Black hair care products, she found it easier to perm her hair rather than wear natural styles. Natural styles such as braids would cost $300 so it was much less expensive, $60 to get a perm. The predominantly White neighborhoods they visited did not cater to Black hair and so Black products were rare and therefore expensive. Sheila, who went to Australia for five months, had a similar issue. Like

Alexandria, Sheila wanted to wear natural styles but could not afford and did not want to pay outlandish prices such as $500-600 for braided styles such as micros-- very tiny braids. Although these two women wanted to reject the notion that perms are more socially acceptable and attractive hair styles for Black women, their location prevented them from doing so. Although, at that time, these women were unable to resist in the form they wanted to, in returning home to Atlanta they had more options on how to wear their hair.

As the participants recognized the negative views locals had of Black women in the United States and reflected on how their hair served as a racial marker of the identity, it made them reflect on the identity that they took for granted. In America race is such an important social issue that they never thought about their identity as an American.

American status

My Accent gave me away! I am American?

Twelve of the twenty participants identified their nationality as "American." Although they self identified this way, they found this word to be problematic. Most of them identified as American because they said they were "born here" but it had nothing to do with they way they feel. Although Carmen told me she identified her nationality as American, she said she was "a part of international community." She said that she only "feels American when outside country." She felt that her accent and fact that she speaks English gave away her status as American in Brazil. Although many such as Alexandria in England and Vanessa and Patrice in Mexico, were identified as Black through their hair, their American English speaking accent "gave them away" as Americans.

Many of the participants discussed their surprise and confusion at being seen as American while they were abroad. Sue, Djenne, Mary and Delia identified with their ethnicity

more than their nationality status as American. Betty and Amber were surprised to be seen as Americans first while abroad because they identified their nationality as Black and African-American. Although they recognize their American status, they did not view it as a major part of their identity. Betty said that "because they [White Americans] treat us second class", I always disassociated myself from self identifying as American. The fact that people abroad saw them as American was an enlightening experience.

Another issue with identifying as American was the term. Delia identified as from the "USA" and not as American. Ann rejected the association of American with identity and instead related her nationality to a birthplace rather a part of her identity. Delia purposefully rejected the American label because she feels "Americans believe they are the world forget and about South American." These women do not embrace the label American due to their disassociation with the racist and ethnocentric implications.

I understand these participants' frustrations and confusion by the locals' abroad perceptions of them as American. I did not think of myself as American until I went outside the country. The first time I traveled abroad was through a study abroad program through the University of Michigan to Tamil Nadu, India in the summer of 2003. I remember going to my professor's family house and his family and our interpreter calling me American and asking me about grocery stores and McDonald's. I remember thinking to myself, "American?, Wait, I am Black!" They associated my wealth and English terminology to Americanness. Ross had a similar experience when she realized that the "Ghanaians perceived me, not as African American, but as American" (2007). Dolby states that the

> American national identity is neither simply discarded nor strengthened, but is riddled with contradictions, as it is actively encountered and constructed outside of the physical borders of the United States. Thus, study abroad provides not only the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself--particularly one's

> national identity--in a context that may stimulate new questions and new formulations of that self (Dolby 2004:150).

This "encounter with an American self" was a surprising aspect of the identity of my participants, Ross and myself. Even as I studied abroad two more times throughout my academic career, I was still surprised to be labeled as an American first and Black second. Although like many of the participants, I reject this label it would be pretentious of me to unacknowledged the privileges it grants abroad.

I am privileged to be American.

Many of the participants discussed the privileges they receive as a result of the American status. Amber discussed how traveling abroad was a great experience because she was able to see what was “started by people of her heritage.” She felt that she can embrace the American label because her people (Africans) influenced the world. Delia, Vanessa, Danielle and Sweze all expressed how they were privileged in not only seeing Africa’s influence around the world but in being a part of a culture that also greatly influenced the world- the United States. Vanessa said that although she is “not patriotic” because her “ethnic” ties lie with Mexico, she recognizes that she is “lucky” to be a citizen. Her family is fighting to come here from Mexico to be “free and have liberties.”

In the focus group, Delia and Vanessa discussed how being an American “cancelled out” or “erased” their Blackness. It was not that people did not see their color or view them as Black, but it was the fact that people were “nicer” to them because they were American. Vanessa talked about people’s unwillingness to talk to her until they knew she was America. Although all of the participants were flushed by vendors selling items and locals wanting to ask questions about “America”, they knew this was attributed to their status as a “rich American.”

Wait…I am still Black!?: Experiences with local racism abroad

Although these Black women struggled with their identity as American while abroad, the realization that they are "still Black" set in when they had racial experiences. The participants discussed how they were viewed compared to the White students on the program. Even though they were all Americans, they expressed how their race still played a factor. Many of them had a strong desire and worked hard to go abroad to learn about another culture, they felt that this was not the case for the White students. Amber who went to Kenya and Ruby who went to Spain felt that their White classmates went abroad to "get drunk and party." They talked about going to local bars and restaurants and conversing with the locals. This view of being seen as American first was not the same as for them as for their White classmates. The White women were viewed as 'spring breakers' and being asked for money by the locals.

Delia, Alexandria, Mary and Ann discussed how all the local men wanted to dance with the White Americans. They were all objectified as Americans but the Whites were the "exotic other." This occurred in places such as the Dominican Republic and Brazil where they are plenty of women of African ancestry that look similar to them. But also in the study abroad locations of cities in Spain, England and Mexico where there are not many people with brown skin and curly hair, the local men did not want to dance with the Black participants because they had racist views on beauty.

Vanessa talked about how she was at a club in Guanajuato, Mexico and a Mexican guy came up to her Indian friend who has a dark complexion and said "You're Black, you are not beautiful." Although her friend was not Black, this made her realize the view that many people around the world have about Blackness as not beautiful. The negative association of Blackness

was also felt by Sheila who went to Australia. Sheila said that the locals asked too many personal questions and would ask her to “speak Black” for them. They also asked her about the N word and if she could rap for them. When she replied that she does not listen to rap, they look at her in awe and tell her “you have to rap because you are Black.” These stereotypes that all Black people in the United Stated listen to rap and talk a certain way was not only held by the local Australians but enforced by her White classmates.

She was the only Black on the trip and there was a situation where one of the study abroad students was stealing from the other students. She said, “one of the girls was a clepto” and stole over $2,000 and electronic items from peoples rooms. When the girl was confronted by the program director, she accused Sheila. Sheila was outraged because she had never been in contact with the girl so questioned why she would blame her. Sheila stated, “Why the Black girl? Tell me race wasn’t involved in that specific situation?” Her classmates did not think that she did it but could not understand how it was a race issue. Although the girl was asked to go home, she felt that they interrogated her and searched her room more thoroughly then they did the “clepto”. Sheila and many of the other participants agreed that this Sheila would have not received such leniency by the police and the program director because she was Black.

Since I have studied abroad three times in college, I have had similar experiences with the participants. I remember being in high school and wanting to attend the study abroad program in Argentina, but my mother strongly objecting to the idea. She said “I love you too much to expose you to international racism”. She was afraid that someone would discriminate against me because I am Black and a woman. Although I know that my mother tends to be overprotective, she was correct in her assumption about the racist and sexist notions and the ignorance about Black people that exists in many countries.

When I attended a study abroad program in Guanajuato, Mexico, my experience as a Black woman was challenging. Like Alexandria and Sheila, I was one of the few Blacks participating in the program out of thirty students who were White. My host family and the locals in the town I lived in, Guanajuato, were all very light skinned which made me an outsider due to the visible differences in physical appearance. My curly hair, dark skin and gender made me very noticeable in my new environment. At times the machismo was so unbearable that I would wear headphones just to block out their comments. I felt that my identity as a Black woman made me have different experiences than my white peers because my skin color and hair served as racial markers of my identity. I felt my Black body was fetishized differently. I remember one day when my classmates and I were walking to class, a group of kids rushed towards me to touch my skin and hair. I was flabbergasted and looked for their mother for help, but she was too busy trying to videotape me. This was only one of the many experiences I had that separated me from my white classmates. This treatment had a profound effect on my emotions, school paper topics, interaction with locals and overall worldview.

I am not my hair or am I? Reflections on hair identity abroad

I'm still in love with me but just a little more!

Participating in a study abroad program did not change their views about their hair or make them want to alter their hairstyles but it made them "a little more in love" with their identity as a Black woman. They discussed having more confidence and a greater pride in the African heritage and features. Shiela, Delia, Vanessa, Carmen and Sue all used the word "proud" to describe how they felt about themselves after studying abroad. They were proud of how they stood up against negative stereotypes and how they could see the influences of the African

culture. Carmen who went to Brazil discussed how she was proud to see how Africa has influenced the world and how that makes her proud to be a Black woman.

Sheila said that she was more proud to be Black after studying abroad in Spain because she said she, “stood up for myself very well.” When the Australians were asking her racist questions and her White classmate accusing her of stealing, she felt like she handled the situation well. Delia said that going to the Dominican Republic made her “want to be African more. Before claimed Jamaican.” She was hesitant to claim African due to her strong association with her mother’s homeland but studying abroad made her realize that her African ancestry is just as important. Vanessa also was more proud of her heritage. She said that she “became a little more proud of Mexican side.” Although the Mexicans she interacted with did not accept her as Mexican, she still loved the culture.

This pride in their racial identity heightened their self esteem and their appreciation of their African features, including their hair. Alexandria talked about how England challenged her self esteem. She said that she went to England “very confident about being a Black woman.” She said that this was a process due to the fact that she is not the typical body shape. Alexandria said that it “took awhile for me to love who I am.” She said that in England the idea of a “beautiful Black woman” was challenged because “everything that the media said who was beautiful- was not Black.” She said that the “white British” fashion did not fit her tastes nor her shape. Although the standard of beauty in England challenged her self esteem, she has since started to find new ways to love herself again. In our later conversations, she has tried different hair styles and really analyzed the idea of beauty. She desires to be more natural and connect with her inner beauty.

Although participants such as Sakeyna feel that hair “shouldn’t define who we are”, hair still serves as an important bonding experience amongst Black women. Black women share a special bond due to their common experiences with their hair. Ruby also struggled with beauty concepts abroad but said that it “allowed me to be more free in myself.” Ruby said that due to the lack of hair care products in Spain she experimented with different hairstyles. Ife and Carmen state that hair connected and created “camaraderie” with other women. For example Ife and Sheila had hair straightening parties in Mexico and Spain with other Black girls they met abroad. This connection through hair has affected the identity and in Carmen words “life” of all Black women.

Through hearing some of their stories about the struggles with perceived identity, racism and hair maintenance, I began to explore my own identity and how my hair was a reflection of it. I was encouraged and moved by the personal hair accounts to try different hair styles. In the course of doing this research, I started to go completely natural. I have always wanted to be natural; by natural I mean not pressing my hair and attempting to gain back my natural curl pattern, but in my exploration of these women, I began to explore myself. A few women, such as Joi, Ife and Amber helped me find strength in wearing my hair the way I wanted to wear it. When I was finished with the interviews and after hanging out with some of my participants, I decided to go to a natural hair salon and get my hair cut. As I sat in the chair and looked in the mirror, I decided that “I am not my hair”, I am just me. Like Amber, I want to “take control over my life and choose who I want to be and how I want to define myself.”

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

The process of discussing body politics of Black women, it has led me to better understand these experiences with socialization, assimilation, resistance, and empowerment as a rites of passage into womanhood for Black women. My participants have negotiated their shifting identities in a way that they found themselves resisting certain beauty myths and finding empowerment in doing so. Black women that go abroad are exposed to international ideas about their identity as a Black woman. They have felt the need to confront these negative stereotypes and also found pride in their African identity and privilege in American status. This new or for some revamped worldview about black beauty influenced how they currently spoke about their hair. Many rejected the idea that they had to keep their hair permed but instead decided to figure out how they wanted to express themselves through their hair. In expressing the desire to keep their hair the same or go natural or stay permed, they were proud of who they are and liked how they handled adversities due to racism. Betty made a good point in that "American society undermines women confidence about their appearance regardless of race."

The resistance of Eurocentric cultural norms about beauty and hair is done by all women influenced by this model including White women. Particularly my participants have found new ways to express and articulate how they resist these norms through their cross cultural experience. Their global interaction with people that had negative, limited views of Black American women exposed them to global ideas about standardized beauty in relation to Black beauty. In participating in a study abroad program they not only were exposed to new cultures

but also to information about those cultures through classes and organized educational trips that they may not have participate in or had access to if they had just traveled. Many expressed that they felt this was the only way that they would get to go abroad due to their school load and an untelling future. They realized that as African American women that we have a huge responsibility to care for our loved ones and in this responsibility we may have limited time to do certain things that are not mandatory such as go abroad. This discussion of hair was a jumping off point for discussing other aspects of identity that were affected or transformed through study abroad.

Among the White majority in the U.S., ignorance or indifference about Blackness, Black hair and skin, hindered the ideal of Black identity and contributed to the standard of beauty that many people the world over try to adhere to. Everyday resistance of the standard of beauty is shown in books such as “Naked” where Black women are writing their own stories about the bodies and experiences and reclaiming role as an active agent in their description of their lives. Ross states that

> it can be argued that ethnocentrism, racism, and myopic global vision result when we maintain too firm a grip on whom we think we are in contrast to whom we think others are, and the ways we respond to each other based on those perceived identities. When we place ourselves outside our comfort zones, or ‘off center,’ our identities shift along with the changed venue, providing a unique opportunity to reflect on our individual identities but also who we are and want to be as a collective race on the planet (2007).

In investigating hair as a racial marker for my participants, I was able to explain the racial positioning of Black women by investigating how their hair, others responses to their hair, and how they have responded to hair.

FUTURE RESEARCH

I hope to apply the rich data I have gathered as a result of my research throughout the year to further study of Black identity. The information I have about Black women's identity, experiences abroad, racism, resistance and beauty concepts will be useful starting points for future projects. The original purpose of my research was to investigate Black women's experiences with study abroad and hair, so I interviewed Black women who have studied abroad. As a result I have acquired much insight into the complexities of issues with identity that Black women in the United States face in different settings.

I encourage anyone reading this to be a "curious feminist." My feminist curiosity directed me to study the subject of hair, which its validity as a scholarly subject worthy to be discussed is still debated. I wanted to not only investigate Black female identity as it relates to hair but to discover and analyze the inside jokes at the beauty salon and the "hair parties" that black women have while abroad. I had to ask questions that many White American scholars deemed unimportant and many Black friends deemed premature. I wanted to take this rich data I acquired through having deep and informal and formal conversations with participants and friends and use it to explain the complexities of Black female identity and show the resistance against the cultural scripting of their bodies by society. I hope through the stories of these women I exposed them as active agents against gender norms and any other oppressive agents in their lives.

I also seek to contribute to a growing body of anthropological knowledge on body/personal adornment and identity, particularly as this is experienced in cross-cultural or international travel and studies abroad. This project has helped to show the complex construction of the participant's identity and hopefully will encourage other social scientists to

explore multiple aspects of identity construction. Although race is an important element, it is important to recognize other key factors to identity development such as class and socialization agents such as family, ethnicity and nationality. Further research also needs to be done on Black men and other racial/ethnic minorities who study abroad to uncover their identity construction and experiences abroad. The information obtained through this research could be useful to study abroad program directors and offices of international study to better recognize the needs of minority students from a biosociocultural perspective. I plan to create how-to guides on how to deal with race issues that minority students may experience abroad and how to discuss issues with hair maintenance that some of the Black women may face. I hope to use the thoughts of these women to create further creative, thought provoking self-reflective papers. I want my work to be interesting, relative, and readable for all audiences, especially Black women in the US. I hope to write in beauty and black hair magazines, academic journals, electronic blogs, and televised shows to show the world all that Black women have offered and continue to offer.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Preliminary Questions

Name:
Interviewee Pseudonym:
Age:
Education level and school:
Hometown:
Race:
Nationality:
Ethnicity:
Travel abroad location:
Study abroad location:
Purpose of program:
School of program:
Programs length of time:
Hair type:
Skin color:

Questions

1. What encouraged you to do a study abroad program?
a. Why and how did you decide to go?

2. Have you ever traveled outside of the United States? When and why?

3. Explain how you self identify - racially, ethnically, nationality?

4. What does it mean to you to be a Black woman?
a. What does mainstream American society say about what it means to be a Black woman? Black literature? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
b. What do you associate with Black women or blackness?

5. Did the locals perceive you as Black?
a. How do you think they came to this conclusion? How do you know what they thought?
b. What does it mean to be Black in the place(s) you went abroad to?

6. Do you feel your physical appearance affected your experience abroad? How?

7. Have you found that your experience in your study abroad program(s) has differed from whites or other people of color? In what ways?

8. Do you feel your experience was limited or heightened because of your gender or race?

9. Did you anticipate having any issues because of your "race"? (Did you have any anxieties before you went abroad?)

a. What kind of racial issues did you have, if any?

10. How has studying abroad affected how you view your identity? Did your view change afterwards? If so, how?

11. How has studying abroad affected how you view and feel about your hair?

12. How does your hair affect your self esteem?

13. How did you care for your hair abroad? Did the way you cared for it change when you returned back to the United States? If so, how?

14. How would you describe your hair? How do you believe others (other students, people in the United States, people in the country you visited) viewed your hair?

15. How are hair types racialized? How do you think the concept of race in America affects people's view of what "good" and "bad" hair are?

16. Why do you think that hair is so important to women and especially Black women?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form
Georgia State University, Department of Anthropology

Informed Consent

Title: The Effects of Study Abroad on Black Women's Identity and Perceptions of Hair

Principal Investigator: Dr. Cassandra White, Department of Anthropology, Georgia State University
Student Investigator: Yolanda Chapman, M.A. candidate, Department of Anthropology, Georgia State University

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate how study abroad affects identity, especially your feelings about your hair. You are invited to participate because you are a Black woman who has participated in a study abroad program and currently lives in Georgia. A minimum of 10 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require approximately 15-45 minutes of your time over one day. Everyone will complete an in- person interview but only some of you will be asked to participate in a focus group on a different day, which may require 1-2 hours of your time.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will complete an in person interview that will take 15-45 minutes of your time. The interview is completed only once, but if more information is needed and if you agree, some of you will be asked to do a second interview. It will be scheduled to further discuss the questions or clarify certain points. The interview will take place at a time and place agreed upon by you and the student investigator and may require 1-2 hours of your time. Also you may be asked to participate in a focus group with other interviewees. This will allow people to share their opinions about identity, hair and study abroad. The focus group will take place at a time and place agreed upon by you and the student investigator and may require 1-3 hours of your time. Interviews and focus groups may be audio taped. If you prefer not to have your interview or focus group taped, please indicate this at the bottom of this survey. No financial compensation will be provided to participants.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally. It will help you to gain insight into how parts of your identity or perceived identity as a Black woman affected your experience abroad, even your life. Also you will be awarded the chance to think about how your experience abroad affects your identity and feelings about your hair. Overall, it is helpful to gain information about how identity affects students study abroad experiences so that professors and study abroad program directors can better understand the experiences that students are having during the study abroad programs. The results of this research will help them to improve and modify their programs to the needs of the students. It will help universities to understand the need to create programs that are sensitive to the needs and interests of students of student's identities and backgrounds.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:
Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to not be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only Cassandra White and Yolanda Chapman will have access to the information you provide. It will be stored in Cassandra White's office in a locked cabinet or in a firewall protected computer. The interview(s) or if a focus group is needed and audio recorded, then it will be kept in the locked cabinet, and any transcriptions will be saved on firewall protected computers. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results, unless otherwise instructed by you. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally, otherwise you approve of this. Pseudonyms, or false names, will be assigned and used for any reference to the information you provide as part of this research.

VII. Contact Persons:

Call Cassandra White or Yolanda Chapman at 404-413-5150 or e-mail at cwhite@gsu.edu or ychapman1@student.gsu.edu if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

_____ _____

Participant Date

If you agree to participate in an interview, please check the box: □

If you agree to participate in a focus group, please check the box: □

If you agree to have your interview audiotaped, please check this box: □

If you agree to have your picture taken, please check the box: □

_____ _____

Principal Investigator or Student Investigator Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix C: Demographics of the Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1.1 Characteristics of All Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Nationality	Ethnicity	School/year	Major	Study Abroad location	Travel abroad location	Hair type/Skin color
Maria	22	Black/Hispanic	American	Black/Panamanian Hispanic	Georgia State senior	Anthropology	Brazil and semester at sea	Panama, Mexico, Bahamas	Dread-multi-textured/ red-brown
Djenne	25	Afro-Trinidadian/Afro-Caribbean	Trinidad and Tobago	Afro-Trinidadian/Afro-Caribbean	Spelman Alumni	Political Science and Inter relations	Barbados	Venezuela , Jamaica, U.S.	Tightly curled/ dark brown like coffee beans
Mary	24	Black	Nigerian	African	Georgia State alumni	Psychology and minor in Anthropology	Brazil	U.S.	Braids, course-typical African hair/dark ebony
Danielle	21	Black	American	Black	Georgia Tech senior	Computational Media	East Asia-Japan	Bahamas	Thick-relaxed/ medium-brown
Ann	23	Black	American	United States	Georgia State alumni	Marketing	Brazil	Brazil, Guyana, Bahamas, Canada	Thin-fine-soft/ Brown
Betty	39	Black	Black	Black American	Georgia State	BA communication; MA Women Studies	Guatemala	West and South Africa	Natural/ Choco-Brown
Vanessa	20	Bi-racial-black/mexican	American	Black/Hispanic	Georgia tech junior	Management and physiology	Montareu, Mexico	Europe	Very curly ringlet curls/Brown

Appendix C: continued…

Sakeyna	23	Black	American	Black American	Georgia State alumni	Economics	India		Dreads-natural/ dark brown
Gacc	20	Black	American	African-American	Clark junior	Social work	Ecuador		Thick/golden brown
Patrice	25	Human	Jamaican or Jamaican-American	White/Black Jamaican	Georgia State senior	Political Science and Anthropology	Guadalajara, Mexico	France, Jamaica, Amsterdam, Berlin	Curly/tan-light-brown, fair skin
Sue	23	Black	Haitian	Haitian	Georgia State alumni	Business administration (accountant)	S. Africa	Haiti, Canada	Relaxed/ black
Shiela	21	African-American	African	African-American	Georgia State senior	Psychology/sociology	Sydney, Australia		Course black /tan
Alexandria	21	African-American	American	Black	Georgia State senior	English	England	(Europe)	Thick and straight/brown
Sewze	22	African-American/Black	American	Black?	Georgia Tech senior	Computer engineering	Japan	(Taiwan)	Nappy-kinky/brown
Ruby	23	African American	American	African American	Georgia State	BA in English	Spain	Mexico	Permed-straight/Dark-brown
Lola	23		American	???	Georgia State	MA religious studies, BA anthropology	Malaysia and Singapore		Different/Brown
Ife	21	Black	American	Black	Georgia State senior	African American studies	Guatemala, Mexico	(El Salvador)	Natural/Brown
Delia	26	African	USA	Jamaican American	BA at Spelman; Master of Arts at Harvard	BA in Psychology MA in Human Development	Dominican Republic	Europe, Africa and Caribbean islands	3b/4a wavy, curly and "kinky" / chocolate-dark skin
Carmen	22	Black	American	?	Georgia State alumni	Political Science	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	France	Wavy brown/caramelo
Amber	21	African American	African American	African American	Emory	Sociology/African Studies	Kenya		Natural/chocolate-dark skinned

[i] Interview conducted at Too Groovey (hair salon) on October 20, 2007