

# **Restyling Blackness:**

Experiences and Construction of Natural Hair Practices Among Black  
Women Living in the UK

**by**

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## Abstract

Many black women struggle with the societal connotations of their hair. After black skin, the hair of people of African descent is seen as a second marker of blackness, and difference. Using digital media sites like YouTube, black women appear to showcase their pride in their “natural hair” as a response to this othering. Studies which have analysed this phenomenon, hail it as a movement for the empowerment of black women. This is a valid but reductionist description of these practices. Thus, this study set out to account for the interstices of this collective experience. Specifically, it engages with the experience of young black women between ages 18-35 living in the UK. Utilising qualitative methods and a postcolonial theoretical lens, the study first interviews 18 women in three focus group sessions as an avenue to intuit their experience. Also a textual reading of 35 natural hair videos on YouTube further illuminated the practices. Content analysis was employed for extracting and organising the superficial data in texts, while semiotics served as an interpretive tool which identified and denaturalised the codes or signs in this cultural practice. The thematic analysis of focus group sessions produced seven major themes. Some of these include; “the nappy hair problem”, “seeing”, and “social connection across diaspora”. The videos revealed that black women are focalised in these practices, and they reclaim the power of the gaze as both subjects and objects in natural hair representation. Yet the attempt to showcase the pride and positives of black hair tends to reinforce negative connotations attached to it.

Ultimately it was found that the experience of natural hair is made up of ambivalent aspects not only linked to empowerment but a negotiation to surmount the societal codes of Otherness. Through natural hair practices, black women first and foremost, feel seen. Their experiences materialise via the YouTube platform and therefore they are validated as real and present members of society. The study additionally highlighted that natural hair experience is a series of dialogues or conversations at its core. These conversations are by black women all over the diaspora speaking about the “hair and blackness problem” and also negotiating ways to surmount the colonial epistemic model which continues to construct them as Other in society.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

*“Why in the world then did I grow up not liking my kinky hair?  
... mother, and why do I have to go through this whole process of learning to  
like my natural hair?  
Why is it that I’m ashamed to go outside with my hair looking like, you know,  
looking natural or with it being out and big?”*

- Haskin-O’Reggio (1999)

The above lines are by a respondent in *The Mirror Lied*, a documentary which explores black women’s hair experiences in the 1990s. The speaker here, Glenda, questions her mother as to why she feels so negatively towards her natural hair. Glenda’s mother does not provide her an answer. Glenda’s concerns about her hair, the feeling of discomfort and even shame towards it, is familiar to many black women all over the world (Chutel 2018).

There have been several responses over time to this ‘hair problem’. This thesis addresses one of these responses, which is the current resurgence of natural hair practices among black women. This study analyses black women’s experiences of natural hair practices in the UK. It specifically explores their engagement with these practices particularly via its representation on YouTube and how this translates into black women’s everyday lives, as well as their black identity formation.

The current practices pertaining to natural hair have been widely described as ‘a movement’ (Henderson 2015, Brown 2018). This movement, referred to as “the natural hair movement”, encourages women of African descent to wear and celebrate their naturally curly, coily or kinky hair texture (Kenneth 2011). Women who engage in natural hair practices are said to “go natural”. In the past, wearing natural hair was seen as backward and unstylish within black communities. Outside black communities, natural hair and Afrocentric styles like braids faced discrimination especially within professional settings (Ferrell 2017). Descriptions such as ‘nappy’, ‘untidy’, ‘unmanageable’ and ‘unattractive’ were attached to the natural hair of people

of African descent (Banks 2000). Many black women grappled in different ways with this problematic view of their hair and bodies. However, there is now an attempt to debunk the negative perceptions towards black women's natural hair and instate it as an equally beautiful and positive way of being.

The current wave of natural hair practices took off in the early 2000s through magazines, internet forums, blogs, websites and, more recently, YouTube, Instagram and other social media sites (Tate 2016). YouTube as a platform has become notable in its contributions to the propagation of natural hair practices (Henderson 2015). Videos related to natural hair began to emerge on the site as early as 2006, a year after the official launching of the YouTube media platform. Using natural hair videos on YouTube, black women and even men visually share, exchange tips, ideas and experiences on growing and maintaining natural hair. It can be argued that this exchange on YouTube has created a unique media and cultural phenomenon worth interrogating. As such this study predominantly explores natural hair practices represented on YouTube, their meanings and significance.

A good number of studies highlight the process by which these practices have helped many black women embrace their bodies, bringing about a sense of empowerment and liberation for those who have otherwise been oppressed because of the negative perceptions towards their hair (Brown 2018) Henderson (2015) Tate (2016), Sobande (2017)). This study however argues that this is a one-sided and reductionist view of the current natural hair practices. The focus on empowerment and liberation is indeed a part of the natural hair practices but it overly stresses the positive aspects of the natural hair phenomenon. This study seeks to explore the multiple dimensions to natural hair practices beyond simply focusing on the 'liberation' narrative.

Despite its significance in popularising the black natural hair movement, there is very little research exploring the role of YouTube in facilitating natural hair practices; YouTube videos which present information on natural hair attract millions of viewers. It is therefore reasonable to infer that it asserts some influence on its audience's views and perceptions of natural hair

and natural hair practices. However, the nature of that influence requires interrogation and thus is of interest to this thesis.

There is some research on the more negative aspects of natural hair practices, but these do not dominate the literature compared to studies which promote the positive outcomes. Kristian (2017) for example highlights how some women are disillusioned with the natural hair movement. The writer of this article explained that despite adopting natural practices, she still faced difficulty in accepting her hair. She stated her problem was not in adopting the practices but in her inability to deal with the “emotional and psychological baggage” she has encountered with her God given hair. Previous studies which have investigated these experiences fall short in examining the psychological and social processes involved in the natural hair experience. Very few consider the nuance of what women truly engage with when they go through the process of embracing their natural hair. As such this study will attempt to fill this gap by closely interrogating the natural hair experience.

### 1.1 Study aims, questions and objectives

This research argues that natural hair practices feature a complex negotiation which transcends empowerment. In dealing with natural hair practices there is an engagement with societal attitudes to black bodies, body image, identity formation, race, and representation. As such this study aims to describe and analyse the experience of natural hair practices on YouTube. It will interrogate the narratives that YouTube videos construct and circulate about black hair and examine the audience engagement with these videos. This is done in order to interpret the realities of the natural hair experience and present its significance in the process of black identity formation among young black women in the UK.

Therefore, this study focuses on one major question;

- How do young black women in the UK experience natural hair practices on YouTube?

This study argues that natural hair care practices on YouTube involve two main aspects; the first is the videos on YouTube pertaining to hair practices. The second is the audience

engagement and experience of these videos. Both of these aspects combine to provide a picture of the experience of natural hair practices on YouTube. As a result, the research enquiry is divided into the following sub questions;

- How do black women in the UK engage with natural hair practices in YouTube videos?
- How do natural hair practices on YouTube construct black hair?
- How do these practices relate to black women's everyday lives and black identity formation?

The first sub question here elicits audience experience of videos using focus groups. Individuals who have watched natural hair videos will be asked about their feelings, observations and impressions of videos.

For the second sub question on exploring the process by which YouTube videos construct black hair, the researcher will directly analyse the videos. This study proposes that these videos construct natural hair and natural hair practices in specific ways. Interrogating the videos will reveal this construction process.

The third sub question combines both audience responses and the construction process in videos to illuminate how these practices impact the everyday views of black hair and black identity. In speaking of their experiences, participants will reveal some of the process of their identity formation. Also in the construction of black hair we examine the constructions of blackness and black identity. This is because speaking about black hair is speaking about black consciousness (Banks 2000). Describing experience is privileged in this project because it is through deeply engaging with the different aspects of the natural hair experience that we can understand the interstices and the key components of the phenomenon. Hence in putting experience at the core, this study utilises the approaches of phenomenology which is also a qualitative method which is dedicated to understanding an experience (See chapter 5 of this thesis for more on phenomenology). Generally, in the phenomenological approach, the

essence of an experience is understood via interrogating different aspects of an experience including personal accounts and texts related to that experience (Grbich 2013). Thus, this thesis focuses on the following objectives;

- To conduct focus groups on lived audience experience of natural hair practices
- To present a detailed description and analysis of the experience of going natural on YouTube
- To textually analyse thirty-five natural hair videos on YouTube using content and semiotic analysis.
- To reflect on the significance of natural hair practices on identity formation of black women and of the experience of being black.

These objectives will be achieved through specific methods. As previously mentioned, for the audience analysis, the study will utilise focus groups for data collection. The focus group interviews will involve mainly young black women between the ages 18-35, living in the UK. They will have currently or previously watched natural hair videos on YouTube. The discussion will focus on how videos inform their everyday experience of natural hair.

YouTube videos related to natural hair practices exist in their thousands across the platform. This study will analyse 35 videos which will be purposively selected. 35 videos allow for data manageability and also a successful analysis within the allotted time for the research. In addition, this number of videos will suffice for this purpose because they cover over twenty themes which have been commonly observed in natural hair videos (See Chapter 5 for more on these themes and the data collection process for videos).

The videos are analysed using content analysis and semiotics. Content analysis and semiotics provide insight into the text or videos because they both allow a direct reading of a text, albeit on different levels. Content analysis is a popular method used in researching YouTube videos due to its flexibility (Curtis and Curtis 2011). However, content analysis is often criticised for

its superficiality (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt 2004). This is because it only codes what is present in the data neglecting its underlying components. Therefore, this study utilises semiotics as a second level of analysis. Semiotics allows for the reading of what is called the 'signification processes in the text'; the codes of language and communications formed by social process (Bignell 2002). This study sets out to understand how videos construct natural hair practices through their narratives, hence semiotics allows the identification of the social aspects involved in this process.

Barker, & Jane (2016) have highlighted that meaning is produced in the interplay between text and the reader. This research sets out to understand the experience and significance of natural hair practices on YouTube. Hence it explores both the textual (videos) aspect and the reader or audience aspect of natural hair practices.

## 1.2 Research context and relevance

This section explores the natural hair phenomenon and the ways in which they relate to the current discourse of black identity formation. It also presents this study's contribution to the understanding of natural hair practices, particularly within the less examined UK context. Lastly, this part concludes by highlighting the importance of promoting the discourse on black experience.

Issues concerning black hair and natural hair continue to remain pertinent. At the time of writing, a student named Ruby Williams made national news in the UK. Williams, a black British school pupil shared her experience of being repeatedly sent home from school because her hair was "too big". It was alleged that she breached the school uniform policy which stated that, "afro hair must be of a reasonable size and length" (Vrik 2020). Ruby developed signs of depression and anxiety about her hair as a result. She reportedly said: "I felt that anytime I would walk into the school with my hair out, all eyes were on me". Ruby's experience is hardly a one-off case and is reminiscent of the experience of Glenda in Haskin o' Reggio' (1999) and many other young black girls.



In February 2019, the state of New York in the US passed legislation known as “the crown act”, prohibiting the discrimination against Afrocentric hairstyles, the first of its kind. California State subsequently passed a similar law. The New York legislation confirmed the real-life consequences of opting for Afrocentric hairstyles. Individuals who choose hairstyles which are not seen as normal often face social and economic exclusion (losing a job or expulsion from school) as in Ruby’s case (see also Banks 2000, Ferrell 2017, Haskin-O’Reggio 1999). Although the law is evidence that there are some positive responses to the activism in natural hair practices, the state of New York and California are only two in fifty states in the U.S. which have addressed hair discrimination.

Thus, presently in many spaces including the UK, black women and even men with afro-textured hair face discrimination. For instance, a study by De Montfort University (2019) found that 1 in 6 school children of African descent in the UK are excluded in school because of their hair. Many women cannot, or are cautious of, wearing natural hair being in fear of how they will be perceived. This shows that the struggle with natural hair is both societal and a personal phenomenon. It contributes to many black women’s struggle with a feeling of outsidership or feelings as Other in society. As a result, it impacts their identity formation and self-esteem (Karspark 2017, Tulloch 2000). In exploring natural hair practices then, this research deals with issues closely related to black women’s struggles with self-esteem, body image and identity formation. The study contributes to its understanding and possibly its future resolution. It not only brings awareness to the subject, but it explores the trajectory and outcomes of this struggle with natural hair.

Furthermore, studying natural hair practices is inevitably linked to conversations around media representation and the body. Representation of black bodies has been highly characterised by negative stereotyping and negative representation (Hall 2013, Jackson 2006). Some scholars argue that stereotyping endures because people of colour are not often included in the decision-making process within major mass media houses (Hunt 2005). Digital media has however disrupted traditional gatekeeping processes that facilitate particular forms of

representation giving users platforms to self-represent. With access to digital media sites like YouTube, black women take advantage and take part in actively creating images of themselves especially when they discuss natural hair on YouTube. Thus, it is important to explore and analyse the process, meanings and some of the outcomes of this novel representation. Also related to this, digital and social media have been known to proliferate negative body ideals among users (Clark 2017). YouTube videos related to natural hair practices originally set out to positively represent black hair as a way of resisting previous societal connotations (Tate 2016). Therefore, with this knowledge about this negative tendencies in digital and social media sites, there arises questions of just how liberatory or positive images of natural hair could be on platforms which initially promote problematic body ideals.

Researching natural hair practices also means invariably writing about black experience. hooks (1992) argues that writing about black experience is a difficult task especially while the epistemic legacies of slavery and colonialism endure. However, Boehmer (1993:272) advocates for the necessity of writing about black experience despite this difficulty. She states; “representing its own silence the colonised body speaks; uttering its wounds, it negates its muted condition”. Hence according to Boehmer (1993), assessing the experience of colonisation is not only a process of reclamation, but also a process of self-articulation which can lead to healing through speaking one’s condition. In the light of this, examining natural hair practices contributes to sharing and illuminating the experience of blackness and black women. Not just a general black experience, but the specific black hair experience of women in the UK since previously the majority of the writings about black hair emanate from the US. Black experience, or the experiences of those who are regarded as “Other”, hardly take precedence in western spaces (Akala 2019). Therefore, this work provides more awareness and contributes to the discussion surrounding this issues. Baker et al (1996) similarly, posits that black revision produces narratives that retell the histories of blackness from new vantage points. This includes the narration of stories previously excluded from the national public

sphere. Therefore, discussing the natural hair practices in the public sphere contributes to the missing narratives of alternative ways of being especially in metropolises such as the UK.

Overall, this study is an interdisciplinary pursuit which cuts across, media studies, sociology, cultural studies and even encroaches into psychology. It deals specifically with subjects pertaining to the media representation of raced bodies, identity politics and digital media.

### 1.3 Reflections

This section describes the researcher's personal experience of going natural. This writing is done here as an attempt at bracketing (see chapter 5). Before proceeding with this thesis, it is important to consider the place of the researcher and also declare and mitigate any biases that may arise in the course of the study.

I first encountered ideas pertaining to natural hair in 2013. This was at a writing seminar in Nigeria and the instructor had hair which I thought looked interesting. She wore a traditional African hairstyle that would have been described as out of fashion. When she was asked about the style, she talked about how black women had been taught to ignore their natural hair and embrace unnatural hairstyles like weaves instead as the norm.

Her hair was beautiful, but I did not agree that the use of weaves meant anything outside just styling. To me then, hair was just hair, it did not necessarily carry any additional meanings or undertones. A few months later, I moved to the UK. This was my first time being regularly adjacent to people of a different physical appearance to myself. Hence it was a new experience for me. I had become part of a minority in terms of the way I looked. I noticed that in the UK, people who were not of African descent wore their hair mainly naturally. They did put their hair in styles, but they styled their natural hair. They did sometimes wear extensions, but it was not the same compulsive way as where I was from. In Nigeria, a woman who did not wear her hair in weaves or at least straightened was seen as unfeminine (Mark 2011). It can be said that in Nigeria, the norm and the pinnacle of a woman's style was long straight hair. However the occasional braiding style or African hairstyles is still common practice. Also

in some cases, women wore cropped hair, yet it was evident that the most desirable form of hair styling was hair made to appear like long-straight-Caucasian-type-hair. This type of hair is made into a wig or weave derived from human hair or synthetics. To this date, Nigeria remains a top market for the famous Brazilian, Indian or Peruvian human hair extensions. Many women who can afford such products pay regularly through the nose.

It was only after leaving Nigeria and moving to the UK that I began to question this standard. I found it puzzling that only people of African descent felt a compulsion to wear straight hair and not their natural hair. This difference struck me. It was also apparent to me that the hair extensions I knew as the norm growing up, seemed a copy of the Caucasian or Asian type hair; long, silky, straight, sometimes loosely curly or wavy. The claims of the lady at the seminar came back to me. It raised new questions for me in terms of why I would habitually subscribe to wearing hair styles that reflect an outlook that is so far removed from my natural appearance. I reflected on the reasons why black women felt it was a requirement to wear straight and long hair. Before my move to the UK, I never questioned these hair styling practices. I simply accepted them as normal. As one that grew up a middle-class Nigerian, straight hair was always the standard, and this was what I followed. I also got the ritual relaxer treatment at a very young age (I can't recall exactly when it was). I kept touching up the relaxer treatments till I was 22.

Using the relaxer was normal and common for many girls growing up in Nigeria. It was something that the majority of us utilised in order to make our hair 'manageable'; easy to comb, slick, straight and shiny. Almost all my peers went through a relaxer treatment to straighten their hair. In experiencing other hair cultures in the UK, I began to question my hair perceptions. I wondered why if it was normal to extensively alter my hair to the point that it became unrecognisable. Why was my hair only acceptable when it was straight? Why were other racial groups en masse not in the habit of using radical treatments like relaxers? They did occasionally change their hair by adding extensions or dyeing it but using treatments to

significantly alter their hair before they styled it was not the norm. At this point I asked as a black person what was so different about my hair? Why couldn't I let it grow naturally as well? Somehow, I came upon YouTube videos about natural hair. Engaging with the information I found on this platform led to some changes in my life. I stopped relaxing my hair. I reduced the amount of weaves and wigs I wore, and I grew out my natural hair and saw for the first time what it actually looked like. I was fascinated and many times challenged by the new and tiny zig zag shaped curls and kinks which grew from my scalp. At age 22, I felt like I finally saw my true self in the mirror. I didn't initially feel this need for a new self before I stopped straightening my hair but when I did stop, and my afro hair grew in, I felt a change. The DIY videos on YouTube taught me how to deal with my natural hair which was once described as 'very hard to manage'. Being someone who enjoyed DIY, I fell to trying out the hairstyles that the women on videos recommended and also the kitchen hair products that they concocted. At that time, which was in 2014, products dedicated to natural African hair were limited. Learning about my hair and how to work it felt like a process of self-discovery. I felt that it was an uplifting experience but at the same time, I did feel anxious about my look. Since it was so drastically different to what I was used to and what was considered the norm for women of my culture and background. As time passed, I noticed that maintaining my hair came with its challenges. There were still times when I felt wearing a wig or straight hair would still be appropriate as opposed to my natural hair; for instance, when it was a special occasion. I noticed that other women were also adopting these natural hair practices, joining the so-called natural hair movement. It had become a trend that people took seriously. I saw this on the thousands of natural hair videos which I found on YouTube. This brought about the questions of this study. I wondered; how do other women experience natural hair? Did natural hair practices have any significance?

As a black woman who has been immersed in the practices of the so-called natural hair movement, taking the objective position as a researcher has been a tough process. My closeness to the project may lead to questions on the reliability of this study but I argue that

in my case, my closeness also carries advantages. My insight on the natural hair community will lend me the proper tools and vocabulary to closely describe the experience of going natural. I see the natural hair experience as a distinct experience. The culture, their meanings and terminology are mostly kept within the specific population of black women who watch videos, visit hair blogs and involve in all kinds of natural hair care practices. Hence, as the researcher, being already conversant with the culture ensures that there will be less occurrence of what is known as aberrant decoding. Aberrant decoding occurs when foreigners in a culture misinterpret the codes in the way they are originally cast which may lead to compromising the interpretation of the study. Thus, in this case we mitigate the occurrence of misinterpretation of the culture.

For me, engaging in natural hair practices has been mostly positive but also with a good amount of struggle. From my reading and research activity so far, I find that there is still much more about natural hair practices to uncover. Describing and interrogating other people's experiences of natural practices will produce an improved understanding of the phenomenon. In describing black women's experiences, I deeply engage with issues of race and the black experience. This is of special significance as I grew up in Nigeria surrounded with bodies like mine. I was spared the complexities of being aware of my raced body until I moved to the UK. Hence dealing with this new qualifier as a "black" woman has been a rather difficult but awakening process. It is important to state that I attempt to do justice to this study both as a researcher and a black woman. As I am directly involved in natural hair practices, some will refer to this research as activism. Whether activist or not I recognise the importance of telling this story and researching black women's experiences, especially as the epistemic legacies of colonialism and slavery which created raced bodies remain. I take inspiration from Fanon (2008: 9-11) and he states; ". . . these things I'm going to say, not shout. For it is a long time since shouting has gone out of my life. . . Of those who heat the iron in order to shape it at once. I should prefer to warm man's body and leave him." Here Fanon explains that he doesn't aim to change anyone or anything from his writing. He simply aims to start a conversation and

highlight issues which have remained in the dark. For him, that is good enough and so it is here.

#### 1.4 Chapter outline

This section outlines and summarises the contents of the rest of the study. Chapter one introduces the thesis, the natural hair movement, the concept of “going natural”, and the study aims and objectives. It also expands upon the relevance of the study, highlighting the ways in which understanding of natural hair practices remains atrophied. It also justifies the need for this study by examining natural hair experience as an important phenomenon which tells of the contemporary identity formation process among black women. The chapter concludes with a reflexive section which outlines the researcher’s personal experience of the phenomenon. This is an attempt at phenomenological bracketing (see Chapter 5 for more in this term) as well as a presentation of the researcher’s personal motivation and role in the study.

Chapter two explores the background and history of natural hair. It traces and outlines the history of black hair from traditional African societies through to the culturally disruptive periods of slavery and colonialism. These historical events are connected to the contemporary meanings invested in the hair of people of African descent. The chapter concludes by further outlining the nature of current black hair styles and introduces the movement’s affiliation with YouTube as a digital media site.

Chapter three includes a literature review of research that are relevant to this project. It includes an overview of literature on media representation of the body, raced black bodies, and more specifically, current research on black hair and the natural hair movement.

Chapter four identifies the theoretical underpinnings of the research. It introduces postcolonial theory and its relevance to the study. The chapter make a case for how the natural hair practices may be seen as a product of *postcoloniality*. It further discusses how a postcolonial lens helps the study expose the core cultural issues that lead to the need for the current natural hair practices.

Chapter five includes an outline of the research design and process. It justifies the use of qualitative methods for the research. The chapter also maps out how semiotics and content analysis are employed as tools for analysis. It further outlines the focus group process its strengths and limitations.

Chapter six presents the analysis and findings of the focus group discussions. It discusses the major recurring themes found within the data. Some of the themes include, “seeing” (the natural hair as an important event for black women’s visibility), “new forms of hair socialisation“, “products and commercialisation”, “hair histories” and more.

Chapter seven tackles the signifying practices of DIY YouTube videos pertaining to the natural hair movement. It explores the language used in the YouTube videos and generates word clouds which highlight the ways natural hair videos construct black hair. The chapter discusses how videos first set out to construct natural hair videos in a positive light. However, it was found that that this attempt at positive representation was marred by the presence of language which still links to previous problematic notions attached to black hair.

The final chapter, chapter eight, recaps on the research aims, findings, processes, strengths, and weakness. It also makes recommendations for future research.



## Chapter 2: Research Background and History

*All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours to help to build it together. . . . But in my case, everything takes on a new guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance.*

-Fanon (2008)

### 2.1 Terms: black hair and natural hair

Black hair as a term is ambiguous. It is not utilised here to refer to hair which is dark or black in colour. It is used in this study to mean the manner in which the hair of people of African descent grows naturally and also hairstyles that generally signal blackness or *Africanness* such as cornrows, braids, twists or dreadlocks (see figs 2.6-2.10). To allow for a variety of expressions, this study interchanges between the phrases 'natural hair movement', 'black hair movement' or the 'the movement', to convey the same meaning. Similarly, it interchanges the expressions, "black hair" and "natural hair". Banks (2000) explains that studying black hair is invariably a process of exploring black consciousness and black experience. This study is also in line with this point of view. Thus, interchanging the terms 'black hair' and 'natural hair' is signals hairstyles which connote black experiences.

In the light of this, it is important to reflect on the meaning of the term "blackness" and the context within which it is used in the study. This study supports the definition of blackness as the congeries of historical, cultural, socio-political and genetic properties and experiences shared by people of African descent (Baker et al 1996). Blackness is a term that takes on different meanings and connotations within different contexts and geographical spaces. In this way, Hall (1992) highlighted the dangers of assuming the existence of an essentialised form of blackness or black experience. Blackness therefore must be viewed as a quality which includes a diversity of experiences across time and space. As such, in analysing the experience of black women in the UK the thesis explores and comments on the complexities of experiences specifically among black women in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

In addition, blackness or to be “black” has commonly carried undertones of struggle or Otherness in society. Blackness often in western spaces appears to be framed as an atypical way of being. Yancy(2008) specifically, argued that blackness has always been fashioned as an antithesis of whiteness and in a similar vein, Akala(2018) observed that while whiteness remains a metaphor for power, blackness invariably becomes a metaphor for powerlessness. These descriptions highlight that the state of blackness is evoked often because of its difference to whiteness .i.e., because there is an assumed normal state of whiteness, then blackness arises as its antithesis. It is important to note that this is a simplified way of defining the elements of blackness. However, highlighting this differentiation between blackness and whiteness and how each exists to give the other meaning, is important to understand the concept of ‘black hair’ or ‘natural hair’. Black hair exists because there is a more normalised ‘white hair’. The concept of ‘white hair’ is not used in common expression, however its existence is certain in the presence of black hair. This problematic state of blackness links to the problematic societal attitudes to black hair, hence why it is the current topic of discussion. Mercer(1994) highlighted that hair is the second marker of blackness after skin colour, as such it is imbued with connotations which many individuals of African descent contend with.

Kenneth (2011) additionally suggests that current trends of natural hair practices attempt to subvert this negative connotation of blackness, presenting black hair as a quality to be appreciated and embraced rather than avoided. This also draws attention to the other elements of blackness which represents traditions of resistance and rebellion (Akala 2018). By working through the issues surrounding natural hair many people of African descent engage with and attempt to resist the current connotations of blackness. Overall blackness includes many diverse aspects and, in this study, particularly, it points to the collective experience of people of African descent, which involves on one hand struggle and on the other, resistance.

Overall, this chapter details the physical appearance of black hair. It also explores its history and meanings. This background drives us to the emergence of the “natural hair movement”

and current natural hair practices. The chapter therefore proceeds to examine the various elements which led to the resurgence of natural hair practices, and also re-engages with the question of how the current natural hair practices may be viewed as a social movement. This chapter highlights these different aspects of black hair in order to provide understanding and context for the discussion and analysis which will follow later in this thesis.

## 2.2 Black hair: physical appearance, history and culture

It is important to note that people of African descent don't always have dark skin or curly hair; there are black people with naturally fair skin, straight hair, or even blue eyes. So, the concept of "African features" can be contested. However, for the sake of the study it is easier to generalise here that African hair, like the feature of dark skin, is different when compared to other groups such as Asians or Caucasians. African hair or Black hair, in its natural state consists of hair strands often shaped like a spring (see fig. 2.1). These hair strands often grow in tight curls or coils sometimes closely packed to the scalp (see fig. 2.2). This shape often causes one's hair to suspend like a halo instead of hanging downwards as seen with other hair types (see fig. 2.2, 2.3). The size of the spring-like curls can vary between sizes, from as tiny as the tip of a pencil to as large as a two-pound coin. The tightness and size of the curls or coils also differs from individual to individual (see fig. 3) and is often linked to which region of the African continent an individual originates from (Ferrell 2017). For instance, people from North Africa, often possess wavy or much looser curls while the majority of people from Sub-Saharan Africa, possess more tight curls/coils.

In her study on the characteristics of hair, Ferrell(2017) suggested that the human population possess hair that can be classed into two major types; circle hair and straight hair. Circle hair describes people who possess curls and coils in their hair, while straight hair describes people without or with very minimal curls. Hence a majority of people of African descent can be said to have circle hair. Ferrell (2017) also collected different ranges of circle hair, sized between 8points to 135points (8pt is about the size of a pin head while 135pt is the size of an American quarter). She found that 12pt is one of the most common hair types collected in her New York

salon. Ferrell (2017) argued that the popularity of 12pt type hair in her salon is no coincidence since it is found to be a prevalent hair size among people from West Africa; which was the hub of the Atlantic slave trade. She also highlighted that 8-10pt hair was the most discriminated in the workplace, even among black people in their own communities. A reason may be that it is the most densely packed and smallest circle hair type; possessing a highly coarse appearance (see fig 4). 8pt hair incidentally is also the hair type or size common among the San people, one of the most ancient groups of people in Africa. Generally, it has been observed that circle hair or coily type hair is less visible in society and appears to be a hair type which is seen as less desirable.

Furthermore, because of its structure, the coily hair common in black people does not evenly reflect light (Dabiri 2019.) Therefore, it often takes a less shiny and uniform appearance when compared to straight hair types. The closeness of the curls or coils means combs cannot easily pass through, especially when dry. This also means that circle hair type is highly susceptible to tangles and knots, the smaller the circle, the more likely it is to tangle. This tangling and coarse quality of circle hair is also referred to as “kinky-ness”. As such this tangling nature calls for hairstyles that keep the kinks in order (Dabiri 2019). This is possibly why most people who have circle hair adopt a plethora of hair styles to maintain their hair. In this way it can be argued that the material nature of black hair appears to have contributed to the diversity of African hair cultures and hairstyling practices. Woodward (1997:82) explains that social theorists who explore the body often overlook the material aspects of the body and how this connects to social and cultural bodily practices. As a result, understanding the physical structure of black hair helps us better understand how it came to be the way it is and how it is currently viewed.

As earlier noted, people of African descent have utilised styles like braids, twists, threading, cornrows dreadlocks (see fig 2.6 to fig 2.10) to care for especially circle type black hair for centuries. Hairstyling practices are also prevalent in other cultures, but the diversity of the styles found within African cultures is unmatched. Styles for black hair are often manipulative

and take time to complete. Once complete, the styles help maintain tidiness and uniformity over a period until the next time a new style is installed. However, in modern times these age-old hair styles appear to have taken on unfavourable connotations especially within the western metropole due to its relation to Africa. This can be connected to the fact that Africa and African cultures have long carried connotations of backwardness and savagery (Hall & Geigen 1992). Hairstyles thus associated with these cultures are therefore seen as abnormal or undesirable.

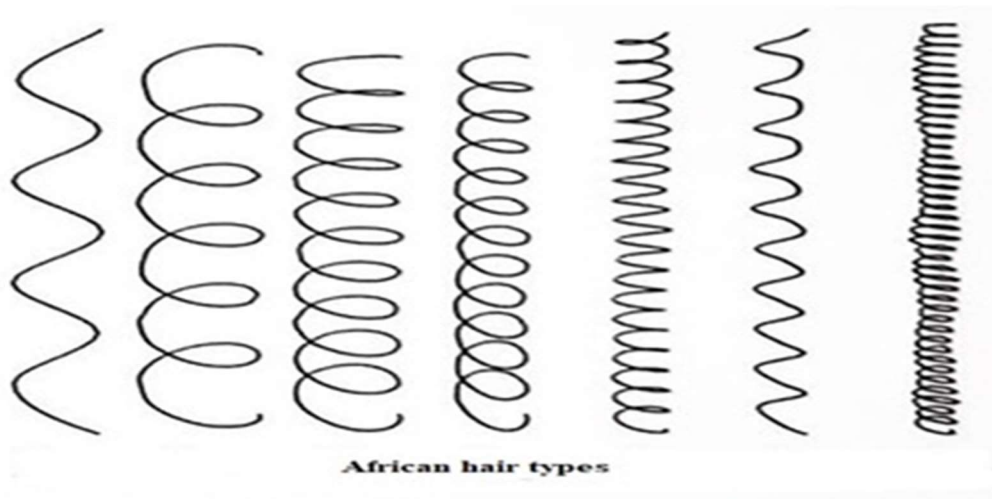


Figure 2.1 African hair types



Figure 2.2 Hair forms a halo

WWW.BLACKNAPS.ORG



Figure2.3 Circle hair types



Figure2.4 A San woman

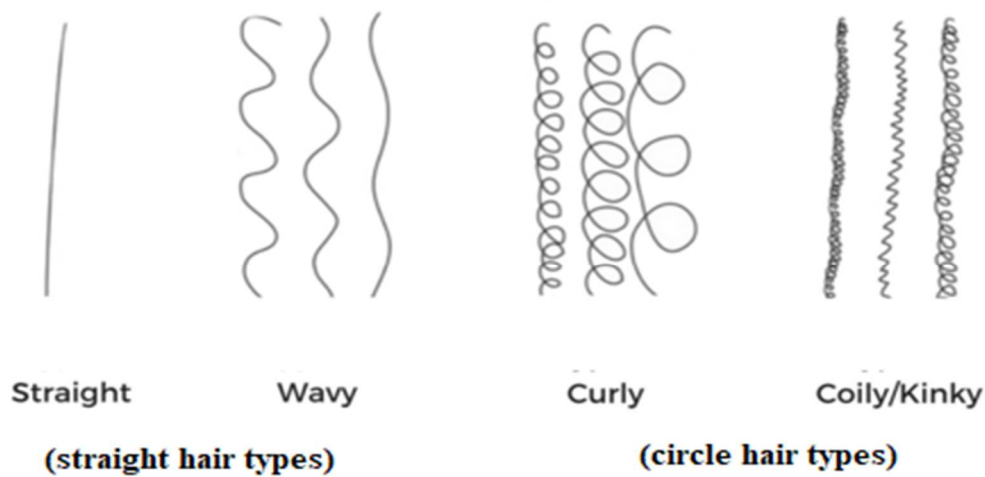


Figure 2.5 African Hair types

The following section will explore the historical aspects of natural hair. It traces black hair in traditional African society, through slavery and into contemporary times. This is important to provide further background on some of the meanings of current natural hair practices.

### 2.2.1 Traditional African society

Explaining the debates surrounding black hair today and the emergence of the natural hair movement requires an engagement with the history of African hair. Hair styling in Africa was used as a medium of communication and cultural identification. It was also a significant medium of art and one's creative self-expression (Sagay 1984). In ancient and traditional African societies Africans across the continent employed different styles and materials in hair grooming. Materials included items such as clay, sisal, tree bark, vegetable fibres, leather and much more. In terms of styles, hair was weaved, twisted, manipulated, or cut into any desired shape. Seiber (2000: 23) explains that voyagers and travellers on the continent described the diverse ways Africans styled their hair. A report from a voyager in 1725 shows that the women of Whydah, once a major trading centre of an unidentified part of west Africa "dress their hair

genteelly, and with art adorning their locks with gold spangles, and bits of coral or beads”. A large array of techniques evolved overtime for styling and hair maintenance. Some included braiding knitting, twisting, threading and much more (see figures 2.8 to 2.10). Hairstyles ranged from simple styles taking minutes or hours to very elaborate styles which sometimes took days to complete. The samples of hair styles seen all over the continent is vast.



Figure 2.6a Braids without extension



Figure 6b Braids with extensions





Figure 2.7b Twists without Extension



Figure 2.7b Twists with hair extensions



Figure 2.8a A hairstylist installing threading



Figure 2.8b Threading popular in 1980s/90s West Africa



Figure 2.9a Cornrows (also known as weaving/canerows)



Figure 2.9b Cornrows a highlight adaptive style

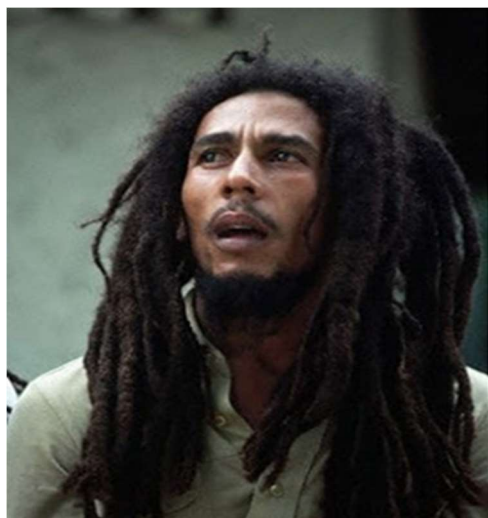


Figure 2.10a Bob Marley in dreadlocks



Figure 2.10b Dreadlocks

Hair grooming was and still is a big part of the culture in many African societies. Due to the physical nature of hair, manipulation was not only possible, but necessary (Dabiri 2019). In traditional African societies hair styling was not just for maintenance and fashion but also an extended marker of one's social status, clan affiliation and overall identity. Both men and women groomed their hair according to the fashion of their family, community, age group and even marital status. The styles could be for everyday purpose or once in a while ritual purposes or costumes or part of a ceremony (Seiber 2000)

For instance, among the Fulani, a tribe spread across west Africa; girls wore simple cornrows before marriage. After marriage, they wore more elaborate feminine styles. Boys wore tonsures in childhood and after the initiation into young adulthood they wore braids. These braids became more elaborate during the years of courtship just before marriage. After marriage, their heads were shaved clean (Sagay 1984: 11). See figure 2.11 to 2.17 for some samples of hairstyling in traditional African societies.



Figure 2.11 Different traditional hair styles



Figure 2.12 Fulani or Woodabe hair style/west Africa



Figure 2.13 East African hair style



Figure 2.14 South African hair style



Figure 2.15 South African hair style



Figure 2.16 Bantu Knots



Figure 2.17 Head tie/ headwraps. It be used as a style to complete outfits and also as practical wear to keep head protected from the sun and dust.

Africa is the world's second largest continent inhabited by many peoples of different backgrounds and cultures, hence one cannot make generalisations. Yet, the significance of hair can be observed in cultures from the south to central and the northern parts of the continent (Sagay 1984:11). Hair was so important that among certain cultures like the Yoruba in West Africa, it was perceived that only those in mourning or with mental health challenges were exempt from the practices of hair grooming and styling. This was also the case in countries like Ghana or Sierra Leone where dishevelled or undone hair signalled a state of disharmony or disconnection with society. Also, inversely, Seiber (2000) observes in traditional African society, men are not indifferent to the sight of well-coiffed girls or vice-versa. If hair is poorly looked after, one may be criticized and insulted, or worse one might be called an outlaw, a witch doctor or an evil spirit (Seiber 2000:26). For the researcher who has experienced growing up in Nigeria, West Africa, this last quote recalls memories of the common phrase often directed at girls, "what will you do with your hair?". It appears that undone hair is still not acceptable in many African communities especially in West Africa. The importance of hair grooming has endured but historical events, particularly slavery and



colonialism, have had a significant impact on black hair culture (Sagay 1984, Smith & Ce 2014). This is explored in the next section.

### 2.2.2 Slavery

The 15th century saw the forceful shipment of millions of African people into slavery in different parts of the world. Accounts show that once the slaves left the savage experience of slave ships, they were cleaned, shaved and sold. Once slaves were bought, they went through a process called 'seasoning'. The International slavery museum (2018) describes 'seasoning' thus ;

" Immediately owners and their overseers sought to obliterate the identities of their newly acquired slaves, to break their wills and sever any bonds with the past. They forced Africans to adapt to new working and living conditions, to learn a new language and adopt new customs."

Seasoning meant slaves were coerced to abandon all activities that were tied to their African roots like language and other cultural activities including traditional hair grooming and styling. In many cases enslaved men remained with closely cropped heads while the women especially wore scarves to protect their heads from the sun or hide their often possibly styled or unstyled hair. While head shaving and head scarves was also not uncommon in normal African contexts outside slavery, the conditions of slavery severely dictated the bodily practices of those who were enslaved. Some accounts show that on Sundays (their only day off) slaves used household items like bacon grease to care for their hair and keep it in styles that were to be maintained till the next Sunday (Blackwelder 2003). A majority of the slave accounts emanated from North America, however accounts from the British, French and Spanish Caribbean Islands also include similar tales of harsh bodily conditions and seasoning on the sugar plantations.

Despite the prevalence of seasoning, it has been argued that some slaves still preserved some of their African traditions. Common African hairstyling techniques such as cornrowing and braiding still featured in slave societies. But the period after emancipation did not allow these hair practices to flourish in post-slave societies, especially the North American ones. Styles

like braiding or cornrowing which appeared to announce blackness at that period were not generally encouraged in public (Blackwelder 2003). This societal averseness to black hairstyles in post-slavery America is suggested in picaninny caricature images of black people and minstrel show performances. Also, house slaves at that time were also known to have commonly adopted the styles worn by their masters one might argue, in a bid to assimilate or blend into their surroundings. In addition, cutting hair was a common form of punishment meted out to female slaves. In a way the hair styles of the enslaved also signified and told stories of their experiences.

During chattel slavery, Africans were taken from societies where their hair care practices were identity markers and a mode of artistic expression to societies where their hair was transformed to become a marker of blackness and inferiority. Leaders of slave institutions began to tie African features (dark skin and afro-textured hair) to animal features (Akala 2018). This is especially observed in the term “woolly hair”, a common qualifier of African hair at that period. Common stereotypes attached to black bodies (dangerous, lazy, savage, mentally inept), emanated also in that period (Akala 2018, Yancy 2002). As such, the Atlantic slave trade can be seen as a period that originated the deliberate degradation and dehumanisation of African bodies.

Even as black bodies began to be constructed in a problematic light by external forces, Brisbon (2009) argues that the period of slavery saw the spread of negative connotations internally among Africans themselves, especially those whose ancestors experienced slavery. The concept of *good hair* vs. *bad hair* is argued to have taken off within this period (Mercer 1987). Those who were considered to have good hair were often mixed race with hair that resembled that of the Caucasian owners (a looser circle hair). Those with bad hair had their coarse kinky African hair described as “nappy”. This distinction is said to have emanated when slave traders advertised light skin and straighter hair to describe merchandise higher prized than the ebony-skinned chattel with tightly curled hair (Blackwelder 2003:16). This led to division among the enslaved, believing that their light skinned counterparts were more valuable and more

beautiful (Sinclair 1993). Cornwell (1993) also explains that during slavery mothers would grieve if their children were born with kinky or tight circle hair because that meant they would have a lesser place in society. To date the differentiation and contention between light skin and dark skin or straight and coarse hair remains even in many parts of Africa, Asia and the Americas, which experienced slavery and colonisation.

### 2.2.3 Jim Crow

After the abolishment of slavery, blacks especially in the USA had to assimilate into American society (Dubois 1999). This was the Jim Crow era which promoted the idea that black people at that time were to live separate but equal to white people. Black people living separate from white meant they continued to face discrimination and it was reported this discrimination was sometimes worse than they endured as slaves (Dubois 1999). As a result, the need to assimilate became more important to those that were emancipated. It is argued that they did this in different ways including attempting to understate physical features that declared their blackness (Dubois 1999). Also, it was in this period that hairstyling practices like hot combing began to emerge (Blackwelder 2003). The process of hot combing involves heating an iron comb on a stove and passing it through the hair to make it straight. Girls often sat through this arduous treatment, as it was said to make them more presentable (Sinclair 1993).

The era of Jim Crow was also the period that Madam C.J. Walker became the first self-made female millionaire in the United States. Black people were not allowed in common hair salons that catered to white people, hence they were faced with finding products and techniques that applied to them. Individuals like Madam C.J. Walker took advantage of the gap in the market. She discovered the market for the sale of relaxers and other kitchen-mixed products which catered for black people in United States. The relaxer is a famous treatment developed in this period for black hair. It is a lye-based treatment which permanently breaks down the protein structure of African hair to make it appear straight. Cornwell (2015) stated that the invention of the relaxer led to a proverbial sigh of relief within the black community since it was a

technique that meant easier access to straight hair for black people( i.e. it was seen as a solution to the problem of kinky-coarse black hair ).

#### 2.2.4 Colonialism

As the abolition of slavery was being considered in the west, the colonial era was taking off across parts of the world specifically in Africa and Asia (Crowder 1998). In Africa, the process included the introduction of new leaders and administration to the local people and also in other cases, the establishment of settler colonies.

Colonisers did not often consider the culture and context of the people it imposed themselves upon. Even in cases where they did consider the colonised culture, it was with an aim to exercise power and control. For instance, the case of the British system of indirect rule in Nigeria which took advantage of the already established emirates system in Northern Nigeria(i.e. using an already established system of government to take control). Crowder (1998) further explains that “indeed, many of them (colonial officers) sincerely believed that Africa was a dark continent, and they were bringing the first light of civilisation to a benighted people, lost in primitive barbarity” (p.10). This perception carried by the colonial institutions meant that they indirectly and directly suppressed the cultures of the colonised with the aim of making the dominated population better and more civilised. This intent of the coloniser on the colonised has been described as “the civilising mission”. The civilising mission set out to eradicate the culture of the colonised people and set-in place a new one. The colonial powers somehow believed that the civilising mission came with good intentions (leaving aside the need to justify the subjugation and extraction of resources among the colonised populations). Some might even point out some of the good outcomes of this good intention, for instance, in bringing education and technology to Africa. However, the civilising mission inherently announced the coloniser’s culture as superior and the colonised as inferior. It can be observed that humans have always interacted and exchanged cultures and ideas, and over time, cultures have changed and adapted through this process. Therefore, it can be argued that it is crude to cast one culture as superior and the other as inferior since every culture, no matter

how advanced it may seem, has its advantages and disadvantages. One culture can learn from another whether it is in the state of hunter-gatherer or Artificial Intelligence and robotic advancement. Hence, it can be argued that the civilising mission inorganically imposed one form of culture, and this brought about considerable negative consequences which the otherwise positive effects of 'civilisation' is yet to remedy.

Colonised people were directly and indirectly coerced to abandon or alter traditional cultures such as the manner of dress, language or even hairstyling (Seiber 2000). The outcomes of this process have been hotly debated. However, there is an agreement that the civilising mission left an identity crisis which remains a reality among the formerly colonised (Smith and Ce 2014, Hall & Gieben 1992) . Colonisation did not only disrupt cultures and other alternative ways of seeing, but it also reinforced ideals of domination which rendered the colonised population as less relevant in the world order, making the colonisers world view as the only right way of being. Fanon (2008:9) especially succinctly describes this process. He states;

Every colonised people-in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local originality-finds itself face to face with the language of the civilising nation; that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle (Fanon 2008:9)

Fanon(2008) highlights the identity crisis and inferiority complex which he believes results from colonisation. He further describes here how those that are colonised are encouraged to "renounce their jungle" i.e. their blackness or African values. This is done because achieving whiteness is framed as more desirable. Fanon (2008) proceeds to claim that in many cases, the colonised succumbed to this call of renouncing their blackness.

Some have argued that the privileging of styling techniques like hot combing or hair relaxing in black communities, may be linked to the attitudes of the colonised who attempt to "renounce their jungle". Sagay (1984) particularly connects the effects of colonialism and international migration of Africans to the relegation of traditional African hair styles. At that period, the straightening and relaxer styles commonly seen on African Americans on the world stage

seemed to have also been adopted by many Africans. It was reported that these styles came to be seen as a more “civilised” fashion (Okimi 2020). Also, at that period it was reported that African stylists who were already familiar with traditional modes of styling, began advertising themselves as “London” and “Paris” trained hairstylists (Sagay 1984). There are also instances where the coloniser enforced laws directly controlling the bodies of the colonised. One was seen in the outlawing of certain body modification and hair styling practices among people in the Congo region (Seiber 2000).

In terms of this identity crisis, Smith & Ce (2014) particularly argued that the relegation of traditional ways of life among the colonised for the so-called more civilised way of life meant that the systems of colonisation hollowed the identity of the colonised. It was no longer acceptable for the colonised to fully identify with their now dubbed “primitive” culture but at the same time, they could not be seen as part of the culture of the coloniser. Hence the colonised encountered a sort of culture and identity limbo, they became ‘*white but not quite*’ (As Homi Bhaba puts it in Peter and Childs 1997). Smith & Ce (2014 :98) further explain,

To establish dominion, the colonial power eradicated previous religions, educational structure, and languages. Although the indigenous adopted a western identity through the coloniser, it was an illusion, empty of meaning, because the native culture in all its complexity, was not recognised by the coloniser. Essentially the people became impostors of themselves.

It can be argued that this imposterism filtered through the lives and identity of the colonised. Although there are no direct markers as to how colonialism affected hair practices, it is evident that the colonial systems did not exactly promote the preservation of indigenous culture, which hair practices are a big part and parcel of as previously stated. However, it is important to note that cultures are not static and are often bound to change over time (Baldwin et al 1999), but the civilising mission shows how colonial systems influenced the cultures of the colonised unnaturally; causing the degradation and relegation of colonised cultures, bodies and identities.

During the 1950s to 1980s when many African nations were freed from direct colonial rule, the period of the Civil Rights movement was occurring simultaneously in the U.S. The Civil Rights

movement aimed to end segregation and the systemic oppression of African Americans in the US. This movement also led to the “black is beautiful” campaign. The black is beautiful campaign aimed to change the negative connotations surrounding African appearance through systems of slavery and colonisation. It aimed to show that the black aesthetic could equally be seen as attractive and acceptable. Hence many black activists and common black people alike, especially those who supported the mobilisation of black power activists, abandoned their relaxers and ironing combs and embraced their African hair as it grew naturally. This era saw the popularisation and immortalisation of the afro (Seiber 2000). The afro became a symbol of the fight for the liberation of African Americans. At the height of the Black power movement, activists like Angela Davies made the afro a symbol of resistance. Davies was eventually declared as a terrorist and was forced to flee. Like Davies, those who wore afros boldly became targets of US law enforcement officers at that period. Masses of black women who wore afros were routinely arrested or questioned by law enforcement in their search for the activist (Davis 1990).

In general, this study maintains that the history of colonisation and slavery exhibits the process by which African people and its diaspora faced considerable cultural disruption. The Africans who were taken as slaves, including their descendants, faced systematic and direct repression of their African cultures and appearance (Dubois 1999). Africans on the African continent faced the “civilising mission” of the colonial system.

Also, from this account, it can be observed how the systems of slavery and colonialism connect to current and contemporary definitions of the African or black body. Research by scholars such as Dubois (1999) and Fanon (2008) explores these effects of slavery and colonisation in detail. These historical events still exhibit their influence in the contemporary representation of blackness as different, other or problematic (Akala 2018).

### 2.3 Contemporary natural hair practices and the natural hair movement

With current hair practices there is an attempt to normalise and popularise natural and Afrocentric hair styles. Black women adopt a plethora of hair styling practices. Many still utilise

chemical (relaxers) or mechanical methods (flat irons) to make their hair more manageable. Apart from straightening methods, the use of hair extension like weaves and wigs to cover hair is also a popular hair practice. There is also the maintenance of traditional styling like braids and cornrows. Currently, hair styles termed as 'natural' (see fig 2.19 to 2.24) have also been added to the plethora of styles available to black women. Natural hair styles involve manipulating one's hair by taking advantage of the coily/curlly hair texture. Before the rise of the natural hair movement, these kinds of styles were not the norm.



Figure 2.18 Twist out/braid out



Figure 2.19 Cornrows crossed with afro buns





Figure 2.20 Styled afro



Figure 2.21 Afro puff



Figure 2.22 Flat twists combined with afro bun



Figure 2.23 Styled Wash and go

In the UK, contemporary hair practices among black women involves all the above-mentioned hair styling techniques including a rising popularity and visibility of natural hair styles. This is evident in the thousands of natural hair YouTube videos and Instagram posts originating in the UK and the surge in the natural hair products markets in the UK (Mintel 2015).

In other spaces like Nigeria where black bodies are more the norm compared to the west, hair practices appear to remain skewed towards wearing weaves and wigs which mimic straight hair types. Mark (2011) observed that wearing weaves and wigs that are closer to the straighter hair types or so called “good hair” look is something that many women across all classes in Nigeria aspire to. One of the respondents in Mark’s (2011) study declares that “no rich man will marry a girl with village [non-straightened] hair”. The word “village” is a word that is used interchangeably with the concept of low class or backwardness in Nigeria. The word is also reminiscent of colonial ideology which suggest that the traditional or the “village” African is undeveloped. It can be assumed that connotations surrounding natural hair have changed since Mark’s (2011) article, but the work provides a glimpse of how natural black hair was viewed within a specific African society. The problematic connotation of black hair is not only present in the western metropolises but also in postcolonial spaces like Nigeria.

Chris Rock in his 2009 documentary, *Good Hair*, highlighted the proliferation of wig/weave culture in the United States. Images of African American stars like Nicki Minaj (fig 2.25) and Beyoncé (fig 2.26), who are world famous pop idols are constantly depicted in long flowing straight locks. Although idols like Beyoncé appear to be reviewing their image and embracing more Afrocentric looks, as seen in one of her latest pictures on Instagram at the time of this writing (fig 2.27), the preference for long straight hair still prevails, as exhibited in current media images of black women in the US. Media images emanating from the US are known to be world dominant in representation.



Figure 2.24 Pop icon Nicki Minaj in a straight pink wig



Figure 2.25 Beyonce in long flowing wig



Figure 2.26 Beyonce in braids( the backdrop of a traditional African and African American styling almanac is visible in this image. In other words, this Instagram picture was a deliberate statement about natural hair styles by the pop star).

Despite the availability of plethora of styles, straightened or straight hair remains one of the most preferred and common hair practices. This preference has been ascribed to the spread

of a Eurocentric beauty standard (Banks 2000). Eurocentric beauty ideals privileges features that are more commonly observed in Caucasian groups; “straight, long, silky and preferably blonde hair”. Noticeably, long and straight hair type is not a natural feature to all Europeans or people of Caucasian ancestry, some have naturally curly hair also. However, the reality of this beauty standard is exhibited in its commonality and visibility in mainstream media. Celebrities are seen in mainly straight hair and hair commercials are flooded with images of women with long silky-smooth flowing hair.

Therefore, it can be argued straighter type hair is the preferred beauty standard in society. And it is important to note that this beauty standard is directly in opposition to the features of people of African descent. Black hair is coily, coarse, matte; and often doesn't have a long appearance but is voluminous. This opposition of natural black hair to reigning beauty standards causes problems for black women who then have to go to greater lengths to fix themselves to fit this standard(Dabiri 2019). This puts pressure on many black women's self-esteem, sense of worthiness and acceptability as members of society.

Even among women who are not black, failure to measure up to this reigning beauty standard leads to difficulties. Berwick (2018) describes the struggles and the insecurities she faced as a white woman with intensely curly hair. She was called “bog brush” and “pubes” by other pupils while in primary school. From Berwick's (2018) account, it is not uncommon for women with naturally curly hair to routinely straighten their hair in order to look more acceptable or beautiful. In fact, many women all over the world straighten, colour, wear extensions or alter their hair generally.

Ferrell (2017) reports on how several women have lost job opportunities for hairstyles like braids or cornrows which are deemed as “ghetto”. In a case in South Africa, students of Pretoria High protested against their school's policy of banning afros and other similar Afrocentric styles in 2016. In 2018 a schoolboy in London was suspended for wearing dreadlocks, while a young girl in the US was expelled for wearing braids. (Vilakazi 2016, Davies 2018 ). Ferrell (2017) also describes how herself and other colleagues were

instrumental in lifting the ban on black hairstyles such as twists and dreadlocks in the US army. They achieved this by making presentations about black hair to high-ranking officers in the U.S. Military. In another case, a high school in Kentucky U.S. restricted specific styles like dreadlocks, cornrows and twists describing them as, “extreme, distracting, or attention-getting which will not be permitted” (Quinn 2016).

More recently, Rigby (2019) calls attention to how the hair of black students in British primary and secondary schools are constantly and overtly policed by teachers. In many cases black students are excluded from schools because of their hair. This exclusion and discrimination sometimes reaches extremes as in the case of Ruby Williams (mentioned in chapter 1 in Vrik (2020)). In a recent case that gained international attention a high school student was forced to cut his dreadlocks while he competed in a wrestling match (see fig 2.28). The referee encouraged the youth to cut off his dreadlocks or forfeit the match as his hair was allegedly in violation of the wrestling guidelines.



Figure 2.27 Young athlete's dreadlocks are cut

People alter and style their hair in many different ways according to the dictates of their culture. However, black or Afrocentric hairstyling practices are heavily policed especially in western spaces. This has been ongoing for decades.

Mercer (1984) thus argues that black hair is always political. He posits that as long as black bodies are seen as different, hairstyles will always remain political. For instance, if a black woman chooses to wear straightened hair, it raises questions whether she is doing so in order to assimilate. On the other hand, if she chooses natural hair, she is broadly considered transgressive or a deviation from acceptable societal norms of hair styling. Meaning is always present in black women's hairstyling practices, notwithstanding the personal motivations of the wearer.

As a result, many black women are ever cognisant of their hair practices. The problematisation of black hair is argued to have inspired many women to consciously make efforts to accept their natural hair and to exhibit it in resistance to societal connotations of black hair (Karspark 2017). This activity has been dubbed the 'natural hair movement' (Henderson 2015) or the contemporary natural hair movement (Brown 2018). Not all women who wear their natural hair however know about the resurgence of natural hair practices or actively seek to do so as a form of resistance (Henderson 2015). The natural hair movement is an effort among people of African descent to wear their hair close to its natural state. It involves caring, styling and showing off African hair in styles which embrace the natural kinky-coily state of black hair (Karspark 2017). The main requirement for "going natural" as it is termed, is to reject the use of chemical straightening relaxers (now dubbed as the creamy crack in the movement) and embrace and work on hair in its natural state. Though a good amount of writing exists about/on the natural hair movement, it is still an amorphous movement. The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements (Snow et al 2004) describes social movements as *collectivities* which act outside institutional channels with some degree of organization and continuity for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority. This challenge may be institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part.

Following this definition, this research comes to view the natural hair movement as a cultural movement involving a collective action in the activity of black women choosing to wear their natural hair. The change-oriented goal may be seen in the move to make natural hair more

visible and acceptable in society. The movement also appears to possess some degree of organisation as seen in women who have made it their life goal to spread information about natural hair on sites like YouTube and other media forums. Although dispersed, some groups involved in this movement have established long standing hair communities online and offline, held hair meetups, fairs and festivals to exchange ideas on natural hair. Yet we must also note that black hair consciousness predates this movement. Jackson (2000) identified what she termed as several “black hair moments” (periods of major visibility for black hair practices and styling) across history. The first hair moment she suggests, was in the civil rights era, black power movement and black is beautiful campaign in 1960s United States. This period saw the popularisation of the afro also known then as “the natural”. The second hair moment according to Jackson (2000) was in the resurgence of Afrocentric hair styles in the ‘70s. This coincided with the rise of African migration to the US from countries like Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. The migrants took their styling practices with them, and they helped increase the knowledge and visibility of styles like braiding, threading and beading in black communities. The third hair moment was in the ‘90s which saw the increased visibility and popularity of African styles like braids in general mainstream media and not just in black spaces. Celebrities like Brandy and Janet Jackson wore black hair styles on magazine covers and in music videos.. This current wave of the movement can be traced from the late 1990s to 2000s among African American women in the USA. The ideas of the natural hair movement have since taken off and spread in many parts of Africa and other domains with a sizeable African diaspora such as Brazil, France and the UK (Chutel 2018).

Despite the hair moments across history, it appeared that black women still grapple with the problematisation of their hair. As previously stated, natural hair is still seen as undesirable, unmanageable, unprofessional, nappy hair, in many spaces. Also, many black people especially in the diaspora had limited knowledge on how to grow, groom and style their hair as it grows naturally (Kaspark (2017). Basic hair knowledge was lost to many people over time and generations. This is due to the dominance and normalisation of hair practices that first



required hair to be significantly altered especially by chemically straightening it before it is worked on (Cornwell 2015). The styling practices that black women employed changed their natural hair so much that many of them had no knowledge of its true nature or methods by which to care for it. Many women had no idea that they had curly hair or what their curly hair looked like because of how entrenched and normalised straightening practices had become (Dabiri 2019).

In the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the rise of the internet, women created spaces and communities to discuss issues which they were concerned about including hair practices. They especially developed hair forums, websites, blogs and vlogs to discuss their hair problems and experiences. With the discussions came the exchange of ideas and many set out to debunk the already established popular beliefs that had developed surrounding black hair; that black hair could not grow, that it was undesirable, unprofessional, unmanageable and impossible to groom in its natural state. As such, how-to articles on natural hair began to emerge on different websites, social media and digital sites such as YouTube. The next section briefly introduces YouTube as an important cultural media site and highlights its connection to natural hair practices.

#### 2.4 YouTube and natural hair practices

YouTube has been described as the world's largest video service. It is said to upload over 400 hours of video per minute (Bergen 2017). The site hosts a high volume of visual content as well as receives millions of viewers around the clock from all over the world. This platform was set up with the aim of removing the technical barrier to the widespread sharing of videos online (Burgess & Green 2009). Launched in 2005, the site has not only fulfilled this aim but established itself as a significant media site of 'cultural generativity', which simultaneously operates as a high-volume website, a broadcast platform, a media archive, as well as a social network (Burgess & Green 2009).

YouTube allows users to freely sign up and upload video content potentially reaching millions of viewers. The visual material on YouTube can either be snippets of traditional mass media

(e.g., television, movies), or are original creations uploaded by YouTube users. In this way YouTube enables cultural participation by ordinary citizens (Jarett 2010). The platform originally operated outside the constraints of traditional media and corporate interests. It gave the users freedom to “broadcast yourself” as the YouTube site mission once stated. Corporations and institutions are now also able to operate side by side with common individual users on YouTube. Also, more recently, Google (the owners of YouTube) have set out to clamp down on video content which they deem as hate speech and or disturbing. This is said to have eroded some of the freedom and democracy on the site, as Google can restrict any video it perceives to have violated its terms whether guilty or not. However, despite the restrictions on YouTube, it retains a volume of visual content unmatched by any other video sharing service on the internet.

Videos that showcase natural hair practices make up some of the massive visual traffic on YouTube. They are classified under the DIY and style categories. DIY videos often set out to teach its viewers specific skills. They often include, but are not restricted to, the tutorial format. They also cover any skills acquirable; from how to sing, learning maths, playing an instrument or fixing an electronic device. In this vein natural hair videos are uploaded mainly by black women, and some black men also, to teach audiences how to handle, style, grow and care for hair. They can also feature vlogs and the video producers discussing matters related to hair and product reviews.

The study traced one of the earliest natural hair videos uploaded to a channel known as *Curly Chronicles in 2007*. This channel did not take off and become popular, instead, it gathered only a few thousand views in total. It featured only a few videos where the host talks about the process by which she grows and maintains her hair in a natural state. She also answered questions from viewers in the comments. However more women since then have produced more natural hair content. Specifically, Vloggers like *Naptural85* and *KimmyTube* have uploaded content since 2008 recording over a decade of what they term as their “hair journey”. In these videos they record their lives, struggles and experiences with natural hair, often

showing through time what is possible to do with black hair. They have produced hundreds of videos with millions of views. Naptural85 specifically has over a million followers/subscribers on the platform.

Natural hair vloggers are also described as “hair gurus”. Their experience is valued by their followers and as such this is expressed in their title as “gurus”. Hair gurus’ reputation is also bolstered by their long locks of natural hair which they have nurtured in the full view of their audiences. Having millions of followers, these so-called gurus become quasi-celebrities who have power to pass on information, raise awareness on any issue and sell products. They receive monetary gain for uploading videos and or supporting sponsored products. As such a good number of black women have been able to gain considerable income from uploading hair videos on YouTube.

This influence of vloggers and the easy exchange of information produces a culture and lifestyle that has grown over the years. This culture and its intricacies are worth examining as it affects the lives of millions of black women all over the world. Henderson (2015) argues that YouTube is responsible for the spread of natural hair practices across continents while Sobande ((2017) strongly supports this platform’s contribution in black women’s self-representation. In effect this study further examines these claims and sheds light on the connections between YouTube and the rise of natural hair practices and the natural hair movement.

Burgess & Green (2009:81) posit that YouTube is a potential site of cosmopolitan cultural citizenship. It has become a space in which individuals can represent their identities and perspectives, engage in self-representation and encounter cultural difference. Through the site, women are able to exchange information, ideas and experience about natural hair. This was not previously possible over traditional media spaces because black women were underrepresented in these spaces. The freedom and accessibility of YouTube appears to have an impact in black representation.

Additionally, Jarret (2010) observes that YouTube is not only about production of texts but is about participation in a common space. Its significance lies in the use of these videos within the culture(s) of a community more than in traditional media concepts of quality and/or popularity. This has impact not just on natural hair practices but also impacts on broader cultural politics, marginalised political expressions and even the process of globalisation.

## 2.5 Media and audience spectacle/performance paradigm

As hinted in the previous section, the impact of social and digital media platforms on everyday life and culture cannot be overstated. It is important to note that, social and digital media has impacted how we access information, how we go about day-to-day activities such as shopping, eating, recreation, how we deal with governments and authorities. These platforms now have a crucial input in the running and functioning of society. Hence it is no surprise that these sites can evolve from public spaces into private spaces related to bodily practices as seen in the role of YouTube in the natural hair movement. This characteristic of the media announces a paradigm shift not just in society but also in the way we think about audiences or users of all forms of media. This paradigm shift has been described as the Spectacle/performance paradigm (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998).

This paradigm illustrates the ways that the media saturation of everyday life leads to crucial identity formation in conjunction with the media. There is a progression from what is known as the simple audience, to the mediated audience and then the diffused audience. The simple audience includes the kind of audience observed in traditional spaces such as theatre, churches, or football matches. Here, there is a clear demarcation between the sender and receiver of messages; the audience and the performers. The simple audience in many cases has clear roles in the production process. For example, the cheering expected from football fans, or the silence expected from theatregoers during plays. This type of audience always inhabits localised and public spaces.

The second type of audience, the mass audience although related to the simple audience, experiences performance through mediated channels such as television or radio. In this case,

there is an even greater physical separation between the audience and performers. For instance, the mass audience is present when we watch news via television. In this case, the audience cannot directly come in contact with the newscasters or producers as seen in the case of theatre. Hence compared to simple audiences, the mass audiences can inhabit a more global space. The mass audience also leads to the creation of the TV star or celebrity phenomenon.

Thirdly, the diffused audience is used to describe almost every individual that makes up contemporary society today. At present media is all around us, on our phones, computers, televisions, billboards, watches, and internet-connected home devices and appliances. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) posit that in such an extremely media-saturated society, everyone becomes an audience all the time. The diffused audience includes all the elements of the simple and mass audiences and more. They exist in both private and public spaces, they can be global and local. They are not restricted by time and space. From Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) interpretation of the diffused audience, it can also be argued that this type of audience is also functional and recognisable in the current blurring of the users and producers within online social and digital platforms like YouTube (Snickars and Vonderau 2009). The diffused audiences of today exist to blur definitions and boundaries. This nature in the diffused audience means that media is now a crucial constituent of everyday life which society cannot do without(Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998:47).

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) state that “. . . the very constitution and the regulation of the mundane is in the hands of the media”(p.69). They predict that as the media becomes overly embedded with everything in our lives, the effect is that innocent day-to-day activities are turned into performances. They claim that individuals in society are so overtaken by this phenomenon that they begin to see themselves as performers. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) describe this situation as the spectacle/performance paradigm. These scholars initially projected that in this paradigm, experiences of being a member of the audience will begin to leak out from the specific performance events which previously contained them, into the wider

realms of everyday life. Being a part of the audience becomes a mundane and normalized event in one's life. This, therefore, means that for today's diffused audience their media-infused lives become part and parcel of their self-construction or identity. Hence they argue that the spectacle and performance paradigm is bound up in current notions of identity formation. This leads to a situation where everyone in society continually lives their lives in performance mode coupled with a need for the spectacle which in turn breeds a form of narcissism and self-seeking. They posit

“The aestheticization of everyday life encourages the widespread use of spectacle. It is the purpose, after all . . . The more the world becomes aestheticized, the more it becomes drenched in images, the more it becomes a cultural object, the more will it become something that invites being looked at. People, objects, events, perform for the diffused audience through their involvement in a richly symbolic world of the spectacle.” (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998:85)

The spectacle/performance audience paradigm brings to light the complex patterns of interaction that characterize the contemporary audience. It highlights the media saturation of everyday life and the consequent significance of performance, spectacle, narcissism and imagination.

The natural hair movement on YouTube exhibits this diffused audience dynamic. This element of the spectacle can also be observed in black women's performance of hair practices online which in turn, seeps into their everyday activities and beliefs. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) tends to take a negative tone in their description of this spectacle and performance process. This is exhibited in their argument related to the narcissistic outcomes of the emphasis of spectacle. Nevertheless, in the subsequent chapters it may be observed that despite this said societal obsession with spectacle and narcissism, this study illustrates that there appears to be more to this media saturation than shallow occupation with everyday performance and common gratification.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter commenced by highlighting natural hair practices as an expression of black experience and consciousness. It traced the physical characteristics of the natural hair of people of African descent highlighting the two main types of hair found among humans, circle, and straight hair. Circle hair is known to be the most common type found in people of African descent. Circle hair is often of a coarse and kinky texture and is perceived as different and abnormal compared to the straight hair types. The study attributes this perception as resulting from the epistemic legacies of slavery and colonialism.

Exploring the structure of African hair helped to provide an understanding of how the hair practices in traditional African society evolved. The coarseness and kinky ness mandated that it be preserved in styles that kept it ordered, like twists, braids and even locks. Black hair was significantly shunned in the slavery period as it became a marker of inferiority adding to the devaluation process of the black body at that period. In more recent times the criteria for black hairstyling has opened up to include age old hair practices like cornrows to weaves, wigs and more recently so-called natural hair styles. Black women all over the world have had a turbulent experience with their hair due to the largely negative societal connotation of natural hair (Karspark 2017). The cases of discrimination show how many women especially in the western metropolises of the UK and US, possess a more developed self-awareness of their hair practices, sometimes only choosing specific styles for specific spaces. For instance, many women choose to wear straightened hair to a workplace instead of Afrocentric ones (Henderson 2015). At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century digital platforms such as YouTube opened up new spaces for discussion of hair practices and for black women, an avenue for the development of a new consciousness around black hair and black bodies through DIY natural hair practices.

The next chapter explores the literature on natural hair practices and the natural hair movement.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

I am not my hair, I am not this skin, I am not your expectation, no.

I am not my hair, I am not this skin, I am the soul that lives within.

-Indie Arie (2006)

### 3.0 Introduction

The above lines are from the chorus of *I am not my hair*, a famous song released by Indie Arie in 2006. In the song, the artiste chronicles her personal struggles with hair throughout her life. She declares that at one point, she felt so pressured by it that she cut it all off. The song raised awareness pertaining to black women's struggle over their appearance due to societal pressures. She hoped for a time when black women will no longer be judged by their appearance as expressed in the line, "I am the soul that lives within". *I am not my hair* can be viewed as a famous text which attempts to highlight the importance of black hair issues.

As previously stated, by engaging with natural hair practices on YouTube, this research includes on a broader level issues surrounding the body, race and representation. Specifically, it explores theories surrounding black bodies, black representation and black identity formation within digital media spaces. This chapter is structured into three major sections. The first section tackles studies related to the representation of bodies in the media, including a discussion on corporeality within digital media sites. Also an overview of significant YouTube studies within this subject matter. The second section narrows the discussion further into the theories and works related to black identity formation, experience and arguments surrounding representation of black bodies in the media.

The third section of this chapter tackles related literature encompassing the arguments on black hair, natural hair practices and the natural hair movement. The chapter then concludes by identifying some of the thesis contribution to the literature especially on the question of the boundaries of natural hair practices and the outcomes of black self-representation.



### 3.1 Media effects, bodies in the media and YouTube

Research pertaining to non-racialised corporeal politics especially in media spaces is a well-developed and popular form of inquiry. Studies which focus on the body have originally been approached from diverse perspectives such as religion, feminism, aging, sporting, dualism (mind and body), the body in everyday life, cyborgs to mention a few (Blackman, 2008; Howson 2013; Orbach 2009, Jeffreys 2014, Nettleton & Watson 1998, Shilling 2005). However, this project is more concerned with media representation of bodies. In studies pertaining to media and the body, there appears to be much emphasis on media effects on the body. Most of these studies expose the correlations between media representation, body image and identity. They tend to favour arguments which connect media representation to the development of negative body ideals in audiences. These studies also discuss the ways in which media images contribute to the rise of health concerns like anorexia and bulimia in many of its young female audience. Another topic popular in this area of enquiry is the rise and popularity of plastic surgery for beauty and cosmetic purposes and the media proliferation of 'perfect' bodies. Harrison (2013) and Wykes & Gunter (2005) all go into detail on the nature of negative media effects on the body. They focus mainly on women and adolescents.

It can be argued that within such studies there exists a tendency to overemphasize the negative effects of media on the body. This does not mean these studies related to corporeal representation do not make any significant contributions. They indeed raise pertinent issues on the media's role in socialisation and identity formation. However, the emphasis on negative media effects diverts attention from subjects such as investigating the actual process of media influence as a way to understand how these negative effects may be contained. Coleman (2008) is one of the few studies which exceeds the focus of negative impacts of the media on body image.

Coleman (2008) explored how adolescent girls formed their self-image through interaction with the media. Unlike other works linked to media and body image she argued that her research participants undergo a process of "becoming" in their identity formation. The process of

becoming proposes that identity is not a static process with a singular (mostly negative) outcome, but it is one that changes over time and place. She explains that adolescent girls form perceptions over time of themselves that may be negative or positive or both depending on how they feel at a given time. Coleman's (2008) finding on becoming, provides a fresh perspective to the media and body discourse. Her study is of a small scale hence one can hardly generalise on its findings, but it is one of the few within media effects studies which highlights the importance of viewing identity formation from a process-oriented stance rather than an outcome based one. As such Coleman (2008) also informs the approach in this research. The process of becoming shows that the contribution of media in identity formation should not be considered only in binaries but as a complex negotiation which also involves the audience agency.

As this research is concerned with black bodies on YouTube, it is also useful to examine how bodies are portrayed on social and digital media sites. Bodies as represented in social and digital media platforms is also a well-researched area. Specific works like Slater & Tiggemann (2013), Fardouly & Vartanian (2016), Clark (2017), Elias and Gill (2017), argue that the use of social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook further spreads body dissatisfaction. Via digital tools like picture filters, photoshop and beauty apps users can create and construct the bodies they desire, hence a further dissociation with the body in real life ensues from utilising these sites.

Tiggemann (2013) specifically, proposed that time spent online was significantly related to the internalization of certain body ideals especially the thin ideal. The more people engaged with online images the more body surveillance increased, body esteem reduced, and dieting intensified. Fardouly & Vartanian (2016) embarked on a round-up longitudinal research and correlational study of social media and body image concern. Their findings show that social media is highly correlated with negative body image. Viteli (2016), on the other hand, observed that too many studies dwell on the negative influences of social media on body image and identity. He applied a more practical approach by stressing the need for education and

sensitisation of the audience on the ability of media to influence body image. Clark (2017) continues with the focus on the negative impact of social media sites. The study argued that media users no longer use mirrors to judge themselves and appearance but rather they scroll through photos on smartphones hunting out which body they would like to clone. Lastly and similarly, Elias & Gill (2017) study the rise of beauty apps which intensifies beauty surveillance. They argue that online platforms increase regulatory gaze on women, and it is marked by the intensification, extensification and the psychologization of this surveillance. In other words, beauty apps online presently, only aggravate women's pursuit for perfect bodies in that it becomes not only highly intensified but also highly internalised.

There is growing scholarly interest in YouTube as a cultural force. Burgess & Green (2009) make a notable contribution in their introductory exploration of YouTube. They carry out an extensive study of YouTube as an audience empowering media site; declaring participatory culture as the core business on the site. They embark on a general analysis of the process by which YouTube attracts and keeps the more elusive youth audience. They also highlight the politics of the user and the producer on the site, discussing the difficulties that arise from the blurred lines between the two. This pioneering work by Burgess & Green (2009) informs this study as it identifies the significant cultural influences of the site. Overall, it establishes YouTube as an important hub of media production and consumption.

Other YouTube studies have gone on to explore the site's role in media literacy ((Haridakis & Hanson (2013), Lange 2015)), how the site supports information-sharing within the health sciences (Kelly et al 2012, Fletcher 2016), as well as ways it has improved online communities and participatory culture (Jarrett 2012, Waldron 2013). Pertaining YouTube and the body, Vellar (2012) particularly brought attention to what it called 'the spreading of the cult body on YouTube'. The work examined how certain users on YouTube such as fans, independent musicians or fashionistas, construct their own cult bodies by deliberately borrowing characteristics from previous media icons and re-enacting them in online videos, in order to fulfil their own creative and expressive needs. Meanwhile, Del Casino & Brooks (2014)

suggested that social networking sites such as YouTube are managed public spaces which aid in interrogating the intertextualities between discourses related to bodies and sexual health. Others such as Meng et al (2015) have examined the effectiveness of media campaigns on YouTube about eating disorder behaviours.

A closely related study to this research is by Holmes (2016). Holmes (2016) explored how girls constructed narratives of identity on YouTube from their experience with anorexia. It examined how the internet has also enabled a range of eating disorder recovery cultures to emerge – whether organized around blogs, Facebook, Instagram or YouTube. In a similar vein, natural hair practices can also be related to these recovery cultures, as black women use YouTube as a space to normalise hair practices that have previously been frowned upon. Importantly, Holmes (2016) highlighted the methods by which YouTube allows self-representation central to the construction of subjectivity within the digital media landscape among users. This self-representation has led to practices which compare, speak back to, or challenge the existing representational discourses of ‘dominant’ media and wider relations of social power. As a result, providing users a source of empowerment and ability to overturn their seemingly negative experience with anorexia. This finding by Holmes (2016) exhibits a trend observable in other studies related to natural hair practices online which connect women’s self-representation to a form of liberation and empowerment. As such reinventing the perception that social media and the body either negatively affects body images or gives audiences a positive space for self-actualisation and empowerment. This highlights the trend of bifurcation in current exploration of media and the body. However, it must be acknowledged that Holmes (2016) makes a significant contribution in raising awareness as to how digital media spaces are positive spaces of self-construction for its users.

Finally, on a side note, concerning specifically digital media and raced bodies, this thesis cannot overlook the contributions of Nakamura (2008). Nakamura (2008) does not study YouTube specifically, but she predicted the rise and importance of digital media sites in the construction of raced bodies and identities. She explored in general, how internet users

collaboratively produce digital images of the body in the context of racial and gender identity formation. The work also developed the theory of digital race formation, which inquired into how race is formed online using visual images as part of the currency of communication and dialogue between users. It therefore performed close readings of digital images on the internet and highlighted how important it is for building identity especially for minority groups (Nakamura 2008:12). Nakamura's (2008) research is seminal not only because it reinforces the concerns and importance of this current raced bodily practice online but gives examples of how online digital bodies inform day to day bodies. However, Nakamura(2008) takes a more general outlook at bodies online while this thesis focuses specifically on natural hair practices online, in examining one category of a minority population; black women in the UK and one type of media, which is YouTube.

Nakamura (2008), Holmes (2016) and other studies of YouTube and the body show that understanding identity formation online is a pressing concern. This is because many individuals especially young people continue to spend more and more time online. This process is significant in understanding the impact of online bodies on offline bodies as well as culture and identity formation.

### 3.2 A more racialised corporeal politics: black bodies, black identity formation and black representation

Natural hair practices in the media not only include the subject of bodies in the media, but also deals specifically with identity formation in racialised black bodies. Mercer (1987), Banks (2000), Dabiri (2019), implicitly supports the notion that the deliberate devaluation of the black body through the epistemic legacies of slavery and colonialism led to the current debates and problematisation of black hair.

While the study of the body generally as a sociological, historical and cultural concept, is much established, specific works on black bodies remain few and far between. This paucity of

literature may be linked to the political and controversial nature of approaching race issues. Particularly, studies which interrogate blackness and black experience appears to be quite informally organised and fragmented. Nevertheless, this project explores a handful of notable studies which appraises black identity formation (Dubois (1999), Fanon (2008)), black experience (Jackson (2006) Yancy (2008)) and black representation (Hall (1992,1993), Mohanram (1999), Malik (2002)).

*The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B Dubois is a collection of essays on black life and consciousness originally published in 1903 (reprint 1999). It is a seminal work which specifically explores black experience in the United States particularly in the South of the country. The essays were written forty years after slavery was abolished to examine the condition of the emancipated African American or the 'Freedman' as Dubois (1999) terms it. Dubois (1999) states that the condition of the Freedman was not improved even after slavery's abolishment; that black people especially in the south still faced intense obstacles particularly in the areas of economic opportunities and education. He opines that these obstacles were mainly a result of what he calls the existence of the "colour line". The concept of the colour line was a direct reference to the unequal relations between white and black Americans at that period. It was a direct way of decrying the "separate but equal" ideals of segregation of the times. The colour line as a term was then later enhanced by W.E.B. Dubois to refer to all systems of prejudice which separate people.

*The Souls of Black Folk*, further examines the psyche, everyday life and culture of the Freedman and argues that the systems of slavery and segregation constantly shapes the life of the black individual. Dubois (1999) observes that every black person must adopt or rather is compelled to adopt a double consciousness in order to fit into the American society. They must live on one hand as a Negro and on the other hand as an American.

Dubois (1999) further argues that this double consciousness leads to a conflicted identity in the black psyche which brings about two types of responses: a response to hypocrisy (false

conformity) or a response to radicalism (outright opposition to the dominant culture). He explains;

” Such double life, with double thought, double social claims, must give rise to double words and double ideals and tempt the mind to prudence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism . . . Today the young negro of the south who would succeed cannot be frank and outspoken, honest and self-assertive but rather he is daily tempted to be silent and wary, politic and shy” (pg.127-128)

It is over a hundred years since W.E.B Dubois wrote, and his ideas may seem now to be outdated or out of context. However, the theory of double consciousness remains familiar today. This observation is not only applicable to the black man living in the south of the United States but for many different black people all over the world. This is evident in the fact that many times it has been the case that those regarded as black find themselves adjusting to a dominant culture especially through bodily and cultural practices; whether it is conforming by adjusting their dark skin (i.e., skin lightening practices) or straightening their hair in order to blend in more within their societies. Also, Dubois mentions that this state of double consciousness tempts to radicalism or hypocrisy. An example of this radicalism may be connected to what was observed in the black power movement of the 1960s United States and also the current popularity of natural hair practices. The hypocrisy on the other hand, appears mirrored in the endurance of popular conforming practices (skin lightening and hair straightening) as previously mentioned.

Overall, it can be argued that this split and painful self-consciousness in the black psyche is mainly manifested in the current debates for and against natural hairstyling practices or the current preoccupation with what is said to be the correct black hair culture. It can be proposed that the emphasis is not on answers to these debates but the debates themselves can be seen as a symptom of the process by which the collective black body currently retains this painful self-consciousness. It is constantly torn in its struggle to find the best avenues to exist in a society where it is deemed as Other or abnormal. Thus, this may be viewed as one of the reasons why the debates against and for natural and unnatural styles hair have been repeatedly brought up through history. Although Dubois (1999) writes from a place of personal

observation and personal experience, his postulations about black life and culture resonates through time and still inspires many writers today.

Another notable and influential critic of black consciousness and experience is the writer and anti-colonial activist Frantz Fanon. Frantz Fanon's, *Black Skin White Mask*, originally published in 1952 (reprint 2008) also presents crucial observations on black identity and experience. He began his treatise by declaring, "I propose nothing short of the liberation of the man of colour from himself" (Fanon 2008:2). Here Frantz Fanon states that the point of his writing was to deconstruct the black psyche. He originally posits that he is after the origins of what he calls the "black problem" from a psychoanalytical point of view. The black problem according to him is that "the black man wants to be white while the white man slaves to reach human level" (Fanon 2008: 3). Here, Fanon suggests that whiteness is framed as the most desirable way of being, as such the black man craves this status, and meanwhile, the actual origin of this black and white demarcation stems from the white man's need to reach "human level"; i.e. the white man's need for identity construction. Also, Fanon adds that "the white man consider themselves superior to black men and black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the value of their intellect" (Fanon 2008: 3). Again, this is a repetition of the last point, Fanon invariably reduces the contention between whiteness and blackness as tactics for identity formation in both cases of blackness and whiteness. Apart from this stark reference to the main contentions of race, Fanon highlights a controversial perspective that these identity dynamics he describes leads to what he calls an internalisation or "epidermalization" of an "inferiority complex" among people racialised as black.

He further argues that this inferiority complex is particularly intensified among the most educated, who must struggle with it unceasingly. In other words, those who are educated (i.e., more proximal to whiteness and the colonial culture) are allegedly in more danger to epidermalize this so-called inferiority complex. Fanon's (2008) arguments may be viewed as biased since he evades utilising a recognisable method of scholarly inquiry. At some point in his piece, he stated; "I leave methods to the botanists and mathematicians. There is a point at



which methods devour themselves” (Fanon 2008:14). He prefers to write from his experience and personal observations of black life. Also, his psychological evaluation on the psyche of the black man wanting to become white comes off as overly punitive. However, considering the context in which Fanon (2008) wrote, his need for harsh tones becomes clearer. It was a time when there was a call to reject the coloniser’s culture, domination and point of view as part of the anti-colonial struggle.

Fanon (2008) proceeds by recommending one solution to this black problem. He posits, “to make man admit that he is nothing, absolutely nothing- and that he must put an end to the narcissism on which he relies in order to imagine that he is different from the other ‘animals’ “ (Fanon 2008:12). Here Fanon recommends the end of the cultural domination which imposes difference especially on black bodies. He calls for equality and respect when it comes to the white man towards black and blacks towards white. ‘We are all animals’, as he puts it. Although he recommends this one-line solution Fanon (2008) spends more time addressing the problem rather than further developing the solution.

Fanon (2008) unlike Dubois (1999) turns the discourse away from systems of domination to focusing the lens on the black personality itself. His theory can be viewed as a continuation of what W.E B Dubois termed as the hypocrisy of the Freedman. Fanon (2008) argues that the black person overly conforms to the point that they aspire to take on the quality of whiteness. By this stance, it can be argued that Fanon’s (2008) main contribution is in the fact that he holds a mirror to every person racialised as black, ensuring that they question how they may be complicit in promoting the ideals of the dominant culture.

Therefore, by stressing this aspect of black identity formation, Fanon (2008) attempts to balance out the black experience discourse. Dubois (1999) on one hand raises awareness to the imposing hegemonic systems and its effects on black bodies and experience. This is an outside-in perspective. Fanon (2008) on the other hand takes an inner look at the black psyche by paying attention to the process by which the colonised or black bodies may imbibe and embody colonial attitudes of domination. In this way, Fanon (2008) not only departs from

but also builds upon the work by Dubois (1999). Fanon went on to influence many anti colonialists and critics of black experience. His theories also influenced black rights activists in the US and his input particularly in *Black Skins White Masks* may be connected to the rise of the debates on self-hate theory to be discussed in more detail in the natural hair practices section of this chapter.

Hall's (1993) article on *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* first published in 1990, includes influence from Frantz Fanon. In this article, Stuart Hall began to develop his ideas on the complexities of the construction of identity among people of the diaspora. Firstly, Hall appeared to support the ideas in Frantz Fanon's work in *Black Skin White Masks*. Hall (1993) noted that Fanon's work exposed the fact that the discourse of dominance which placed blackness as Other also had the power to internally compel those that were subjected (Hall 1993:394). In other words, he argues that the process of cultural domination is not only through external forces like violence but can also be internal equally, where the dominated is convinced to accept their subjugation. Hall (1993) further suggested that this conformation to the norm by the colonised is reinforced and internalised via regimes of representation. By this position, Hall (1993) identifies the importance of representation in the formation of the identity of those seen as Other.

Hall (1993) further postulates in his work that Black Caribbean identities are framed by vectors of similarity and discontinuity. This similarity and difference may be seen in the peoples dragged into slavery, transportation, colonisation, migration and indentured labour from the African and Asian continent. This common history was formative for these groups of people, however this does not mean their origins are similar. As such, according to Hall (1993), identities are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. It is also subject to the play of history, culture and power. Cultural identity can then be seen as a matter of becoming as well as being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past (Hall 1993: 394). In the light of these arguments therefore, Hall (1993) seems to echo both Fanon and Dubois as they both also acknowledge history and

power in their postulations on black identity. From them Hall (1993) learns that identity formation is indeed complex. However, in highlighting the complexity of identity formation Hall (1993) did not contribute much to defining or promoting a clearer understanding of the nature of identity formation especially among people of colour. His main focus, however, was to pay attention to the existence of the interstices of black identity formation; how people that identify as black may have similar experience and history but yet also differ in many aspects. He further developed this idea in another article called “What is Black in Popular culture” (Hall 1992).

In this article, Hall (1992) emphasizes the need to guard against essentialising black experience, as once the “black” is torn from its historical, cultural and political embedding, and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, it means that we end up valorising the racism which we attempt to deconstruct (Hall 1992:10). Hall (1992) underlines the importance of considering the diversity of black experience and not only its homogeneity to avoid reinforcing racism.

Hall’s (1992) focus on the diversity of blackness emerged because he observed the tendency in representative regimes to present blackness in a limited manner. In doing so, Hall (1992) highlighted a much-needed perspective in the study and representation of black experience. He also pointed to the need for the consideration and differentiating of the many different forms of black identities. For instance, Black Caribbean, Black African, African America, Afro Brazilian, mixed race identities, to mention a few. Hall’s theory of a non-essentialised black identity is further echoed by many other writers, for instance Paul Gilroy in his theory of the black Atlantic (Woodward 1997). However, it can be argued that further division of the black experience perpetuates the already common societally pervasive habit of highlighting cultural differences over similarities. In current culture, difference often involves negative connotations (see chapter 2 of this thesis). Hence further splitting the black identity tends to further compound the difference imposed on black bodies. While complex identities are common and even necessary in this postmodern age, it is also important to highlight that despite the

existence of different identities, people racialised as black also yearn to be accepted in their various societies in spite and because of this difference. For instance, it can be argued that the current popularity of natural hair practices is linked to an advocacy for the normalisation of black bodies, it does not matter how different or similar those black bodies are.

Further on representation, Mohanram (1999) investigates the process of black representation within a variety of discourses and texts central to western notions of identity. Moharam (1999) argues that blackness is a discursive practice which exists in the intersections of history, culture, economics, geography and language. As such, she explores how blackness can become a construction within different geographical spaces. For instance, among Maori women and indigenous aborigines in Australia. This again solidifies Hall's(1993) assertion of a non-essentialised blackness. Mohanram's work highlights the existence of the experience of blackness in communities that would have not been originally described as black. She also further concluded that by her findings, the materiality of the body is really a culturally orchestrated or mediated event (pg.43) since they can take on different meanings at different contexts and spaces.

Malik's (2002) study is equally useful but explores black representation in one specific geographical space. The research delves into black and Asian representation on British television. It explores the representations of race in different forms of British media such as news, soap opera and TV documentary. Malik (2002) found that African-Caribbean people are mostly present in social issue discourses such as music, light entertainment, sports and comedy. However, black visibility tends to be less pronounced in major roles, big-budget British films, and non 'race-related' documentaries. She also found that Asians, on the whole, were more usually marked by their absence. It is however the case that changes have occurred since Malik's (2002) study.

More importantly, Malik(2000) highlights that her aim is not about pointing out the 'racist' nature of representation in British television. Instead, she calls for a more nuanced view of her findings by declaring that there is less need for what is known as more 'truthful' representations

of blackness but more need for representation that is diverse, aesthetically innovative, informative, respectful and more accurate. She therefore argues that black representation is not about a positive or negative depiction but one that captures the diversity in blackness and is equally respectful of black experiences. Malik (2002) also notes that meanings around 'race' are never fixed and 'culture' itself is permanently in flux and always a potential site of struggle. Hence, defining a simple progress model of 'blackness' on British television becomes difficult (Pg. 173). This view is significant in this particular study.

Another study by Jackson (2006) further explores blackness in representation. It set out to call attention to the spontaneous objectification of black bodies still present in contemporary media. The study focused mainly on the depiction of black masculine bodies constructed in negatives of hyper-sexuality, criminalisation and violence. The author also argued that black popular culture stars are often complacent in promoting this image in the United States. Jackson (2006) further adds that negativity in mass media while representing raced bodies is also further promoted by emphasizing the difference between these bodies, as opposed to highlighting their similarities. Hence he argues that twentieth and twenty-first century representations of black bodies have powerfully debilitating possibilities because of their negative denotations and connotations. Unlike Malik (2002), Jackson (2006), chooses not to take a middle ground in exploring the representation of blackness. He focuses on revealing the nature of these negative aspects of black representation.

One of Jackson's (2006) main arguments is that black identities are centrally confounded by struggle— struggle to achieve, to be heard and understood, to be loved, recognized, valued, and to survive. Hence the study develops a theory known as the 'black masculine identity paradigm'. The black identity paradigm is represented as a mandala composed of four "needs" that orbit around struggle. The four elements include a struggle for: recognition, independence, achievement, and community. This concept of struggle and "needs" has not been directly outlined by any other previously reviewed works which examine black identity and representation. Scholars like Dubois or Fanon hint at struggle but the black identity paradigm

identifies the nature of struggle attached to black bodies. As such it can be argued that by this naming, Jackson(2006) extends this conversation around 'struggle'. Despite this emphasis on negative representation of black bodies, Jackson (2006) predicted that black bodies will be socially reconstituted and redefined on a daily basis via the emergence of new media. He argues that since mass media takes a toxic line of race representation, new and popular media possesses the remarkable opportunity to salvage race representation. Since the media fails some of its consumers (especially black people), they are left to reclaim their consciousness and representation via new media sites (pg. 144). In a way, Jackson (2006) signals the hope people of colour have placed on their own self representation in new media sites, since it appears they cannot rely on traditional mass media.

Yancy (2008) departs from the focus of media and representation as done in Malik (2002) and Jackson (2006) and focuses on writing about black experience and identity from a philosophical and personal existential context. He provides a stark description and analysis of the black experience and demonstrates how blackness is ever connected to whiteness or the white gaze. Yancy (2008) appears to deliberately set out to shock his reader in its exposition of the black experience. It forces the reader to face the base associations that are attached to blackness as a direct way to challenging ways of seeing and privilege.

He argues that "the black body is constructed as antithetical within a binary logic that points to the white body's own signifying [and material] forces to call attention to itself as normative" (p. xvi). The key words here are antithetical and normative. The white body is constructed as normal; hence, black bodies automatically become oppositional to white bodies, therefore becoming abnormal and requiring to be worked on to become normal (white). He posits that these systems of signification are commonplace especially within the United States.

Specifically exploring black bodies in North America, Yancy (2008) like Jackson (2006) further takes the perspective of exploring the negative connotations attached to black bodies. Yancy (2008) explains; "my dark embodied existence, my lived historical being, became signifiers; inferior, nigger, evil, dirty, sullen, immoral, lascivious (pg.70)". The black body in this vein

becomes a highly problematic entity according to Yancy (Yancy 2008: 69). Yancy (2008) by this position, doesn't appear to add much to the discourse of black identity. He only recalls how black bodies are seen as a problem in society, a subject of significant scholarship since the work of Dubois (1999) and Fanon (2008). However, by directly describing this problem Yancy (2008) draws in the reader by making them face the reality and the urgency of the problematic connotations of black bodies; hence making it a problem that is real and contemporary. For instance, Yancy (2008) explains;

Having one's black body returned as ontologically problematic, one begins to think, to feel, to emote, even if unconsciously, I'm a nigger? The internalisation of the white gaze creates a doubleness within the black psyche., leading to a destructive process of superfluous self-surveillance and self-interrogation (pg.68)

Within these lines one can observe a direct reference to the theories of Dubois (1999) and Fanon (2008); the black body as a problem, double consciousness and the internalisation of the white gaze.

Although Yancy's perspective amplifies the discourse of difference and contributes to research which empirically deals with exposing the nature of black experience, his view on blackness still appears one-sided. Yancy's (2008) account of blackness almost essentialises blackness as an experience of negativity in the presence of the white gaze. His writing also fails to offer strong suggestions for the resolution of the antithesis between black and white. Yancy's most important contribution is describing blackness as a production of the white gaze. For Yancy (2008), it is apparent the black bodies exist in constant contrast to white. Hence it can be inferred that blackness only materialises in the imperceptible presence of whiteness. This is an important point in understanding blackness and even black hair. Finally, unlike Jackson (2006), Yancy (2008) is not shy to pin blame on white privilege.

In terms of black identity formation this chapter so far has explored the theory of double consciousness (Dubois 1999), the internalisation of inferiority complex (Fanon 2008) and debates against essentialising blackness (Hall 1992). Studies regarding black representation highlight the need for an improvement and diversity in the representations of blackness (Malik

2002, Jackson 2006). It is clear that scholars in black experience and representation write from a diversity of styles, purposes and contexts. However, these seemingly diverse works bear many similarities, interstices and also build upon one another. The following section explores indicative recent research on black bodies and identity.

### 3.2.1 More recent research on black bodies and identity

Mowatt (2013) raises awareness on the hypervisibility and invisibility which frames the black female body. The study undertakes a critique of historical and contemporary representations of black women's bodies to argue that black women are represented in stereotyped and commodified ways through-out leisure spaces, including scholarship. They conclude that these issues concerning black women could advance black feminism and a culturally congruent epistemology in the field of third wave feminism.

Other scholars such as Bradley (2015) examine the impact of social and digital media sites in raising awareness to black women's issues and concerns that have otherwise been marginalized in offline spaces. Bradley (2015) echoing Mowatt (2013) states that social media allows black women to realise their hunt for visibility via social media such as YouTube, Twitter and Tumblr; establishing communities and sharing/documenting their experiences online. She focuses on the concept of "black girl awkwardness", which relates to black women's use of social media to create comedy for self-realization and social critique.

Meanwhile, Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo (2017), explored the lived experience of black Africans in Australia. The participants in this study highlighted what could be categorized as the burdensome nature of black embodiment. The study finds that black bodies of African migrants are "troublesome" because they are relegated to particular unspoken standards and expectations, simply by being "dark" skinned. Their blackness becomes an imposed identity. They are presumed guilty, condemned by an ideological frame of reference that problematizes them and reduces their very existence to the ontological and epistemological disturbance of white space (Mapedzahama & Kwanash-Aidoo 2017:10). This work is particularly important for this research because it sets a current example on how to write about black experience.



So far, it can be observed again that the more recent literature pertaining to blackness, representation and identity emanates from different angles. Among these works there is a lot of emphasis on black bodies as a problem, systems that cause these problem or perpetuate this problem in society. Works which explore representation of blackness such as Malik (2002) and Jackson (2006) highlight the unsatisfactory nature of black representation in the media and place high hopes in the new media's ability to present more robust representations of black bodies. Bradley (2015) also shares this optimism in new media by highlighting the empowered black women images on social media sites. The next section discusses research on black hair and the natural hair movement.

### 3.3 Agency and empowerment: black hair and the natural hair movement

The discourse pertaining to black hair and natural hair practices can be traced as far back as the early 1900s when black nationalists began to debate the outlook and countenance of the 'good negro' in the United States (Jackson 2000). However, more concrete positions pertaining to black hair became evident in the 1960s with the first appearance of the Afro within the circles of the civil and black rights activists in the US. The activists advocated for wearing this style because they saw it as a symbol of their rejection of the dominant culture which sought to devalue their black bodies, lives and identities (Seiber 2000). At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as more critical works increased around the concept of natural hair, other studies exploring black women's identity in similar ways were also simultaneously emerging. These studies show that black women's search for identity has been a pressing and contemporary issue. Some notable works pertaining to black women's identity formation examined here are by Tulloch (2000) and Emerson (2005).

Tulloch (2000) analysed the practice of wearing the headtie as an expression of reclaiming black British women's identity. The headtie is a decorative head covering textile which is commonly used among women in Africa, the Caribbean and across the general diaspora (See figure 2.17 in Chapter 2). According to Tulloch (2000) this apparel was used by black British women beginning from the 1970s to project an aesthetic identity which was a response and

rejection of the inferiority imposed on their bodies (Tulloch 2000:211). The headtie helped black women form a group identity in Britain, achieving a level of oneness and reasserting their identities. Emerson (2005) interrogated black women's representation in music videos. She analysed music videos by female African American musicians, produced and distributed at the end of the 1990s. The study found that self-representation by black women in music videos at this period was complex and multifaceted. In briefly engaging with these related works on black identity and representation one observes how both Tulloch (2000) and Emmerson (2005) signal the preoccupation with understanding black identity and how this anxiety surrounding identity has not much changed. In Tulloch's (2000) work we can observe that black women in Britain have been constantly concerned and have grappled with their identity formation. They have set out to assert their identity in many different ways like dress and hair through history. It can be argued that the constant preoccupation with matters of identity may be a sign and side effect of the burden of difference imposed on black bodies especially within the western metropole; again, echoing Dubois's theory of double consciousness. From Emmerson (2005), it can be observed that black women's opportunities of self-representation precede YouTube videos or social media but there are still unanswered questions about the process and outcomes of black women's current self-representation online.

Exploring these other works related to black women's identity and representation before interrogating the literature on black hair is imperative because it provides further context for understanding black identity and representation in black women's natural hair practices in the UK. The following part of this section then, continues this question of black women's identity and representation via its interrogation of natural hair practices. It chronicles the various arguments relating to black hair practices and examines key arguments in black hair research from older works like Mercer (1987), Bank (2000), to more recent ones like Dabiri (2019).

Mercer (1987) produced one of the most influential pieces on the politics of black hair. In the study, he attempts to expose what he calls the problematic concept of "natural hair". Mercer

wrote in the 1980s, when the natural vs unnatural debate surrounding black hair became a popular concern yet again. These arguments were especially common in black communities within the US and the UK. It was especially championed by black nationalists who recommended the rejection of practices such as hair straightening or styles that mimicked Asian or Caucasian type hair for styles which utilised one's natural hair texture. Mercer (1987) explained that his writing was done to address these contemporary debates surrounding the difference between two logics of black stylization; the first in emphasizing 'natural' looks and the other, emphasizing 'artifice'.

Mercer's (1987) response to this debate was that there could hardly exist any kind of hairstyle which could be truly described as natural. This is because all hairstyles need to be worked on, they do not emerge naturally. Even the Afro, which was known as 'the natural', had to be combed and shaped in a particular manner to make the style possible. In this vein, Mercer (1987) writes;

“Yet hair is never a straightforward biological 'fact' because it is almost always groomed, prepared, cut, concealed and generally 'worked upon' by human hands. Such practices socialize hair, making it the medium of significant 'statements' about self and society and the codes of value that bind them, or do not. In this way hair is merely a raw material, constantly processed by cultural practices which thus invest it with 'meanings' and 'value'.” (Mercer 1987: 3)

Thus, Mercer (1987) prefers to see hair as an instrument which becomes statements about the wearer and also the times in society. He points out that both straightening and natural looks are equally in good measure, black style practices. Both styles equally signal black people's experience and responses to the hegemonic culture. Both styling practices, the ones perceived as 'natural' or 'unnatural' tell black people's story. As such he further explains;

“Black hair-styling may thus be evaluated as a popular art form articulating a variety of aesthetic 'solutions' to a range of 'problems' created by ideologies of race and racism . . . . When hairstyling is critically evaluated as an aesthetic practice inscribed in everyday life, all black hair-styles are political in that they articulate responses to the panoply of historical forces which have invested this element of the ethnic signifier with both personal and political 'meaning' and significance.” (Mercer 1987:3-4)

Mercer's (1987) position that all black hair styles can be seen as a product of the black condition is valid. However, Mercer's position does not resolve the natural vs unnatural conundrum. He ignores the reasons why the natural hair debate originated in the first place. Even though all style practices by black people are in fact part of the black experience, according to some black nationalists, some styles recall the negative and oppressive connotations attached to black bodies more than other styles. Therefore, there is a need to change this negative connotation by adopting more positive styles. The need for change is at the core of the natural vs unnatural question. If all black hairstyles then are to be admitted equally, how do black people signal this need to move on from practices that are said to oppress them?

Later in Mercer's (1987) treatise he acknowledges that his work was not meant to write off the effective liberations gained and made possible by inverting the order of aesthetic oppression (aesthetic oppression refers to how typical African features were constructed as abnormal, hence, an evidence for why they may be dominated). However, this simple acknowledgement is hardly adequate as he does not thoroughly engage with this natural hair debate of overturning aesthetic oppression. Arguing that black hair practices should be admitted equally may be indeed undoing the progress made against the order of aesthetic oppression.

However, apart from this short coming, it is important to note that Mercer (1987) makes a significant contribution towards raising awareness on the interstices of black stylisation and black hair politics. He concludes that the political horizon of postmodern popular culture involves the diversity of contemporary hairstyles which is a symbol of the inventive and improvisational aesthetic which should be acknowledged as Africa's gift to modernity. He therefore justifies his arguments by acknowledging that the postmodern world is perhaps the best place where contradictory hair styling practices like straightening may be acceptable in black life.

Banks (2000) is another notable work on black hair. The study utilises the everyday discussions and interactions between black women about hair to reveal their ideas about race,

gender, sexuality, beauty, and power. As such, Banks (2000) takes a survey of black women's consciousness within their own communities and mainstream culture via their discussions. In the work, she interrogated several debates within the black hair discourse. For example, she explored the good hair vs bad hair debates, and also the issues of hair straightening, and the arguments related to the wearing of wigs and weaves as an alleged form of self-hate among black women.

For the good hair vs bad hair debate, Banks (2000) explores how this good hair/bad hair rhetoric is connected to the legacies of slavery. Good hair on a black person, is hair that looks closer to the Asian or Caucasian type hair; hair that is straighter, not too kinky or curly. While bad hair is curlier or coily, often seen as too tough, undesirable and hard to manage. This distinction between good and bad hair was rife especially within black communities and many of those who were said to possess "bad hair" were discriminated against because of it. The self-hate theory stated that black women especially those who favoured practices like hair straightening, exhibited a form of self-hate. It was the belief that straightening sought to eradicate or disguise the kinky features of black hair, hence it was a way of assimilating, denying or hiding away one's blackness. This self-hate theory is said to be associated with activists like Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X who were against all activities that were alleged to promote the subjugation and erasure of black bodies and identity.

In the case of these debates related to good hair vs bad hair and the self-hate theory, Banks (2000) conducted focus group discussions which found that black women did not always define their hair by societal standards. They did not often consider the implications of hair politics in their daily life. Bank's (2000) participants preferred to see their hair as an expression of personal style and straightening practices were said to be only undertaken for the sake of manageability not self-hate. They also added that the idea of self-hate was too strong an expression. Instead the participants recommended that "lack of self-love", could be substituted for it (Banks 2000:151). Banks (2000) observed that the substitution of the self-hate theory for

“a lack of self-love”, showed contradictions; in that the women supported the self-hatred theory in their attempt to subvert it (pg.151).

It can be argued that the self-hate theory is an overly punitive way of seeing black women’s adoption of hair practices like straightening. This is because it is important to note that bodily practices are passed down through socialisation and the dictates of environment (Howson 2013). It can be argued that hair straightening emerged from the period of slavery and segregation as a tool to conform (Blackwelder 2013), hence it is easy to observe how the practice became normalised in black communities despite its negative origins. As a result, the popularity of hair straightening practices among black people is not surprising as many women are simply going in accordance with their socialisation. Even though these practices have been seen as tools of aesthetic oppression it is a normal part of their lives. Often socialisation can be in positive or negative forms, what is seen as normal in a society does not automatically mean that activity in many cases is always ideal or even right. Hence in a society where black bodies are constructed as abnormal one can argue that the practice of hair straightening is not so extraordinary.

Banks (2000) further adds that, “hair matters for black women are never merely arrested within aesthetics as hair can be a badge of cultural pride, as well as simply an indicator of style; it can be used to maintain the status quo or go against it” (Banks 2000:148). Hence for Banks (2000) hair can be both political as well as casual depending on the circumstance.

Jackson (2000) observed that the academic work on black hair had a major influence on how individuals and academics began to view black hair. This study observed that academic works like Banks (2000) and Mercer (1987) increased the limelight pertaining the meanings and implications of natural hair.

### 3.31 Black hair and the natural hair movement

Shortly after the publishing of works like Banks (2000), the term, “the natural hair movement” started to come into use. In recent years, the study of black hair and the emergence of the natural hair movement has been much recorded in popular beauty magazines and news sites,

for instance Kristian (2017), Kasprzak 2017, Stylist (2016) to mention a few. Also, the term 'natural hair movement', features in academic research including Henderson (2015) and Sobande (2017) and Dabiri (2019). These provide more critical insight on black hair and natural hair practices. This section will briefly expound upon the arguments within contemporary studies of black hair and the natural hair movement.

Henderson (2015) explores the process by which the natural hair movement redefines black women's identities. She interrogates the experiences and interactions of black women with the concept of natural hair, with specific attention to the ways in which their attitudes and identities have been influenced in relation to the movement. She examines these questions among black women in Washington DC metro area of the United States. The study observed that many works on black hair assume that some hairstyles are more oppressive than others. However, there is little research focusing on the perspectives of the women who wear them.

Henderson (2015) also argues that "the natural hair movement is characterized by the African American community-at-large as a cultural shift not only in the way black women wear their hair, but also a shift in the way black women see themselves" (30). She cites that one of her reasons for naming black women's hair practices as a movement is due to its popularity and obvious economic impact. She argues that brands such as L'Oréal, Patente, and others which once ignored black hair have now established product lines to accommodate their different hair texture (Henderson 2015:2). As such, her premise for the existence of the natural hair movement stems from the fact that hair brands which cater to dominant or "normal" hair types have finally acknowledged the different needs of black hair. Henderson's (2015) argument appears problematic because it suggests that the movement only becomes validated or valuable in its acceptance by mainstream white-owned hair care lines. This situation is reminiscent of what Yancy (2008) terms 'the ocular power of whiteness', where the quality of blackness is called to existence through the white gaze.

It is also worthy of note that the sudden boom of the natural hair market more or less about 10 years ago is peculiar. People of African descent have been growing their natural hair for

as long as they have existed, yet hair care science and hair lines which factors in the specific needs of afro hair types only recently became mainstream. For instance, major UK retailers like Boots and Superdrug which did not previously carry specifically black hair care products, now showcase natural hair care brands such as *Shea Moisture*, *Cantu* and *As I Am* haircare lines. With this very recent growth it appears the natural hair of people of African descent only recently came into being. This situation evidences the high level of conformity which has previously been encouraged for black bodies.

Furthermore, Henderson(2015) through her focus group discussions found that a majority of the black women she interviewed, whether the ones who wore their hair in its natural state or those who straightened their hair, prefer to be associated with having “natural hair”. Women who straightened their hair did not feel that they were consciously ascribing to hegemonic beauty ideals. Rather, they straightened their hair as a matter of convenience. Henderson (2015) concludes that no matter how black women wear their hair, whether straightened or not, they should all be included in the natural hair movement because this is how most of them feel.

Henderson’s (2015) findings, similar to Banks (2000), shows that many women prefer to ignore the political nuances implicated in hair straightening practices. It also shows that the use of the word ‘natural’ has become ambiguous in black communities. It’s definition has become elusive. However, the quest to be considered part of this movement regardless of hairstyle evidences the impact it has had on black women. Yet it also reveals the confusion among black women about what exactly is the natural hair movement. Or who qualifies as “natural” or what might be the criteria for joining this natural hair movement.

Also, Henderson (2015) earlier described the movement as a shift in the way black women wear their hair and see themselves. This leads to contradictions in pinpointing where this shift lies. If both straight hair and natural hair types can be both defined as “natural”, then what becomes the point of specifically advocating that black women wear more natural styles or that they embrace the curly/coily hair structure? Despite the claim that many black women do



not consider hair politics in their day-to-day lives, it appears that the process of societal embodiment, which demands the following of set rules continues to dictate their actions. For instance, it can be assumed that an unstated rule in current society is that blackness and black hair in its natural form is unacceptable (See Chapter 2). As such it can be argued that Henderson's (2015) findings exhibits the extent to which many black women have internalised and normalised these societal codes which marginalise their natural appearance. Also, the fact that women see having to straighten their hair as the most convenient, recalls the belief that black hair is inherently hard to manage and abnormal. It is a belief that again reinforces the problematic rhetoric about black hair. Henderson's (2015) findings may also be linked to Mercer's (1987) argument, that all black hair styles should be acceptable no matter what form they take.

Overall, Henderson (2015) provides some insight on the discourse of black women's hair practices and identity formation particularly in the United States context. She concludes that black women's socialization encourages them to produce their bodies as objects for others to praise and scrutinise. Therefore, they must do away with this pressure by defining their bodies for themselves. This conclusion is in line with her use of the black feminist theory which champions black women's agency. However as much as black women appear to wield agency over their bodies, bodies are a product of social construction; made up of the rules and codes that bind society (Howson 2013).

Additionally, it is important to note the works of Tate (2016) and Brown (2018) who have also provided similar arguments to Henderson (2015). Tate (2016) analyses the content creators of the natural hair movement through the lenses of 'womanism'. Like Henderson (2015) she finds that the force of black digital creators' voices on spaces like YouTube has compelled mainstream media and big businesses to pay attention (Tate 2016:61). Not only this, black women's activities of testifying about their natural hair journey online has informed, inspired, and encouraged black women to embrace their natural hair (Tate 2016: 58). Tate (2016) in

this way advocates for the existence of a contemporary natural hair movement but does not go further to explain it in detail.

Similarly, Brown (2018) explored black women's hair practices online in Canada. She argued that social media platforms, like beauty salons, become meeting places where black Canadian women share and connect with their hair experience. This in turn has created a natural hair movement which not only challenges mainstream beauty standards but also takes advantage of the hyper visible presence of black women in Canada to vocalise their experience on hair and also indirectly speak on racism in Canada (Brown 2018: 78). Brown (2018) also concludes that the essence of black hair politics in Canada is that black women should be free to wear their hair exactly how they feel and should be free of the pressure to conform within Canadian society. Tate(2016) and Brown's (2018) conclusion emphasizes that there is much focus on black women's resistance through natural hair practices. This is linked to a sense of empowerment; that black women now possess the power to make choices for themselves. It is clear how black women resist or attempt to resist the societal connotations of black bodies via natural hair practices however focusing on this resistance neglects the other sides of the significance of natural hair practices.

. Sobande (2017) unlike Brown (2018), and the other previously mentioned studies, examines black women's identity formation in Britain. Before her study there was very little research on natural hair practices particularly in the UK context. Sobande (2017) did not originally set out to explore natural hair practices in the UK but the representation of black British women on YouTube. Still, she ends up examining YouTube videos on natural hair practices as a major way black women have been represented online. This change in focus by Sobande (2017) is unsurprising because the black hair question includes one of the largest concerns of black women especially those living in western societies. YouTube plays a significant role in the attempt to solve black women's preoccupation with their hair.

Hence, Sobande's (2017) serendipitous study of YouTube videos pertaining natural hair practices, found that YouTube is available to young black women in Britain as a socio-cultural

source of knowledge shared among them. She further adds that it affords collaborative forms of self-construction and allows for a collective sense of resistance against dominant mass-media. This is an important finding in that Sobande (2017) confirms the importance of digital media sites as an alternative voice to black representation.

Sobande (2017) noted that black women's texts such as hair vlogs nourish and sustain their readers. In engaging with the vlogs black women gain the ability to involve in strategies of representation which leads to empowerment. Although Sobande (2017) makes significant contributions especially in showing the relationship between online platforms and black representation, her work continues to echo the common rhetoric of empowerment found within the many studies on black women's natural hair practices online.

A more recent discourse on the experience of black hair is developed by Dabiri (2019). Her study includes a detailed interrogation of the history, culture and complex social relations related to black women's hair. The study begins by exploring the problematic connotations of black hair especially on a personal level and connects it to hair on a societal level. On a personal level, Dabiri (2019) explains, "I was trying to get as far away from my texture as possible . . . my actions were a bid for assimilation, by way of disguise. My efforts stemmed from the cardinal terror that people would catch sight of my real hair" (Dabiri 2019: 8). This account is probably one of the few works on natural hair in which a black woman openly admits antagonistic feelings towards her hair as opposed to what was observed in Banks (2000) and Henderson (2015).

Very few studies on black hair capture such an in-depth personal experience of hair. On a societal level, she notes that when we think about what we are taught constitutes beautiful hair, the characteristics of Afro hair are notable only for their absence. Straight, shiny, glossy smooth, flowing are certainly not qualities of black people's hair. She also comments on the culture of hair straightening. She explains that many girls didn't even realise that they had curly hair until they were much older and finally quit relaxing their hair (pg. 22). As such unlike

Mercer (1987) and Henderson (2015), she does not support the practice of hair straightening as she sees it as a tool which hinders black women from confronting their true image.

Further on the politics of natural hair styles, Dabiri (2019) observes that many women in having to insist that their decision to go natural is not explicitly political shows how far from the norm black hair is still considered to be. This is an important observation because Dabiri in this way also responds to the arguments by Banks (2000) and Henderson (2015). She posits the evidence for this normalisation is seen in the extreme lengths black women go to drastically change their appearance in order to transform and fit in (Dabiri 2019: 39).

Dabiri (2019) also explores the advent of the natural hair movement. She describes the natural hair movement as a collective reawakening for black women but inversely observes that the increased visibility in mainstream media platforms headed by dominant groups, cannot be equated to the liberation of black bodies. As a result, she is not convinced that the current increase in visibility of black women solves the problematisation of black bodies. Specifically, about the natural hair movement she argues:

“People are quick to highlight the parallels between the black activism of the 60s and 70s with today’s movements. In truth there are major distinctions, and in relation to hair, the different ideologies that underpin both movements have a direct effect on how, ‘natural’ our natural hair looks. . . Our black power forebears were anti-consumerist, grounded in social Marxist theory. Today, ‘activism’ is seen by many as a legitimate hustle through which to ‘get your coin’. On top of this we buy products and lifestyles that demonstrate our wokeness; we are persuaded we can shop ourselves free.” (Dabiri 2019:137)

This position is novel compared to other studies of the movement. Studies like those described earlier in this section promote the empowering and liberating qualities of the black hair movement. Dabiri (2019) on the other hand, dismisses the activities of the current movement as counterfeit and overly commercialised activism. She adds that it can be easy to confuse representation with liberation; that speaking about pain is not the same as dismantling the power structures that create pain.

Indeed, the current practices of the natural hair movement appears to be undermined by its commercial aspects. However, one can argue that this is not enough reason to dismiss the

significance of black women's current hair practices. It is also important to disagree with Dabiri (2019) on the point that speaking about pain is not dismantling the power structures which create it. This project argues that speaking of pain is indeed one of the steps to dismantling those negative structures as it exposes them, hence undermining its power. Also, studies like Boehmer (1993) and hooks (1992) strongly argue for speaking one's pain as a path to healing that pain. Also, Dabiri's (2019) dismissal of the natural hair movement may be linked to an assumption that positive change is something that occurs immediately. Boyd (1997) counters this assumption by observing that the realm of social and cultural change comes from the residual impact of cultural producers; liberation hence becomes a process that occurs one cultural representation at a time. One can observe how perceptions attached to natural hair have slowly changed from as far back as the 1960s black is beautiful movement to the recent 2019 legislation in New York banning discrimination against black hair styles and also, the present-day popularity of natural hair practices on YouTube.

Overall Dabiri (2019) makes significant contributions to the black hair discourse, especially in the fact that she highlights the stress and the stigma behind dealing with black hair. She debunks common myths surrounding natural hair and equally tackles the topic of black men's relationship with black hair which is a much-needed angle in the study of natural hair. By engaging at both a personal and societal level or a micro and macro level, the study produces a more balanced view of the natural hair discourse. However, it becomes problematic that Dabiri (2019) does little in declaring her biases since she leans much on writing from personal experience. Her study concludes on a positive note defending the sophistication of black hair by comparing some African braiding techniques to forms of mathematical encoding. Despite this extensive contribution to the black hair discourse, her work also tends to edge into an apologia for black or natural hair; somehow needing to defend black hair to the West. This effort is certainly with good intentions especially towards raising awareness to end the discrimination against black hair and black bodies in the western metropolises.

As explored in all the above studies, the concerns surrounding black hair have been traced as far back as the 1960s or even much earlier in the 1900s. The debates set off with arguments for and against natural or unnatural hair, with more recent works arguing that there should be no need to demarcate black women's hair practices since all hairstyles in their own way refer to experiences of blackness. The self-hate theory overly castigated black women's hair choices and brought to the fore the fact that black bodies are constantly political (Mercer 1987, Dabiri 2019). The studies examined here discuss hair issues from different angles, but it can be observed that the main themes are relatively similar. For instance, Mercer(1987), Henderson(2015) and Dabiri (2019) tackle the natural vs unnatural debate and the hair straightening debate, but they all agree that the legacies of slavery and colonialism left their mark on today's meanings of blackness and black hair. Additionally, there are major contentions on the meaning of the natural hair movement. Brown (2018), Henderson (2015), Tate (2016), argue that the movement is empowering for all black women with any form of black hair while Dabiri (2019) posits that the current movement is more or less an imitation movement, which focuses on convincing women to part with their monies as a guise of buying freedom.

Thus, it can be argued that there is a bifurcation in the current understanding of natural hair practices. The focus so far on black hair practices has been either dependent on promoting these practices as an achievement of black women's empowerment or on the other hand, an insignificant commercial movement. Also, in general, many of the studies explored here do not consider or fully develop upon how the regimes of representation or the media may contribute to the meanings of black hair. This study therefore attempts to further develop the less examined aspects of natural hair practices. It also contributes by exploring black hair discourse not only as it evolves within digital media spaces but also within the UK context. Most studies have previously focused mainly on the US and North America.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter commenced on a broader level, analysing research regarding media representation of bodies. It then focused on a more specific level, examining black representation and identity and the debates around natural hair practices. It observed that studies in media representation lay much emphasis on the negative effects of the media on body image. In the light of this, this study departs from this preoccupation with the effects and outcomes of media and body image and focuses on the process by which digital media constructs bodies. A focus on the construction of natural hair and natural hair practices provides further understanding of the process by which digital media sites are becoming important tools of socialisation and cultural creation and recreation.

Regarding black identity and representation, existing literature points to a black identity that is marked by struggle; a double consciousness (Dubois 1999) and possible internalisation of negative societal ideals of the black body (Fanon 2008, Yancy 2008). This sense of struggle is also observed in the unsettled debates within natural hair practices. Previous works on black representation shows that there is need for better ways of representing blackness especially in the mainstream traditional media (Malik 2002), hence new media sites like YouTube, are seen as key to inverting the problematic representation of blackness (Jackson(2006), Bradley(2015)). This study contributes by closely questioning the process and outcomes of this hopeful self-representation ongoing via natural hair practices on YouTube.

Natural hair practices and the discourse on black hair is an important debate especially in black communities and they are concerned with how best black bodies and black hair should be projected in a world where it is classed as Other or different. In studies pertaining to natural hair, the debates of who is natural or unnatural remains unanswered, the problem of straightening is still debated, and the natural hair movement is yet to take a tangible form in terms of its definition and boundaries. This thesis therefore in posing its own questions, attempts to fill in some of these gaps that emerge in the study of black hair through a study of natural practices in the UK.

The next chapter further explores the theoretical underpinnings guiding this study.



# Chapter 4 : Natural Hair Practices as a Symptom of Postcoloniality

*“Did we ever have a hope?” [Arjun] said. “We rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives, coloured everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge indelible stain which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves.*

- Borch, & Rutherford (2008).

## 4.0 Introduction

The literature related to black hair demonstrates that natural hair practices have been popularly explored utilising the feminist or womanist lens. However, it can be argued that feminism as a lens for studying natural hair is limiting. With natural hair practices feminism as a theory understates the larger picture in understanding natural hair practices. Postcolonial theory, unlike feminism, privileges prominent issues in black hair discourse such as experiences of race or blackness, difference and Othering. This chapter introduces postcolonial theory and presents the rationale for its utilisation as the principal lens for exploring natural hair practices in this thesis.

This chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section commences with an introduction to postcolonial terms and the key concerns of postcolonial theory. It discusses issues of *postcoloniality* and the role of colonial discourse. Also, the section argues for natural hair practices as a product or symptom of *postcoloniality*. It explores natural hair videos as texts which “write back” on societal connotations of black hair. The second section discusses postcolonial positions on identity and briefly summarises the arguments of key thinkers in this area. The last section of this chapter highlights the benefits of postcolonial theory in understanding the nature of natural hair experience, its meanings and significance.

#### 4.1 What is postcolonial theory?

To understand natural hair practices and the postcolonial, it is important to understand *postcoloniality* and postcolonial theory as concepts. Below we also briefly unpack more related terms such as colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism.

The postcolonial era is loosely related to the period after colonisation. This was particularly in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the period the British empire and other European powers relinquished direct control and government of millions of colonised people within vast territories, especially in Africa and Asia. Colonialism is the conquest and direct control of other people's land; brought on through economic exploitation; a scramble for new (or preferable captive markets) and a source for raw materials (Childs & Williams 1997). This definition highlights colonisation as a process which is mainly about the coloniser reaping economic benefits. However, to achieve these ends, the control of the colonised people through various means such as military force or otherwise is imperative. It is important to note that when this thesis explores colonisation it is more concerned with these methods of domination (especially noncoercive forms) of colonised populations, as opposed to simply the economic implications of the process.

The terms colonisation and imperialism are often interchanged in common practice, but they possess different meanings. Colonisation refers to the physical occupation and government of a colony. On the other hand, imperialism refers to the ideology that fuels this occupation; the sense that one group possesses a right to rule over another (Williams & Chrisman 1993). Hence the colonialism that thrived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is seen as a form of imperialism. It is described as a phase in the history of imperialism which extends up to the current period in the form of globalisation (Childs & Williams 1997, Williams & Chrisman 1993).

The 'end' of colonialism then, ushers in a state of what is known as "postcoloniality". The term *postcoloniality* describes the current political, social, and economic condition of formerly colonised states and populations (Ghandi 1998, McLeod 2000). Empire and colonisation has a profound impact in the past and present societies of both the colonial powers and colonised

as well. It shapes much of the current global economic, social and political fabric (Akala 2018). Postcolonial theory hence combines as a literary and cultural analysis of the state of postcoloniality. This section will further argue for the current emergence of natural hair practices and natural hair movement as a symptom of postcoloniality.

Nevertheless, postcolonial theory includes many points of contention such as, 'what is postcolonial?' 'Where is postcolonial?' And even 'when is postcolonial?' (Childs & Williams 1997). In terms of 'when is postcolonial', the fact that the colonial powers withdrew direct control of their acquired colonies did not necessarily mean that they relinquished control. This situation is known as neocolonialism. Neocolonialism is a process of maintaining maximum indirect control over erstwhile colonies, via political, cultural and above all economic channels (Childs & Williams 1997). Hence Ghandi (1998:174) argues that the term "post-colonial" becomes problematic because it identifies itself with the epochal 'end' of colonialism. It therefore becomes falsely utopian or prematurely celebratory, ignoring the problem of neocolonialism. The acknowledgement of neocolonialism serves as a major criticism to postcolonialism. It threatens the veracity of the existence of a period after colonialism, hence disturbing the very foundations of what is known as postcolonial theory.

In order to reconcile this contradiction, McLeod (2000) explains;

The term postcolonialism is not the same as after colonialism, as if colonial values are no longer to be reckoned with. It does not define a radically new historical era, nor does it herald a brave new world where the ills of the colonial past have been cured. Rather postcolonialism recognises both historical continuity and change. On one hand it acknowledges that the material realities and modes of representation common to colonialism are still very much with us today, even if the political map of the world has changed through decolonisation. But on the other hand, it asserts the promise, possibility, and a continuing necessity of change, also, recognising that important challenges and changes have already been achieved. (pg.33)

The above description captures the essence and the contradictions of postcolonialism, attempting to place postcolonialism in a place where it can function despite its precarious position; "a state of paradoxical in-between-ness" as described by Child's and Williams (1997). By McLeod's (2000) argument it can be observed that the postcolonial oscillates between the

past and the present experiences of colonisation; also moving between highlighting the changes that have occurred, as well as the change that still needs to occur. McLeod (2000) acknowledges that the postcolonial does not necessarily mean the end of colonialism, but the attempt to reach that end. Also, according to Childs & Williams (1997:8) the field of postcolonialism does not become less valuable because it always functions in a state of inbetweenness. They explain that despite the contradiction in postcolonialism, it would be insensitive and careless to ignore the legacies of colonialism. Hence McLeod (2000) and Childs and Williams (1997) argue for postcolonial theory as an anticipatory discourse. They recognise that there is not yet a period that can be truly referred to as after colonialism, since neo-colonialism remains a reality. But the study of postcoloniality remains highly relevant to address the legacies of colonisation.

Other scholars like Ghandi (1998) also argue that postcolonialism is a nebulous term which seems to lack an 'originary moment' or a coherent methodology. However, Quayson (2002) provides the most comprehensive summation of postcolonial theory. He explains that postcolonialism involves a studied engagement with the past and present effects of the conditions and experience of colonialism, also including the conditions coming after the historical end of colonialism. These experiences may be of various kinds such as those of slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender and place (Quayson 2002:3). Therefore, in general, postcolonial theory can be seen as an analysis of the legacies of colonialism (i.e., the state of postcoloniality) including providing counter discourses against these legacies.

#### 4.2 A symptom of postcoloniality and a text of resistance: postcolonial theory and colonial discourse

Postcolonial theory was first founded on revealing the workings of colonial discourse. This discourse involves the methods through which colonialism fosters certain beliefs, cultures and ways of seeing. Colonial discourse was mainly prevalent in different textual forms produced by the west which codified knowledge about non-metropolitan areas and cultures especially those under colonial control. The colonial ways of seeing justified and normalised the

coloniser's right to rule over others. It installed the colonised people as different; 'other', savage, exotic and inferior and promoted the coloniser as right, superior and justified in all its ways. It mainly invited the colonised to accept their subordinated position in this order of things. Colonial discourse then, acknowledges the power in the ideology of colonialism. It deconstructs how colonialism shapes the history, culture, and identities of the coloniser and colonised.

It is also argued that it is through colonial discourse that the world was introduced to reigning binary oppositions such as the west vs. the rest (Hall 1992), Orient vs Occident (Said 1984), white vs. black (Fanon 2008), the civilized vs. the uncivilized/savage (Childs & Williams 1997) and first world countries vs. third world countries. These discourses permeate all forms of representation in contemporary times, and the black vs white discourse underwrites the foundation of the emergence of natural hair practices.

Through colonial discourse the concept of black hair is created in difference to white hair. As previously stated, the notion of black hair exists because of the acknowledgement of a normalised type of hair. Mohanram (1999), observed that, colonialism, and the racial dynamics it produced, were largely expressions of white bodies from western hemispheres recreating and reworlding non-western regions of the world. In other words, colonial discourse created the concept of race; black is different to white. Similarly, Hall (1997) argues that this binary opposition i.e., the powerful opposition between civilisation (white) and savagery (black), cemented the body as the discursive site through which much of this racialised knowledge' was produced and circulated. The appearance of the body in white and black "thus provided the incontrovertible evidence; for the naturalisation of racial difference (Hall 1997: 244). Race was not only a creation and consequence of colonisation, but the body remains central in this othering process. Black appearance including skin and hair under colonial discourse became clear markers of the inferiority of the colonised and as such, it became problematic. Therefore, Afrocentric styles different to the Eurocentric norm such as dreadlocks, twists, braids are still

branded as undesirable or unprofessional (Ferrell 2017, Vrik 2020). While hairstyles which look nearer to the Caucasian style are more visible and normalised.

It can be argued that without colonial discourse, the current controversies which surround black bodies may not have emerged. In this way, the rise of natural hair practices can be described as a symptom of the state of postcoloniality. As previously mentioned, postcoloniality relates to the current state of formerly colonised populations. The current state of the formerly colonised body remains steeped in the colonial discourse of backwardness which not only suggests inferiority but a distortion of the normalised white bodies. Hence the state of postcoloniality supports the problematisation of black hair.

Furthermore, it should be noted that postcolonial theory was initially mainly dedicated to textual analysis which tracked, deconstructed and debunked forms of colonial discourse. Early versions of postcolonial critiques involved literary criticism which analysed canonical English literary texts in order to examine their latent assumptions and use of colonial discourses (McLeod 2000). As time progressed, postcolonial theory also enquired into different representation of colonized subjects in a variety of texts not just literary ones. It also further advanced into encouraging production of literature which “writes back” or responds to colonial production of knowledge. As such a genre of postcolonial literature emerged which actively aimed to decolonise the mind, promoting and formulating non-western modes of discourse. It is argued that while the west denied the existence of history in the areas it colonised, postcolonial texts established its importance as an avenue to recover and revalue indigenous history (Childs & Williams (1997:8)). In the spirit of revaluing non-western modes of discourse, natural hair practices not only emerged as a symptom of postcoloniality but natural hair practices on can be seen as writing back to the societal connotations of blackness. This emphasis of writing-back can be seen in the exaltation of more African hair styles within the natural hair movement. Hence in writing back natural hair practices tackle the colonial epistemic systems which shapes the process of embodiment in present society. Quayson (2002) notes that postcolonialism has consequently extended to providing responses to the

discourses of imperial Europe in areas of history, philosophy, anthropology and linguistics. In the case of this study, it is utilised to understand the responses related to discourses surrounding the body.

In general, colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial theory are critiques of the production of knowledge about the Other (Williams & Chrisman (1993:8)). Hence it is important to add that postcolonialism can also be approached as a form of textual analysis specifically, an analysis of othering and difference. The aim is to deconstruct and subvert the process by which colonial discourse is cemented at the heart of epistemology. As a result, the theory involves reading text produced during colonialism and by the diaspora; both those that directly address the experiences and consequences of empire. Hence it has been highlighted that natural hair practices writes back to societal connotations of black bodies and this study reads these practices in their process of writing back. Natural hair videos are produced by black women in the diaspora who aim to subvert societal connotations of black hair, showing natural hair in a positive light. The original aim of texts like natural hair videos is to rework the previous negative notions attached to black hair and present information which subverts the previous societal connotations of black hair. Tate (2016) highlights that “the natural hair movement created a “social change perspective” rooted in self-love, and self-acceptance; empowering black women throughout the diaspora to embrace their natural hair” (pg.59). In analysing natural hair videos this study examines the process of this alleged resistance and its meanings and outcomes in the daily life and self-perception of black women.

### 4.3 Postcolonial discourse and identity

From the above introduction to postcolonialism, it can be gathered that postcolonial theory covers a broad range of themes and concerns; from examining the past and how it intersects with present cultures and legacies of colonialism, to the representation and agency of those dubbed as Other. In this vein, with postcolonialism being so widely applied, it is important to note that this study is mainly concerned with the identity aspects of postcolonial theory. As previously mentioned, this thesis explores the impact of colonial domination on the colonised,

especially on their bodies and identity. Specifically, this research draws from postcolonial works which relates to colonial discourse on black identity and culture. It highlights the process by which colonial legacies imprinted on the bodies and identities of the Other, which invariably affects how the Other is seen in society, as well as the way they see themselves. This section details postcolonial theory's key arguments on identity and the key thinkers in this area.

Borch and Rutherford (2008) argued that colonization divides spirit, mind and body of those colonized and, even when it does not enslave the bodies, it transforms them into objects. They argue that the constitutive problem of colonial discourse is the misrepresentation of Othered bodies, depriving them of a voice. In other words, colonial discourse sought to control the identity and world view of the colonised. Postcolonial theory points to the personal consequences of colonial discourse i.e. how colonial discourses invaded the environmental space and the personal bodies and identities of the Other. Through normalisation of Othering, colonised people faced some disruption in their identity formation (Smith & Ce 2014).

As Hall (1993) observed, this disruption on identity was not only imposed but was imbibed by the colonised. As previously stated in the last chapter Hall (1993) explained that the colonised was not only set up as Other, but they were also subject to an inner compulsion and conformation to that Othering. Other postcolonial thinkers further established and explored the processes by which colonial discourse was used to shape the identity of the colonised and even the coloniser.

#### 4.2.1 Key thinkers of postcolonial theory

It has been acknowledged that Edward Said's most influential work, *Orientalism* (1985) ushered in the birth of postcolonial theory as a discipline. *Orientalism* (1985) involved a critique of the body of discipline which studies the concept or place known as the 'Orient'. The work borrowed from theories like Marxism, structuralism and Foucault's discourse analysis to deconstruct the Orient. Said (1985) argued that Orientalism as a western discipline imagined and created the concept of the *Orient*. The Orient became associated with a fictional representation which describes people of the middle east as exotic, different and even sub-



human. Said saw the mainly negative and problematic production of the Orient as a part of the west's campaign of domination.

Said (2003:25) noted that the "study (of orientalism) proposes itself as a step to understanding western cultural domination . . . my hope is to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination and specifically for former colonised people, the dangers, and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves and others". Therefore, according to Said (2003), the identity of the colonised is a creation of the west and there is a danger that the colonised may adopt and accept this problematic order.

Said's bias was brought up as a criticism of *Orientalism*. It was argued that he did not declare and engage with his own middle eastern origins in the course of his position on the Orient vs the Occident (Potter 2019). Another criticism was that Said borrowed from the very western thought which he maligned, having previously admitted that his work was inspired by Foucault and Gramsci. An additional point of contention was that there remains difficulty in ascertaining what would be a 'true representation' of the Orient. Despite these criticisms, the ideas in *Orientalism* were adopted and developed by other scholars who applied its arguments to other colonized regions of the world like Africa, to display the west's strategies of domination, via its use of colonial discourse.

Another notable postcolonial thinker who describes the process of cultural domination is W.E.B. DuBois. Du Bois was born William Edward Burghardt Du Bois in Massachusetts, USA, 1886. His work was largely ignored within sociology and postcolonial studies until recently (Go 2016). Dubois's contribution is immense in understanding identity formation in the midst of the epistemic systems of slavery and colonialism. As explored in the last chapter, Du Bois theorises on the aftereffects of slavery and its social consequences for emancipated African American people. His work was one of the earliest which outlined the outcomes of these systems of domination on black identity.

Slavery is not often mentioned as part of the colonial discourse, but slavery and colonialism possess several points of convergence and similarities. For instance, slavery entailed exploiting peoples for economic gain as does colonialism. Secondly, to justify the exploitation, several narratives were often setup which invested the body of the enslaved and colonised with notions of inferiority and savagery, deserving of its domination (Hall & Gieben 1992).

Dubois's theory of double consciousness described the self-doubt and confusion which plagued the colonised as a result of their alleged abnormality or difference. Hubbard (2003) argues that Dubois' canonical work, *Souls of Black Folk* possesses a contemporary interpretation. Hubbard (2003) stated that Dubois proves that the current familiar and limited continuum in which we live, must be acknowledged if one is to fully understand what it means to be black in the modern western world. By studying Dubois' theory of "twoness" or double consciousness we better understand the present identity formation within the formerly enslaved, which is synonymous to the in-between and othered identities of the formerly colonised.

Frantz Fanon is also another influential postcolonial theorist who inspires this study. He explores the processes by which the colonised is encouraged to internalise colonial discourse. Fanon's most poignant contribution on the identity formation of the colonised is that the colonised is encouraged to abandon their perceived primitive selves and rise to the elevated status of the coloniser. The colonised is encouraged to lose his or her blackness for a more desirable state of whiteness. Unlike Said, Fanon is convinced that the colonised person is not in danger of accepting colonial discourse but indeed has no choice but to take on this imposed new identity. Fanon's work, *Black Skin White Masks*, in general brings to the fore the outcomes of identity formation for the colonised subject, which is a process of being coerced into internalisation of the self as Other. He argues that colonialism is only destroyed once this way of thinking about identity is successfully challenged (McLeod 2000: 21).

Furthermore, Fanon later postulated in another essay, 'On National Culture' (Fanon & Philcox 2005), that there has been a call by native intellectuals to re-establish and re-embrace pre-

colonial cultures and identities as a response to correct the relegation of colonised cultures. Such a move can also be identified in current natural hair practices by the way in which old African hairstyles are re-adopted. However, in this essay Fanon acknowledged that the desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history, but also opposing one's own people. He suggests that for any progress to occur the intellectuals or those who seek liberation from colonial epistemic systems, must harness the power of present realities as a way to advance towards the future (McLeod 2000:21, Smith & Ce 2014:102). Fanon's argument is applicable in the current natural hair discourse within the debates of natural vs unnatural hairstyles. Instead of attempting to return to the more 'original' African hairstyles which have been used to maintain black hair, it is also imperative to consider the current meanings of black hair styles in the present. This is because the pre-colonial African hair is extinct or past. There is a need to forge ahead and consider the present realities of black hair as a way to craft new black hair styles and black identities

Finally, Homi K. Bhabha's main contribution in postcolonial discourse was importantly emphasizing that both the colonised and coloniser's identities were affected by the hegemonic epistemic orders of colonisation. In the case of the colonised, Bhabha proposed that they not only feel inferior as Fanon suggested, but they developed "sly civilities", hybrid and ambivalent identities to combat the hegemony of colonial discourse. The concept of slyness again connects to Dubois's description of the black experience; the pressure of being tempted to hypocrisy or to radicalism (Dubois 1999). Therefore, what Bhabha sees as sly civility, or a smart way of conforming was described by Dubois as a form of hypocrisy. Dubois described this hypocrisy as a need to reduce the black personality so as to be seen as a more acceptable American.

Also, Bhabha in Childs and Williams (1997) argues that every concept the coloniser brings to the colonised will itself be reborn, renewed, reinterpreted in the light of the other's culture. Hence Bhabha unlike Fanon argues for a middle ground in the relationship between the

colonised and coloniser. He argues that colonised identities are not only negatively affected but they are steeped in what he calls mimicry and ambivalence. Mimicry is the process by which the colonised is required to resemble the coloniser, but this attempt is never overtly successful. The colonised becomes “white but not quite”, leading to an ambivalence or unsteadiness in their identity formation. Bhabha however fails to provide a concrete analysis of the identities of the coloniser and colonised. He states that he is quite content in describing the splits, crossings, and dissonances within the discourse.

In the light of these arguments; double consciousness which signals the problems of being regarded as Other, epidermalization or internalisation of the racial order, mimicry and ambivalence, it is clear that the formation processes of postcolonial identities has been described in different complex ways. However, the agreement within these diverse postulations is that colonial discourse infringes on and disrupts the identity of the colonised and the coloniser. This disruption is also evident in the politics surrounding black hair.

#### 4.5 Application of postcolonial theory

From this discussion of postcolonial theory, it can be argued that it is particularly beneficial to this research because it sheds light on natural hair practices as significant resistance texts emerging as a symptom of postcoloniality. Postcolonial theory also helps us historicise the black hair movement, showing how natural hair practices include and transcend gender issues and become significant practices which inform the current state of blackness in society. McLeod (2000:33) notes that postcolonialism involves reading in three types of texts; Firstly, texts produced by writers from countries with a history of colonialism. Secondly, writings produced during colonialism; both those that directly address the experiences of empire and those that seem not to. Finally, texts produced by those that have migrated from countries with a history of colonialism or those descended from migrant families; diaspora experience and its many consequences. Natural hair practices especially online point to texts which explore the diaspora experience and the consequences of the colonial experience.

Natural hair videos as a text, especially text produced by the consequences of diaspora experience will show how black women have chosen to respond to societal connotations of their bodies.

As previously mentioned, it has been observed that other studies which explore the black hair and the natural hair movement often adopt the feminist angle (Banks 2000, Henderson 2015, Jackson 2016, Tate 2016). Nevertheless, feminism does not properly trace and engage with why and how the connotations surrounding black hair came to be established. Feminism focuses on agency and power structures while marginalise women. While this angle in exploring the natural hair movement is useful, historicising these structures is equally as important. To rely only on feminism would thus mean ignoring crucial aspects of history, race and empire and how they are embedded in black hair practices. Gaines(1999) argues that feminist theory reinforces white-middle class values by taking gender as its starting point in the analysis of oppression. This leads to keeping women from seeing other structures of oppression. Also, Reno-lodge (2018) in her work on race in the UK, highlighted the failings of contemporary feminism in acknowledging and properly engaging with the intersections of race and gender. She argues that contemporary feminists often ignore black experience, therefore failing to properly tackle pertinent issues concerning black women. This does not mean that feminism and postcolonialism are polar opposites, in fact, postcolonialism also imbibes feminism as exemplified in the work of its key theorist, Gayatri Spivak. However, postcolonial theory first and foremost foregrounds natural hair practices not only as a gender issue, but as a race issue. Hence highlighting its broader historical context and forcing us to engage with its critical role in identity formation and politics today.

In addition to the importance of better historicizing the natural hair movement, studying natural hair practices within postcolonial studies opens up postcolonial perspectives in media studies.

Brunt & Cree 2011:3 note that;

Media culture has always been concerned with issues of representation, stereotyping, identity formation and ideological works of popular media cultures. Its focus is always on the new and rarely pays attention to the historical. I want

to suggest that the adoption of postcolonial concepts by media studies could allow for a new engagement with contemporary discourses of ethnic minorities in Britain and rescue media studies from cultural and political inertia in relation to postcolonial experiences and representation.

Here Brunt & Cree (2011) highlight the importance of applying a postcolonial lens to media culture studies. They claim that media studies as a field lacks tangible consideration of the historical aspects of research; this study supports the recommendations of Brunt & Cree (2011) for more focus on historicity.

Finally, applying postcolonial theory adds to the literature which highlights the process by which the Other is constructed. Postcolonial theory has been popular in literary analysis. However, it has also been applied to visual texts especially in terms of film analysis. Notable recent studies include Basu Thakur (2015), which tackles a postcolonial critique of the blockbuster Hollywood movie *Avatar*(2009). Also a more canonical application of postcolonial theory to visual material is seen in Mercer (1999) which analyses artistic photographs titled *Black Males* by Mapplethorpe. He identifies these photographs as cultural artifacts which say something about the way black people and black male sexuality is perceived. Both Mercer (1999) and Basu Thakur (2015) aim to expose the codes of what they term as the 'imperial gaze'. The imperial gaze is inspired by Laura Mulvey's feminist theory of the male gaze, as such, instead of looking at images in terms of how they support the patriarchy, postcolonial theory in film explores racial connotation in images. Therefore, it prioritizes how the Other is viewed. Even less popular are works which delve into how those deemed as other view themselves. This thesis therefore becomes pertinent as it advances beyond the emphasis of the process by which the imperial gaze constructs the Other. It adds to the literature by exploring how the so-called Other, in this case black women, represent themselves and tell their own stories.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored postcolonial theory as a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, at the local level of ex-colonial societies and on

a global level (Quayson 2002). It argued that natural hair practices emerged as a response to colonial discourse thereby establishing that natural hair practices and the natural hair movement can be approached as a symptom of postcoloniality, as evidence of the aftereffects and experiences of colonisation.

Also, at the forefront of postcolonialism, is an attempt to deconstruct and subvert the process by which colonial discourse is cemented at the heart of epistemology. As a result, natural hair practices and natural hair videos are viewed as text written by diaspora which address the experiences and consequences of empire.

In effect the study of natural hair practices and the natural hair movement is firmly rooted in the concerns of postcolonial theory, not only as an issue related to gender but of broader social significance in experiences of blackness, difference and Othering. Chapter 5 presents the thesis research design and methods.

# Chapter 5: Methodology

*Pictures are more imperative than writing. They impose meaning at one stroke, without analysing or diluting it - at the same time, pictures become a form of writing as soon as they are meaningful.*

- Barthes (2009)

## 5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design in detail. First, it explains the study's rationale for utilising a purely qualitative format. It details how it operates as a phenomenological pursuit; an attempt to gain understanding of the 'essence' of the natural hair experience on YouTube. It then explores the study's use of visual methodologies, particularly semiotics and content analysis. It also discusses the processes and limitations of choosing the sample videos for analysis and conducting focus groups as methods for data collection. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the ethical considerations which informed the research and the data handling procedure.

## 5.1 Research design: using qualitative research, phenomenology and visual methodology

This study adopted purely qualitative methods to achieve its aims. This is because the study of experience is a complex activity (Grbich 2013), which cannot be easily quantifiable. It relies instead on deep description that seeks to expose the nuances, dimensions and various underlying meanings of the phenomenon in question. This section discusses qualitative and quantitative approaches, their convergences, differences, and the rationale for choosing qualitative methods for this study.

Within research, there are two main strands of approaches; quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative research includes methods such as survey and experimental research. They are often regarded as the 'better' and 'more scientific' methods of study (Greenfield & Greener 2016). This is because of their use of numerical and statistical approaches, which according to positivist social scientists can be viewed as more objective. Qualitative research on the other hand involves more interpretive inquiries which rely on description. Qualitative



methods include significant contribution to research because not all research inquiries can be reduced to numerical values (Greenfield & Greener 2016). Questions that interrogate the 'how' as opposed to 'how much' cannot be tackled easily through quantitative research. The concept of lived experience is of a subjective nature. It involves engaging with complex and mainly immeasurable elements such as feelings, emotions and rapid changes which quantitative data cannot capture. Discussing natural hair practices involves an exploration of real-life experiences, audience feelings and their underlying meanings and significance in society. Thus, utilising qualitative methods enables us to engage with these practices' more abstract and dynamic concerns. Richards & Morse (2007) explains that qualitative research best aids in navigating 'what's going on' with a new or generally emerging subject and also ask questions like; 'how do we know what we know?'. 'How do we know what people feel?' In understanding the natural hair experience among black women in the U.K, questions of a similar nature arise.

Newman & Benz (1998) also note that qualitative and quantitative research have been placed in a false dichotomy where they otherwise share certain characteristics. For instance, proponents of both qualitative and quantitative research support the notion that humans agree on the existence of a common reality. As such, both research practices can be combined and will work together depending on the aims of a study. An example of the interconnected nature of qualitative and quantitative research approaches may be observed in Burgess & Green's (2009) pioneering study on YouTube. In this monograph, they adopt mixed methods of both the qualitative and quantitative to explore YouTube as a media platform. Burgess & Green (2009) set out to explain the general patterns of the videos found on YouTube. This called for counting and categorising videos, which invariably means the use of quantitative methods. On the other hand, they also set out to explain and describe the nature of the videos already categorised, and for this they utilised more in-depth qualitative methods. By this approach, Burgess & Green (2009) demonstrate the ways in which quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined. In discussing how young black women in the UK experience natural hair

practices on YouTube and how YouTube videos construct natural hair practices, there are complex elements which involve non-numerical aspects. This requires an engagement with the subjective entity of 'experience' hence the need for qualitative tools. In general, this use of qualitative methods recalls Greenfield & Greener's (2016:214) position which highlights that researchers in qualitative studies not only describe phenomena, but are also able to identify underlying influential factors, attitudes and motivations. This study not only sets out to describe the natural hair experience but also interrogates the underlying factors that shape this experience.

Although qualitative research is most suited for this study, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, qualitative approaches, due to the need for detail, requires a longer period of time to accomplish. As in the case of this study, the videos analysed as texts involved a considerable amount of time; a few weeks in identifying and choosing the videos and months in organisation and analysis. Secondly, the fact that qualitative research is highly descriptive and interpretive lessens its reliability as the description rests on the ability of the researcher. To curtail this shortcoming, the researcher explored reflexivity in order to reduce the occurrence of biases that might affect the outcome of the study.

Generally, studying YouTube videos is relatively nascent and so far, qualitative research has been the most popular approach to studying the platform (Burgess & Green 2009). Nevertheless, there remains a need to further develop research approaches to the platform. Thelwall (2018) observed that YouTube research is continuously hampered by the ever-changing algorithms on the site while Burgess & Green (2009) also found that there remains a lack of understanding of YouTube as a media platform. This makes studying YouTube particularly challenging.

#### 5.1.1 Phenomenology

Qualitative research involves several research methods such as ethnography, phenomenology, case study and narrative research. These are all concerned with understanding and exploring experience. This study particularly adopted and applied the

phenomenological style of qualitative research. Phenomenology was originally established as a branch of philosophy, and it later applied as a research method. Phenomenology is particularly concerned with identifying the essence of human experiences concerning a specific phenomenon (Creswell 2003). It aims to study and describe lived experience and highlight the different aspects and meanings of these experiences. Phenomenology was developed by Edward Husserl in his book *Ideas II* in 1913. Husserl saw phenomenology as an alternative to cartesian forms of knowledge which proposes that there is a true and objective way of understanding the world. Instead, Husserl proposed that understanding of the world and phenomena can be attained through comprehending human experience of that phenomena. As such Husserl saw phenomenology as “the science of the essence of consciousness” (Grbich 2013).

Capturing the essence of consciousness seems an ambitious pursuit, however phenomenology is credited with producing valuable explanations of phenomena, experiences and subjects that are often hard to explain and rarely captured; for example, domestic violence or near-death experience. This research adopts the strategies of phenomenology to tackle and understand natural hair practices and experiences. Natural hair practices involves exploring different interrelated issues such as race and othering, self-esteem and embodiment in society. These multiple aspects contribute to the complexity of the phenomenon.

‘Bracketing’ or ‘phenomenological’ reduction has been seen as an important part of engaging in phenomenological research. Grbich (2013:93) explains that ‘bracketing’ is a process where the researcher identifies, records or extracts his or her own experiences and prior knowledge of the phenomenon he/she wishes to study. This is done to ensure that the researcher’s personal experience and assumptions of the subject is set aside before engaging with the research. With this achieved, the researcher then in embarking on the research, has a higher chance of arriving at what is called the ‘true essence’ of the phenomenon.

The concept of true essence or true consciousness of a phenomenon is however problematic. Husserl’s idea of ‘bracketing’ was challenged by later theorists in phenomenology who

developed phenomenology further into the existentialist tradition and the hermeneutic tradition. While the classical mode of phenomenology originally formed by Husserl insisted on the importance of 'bracketing' to understand experiences, other theorists in the existentialist camp like Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre later critiqued this argument. The existentialist theorists argued that a complete phenomenological reduction or bracketing is impossible since one must first experience oneself as existing in order to confront other experiences (Grbich 2013: 98). Hence the researcher's experience is ever-present as part of the research and should not be dismissed or put aside as prescribed in the classic tradition.

It is important to note that this study adopts this existentialist format of phenomenology. A form of bracketing was attempted (see reflections in Chapter 1), but it was mostly used as self-reflexivity not as a complete bracketing of the researcher's prior experience of natural hair practices. In existential phenomenology adopted here, the researcher's experiences are seen as a valuable addition to understanding the natural hair phenomenon and not as an impediment .

In utilizing the existential mode of phenomenology as a guide to understanding the experience of natural hair practices, this study broadens understanding of the meanings and significance of the experience. As a result, phenomenology is also used in conjunction with postcolonial theory in this study. Existential phenomenology gives precedence to fully understanding and describing lived experience (Merriam and Grenier 2019). In phenomenology, description is what produces understanding about the phenomena in question (Moustakas 2011). Therefore, on a surface level, phenomenology as a methodology does not appear to encourage relying upon theories for the explanation of a phenomenon. Postcolonial theory was highlighted as the theory of focus in Chapter 4 of this study, but this theoretical focus seems to lead to contradictions as phenomenology champions attaining the 'essence' or a "pure" description of the phenomenon. In the light of this, applying a theoretical lens then seems to detract from attaining this so-called pure description of the experience. However, it has also been noted

that another aspect of doing phenomenology is not only about describing the phenomenon but also interpreting the meaning of that experience (Grbich 2013).

This is where this study merged its chosen theoretical framework and the phenomenological methodology. The study described the experience of natural hair practice using phenomenological guidelines. It placed the women's experiences at the forefront and provided descriptions of their collective experiences. However, for the sake of also answering the research question which meant to elicit the meaning and the significance of natural hair experience, postcolonial theory was embedded in the phenomenological research design as a tool for interpretation. Grbich(2013) explains that the process of forming meanings of phenomena is common to lining them with relevant concepts. It can be argued that postcolonial theory has been observed as one of the major theories which outline and defines major relevant concepts related to this study. For instance, its emphasis on race, blackness, difference, othering, and the construction of the black body. In this vein, applying postcolonial theory adds a further layer to intuiting the meaning of the experience in question. It is the interpretive level of the description that improves our understanding of the natural hair phenomenon particularly within its history and contemporary place in society thereby enriching the study findings further.

Phenomenology is unlike many other forms of qualitative approaches such as ethnography or grounded theory. Ethnography for instance, is concerned with extensive fieldwork pursued in a variety of social settings that allow for direct observations of the activities of a group. It involves studies and extensive field work of an intact cultural group in their natural setting over a long period of time by collecting observational data (Creswell 2003:14, Moustakas 2011). Hence ethnography requires that a particular group be studied in an already established or well-defined community, usually by a party that exists as an outsider in that culture or community.

Ethnography in this vein, involves much emphasis on the participants or an experience and not usually other factors which contribute to that experience. As such an ethnographical study

of natural hair practices will involve solely focusing on the individuals who experience natural hair practices and what they do and say. This may indeed provide some understanding of natural hair practices but ultimately other elements of the natural hair experience such as YouTube videos online may be neglected. Phenomenology allows for all aspects of an experience to be considered as a means to understand the 'essence' or the defining components that make up a particular experience. Grbich (2013) especially posits that to analyse a phenomenon in the phenomenological tradition, the researcher should place emphasis on memory, emotion, fantasies, action and their representations in language and culture. Therefore, in understanding phenomena and experiences especially in the phenomenological tradition, including as many aspects as possible of the experience is advised. Also, as previously mentioned, ethnography usually relies on the objectivity of an observer who is an outsider to the culture or an observer who possesses minimal prior experience within the culture of enquiry. This objectivity may not be so easily attainable in the case of this study because the researcher is a black woman who is already involved with natural hair experiences. From the existential phenomenological perspective, the researcher may take advantage of their immersion in the experience and produce a richer description of experience. In ethnography however, closeness to the experience may be perceived as an impediment.

Grounded theory, another qualitative method, involves focusing on revealing elements of an experience. Using these elements and their interrelationships a theory is developed which enables the researcher to understand the nature and meaning of the experience (Moustakas 2011). Different methods and practices have been attached to performing grounded theory however there is some agreement that grounded theory may be utilised in developing a singular theory about an experience. This is otherwise seen as an empirical generalisation or an abstract understanding of a process (Creswell 2014). This study is not after producing a specific generalisation of natural hair practice, but it is more related to capturing the complexities and interpretation of natural hair experience. Therefore, this research adopts

phenomenology over other forms of qualitative approaches such as ethnography and grounded theory because it is an approach which best suits the research aims. Phenomenology allows the analysis of the different facets of an experience, and in this case it is assumed that the elements of natural hair practices on YouTube includes two main aspects; the YouTube videos and the audience who watch videos.

Phenomenology as a type of qualitative research nonetheless remains imperfect since it was originally developed as a philosophical framework rather than a concise qualitative method of enquiry. This study therefore applies the phenomenological methods recommended by Moustakas (2011) and Grbich (2013). The study first asked questions which seek to fully reveal essences and meanings of a particular human experience. The research question was formulated to emphasise the experience of natural hair practices. Thus this study inquired; How do young black women in the UK experience natural hair practices on YouTube? The aim of this form of questioning was to produce a comprehensive and accurate description of the experience rather than using a method that relies on measurements, ratings, or scores (Moustakas 2011). After the research questions was decided upon, the next step was the data collection step prescribed in the style of phenomenology. This involves long and interactive interviews with research participants who have experienced the 'phenomenon'. Hence, this study recruited and interviewed participants who are involved with natural hair practices. Accounts and interviews are seen as the principal methods of data collection in phenomenology, however as previously stated other elements such as texts (videos) associated with that phenomena may be included. Natural hair videos on YouTube were also incorporated in this case.

The final steps to completing phenomenological research is that the interviews and related texts are examined for the emergent themes. These emergent themes include the clusters of significant statements, quotes in interviews or specific elements in the texts/videos which describe how the participants experience the phenomena. These specific elements are further reduced to the essence of the phenomenon. This essence is written up in form of a short

passage which provide understanding of the key elements of the phenomenon (see the essence of natural hair practices in chapter 8 of this thesis).

### 5.1.2 Visual methods: YouTube research, semiotics and content analysis

YouTube natural hair videos were analysed as one aspect of the natural hair experience. This section details the visual methods employed to tackle YouTube data. This is specifically the two visual styles, content analysis and semiotics analysis. More details on the first method of understanding the natural hair experience (focus group interviews) is provided further in the data collection section of this chapter.

Visual research involves the use of images particularly photographs for research (see Banks 2007, Emisson & Smith et al 2012, Rose 2016). Visual methods include two main styles of research; the first is researcher-produced materials and the second is non-researcher produced visual materials (Rose 2016, Emisson & Smith et al 2012). Visual data produced by the researcher is often encouraged not simply for data collection and observation but as a form of reflexive activity on the part of the researcher (Barabantseva & Lawrence (2015)). Non-researcher produced material is most popularly utilised within the methods of photo elicitation and image analysis such as semiotics (Banks 2007, Emisson & Smith 2012). Studies regarding new media visual content such as YouTube videos remains a developing area for research (Rose 2016, Land & Patrick 2014). However, research under visual areas such as film analysis and television studies are quite well established. YouTube videos involves a combination of film or visual elements and features associated to it as a digital media platform. Within the literature of visual methods there are recommendations for methods to deal with visual materials, especially images. These include; photo elicitation, semiotics, and content analysis. There is no distinctive or widely agreed method for dealing specifically with videos especially YouTube videos (Rose 2016).

Various studies employ varying approaches to analysing YouTube videos, yet the most common approaches include content analysis (Beal (2012) and ethnography (Vellar, (2012).



For instance, Tenyi et al (2016) and Kelly et al. (2012) explore how YouTube videos are utilised in constructing discourses around body image. Although Tenyi et al (2016) describes their study as mainly observational, they use a categorisation process which is related to content analysis. Lange (2015) also in her study, 'Kids on YouTube', utilised the ethnographic method to explain the experience of young video producers on the platform. Additionally, in terms of methods for analysing YouTube videos, the approach proposed by Benson (2017) is worthy of note.

Benson (2017) developed a specific model for studying YouTube which he terms the multimodal approach. He supports the use of the multimodal approach for tackling YouTube's complex interface. The multimodal approach supports the use of every single element involved in the YouTube webpage for analysis (video, audio, writing, hyperlink, icons). This method possesses potential in terms of accumulating data but may not help achieve the aims of this inquiry. This study aims to analyse the ways in which videos constructs black hair and understand audience experience of going natural. Exploring elements outside the videos like hyperlinks and icons as Benson (2017) recommends, may require too much time and resources and may mislead the research in terms of keeping the focus on the main aspects of the visual data it needs to interrogate. The other elements such as icons and hyperlinks may have indeed contributed to understanding natural hair videos, but the study believes that the videos themselves not the links or elements surrounding it, are the most important elements in the construction of meaning around the natural hair. Audiences of natural hair videos first and foremost pay attention to the content and messages in the video which is what the study focuses on.

Video analysis generally remains a work in progress within social sciences, but the most popular acknowledgement is that analysing videos is a subjective process. As Van Leeuwen (2004) states, with visual analysis or analysing videos, it is more important to consider the aims the researcher hopes to achieve. Similarly, Burgess and Green (2009) posits that the research question and aim of the research will determine how the YouTube videos may be

approached. Due to the lack of a standardised method for analysing YouTube videos, this research developed a visual analysis method which combined content analysis and semiotics. Semiotics, also known as semiology, is described as the study of signs in society (Bignell 2002). Semiotics looks beyond the surface to expose underlying conventions, connotations, differences, relationships and rules employed in a culture. Its aim is to make known meanings that are only implicit. The tradition of semiotics began under the discipline of linguistics spearheaded by the theorist, Ferdinand de Saussure. Over time, a social and culturally focused form of semiotics was developed by Roland Barthes (Curtis and Curtis 2011). Other scholars like S. Pierce and Jean Baudrillard (through his theory of hyperreality) have made contributions to the field of semiotics. This study is mostly inspired by the work of Roland Barthes. Barthes is most concerned with a semiotics which heavily leans on denaturalising a cultural phenomenon. Denaturalising a cultural phenomenon has to do with taking apart the elements that make a phenomenon appear natural. This study aims to denaturalise natural hair practices on YouTube as a way of accessing its meanings and significance in society. This study not only described natural hair experiences, but it also further intuitively its underlying meanings and significance (as in the phenomenological tradition) using semiotics.

Semiotics is said to be best used to decode the underlying rules of a culture (Curtis & Curtis 2011: 258). It is concerned with how signs and language works. To understand a sign (text, image visual or writing), we must extract its codes. Saussure proposed that reality is constructed by words and other signs we use. Signs are said to be arbitrary, i.e., they carry no obvious relationships to the things that they signify, but they are given their meaning according to societal codes. For example, the word 'cat' calls to attention a four-legged feline creature. The word 'cat' and the feline creature itself have no direct relationship originally, but the word 'cat' makes sense to us because society has assigned it that meaning. The capacity of linguistic signs to be meaningful depends on their existence in a social context, and on their conventionally accepted use in that social context. In other words, semiotics highlights that we don't perceive things in the actual way they are, but we perceive them through the social order

or precepts we belong to. In this vein, this research applied this assumption to the natural hair practices on YouTube. By denaturalising natural hair videos this study accessed the social meanings currently attached to natural hair or black hair via videos. The videos were approached as a sign system which now in turn creates rules related to the meanings and perceptions of black hair/blackness in society.

An advantage of semiotics is that it can be applied to the much wider field of meaning making which includes areas of fashion, theatre, dance, literature and architecture (Bignell 2002). Anything can be interpreted as a sign, be it a piece of writing, fashion advertising or an individual's sense of style. On the other hand, semiotics has particular weaknesses as it focuses only on the underlying meaning while ignoring the elements that make up or produce the text. For instance, this might be compared to judging a meal by the quality of the ingredients without concern for how the food was cooked or how it tastes. Semiotic analysis then becomes a performance that relies heavily on the critic and takes attention from the work itself. This is a common problem of most interpretive frameworks (Grbich 2013: 13). In the light of this knowledge then, content analysis was applied to organise and highlight the clear meanings in the text while semiotics aided in eliciting the latent meanings. This study required a method to manage the large amounts of data to be analysed before it was interpreted. Therefore, it triangulated semiotics with content analysis to organise and extract the particular aspects of the data to be interpreted.

Content analysis entails inspection of the data for recurrent instances of some kind (this could include words, phrase or some larger unit of 'meaning') (Silverman 2011). Content analysis is said to have developed as a quantitative method used by journalists to track newspaper reporting biases. Overtime, content analysis was however also adopted into the qualitative approach (Emmison & Smith et al (2012). Qualitative content analysis has become an established form of content analysis in the social sciences (Curtis & Curtis (2011), Silverman (2011)).

An advantage of qualitative content analysis is that it is a systematic method which reduces often large data involved in qualitative research. This was especially useful in this thesis because it helped concentrate the bulky visual data confronted in the study. The videos which were analysed in this research were lengthy and high in number hence qualitative content analysis aided in organising the data and interpreting meanings. Content analysis as a method generally affords a level of flexibility and can be replicated and adopted by researchers at any level (Flick 2014).

Curtis & Curtis (2011) explain that qualitative content analysis operates by identifying the most dominant and recurring elements of the data. The data is extracted using a method known as coding, where the dominant themes emerge through counting. This is done by assigning successive parts of the material to the categories of what is known as a coding frame (Flick 2014). The coding frame in the case of this study was utilised to organise the data and highlight the most important aspects of the data. Once the data was organised in this frame (see appendix 7), meaning was revealed through the most recurring elements in the frame. With content analysis the researcher is encouraged to present only what is directly visible in the data. For this study, a superficial description of natural hair experience is not the goal. The study is also concerned with the social meanings and significance of this experience hence content analysis is used in conjunction to semiotics.

Overall, the study is of a mainly qualitative format utilising the phenomenological tradition. In order to describe black women's experience of natural hair practices, focus group interviews were carried out and the texts related to natural hair practices were analysed using a combination of semiotics and content analysis. The emerging themes in both the interviews and textual data were identified and analysed. These processes all combined to produce a description of the essence of natural hair practices among young black women in the UK.

## 5.4 Data collection

### 5.4.1 Focus groups

Focus groups was included in this study as a major form of data collection to elicit the collective experience of the respondents. Curtis & Curtis (2011) explain that a key reason for “doing research via focus groups is for in-depth interviewing of a collective or for finding out about collectively held beliefs and attitudes (pg.104)”. Understanding the collectively held beliefs is crucial and the first point of call to describing an experience in the phenomenological tradition(Moustakas 2011).

Focus group research produces rich qualitative data. However, the high volume and complexity of data may derail the focus of the researcher. As such it was important to plan appropriately throughout the focus group process. This study encountered over 40,000 words of audience talk for analysis and this meant that a lot of time was dedicated to transcribing and analysing the focus group material. Recruiting for focus groups can be done by random selection, snowballing (friends or friends are invited), piggyback (participants suggest), existing groups e.g., clubs, flyers and posters (Curtis & Curtis 2011). Participants in this study were located using the snowballing technique. Banks (2000) also recorded high success using snowballing for recruiting participants in her study, “*Hair Matters*”. For this study, the researcher first approached acquaintances who she assumed would be interested in the research and asked them to recommend their friends. In addition, the researcher passed around fliers for the focus group discussions. The university network of African-Caribbean students was also used to reach participants. The researcher also attended natural hair events such as the *Return to Your Roots* hair event, an event held in Birmingham 2018 to attract participants.

The criteria for choosing participants was that they are women between the ages of 18 to 35 and they previously or still currently watch natural hair YouTube videos. This age range was chosen because it is argued that YouTube is often the preferred information platform for younger people (Burgess & Green 2009). Selecting participants that currently or previously watched YouTube videos ensured that the participants had engaged with YouTube videos

and therefore could discuss their experiences of the videos under study. The participants included international students of African origin who had been living in the UK and black women born and bred in the UK. There was also a small number of mixed-race participants who identified as black. This diversity of participants ensured the diversity of data (Curtis & Curtis 2011) from different categories of black women who live in the UK.

Non-probability sampling was utilised because the researcher was not after a perfect population representative study. Instead, the project set out to understand the experience of a specific group of people i.e., black women who watch black hair videos on YouTube. Maxwell (2005:88) explains that in qualitative research, a perfect sampling is not the goal but identifying the participants and setting which will answer the research questions. Ritchie & Lewis (2003) also add that a non-probability sampling is appropriate when the researcher is after a study which aims to describe an experience in-depth.

The focus groups session involved 18 women and one man. The discussions were divided into three separate sessions conducted on different days. Creswell & Poth (2018:79) argue that interviewing 5 to 25 individuals is a standard in attempting to understand a phenomenon. As such this study meets the requirement for producing enough data to understand the phenomenon under study. During the recruiting process the researcher explicitly asked for female participants however one male participant tagged along with his female companion. Instead of sending him away and risk losing the female participant he accompanied, the researcher saw it as an opportunity to test if indeed the experience of females and male in natural hair practices can be differentiated.

It was observed that women talked about their hair experiences in a specific manner quite different from the way the male participant talked of his own experience. Contrasting the small male sample and the female sample it was confirmed that hair practices was something that impacted the body image and self-esteem of female participants more compared to the male participant. Hence, using the male participant further validated the researcher's decision to make the study a female centred enquiry of natural hair practices. This confirmation was not

required however the researcher chose to adapt to how the incidents as they emerged during the research process. This form of adaptability is not uncommon in qualitative research practice(Creswell 2014).

It should also be noted that the researcher first tested the interview questions by carrying out a mock interview. This interview was recorded, and the researcher was able to reflect on how questions were worded and to correct them before the proper focus group session was conducted. After the first focus group was carried out the questions were also slightly reviewed and reworded since the researcher identified questions that were harder for the participants to understand. This iterative process of editing the interview questions to make answering easier for the participants had its pros and cons. The main benefit was that the researcher was able to question participants more effectively(see appendix 6). The disadvantage was that it primed the researcher with false expectations of how the questioning and answering process in the focus group sessions would unfold. However these expectations were corrected once the actual focus group activity was carried out.

The focus group sessions were recorded and videoed. Video recording was utilised because the researcher lacked additional personnel to aid in the moderation of the focus group sessions. Initially, a few of the participants were conscious of the video camera but as the discussion proceeded, they quickly forgot about the camera and had a more natural discussion. The researcher experienced difficulties negotiating between the role of both researcher and moderator of the focus group sessions. It took some learning to ensure that the participants were not being led in answering the questions. The researcher/moderator had to constantly remain aware and find a balance between letting the discussion flow naturally, ensuring that she was not leading the discussion and also catching opportunities for probing participants further.

Another limitation faced in the focus group process involved the issue of gathering a group to discuss at the same place at the same time. This study particularly faced this problem because when the researcher would gain recruits, they would end up dropping out. Due to the

complexity of getting a group together at a specific place and time the researcher had to be flexible to move meeting dates around to meet everyone's availability. In the end, recruitment for one focus group session took about two weeks to complete and the meeting was set up also two weeks after the recruitment ended. In this way, half of the recruited participants were able to attend while a good number still dropped out despite the long notice.

Additionally, not only is the place and date for meeting important, the time of day which the focus group session is held is also crucial. It often defines the trajectory and vibrancy of the discussion. The researcher observed that one out of the three focus groups which was conducted in the evening hours of 5pm to 7pm had less participant engagement compared to the other two focus groups which were held between 11am and 3pm in the afternoon.

Another limitation of focus group is that the presence of the researcher or moderator in the focus group session leads to the danger of producing a false consensus (Curtis & Curtis 2011). The participants may feel swayed by what they feel the moderator wants to hear and the moderator may also unknowingly question the participants in ways that would be leading. As a result, some have argued that the focus group data may lack in validity and reliability. As Curtis & Curtis (2011) puts it; "the concern is that on another day and with another moderator, participants discussions may turn out differently" (pg.113). This study remained cognizant of these limitations. The researcher endeavoured to keep a safe distance from the discussion and encouraged participants with seemingly opposing views to also contribute.

#### 5.4.2 Videos

The videos chosen for this research were identified through a blend of the researcher experience and information provided by the focus group participants. From previous encounters with watching YouTube videos, the researcher gained prior knowledge of the popular YouTubers involved in making DIY and style natural hair videos. The participants also, in their focus group discussions helped identify more natural hair YouTubers both familiar and unfamiliar to the researcher. Vloggers such as 'Naptural 85' and 'Chizi Duru' were mentioned in focus group discussions and their videos were also featured as part of the data set.



YouTube reports that videos under the tag “natural hair”, number up to seventy thousand videos. The researcher chose thirty-five of these videos for analysis. The aim of analysing videos or embarking on this textual analysis was to provide further insight on how black women experience natural hair practices on YouTube. The videos are seen as further informants on the experience in addition to participant accounts. In this vein, just like the number of individuals for interviews (five to twenty-five participants as recommended by Creswell & Poth (2018:79), a similar number was chosen for videos to gain an understanding of this experience. These videos were selected randomly with a few considerations in place. The aim was not to go after a representative study of natural hair videos but to provide supporting insight into the natural hair experience.

Particularly, the videos were chosen against the amount of natural hair video themes present on YouTube, the researcher observed that natural hair video themes or types include up to twenty-seven different sub-themes and categories. These themes include; *hair growth or how to grow hair videos, short natural hair, natural hair, styling and tutorial, big chop, transitioning natural hair, straightening natural hair, protective styles, 4c hair, DIY products, length check, wash day, kids natural hair, products, DIY products, reverting, maintaining hair, moisturising hair, heat damage, wash and go, straight hair, afro hair, nutrition for hair growth(food), challenge videos, natural hair videos produced by companies or non-amateur producers, hair challenge videos, other*. After the twenty-seven themes were identified, the researcher gave allowance for the possibility of discovering more themes, hence the thirty-five videos. However more themes were not identified.

One video was picked at random against each theme except for styling videos and the *other* category. Two videos fell into the *other* category and seven samples were used against the styling and tutorial category. This increase covered the initially open slots reserved for the unknown themes.

Also, more videos on the styling and tutorial genre were analysed because it was observed as one of the most dominant and popular forms of natural hair videos. This observation was

confirmed via focus group sessions conducted in the study. When women were asked why they watch natural hair videos, a common response was that they watch YouTube videos in order to gain knowledge to handle their hair; they needed to know “what to do” with their hair. The phrase “what to do with hair”, directly points to the fact that the ability to care for and style natural hair was one of the most foremost concerns among black women who wore natural hair. Hence hair care and style tutorial videos were considered in this study as one of the most important genres to understand the natural hair experience. The videos chosen spanned between 2007 to 2019. This time frame provided a sweeping view of the nature of videos produced from the period natural hair videos emerged on YouTube to the point when the research analysis was undertaken. The chosen videos were also required to pass the criteria of having between one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand views. This threshold of two hundred thousand views was enforced because it has been observed that more views imply a high level of audience reach and impact (Lindgreen 2008).

Again, with YouTube studies, there are no identifiable rules for choosing videos for analysis because it is a relatively new area of academic pursuit. The only recurring agreement in these studies is that high audience view is equated to high audience impact ( Burgess & Green (2009) and Beal (2012)). Scholars like Beal (2012) for instance, explored how the images of nurses were constructed on YouTube. They chose five out of the most viewed videos from the thousands that were generated in their search. This study may have followed this example by only analysing the most viewed natural hair videos on YouTube, but it was found that only a few specific themes of the natural hair videos have extremely high views often in millions. Videos with such enormous views are related to the subject of “ *how to grow long hair*”. However, since this is just one of the many themes of natural hair videos on YouTube, analysing the highest viewed natural hair videos would have meant only focusing on this one theme. Hence this study decided to set its own range of high views between one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand views. This is because, from observations, extremely popular natural hair channels on YouTube such as *Natural85* or *Mahogany Curls* possess

an average of one hundred thousand views per video. By analysing the videos which have between one hundred to two hundred thousand views, this study kept in line with the high views to high audience impact style common in the analysis of YouTube videos without compromising on the variety of videos it analysed.

Furthermore, the videos for analysis were located using the search bar and filter settings on YouTube. The first search word used by the researcher was "*natural hair*". This search option produced videos both related and unrelated to the search themes listed above. The researcher picked and saved videos related to the themes at random, as long as they met the criteria of between one hundred to two hundred thousand views. Also, other search words such as "*black hair*", "*natural*", "*afro hair*", "*4a*", "*4b*" and "*4c hair*", all of these are subsections of the tag "*natural hair*", (See more on these terms in chapter 7 section 7.2), were utilised to locate videos. The final thirty-five videos were then downloaded from YouTube and kept on a physical c.d. during the duration of the analysis in order to guard against the possible erasure of the chosen videos from the platform. The videos downloaded were used for research purposes only.

The selected videos were then categorised utilising content analysis. The videos were subjected to a coding frame which aimed to deconstruct how videos produce the concept of black hair to their audience. The coding frame featured answers to the questions asked of each of the thirty-five videos. These questions include: "what is in the foreground of videos(include colour)", "what is in the background(include colour)", "what words and phrases are used to describe hair", "what other words or phrases appear distinct", "how is the audience addressed", "describe the background music" (see appendix 7 for more details on the coding frame). These questions were used to denaturalise the elements that form the fabric of videos. Geiger & Rutsky (2005:21) explains that, in films, the complexity of the combination of images, music, and spoken dialogue transmits certain feelings and messages to the audience. Similarly, as YouTube producers discuss and showcase hair matters in videos, they use images, sound, colours and words to pass across their meaning. As such the study

interrogated these elements or 'signs' found in videos to identify the ways in which they construct black hair.

The comments usually present under these YouTube videos were however not analysed in this study. This is due to the fact that the researcher chose to measure audience engagement through focus groups. Thelwall (2018) observes that for every 204 views of a YouTube video only 0.5% of the viewers leave a comment, hence since only a small proportion of viewers comment on videos. Hence the extent to which comments can give audience insight is limited. Thelwall (2018) also found that comments on videos appear similar, ranging in themes characterized by interactivity, thankfulness, encouragement and support. Comments on videos do not often portray the richness and nuance of the natural hair experience. As such, the research chose focus groups as an approach for understanding audience engagement with the YouTube videos. Moreover, this study explores the specific perspective of black women living in the UK. Comments found on natural hair videos are often international origin, with many coming from other parts of the world.

### 5.5 Data analysis

This section further details the analysis process utilised first with the focus group data and then secondly with the visual or textual data. A phenomenological thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the focus group data while content analysis and semiotics was applied to the visual data.

As previously stated, three focus group sessions were conducted for this study. The sessions were transcribed by the researcher into three separate documents(see appendix 6). All three transcripts were read several times to enable the researcher to familiarize with the contents of the discussions. The transcripts were then uploaded into the Nvivo-12 software to begin the initial coding. NVivo is a qualitative data management software which allows the organisation and analysis of files related to a research project. Data such as transcripts, literature and excel entries can be added to the software.

The initial coding process was done utilising line-by-line coding. Each line in the transcript was read, re-read and grouped with other similar lines or expressions found within the transcripts. This created groups and patterns to form the first group of emerging themes. NVivo allowed the researcher easy navigation to accomplish this coding process, highlighting and grouping the lines in each transcript. With this process, the researcher first identified over 20 themes or nodes (as they are referenced in NVivo). Some of these include; *style freedom, empowerment, financial freedom, getting to know yourself, UK vs America, difference, hair experience, products, wokeness, embracing blackness, don't touch my hair, younger generation, different ways of being black, lifestyle changes, practical information, time to do hair, other, points of crosstalk, points of laughter, points of acquiescence.*

It may be observed that some of the themes include points of similarities, as such they were further merged into broader categories. Through this further coding process the research produced seven final themes which explain how black women in the UK experience natural hair practices; This include *hair in real life, hair as a problem, social connections, products and commercialisation, positive associations with hair, hair confidence and seeing.* These themes were extensively described and further interpreted by engaging with the social meanings within them. All of this was done within the framework of postcolonial theory; by considering the meaning of the participants within race, empire and the black identity formation.

The videos or texts were analysed in a different manner to the focus groups. As previously stated, they were organised using content analysis. A coding frame was produced to highlight the recurring elements within videos(see appendix 7). Two separate coders were used to generate the data to ensure data reliability. Each coders watched all the videos twice over to familiarise themselves with the content before answering the questions in the coding tables. All the videos analysed came to over 10 hours of total watch time for each coder.

However, the data set between the two coders encountered points of differences. Particularly in regard to the question; “what words appear distinct in the video”, the entries differed. Since this disagreement in entries came down to the subjectivity and personal experience of both

coders, a choice was made to merge the differing entries of both coders into one entry and use it for the analysis. Owing to the fact that this study is purely qualitative not quantitative there was less emphasis on high similarity between coders.

After the coding tables were completed, NVivo-12 was utilised to run a word search to identify the most recurring terms within each question. For instance, with the question “what words are used to describe hair”, the terms, ‘dry’, ‘curls’ and ‘like’ are some of the most recurring. This method of denaturalising the videos can be seen as a way of word-by-word coding as opposed to the line-by-line coding used in the focus group analysis. These most recurring words identified were used to form word clouds (also facilitated by NVivo). These word clouds created a picture of the messages imbedded in natural hair videos. Also in the video analysis process, a further level of analysis ( semiotics) was introduced. The researcher noted specific significant terms (i.e. ‘codes’ or ‘signs’) in the line-by-line coding process which speak on the social construction of black hair in videos. Some of these terms include phrases like “protective styling”, “dry and moisture”, “curls and straight” and so on (See Chapter 7 for more details).

Finally, both analysis of focus group data and video data were then combined to produce a short description or intuitive description of the essence of natural hair experience. This answered the question of how black women in the UK experience natural hair practices. This final description is seen as the culminating point in undertaking a phenomenological research.

### 5.6 Ethics and data handling

All ethical considerations for this study were presented and approved by the ethics board of the University of Central Lancashire. All focus group participants read and understood the project description and signed consent forms before the interview sessions commenced (see appendix 6 for consent form sample). Data which was not produced by the researcher i.e., the YouTube videos for analysis, all exist in the public domain. They have not been downloaded off YouTube for any other purposes apart from research. The other data produced by the researcher i.e., the focus group recordings are on hard copies in locked office cabinets only accessible to the researcher. The identities of all the focus group participants were protected

by changing their names on the transcripts. All other sensitive files related to the research are on password protected on cloud facilities provided by the University of Central Lancashire.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This chapter commenced by exploring the rationale for utilising a solely qualitative format for the research. It discussed both the quantitative and qualitative research approaches and explained the suitability of qualitative methods for this study.

It further explored the various qualitative research methods used in this project including phenomenology, content analysis, semiotics and focus groups. The latter part of the chapter discussed the data collection process. It explained the processes by which natural hair videos were chosen and the rationale for the amount of videos chosen for analysis as well as the methods of analysis. The last part of the chapter examined the focus group discussions, the challenges faced in their organisation and the steps taken to mitigate these challenges. The chapter then briefly reflected on the data governance of the project.

Overall, this chapter justified the methodological decisions and processes taken in the course of this study. The creativity and flexibility allowed in qualitative research made many of the decisions possible (Silverman 2011). The next chapter presents and analyses the focus group discussions.

## Chapter 6: Weird afros and embracing blackness: black women's natural hair experiences.

*They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, how does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent coloured man in my town; or I fought at Mechanicsville; or do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, how does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.*

*-Dubois (1999)*

### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter reports and analyses the natural hair experience of focus group participants. The focus group members were asked about their perceptions of videos regarding natural hair practices on YouTube. Three focus group sessions were initially conducted for this study. However, they were all analysed collectively, with the most recurring themes shared in the discussions identified and discussed further. This was done to allow for conciseness (not neglecting quality), as well as to ensure the completion of the study within the allotted time frame. As previously highlighted in Chapter 5, the following seven themes emerged in reading and re-reading the focus group transcripts: *hair histories*, *practical information*, *hair in real life*, *hair confidence*, *seeing*, *products and commercialisation* and *social connection*. Each section in this chapter is dedicated to one theme. The focus of analysis was directed at illuminating the participants' experience and how this shapes their notions of black hair and, by extension, their identity. The focus group 'talk' reveals the nature of participants experience (Ritchie et al 2014) and reveals the essence and significance of natural hair practices.

In the process of analysis, the group dynamics were taken into consideration. The researcher observed how participants agreed or disagreed with one another, including their body language. Emphasis was also placed on elements such as sounds of acquiescence within the group, points of crosstalk, points of laughter and even silence in the discussion. Other forms



of group response included using phrases like “yeah”, “uh-huh” or other body language cues such as nodding. Laughter is also another way in which the group expressed consensus.

Crosstalk refers to incidents in the interaction when participants talked over each other. At the commencement of each focus group session, focus group members were encouraged to allow one individual to speak at a time. Nevertheless, throughout the discussion, the participants did not often adhere to this recommendation. It was observed that major incidents of cross-talking occurred when a participant raised a claim that others considered impressive or controversial. Also, in some instances, silence ensued with the raising of an important argument or if group members intended to ruminate over a viewpoint. Silence among group members may have also indicated that there was disagreement over a view, however, no discussant was willing to vocalise their objection, probably so as not to impede the group rapport. It should be noted that the above observations did not always apply in all instances of the group rapport.

Throughout this chapter, quotes and sections of the focus group discussion are presented. These are organised using indentations and sometimes also including quotation marks. The quotes may also be divided into excerpts to indicate points from different focus group sessions or different points in a conversation. A few excerpts with long exchanges between participants are also included, for instance as seen in section 6.6 on products and commercialisation. The researcher also refers to focus group participants using devised names to maintain anonymity. The participants quoted here include; Tessi, Ama, Ana, Nava, Nina, Ria, Flo, Fiona, White, Red, Tiwa, Rela, Agatha, Sasha, Marsha, Pepper, Tracy, Anita. The name Mod is used to indicate the Moderator.

### 6.1 Hair histories and the nappy hair problem

Focus group participants often highlighted their interaction with their hair in the past to provide context to how they deal with it in the present. Their discomfort with black “nappy” hair was a sentiment that was shared across the board in all the three focus group sessions. This position emerged naturally in their exchange as they spoke about their hair experiences. Participants description of previous hair experience in daily life hinted at a sense of struggle, especially in

trying to find methods to maintain their perceived problematic afro or “nappy” hair. A good number of the participants narrated how they were encouraged or sometimes coerced into undertaking relaxer treatments to ensure their hair was manageable, or in order to look like others around them.

Several participants explain;

***Nava: When I got to Ghana, I was 8, my hair was natural, I hadn't relaxed my hair. My Aunt did it when my mum was out of the house. She didn't know how to brush through my hair.***

***Ria: Honestly, I know myself, I had my hair permed a lot when I was a lot younger and after that I thought actually, “this is trash, I don't want this”. Then I was going to be a bridesmaid for an Aunty in church and she is like you are relaxing your hair and I was like I don't want to. And she was like. . . So, the second time, I didn't have a choice in it, and I have really felt that going forward.***

***Nina: . . .when I was trying to become natural. I tried it first when I was 11 and I didn't know what to do, my aunt and my mom bullied me back to relaxing my hair because like, I had to take care of it, and it was very painful when she was doing my hair. Like I thought my hair was ripping as she was doing it, so I went back to being relaxed. And then I didn't know about YouTube then.***

In the quotes above participants were subjected to straightening practices which, often, they did not want or like. Straightening was seen as one of the major techniques to care for afro, textured, or circle type hair, which made it appear neat and manageable. Leaving hair in its natural i.e., “nappy” state was seen as an unacceptable hair practice in many black communities before the popularity of natural hair practices (Dabiri 2019). Therefore, even when the group members resisted straightening practices, they returned to utilising it especially due to social pressure. Individuals like Ria were forced to conform by parents and others around them. Focus group members narrated how they were socialised by their family members to maintain the prevailing hair practice, which was often straightened hair.

Even with the popularity and normalisation of hair straightening, it should be noted that not all black women or black families subscribed to the practice. For instance, participants like Tessi related how her mother did not permit hair straightening. This still caused sadness and discomfort because it made her appear different to the other black girls around her. This suggests that whether group members employed or did not employ hair straightening, or other conforming practices, they were often initially concerned about their hair. As Dubois (1999) stated, even in hypocrisy or radicalism the black identity is continually afflicted by a double consciousness. They are conflicted about the best avenue to present themselves due to their perception of their Otherness. A majority of the participants revealed that a common emotion towards their hair was unacceptance, discomfort and even in some extreme cases, shame. For instance, Sasha explains;

***Sasha: Yeah, I never used to cut my hair, I just used to tie it up and . . . I was just used to being the only mixed-race girl at my school, with nappy hair basically. I would be nervous but then I accepted it. But I was always embarrassed with it.***

Sasha who is mixed-race, recalls the confusion and embarrassment of being the only one with her hair-type in her school. Her self-consciousness may be judged as simply a result of the difference of her physical appearance. There were no other people that looked like her therefore her discomfort may have little to do with her racialised body. However, Sasha's description of her experience is also echoed by Dabiri (2019) who writes of her time growing up in Ireland as one of the few mixed-race women in her community. Therefore, this experience appears to be common especially for black bodies which find themselves in close proximity to white bodies.

Fanon (2008) asserts that due to colonial epistemic systems the black individual tends to internalise the self as the Other. Sasha and the other focus group participants made no mention of incidents of being directly told that there was something wrong with their hair, but they appear to have formed almost instinctive negative perceptions towards their hair or bodies in interesting ways. In further explaining this phenomenon, Yancy (2002) also argues

that the white subject interpolates the black subject as inferior, and this urges the black subject to continually see themselves by internalising the white gaze. The internalisation of the white gaze leads to a troubling experience of one's black body. Features like black hair appears to heighten the black individual's consciousness or internalisation of their difference. In Sasha's case, this internalisation is described as a nervousness while she is in the midst of white bodies. In the excerpt, she hints at being perpetually 'judged' against the "normal" white hair of the other students and this led to a sense of discomfort and negative self-awareness.

Another manner by which hair as a problem emerged as a theme is observed when focus group participants were asked if they felt comfortable wearing their natural hair. Some of their responses are in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1:

**White:** *Before, I never used to [ refers to feeling comfortable wearing hair]. Some days I go to school my mum will be like, can you just. . . [gestures combing]. I was like no I don't want to comb . . . Yo, I was crying. But now I just . . . [gestures having hair out] I don't care.*

**Red:** *That is because more people have embraced it*

**White:** *yeah that is because more people have embraced it.*

[Laughter erupts as both White and Red say the same thing at the same time]

Excerpt 2:

**Red:** *I don't know, I just feel like a lot of people are carrying their Afro now. But I never was able to carry my Afro like that. I just feel like I look weird. I don't know, I didn't feel like it was normal. I felt like it was 'nappy'. So yeah, I just don't know.*

**Mod:** *You felt your hair the way it grew was not normal?*

**Red:** *it is not even the way it grew, it's just the way it was . . . [ makes gestures that describe fly away hair or a halo of hair, connoting frizzy texture hair]. I find it weird to look at Afros, whereas now everyone is embracing it and I am like*

*okay, okay.*

In the first excerpt, White recalls how her mum insisted on combing her hair before school and how this made her cry. White's sentiments can be connected to Sasha's own feelings towards the difference of her hair as described above. Also Red equally expresses a similar position in describing afro hair as weird. Here the stereotypes of good hair versus bad hair come into play. Participants live their everyday lives with these stereotypes, as seen in the way Red admits, "I felt that it was nappy". For an individual to experience their body as 'bad' or a problem paints a picture of the burdensome nature of blackness. The participants highlighted that they continued to struggle till they observed other black women embracing their nappy hair. Red also added, *"I find it weird to look at afros, whereas now everyone is embracing it and I am like okay okay."* Her double use of the word "okay" does not connote a total acceptance of her hair but a degree of it. Several other participants expressed the same sentiments throughout the discussion. Therefore, it can be observed how the popularisation of natural hair practices forces black women to confront and grapple with their internalisation of difference. They engage with their Otherness as a first step in attempting to redefine and change their early problematic perceptions of black hair or blackness. Sasha went on to add that, although a lot more people have embraced their natural hair she required more time to eventually feel comfortable with her hair. Flo also similarly expressed that she would keep her hair short until she was ready to deal with it again. There was silence as Flo, Red and Sasha expressed their ambivalent sentiments toward their hair. None of the other participants expressed any objections or rebuttals. These sentiments convey that natural hair practices aid black women in confronting their Otherness; this struggle with their perceived problematic bodies may not be easily resolved, however there are attempts.

Overall, the theme 'hair histories and nappy hair problem' registers participants feelings of struggle with their hair and Otherness. This experience shows that participants grapple with the problematic associations and stereotypes of black hair in their everyday life. They attempt

to surmount family and societal pressure to appear a certain way. Their negative self-perception appears to have been alleviated as they observe other black women like them embracing their hair in the course of the natural hair movement. Nevertheless, this does not mean however that they are rid of the internalisation of their bodies as Other by wearing natural hair. The ambivalent sentiments observed through this theme undermines the arguments that privilege empowerment as the main outcome of YouTube natural hair experience (Sobande, Tate2016). Instead, it can be argued that with the aid of hair images on YouTube, black women engage in what might be termed as a “struggle love” relationship with their hair and bodies.

## 6.2 Practical information and dispelling colonial discourse

***Pepper: I feel like growing up I didn't even know that black hair could grow***

***Tracy: Yeah, who told us that lie?***

As inferred above, information is at the centre of current natural hair practices. The previous section explored participants' foremost hair experiences particularly relating to viewing hair as a problem and dealing with feelings of self-consciousness in their daily life because of it. In addition to this participants also, in many instances, raised issues concerning black hair myths and avenues by which natural hair practices on YouTube had been instrumental in dismantling/contesting these myths. Some of the myths referenced included beliefs that black hair could not grow long, that black hair was nappy and ugly, unprofessional, unruly or hard to manage. Therefore, it always needed to be straightened, altered or obscured in wigs and weaves, et cetera. These beliefs can be connected to the colonial discourse (primitivity, abnormality and difference) and the dissociation of the colonised from their bodies as a consequence of such discourses (Fanon 2008, Dubois 1999), (also see Chapter 2 section 2.2).

Information relating to the care of the body is often first and foremost passed on traditionally via family socialisation and one's immediate community. The internet however now includes a vast array of information on body care practices to be circulated online. For people who

engage with natural hair practices, the information exchange on digital media platforms impressed upon their daily lives. Participants reiterated that their experience with going natural on YouTube meant that they gained access to information that they otherwise wouldn't have encountered. By watching the YouTube videos, they were able to learn about different hair terms, the nature of their hair, different hairstyles and ways of handling their hair. Participants highlighted that videos provided information on how they could care for their hair.

***Ama: To me it was kind of educational as well because that is how I learnt how to do my hair, do braids and everything.***

***Ana: It also helped me because I learnt that there are different types of hair. And I would like to know what type of hair mine is and what to do and how to take care of it. Yeah because I didn't know there was 4b, 4c, and all that so.***

***Flo: And when she moved away (her sister), I did not know how to do it (hair), so I had to learn a few of the things to do by myself. I had to make it for other people as well. I had to tell them what I wanted because there is no black hair shop around me, so I had to go to a white hair shop and was like, I want this.***

Also, Marsha adds:

***Yeah, I was going to say that as well because my mum is white, and my dad can't do hair [laughs]. I relaxed my hair, and I was like I don't want to relax it anymore, so YouTube was how I learned how to manage it properly myself.***

A broadening of hair knowledge was important to these women because their negative beliefs about their hair was invariably tied to their self-esteem. Being unable to grow long hair for most women meant their exclusion from the normalised images of femininity and desirability, and blackness is constructed far from the reigning beauty standards due to the proliferation of Eurocentric beauty ideals. It is assumed that the less desirable a woman is perceived to be,

the more likely it is that she will be excluded from access to social resources such as a suitable mate or even job opportunities (Mark 2011). Hence feeling beautiful and desirable is important to many women. With the participants exposure to new information regarding their hair, they encounter new ways to describe and see themselves. This process may be viewed as an avenue to cast off colonial discourses surrounding their bodies.

Another way practical information changed participant's perception of their hair was providing them with more agency over their bodies. They possess increased access to options and methods by which to handle their hair. This provides additional freedom as they are no longer dependent on other people like hairdressers or stylists for their daily hair practices. In spaces like the UK, which is more populated by white bodies, stylists who can handle black hair are not so easily accessible. There are exceptions in metropolises like London or Manchester, but participants talk of traveling considerable distances in order to locate a stylist. For instance, in the focus group discussions, Pepper narrated how in secondary school she experienced an agonising two weeks wait before she could book a stylist. In that time, she had to suffer the 'discomfort' of going to school in an afro. Tracy also talked of the stress of travel, having to take several buses in her home city of Manchester to locate a stylist.

Similarly, Flo in the above excerpt states; *"there are no black shops around me"*. Considering the frequency and level of skill and specific know-how required to maintain afro textured hair, a lack of stylists meant additional challenges to the everyday lives of black women. As such, the information about hair they received online was significant to them because they were able to finally solve their daily hair problems. The shortage of black hair stylists in the UK may be easily viewed as a population issue. There are more white people in the UK hence it is unsurprising that more hair stylists will specialise in handling Caucasian hair types (if there even exists such a category). Nevertheless, it can also be argued that the demarcation of black hair shops and white hair shops also announces the continual bifurcation of white bodies and black bodies in the metropole. If these binaries were so imperative then there might also exist doctors that only cater for white bodies instead of black bodies and vice versa. Still, these



cultural distinctions continue to exhibit the power and realities of race as a social and cultural construct, so ubiquitous that it overcomes the logic of biology.

It is not only in white hair shops that the handling of black hair remains a mystery. Even within black communities knowledge about black hair was limited because black hair and black bodies were often subjected to practices which required it to first be altered. It was normal that black hair was straightened, permed, relaxed or concealed before it was worked on (Cornwell 2015). As such, to date, many who would describe themselves as black hair stylists possess limited knowledge on how to work on black hair while in its natural state.

In the light of this, participants expressed gratitude in being able to access natural hair YouTube videos. There was a sense of relief in their tone when they discussed the ways information on YouTube had helped them. From the information they gained, their natural hair was no longer seen as mysterious and unmanageable. They were able to change their perception of hair and by extension they began altering the way they saw their bodies. For instance, Ria observes;

***For me it was like eye opening. I just lived my normal life, daily. I didn't know much about other types of hairstyles you can do except the basic ones.***

Tracy also explains;

***Again, I was able to watch YouTube videos and figure out how I can deal with it myself properly and make it look nice, it has taken the fear away of I-need-to-do-my-hair-immediately, which has been so good. It has saved me so much money.***

Here Tracy explains that being exposed to information made her more familiar and comfortable with her hair. Unfamiliarity with one's hair meant many women would instead hide their hair under wigs or weaves. McLeod (2000:22) acknowledged that freedom from colonialism or colonial discourse does not emanate from the raising or lowering flags but from

a change of perception and a challenge to the dominant ways of seeing. Access to practical information meant that black women are able to gain more freedom from stereotypes, myths and colonial discourse by engaging with alternative and more diverse narratives surrounding black hair.

### 6.3 Daily hair experiences as a process of negotiation

Focus group discussions also mainly highlighted the meanings of participants' hair practices within the context of their day-to-day life. Daily activities appear mundane, but they shape the culture and experience of natural hair practices. This section demonstrates how participants work through the meaning of being natural by translating natural hair videos to day-to-day practices. It also explores how YouTube can be seen as a dialogic and experimental space in which black women can access their own realities and personal journeys with their hair.

YouTube videos prescribes an array of hair practices to its audiences. This information is disseminated by often non-professional and sometimes professional hairstylists who are tagged as "hair gurus". The videos on YouTube provide significant details about hair, with thousands of videos discussing hair characteristics, what practices to undertake or not to, hair sensitivities, hair porosities, hair styles, hair products etcetera. Viewers interact with this hair information and attempt to apply it in their daily lives.

In the previous section, participants discussed how their encounter with practical information led to a more positive experience of their bodies and a rejection of stereotypes and problematic associations attached to their hair. In spite of this participants reported that they still faced difficulty in applying this information. Indeed their difficulties even sometimes led to unhealthy hair practices. For instance, Pepper narrates;

***. . . When I first started watching videos, I would trim my hair; not every day but every time I twisted my hair, and it was like really? It was really excessive not like every single night but every couple of nights then I would have my hair in braids most of the time, so I don't do it normally. My hair has not dropped off because I have not trimmed it in six weeks ...***

Indirectly, Pepper explains that after her first interaction with the information on YouTube; she was under the impression that constantly trimming hair was necessary but with time she learnt otherwise. Another example is observed where participants take on board suggestions by hair gurus in order to grow long hair. These hair practices don't always bring about positive results. Most of the participants reiterated how the styles they were shown through videos often flopped in real life.

***Tessi: . . . For me it's like nah, because I can't get the same result as them***

(refers to hair gurus)

***Ana: Yeah, I look bad with it [refers to hairstyle] so I'm just like. Why? Why can't I look like the girls in the videos [feigns sobbing voice]. After that I'm just like well, let me just do cornrows or something like that.***

***Ama: It was a good thing because I learnt to do new styles and like, when I would do them I felt more confident with my hair and though sometimes it didn't work out how they did it. I would be like oh, what am I doing? [giggles]***

***Sasha: I think I watch YouTube very much because I feel Youtubers assume that this is how I do my hair, you will get the same result, it is not really guaranteed, it is not reliable. Often, I was being naïve, I will try and then nothing happens, I'm like oh. . .***

Hair practices in a virtual world doesn't often translate well in real life. Afrikanhairgod (2018) in his YouTube video explained why he was quitting his channel as a YouTube hair guru. One reason was that videos often tend to sell viewers fantasy hair or hair porn. He explained that the videos often projected hair that was more or less unachievable in real life and that he did not want to continue to be part of the train that propagated fantasies to its audience.

Participants overall were however not discouraged by their setbacks in putting the styles into practice but learnt overtime and adjusted accordingly. Nava explains:

***“The thing is I don’t usually aim to look like them [refers to hair gurus], I aim to look at least decent to go out of the house.”***

Tracy adds:

***I think that only recently have people started to specify the characteristics of hair. They (hair gurus) just say I’ve got this hair type, or this texture and I use these products and you think it is good advice but it’s not. Then it’s like a bit of a disservice to people watching. I think that is how I felt until recently, when I learnt that oh actually it is more complicated than the hair type that you have. Now YouTubers are starting to delve into and understand the importance of this (hair type), but I watched it followed it completely to the letter and my hair didn’t react like it should have and then you damage your hair, and it is like a cycle. Now I think It is kind of getting better.***

She notes that the hair gurus themselves pay attention to their mistakes and also change accordingly.

From this it can be noted that participants often express agency in dealing with these online mediated hair practices online. The assumption that online audiences are usually necessarily vulnerable is therefore problematic (See Chapter 3 studies on social media and body image). The participants in these focus groups revealed that they are not unduly influenced by the perfect images they encounter online but that they learn to make their own choices about how they will employ them in their daily lives.

YouTube thus operates mainly as an experimental and dialogic space. On the platform both users and producers exchange information. Producers are allowed to present images of what they feel should be the ideal representation of black hair. Hair gurus show the perfect sides of their hair journeys, and they also sometimes show their hair failures. In this way they experiment with hair and converse and debate with black women all over the world about what natural hair should be or what it should look like. Through viewing natural hair practices online with other women, participants appear to have transcended the confines of hegemonic standards of beauty and aesthetic oppression. They now gain the tools to personally work

through their own hair practices and perceptions as required. Participants are no longer left to the devices of their problematic relationship with their hair, but they gain tools and ideas from their experience of natural hair videos to work on themselves. At times they are successful, at other times they are not, and this becomes part of the process of their natural hair experience. This constant negotiation is in line with Hall's(1993) position that identity formation process does not remain constant but changes and evolves. By dialoguing and experimenting on YouTube, black women encounter a constantly shifting identity formation process. They learn, they progress, they encounter setbacks and recover.

Another way participants expressed their negotiation of their hair in daily life relates to the way hair shapes their interactions with others and even institutions. During the discussion participants often talked of how other family members had hair that was often times considered of better appearance to theirs. This sometimes led to discontent with their hair practices. Flo explains

***"I always felt compared to my friends or my younger sister, they have really thick hair, and it grows really well, it is really strong, whereas mine is soft and also quite brittle. So, it breaks easily, and it is quite dry so compared to other people in my family even though we have the same genes, my hair wasn't as good as theirs. So, my older sister uses a lot of natural products, and it still didn't work for me, so I just got tired of it."***

This comparison was repeated among participants who often lamented how they still had difficulty growing long hair despite going natural. Sasha mentions how her hair was different to her other mixed-race sisters making her quite ashamed of her kinkier textured hair. This sense of discontent or controversy with hair practices is further exhibited when participants talked of their hair in relation to their workspace. For instance, Anita explains:

***". . . In high school I went to predominantly white schools I felt pressure to look a certain way. In university I was open to a lot of things, so I didn't feel like a certain way and then when I went back into work was when I felt like I had to look a certain way again and that is what personally I would say. It is weird and messy. Some places yes, some places no, because we work in different places. Some places it is cool some places it is not."***

In the above excerpt, Anita describes the pressure to look a certain way especially in school and places of work. What these two institutions have in common is that they directly or indirectly place restrictions on or control the bodies of their members. Anita says she felt freer in university. However, universities are less regimented in terms of bodily practices compared to secondary schools or some workplaces. Rigby (2019) also confirmed the existence of policing on black pupils hair in primary and secondary school. Black women have severally reported being excluded or penalised at workplaces if they chose to wear certain perceived different natural or Afrocentric hair styles. Pepper and Anita argued thus;

***Pepper: it might be naïve, but I think that I am just going to wear my braids in my office that I am starting in September, that is completely fine. I won't go in with silver [hair] but if I did, then if anyone wanted to chat to me about it, I would be cross. Yeah.***

***Anita (replies): the thing is from my point of view, maybe I am jaded, I feel like inevitably, your first thing is survival. You need to survive that is your first and foremost point.***

There was silence from the rest of the group as Anita and Pepper had this exchange about hair in the workplace. Pepper is adamant that she will present herself to her workplace as she sees fit. However, her declaration indicates that she expects to meet resistance when it comes to her appearance, and she says she is ready to fight against it. But Anita seems to admonish Pepper for wanting to endanger her job by fighting that battle. According to her the most important thing is 'survival'. Anita is against taking unnecessary risk that might put one's career and source of livelihood in danger. In this way she suggests having to blend in or assimilate. Here the sense of negotiation comes in play.

Anita's point of view proves that taking on natural hair practices did not change the concern and the self-censure many black women face when it comes to dealing with the difference of their hair practices. The conflict remains in the way black women involved in natural hair practices choose to present themselves daily. They know how they wear their hair will be judged by their peers and even by those in positions of power around them. As such everyday

hair practices becomes a negotiation. It becomes a choice whether to 'survive' or do what one wants and prepare to defend that choice. Participants want to succeed in their daily lives and workplaces, but they are still concerned that natural hair practices may impede their progress and ambitions. For black women in the UK, despite the agency in natural hair practices, their decision on how to wear their hair remains an everyday dilemma.

Overall, daily hair experience points to the fact that natural hair practices involve a constant daily effort to build bodies and identities. Their effort is a negotiation, experimentation, a constant learning and unlearning process. They work through all of this constantly in their day-to-day life. *Agatha explains this negation process. She explains;*

***“You get both positive and negative. What is your negative? The things that have been said before; there are things that happen in YouTube that you can’t put in your life because it can’t be the same thing. But you won’t know unless you try”.***

Therefore, participants go through the trial and error of daily natural hair practices. In this way they are actively redefining and recreating the way they see their hair and their bodies.

Brown (2018) posits that within online natural hair spaces, black women resist socially constructed notions of beauty. However, the data here suggests that natural hair practices are not only an outright resistance but a negotiation.

#### 6.4 Confidence and improved self-knowledge especially secured for the younger generation.

This section discusses the positive associations participants attributed to natural hair practices. Positive talk related to hair emerged in three major ways. The first is the use of the word 'pride' and other similar phrases like 'confidence' and 'freedom'. The second involves a style-freedom gained from involving themselves in their natural hair practices. Lastly

participants highlighted that they experienced an improved sense of self-worth in their natural hair practices.

In the discussion, participants made a good number of positive associations with their experience of going natural. They felt a sense of happiness engaging with natural hair practices. These positive feelings were expressed using words like; “proud”, “confidence”, “freedom”, “power”, “hope”, “uplifting”.

When she was asked about how watching YouTube videos made her feel, Agatha stated;

***Agatha: I just feel proud . . .***

***Rela (interrupting Agatha): Promoting the black culture***

***Agatha (continues): . . . That our hair is beautiful, it's natural.***

Also, Tiwa, in a like note stated:

***“ It kind of makes me feel happy and proud because black people feel like all hair needs to be straight, it needs to be texturized, and you get those who treat (relax) their hair and also you get those that their hair is nice and long and its beautiful.”***

Feeling an emotion like pride from a simple everyday practice such as wearing hair is connected to the politics and complexities attached to black bodies. Tulloch (2000) observes that black women especially in metropolises like the UK and US have felt compelled to announce their presence in these societies through identity affirming actions like head wraps and other specific modes of dress. Practices which declare one's identity or affiliations are often common among peoples or communities however, in the case of black women, it seems to carry added significance. Black women's need to specially assert their identity appears to surge and recede over specific periods of history (Jackson 2000). In this case, participants discussion shows that wearing natural hair currently may be seen as a statement and marker of black pride and beauty. Participants have felt that it is necessary to wear their natural hair as a way of showing they are proud of their blackness. It can be argued that the reason for



this is the active need to counter the feeling of alterity attached to black bodies. To alleviate their nagging double consciousness (Dubois 1999). It appears that as long as black people continue to feel as Other in the metropole they will seek out avenues to counter this sense of Otherness by asserting their black identity. The emergence of current natural hair practices overlapping with the boom in social media and digital media platforms like YouTube is no coincidence. These spaces afford an avenue for marginal voices to speak on their sense of alterity in society. Studies like Jackson (2000) and Jackson (2006) predicted the rise of another hair moment and the role of new media to re-examine the nature of black representation. Their predictions appear to have both materialised in the current natural hair movement on YouTube.

Furthermore, the words 'pride' and 'confidence' were often used in close proximity in the discussion, however it was found that these two terms do not exactly convey the same meaning for participants. For instance, Afia explains;

***“When I started watching YouTube videos, it was more about how I can carry my hair with a bit of confidence. Sometimes you may wear a new style and you are like hmm. . . what are people going to think about it?”***

*Red similarly states;*

***“I feel like just getting complimented a lot for your natural hair, it can boost up confidence.”***

***White: [interrupting Red] Oh it did!***

This exchange shows that while focus group members did feel a sense of pride and self-affirmation through hair practices, they continued to seek validation from others. The term 'confidence' suggests that despite participants use of natural hair practices they were unsure about how others around them would react. As Afia points out, “watching *videos was about how do I carry my hair with confidence*”. Meanwhile, Red and White described how they felt

more at ease as they gained compliments while carrying their natural hair. This indicates that participants are unconsciously or consciously aware that they are presenting themselves outside the normalised societal codes by engaging in natural hair practices. They are aware that their hair practices are different to what is acceptable in their communities and hope that others will support and validate them. When this happened, they reported that they gained more confidence. In the light of this, it can be argued that natural hair practice in essence translates to black women working and actively seeking to gain acceptance of their differently perceived hair, bodies and sense of blackness. Consequently, the term “pride” can be said to connote the need to resist Otherness imposed on black bodies in society, while the term “confidence” is used to relate a sense of yearning for inclusion in society. In other words, within natural hair practice by using words like pride and confidence, black women highlight their need for recognition as well as their need for acceptance.

Another reference to the positive aspects of natural hair practices was seen in the concept of style freedom. The style freedom referenced here is different to the points highlighted in the theme related to practical information. In this theme, style freedom relates to the fact that the style repertoire of black women appears to have become broader due to the introduction of natural hair practices on digital spaces like YouTube. In the past black women were discouraged from wearing their hair naturally and encouraged to adopt either perms (relaxers), weaves and wigs. However, with natural hair practices, the meanings and hierarchies of these hair styles appears to be changing. For instance, Tessi and Nina explain.;

***Tessi: It's not so boring; to see how black women are going against that thing of everyone needs a perm and they are just like not afraid to rock their natural hair now. It's like I can also go with an afro too, it is not just about having Brazilian hair and all that. You know with my natural hair I can look beautiful the way God made me originally***

***Nina: it is just uplifting; on all the nice hair styles I could do, from even short to long.***

***Nina: It's nice to see black girls with different styles like afros to like braids. You see still people with weaves and stuff which is fine but to actually see someone with relaxed hair is very rare now.***

These statements not only suggest the changing perceptions pertaining to black hair, but it also echoes the resurfacing argument that relates to hairstyles that recall aesthetic oppression (Mercer 1987). Tessa's position acknowledges that black women are presently more attuned to natural hair styles than in the past. By expressing that a black woman could look beautiful "the way God made her" the participants reveal again the changing ways of seeing black bodies made possible by natural hair practices.

From the above observations, participants were positive about wearing natural hair styles but remained just as receptive to so-called "unnatural hairstyles". As Nina says in the last quoted excerpts, "*you still see people with weaves and stuff*". Also, from the researcher's observation of natural hair videos as well as through the participants discussion, it appears that within current natural hair practices, so-called 'natural' hair styles still co-exist comfortably with those deemed 'unnatural'. Women who wear their hair natural also appear to still adopt styles like weaves, wigs or extensions. Natural hair gurus particularly those who promote wearing natural hair still also from time to time, wear these so-called unnatural hair styles. Within the natural hair space on YouTube particularly, these previously dubbed oppressive styles have been rechristened and adopted as "protective styling".

The current process of rebranding these 'unnatural styles' appears to challenge the popular assumptions about the current black natural hair movement. It shows that current natural hair practices are not fixated on differentiating hairstyles into the categories of natural or unnatural or black and anti-black. Currently instead black women choose to hybridise these styles. Bhaba expressed that identity formation in the postcolonial is not binary as in coloniser vs colonised, they are hybrid identities, not split in consciousness, but parts of the colonised can be recognised in the coloniser and vice versa (Childs & Williams 1997). Bhaba further argued that this hybridity is at the centre of disrupting the hegemonic colonial narrative of culture and identity. "Original" natural hair styles (or those that can be traced back into Africa before slavery and colonisation) were seen as the best way for black people to wear their hair. As in

arguments by black nationalists in the 1960s there was a call for the colonised to return to their original identity before the advent of the coloniser. Yet presently, styles have changed. Current natural hair practices incorporate both these so called natural and unnatural styles therefore forming a hybrid culture that integrates the image of the coloniser and colonised.

In essence, with current natural hair practices, hair styles are no longer methods by which black women's bodies are controlled or suppressed (As in the case of hair straightening to conform or to make black hair 'normal') but they are now seen as the many alternative ways which black women can choose to present their bodies; a combination of the old (natural) and new (unnatural). This seems contradictory as one of the apparent aims of natural hair practices was to reject styles that seemed to erase black features (Kenneth 2011, Karspark 2017). Nevertheless, by the current renaming of unnatural styles like wigs and weaves in the natural hair community as protective styling, proponents of the natural hair movement appear to signal an agency. This process is further uncovered as Bhaba posits "every concept the coloniser brings to the colonised will itself be reborn, renewed, reinterpreted in the light of the other's culture (Child & Williams 1997: 136) In the light of this, black women disrupt the power of the oppressive unnatural styles by reinterpreting them as protective styling.

Apart from the expansion of the meanings of available hair styles and hair practices, focus group members reported that they felt a more developed sense of self through natural hair practices. This sense of self-discovery was also connected to an improved stability in their sense of being black women.

***Nava: . . . Yeah, I guess, I feel closer to myself than I did when I was in Ghana relaxing my hair . . . I didn't do it (relax her hair) because I had difficulty managing my hair, I did it because I wanted to look as white and as European, the standard of beauty, at that time. So, I feel like I did change.***

The above excerpt was Nava's response to whether she felt any personal changes when she engaged in natural hair practices. In another instance, participants were also probed about the personal meanings of black hair practices, and they directly connected their hair to their black identity. Agatha and Sasha stated that;

***Agatha: It's getting to know more about yourself.***

***Sasha: It feels like it made me accept my identity, my black identity.***

The participants through these short responses had made connections between hair and identity. Their description conveyed a sense that engaging in hair practices brought them closer to themselves. This in turn showed that participants' decision to embrace natural hair practices was equally about validating their black identity. Anita explains

***Anita: I think we are in a move of pro blackness; it is coming back up across the board. And I think it (hair) comes with it. . . it comes with when you are embracing blackness in a world where it is white dominant, . . . so that is why we end up talking about race because hair is part of race.***

Here Anita openly reiterates the important connection between natural hair practices and race. She highlights that natural hair practices play a significant role in reinforcing this struggle and need for black acceptance.

In the light of this self-discovery in embracing blackness and positive association with hair, participants revealed an alternative side to these feelings of self-discovery. Participants expressed that they felt motivated by the confidence and pride in asserting themselves through their hair practice, but it is not a new sentiment. This is not the first time there has been a movement to change the notion of difference attached to black bodies (Jackson 2000). In the light of this, the researcher questioned focus group members about whether the current ideals of the natural hair movement will last. Members lacked a unanimous answer. However, two out of the three focus groups sessions pointed out that perhaps the younger generation will encounter more solid benefits from this present natural hair movement. These sentiments were mainly captured in the following excerpts;

***Agatha: (continues), so I think in like 2-3 years' time, all our kids are going to be like natural. And our kids' friends will want to be natural.***

***Ria: . . . I feel like knowing more about natural hair and how to look after it and how it is empowering and how it is still beautiful; I would feed that to my children and want her to feed that onto her children as well . . .***

***White: I feel like the younger generation are finding it easier to get natural hair since everything is out there but for us it was just relax your hair... relax your hair...***

White's statement highlighted that with the emerging less emphasis on old values (Relaxing) and instating of new ones, the younger generation would find it easier to embody their blackness in natural hair styles. Agatha and Ria also indicated similar positions. The significance and impact of the current wave of natural hair practices is hampered by the fact that the call for change may only be another short-lived hair moment as observed by Jackson (2000). Dabiri's (2019) position that there is not much to expect from the current natural hair movement again comes to the fore with the uncertainty in this movement. However the notion of a younger generation links to Boyd's (1997) argument that change does not happen in one sweeping moment but by one cultural representation at a time. The current natural hair practice on YouTube appears to follow this pattern, one cultural representation at a time.

#### 6.5 Seeing: the importance of representation, visibility and validation

When participants were asked why they watched natural hair videos, their main response was that they "liked seeing natural hair". Seeing was the most recurrent concept in all focus group sessions and it was used by participants in complex ways. They used the word as a play on YouTube's visuality and also to articulate the importance of representation of black women in society. This involved highlighting the new possibilities for black bodies, linked to an increased sense of visibility and validation in society. As such, it was observed that seeing can be connected to a process of materialising and recreating Othered and invisible black bodies in society.

Seeing as a theme originally relates to positive associations in natural hair practice. This section may therefore be seen as a continuation of the previous one. However, this particular theme, seeing, involves an important less acknowledged aspect of natural hair practice. This refers to the connection between black hair and black representation.

YouTube natural hair videos can be acknowledged as a space for recreating and unmasking the different dimensions and ways of being for black bodies. For instance, Tessi, explains:

***“ . . . it’s different from the hair you normally see. Everybody just has weave and then you see a girl with like long Brazilian hair. It is not your real hair you know; It’s nice, but then seeing someone with black hair, like with proper natural hair, it looks beautiful and the way she styles it and all that. I think it really looks nice and I really admire it.”***

Here, Tessi makes a comparison between what she often confronts in real life and on videos. In her opinion, in reality, there is a proliferation of hairstyles that do not promote black women’s natural hair texture. This is also a position shared by other participants in the group. She concludes that seeing women with “proper” natural hair on YouTube communicates to her a much more valid sense of beauty, which is highly admirable and acceptable. The fact that black women note the difference between styles like wigs or weaves and more natural hair suggest that there exists an understated consensus (among black women at least) that wigs or weaves and other hair styles that appear to conform to the reigning Eurocentric standards of beauty, deprive black women of the opportunity to fully express themselves.

Similar to Tessi’s observation, Sobande (2017) highlighted that mainstream media offered a limited representation of Black women by perpetually representing them wearing ‘wigs and weaves’. Hence from Tessi’s statement, it can be inferred that YouTube natural hair videos provide black women with alternatives to dominant mediated image,

Additionally, the focus group respondents observed that in the representation of natural hair practices they encounter a more robust representation of themselves. For instance, Agatha explains.

***I just feel proud because, they show something we don’t really see outside on a daily basis. My cousin she came to me she was like let’s become natural together, I was like no we don’t have curls. She was like oh we do have curls and I was like we don’t, she was like, see all these that these YouTubers . . . Then I wasn’t into YouTube but then once I saw them having the curls I was***

***just like, oh, this might actually work. So, I went to YouTube and saw that there was loads of them and we just didn't know that they were there.***

The domination of colonial epistemic systems connected to the internalisation of certain myths and stereotypes in peoples of African descent. It was proliferated to the extent that it appeared to keep them in the dark about their own bodies (Fanon 2008). In societies where slavery thrived, for instance the US and Brazil, having African features such as kinky tightly curled hair or dark skin was detrimental to one's survival, success and assimilation in society (Cornwell 2013, Banks 2000). Also, in many African societies which experienced colonialism, Sagay (1983) explains that people were encouraged to leave behind traditional African hair practices to adopt more 'modern' ones. To many, adopting this alleged more advanced or modern practice seemed a rational response. As Fanon in McLeod (2000) explains, "to don the mask of civilisation will mean to cover the 'uncivilised' nature indexed by black skins." (pg. 21) To date many black women engage in practices passed down through such imperial systems. This need to set aside, ignore or sometimes erase African bodies, features and cultures appeared to have been so entrenched that many black women even today have little knowledge about their own bodies or how their hair naturally grows. As stated earlier, many black women have become dissociated from their own bodies as a result. This is evident in Agatha's story. When her cousin asks her to go natural, she contests the proposition because from her own personal experience, black girls do not have curls, they only had straight hair. However, when Agatha was later introduced to black natural hair YouTube videos, she was presented tangible counter evidence against her previous perceptions and beliefs. As such, it can be argued that natural hair practices appear to aid black women to align further with what might be possibly seen as their truer selves. This concept of a truer self is however a complex one because we embody the rules and codes of culture, which we must note, is also always in flux. Identity formation itself also is never static (Hall 2013, Malik 2002, Coleman 2008). However, coming closer to a truer self may be seen as easing the burden of seeing ones hair as different, problematic or unchangeable in Agatha's case. For participants, this served as an encouragement to delve into natural hair practices on YouTube.



Nava further highlights some of the specifics involved in the attempt to reframe and reclaim black bodies via natural hair practices. She explains

***Nava: And it [YouTube videos] is good for like representation, because everyone thinks that black hair does not grow. It is always short, you guys need to have weave to make it long and it's like, no we don't, okay? If you actually take care of it . . . but natural hair is long . . . it is a long process to look after all the time. It is not something that as a uni. student . . . it is not every time I have an hour two hours to dedicate to my hair every single day. Hence why all these protective styles come in. So, it's just nice to see someone that is like okay my hair can be like that too and I don't have to go through all these pains to get there . . .***

Here Nava points out that via YouTube she had not only seen positive representation of black women, but she has been convinced that the myths pertaining to black hair are untrue. However, the latter half of Nava's statement shows the positive intentions of natural hair videos to highlight the good sides of black hair may not be entirely successful. Nava goes on to repeat some common YouTube natural hair tropes; pointing out that although natural hair is beautiful, it requires a lot of effort to care for. This amount of time a student like herself does not possess. These new hair tropes show that while participants dispel old ideas about black hair, they take up new ones from their interaction with videos and these new concepts may not differ so much from the old ones. For example, the belief that natural hair requires a high amount of effort and time is hardly distinct from the old hair stereotype that black hair is complex and unmanageable.

Another way participants used the term seeing is to relate how YouTube natural hair videos brought about increased visibility which led to a form of validation as members of the society. The following excerpts show some of the participants sentiments in this regard:

***Tracy: . . .Yeah, I was agreeing with the fact that representation is a really important thing and for me it is seeing. . . for me I went to a predominantly white school, predominantly white area. When I was growing up, I wanted my hair to be straight luscious and long. It is now, but it is curly, and I have positive words and thoughts which I attribute to it instead of negativity which I feel, you know, it came a lot from seeing YouTube videos and seeing my type of hair reflected in it.***

*Pepper: I posted on a Facebook page for black women, and someone was like, do you have any YouTubers or Instagram-mers you can recommend, and I sent this screenshot of this girl I follow on Instagram who has got like this amazing 4c, 4b Afro, loads of hair and she has loads of videos and the girl was like, 'I literally just teared up and showed my mum and was like, mum, she has hair like mine, I can have beautiful hair too'. And I'm thinking aww that is so sweet.*

*[Laughter]*

*Pepper: 'cos I feel it is a nice way to see yourself reflected in that beauty.*

*Tracy: Yeah, I would say the same thing.*

Baldwin (1999) highlights that the visual is the foremost and primary avenue of making sense of the world. The participants emphasized that through seeing reflections of themselves they begin to feel present and validated as members of society. Works such as Goldberg (2017) and Malik (2002) have increased awareness on the paucity of relatable and balanced black images within western metropolises. Through YouTube images, black women have their images reflected back at them and they begin to see and make sense of themselves.

The role natural hair practices play in black women's visibility is not often considered in the discussion of natural hair practices. Henderson (2015), Tate (2016) and Brown (2018) acknowledge that there is a shift in black women's identity formation through natural hair practices, and this study adds that this shift is mainly situated within the regimes of representation. The above excerpts highlight how pertinent representation is in understanding the rise of the natural hair movement.

Goldberg (2017) recounts how a black woman (called Hart) faced difficulties in undergoing breast reconstructive surgery. Hart in Goldberg (2017) explains, "When I went to get my reconstructive surgery, it took my plastic surgeon two weeks to find one image of a black woman that had a double mastectomy. My image is not one that's there." The lack of images representing black women in the UK is often seen as an issue about equality, but Hart's case shows the damaging nature of the scarcity of black women's images. Her image "was one that

was not there”, in essence this means that the black image was one that did not exist. It can be argued that the inadequate representation of black bodies is not only about inequality, but it leads to the lessening and erasure of blackness and black experience from national consciousness. Berger (1972) argues that seeing is about reproduction and conveying a particular story and experience. Hence the lack of representation of black women brings about an invisibility of black bodies and black experience. If a thing is not seen that means it doesn't exist and as such it hardly factors into one's world view. Natural practices on visual spaces like YouTube enable black women to feel like they have now been factored into existence. Their bodies, experiences, struggles are now being made real in the metropole via YouTube images.

It is important to note that this point surrounding the invisibility and paucity of the black image is not exactly new. However, the difference in this case is that black women through natural hair practices online are actively on a world scale, creating and validating their image and life experiences. It can be argued that this is a significant phenomenon in the current politics of representation. Colonial epistemic systems promote the representation of specific forms of dominant westernised bodies. The continual proliferation of these types of images make them appear like they are the only relevant, important, or even available forms of bodies. Hence as black women take up space on social media platforms, the image of the body is diversified, and colonial knowledge and cultural formation are beginning to be challenged.

Nevertheless, the increase of the black image in both mainstream media and more online may carry other implications. Dabiri (2019) posits that the images of the Other have become more prevalent because it lines the pockets of the dominant culture not because the dominant culture recognises black image as valid and needed. Boyd (1997) similarly supports this position by predicting that as the mainstream representation requires more and more images to fill the ever-expanding visual space, it is inevitable that there will be a minority presence. Although spaces like YouTube remedy the invisibility of black bodies and reinstate the validity of black life and experience, according to these arguments, this increased visibility does not

signal sustainable social change. It is important to note that, however questionable the reason for this increased visibility appears, it can hardly be denied that this increase has impacted the lives and self-esteem of black women.

#### 6.6 Products and commercialisation: the paradox of the natural hair movement.

Another major point of experience on going natural for participants is their involvement with the commercial aspects of natural hair videos. The focus group participants reported that they watch natural hair YouTube videos often for the product reviews. Watching videos for product information particularly is significant because before the popularity of natural hair practices, products which catered for afro textured hair were few and far between (Mintel 2015). Products commonly found on beauty shelves did not always meet the needs of afro textured hair. However, currently with the rise of the natural hair movement, brands like Shea Moisture, Cantu and others have emerged, growing into multi-million-dollar businesses catering for afro-textured and curly hair in the past decade. As such participants see these videos as a valuable resource to navigate the new market of natural hair products.

YouTube is a significant platform on which products are marketed. From the discussion, the focus group respondents constantly reiterate their encounter with product promotion on YouTube and the importance of the commercial activities therein. They initially reported that their encounter with product reviews was a useful aspect of their engagement with natural hair. For instance. Ria explains

***“Apart from learning how to do your hair, some of them will give you suggestions for like hair products and I found that very necessary.”***

Tiwa adds,

***“they help you with the right products that you can buy because some products don’t work for certain type of people and their hair.”***

This sentiment of buying products is repeated across all focus groups sessions. It appears that the participants accept buying products as part of the experience of going natural.

However, on another level, they also encounter problems with buying products;

Sasha explains,

***“I feel like they make me feel more underprivileged. The products they use are so expensive . . . I am from a poor home anyways and I can’t spend 10 pounds on one product it is a lot of money. It kind of makes you feel like, I can’t have long hair because I can’t afford to have. . .”***

Sasha is interrupted at this point with sounds and words of agreement from others in the group and then she goes on to add,

***“I will watch the videos and I will try to use the same products that they use but my hair will still be dry and stuff, so it is just like . . . but my hair is always dry, frizzy and it’s just mad.”***

At this point, laughter from the group follows. Similar sentiments were also expressed. Participants are satisfied that YouTube videos point them to products that can cater to their hair but at the same time complain they are introduced to a world of product peddling where the items are too expensive or sometimes ineffective. Participants admit that the messages on YouTube lure them into the over-commercialised hair culture.

Dabiri (2019) decries the entrance of over commercialisation into the natural hair movement. She describes the consumerism that has entered into natural hair spaces as counter-revolutionary and describes how it undermines the authenticity of the movement as it has become all about shopping for vanity and self-validation. She argues;

The natural-hair movement that emerged from this earlier intellectual and political space sought to avoid artificial manipulation of hair as a rejection of consumerism . . . Today we are product obsessed, and a lot of them are expensive products. . . some which claim to be organic materials which are pricey and often marketed as high-end luxury goods. (Dabiri 2019:138).

Dabiri makes a valid argument about product marketing within current natural hair practices which appears to have become normalised. Nonetheless, it can be argued that this product obsession may not just be a case of vanity, instead it may highlight that those involved with natural hair movement are encouraged to do more buying as the products are presented as solutions to their black hair 'problems'. Hair gurus on YouTube are constantly rewarded for promoting products to their viewers. A symbiotic relationship ensues between hair gurus and hair companies. They take up sponsorship from hair companies so as to continue producing free content on YouTube while the companies take advantage of the millions of viewers on videos, luring in consumers on the premise that their products will fulfil their desires and fantasies for long healthy hair. The following exchange between focus group members reveals this commercial and liberatory tension;

*Nina: So, if you are watching YouTube, you know what to order from Amazon or order from eBay, so you stop wasting all this money on different hair products.*

*Ana: Oh! also sometimes for reviews. Some people say use this or use that, but you want to actually see what it does, so you . . .*

*Tessi: sometimes I'm tired of Shea moisture and Cantu.*

*Nava: Amen (Claps)*

*Tessi: I feel like Cantu doesn't work. . .*

*[Crosstalk]*

*Tessi: So, I am using it to find new products. I am just like moving through videos*

*Nava: I don't mind them doing products for white people; They should do separate products because our hair is not the same.*

***Nina: See that's why; expand your brand but water down your products?***

***That's not right.***

***[Acquiescence]***

***Tessi: My leave in conditioner is like water...***

***Nina: Yeah, it's like you know it doesn't work for all of us, so that's separate***

***...***

***Nava: I'm sure they would have bought it as well; I think they didn't trust that white people will buy it, so they wanted to just . . .***

***Nina: It's not going to work as well, and you are still selling it at the same price and then you water it down . . .***

***Ama: (background) Boycott . . .***

The above exchange is one conversation, but participants interrupt and bounce ideas off each other, so the conversation appears disjointed. Yet, it can be noticed that participants are grateful to find product reviews on YouTube but, at the same time this leads them down the habit of buying and trying, discarding and then more buying. The excerpt also referred to how natural hair product companies such as Shea moisture and Cantu, even when they claim their products are for black women, reduce the standards of their products. They water down their products to the point that they become less effective for black hair, allegedly in a bid to also get more white consumers to buy their products.

Dabiri (2019) is dismissive of the current wave of the natural movement for its over commercialisation may also be contested. Firstly, the scale and power of the natural hair movement is exhibited by its ability to create whole new markets worth millions of dollars over the past few years (Mintel 2015). The movement's ability to influence markets to include black women's needs shows the level of change resulting from the advocacies of the current natural

movement. Secondly, it can be observed through history that black people's hair practices have been intertwined with commercialisation. In the 1920s, Madam CJ Walker was able to become the first black female millionaire in the U.S. due to her introduction of hair straightening practices and other hair care solutions. Her hair care products and training were seen as a breakthrough for many in the black community in the US during the segregation period (Blackwelder 2003). Also, in the 1970s and 1980s, the implementation of "the curl" led many black people into buying Jheri curl tool kits; another hair style which was seen as liberating to black people after the rave of the afro died down (Morris 1989). And in the 1990s, the popularisation of the braiding styles provided many African Americans, especially African immigrants to the US, a vital source of income and livelihood. In general beauty practices can rarely be divorced from its commercial aspects. Women are encouraged to look a certain way and the market takes advantage by providing the tools and products for them to meet these standards. Still, it cannot be denied that there is some irony and contradiction in this marketing and hair dynamic because people were often sold what they already possessed. For instance, the popular Jheri curl tool kit sold the idea of long, luscious curls to black people. This was something that they already naturally possessed if they were not so taken by the prevalent and damaging practices of hair straightening and hot combing. One can observe that this is the same strategy presently with YouTube and hair products.

Moreover, the current popularity of natural hair practices has meant that women with afro textured hair now have increased access to products to cater for them specifically. This can be seen as a positive step in the inclusion of black bodies in society. Also, black women are also benefiting from the commercialisation of hair practices. From making YouTube videos, many black women have found extra sources of income as hair gurus and owners of small natural hair beauty brands. It is true however that some mainstream commercial companies who have previously ignored black women are now buying into the activities of natural hair practices. For instance, companies like Cosmopolitan have incorporated black women's style practices creating a segment on their YouTube channel called *Braid-up*. It is not clear whether



they are truly supporting black women's visibility or are simply riding the trends of the natural hair movement for profit.

Participants also describe other financial aspects of their involvement with natural hair practices. In response to the question on the reasons for watching YouTube videos, a participant explained;

***Ria: I think it's a nice cheap alternative. My wallet does not stretch for weave***

***[General laughter]***

***Ria: And I know how I am, I am not going to be buying it, so, it's nice to know there is other ways to look nice without having to like to break your budget.***

***I'm sorry . . .***

Here Ria explains that learning about hair on YouTube helped her avoid having to spend excessively on weaves which cost between tens to thousands of pounds to buy and install. Weaves were usually the default style for many black women before the popularity of natural hair practices. However, with hair forums and natural YouTube videos, the styling practices have been greatly extended. The following excerpt discusses further the commercial aspects of hair practices:

***Ama: To me it was kind of educational as well because that is how I learnt how to do my hair, do braids and everything because I didn't want to spend too much money going to hairdressers.***

***Tessi: I know***

***Crosstalk [Murmuring from the group]***

***Nava: A whole 90 pounds just for braids. What? Are you going to[put] gold [in] my hair?***

*[General laughter]*

*Tessi: I know right?*

*Nina: Guys they have to make a living too. Do you know how long it is to sit down and make your hair?*

*[Crosstalk]*

*Nina: talking to Jane I understand why they charge so much*

*[Crosstalk]*

*Tessi: But you yourself have never paid*

*Nina: Yea I'm the practice child, they want to practice and doing it on my head, I have a few hairstyles, so you learn.*

*Tessi: exactly you don't know about spending that money*

*Nina: when I was in Australia, do you know how much it was to get my hair done?*

*[Cross talk]*

*Nina: 300 pounds I spent on my hair.*

*[Cross talk]*

*Tessi: I'm from Africa if you want to do your hair it's like 2 pounds*

*Nina: What country are you from, Cameroon.*

From the above excerpt participants explain that in places like the UK and Australia, they find themselves spending a lot of money on their hair. In diasporic spaces accessible and affordable hair care is limited. However, with YouTube videos, participants go through training on how they can personally manage their hair without the need for a professional hairdresser.

As such, notwithstanding that natural hair videos lure viewers to buy products, they also create avenues for women to spend less.

### 6.7 Social connection across the diaspora and new forms of hair socialisation

According to Dabiri (2019) hair braiding is social time for black women. From the focus group conversation, it can be gathered that natural hair practices not only point to the social significance of hair, but it also signals a change in the social processes involved in black hair as well as black life. This section explores how hair practices on YouTube signal the addition of online media spaces to family and peer socialisation with bodily practices . Additionally, it also shows the blurring of various diasporic boundaries to foster the global conversation on redefining black bodies outside entrenched colonial epistemic systems.

Afro textured hair, due to its nature requires more care and expertise for styling compared to less textured hair type. As such, many black women from a young age have the experience of their mothers, friends or relatives having to constantly tend to their hair. Through this relationship with hair, bonds are often formed with others within the community. Hence people of African descent have always used hair as a medium of connection and communicating with others in the community.

The researcher recalls a story she was told, while growing up in Nigeria, West Africa. This story hints at the importance of working on hair as a social activity. Once in a girls' boarding school, one student constantly wore carefully coiffed and beautifully styled hair to the surprise of her classmates and all those around her. None of her housemates or classmates or friends were involved in making her hair and they were not allowed to leave the school either to seek the services of a hairdresser. So, it was a mystery how this student's hair appeared neat, intricate and freshly done all the time. A few students decided to unravel the mystery. They spied on their classmate one night. They witnessed their classmate take off her head, complete the hair style and attach her head back on to her neck. They all fled in alarm and fear. They had found out that their classmate was a ghost.

This story, whether the stuff of legend or exaggerated schoolgirl tales, points to haircare as a social concept. It was considered bizarre for a person to personally work on their own hair within a couple of traditional African societies. This story suggests that such a person had to be a ghost, a spirit or some non-human entity.

Participants further talk about the social elements of hair when they describe how they got involved with the natural hair practices. A majority of the participants pointed to close family relations like siblings and friends as their introduction to natural hair practices:

***Agatha: My cousin. She became natural. I saw her hair and I was like wow you do have curls. I was like I want curls too. So that's it. I went for it.***

***Red: . . .After that I saw my sisters relaxing their hair, so I thought that was the way too. But then one time, my older sister went natural, so I just wanted to copy her, so it just started from there.***

Across the board participants reported their hair choices were connected to what family and friends did with their hair. Agatha even declared the extent to which this occurs;

***"I made three to four friends become natural, just by showing them how much I love my hair always posting. I'm that type of person every 5 minutes 'oh my hair is dry now; my hair is drying now'. Yeah and they just loved it. And they were like, Agatha, you actually did a good thing with your hair, and they are like, send me all the steps and I will do it as well and they did it. And they love their hair now."***

As hair practices have been shown to be important for connecting members to the community, it can be argued that current hair practices also allow a shift in the process of hair socialisation. Hair practices online show the play impact of online spaces on bodily practices which was not the case previously. Where it was usually family or an official hairdresser that handled hair, now women also look to outside information to gain autonomy over their hair; hence hair that

was learned through family socialisation is additionally supported with media socialisation. YouTube natural hair videos now encourage women to become personally responsible for their own hair. It does this by presenting viewers with ways that they can manage their hair and it also contains thousands of demos of women personally working and succeeding in doing hair styles. Participants make reference to this process in the following instance.

***Flo: My older sister used to do my hair until I was about sixteen and when she moved away, I didn't know how to do it, so I had to learn a few of the things to do by myself.***

***Afia: for me it was when my mum stopped looking after my hair so, I started looking after it myself, so I had to learn how to look after it properly.***

Activities in natural hair practices actually now appear to go against this belief that hair must be worked on by others in one's social circle. Videos emphasize black women's ability to solely cater for their own hair. This encouragement is not only practical for many, as hinted in the above excerpts, but it also provides women significant agency over their own bodies. This has positive outcomes but at the same time the beneficial social elements that were originally tied to black hair begin to be lost. Women working on hair themselves suggests a disconnect from the previous ability to use hair as a bonding avenue with others in their community.

It should be added that especially in diasporic spaces, this practice of personal hair styling was born out of necessity. Living in spaces where black bodies are Othered, women often encountered problems finding people who could cater to their hair needs. The participants discussed how, once their immediate family members were unable to work on their hair, they were required to find other alternatives, especially if they had no access to professional hairdressers. Pepper described the lack of access to a hairdresser which led to long agonising waits between hair styles. Tracy similarly tells of how she had to take several buses to find a

stylist, echoing the experience of many black women living in the UK. In a way these difficulties encouraged natural hair practices via online platforms such as YouTube.

Yet in the midst of these difficulties, Black women are introduced to new ideas about hair, and they are encouraged to craft their own image outside previous community or family socialisation. Hence with the addition of media socialisation, there is a change in hair perceptions. Hair is not only a tool of social interaction, but it becomes a tool that black women use to express their agency over the meanings and definitions of their bodies. Thus, natural hair practices signal the change in this hair sociality as they take charge of their bodies, not having to depend on others for their hair needs.

Furthermore, natural hair practices announce a new kind of connection is formed over diasporic spaces. Natural hair practices on platforms like YouTube remove the boundaries of diasporic spaces. Black women in the UK communicate with those in the US, Latin America and Africa, (all over the world). They communicate and exchange ideas about hair. In this way the movement may be seen as a conversation between women in these different, but also similarly connected, spaces. In creating, participating, and experimenting with hair practices, they redefine black beauty and identity.

## 6.8 Conclusion

In this chapter participants provided responses to the question 'how does it feel to be a problem' (Dubois 1999). Their experience includes a range of diverse aspects: positive, negative and often ambivalent. Their identity formation process ranges from revised ways of seeing which dispelled colonial discourse, and a hybridity that allowed the merging of a colonial past and a renegotiated future. The discussion so far highlights that natural hair practices are not about black women overly preoccupied with hair and beauty. The hair practices involve processes of cultural creation and recreation made possible by the freedom of digital media sites like YouTube. Through hair they build a new sense of black identity defined not by society but by their own ideal, which they bring to life through the help of media platforms like YouTube.

The above summarised themes in one way or the other reiterate a few key issues. The focus group discussions revealed that engagement with natural hair practices on YouTube involve mostly, a positive renegotiation of the meanings of black hair and an attempt to recreate and redefine black bodies outside the entrenched epistemic systems of slavery and colonisation. It further entails the creation of new forms of socialisation through hair practices which at once gives black women individual agency but also encourages broader diasporic connections across geographies.

The next chapter focuses on how black hair is constructed in YouTube videos.

# Chapter 7: How do YouTube videos construct black hair?

*Moreover, we tend to privilege experience itself, as if black life is lived experience outside representation. . . Instead, it is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are.*

- Hall (1992)

## 7.0 Introduction

In the above quote Hall (1992) stresses that representation is a focal point to understanding black identity. In a similar vein, this study proposes that the representation of natural hair on YouTube is related to how young black women see their hair and by extension, themselves. This chapter presents and analyses thirty-five natural hair videos found on YouTube.

Natural hair videos may appear as trivial amateur tutorials and vlogs designed for information and entertainment. However, it can be argued that these videos include self-representation by black women rarely witnessed in other media spaces. In the previous chapter, this study found that black women express agency in their representation through natural hair videos. In turn, this process materialises and validates their experiences as worthy and equal members in a society where they are often deemed as Other. As much as being included in the realm of representation is a positive experience, it is crucial to examine the actual content and underlying messages within these videos. Critically examining natural hair videos will reveal how black women construct black hair. As expressed in Chapter 2, black hair is a metaphor for black consciousness. Thus, natural hair videos represent important signifying practices which highlight some understanding of black identity formation and black experience.

Postcolonial theory mainly analyses the process by which the western-self constructs discourses of domination in its representation of the perceived Other. Thus, the focal point of postcolonial analysis was to deconstruct these discourses of western domination. Even in the postcolonial analysis of image and film, the emphasis is to dismantle the power of the imperial gaze. For instance, Mercer's (1999) famous reading of photographs of black male bodies



taken by an artist known as Mapplethorpe comes to light. The analysis shows the ways in which the coloniser's gaze set out to fabricate and totalise the black body as an aesthetic and erotic object. Mercer (1999) viewed the photographs as cultural artifacts which exposed the process by which the imperial gaze produced the black body as something different, exotic and Other. More recently, Basu Thakur (2015) advocated for a postcolonial film critique which advanced away from an emphasis on the processes by which the west constructs the Other, to focus on how these constructions sustain the ideas of the 'west' itself. Basu Thakur's (2015) aim is to uncover this phenomenon, particularly within Hollywood cinematic representations. It is clear that both Mercer (1999) and Basu Thakur (2015), in their study of the postcolonial and the image, still centre the west or the coloniser in its analysis. These studies also express the paucity of research which details the ways in which the Other sees and represents itself. Still this shortage is foreseeable as the Other is exposed to limited opportunities at the helm of representation especially in western geographies (Hunt 2015). Thus, natural hair practices on YouTube may be seen as unique forms of the self-representation by the so called Other which is worth examining.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part begins with an introductory section which briefly describes the nature of the YouTube videos under analysis. Subsequent sections of part one presents and briefly discusses snippets of the content analysis data. This is a superficial description of the data in the thirty-five videos analysed, which allows an introduction to the nature and general elements of the narratives in natural hair videos. The second part of this data includes an in-depth semiotic analysis of natural hair videos. It involves highlighting the cultural practices pertaining to hair in videos and engages with the meanings and connotations of these cultural codes .

Videos related to natural hair practices are commonly found in the DIY or How-to and Style section of YouTube. They are accessible by directly searching for the phrase, "natural hair" on the search bar of the YouTube website or App. Black women are often introduced to these videos via automatic recommendations from the YouTube algorithm or they specifically search

for videos of how to care for natural hair or black hair. The videos feature mainly women, or occasionally men, talking about or demonstrating natural hair care and styling. Videos not only show audiences how to care for their hair, but they also include specific unique techniques, product recommendations and so on. Figure 7.1 shows an example of a common natural hair video interface.

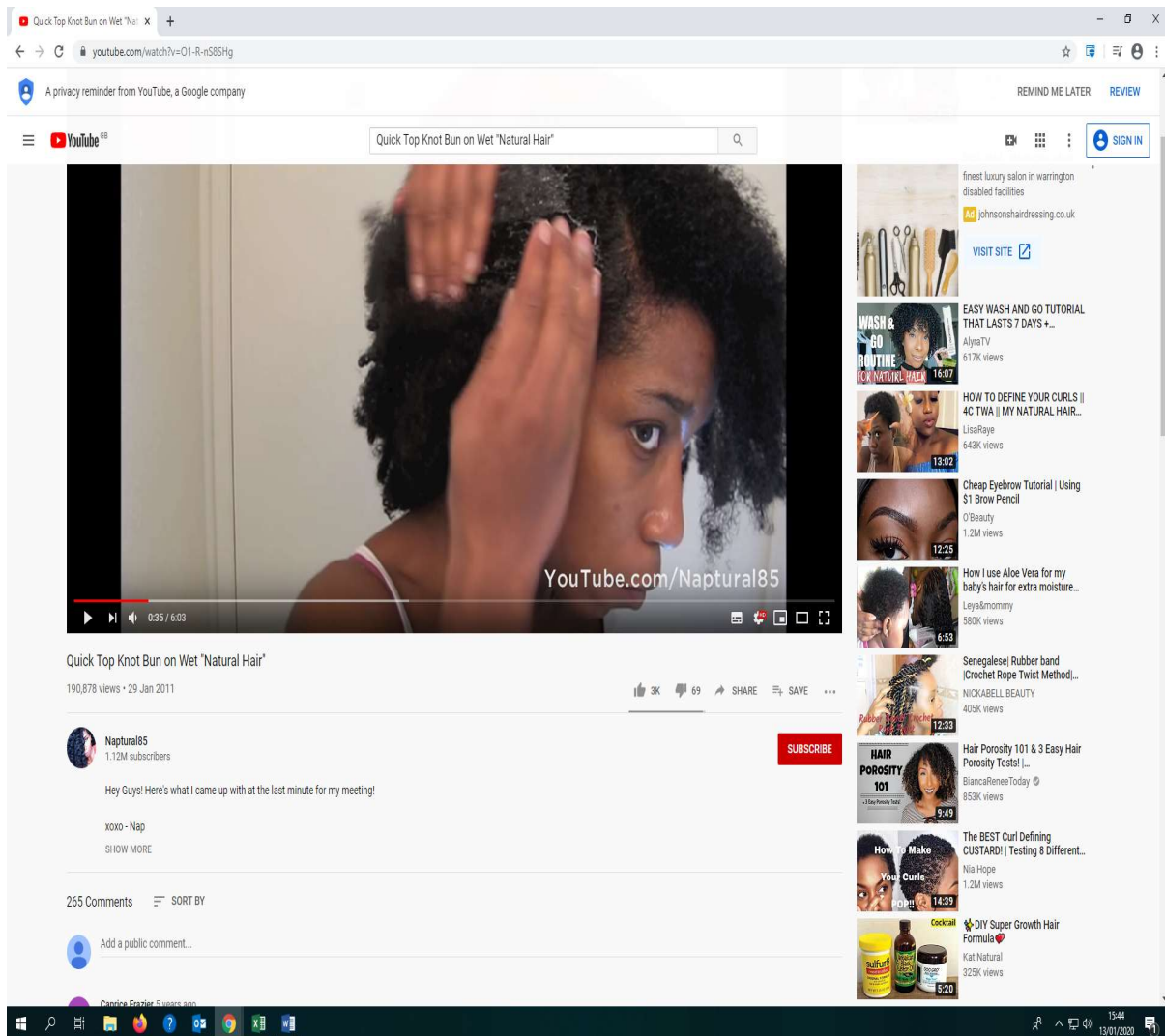


Figure 7.28 Common interface of a natural hair video on YouTube (Naptural85 2011)

At the centre of the page is the video file. On the side are thumbnails which contain links to other related videos. Towards the bottom of the page is the comments section. This study focuses on the contents of the video file as the main unit of analysis. It does not pay attention to the other elements surrounding the video such as other links, and comments. It is argued

that the video files themselves contain the most important information needed to answer the research question pertaining to how videos construct black hair experience.

As earlier noted in Chapter 5 of this work, we will attempt to denaturalise the videos to enable an interrogation of the process by which black natural hair is visually constructed in the videos. The specific focus remains on the following key elements of the text which contributes to constructing the narratives in natural hair videos. As such we ask the following questions. What is the title of the video including a summary (its plot and contents)? What is in the video foreground (include colours)? What is in the background (include colours)? What words and phrases are used to describe hair? What other words and phrases appear distinct in the video or calls the attention of the viewer? What background music is used? And finally, what words are used to address the audience?

The answers to these questions are organised into a coding frame for all thirty-five videos explored (See appendix 7.1). Using NVivo, word searches were carried out within this coding frame to identify recurring themes or concepts. As previously indicated, the emerging and recurring concepts also known as the cultural codes and convention which will be further interpreted for their underlying social meanings and implications in the second part of this chapter. It is important to note that all thirty-five videos are analysed as one text which speak on the construction process of natural hair on YouTube. This pattern of analysing YouTube videos was originally developed by the researcher to suit the needs of this particular study as there is no set methodology for analysing YouTube videos

## 7.1 Denaturalising black hair narratives in YouTube videos

### 7.1.1. Video titles and summary (including description of video thumbnail)

To begin denaturalising videos, each coder started off with noting the title of each video. They then went on to write a short summary of what each video was about. A description of the thumbnail was also included. Thumbnails on YouTube videos can be seen as a vital part of a YouTube video. A thumbnail includes pictures or texts that are embedded with links. They are set up to attract attention or draw curiosity and encourages clicks from site users. On clicking,

users are led to video files. As observed in figure 7.1, they are often on the right-hand side of the YouTube interface. Each video on YouTube includes a thumbnail. The coders were encouraged to include the description of video thumbnails as they are specifically designed to appeal to the audience.

For the sake of data management only the first six of the thirty-five videos; their summary and their thumbnails are included here (see appendix 7.1 for a full list of the thirty-five videos analysed). This decision to only present the first six videos is maintained all through this chapter in order to manage the data volume. The tables in this chapter include entries from both coders, placed side by side. This is done to evidence the similarity and the agreement between coders. However, Table 7.1 is the only table in this chapter which does not show entries from both coders. This is done to allow space management as both coders record identical entries on video titles and their content summary (see Appendix 7.1 and 7.2).

Table 7.1

<b>Vid No.</b>	<b>Video Title and date Published</b>	<b>Video Summary (S) (including description of thumbnail or title cover (T))</b>
1	<i>Structure of Hair - Part 1 The Basics (2010)</i>	<b>Title Cover:</b> Slide with orange text, pink hearts on the top left corner, big orange oval shape with dots scattered in the middle and another image next to it. <b>Summary:</b> The woman talks about a hair follicle at a microscopic level and what gives our hair its colours, as well as why our hair may be dry. She also provides different solutions to fix dry hair.
2	<i>Natural Hair: Aaliyah's Second Big Chop (2012)</i>	<b>Title Cover:</b> Features a lady getting a haircut. <b>Summary:</b> This is a video on a lady getting her hair shaved for a natural look
3	<i>Kimmytube Hair Growth Journey Part 1 (2010)</i>	<b>T:</b> A woman smiling, wearing a black top. <b>S:</b> The woman speaks about her hair journey in terms of how she has been maintaining her hair, what she has been doing right and wrong and what helped her to grow her hair longer and healthier.

4	<i>3 quick everyday natural hair styles (2015)</i>	<p><b>T:</b> Two pictures of the same woman, a side view of her in braids and a front view of her in braids.</p> <p><b>S:</b> This video was a tutorial on different hair styles, she goes through how she applies products and how she parts her hair to show the audience how she completes her looks. She also does a get to know me part at the end of the video to interact with the audience</p>
5	<i>How to get perfect bantu knot out results on dry natural hair: Alyssa Forever (2013)</i>	<p><b>T:</b> A woman fixing her curly hair.</p> <p><b>S:</b> A woman gives a tutorial on how to do Bantu knots, her overnight process and gives tips on how to prevent frizz the next day, she then proceeds to show this process till the end of the video where she shows the final results.</p>
6	<i>What does science say about afro hair? (2016)</i>	<p><b>T:</b> An image of a girl on the left side and a series of black and white photos on the right, accompanied by bold writing on red background.</p> <p><b>S:</b> The woman proceeds to give an educational video on the history of African hair and provides scientific reasoning as to why it is the way it is, she uses a lot of technical formal speech that can be hard to grasp at times.</p>

A scan of table 7.1 shows that most titles of natural hair videos include the word “hair”. The term “hair”, on the title of a natural hair video is not mandatory but this is often the case for many videos. It may be inferred that directly referring to ‘hair’ in video titles allows viewers more ease in searching and locating natural hair videos within the vast content present on YouTube. Also, from Table 7.1, it is clear that the videos are mostly about styling, ‘hair journeys’ and general information about hair and hair practices. The thumbnails also point to hair practices or involve bold graphics that draw the attention of audiences. For instance, Video 1 includes orange text, pink hearts and images and Video 3 involves a girl smiling, which also attracts positive attention. Video 6 involves bold writing on a red background. This use of bold images, colours and positive cues such as smiling works to attract viewers to the videos. The video title and summary are placed here to show what the videos are about and also shows examples of what is usually common with natural hair videos.

### 7.1.2 What is in the foreground (include colours)

After the video title and summary, the next question coders asked was, what is in the foreground? The foreground includes the principal part of the screen, mostly the centre and all the elements therein.

Table 7.2

What is in the foreground (include colours) [Entries by coder 1]	What is in the foreground (include colours) [Entries by coder 2]
1. A woman sitting on steps. She has a rope and a hose. She is dressed in house clothes, no make up. She manipulates the items and does a show and tell	The video features a woman sitting down on a set of stairs surrounded by items. She provides close ups of these items and then proceeds to make something out of it.
2. Two ladies, one sits while the other trims her hair. The subject getting her hair cut off occasionally raises a photo of Solange with hair cropped, she smiles widely at the finished result of her cropped head.	Two ladies, one is sitting down wearing a white shirt and the other one is stood up wearing a pink shirt whilst she is fiddling with the other lady's hair.
3. Lady combing and manipulating hair	Lady showing off her hair length and comparing it to previous videos. Her hair is wet
4. Head shot of lady manipulating hair, seems to be wearing home clothes	Lady parting her hair with moisturiser and is styling it.
5. Girl demonstrating, occasionally products come in focus	A lady showing off different stages to how she gets her hairstyle

6. Head shot with lady talking, occasional micrographs of afro hair, illustration of afro hair shape compared to others	A lady speaking and explaining about the differences with hairs from different cultures such as Asian hair vs afro hair, she provides slides and microscopic photos of hair strands to demonstrate the differences
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From Table 7.2 it can be observed that the main content of the video foreground includes a woman speaking. Out of the 35 videos that were examined 31 of the videos had black women in the front and centre of the visual as the principal subject. The videos presented them talking about hair, making hair demonstrations, presenting products or in the process of making hair. Within the realm of mainstream media representation black women are rarely the main subject of focus, or if they are the main subject they are rarely represented with honesty (Hunt 2005, Malik 2002). The implications of black women being front and centre in the representation is further expanded upon in the second part of this chapter.

### 7.1.3 What is in the background (include colours)

Table 7.3

<b>What is in the background (include colours)</b> <b>[Entries by coder 1]</b>	<b>What is in the background (include colours)</b> <b>[Entries by coder 2]</b>
1. Appears to be the downstairs of a residential home	Stairs inside a house and a table beside the stairs with pink sheets on it.
2. Panels of white doors, suggesting a residential building	White door and it looks like white shower tiles and a glass panel on the left side.
3. Shower bathroom	Beige bathroom tiles with a flower design going across horizontally.

4. Living room with brown colours	Corridor with a tv and other electronics
5. Bathroom	Different backgrounds, white wall with a towel hanging in the background, white windowsill with blinds and a towel rack on the bottom.
6. Living room, tv, settee, occasional microscopic images of black hair, micrographs on the structure of hair	Living room background of a household

Twenty four out of the thirty-five videos analysed feature a background that included some kind of home space. Prominent colours in these spaces included white, pink and brown. The remaining eleven videos that were analysed include a background with a plain or neutral space including colours like white, grey or beige. Generally, a good amount of the background utilised in videos include a home or residential setting; an informal home space, bathroom, living rooms, doors, bedrooms and so on. Lange (2015) noted that YouTube videos are made by mostly amateur producers and non-professional individuals who use the common equipment available to them. In the case of natural hair videos, this background is also common because hair gurus produce videos most of the time with little or no access to formal studio settings. As such, using the home space was born out of necessity. However, it may be observed that this use of home space as the main setting imbues in the audience, a sense of familiarity. It projects a domestic space, which further inculcates a sense of intimacy and comfort between the video producers and audience. This in turn translates a sense of privacy and personality on to the subject of black hair. It can be assumed that this encourages the audience to be more open to the practices prescribed by videos. Brown (2018) also similarly recognised the positive inspiring effects of the home space for those involved in natural hair practices and how it was crucial to form a sense of community among them.



7.1.4 What words are used to address the audience or how is the audience addressed (including tone of speaker)

This section explores how the subjects in the videos mainly address their audience. Natural hair videos or vlogs use certain forms of language to target the audience. This is meant to establish rapport with them. This section explores the nature of this language.

Table 7.4

<b>What words are used to address the audience or how is the audience addressed (including tone of speaker) [Entries by coder 1]</b>	<b>What words are used to address the audience or how is the audience addressed (including tone of speaker) [Entries by coder 2]</b>
1. Explain to you, your hair, look at your fingers, you see, I like to call. Tone: is explanatory and formal (like a teacher in a classroom)	You have what we call', she speaks very instructively and explanatory in her spoken manner
2. Hi everyone, as you can see, Friendly tone, lots of laughter and smiles, waves goodbye to the audience	Hi everyone, tell everyone bye, Bye guys, very relaxed tone of voice, like a conversation between friends, a bit inquisitive at the end
3. People like to see before and afters, some of you	You have also seen the progress of my hair, you know. It features informal speech, the lady is telling a story about her hair progress
4. Hey loves, bear with me, explanatory and directive tone, I hope that's helpful, I hope you guys can understand, you guys can replay the video, over and over again, it wasn't hard at all, I wanted to talk to you guys about a new thing, I wanted to share	Hey, loves, you guys, very instructive in her tone, quite relaxed and friendly, doesn't use any unfamiliar terms

5. You, you don't want frizz, thank you for watching	Unfortunately, you're going to, addresses the audience directly whilst explaining what she is doing, uses informal speech
6. Hey everyone, our hair, I hope you found this video helpful and informative, uses scientific language and explanation	Speech is very formal and informative and uses an abundance of technical terms in relevance to the topic. 'According to', 'and thus', 'you may have, you will' addresses the audience directly.

As observed in the above table, much of the talk directed to the audience is in mostly a very friendly or informal tone. A few utilise formal or teaching tones, but a majority of the videos address the audience in an informal manner using words and phrases like, “hey loves”, “hey guys” and so on. They employ informal forms of speech that friends would often use in their circle. In this way videos create an atmosphere of camaraderie and community with their viewers. Jarret (2010) argues that producing successful content on YouTube requires a literacy based not only in technical skill, but also within the cultural norms and values that animate the site. It appears the cultural norms in this case is the constant need to create communities on the platform. This kind of familiar language with the audience is a form of address which permeates natural hair practices online. The friendliness of tone not only imbues a sense of community but communicates to the audience that the information that they receive towards hair is trustworthy. This kind of language is often inviting in informality, and it can be argued, it encourages the audience to suspend immediate scrutiny of the information they encounter on videos.

#### 7.1.5 Describe background music

The background music in videos is similar to the forms of audience address used. The music is also used to set the tone in videos and continues the encouraging tones so far portrayed around black hair to the audience. Much of this music plays in the background of the videos

with or without the voiceover of the subject. The following table provides a glimpse of the kinds of music for the first six entries.

Table 7.5

Describe background music [Entries by coder 1]	Describe background music [Entries by coder 2]
1. Slow music made of mostly strings and low drums (causes anticipatory atmosphere)	The background music is what I would expect to hear during tutorial videos or video intros, it's upbeat and bright in tone.
2. Upbeat music repeating the words "chocolate box"	It is a fast-paced song with a serene singing voice of a lady and then a man singing. Lyrics are slightly hard to decipher other than the words 'a chocolate box' which is repeated.
3. No music just voice	None just her speaking
4. Fiesta music, island vibe	Sounds like carnival music, lively and upbeat
5. Funky orchestra music	A mix between songs, all happy and loud music. Makes you feel optimistic as well when you listen to it.
6. Upbeat rock and roll intro	No music identified other than the intro music which was a quick rock music.

In terms of music, the majority of videos utilise jazzy, upbeat or hip-hop scores as accompaniments. As such through positive address formats to the audience and lively music, videos portray and inculcate an overall optimistic attitude to natural hair practices.

#### 7.1.6 What words or phrases are used to describe hair

The above sections explained that natural hair videos used elements such as the home space, informal and inviting language and optimistic music to imbue a sense of regularity around natural hair practices. However, the language used to describe hair reveals more ambivalence. It can be argued that the language used to describe hair in the videos is arguably the most common in establishing the 'information focus' of the videos. Among all the categories of analysis, the categories that pertain to language contain the highest volume of entries. Baldwin et al (1999) states that language doesn't just represent and reflect but it also constructs a culture. As such it is important to ask, *what words and phrases are used to describe hair?* Below is an excerpt of the first six videos that were analysed using this question.

Table 7.6

What words or phrases are used to describe hair [Entries by coder 1]	What words or phrases are used to describe hair [Entries by coder 2]
1. Dry, hard to maintain moisture, roof of a home, bark of a tree, hair is fur, moisture	Dry and hard to maintain, moisture, the tootsie centre, human hair is our fur,
2. you have great hair- no I don't, grey hair stresses me out, big chop, Brazilian blow out horrible, big chopped for something different, I love it, may grow it out, may keep it short	grey hair, it depends on the grain, you have a cowlick, big chop, Brazilian blowout, chop the ends off,

<p>3. hair growth, progress over time how hair has grown, hair growth seems to be an issue for black women in particular, myth that hair can't grow, I once believed too that I couldn't grow my hair long, habit when we were relaxed, water is not the enemy but the cure, curls are evidence water has touched my hair. hair was wispy and flat, I didn't like it.</p>	<p>long hair, healthy hair, down their backs and to their waist, hair goals, long hair is healthy hair, hit and miss, retaining hair, better preserved, teeny weenie afro, cycle, hair damaged, shoulder level, dryness, very very dry, moisturised, it felt full, felt like straw, water is what makes your hair elastic, manageable, texturiser, straightened it for a trim, relaxed hair, wispy and flat</p>
<p>4. styles super quick and easy , stretched or none stretched, moisturising , separate sections, high puff, cute and retro , using dark and lovely super softening butter cream, smooth down my edges, managing my hair so it doesn't break, gorilla gel to look more slick, flat twist, cute quick protective style</p>	<p>stretched hair, moisturising, separate into sections, parting in a zigzag, optional, high puffs, retro style, brush my edges, pigtail puff, formulate into a bun, sleek, comb overlook, flat twisting style, bottom part of the twist,</p>
<p>5. three-day old wash n go, product build up ,it's frizzy , worn out and ready to be washed, using a sulphate free shampoo, free to use any brand you want, detangling, awesome for your hair ,</p>	<p>frizzy, worn out, product build up, clean, repair preventing and protecting, detangle time, split ends, smooth straight, tangles, dry, nappy and ratty, smooth ends, smooth roots,</p>
<p>6. channel that helps you grow your 4b, 4c hair to longer lengths, afro hair, hair regime, no biological difference between hair of any other group and afro hair but there is difference in morphology, we all know afro hair is prone to knots, adopt styles that reduce knotting and combing for length, keep up protective styles, our hair wasn't as weak as we thought it was,</p>	<p>knots, damage to the cuticle, kinky hair, straight European hair, natural hair, matted, splits, breakage, black frizzled hair, willy hair, short tightly curled hair, demonic licentious and pubic, looks and feels dry, hairs shine, colour shape and thickness, kinks and curls,</p>

As seen in the above table, a wide variety of words are used to describe hair and hair experience. Both positive and negative words feature, but there appears to be a dominance of negative or neutral words. There is also mention of hair products, and the different states of hair such as 'dry', 'frizzy', 'growth' or 'growing' etc.

Due to the density of the words used to describe hair, NVivo word frequency was utilised to identify the most recurring words in this section. The most recurring words point to the most

prominent patterns in black hair language in YouTube. The following word clouds includes 30 most frequent words used;



Figure 7.29 Word cloud showing most recurring words in hair language

Apart from the most obvious terms like 'hair' and 'natural', the other words found in the above provide clues of the way videos project hair. The word 'dry' came in as the second most used term after 'hair'. 'Hair' appeared 147 times followed by the word 'dry' 27 times and then 'curly' 19 times. Most of the words that emerge such as 'style', 'stretch', 'detangle', 'protective' and so on point to the emphasis on hair care. On one hand, it can be argued that this focus on care shows that the videos do what they aim to do, which is show women how to care for hair, but the fact that the word "dry" comes in at the top for hair description shows how much caring for hair again points to the notion of natural hair as a problem. The first entries in table 7.4 describe hair as "dry and hard to maintain moisture". Natural hair possesses a spiral pattern which doesn't encourage the spread of sebum which keeps hair pliable and moisturised and as such, the hair easily dries out (Dabiri 2019). This is a natural characteristic of this hair type which is remedied by the right care techniques. But the fact that the quality of dryness is highly recurrent in the words used to describe hair links to the issue of talking of black hair as a problem. The focus on the negative attributes of hair, shows that natural hair videos continues

to project black hair as problematic. Although generally videos seem to set out to teach about black hair and show a positive experience of blackness as seen in the previous sections above, it appears the actual preoccupation of videos is to find actual ways to tackle the “hair problem”.

#### 7.1.7 What other words appear distinct (i.e., attract attention or curiosity)

Coders were also asked to record words and phrases which draw their attention or create curiosity. It did not matter whether these words were related or unrelated to hair. Recording distinct words was important because it was observed that other phrases or language which were not necessarily hair focused revealed the methods by which black hair may be constructed. Similar to the other sections, the first six videos are presented in the following table;

Table 7.7

<b>What other words or phrases appear distinct [Entries by Coder 1]</b>	<b>What other words or phrases jump out or appear distinct [Details by coder 2]</b>
1. This thing called hair, melanin, Ph balance	cuticle, cortex, medulla, protective shield, overlapping shingles structure, transparent, covers and protects, the tootsie centre, melanin, intercellular cement, that's a fancy term, the mystery, fragmented, hair is our fur,
2. we don't brush our hair, so we don't know (argument about hair grain), Solange Knowles look, nervous/scared with the clippers	how long have you been natural, why not do something short, something different, Solange Knowles, I was so afraid for the blade or the guard to fall off, I love being natural, I would recommend it to everyone

<p>3. see before and after, special background in ethnicity, you know what, long hair is healthy hair, retaining length, careful technique, no hair forums, no language around hair, cut hair in 1999, texturizer, curl pattern</p>	<p>before and afters, progress overtime, hair growth, for black women in particular, they don't believe we can grow hair long, that's a myth, special background, hair goals, long hair is healthy hair, hit and miss, retaining hair, better preserved, no language around natural hair, teeny weenie afro, cycle, it felt full, felt like straw, water is what makes your hair elastic, texturiser, straightened it for a trim, relaxed hair, wispy and flat</p>
<p>4. rocking this summer, optional but that's how I like to wear this style, getting a lot of request about style, it took me a lot of practice</p>	<p>3 simple styles that I've been rocking, high puffs, flat twisting style</p>
<p>5. none</p>	<p>awesome things to your hair, yeah smooth those ends girl, yo, yes, ends are key, loose knots, revert back to its natural curl pattern, Bam! And that's all there is to it!</p>
<p>6. I'm wearing a wig today, don't let that detract from what I am saying</p>	<p>natural hair community, no biochemical difference, morphology, curvature, straight follicle, cross section of black hair, homo sapiens, race, our hair is the second most important in race identifier,</p>

This is the category where both coders showed a lot of difference in opinion because this question was highly subjective. Both coders possessed different levels of experience with natural hair videos. One coder was more exposed to natural hair terms and practices, while the other had no form of experience, as such this reflected in the entries. This reduces the agreement between the coders. The researcher lacked the time and resources to redo that part of the coding till the coders reached an agreement. Hence to resolve this problem both entries by coders were merged together and analysed as a unit which described distinct terms. An NVivo word query was also utilised to identify the most recurring words in the merged



section. The following word cloud was generated showing 30 of the most frequent words between them;



Figure 7.30 Word cloud showing the most frequently used distinct words

In this case, it appears that the most recurring words again are similar to words used to describe hair. But unlike the last section there are more positive words used here such as “like”, “love”, “growth”, “style”. These words are connected to a sense of care for hair. Thus it can be inferred that natural hair practices also highly emphasize caring for hair. as such it would appear that videos also attempt to fulfil their original purpose which was to teach black women how to care for hair. Despite this, the presence and prominence of words such as “dry”, “long” hair and hair “growth” again calls to the notion of hair as a problem.

In addition, words such as “growth” and “long”, appear in both word clouds that are most directly related to hair language. Afrikanhairgod (2018) argues that despite the videos teaching hair care, they also at the same time, attempt to inculcate into the audience a preoccupation with growing long hair. While watching the videos in the course of the research process the researcher observed that Afrikanhairgod’s (2018) position may be supported because all the emphasis of care was all towards the end goal of growing long hair. The most popular videos on the site are those that teach how to grow long hair. Long hair has a certain significance in

natural hair practices and this concept is further engaged in the succeeding part of this chapter.

## 7.2 The connotations of cultural practices in natural hair videos

This section analyses important and specific key codes or signs observed within the cultural practices of natural hair videos on YouTube. Analysing these codes is a method of further understanding the construction of black hair and blackness in natural hair videos. Throughout this section videos are referenced by their official serial number in this study and the list and links to videos can be accessed in the videography section of this thesis.

### 7.2.1 Hair pride, black solidarity and counter essentialism

As previously examined in the last part of this chapter, black hair is constructed initially in a positive and light with the language surrounding revealing more of a sense of ambivalence as the reference of black hair as a problem seems to recur. Also, the videos seem to convey to the audience tones of black pride or black solidarity in hair. This is evidenced in the fact that natural hair videos online were made first and foremost as black women's response to the societal connotation of difference and otherness attributed to their bodies (Karspark 2017 also See Videos 3 and 2).

Myth busting codes or terms were often utilised in videos. Some of them include "black hair can grow", "it is not that hard", "it is painless and easy" (See Video 1 and Video 22). Therefore, videos are seen as avenues to fashion a non-problematic sense of blackness. They invite the audiences to a form of blackness that one can be proud of. This correlates with focus group participants response to the question of how watching natural hair videos made them feel. Participants directly quoted that it made them "feel proud" of their black hair; in other words, it made them feel proud of their bodies and black identity. This emphasis on pride suggests that pride, or a healthy self-esteem, is not a default feeling when it comes to the way they think of or describe of their hair. Hence natural hair videos carry more appeal because they help black women feel pride in their hair.

However, such engagement is not lasting because it works as a form of counter essentialism. To counter difference and Othering with positive images of black pride is provided as a solution. This pride is however short lived because it continually recalls the existence of the conventional negative ways of seeing blackness in society. Hooks (1992) argues that in race and representation, the concern is to progress beyond debates of good and bad imagery. Counter essentialism does not solve the black hair problem even within the productions of natural hair videos because it constantly recalls the negative associations attached black hair.

### 7.2.2 Continued colonial binaries : moisture and dry, curls and straight, black and white

Furthermore the attempt to overturn the meaning of blackness also perpetuates colonial binaries. These binaries show in common codes used to describe hair. In the earlier part of this chapter, “dry” was highlighted as a frequent term which was used to describe black hair. It can also be noted that in the word cloud (figure 7.2) that “dry” was present alongside “moisture”. This trend is also observed in figure 7.3 with the words “curly and straight” as well. As much as videos are produced as an attempt to surmount the tradition colonial epistemic knowledge of blackness, the constant use of such binaries in the representation reinforce these binaries. Also, in a similar vein, the colonial rhetoric is also present in the talk about “hair texture” also referred to as “curl pattern”. In natural hair videos, there are recurring debates about hair textures, about how they compare to each other (see Video 21 ) or what they look like (see video 23). In black hair representation, hair has been classified in terms of type 1, 2, 3 and 4. Each of these types are said to have subcategories of a, b, and c. Types 1 and 2 are straight hair types and types 3 and 4 are circle hair types. This study deliberately left out this classification in its description of black hair in Chapter 2 because this hair typing system reinforces a hierarchy system with straight hair types being at the top (1 and 2) and circle or kinky hair types below, being described at 3 and 4. Particularly, there is a lot of debate about this typing system especially about the 4c type hair. A lot of people of sub-Saharan Africa especially of west and central African origin are said to possess this stubborn 4c hair type.

Thus many videos are dedicated to dealing with this allegedly least beautiful and complex 4c hair type. It can be argued that this constant comparison and war between hair textures are remnants of the preoccupation with the good hair vs bad hair rhetoric. This rhetoric in turn connects to the original colonial construction of whiteness vs blackness. As such, it can be observed here that the internalisation of the imperial gaze continues to manifest in how the perceived Other represents themselves. The good intentions of natural hair practices have not been able to overcome the internalisation of this gaze. Hence there is a need for people of colour to remain vigilant of such forms of representation that reinforce this gaze.

### 7.2.3 The return of the gaze and new fetishizations

This concept of the gaze is also reinvented as black women are now responsible as the subject in representation. They are no longer objects for the colonial gaze (Yancy 2008), but they become both the objects and subject in viewing and making natural hair videos. As observed in the question of what is in the foreground in videos, the finding was that black women now take the front and centre in their representation. This is a new phenomenon as blackness is focalised via natural hair videos. By talking about their experience and exhibiting first-hand skills black women take advantage of the power of representation to create their bodies. This is an anomaly in the regimes of representation. Hall (1990) observed that colonial regimes of representation had the power to normalise the black body as Other. However, in the case of natural hair practices on YouTube, the regime of representation is exchanged as black women begin to define themselves the way they choose. New media like YouTube appear to project blackness no longer as a secondary way of being but an equally important way of being, as black women fully project their hair experience via the platform. This finding is in line with the observations from the previous chapter related to the theme of seeing. The participants in the focus groups described how they were able to see other black women like themselves and how this was very important to their sense of self. Hence natural hair practices allow the return of the gaze to the Other. Although the return of this gaze does not mean entire liberation as

observed in the previous two sections, black women having power over the gaze itself has been described as revolutionary. hooks (1992:6) argued that it is only when we collectively change the way we look at ourselves and the world that we can change how we are seen. As such owning the gaze is the right step in remedying the problematic connotation attached to black hair and black bodies. hooks(1992) also further suggested that black people take charge of looking in a way that does not reinforce the colonial gaze but that adopts an alternative method which will counter the power of the colonising image. This shows that to take over the gaze is one thing, but overcoming the internalised colonial gaze is another.

Sections 7.2.2 indicates that countering the colonial way of seeing remains a work in progress. This need for progress is further exhibited when we explore one of the ways black women look at themselves within natural hair practices. It can be argued that black hair videos further dissect the black body in its preoccupation with long black hair.

It was previously noted that videos on the subject of how to grow long hair was one of the most popular genres of natural hair videos, drawing in millions of views. Also, the focus group participants on many occasions described how they admired the long flowing locks of YouTube beauty gurus and could not wait to be like them. But then the participants became disappointed when the styles and directions of the beauty vloggers failed in real life. Thus, natural hair videos tend to promote the impression that an ideal image of blackness is only attained through gaining long black hair. It should be noted that long hair on black bodies will not appear similar to long hair in straighter hair types. This is because some types of black hair in its natural state tends to grow naturally in a halo around the head (see figures 2.2 in Chapter 2). Therefore, many black women may never acquire long hair in the common sense of the word but a full and voluminous head of hair which tends to suspend horizontally not vertically. Yet, the audience continually strive towards the common standard of long hair.

Long hair generally connotes a connection to an ideal and desirable feminine in society. Striving for that ideal is not inherently negative however the over-emphasis on long hair in current natural hair practices takes away from the natural hair movement's goal to normalise

the image of black hair and black bodies. Proponents of the natural hair movement are diverted from this goal in their quest for long hair. The focus group participants discussed how they frequently bought products and how they become frustrated when their hair didn't grow as long as they imagined it would by using the products. From this example, the commercialisation paradox (chapter 6 section 6.6) observed in current natural hair practice can be linked to this fetishization of long hair, it invariably hampers the need for social change advocated in the current natural hair movement, and it also appears to undermine the power of returning the gaze to black women as they see and construct their hair and promote their experiences.

#### 7.2.4 Cultivating and earning beauty

This search for long hair also leads to another recurrent code in natural hair practices. This code has to do with seeing black beauty as a thing to be worked for and earned before beauty will be achieved. As previously stated, gaining long beautiful hair is the symbol of gaining femininity and acceptability in society. However, the rhetoric found in natural hair videos communicates to audiences that this is not freely achievable without constant hard work. Here prominent phrases like "sticking to a routine" or "hair regimen" emerge( see videos 20 and 22). Over time, hair gurus have set up rules and methods to follow in order for one to gain long hair. These rules, routines or regiments, although have their uses also suggest a constant need for structuring working and cultivating to achieve what is seen as desirable hair. Also, another term that connotes a similar notion, is the popular term "protective styling". Although protective styling is mainly related to techniques with which women can preserve their length, this sense of preservation also connotes that need of guarding one's beauty as a mean to preserve and to maintain it. Finally, another phrase "the Lazy natural" is another term that reinforces this perception. Several subjects in videos have described themselves as 'lazy naturals' because " they don't do the most" (see Video 26) when it comes to taking care of their hair. In stating that they are lazy naturals they reference a common expectation within

the natural hair circles whereby women are expected to follow certain routines and regimes and also apply certain products, all in order to gain long hair. The idea of beauty being only available after it is earned, further connects to the societal stereotype of the strong black woman; who is ever striving and working to meet with the approval of society. Blackness is not acceptable as a state of being, but it must be fixed or worked on in some way before it is accepted.

#### 7.2.5 Black hair as a process or a journey of transforming the black body

Another way black hair is constructed in YouTube videos is as an important journey or process of transforming the black body. Women who produce hair videos tend to use videos as journals of their inspiring natural hair experience. They not only provide information, but they speak in depth about their time before, during, and after acquiring natural black hair. Speaking about black hair in this form projects black hair as a process or a journey. This journey involves several different stages and even initiation rites.

It can be observed that a good number of the videos refer to terms such as “transitioning” and “big chop”( E.g. see videos 2 and 28). To be considered a bona fide member of the natural hair movement, women are expected to cease the use of chemical relaxer treatments which keeps hair straight. Before the popularity of current natural hair practices, the routine practice for many black women was to constantly apply chemical relaxers several times per year as a way to permanently straighten their hair. To become “natural” one has to completely give up this practice. When this is done a new growth of afro or curly textured hair emerges.

This period of waiting for this new hair growth is known as a “transitioning”. The concept of “transitioning” connotes a literal changing. This is not only in physical appearance but also in one’s mindset towards their hair. Giving up the relaxer is a statement that seems to declare that one will no longer hide their blackness by erasing or straightening their curly/coily hair. Once the individual is satisfied with the amount of new growth, the old straight hair is cut off, leaving only the afro textured hair (See Video 2). This process of cutting away the old straight hair is known as the “big chop”. The big chop process may be seen as a literal baptism rite

where the old hair practices are cut away and a new is instated. Once this rite is complete, practitioners are expected to utilise routine and regimens and products and tools to grow desirable and beautiful long black hair. Nevertheless, renouncing the “old” hair practices for the new ones is not a straightforward process. Giving up relaxer treatments did not mean that those choosing their “natural” hair stopped straightening their hair. They did it in other ways by continuing to wear straight wigs or using mechanical straightening tools like flat irons. One of the hair gurus attempted to explain this paradox by stating that women are free to style their hair in anyway, as long as they liked their hair in its natural state (Video 30). From the researcher’s observations of videos, a way to show that one liked their natural hair was to adopt different styles including straightening as long as it was not permanent as it would be with the relaxer. Hence for one to call themselves natural they are to adopt a mixture of practices which does not privilege only straight hair but includes one’s natural afro texture hair.

Going through transitioning and then big chopping only to continually use straightening practices seems a paradox. However, this paradox connects to the hybridisation of cultures observed in the focus group chapter. It suggests that the black hair as a process of transforming black body is not about a transformation that emphasizes only a positive blackness but a transformation that merges both past and present experiences. The current natural hair practices shows that black hair culture does not mean a casting off the results of the disruptions of colonisation and slavery but acknowledging and including of those experiences, as well as forming new ones. This is also in line with Fanon’s & Philcox (2005) position that the emphasis should not remain on going back to precolonial identities but forming new ones that reflect both the past and present identities as a way of overcoming Othering.

#### 7.2.6 New language surrounding black hair

Finally, as problematic as some of these terms or codes emerging in natural hair videos appear to be, it can be argued that their recurring use in black hair communities, signals the



launching of a new form of black hair language. When the researcher explored the focus group talk, it was found that in the discussion certain notable words are used to describe hair. In focus group 1, two participants have an exchange about; “hair types”;

**Rela:** *I found out too that there are different types of hair, I thought every black person was 4c*

**White:** *(to Agatha), what’s your hair type?*

Other excerpts include;

**Nava:** *uh-huh, I learnt to detangle my hair. I need all the help I can get, like my curls are so annoying, like usually I’m stretched out. They are usually so annoyingly tiny.*

**Nina:** *Are you 4c?*

**Nava:** *Yeah like 4b, 4c. It’s straggly and on top it’s curly. So, it’s like you have to... it’s stressful. It’s hard to find people on YouTube who actually have 4b, 4c hair You usually see 3c, that’s the common one.*

And another excerpt;

**Nina:** *How to detangle, what to do and what products works and when you should comb it. Like, it really did change my lifestyle as well.*

All the words that are underlined above, “curls”, “detangled”, “curly”, can be found in the word clouds earlier generated from videos. Hence it appears that in some ways the language that is prevalent on YouTube videos on natural hair practices make their way into the everyday language of young black women. As such the representation of natural hair practices on DIY

videos or vlogs on YouTube is currently shaping the language and by extension, the way black women see natural hair.

Before the advent of the current natural hair movement words like “dry” hair or “detangling”, or curls were not as prominent in black women’s everyday language of describing hair. The more prominent words for black natural hair in the past included “afro”, “nappy” or even “unmanageable” (Banks 2000). Thus, it can be argued that there was no specific register to describe black hair as most of the time, the normalised practice was to straighten it out or put it away under wigs or weaves. With this finding, it appears that the current natural hair movement provides black women with language that describes their hair. This can be seen as a positive step in materialising black hair culture. Through the language black women begin to alter the way they see themselves and contrive new expressions for the way they describe their hair and black identity.

### 7.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the process by which YouTube provides a space where black women are focalised in representation. By exploring how the Other self-constructs, this study produces an alternative perspective in postcolonial analysis of representation. The videos set out to portray natural hair practices through its use of signs in the foreground and background of videos; positive colours, vibrant music and bold and inviting texts that speak to a positive experience of natural hair practices. Despite the attempt at positive construction, the language in natural hair videos reveals that black women still subscribe to the rhetoric of black hair as a problem. Also, the emphasis on length and straight hair also reaffirms the lingering dominance of Eurocentric ideals of beauty even within natural hair communities. In general, the emphasis on positive representation in natural hair videos ultimately calls attention again to the negative perceptions towards black hair. Hall (1997:274) similarly observes that attempting to positively

overturn the negative regimes of black representation by positive representation isn't always effective. He states;

The problem with positive/negative strategy in representation is that adding positive images to the largely negative repertoire of the dominant regime of representation increases the diversity of ways in which being black is represented but does not necessarily displace the negative. Since binaries remain in place meanings continue to be framed by them.

Despite the videos attempting to empower black women, they still project a sense that black women need to pursue solutions to their abnormal bodies.

We also explored the different dimensions of identity formation process and how it involves a complex combination of continued colonial binaries and internalisation, the return of the gaze, and a sense that beauty is not freely accessible to black women. Yet, these codes and languages signal a progress in the materialisation and validation of black experiences. Black hair is constructed as a process or journey which signals a complex identity. To understand black identity formation, its vectors of similarity and discontinuity must be acknowledged (Hall 1993).

However, it can be argued that as black women attempt to represent themselves, they engage in important conversations about how they could divest their bodies of its Otherness. They form not entirely new but hybrid cultures in black hair and their ways of being. They try, succeed and fail at new hairstyles. They discuss and try new products. They grapple with the old associations of black hair and attempt to reconfigure their meanings.

Burgess & Green (2009:81) noted that YouTube is a potential site of cosmopolitan cultural citizenship - a space in which individuals can represent their identities and perspectives, engage in self-representation of others and encounter cultural difference. This description of YouTube is seen manifest in the outcomes of natural hair practices on it.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

*As cultural critics we should aim to explain the various processes of culture in relation to aesthetics, the economy, and the political system that defines the world around us. Our goal is much like that of the country preachers I used to hear as a child who would be encouraged by a church member to 'make it plain'. In the process of making it plain, we have to evaluate and deconstruct our subjects so as to speak to others about our interpretation of the material.*

*Boyd (1997)*

Thus far, this thesis has attempted to 'make plain' the experience of natural hair practices and to interpret its meaning and significance. This chapter includes concise answers to the research questions, a description of the essence of natural hair experience, study challenges and limitations, as well as recommendations for further research.

### 8.0 Intuiting the natural hair experience on YouTube

This study questioned the experience of young black women in the UK pertaining to natural hair practices on YouTube. The aim was to present an in-depth description of this experience, analyse the construction of black hair (by inference blackness) and interpret the significance of these practices in the identity formation processes of black women. In this project, the natural hair experience on YouTube was examined within two main facets; the audience experience of natural hair videos on YouTube and the construction of black hair in these videos.

The audience experience proved that natural hair practices involves complexity and ambiguity. Participants' accounts related originally to experiencing black hair as a problem. Yet images of different forms of blackness encountered on YouTube videos diversified their idea of the black image and led them to view their experiences as equally valid in society. They also utilise the YouTube platform to dialogue, negotiate and experiment with the production of their bodies and identities. In general their problematic hair experience is combined with new and proposed definitions of hair to form hybrid hair cultures.

Pertaining to the question of the construction of black hair in natural hair videos, it is important to note that the videos originally set out to teach women how to care for hair. However, the images also suggest positive and admirable representations of blackness which rejects the previous societal connotations surrounding black hair. This need to positively represent black hair tends to unconsciously reify the rhetoric of black hair as a problem. The positive representation of black women reintroduces the negative ways of seeing black hair that it first set out to undermine. There is also a fetishization of long hair which sets up a new type of gaze on black bodies reminiscent of the imperial gaze. In utilising terms such as “4c hair and hair texture”, videos also evidence the persistence of the good and bad hair rhetoric which emanated from the slavery period. On the other hand, videos also signify the revolutionary focalisation of black women in representation. Black women take front and centre in their representation and obtain agency within the regimes of representation by reclaiming the colonising gaze. Via natural hair practices, they are consequently included as subjects in the process of looking instead of objects. This is an important step because they begin to attempt a personal construction of their images and identities, separate from the dominating systems of colonial discourse. In this process, they also establish new ways of speaking about blackness by introducing and normalising new forms of hair language. They are yet to overcome the problematic notions of alterity. Nevertheless, they negotiate and experiment in different ways to divest their bodies of its Otherness.

Highlighting the significance of the natural hair experience can be characterized as a process of intuiting the essence of that experience within the phenomenological tradition (Grbich 2013). Intuiting the essence of an experience is seen as the final stage of doing phenomenological research where the key aspects of what makes up an experience is interpreted and captured in a succinct description (Moustakas 2011). In this case, the experiences of natural hair practices on YouTube can be intuited or interpreted as a series of different but interconnected dialogues or conversations among black women. Firstly, natural hair practices can be seen as a conversation highlighting the problematic experience of black bodies especially in spaces or

societies whose foundations are set on the colonial epistemic model. The Othering of black bodies remains a contemporary issue, as observed in the fact that women who claim to be natural continue to see their hair as a problem. Black women continue to grapple with self-consciousness because of their perceived difference. They gain information from engagement with YouTube videos which appears to proffer solutions. Yet, these solutions perpetuate the problematic ideals surrounding hair.

Secondly, this experience can be intuited as conversations about forming identities outside the binaries of the western self and the Other. It mobilises participants to reject the colonial and epistemic model which has positioned blackness as inferior, different or invisible. Natural hair practices mediate blackness as a valid and visible experience apart from Othered identities. It can be argued that this quality of 'seeing' in natural hair practices which leads to the materialisation and validation of blackness is the most powerful element of natural hair practices. In the process of seeing, black women feel their agency in their ability to construct new ways of identity formation.

Lastly, this conversation related to divesting black bodies of Otherness, is further expanded across geographical space and history within the diaspora. Through natural hair practices black women in the UK exchange ideas with women in the Americas or Africa about alternative ways of being. They explore different hair practices and develop new ways to talk about black hair and blackness. These conversations reveal that dismantling colonial discourse, which continues to construct black bodies, remains a key and urgent concern in Othered spaces all over the world.

The following section summarises the key findings in this thesis and its contribution to knowledge.

### 8.1 Key findings and contribution to knowledge

Studies pertaining to black hair and the natural hair movement have explored the subject from different angles. Specifically, Henderson (2015) argued that natural hair practices related to allowing women freedom from family and societal pressures to appear in a specific way. Sobande (2017) in her study of the representation of black women, highlighted the positive and liberating nature of black women's self-representation through natural hair vlogs. The literature exploring black hair and natural hair practices in general was found to be bifurcated. They were either on one hand, highly optimistic regarding the empowerment and liberation in natural hair practices (Tate (2016), Brown (2018), Sobande (2015)). On the other hand, they were overly punitive of current natural hair practices (Dabiri 2019). Terms such as empowerment and liberation can be included as valid aspects of natural hair practices however they are ultimately reductionist in their description of natural hair experience. This study contributed by bringing attention to the interstices of natural hair practices. It found that black women who engage with natural hair practice face more of a negotiation process rather than a total resistance of societal connotations of blackness. They grapple with equally positive and negative aspects of the hair experience. This is exemplified in the hybridisation of styles within current natural hair practices. Styles which were seen as aesthetically oppressive are now renamed in the current hair movement as "protective styling". This process signals black women's agency in their ability to redefine the way that their hair is described. These change in hair language, partly made possible via mediums like YouTube, have real implications in black women's everyday lives.

Also, phrases such as "empowerment and liberation" tend to provide the impression that participants in this movement have successfully overturned the negative connotations of black hair. However, the account of black hair experience and video analysis in this study highlights that experiencing hair as a problem continues to be part of the natural hair movement. Nevertheless, this is not ignoring the small positive steps black women have taken in the process of divesting their bodies of Otherness.

Furthermore, the most common perspective by which most previous works have investigated black hair practices emerge from a feminist (Henderson 2015) or womanist (Tate 2016) perspective. The feminist angle is equally important since natural hair is ultimately a concern about black women. However, feminism offers a limited view of natural hair practices. Exploring natural hair practices only via the feminist lens ignores the concerns, meanings and the significance of natural hair practices within a wider cultural context. Feminism fails to expound on the specific origins of the movement, which is the raced black body. As such this study broadens the understanding of natural hair practice by situating it as a contemporary race issue. It demonstrated that the current emergence and recurrence of movements such as the natural hair movement remains a symptom of postcoloniality. Postcoloniality as previously discussed refers to the outcomes and experiences of the colonial aftermath. Hence natural hair practices can be connected to the many responses to the established and normalised colonial epistemic model. This study emphasizes that speaking about black hair connects to the ongoing attempt to transcend the legacies of colonial knowledge systems and ways of seeing which created the notion of raced bodies.

Furthermore, this study contributed by centring the importance of representation within the study of natural hair practices. Most studies which analyse the movement fall short in fully acknowledging the importance of representation in the current discourse of black hair practices. A key finding in the focus group discussion is that the natural hair experience greatly relates to the concept of “seeing”. Seeing is both a play on YouTube’s visuality and the emergence of black women’s bodies from unrelatable representation in mainstream traditional media. The previous limited representation of black women led to an invisibility which shuts out the validity of black bodies and the black experience in postcolonial spaces like Britain (Malik 2002). Natural hair videos, therefore, become an avenue for black women to see and create images of themselves as valued members of society. As such it can be argued that “seeing” black bodies may be viewed as the most principal form of empowerment that black women experience in current practices of the natural hair movement.



Also pertaining to the subject of representation, accounting for black women's experience in this movement promoted understanding of the processes of black women's self-representation. Bradley (2015), Jackson (2006) and Nakamura (2008) connected new and digital media spaces to opportunities to reclaim the images of the Other. As such this study further built upon the work in these studies by interrogating the actual processes and outcomes of such a representation. It uncovered that black women's self-representation included their continued internalisation as the Other. However this flaw of internalisation also does not deter some of the new ways of seeing and talking about blackness brought on by this self-representation.

Likewise, the focus on representation in this thesis exhibits a practical example of the contribution of media spaces like YouTube in the contemporary progression and cycle of cultures. The study discovered how YouTube serves as important experimental and dialogic spaces for black women to negotiate their hair practices. The provision in this platform is significant for forwarding the conversations black women have about their hair and black experience. As such, platforms such as YouTube allow the diversification of representation from which alternative voices may be equally heard. It can be argued that this current natural hair movement is different from the other black hair movements in the past because it coincides with the institution of powerful digital media platforms such as YouTube. This has allowed the ideas of the movement to gain traction and occur simultaneously in different diasporic spaces. The movement's impact has been more substantial because it allows groups such as black women to tap into the regimes of representation.

In summary, by documenting and analysing natural hair experience, this study not only raises awareness of a unique cultural and media phenomenon, but it also deepens understanding of the splitting and crossings of black women's identity formation process in 21st century Britain. It gives accounts of the actual process involved in this so-called natural hair movement. It also provides answers to some of the unanswered questions in the scholarship regarding this phenomenon such as who is natural? Or what is actually involved in the natural hair

movement? The account in this study shows that being natural is mainly attributed to negotiating with one's blackness in society. Acknowledging both the old oppressive styles and new styles to form hybrid identities which include both the past and present realities of blackness.

## 8.2 Study challenges and limitations

This section discusses the study limitations. The focus group process is a particular area of focus.

Due to the lack of set procedures found in qualitative research compared to quantitative research, the researcher has taken the bulk of the decisions on the study design. Through a creative and reflexive process, the researcher adopted a mixed method style involving qualitative approaches such as phenomenology, focus group, semiotics and content analysis.

A specifically challenging aspect in the research process was deciding how to analyse the YouTube videos. YouTube video analysis has no established methodological guidelines (Thelwall 2018). As such this work utilised semiotic and content analysis which are methods that are both open and fluid enough to apply to any form of data including visual materials like YouTube videos.

The researcher however found that the video analysis process was weighed down by a long and cumbersome coding process which encountered additional problems with coder agreement. At this point, it appeared using only semiotics (which was about taking notes of the recurrent codes and signs) for interpretation would have sufficed. Yet, the process of going the long route in doing the coding tables provided tangible evidence which backed the conclusions of the study. This evidence would have been difficult to present if the researcher only performed a semiotic style of analysis. This is because semiotics has sometimes been accused of being a form of "armchair" analysis which overly relies on the positions of the researcher (Cutis & Curtis 2011). Hence, although it was initially difficult to reconcile both methods, combining content analysis and semiotics enabled the researcher to produce a standard method that could be applied to understanding any YouTube visual material.

Furthermore, the focus group sessions were similarly enlightening in this study. The research faced particular difficulties in recruiting participants. This was especially in getting focus group members to gather in one location at the same time. Many participants who had promised to show up dropped out often last minute for various reasons. It was observed that only those who were strongly interested in the topic of discussion found time to attend the meetings. In one way, this calibre of participants turned out as an advantage because the more personally interested they were, the more willing they were to share and talk openly about their experiences.

It was also noted that a number of potential participants were not able to participate due to the political nature of the topic. The researcher assumed that the call on people to talk about their black experience involved a level of vulnerability which many were not willing to broach. The solution to this was to provide enough time for recruitment and to ensure that participants understood the reasons contributing to such a discussion was important. In retrospect, allowing prospective participants to observe ongoing focus group sessions would have encouraged others to participate in subsequent sessions. The researcher came to this conclusion because at the end of focus group sittings participants often talked about the benefits of the meeting and declared that they felt unburdened talking about the subject. Speaking about their experiences was an outlet for them to broach such important issues which are not commonly discussed in day-to-day settings. Recruiting participants for focus group discussions on a sensitive topic therefore requires time, between several weeks to months.

Difficulties also arose in the focus group process because the researcher also doubled as the focus group moderator. The researcher and moderator are two different roles that require two different perspectives. It was therefore difficult for one person to embody those two roles at the same time. It took additional effort and a sharpened awareness for the researcher to succeed as the moderator because as an inexperienced moderator, the researcher particularly had to be aware of how her judgement impeded the discussion process. For

instance, the researcher in the capacity of the moderator often came across situations where she judged a participant's answer to a question as unhelpful and therefore did not probe the participant further on their point. However, when the researcher stepped back and analysed the transcripts, she saw that there were missed opportunities with certain participants. Also, in the capacity of moderator, the researcher struggled with finding a balance between allowing the conversation flow because of time constraints and also ensuring that the participants were not led in the line of discussion. These limitations however did not cause too many problems because the researcher became more versed in the capacity of the moderator as more sessions were conducted. Pertaining to the issue of missed opportunities, this was resolved eventually since participants tended to repeat themselves and expand upon their previous points later in the discussion.

It is also important to note that the small sample sizes analysed in this study means that the findings are not generalizable. However, the importance of the findings here can be seen in the contribution it makes to the broader scholarship on black hair, extending the work of scholars such as Mercer (1987), Dabiri (2019) among others. This study was also conducted by a black woman and therefore, there are bound to be questions around bias as establishing the relational distance between the researcher and the subject is notably challenging. Grbich (2013) explains that bias is unavoidable within research because every researcher emerges programmed with a set of world views, beliefs, experiences and conditioning. According to the existential phenomenology method which this study adopts, the researcher's connection to the study may be seen as a good opportunity to enrich the research. The most important consideration is for the researcher to remain aware of their bias. This is opposed to the other phenomenological methods which suggests that a researcher's previous experience of a phenomenon can be thoroughly expunged as suggested by the process of bracketing discussed in Chapter 5. In the case of this study, the researcher's prior experience of the phenomenon allowed a substantive understanding of the subject.

### 8.3 Future research recommendations

This study highlights how cultures today are still shaped by the legacies of the epistemic systems of slavery and colonialism (Quayson 2002). More research is required to explore how these systems continue to influence ways of seeing, in the daily life and bodies of both the colonised and coloniser. This process should not be reduced to counter essentialism (how the so called Other is better than the western self), but it should be a process of diversifying the ways of seeing and being in the world; representing reality in ways which do not reinforce colonial values.

This study explored the shifting nature of black representation as well as the bearings of representation in black women's everyday life. Thus, it is important to further examine the contemporary depictions of blackness particularly the representation of black women in current media such as films, tv shows and documentaries.

It would also be insightful to explore the natural hair movement in the African continent. Particularly in light of the continent's history with slavery and colonialism and its cultural and political framing as the ultimate Other. It is important to note that blackness and black identity also operates differently in that space. As such, it would be vital to ask; what are some of the meanings, tensions and negotiations that attend natural hair practices in that part of the world?

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## Appendices

### Appendix 6.0 :Participant Consent Form

#### **Project Title: YouTube, DIY and the Body Culture: A Case Study of the Black Hair Movement**

**Description:** During the black power movement of the 1960s, African Americans bravely wore their afros as a symbol of their black pride. This movement eventually came to an end. In 2016, the US military finally lifted its ban on African Hair styles such as Twists and dreadlocks. Thanks to the growth of the natural/black hair movement, more and more black people (women especially) are embracing their kinky hair. Has the story of black hair then reached its denouement in the midst of empowerment from the current wave of the black hair movement? This project tackles this question through the lens of post-colonialism. It also interrogates the production and consumption processes behind black hair related DIY videos on YouTube. It questions how DIY YouTube videos currently constructs the concept of black hair, seeking to expose its underbelly through semiotics and content analysis. Also, by carrying out focus groups, it seeks to answer how the majorly young, black female target audience (specifically those in the UK) interpret and apply the videos.

#### **Please fill in the details below to express consent for participation in this research**

.Data from this focus group will be published by the researcher in a dissertation, peer reviewed paper and conference paper. Please direct all questions to the researcher if any. For any further queries or ethical concerns please email the researcher; [ftissa@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:ftissa@uclan.ac.uk) or the research office; [roffice@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:roffice@uclan.ac.uk).

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the description for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions

**Please initial**

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason

3. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in confidence

4. I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study at a period of exactly 1 month from the time of this focus group activity

5. I agree to be filmed/recorded (delete as appropriate) and for anonymised quotes to be used as part of the research project

6. I agree to take part in the research project

Name of participant: ..... Signature of participant: ..... Date: .....

Name of witness: ..... Signature of witness:.....

Name of Researcher: ..... Signature of Researcher: ..... /  
Date:.....



## Appendix 6.1: Focus group questions

### Session 1 questions

1. What mediums do you usually use for getting your hair information? What kind of media do you go to?
2. How did you begin watching black hair videos on YouTube? Can you remember?
3. Are there any YouTubers you watch in particular?
4. Are there any reasons you enjoy watching black hair videos?
5. In what ways do you watch black hair videos. So, do you watch them by yourself, with friends for instance?
6. Do you have any specific reasons for watching videos?
7. Think back to times you have been watching hair videos, how did they make you feel usually?
8. Did the videos affect your general body outlook or style outlook? If so how?
9. Compare before you started watching videos and after you started watching videos, was there any difference to you personally?
10. Did watching videos change you? If so how do you think these changes will last?
11. Do you think you will keep watching black hair videos?
12. Any other points wish to add about black hair videos?

### Session 2 questions

1. What mediums do you go to get your hair information?
2. Think back to the times you watched videos, how did they usually make you feel?
3. So how did watching videos affect you personally? Did anything change say personal style or thinking
4. What specific or general messages do you take from watching videos, specific ideas
5. Do you feel pressured look a certain way by watching videos?
6. Do you feel like YouTube is about style and beauty or do you feel it is something more?
7. Do you feel watching YouTube videos changed you?
8. If you changed in anyway, how do you think these changes will last?

### Session 3 questions

1. What mediums do you go to get your hair information?
2. Think back to the times you watch videos; how did they usually make you feel?
3. How did watching videos affect you personally? Did anything change say personal style or thinking
4. What specific or general messages o you take form watching videos, specific ideas
5. Do you feel pressured look a certain way by watching videos?
6. Do you feel like YouTube is about style and beauty of do you feel it is something more?
7. Do you feel watching YouTube videos changed you?
8. So if you changed in anyway, how do you think these changes will last?

## Appendix 6.2

### Appendix 6.21: Focus group 1

#### Transcript focus group 1

Before the questioning began, the moderator explained the research project with room for questioning and the group signed the consent sheets. Then the group played an icebreaker game called HA-HA-HA. It involved passing the words HA-HA-HA round in a circle, the first individual laugh or make funny noises, lost and was kicked out of the circle. It ended with lots of laughs, which loosened up the group.

**Key** for focus group: Mod stands for moderator; Participants are (given code names for anonymity): Nava, Nina, Tessi, Ama, Ana and Ria.

**Mod:** Okay Let's begin. Please feel free to answer how you deem fit. There is no wrong answers, you can always contribute, even though it might not be the same thing the other person is saying, and we can speak one at a time.

**Mod:** *what mediums do you usually use for getting your hair information? What kind of media do you go to?*

**Nava:** YouTube

**Nina:** YouTube and Magazines like You know, the black hair magazines that is always sold at Nisa?

**Mod:** Is it?

**Nina:** Yeah, so, once in a while, I used to buy those to see what they say about products and stuff

**Mod:** Anyone else?

**Tessi:** YouTube, and there is this website (forgot the name) they have different articles about black hair. Like a girl will try a product and then she talks about how she did this or that. But YouTube is the main one.

**Mod:** *Ok. Next question is; How did you begin watching black hair videos on YouTube? Can you remember?*

**Nava:** I think when I was transitioning.

**Nina:** Same. When I decided I want to be natural, because I was in the transitioning stage and I was like, I want to take care of the curliness that is coming out of my head. So . . .

**Mod:** So how exactly did you find out about YouTube videos on Black Hair?

**Nina:** Well because YouTube is a forum in general and you just watch it for music and then you have like . . . uhm. . . how to do this, how to do that, so it was like. Let me see if there are any videos about how to be natural or how to transition and that's when I decided to be . . .

**Ama:** For me, I used to be relaxed. I was relaxed and, and I was like I didn't want to relax my hair, so I started looking at how to do my hair myself and then from there I was like, might as well go natural and cut off this relaxed bits. Then YouTube videos . . .

**Ana:** and Uhhh . . . My sister introduced me to it . . .

**Mod:** Oh!

**Ana:** Since she was always watching them, and I was like. Oh what is this and I started watch it as well

**Mod:** That's nice. Anyone else want to add?

**Ria:** Uhm, it was actually **Nina**.

**Mod:** Oh!

*(group Laughs)*

**Mod to Nina:** Oh you were sharing the love (laughs)

**Ria:** Originally, I was already natural, but I hadn't sought any advice about how to go about my hair or any products and she would be like oh, I watched this person or that person. So . . . yeah (*Van 2 also acquiesces in the background*)

**Mod:** so any . . .

**Tessi:** For me it was my flat mate (*Mary-Jane*). She told me the benefits of being natural and all that. We used to talk about it, and I was like why not let me go and find on YouTube too.

*Mod: Oh cool. So any YouTubers you watch in particular?*

**Ana:** Chizi Duru

**Mod:** Yeah I know her, (gets up) Sorry I'm just checking if this guy is working? (*checking the camera filming the session*) Yeah continue... continue

**Nina:** Uhm . . . Fusion of Cultures, she is Ghanaian, but her hair is on point.

*All Laughs*

**Ama:** Her hair . . . is on point- hair terms

**Let:** No it is not she has got

*Crosstalk*

Laughter

**Nina:** No, no, no, she is Ghanaian

*Unintelligible, More laughter*

**Nina:** A lot of the YouTubers are African American and if you know their backgrounds and their history a lot of them are like mixed?

*(Group cuts in, unintelligible crosstalk)*

**Nina:** . . . now that's why I have to go and find out if they are actually African, so I know that this is (*taps table*) real . . .

**Mod:** Any other YouTubers?

**Ria:** Uhm.. I had to look her up. . . Naptural 85..

*(Some members in the group acquiesce, yeah)*

**Mod:** So . . . we concluded that the mediums we usually use. . .

*General Laughter. . . Moderator's chair losses control and she almost topples*

**Mod:** My chair has a mind of its own *(laughs)*

**Ria:** There was actually a YouTuber that was very popular, her name was Brianna Rie

**Members cut in:** Oh

**Ria:** The braiding tutorials that was just so complicated.- hair in real life

**Cat 1:** did she have a book or something . . .

**Son:** Yeah she did

**Ama:** About how to be natural and then she relaxed her hair, I was like Bye

*(General laughter)*

**Ria:** I just couldn't follow her because her tutorials was too complicated

*(Crosstalk)*

**Tessi:** . . . You will just put gel, do this and then everything is laid, Man when I do that everything . . .

*(More crosstalk)*

**Mod:** *(cuts in)* So, in general we agree sort of, that we use YouTube mostly?

**All:** Yeah.

**Mod:** *Ok, That's nice. So, any reasons you enjoy watching black hair videos?*

**Tessi:** It's popping man, I mean the curls . . .

**Mod:** what do you mean popping exactly?

**Tessi:** Like, uhm, it's different form the hair you normally see. Everybody just has weave and then you see a girl with like long Brazilian hair. It is not your real hair you know, it's nice, but then seeing someone with black hair, like with proper natural hair, it looks beautiful and the way she styles it and all that. I think it really looks nice and I really admire it.

**Nava:** And it is good for like representation, because everyone thinks that black hair does not grow. It is always short, you guys need to have weave to make it long and it's like, no we don't, okay? If you actually take care of it . . . but natural hair is long . . . it is a long process to look after all the time. It is not something that as a uni student . . . it is not every time I have an hour two hours to dedicate to my hair every single day. Hence why all these protective styles come in. So, it's just nice to see someone that is like okay my hair can be like that too and I don't have to go through all these pains to get there . . .

**Ria:** I think it's a nice cheap alternative. My wallet does not stretch for weave

*(General laughter)*

**Ria:** And I know how I am, I am not going to be buying it, so, it's nice to know there is other ways to look nice without having to like to break your budget. I'm sorry . . .

**Mod:** Any one like to add something else? Why you enjoy watching ...

**Ama:** I watch a lot of like YouTubers. I like to see how like each person's hair; you know how they do like 3 years natural, like the length check and everything. It is interesting how natural, they are all probably the same texture, but their lengths are different? So, it just

makes me like, uhm . . . in a few years, yeah, I would probably get there. Yeah . . . everyone is different.

**Mod** : Like a confidence thing . . . yeah, which is good.

*In what ways do you watch black hair videos. So, do you watch them by yourself, with friends?*

**Ama**: I watch it by myself, I have a playlist on YouTube dedicated to hair.

(Cross talk)

**Tessi**: . . . like 90% of the things are hair

**Mod**: *So are there any specific reasons?*

**Tessi**: I do it before I sleep at like 2am, I don't think I will call anybody like do you want to watch? . . . (laughter)

General laughter

**Ana**: Sometimes when I'm like oh, what should I do with my hair tomorrow? I'm like let me just check

**Nina**: I just like learning to be honest. It's just nice to see all the different things that you can do

**Van1**: It's only when I'm going somewhere that I care- for spectacle

(General laughter)

(Crosstalk)

**Mod**: like if you are going out?

**Van1**: . . . Like if I'm going out-out

(Cross talk)

**Nava**: Not going out to a club. . . just going out of my house; to a place that there will be lots of people.

**Mod**: So really watch them when:

**Van 1**: Yeah maybe the night before because I'm last minute like that.

(General laughter)

**Cat 1**: I do it the night before if I am taking out my braids. If I know I am going somewhere the next day, otherwise I'm just putting cornrows and then wear a hat. But, if I'm not going somewhere then I would look at videos, for inspiration and like get the curls popping.

(Cross talk)

**Mod**: Anything else? (no replies) Okay

*Think back to times you have been watching hair videos, How did they make you feel usually?*

**Tessi**: Oh . . . It actually gives me hope. Because I shaved my hair. Can't remember was it 2006 or something like that. And then after that it stopped growing, it was just the same length every time and then I don't have a lot of hair on my head too. And then people were always laughing at me and then I started watching the videos and I saw those girls and how

they grew their hair and all that. I was like wow, so it is actually possible for me too. Like my hair can grow and it can look good and all that like, yeah.

**Nava:** Sorry what was the question again.

**Mod:** Think back to times you watch videos, how did it make you feel? What was the feeling that came with watching videos?

**Nava:** Uhhh... I didn't feel alone I guess. Yeah, it's so easy to feel like that when you are in the UK. Pre; Pro-black movement, there wasn't that kind of unity. So yeah, it didn't make me feel lonely and confused. Okay

It didn't make me feel confused

**Mod:** Van 2?

**Nina:** It's 50/50 sometimes it's like this looks so tiring.

(General laughter)

**Nina:** other times I do really like the way . . . it looks fun. I actually like the way she has done this, because they talk while they are doing their hair, so they talk about other stuff, so it's like okay yes, it's like having a conversation with someone. Like in the room as she is talking and doing her hair, so it's fun. Sometimes it's tiring cos it's like, I'm not getting it the way you are getting it, like it's not happening. So Yeah.

**Ria:** For me it was like eye opening. I just lived my normal life, daily. I didn't know much about like other types of hairstyles you can do except the basic ones?

**Mod:** yeah

**Ria:** so like, looking at some of the videos I'm like looking the different styles of braids, different texture, different material you can put in your hair, like yarn braids for instance. I was like oh, okay? It was just quite fun to see all the different things that was possible.

**Mod:** Any other ideas?

**Ana:** Uhm it was just interesting, cos like also when you watch it, it is kind of like I don't know, soothing?

All: Yeah' (laughter)

**Ana:** sometimes yeah

**Ama:** To me it was kind of educational as well because that is how I learnt how to do my hair, do braids and everything because I didn't want to spend too much money going to hairdressers

**Tessi:** I know

Murmurings from the group and crosstalk

**Nava:** A whole 90 pounds just for braids. What? Are you going to gold my hair?

General laughter

**Tessi:** I know right?

**Nina:** Guys they have to make a living too. Do you know how long it is to sit down and make your hair?

Crosstalk

**Nina:** talking to Jane I understand why they charge so much

Crosstalk

**Tessi:** But you yourself have never paid

**Nina:** Yea I'm the practice child, they want to practice and doing it on my head, I have a few hairstyles, so you learn.

**Let:** exactly you don't know about spending that money

**Nina:** when I was in Australia, do you know how much it was to get my hair done?

Cross talk

**Nina:** 300 pounds I spent on my hair.

Cross talk

**Tessi:** I'm from Africa if you want to do your hair it's like 2 pounds

**Nina:** What country are you from, Cameroon

**Mod:** Alright guys let's get back to the point

**Tessi:** There is like 2 pound and when you come here is like 100 pounds. Who is now going to pay for that, I'm sorry, no!

**Mod:** So, watching the videos changed that?

**Tessi:** Yeah exactly; when you watch the videos, you see how easy it is and you are like I'm I really going to pay for that, like knowing that it's that easy.

**Mod:** Our next question . . .

**Ria:** Apart from learning how to do your hair, some of them will give you suggestions for like hair products and I found that very necessary.

Cross talk

**Ria:** Let's not lie, they need that coins, but they say it won't work on everyone and it gives you more options and it's like If you are up here in Preston and you don't have Pacs around the corner, you need to know what maybe you can substitute ad make work. So you can go back and refer

**Nina:** Pacs is a cosmetic store in London

Cross talk

**Nina:** they supply everything from hair to body products and they are cheap

Crosstalk

**Nina:** So if you are watching YouTube, you know what to order from Amazon or order from eBay, so you stop wasting all this money on different hair products.



**Mod:** *That's nice. Did the videos affect your general body outlook or style outlook. If so how?*

**Nina:** Yeah it does, in a positive way because it is just uplifting; on all the nice hair styles I could do, from even short to long.

**Tessi:** For me it's like nah because I can't get the same result as them, so it always looks bad. Yeah, I look bad with it so I'm just like. Why? Why can't I look like the girls in the videos (feigns sobbing voice). After that I'm just like well, let me just do cornrows or something like that.

**Ama:** Yeah, I will say in a good way as well. Yeah, cos I have learned that if I actually exercise patience, my hair won't grow overnight. I remember when I put my hair in a bun on time and it was coming out was like (gestures) yeah. You know how onions has that like small thing yeah

**Nava:** Yeah

**Ama:** But this time it was like much more

*Crosstalk*

**Tessi:** I could hold my hair in a bun, I was like yo! I'm excited.

**Mod:** anyone else?

**Ana** sorry what did you mean exactly?

**Mod:** Did watching the videos change anything about the way you look or how you style yourself.

**Ana:** oh yeah yeah, yeah. Like sometimes in a positive way

*Crosstalk*

**Tessi:** Yeah, I saw her trying many things like boom, boom boom; yeah, I've seen her.

**Ana:** Yeah, I've tried.

**Mod:** (to Cat2) What exactly did you do?

**Ana:** It was a good thing because i learnt to new styles and like, when I would do them I felt more confident with my hair and though sometimes it didn't work out how they did it. I would be like oh, what I'm I doing? (giggles)

**Ria:** I found it good for healthy living. Because the girls were like oh honestly, you could do all the madness with your hair but if you are not eating right, your hair will not grow. If you are not feeding your hair and other parts of your body, right?, It's going to show. Like you will go through bits of growth and then stop, then grow, stop. So, it was also a reminder that as much as you want to spend money on the good stuff that you (incoherent) and you wanna be checking the measure. Like if you are not eating healthy, it will show. It's also a reminder that, also, make sure you are also eating well so it will feed back into your hair because it's not just the product

**Mod:** So did you change the foods you ate normally?

**Ria:** I paid more attention to the things that would probably help, so like almonds , like more fresh fruits and other bits and pieces it all helps to make sure you are getting an extra vitamin of this, so that some of it can go to hair because like it's not your body's main priority where it might be yours, it is not your body's, so you need to always think of feeding your hair.

**Nina:** I got hair supplements like biotin and other things that would make my hair grow. And yea the same with eating healthier. Like I started adding more to vegetables to my cooking. ; So it has helped. I definitely think it has helped.

**Nava:** The thing is I don't usually aim to look like them, I aim to look at least decent to go out of the house. So, yeah It is upsetting when I don't get the result that I wanted. The thing is I don't really try, I'm very type b and I don't really care, so It doesn't really affect me.

**Mod:** So when you started watching videos you changed something at some point?

**Nava:** yeah

**Nina:** Oh yeah Definitely

**Nava:** I decided I liked avocados a lot

(Laughter)

**Nava:** They said it's good for your hair, so.

**Mod:** So you put avocados in your hair

**Nava:** No, I eat it. I wouldn't waste it like that.

(Laughter)

**Mod:** Oh so you eat more avocados.

**Nava:** Yeah.

**Mod:** Cat, anything you would like to add?

**Ana:** No, I don't think it changed much. I just learnt to make my own stuff. Though when I first tried it, it didn't work out. I tried the egg and yogurt thing, but it didn't work out.

Crosstalk

*Mod: Compare before you started watching videos and after you started watching videos, was there any difference to you personally?*

### Transcript focus group 2

**Key** for focus group: Mod stands for moderator; Participants are (given code names for anonymity):

*What mediums do you go to get your hair information?*

**Agatha:** YouTube

**Red:** Medium/ Yeah blog or magazines or . . .

**Agatha:** YouTube!

**Rela:** YouTube for me

**Agatha:** Instagram

**Tiwa:** Yeah Instagram

Head nodding among other members of the group

**Mod:** *So how did you begin watching YouTube videos anybody?*

**White:** when I took my hair out and then I was like oh I have my natural hair

**Mod:** when you took your hair out?

**White:** yeah say if I have braids . . .

**Mod:** No, no like in the beginning, how were you introduced to watching YouTube videos?

**Agatha:** My cousin. She became natural. I saw her hair and I was like wow you do have curls. I was like I want curls too. So that's it. I went for it.

**Rela:** For me, when I came to the UK, three years ago said, people said if you perm your hair, when it gets cold, it's going to keep going (gestures a falling motion)

**Mod:** (*cuts in*) Yeah it's going to fall off

**Rela:** *continues* yeah fall off. So, you have to keep natural hair here because of the weather, which I did .

**Mod:** *cuts in* . . .but you went back that's fine, that's perfectly fine.

Laughter from all

**Mod:** anyone else?

**Flow1:** My older sister used to do my hair until I was about sixteen and when she moved away, I didn't know how to do it, so I had to learn a few of the things to do by myself. I had to make it for other people? i had to tell them what I wanted because there is no black hair shop around me, so I had to go to a white hair shop and was like I want this.

All laughs

**Mod:** afro1?

**Afia:** for me it was when my mum stopped looking after my hair so, I started looking after it myself, so I had to learn how to look after it properly

**Mod:** Red?

**Red:** I was born with Dreads, I cut my dreads off when I was like 9? After that I saw my sisters relaxing their hair, so I thought that was the way too. But then one time, my older sister went natural, so I just wanted to copy her, so it just started from there.

*Mod next questions How did YouTube videos help you go natural*

**Agatha:** knowledge, they just give you knowledge

**Tiwa:** they help you with the right products that you can buy because some products don't work for certain type of people and their hair

**Rela:** watching a few videos you see visual directions of how to go about it and the outcome of the style

**White:** yeah instead of reading instructions

Rela and others acquiesce

Further Sounds of acquiescence; **Yeah** and *head nodding and laughter*

**Rela:** Yeah so when you see what they are doing I think visual is easier on the mind

Mod: Yeah, any other . . . how did YouTube help you... *gesturing* ...

**Afia:** Information,

**Rela:** And uhm when you go on YouTube, some people make reviews on different products. And sometimes they can give you reviews based on prices and quality, so they can tell you this product and tis product. . . and they are saying you can get this cheaper and they were saying sometimes you see something 'afro' you just go like it's going to work for you and that is not always the case. You get those watch those few reviews on YouTube and you can make your own routine based on different videos you've watched and use your own products based on different videos you have watched.

**Mod:** Ok so those were the introductory questions, the next question is

*How does watching YouTube videos make you feel generally, what kind of emotions does it evoke when you find yourself watching those kind of videos –*

*Afro2 scratches head, a bit of silence follows question*

**Tiwa:** It kind of makes me feel happy and prod because black people feel like all hair needs to be straight, it needs to be texturized, and you get those who treat their hair, you get those that their hair is nice and long and its beautiful *gestures to hair waving* .

**Rela:** After reading the documentary, gestures to consent from and project summary, what I will deduct from your questions, I will say; before 2016 as it says here (refers to project description) black hair was underrated, I was like oh my God why it was so underrated, it's so beautiful, especially now that with technology they can tell you do this and do that. You know the information can pass around and it can look like this (*gestures to afro 1 with her full twist out style*), usually you know afro hair will be like this (*gestures voluminous hair*), you can't pass your hand through it. You are like I can't and that's why we always want to relax it, most people

relax it because of the pain. So, knowing that you can take it and you feel proud of it knowing that it is natural beauty

**Mod:** Afro 2, watching those vloggers, what kind of emotions do they pass on to you?

**Agatha:** I just feel proud

**Relax:** (*cuts in*) Promoting the black Culture

Background: yeah

**Agatha:** I just feel proud because uhm, they show something we don't really see outside on a daily basis. My cousin she came to me she was like let's become natural together, I was like no we don't have curls. She was like oh we do have curls and I was like we don't, she was like, all these that these YouTubers . . . Then I wasn't into YouTube but then once I saw them having the curls I was just like, oh, this might actually work. So, I went to YouTube and saw that there was loads of them and we just didn't know that they were there.

**Mod:** Any other inputs?

**Flo:** I agree what everyone else said, you don't really see it on other people. Oh you see, she has natural hair, she takes care of it and it's not tasking, and she just makes it part of her week or part of her routine **and if I do it like her I can do it?**

**Mod:** So, you don't feel like this might be a lot of work?

**White:** It is and it's kind of expensive as well

*Sounds of acquiescence form the group hmmm*

**Rela:** It is expensive, but it depends on because if you look at the care side of it is more expensive to take care of natural hair than permed hair. Keeping it like this (*gestures towards afro 2*) will cost you a lot less than buying extensions all the time. So, it is expensive to an extent and cheap as well.

**Moderator:** yeah it doesn't always have to be good because everything has a good and a bad side so if there are actual pressures you feel from watching videos, feel free to talk about them

**Flo:** Yeah, I wanted to cut my hair because I have been natural all my life, no using texturizer, not relaxing my hair. I begged her too when I was like ten and she was like no uhm I always felt compared to my friends or my younger sister, they have really thick hair, and it grows really well, it is really strong, whereas mine is soft and also quite brittle. So, it breaks easily, and it is quite dry so compared to other people in my family even though we have the same genes, my hair wasn't as long/good? as theirs. So, my older sister uses a lot of natural products, and it still didn't work for me, so I just got tired of it. And seeing youtubers as . . . I was a yay, black hair is getting recognised, like people see the beauty or how beautiful it is, I just felt like mine just wasn't up to scratch. So finally, I came to university, cut it off and started again.

**Mod:**

*So what kind of message do you take from watching videos*

**Agatha:** I take some bad messages.

Laughter

**Agatha:** (continues) sometimes You watch like all those nice, beautiful type 3a, 3b. and you are like . . . and when you try it, and you are like this is not for my hair. That has happened to me, I have spent so much money on shea moisture and stuff, and it doesn't work, and I go back to Cantu, and it just makes it .... That is one thing about YouTube, it will teach you stuff, but it might lead you in the wrong direction. Like oh, it looks nice on her, worked on her but it won't work on your hair. So, it does take a bit of a while to find your hair type, what products are right for your hair . . .so it has got good stuff about it and bad stuff.

**Relax:** Can I just add something to what you said/

**Agatha:** Yeah

Relax: I don't disagree with what you said but I feel we can also look at it from another angle. Sorry I always look at things like that. From the angle that, if you are on week two for your natural hair growth and you use a product and I'm on week 10 and I use the same product, because I have used a product over and over, the effect might not be the same. It might not be lying it's just because I have used it more times than you have, that's why it works better?

White cuts in;

**Agatha:** Yeah I have done that #

**crosstalk**

**Red:** I find that Cantu makes my hair really dry, like it does not work and when I try Auntie Jackie's or ...

**Rela:** That's why I say I agree with what you're saying...

**Mod:** *cuts in* So overall, what message do you usually take from watching videos?

Crosstalk,

**Mod:** *continues* what perceptions about your hair or body do you gain from watching YouTube videos

**Agatha:** That our hair is beautiful, it's natural, we all have different patterns, even though we are all light skinned or dark skinned we all have different patterns. It doesn't matter where you come from, our hair is unique.

**Mod:** Flow 2?

**Fiona:** same, I feel the same

**Mod:** It can be opposite to that, it's fine. White?

White: it's true, because even me and my sister, we don't have the same hair type.

**Crosstalk from Red**

**Laughter**

**Red:** she only just became natural, and her hair is long

**Mod:** Do you feel like the videos gave you promises that they couldn't keep?

**Red:** Yeah. . .

**White:** cuts in I feel like the younger generation are finding it easier to get natural hair since everything is out there but for us it was just relax your hair... relax your hair... relax your hair...

### ***Acquiescence form the group***

**White:** Even if I didn't want to my mum will relax my hair . we will use texturisers it's okay . . .  
no.

**Mod:** So Red did you feel like the videos gave you certain impressions because as you said .  
. . .

**Red:** Yeah because my sister, she has basically been relaxing her hair all her life and she has only became natural for like a year and her hair is longer than mine. I was like what's up...  
shrugs shoulders

**White:** But then everyone is different, innit?

**Red:** yeah

**Rela:** I found out to that there are different types of hair, I thought every black person was 4c

**White:** to Afro 2, what's your hair type?

**Afro 2:** we decided today that it might be a 3c, 4a, I always thought so, but I wasn't sure, like I said, we all might be 3as, but we have different curls and sizes

**White:** can you see mine, it's coming out

### ***Laughter***

**White:** Yeah, I don't understand my hair

**Mod:** [Is watching YouTube videos about beauty and style or is it something more than that](#)

**Agatha:** it's getting to know more about yourself

**White:** It helps though

**Mod:** *cuts in* you can start ...

**Mod:** the question was is watching YouTube videos just about style or is it something more

**White:** yeah it is style and beauty but then I wanted to add . . . taps table

**Mod:** (*cuts in*) we can move on and maybe come back ...

**Rela:** when you say beauty and style is it reference to hair or in general?

**Mod:** In general

**Rela:** No. it is definitely not

**White:** Oh yeah that

Laughter

**Mod:** Definitely not, can you expand?

**Rela:** I do my research even sometimes on YouTube .I would not reference it, but it gives me a hint about things. ...

At the time I had natural hair it wasn't about the beauty but it's about how to manage the hair

Acquiescence: Yeah

**Agatha:** for your own benefit yeah

**White:** It actually helps though because I was saying . . .

**Laughter**

**White:** Continues Yeah I don't know my hair type so if I'm watching a YouTube video, I can try and say okay is my hair like that? She know her hair is a 4c, so I know I can compare, what I should do with my hair. That was what I was trying to say that it kind of helps.

**Agatha:** it's not for beauty it is for your own knowledge.

**Acquiescence:** yeah

**Mod:** What do you think Afro1?

**Afia:** when started watching YouTube videos it is more about how I can carry my hair with a bit of confidence. Sometimes you may wear a new style and you are like hmmm what are people going to think about it.

**Mod:** Flow1? Is it about beauty or is it more than beauty? It's fine if it is just about beauty.

**Flo:** It is about beauty, but it is not all about beauty, like everyone is saying it is finding out about how people can maintain the hair ... on YouTube there is people who have gone through those kind of things tbc

**Mod:** Any thoughts ?

**Tiwa:** No, I don't. I do agree with everyone to an extent

**Mod:** It doesn't have to be the same. Red? It's fine we can move on

*Compared to when you started watching videos to after you started watching videos, what is the personal difference to you?*

**White:** I used to straighten my hair but now I leave my hair out curly. That's all, that was the difference

**Mod:** So, you are not afraid to wear your hair out currently

**White:** yeah

**Flo or white:** Mine is a bit different before

Yeah that is fine

**Flo:** Before I started watching YouTube I just oiled my hair, I just washed my hair very simple routine my hair would grow. Because I wanted my hair to grow longer that is why I started watching YouTube ; how can I have my hair grow longer and ... and my hair stopped growing, it stopped growing three years, four years and it started getting brittle all of that . I feel like maybe I was trying too many different products, but I felt like if I just stuck to doing what I was doing before YouTube, I think my hair would have grown or won't be . . .

**Fiona:** . . . tbc

**Agatha?:** what was the question again?

**Mod:** before you started watching videos and after you started watching videos, is there any difference to your personal behaviour or style?



**Agatha:** I don't know before I used to put my hair in a high puff, just leave it there but ... now that I am natural, I feel like it's more about the ... because YouTube videos they help me thing about other hairstyles that I can do. You will see people with different hairstyles every week or two weeks out but before it just used to be the same boring style

**All:** Yeah same

Was that the videos of you copying your mum?

It was the videos as well because you can't use every dye. because some dyes actually damage your hair and then some ...

**Mod:** Flow 1 mentioned something about wanting to grow her hair long, does anyone have that pressure as well?

**Agatha:** Now I do

**Red:** I just want my hair to look curly and proper like. I have a lot of shrinkage. So my head will be like this, but my hair(gestures hair close to hair) is actually long.

**Mod:** does anybody else struggle with shrinkage?

**White:** When I take my hair it out does this (gestures to falling hair) and when |I am in the shower it does this (gestures

**Rela:** I do but I can never say I want my hair to be that way because today I want my hair short, tomorrow I want it long, the day after I want it curly.

laughter

**Mod:** was it while you were natural you struggled with shrinkage?

**Rela:** Yeah. I never stayed with my hair out (Gestures; shakes head and raises shoulders). I didn't know how to style it and to me it was like (gestures raises hands to connote I give up). Obviously, I didn't have the time and patience.

**Mod:** Yeah so do you feel there is a lot of process? That goes in . . .

**Rela:** Yeah. Definitely Yeah. There is a lot of guidance and suggestions.

**Mod:** Does anybody feel that way? Are the suggestions in the videos, too much to handle? Or it is the other way around.

**Agatha:** I love shrinkage. That is my way of thinking> the longer your hair is, if it shrinks, it means your hair is going to be fuller, into an Afro. So that is what I love about it. Full hair in my hair, so the longer, . . .

**Mod:** Is that what the videos tell you?

**Agatha:** No that is just my experience. The videos tell you shrinkage is not that good.

**Mod:** It's not good, that what you get?

**Agatha:** I think sometimes that is what I get. They try to do hair styles that helps you not show your shrinkage. Like if you did twists and did a twist out, it won't shrink as much as they (the hair) want to. But then After that it will shrink. ...

**Rela:** They don't say it, but they imply it.

**Acquiescence**

**Mod:** They don't say it, but they imply it. I like that.

*Do you feel pressured to look a certain way from watching videos?*

**White:** No

Mod Anyone else?

*No response*

**Mod:** Ok

*Do you feel normal wearing your hair out?*

Yeah from m various in group

**Red:** I never used to

**White:** Before, I never used to. Some days I go to school my mum will be like, can you just (gestures combing) *no I don't wanna comb...* Yo, I was crying. But now I just (gestures to having hair out) I don't care

**Red:** That is because more people have embraced it

**White:** yeah that is cos more people have embraced it.

Laughter at double speaking

**Rela:** That is what she wanted to say

**Red:** I don't know, I just feel like a lot of people carrying their Afro now. But I never was able to carry my Afro like that. I just feel like I look weird. I don't know, I didn't feel like it was normal. I felt like it was 'nappy'. So Yeah, I just don't know.

**Mod:** You felt your hair the way it grew was not normal?

**Red:** it is not even the way it grew, it just the way it was (gestures fly away hair or halo hair, gesture translates to frizzy I think) I find it weird to look at Afros, whereas now everyone is embracing it and I am like okay okay.

**Mod:** now that I think about it people don't actually wear afros.

**Flo:** I can wear my hair out styling it yeah but combing my afro out no. Even if I shaped it and styled it, I still don't think it looks cool, for me at least, it looks strange. I didn't used to go to work if I couldn't style my hair or if it didn't turn out the way I wanted, I wouldn't actually go to work.

**Red:** it just didn't look normal, for me it didn't fit in, so that is what I meant

**Flo:** I said strange because it would just be doing (gestures a collision movement with hands) crossroads. Generally when things don't go my way, I don't like it. When I want to do this and it doesn't (shrugs shoulders) I'm like okay, I'm not going out. That is just how I go about it.

**Agatha:** sorry what was the question again?

**Mod:** Do you feel normal wearing your Afro out

**Agatha:** Yeah it does feel normal. I have always been and always will.

**Mod:** was that before watching videos or after watching videos?

**Agatha:** Both, I just had to go. Just go.

**Fiona:** ... I didn't have a problem with it in the first place, even when it was breaking, I would have a band round it, and I would just go. I could come out I didn't mind.

**Mod:** Afro 2

**Afia:** it was normal for me. I was born natural so I there wasn't really a change but maybe in the styles because I used to watch a lot of YouTube and stuff, but it was always normal.

**Mod:** (to relax) So how come you went back to relaxing your hair after watching videos?

**Rela:** like I said, answering your question, I didn't feel as confident in my natural hair mainly because of my edges. I do a lot of braids so my front hair was like (gestures a signal for gone); so YouTube taught me how to do baby hair and you can make it thick if you want to.

**Mod:** So, you felt like you don't have that baby hair?

**Rela:** No. I didn't know how to do it before, it's not well done today but I usually do it quite nicely.

**Mod:** So, you didn't feel confident with your natural hair

**Rela:** When it is just like this (gestures full standing hair) I didn't know how to style it.

**Mod:** even with the videos?

**Rela:** I wasn't patient enough to actually put the videos into practice because like I said I was never staying with my hair out. It was natural but it was always in a weave or in braids or something like that. (Shakes head)

**Mod:** You are not different a lot of women watch YouTube video . . .

**Rela:** I will never be like this or this or this (gestures to the people in the room with their hair out in some style). I was always in something. In some weaves, in some braids, it was natural but never out.

**Mod:** Yeah, a lot of people still go with that. They are natural but they just put on their wig and just go. That's normal.

**Mod:** next question

*Do you feel you gain a positive or negative message from watching videos?*

**Agatha:** It can be both

**Rela:** yeah It can be both.

**Mod:** We have to specify, what is the best positive?

**Red:** I feel like just getting complemented a lot for your natural hair, it can boost up confidence.

**White:** cuts in Oh it did

**All:** Laughter

**Red:** so yeah

**Mod:** afro 2?

**Agatha:** You get both positive and negative. What is your negative? The things that have been said before; there are things that happen in YouTube that you can't put in your life because it can't be the same thing. But you won't know unless you try. (referring to DIY practices)

**Red to Agatha:** there is the gummies that they eat for hair, Insta barbies like to post it, is that true? (meaning do they work?)

**Agatha:** Well, I got those at home.

### ***Crosstalk and laughter***

**Agatha;** (continues) I think It worked for like two months and then stopped.

**Rela :** What is that.

**White and Agatha:** Those blue gummy vitamins.

**White;** yeah, makes your hair grow.

**Agatha:** but when I started them, I was going to the gym, I was drinking water, I was eating healthy, and I took those on top of everything else. But once I started placement, going to work forty hours a week, and having no time for anything. Assignments and everything, I stopped gym, I stopped everything, I just eat random stuff and I feel like from then on it never helped again. So that could be it. It is true when they say having a healthy lifestyle helps, but those vitamins on top they do help but if you don't take that healthy life into practice then forget about it (The lifestyle thing).

**Rela:** It is a combined thing

**Agatha** Yeah

**Mod:** what about you Twa?

**Twa:** sorry what was the question.?

**Mod:** Any positive or negative messages from watching videos?

**Twa:** I watch YouTube videos a lot because I like to have someone in with me showing me (gestures a face-to-face situation) ... ? Yeah that could be negative. The positive ...

**Mod:** sorry you feel a bit of distance to videos, is that what you mean?

**Twa:** yeah I just feel like seeing and touching it myself, being there with someone instead of taking it back and remembering I can just ask the person there with me.

**Mod:** And the positive?

**Twa:** You just learn different things and even though it is not for you can just tell your friends that there is this and it can help them.

**Rela:** Just from what she said, I want to say I understand because when someone in front of you tells you this works, you feel more motivated because you sometimes you feel like maybe she is doing this for the likes and for the pay.

All laughter

So when it is someone you say oh really || I will try it but when it is on YouTube. Nowadays, sometimes I watch things on YouTube for weight loss and stuff. They tell you something and you are like, what? They do it for the likes.

*Background yeah*

**Mod:** doing it for the likes, yeah that is something we actually need to consider (to afro1, do you feel that way?)

**Afia;** I feel like sometimes a negative could be like they are forcing something down your throat. If you don't want to follow a specific routine and stuff, you are not doing it the right way, you are not being natural the right way. I feel that is one of the negatives.

**Mod:** any other adds?

**Mod:** So, you feel like vies changed you in a way, did it

**Someone(unidentified speaker:** Oh no. It

**Other (unidentified speaker) :** It did.

*So how do you thing these changes will last and how will they last (revise question,. If videos have changed you, How will the changes last?)*

**Agatha:** In my opinion I think it will last because us black community we are starting to grow more and more. I went to this hair festival in London this July and people ask me where you come from, I said Manchester. And all round the UK. . . people said like, and you actually came to this festival? And I was like it's Afro hair weekend?

**All acquiesce**

And those British ladies or companies who do like products will sell for really cheap. Cantu was there, Shea moisture was there all these on this cue? And they will give like small gift bags and stuff, and they do it every year. I think this is the third year that they are doing it

**Red:** is I the natural hair week event?

Yeah I have been to one in Manchester

**Agatha;** Yeah but this year they went to London, they didn't do it in Manchester. Because of problem, black girls arguing. I don't know. And she did say that American women buy stuff from England, and we don't buy anything from them. Trying to say that here we still haven't? accepted who we are but in America everybody else is on it already.

Acquiescence from red

**Agatha: continues** And in America, with all the YouTube and technology, I think they are sending the message to us, but we are slowly getting there.

Yes acquiescence

**Agatha;** continues, so I think in like 2-3 years' time, all our kids are going to be like natural. And our kids' friends will want to be natural. I made three to four friends become natural, just by showing them how much I love my hair always posting. I'm that type of person every 5 minutes "oh my hair is dry now; my hair is drying now". Yeah and they just loved it. And they were like, Afro2 you actually did a good thing with your hair, and they are like. Send me all the steps and I will do it as well and they did it. And they love their hair now. So I think it will grow.

**Mod:** flow 1? [Do you think the changes videos brought on you will last?](#)

**Flo:** Well I think I'm going to keep it quite short, so I guess yes. But. . . it kind of depends on what I want to do with it because I basically did the big chop. But I don't know it depends on

what I want to do with it eventually. It depends on how bored I get of wigs. How bored I get of my short hair. Depends on if I wanna grow it out maybe.

**Mod:** Yeah you've not decided . . .

**Fiona:** I just wanted to say that YouTube goes not just into natural products and how to style natural hair, but it is protective styles as well because I remember like wigs and braids. Because some people with tender scalps like I have were introduced to wigs. So I didn't know much about wigs until YouTube so that helped as well.

**Mod:** Anything you want to add afro 1

**Afia:** no

**Mod:** [will You Keep watching black hair videos?](#)

**A few in the group :** yeah

**Someone:** I don't know

**Mod:** No? Someone can say no

Yeah to relax, you were like you won't keep watching them why not?

**Rela:** I don't know did I say that

Laughter

**Mod:** cos you stopped watching them#

**Rela:** cos I went . . .

**Mod;** yeah you permed . . .

**Rela:** I don't know that's a harsh question because like I said today I want something the next day I want something else.

**Mod:** Yeah okay. Any other points anyone wishes to add about natural hair?

**Rela:** It's just beautiful

Laughter

**Mod:** Yeah anything else, maybe a complaint or an observation or something.

**Flo:** I feel like, well now I know more. I feel like two years ago, three years ago there were not like that many girls with tough 4c hair or really short 4c hair, so when you watch YouTube videos and you are trying to find different ways to style hair or products to put in your hair and you are trying to find someone that looks like you, that has the same kind of hair as you and the same kind of attitude as you and you are like okay,, she is really similar to me, I think I can copy it . But it is like I'm taking advice from someone that is not in the same situation. Like I'm taking advice from a white skinned girl with like 3a hair . . . and I can't find anyone else

**White:** All they do is like (smoothing down action) and they are done.

**Flo:** continues and I see a girl and she does here edges *wosh-wosh* done. And I am there like (makes gestures of struggling)

Others join in, **laughter**

**Flo:** continues And I like to do mine but why is it taking 20 minutes to do my edges,

Laughter

**Mod:** ok so usually what you see on videos is not what happens in real life

A good number (shakes head in acceptance, then laughter)

**Mod:** yeah that is a problem isn't it. What's the deal, is it that people can't wear short hair? People seems to have problems wearing their short hair outside.

**Agatha:** what I think is people are beginning to embrace their short hair, at the same time, we want the length because everybody has got the length. So they still find it hard '@oh my hair is short' or my shrinkage it's too small because everybody else has got the length. A

Acquiescence from red.

**Agatha:** . . . So they still find it hard that my hair is short, or my shrinkage is just too small. It is because everybody out there has got length.

Acquiescence from red.

**Agatha:** . . .yeah so we still try to go through that, if she has got length I will show . . . Sometimes I feel like I want to straighten my hair just to show people it is actually long it is not just in a high puff. (gestures to free afro).

The other day I went with twists to my work and this lady looked at me and was like I know you. I was like of course you know me. She was like go put that puff up, go put that hair up, I was like wow . . .

Laughter

**Agatha:** I was like unfortunately, I can't do that today. That was what I said to her. She said go put that puffy up.

**Mod:** Yeah a lot of people outside our race don't understand how our hair works

**Agatha:** yeah she just thought wake up, go out with a puff everyday but guess what I decided to use twists for a whole week. You just have to deal with it. I will look bad for an entire week today. So I can look good for two weeks. That's what I tell them all the time.

**Red:** You know it annoys me when they start touching your hair because they want to feel what you have there

Twa and White commence a mimicry play over red's head; 'Oh your hair is so soft ', feign touching.

**Red:** Yeah shakes head

**Rela:** You guys talking about nappy, I'm not even nappy but they do the same thing. Cos I do long hair today, the other day short one, when people want to talk about me they say, oh Doyle know this girl, oh she has maybe a long weave' You don't describe an African girl with their hair, you know they change it like this (gestures a rotating movement) . Next week it's like this, next week it's like this . . .you know. It's not like here when you know this girl has short hair. No you didn't do that. Laughter.

**Flo:** Oh about what you said about like uhm people being afraid to wear their short hair out. You don't see Youtubers say I have short hair, this is what I do with my hair . I feel like it's excluded in the natural hair community because how much product can you Putin it. it's short, it's easier to maintain. It is easy to maintain that's why I did it(cut my hair short), but it doesn't look like I was my hair or shampoo my hair. It needs oil, it needs moisturising

Relax: Now I remember why I relaxed m y hair, my hair is very short. I had to style it short . .  
.I can't remember the style though. Even when I was thinking about going back to nappy was  
to go short nappy actually. Because I think it's less work.

**Mod:** Okay you like less work.

**Relax:** Yeah

**Mod:** but actually that's not the reality with the videos everybody is looking for long hair

**Rela:** But being with short hair it's always long, don't need videos

**Mod:** Does anybody want to add any ending remarks?

Pause.

**Mod:** Okay we have come to the end of our questions



### Focus Group Transcript 3

*Mod: OK, What are your go to media sites for hair information.*

**Masha:** YouTube

**Pepper:** yeah YouTube

**Masha:** Basically, watching hair tutorials

**Rias:** Yeah

**Tracy:** Yeah YouTube and Pinterest

**Anita:** Yeah I was going to say Pinterest as well

**Tracy:** If I go for a style and I am looking for inspiration to do it I go to Pinterest and then I go to YouTube to find out how to do it

**Mod:** Anyone else apart from Pinterest?

**Rias:** I basically go on Instagram and YouTube

**Pepper:** Yeah if you go on explore page

**Crosstalk inaudible**

**Masha:** Yeah literally it like tailors it to what you are looking at

**Pepper:** Yeah

**Mod:** Anita?

**Anita:** No, I just realized I wasn't answering the question

**Mod:** what did you want to say?

**Anita:** I had literally thought about the conversation and I was like information and where you get it from. All I could think about it; Unless I see someone with really great hair the only time I would ever. . . if it is really good, really-really good and there is an event I want to go to, it is the only time I would go up to them and be like your hair is amazing please...

**Mod:** Oh so you ask people

**Anita:** I have only done it once or twice, but it has usually been somewhere I have not seen it anywhere . . . Just plucked up the courage.

**Mod:** Yeah that is something as well

**Anita:** but I feel like normal people don't do that (laughs)

**Pepper:** last year when I wanted to get braids, I asked a girl in Primark, where did you get braids . . . I went to Liverpool once on recommendation from someone from Manchester. .

**Mod:** So everybody here watches YouTube videos?

**Marsha:** Yeah definitely

**Mod:** You, no?

**Anita:** only for wraps, only when you want to wrap hair do you know

**Mod:** But you've seen one or two videos:

**Anita:** yeah-yeah

*How did you start watching videos on YouTube, can anyone remember?*

**Pepper:** I think from my sisters, because they both went natural before I did and they were like it's really easy, just watch this and you will learn how to do hair. Yeah.

**Rias:** I was finding out about hair textures at that time. I was in year eleven, college and that was when I was really taking care of my hair more. I was finding out my hair texture was a bit looser. It was that trying to manipulate that that I . . .it was just education and stuff

**Sasha:** To be honest I didn't even know YouTube for hair. I thought it was just for music videos and stuff, so when I was like 15, I realized that actually people post on it. Obviously because I'm mixed race I'm with my white family all the time. I didn't really know how to look after my hair. It was kind of like a shameful thing because all my cousins had white hair and stuff. I didn't really understand where my hair came from and stuff. I will see people with nice afros and I will just watch it(refers to the videos) You know the photo(thumbnails), I saw nice photos on them and I just clicked on it. And I saw loads of videos and stuff on how to look after your hair. So basically I just . . .

**Marsha:** Yeah I was going to say that as well because my mum is white and my dad, can't do hair (laughs) I relaxed my hair and I was like I don't want to relax it anymore so YouTube was how I learned how to manage it properly myself.

*Mod: How did you get to relaxing your hair.*

**Marsha:** Uhm I did it in year 9, no actually it was in year 7, I don't know how. I think it is like my mum's friends told her about it or something and then we were like oh my God this is the answer. This is what we have been needing and my mum, and actually my mum said to me, I feel really bad that I didn't know this before, all these years we have been struggling brushing your hair and we could have had this. Because she didn't know that and it got to year 12 and I was like I need to take this out, this is bad.

**Pepper:** what you say about hair texture is so interesting because we are both from Oxford (refs to Marsha). I went to school in the country side and I was the only black girl in my year and my hair is black hair was like, coarse. As coarse as it gets and if you are mixed race, you have these like . . .

**Rias:** cuts in (ringlets)

**Pepper:** Yeah, luscious ringlets and I learn that is the definition of black hair. Yeah, it is not just true at all. When I met you (refers to Marsha).

**Marsha:** (replies Pepper), Yeah my hair is not loose, actually it is really like (gestures clinched fists)

**Rias:** Tight

**Marsha:** yeah

**Rias:** Yeah that is what it is like and when I was young I find people are idolizing my hair.

Recently I started Uni and me and my friend he is mixed race got curly hair and had had hair out like this (as he was wearing) and the teacher goes Oh you have good hair. I realized that

because he walked past the same teacher and she didn't say nothing. And with black people, it's like if you don't have curls; it's oh you have something different. Yeah you know what I mean that is why I was like, this is something people don't see everyday.

**Pepper:** Yeah

**Rias:** That is why I had to start educating myself on the different textures and even on my head there is so many different textures.

**Mod:** So it was from that teacher's comment that you ...

**Rias:** No no, that was one I could think of recently but my hair . . . I'm mixed with Indian and I have always wondered why my hair has always been a fascination and it was only in the last two years of college that I was just finding out how people . . . You Know I look after my hair so much . . . and a lot of people especially the boys ae like: how do you get your hair so like this? I am like you know you can do this as well. It is actually not hard, it is just maintenance

### **Acquiescence**

**Marsha:** Yeah

*Mod: Think back to the times you watch videos; how did they usually make you feel?*

**Anita:** I don't know sometimes I think this is cool and I can wear this and it's free. But another part of me is like how the hell can you do all this. Like I was watching one woman do it, her hands were up so consistently and I'm like, so your hands don't get sore then.

### **General laughter**

**Pepper:** Yeah, and when you see it, you are like that is not physically possible

**Anita:** Yeah, just that realization, okay that person has done it for years that why they are like that. It probably wasn't like that the first one. But I think it a world really. Like a whole place with all these different people who do it, especially if you grow up where there is like no diversity. How I grew up was like my mum came here when I was three and remarried my stepdad who is English and he was remarried from his first wife. So my mum came with me and he came with two of his daughters who at that young age were blonde (like all white children when they are like 5). Then they had my little brother and sister, so I grew up in a house with two mixed race children, two white children and myself, so I was the only person that had my texture.

I found your story (**refers to Masha**) really interesting because my little sister, the first time I decided to stop relaxing was based on my little sister. Because she was always fine with her hair being curly and I was the one who would relax my hair because I was constantly pressure (I was working in legal) to have relaxed hair. Because my little sister is my little sister and basically just follows everything that I do, then decided to relax her hair. So, I came back from school and she had relaxed her hair. And that is when I decide I will relax my hair again.

**Masha: (cuts in)** Really?

**Anita: (continues)** She was like I just wanted to look like you and it made me really uncomfortable

**Group:** Yeah

**Mod:** You said because of legal you were constantly pressured?

**Anita:** Yeah, it is just like legal work, to be more professional.

**Pepper:** Was it overt or . . .

**Anita:** It was more like when it is not relaxed people just continue to say be more professional and be more formal and when it is relaxed people stop saying that and they are like you look more professional. Nobody uses the words "your black hair makes you unprofessional". They just want you to change it and praise you for changing it.

**Sasha:** even when you go to law firms you won't see a normal afro or anything because it is not seen as professional.

**Anita:** hmmm . . .

**Pepper:** I did an internship this summer and I don't know that that is the experience of lots of black women. I have had the complete opposite on the fact that the women in my office all had their natural hair and it is like one of the biggest companies in the UK. And it is interesting where certain offices . . . and others are so far behind . . . what was the question again?

**Mod:** Think back to the times you watch videos how did they make you feel

**Pepper:** before I knew about textures I would watch these people with looser hair than me and be like, if I just do this my curls will just fall down

*laughter*

**Rias** cuts in (inaudible)

**Pepper:** Yeah and that can be quite disheartening but then when you understand your hair. I always thought I had the thickest hair you could get but then I realized my hair is not 4c is like 4b, I'm like if I put Shea moisture, there will be curls but they are not loose. So, it is nice to get the reviews products and the information

**Tracy:** something I have learnt in the past year is that. The hair type is isn't really important it is more to do with the qualities and the characteristics of your hair so understanding your hair's porosity and understanding the fineness the strands of your hair and understanding if you have protein sensitivity and caffeine sensitivity. People suggests loads of things to do and loads of different treatments and products to use. If you just go with someone that has 4c hair like you, it might not work for you. They might be able to take a lot of protein treatments because they have high density and high porosity hair but then if you don't you are not going to get the same results that they have. And you are thinking you're confused but we have got the same hair or type but why does it not work. Then you go and try things and you waste money, and you damage your hair. Because everyone is fixated on hair type, actually it is not that important.

**Rias: (cuts in)** how you manipulate it.

**Tracy:** exactly Yeah

**Mod:** So you feel videos fixate on hair type?

**Tracy:** yeah, and I think that only recently have people started to specify the characteristics of hair, I think before I understood that YouTube was not all the influencing... when talking about that and they just said I've got this hair type or this texture and I use these products and you think it is good advice but it's not. Then it's like a bit of a disservice to people watching. I think that is how I felt until recently. When I learnt that oh actually it is more complicated than

the hair type that you have. Now YouTubers are starting to delve into and understand the importance of that but before if am kind of like uh... watched it followed it completely to the letter and my hair doesn't react like we said and you damage your hair and it is like a cycle. Now I think it is kind of getting better.

**Sasha:** I feel like they make me feel more underprivileged. The products they use are so expensive

### **Some acquiescence**

Sasha: Like me, I am from a poor home anyways and I can't spend 10 pound on one product it is a lot of money. it kind of makes you feel like I can't, have long hair because I cant afford to have. . .

Some acquiescence

**Masha:** Yeah that's so true

**Sasha:** I will watch the videos and I will try use the same products that they use but my hair will still be dry and stuff, so it is just like . . .Even my sisters we are related but we all have different hair types. I have got the thickest hair of all of them; they don't need that much product in their hair but their hair is really soft but my hair is always dry, frizzy and it's just mad.

### **General Laughter**

**Mod :** [So how did watching videos affect you personally? Did anything change say personal style or thinking?](#)

**Sasha:** I was kind to like. . . when you see people with different hair you are like oh they are just like you , ..

**Pepper:** . . . When I first started watching videos I would trim my not every day but every time I twisted my hair and it was like really? It was really excessive not like every single night but every couple of nights then I would have my hair in braids most of the time so I don't do it normally. My hair has not dropped off because I have not trimmed it in six weeks ...

**Mod:** Oh you feel like maybe e you get some ideas from the videos which...

**Pepper:** Yeah . . .

**Anita:** (Cuts in) I was going to say sometimes it is videos as well about why you should use stuff and also it is things that you should avoid because it damages your hair . so it is mostly linking it to things you don't use and just steer you really clear of it.

**Pepper:** That's so true

**Tracy:** I would say like being able to watch and access different contents with people across the world has kind of helped me to realize that I don't need stylists to do my hair. I have power and I can do my hair myself. So, for a long time it was either I had my mum, and when I got older, she didn't have the time I would take the bus a train and another bus to go to my hair dresser and then I would come home and that was the only option I thought I had to do my hair. So, it was either put it in braids by hair stylists or I get done by my mum and then I have to take it out. Immediately I have to change it and get new braids put in and I kind of felt that anxiety because when you have hair you need to change, and it is breaking your ends off you can't find the time to get an appointment. So, you wear it for another week damaging your hair more instead of taking it out and having your hair out for like two weeks. Again, I was able to watch YouTube videos and figure out how I can deal with it myself properly and make it look

nice, It has taken the fear away of I need to do my hair immediately which has been so good. It has saved me so much money/.

**Masha:** Yeah. I think it's also like 'oh my God You look so good, you do it really well with your hair' and I'm like yeah I should be able to look after it

Crosstalk and laughter

**Masha:** But I should be able to twist and like protect it. . .

**Pepper:** Yeah

**Rias:** I still don't do it, I slept with my hair out .. I don't think I have the requirement of doing certain things. My journey (because I'm a boy I think it is different anyway) but my journey has been something I wanted to do personally for myself. If you see my hair back then, oh my gosh it was not something that I want to show you.

**Laughter**

**Rias:** It didn't really look like my hair now. My journey has been so fun for me. I find out things every other day. Like This style was two days ago .. I was like oh my God I could do this this and this ; Oh my god. Even things like twisting and trimming your ends I didn't know about that a month ago and once I started doing that it the curls were just popping ... I am not afraid to lose length, I want healthy hair .

**Acquiescence**

**Pepper:** I feel like growing up I didn't even know that black hair could grow

**Tracy:** Yeah who told us that lie?

**Pepper:** So me clinging on to like

Rias: Length?

**Pepper:** the relaxed thin strands

**Acquiesce and Laughter**

**Pepper:** and I am like I am not cutting my hair. My mum shaved my hair off she was like sit down and then my auntie came and she (imitates clipper) No it was like, I used to have eczema when I was young, we didn't really know what it was then. So just have bald patches on my head, so that is why she shaved it off. Which I know now but as a six year old (**mimics crying and tantrums**).

**Laughter**

**Pepper:** But now my hair has grown so much. It is longer than it has ever been since I have been cutting it .

**Mod:** so you were able to go on your journey through the videos

**Pepper:** (nods)

**Marsha:** yeah definitely

**Rias:** For me I think they (videos) are really-really inspiring. Because YouTube is one of the things where I look up debates too. I was looking up debates In America about the system and about people are not able to get into work places with their natural hair. When you look at the side of cultural appropriation

**Pepper:** Yeah

**Masha:** (*nods*)

**Rias:** and Kim Kardashian and all these people that are trying to mimic black hair styles and ... am just like , for me it is quite annoying it's like you are trying to take a part of our culture and we are still in that situation where people are not able to go to work, things like that. And styles that they take- not say take- they use but don't know the significance behind it. And with black hair tradition it was this ... it was about this concept of; 'Oh black people are doing white hair'. But straight hair has no tradition, has no significance, the way your hair falls is not defined by a tradition, it has no cultural value. So I negotiate with the content and I educate myself on YouTube about what is going on in the world. How we are we progressing, things like that, I think it is like both sides, Good and bad that I get from it.

**Mod:** Sasha?

**Sasha:** It feel like it made me accept my identity, my black identity. Nowadays I don't really value my hair, I cut it off all the time because I know it will grow back, I've not really . . .

**Rias:** cuts in; you are not attached to it . . .

**Sasha:** Yeah

**Masha:** really?

**Sasha:** Yeah. You know loads of girls, even my sisters, they see it as feminine value, it defines them as a woman. For me, I don't need to have hair to be who I am. I feel like If a person sees me and don't have a good first impression of me. They don't deserve to know me, if they judge me by my hair.

**Mod:** But you did mention . . .

**Anita:** Sorry I was just going to say. I understand exactly what you are saying but I do feel like hair has a lot of value around the way people interact with you. Because I did have full on. . . do you remember when Rihanna was cool because she shaved the sides like that (*gestures hair shaved off something like a crew cut*) . So, I did have that style, especially when I have it down instead of up.

**Sasha:** Like (gesture shaved side)

**Anita:** Yeah the top is intact but the sides are down. It was bald from the back and sometimes when you have down instead of up., do you know like the peepy thing (*demonstrates a ponytail style something like man bun*). So guys will see me from the back and I feel like a whole lot of aggression that I would get from other men, thinking I was a black boy was actually different. Yeah especially in stores, it was really weird . It was something that I didn't see it happening especially because I tend to wear it with big baggy stuff and I'm quite tall. So, most times in the evening. . . So there is a difference from me having long hair that come down. That's me personally. So, I just feel like people do interact with you differently and how you present yourself.

**Rias:** Of course

**Sasha:** Yeah, my dad, he is African, and he is like oh you are not feminine, you can't get . . . he always tells me about my femininity and stuff because I don't dress like . . . I cant explain it. . .

**Rias:** She dresses how she wants to dress

**Sasha:** yeah...I literally would dress like anything but I don't really care. He always lectures me about being feminine because he is Muslim as well.

### ***Laughter and crosstalk***

**Sasha:** When I cut my hair he was like . . . or he sees me with this (**gestures to her clothes**). I feel like I can't explain to him that this is how I dress or something, it doesn't mean that I am not feminine and stuff. it just annoying

**Rias:** That is the opposite for me

**Mod ;** You did mention that you felt some kind of way growing up with your hair texture

**Sasha:** Yeah, I never used to cut my hair, I just used to tie it up and .. I was just used to being the only mixed race girl at my school, with nappy hair basically. I would be nervous but then I accepted it. But I was always embarrassed with it. Even say if I look after my hair., say like a few months like half a year ago, I always used to tie it up because I would still feel bad about my afro even if it was nice and healthy. So, I had to cut it off just as a challenge because you can't tell when it is shortened. So that is why I did it.

**Mod:** So nowadays you can wear it out?

**Sasha:** yeah, I don't have to do it. it is actually a step-in progress.

**Rias:** It was the opposite for me

**Mod:** What was your experience?

**Rias:** For me I always wanted long hair. I don't know what it is with parents and black boys. Grrrr . . . (**mimics sound of a clipper**) The all take it off,

**Tracy; (cuts in)** Yeah you be like my head is cold (**laughs**)

**Rias:** Yeah, back in highs school when it was cold (shakes head) and I used to get bullied too, it was just. . . I just don't understand. For me I would have like my hair to be growing from day one

**All:** yeah

**Rias:** And I will just have that journey with me but my parents didn't allow me to grow it for so long and then when I started growing it and looking after it and taking care of it and they were like, 'why are you taking so long with your hair' . Why are you being so feminine,' I was like , it's not that; it's grooming, guys can groom. Guys need to groom themselves to be presentable.

### ***Acquiescence***

**Rias: *It's not everyday you get a trim like with skin head***

### ***Laughter***

**Rias:** It all plays a part in how you . . . and for me my hair was a big thing I wanted to groom. Like I said it was a mission for me to get to a stage where it is now. And I never thought I will get to that stage and now my parents are like oh my gosh your hair is this this this. . . It is funny to think back then they were like no-nonono, but now they are like oh my god your hair is so this and that.



### **Laughter**

**Rias:** I'm doing it and Jamaicans, some people they don't do what I do, it depends on what side . . . Come straight from Jamaica (my step mum), she would never do what I was doing. And she doesn't understand how it's grown . . .

**Pepper:** It is so interesting when you say that. I had a similar experience too . . . They never cared my parents. I got thrown whatever clothes. My family was poor, I got handed boys clothes basically. Till probably year twelve. I would never wear, earrings, make up, never cared about my hair. I was just like the laziest person. When my sisters, started looking after their hair and stuff. I was like it's not for me, I am not getting involved in that.

### **Laughter**

**Pepper:** I think it is interesting because the more I looked after my hair and cared after my hair, *everything else sort of fell into place. I never knew how much it meant to me. I love putting on clothes* and feeling good about myself and I felt like a lot of that has come from hair. My mom would have dropped dead a few years ago if I was getting silver hair. I didn't even tell her I was getting it and this is like my second time having back to back having it. Then when I came home it was late, I was at the hair dresser all day then I went straight to bed. Then in the morning I came down my mum was on the phone and she saw it and she was like (**feigns a surprised look**), she dropped the phone and didn't do anything. Straight afterwards I was like, 'do you hate it', she was like 'no I actually like it', just took me aback. So, it's weird how your parents have a weird like (**gestures spinning**)

**Tracy:** *They change*

**Pepper:** *Yeah*

**Rias:** So my Nana always appreciated my hair, the first person in my family. She was like 'your hair is so beautiful,' it is like a motivation to carry on.

**Pepper:** *Yeah*

**Rias:** She taught me what to do with my hair what to and what not to do. Even my products that I use. Because even my products like you said it is a personal thing with product. My hair is high porosity. I have to spray my hair

**Tracy:** *yeah*

**Rias:** I have to spray my hair like it is wet but it is not wet at the same time, I need a lot of oils to make my hair not look dry. I carry my spray bottle around.

### **Laughter**

**Rias:** . . but I think for me it should be a personal journey. Finding all your products and stuff, you do need like a cream and one oils and water, essentials and that is all you possibly need and it varies because my cousin has similar to me but she is low porosity and she uses more like coconut oils and stuff to lock in, But I think it you should follow any youtuber , I think you should take direction . . see if you experience certain things but I think that the products that you us will change.. Like today I used the same products

**Sasha:**     **What's     that     smelly     one     you     use     .     .     .**

**Rias;** I use hemp oil cos it makes it look dark

*Mod: What specific or general messages o you take form watching videos?*

**Marsha:** yeah ,

**Tracy:** what do you mean

*Mod: so what kind of ideas do you gather from watching videos*

**Rias:** Not much anymore what can I say, knowledge? but I think it is more debates that I look at . Things that happen.

**Anita:** I feel like . I just like seeing men and women having different beautiful styles.

I just like seeing it . You go outside today you are not going to see that.

**Pepper:** Yeah

**Rias:** (*cuts in*) (inaudible)

**Anita:** Yeah, do you know what I mean. I don't know there is something about it. Like, growing up, does anyone remember, those books you get, like the preteen ones and it always had on top the free sample and you just couldn't use it because it was never ever geared to anyone of colour.

**Acquiescence**

**Anita:** And I just remember going through it and thinking oh these are what pretty girls are like a do you are not just there. And for me I just remember seeing the wave of all these styles

**Acquiescence**

**Anita:** and all these looks and just thinking wow, there were all so great, there are all so pretty and part of not being able to see yourself.

**Pepper:** Yeah

**Anita:** and or seeing the styles, you end up thinking this is what pretty is and everyone is saying and I can't be it, I am not just that thing. You know what I mean.

**Rias:** coming from a boy you never look into the girl mind I feel like it is harder for me. it was my own personal journey. Guys don't care about these things, it just how guys are taught to be, they think grooming is too feminine this ant that but for you it is like how you perceive the world and the roles models you have. Not having women role models is like I don't have a part of myself.

**Anita:** and yeah, you would have these little butterfly clip things that you could put in

**Tracy:** Yeah

**Anita:** and I remember, so when I would get it I just give it to my sisters because I knew it wasn't for me and those things weren't for me.

**Pepper:** Femininity is defined by white

**Anita:** white yeah, so like just seeing it, when I saw it I was just like; she is pretty, she is pretty... And it is just like ok cool. It is an aspect of I can do this, I can carry it and . . .

**Pepper:** (*cuts in*) there is a certain Facebook page. I posted on an Facebook page for black women and someone was like, do you Have any a YouTubers or *instagramers* you can recommend and I sent this screenshot of this girl I follow on Instagram who has got like this amazing 4c, 4b Afro, loads of hair and she, loads of videos and the girl was like 'I literally just

teared up and showed my mum and was like mum she has hair like mine, I can have beautiful hair too'. And I am thinking aww that is so sweet.

### **Laughter**

**Pepper:** cos I feel it is a nice way to see yourself reflected in that beauty.

**Tracy:** Yeah, I would say the same thing because think that. I'm doing my project about black hair as well and my interest mainly in representation, what that looks like in architecture, especially when you look at buildings for black hair, hair shops, salons barbers and from my point of view, you (refers to Anita) were saying about getting things as kids and knowing I can't use this even though the magazine told you this is standard of beauty. You do not fit because it physically just doesn't work not that they are saying it is not for you, they are saying that in an underhand way.

**Rias:** Subconsciously

**Tracy:** So, for me, being able to have an architectural space that celebrates black hair I think is really important. That is why YouTube and Instagram and all of those things are really-really important for us. Because no one is policing you and even though it is still other forms of beauty being celebrated by general media, this is just a way to promote ourselves, share what we need, tell people that this is for you even though other people aren't telling you, you have got a platform. For me that is what I learnt, that is the main importance or usefulness.

**Mod:** Masha did you have any other ideas?

**Marsha:** Yeah, I was agreeing with the fact that representation is a really important thing and for me it is seeing. . . for me I went to a predominantly white school, predominantly white area. When I was growing up I wanted my hair to be straight luscious and long, it is now but it is curly and I have positive words and thoughts which I attribute it to instead of negativity which I feel, you know, it came a lot from seeing YouTube videos and seeing my type of hair reflected in it.

**Rias:** I was going to say, you don't realise it-but you do realise it(*gestures at all*)- but this country is not built for us, and I was getting mad about it all the time. This country is not made to cater to our culture, in any means; either is from tv that represents your hair head and shoulders and stuff or you don't see any adverts or . . .

**Pepper:** you remember when shea moisture did that

**Rias:** Yeah!

**Pepper:** Aww . . .

**Rias:** it was so rude but its fine. Uhm Jamaican burgers and stuff and it is like what are you doing, this is not how you try to relate with us in anyway. I think it has to be about our own personal journey . . .lost my train of thought. . .

**Mod:** that's fine. . .

**Sasha:** I think I watch YouTube very much because I feel youtubers assume that this is how I do my hair, you will get the same result, it is not really guaranteed, it is not reliable. Often, I was being naïve, I will try and then nothing happens, I'm like oh. . . I feel like, what you said (refers to Tracy) our hair is different, it is more than textures...

**Tracy:** yeah

### **Crosstalk**

**Sasha:** I just have to find it myself

*Mod: Do you feel pressured look a certain way by watching videos?*

**Tracy:** not anymore

**Masha and Pepper:** Shake their heads (meaning no)

**Anita:** I would say I am pressured to look a certain way in certain places but definitely not by YouTube videos for myself, I feel living in a white world, that is where that pressure comes.

**Rias:** I don't feel the pressure

**Mod:** you used to?

**Pepper:** As a child yeah

**Rias:** I never felt with my hair; in the standards of beauty where do you fit in that scale? So I've never felt beneath a white person, I have never felt the pressure to be on top. I wish I didn't have this, it was not with hair though but more with troubles, I wish I did not have this pressure to do this because I am black and I wish I didn't have this stereotypes, it doesn't necessarily have to do with hair itself. Do you know what I mean

**Anita:** I see what you mean but I from my perspective, I feel I like I see that in different ways. In primary, in high school I went to predominantly white schools I felt pressure to look a certain way. University I was open to a lot of things, so I didn't feel like a certain way and then when I went back into work was when I felt like I had to look a certain way again and that is what personally I would say. It is weird and messy, Some places yes, some places no, because we work in different places. Some places it is cool some places it is not. I feel like when I get into a certain rank, you start getting promoted and you start working . . . I working in a technical field and I go on courses and when I literally walk in a room and someone would go are you in the right room? Is this room for you because it is literally 40 year old men and me. So that is when it starts feeling again it is less of the hair itself but it is more like you are physically in the body they expect the information to be in. It is not like anyone says look this way, there is almost like there is an urge inside you that says obviously I have braids, there is an urge inside you that is like if you minimize these thing inside you it will be easier and they will respond.

### **Crosstalk.**

**Anita:** The way you present yourself if that makes sense is, do I want to talk about the software on this program or will I want to talk about how do my hair look like that, how did you do those braids, how did those get done, what do I want to spend my time on today?

**Pepper:** I think like you said, in primary school I have a very specific memory . . . I had two best friend, one was white, one was half Nigeria and I was fully Nigerian and I remember my white friend will be like oh I wish my hair was like yours and I would be like and I wish my hair was like yours. It was a child's thing completely innocent. And I would be like why would you want my hair (**whispering to suggest as subconscious thought**). But it was never like a self hate, it is nothing, so yeah. Then in secondary school I remember in year 7, I took my braids out and had to wait like two days to go to a hair dresser and I really-really didn't want to go to school and I was thinking how to get out of it for the day. And when I went, everyone was putting their hand in my hair. Then this girl was like uh it is really greasy, and I was like yeah. I was too . . . I didn't know what to say; if someone said that to me now, which last year someone did, they were like uh you have got quite a lot of grease in there or product, and she

was like is that not too much? And I was like don't tell me how to do my hair, you have clearly never touched black hair before, which is why you are opening your mouth to say it. So why are you opening your mouth to say.

### **Laughter**

**Pepper:** I feel like as I have become myself, my hair is not something that I worry about other people's perception at all and I don't know if it is because I am lucky that I have not being in your (Anita's) situation where what you said about the job where she looks different. But on like Instagram, there is all these... "Aww her waist is so tiny", like all of these other things but hair is the last thing now that I would...

**Rias;** yeah same

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**Mod:** So, did the videos project a new standard for you to follow?

Pepper: No

**Tracy:** I think it did for me when you see black women with similar hair type to me, and their hair was really long and really healthy and I sat thinking, why isn't my hair like that and honestly I was for a long time hung up on length, even when I started to understand taking care of it and when you start to see growth and see length retention and suddenly you just slip up for a couple of weeks or your hasn't grown for like six months and I think it is those things in the beginning, there was a standard I was trying to match up to even though it wasn't like white hair , it was black people but it was

**Rias:** within the black community

**Tracy:** Yeah within that black community and even when you see people with looser curls and they are like oh, I do this, and I do that. Their hair is amazing, and I think why can't my hair go like that, or if you do a twist-out and the twist-out is like trash and you are thinking... does it? And I think those are the standards that I had; oh I have got to reach this. I really slowly realized that actually no, my hair is my hair and I enjoy it how I enjoy it, if it takes me ten years to get to the same length as somebody grew their hair in a year, so be it...

**Rias:** I feel like to me, I don't know if it is because I am a creative person my whole being is about not trying to follow standards of what people have told me to do and it really annoys me trying to conform to what society tell me you should or can do as a black person. Hair was one of the aspects, I think it was language and . . . Like if society sees you speaking, they have a stereotype. But as long as you can fluctuate between two not in terms of like, you always need a formal voice and a culture voice and it is not about trying to hide that voice. Many people say you have a white voice- you know what I mean- I think is not about hiding that white voice it is about knowing a time and a place to use it- you know what I mean- you ... use your formal voice but don't feel like if you are in a room with all - I have been in a situation when I have been in a room with all white people and I have being like- I'm not going to conform to your standards, I am going to speak the same way. I don't care how you view me. ...I am not trying to follow you or be like you, I am trying to be myself. My clothing, do I care about how you think about how you think of how I dress? It is not about ... even within my own culture, this is not normal- do you know what I mean- We are fighting to be seen by white people and within our culture

**Pepper;** Yeah

**Rias:** and that is stereotypes to and that affects us with hair, colourism is a big thing within our culture , mixed race over black- even within that there is mixed race people that have coarser hair. I think it is all about breaking down the change within us because these are the things that have been placed on us for millennia. So, it is just about breaking the things that we think are normal. In our culture there is a subtle racism that affects us, it is the ones you hear that you think, 'do I respond to you? Or stay quiet'. I will be like you are wrong. It is the idea that you know what you are talking about but you know you don't know what you are talking about and it is being passed down what you think you know. I was raised in a secluded space while for you it was different. And it is when you come out of this space that you see the world and the way the world really is. I think I feel like coming out of my city but coming out of the space that I was in.

***Crosstalk***

**Mod:** So how did you get to know that you weren't white

**Sasha:** I remember in primary school and we did like a recreation of segregation (segregated bus). I was so confused I didn't know where I stood, obviously I had been brought up by my family. . . obviously when you are young you are oblivious to race and stuff so I didn't know, I was so confused I just stood there for a good ten minutes. I did not know we're to stand. This was like the bus and stuff, we fully recreated it.

***Crosstalk***

**Rias:** wow

**Sasha:** That what I was saying everyone was already in their positions...

**Anita:** this was in Primary school.

**Sasha:** Yeah black history month

***Anita laughs***

**Sasha:** So as I was saying I didn't know what segregation was, I just knew that there were differences. There was Asian people as well and I didn't even know where Asian people were on the bus and stuff. I will be white.

***Crosstalk***

**Anita:** It's insensitive, it is not even this history, our history.

***Crosstalk***

**Anita:** It was more like no blacks, no Irish, no darks. They was no black and white spectrum on the bus it was just that the bus drivers will not pick people up, they would just selectively choose not to pick people up. It wasn't like America.

***crosstalk***

**Pepper:** They focus about America's racism and they never talk about the racism here

***Crosstalk***

**Rias:** Inaudible

**Pepper:** Inaudible

***crosstalk***

**Sasha: inaudible.** . . Obviously I was darker than white people and white than black people. A girl was said you lot are black. I was like what?

**laughter**

**Sasha:** but my mum is white, and I wasn't black but in the end I went to the back of the bus.

**Crosstalk**

**Anita:** did you tell your mum when you went home?

**Sasha:** I can't remember it was back then.

**Pepper:** Asks Anita question inaudible

**Sasha:** Every time everyone tells me you are white or black, or you are just black you are not white. I'm like my mum is white, my mum is white.

**Mod:** do you have to be on any side?

**Sasha:** Literally people tell me you are not white, you are black. It doesn't matter if you have a white mum. I remember, me and my friends were on the bus and this old lady. Those aunties that will just talk to you on the bus- she said don't think that you have more privilege because you are mixed, at the end of the day you are still seen the way your friends are, like dark and stuff. It's ingrained in you are not going to be worth it, you are not going to succeed because you're black.

**Pepper:** So Marsha is gone but she must have been like 14 and got accused of stealing and she had her Afro out and never usually did. Then she got accused of stealing like three times in a month from Primark and then her mum called up and she you have accused my black daughter. I think, in those situations when the racial bias is against you then you are black.

**Sasha:** Yeah that is what I don't get . . .

**Pepper:** do you know what I mean? It's just weird how like . . .

**Rias:** it depends on where you go, identity it varies within

**Pepper:** it's political, it's like political whiteness

**Crosstalk**

**Sasha:** I feel more included and more accepted with my black family than with my white family.

**Anita:** I just find it interestingly. Like I said my brother and sister grew up with predominantly black people so – my little sister, point blank was just like I am black all the way through and I am like oh you are mixed race and you shouldn't . . . she is just no I am black . That is how I identify myself.

**Sasha:** That is the thing, my sister too, she fully identifies as black, but I don't feel like you should completely disregard a whole part of the family that made you in the first place.

**Anita :** I am definitely not going to speak on behalf of my sister because she can speak for herself but she is like I identify as black, my little brother identifies as mixed race, but I also find it interesting because my little sister, we have got ten years apart from my step(white) sisters are around my age. She (younger sister) was growing up she was close to them, because they were very girly, and I wasn't. And when she started to experience racism, she would come to me and talk about it because my sisters don't know what to say. Rather than the usual everyone's equal, sorry that happened. So, she would come to me. That is one thing

I find interesting, the directory of our relationship changed, and she just started coming to me. She just started hanging around me, sitting next to me. If her now as an adult, why are you close to me, she is like, you have always been my big sister and we spend a lot of time together. But I and my stepsister can literally pinpoint the time she started choosing to be close to me. That is because she started to identify with the negative aspects of being black and needed positive affirmations of what blackness it. So, I find it really interesting, the conversation really interesting.

**Sasha:** yeah even my uncles and stuff, there are very racist. I have never seen most of my white family because I'm with black people and stuff so . . . People will tell me we are all the same and stuff. . .

**Pepper:** (cuts in) that is such a disgusting thing to say...

### ***Crosstalk and laughter***

**Rias:** . . . when I experience this everyday lowkey in my life people tell me but everybody is equal, it is not that deep. I'm like just close your mouth, take my chains and see how it feels. [***inaudible***] Experiencing black is so deep. The feeling of being black, you just feel it everyday, that idea that you don't fit in completely in society.

**Pepper:** I saw something the other day, a comment on Facebook, this white woman had written ..."I went in the other day to the doctor, there was no one in there and the receptionist was really rude to me and I sat down in the waiting room and a black woman came in and she we rude to her. And she was like at that point I had this self reflection where I was like that woman could have been like she is being rude to me because I am black and I would never have to think about that I would never have to think about that" ... It like encompassed the difference between like but Anyway I feel that is a whole other conversation.

*Mod: Do you feel like YouTube is about style and beauty of do you feel it is something more?*

**Vic:** It is mainly style and beauty

**Rias:** I think it is more

### ***Crosstalk***

**Anita:** I think we are in a move of pro blackness, it is coming back up across the board. And I think it (hair) comes with it because it is in different types of ways. The same women like men could be 'different ways to straighten your hair', different ways . . . Do you know what I mean, 'how your hair looks this way'. . . But it is very much it comes with when you are embracing blackness in a world where it is white dominant, it is to . . . so that is why we end up talking about race because hair is part of race.

**Pepper** I think it definitely depends on who you are watching though because some YouTubers; like Patricia bright for example, she is quite like apolitical and I have only seen her talk about . . . race and it was once when people were like . . . interracial (relationships) and she was like 'I don't see it as that' but people were like yeah it is . . . whatever makes you sleep well at night. So, it depends who you are watching, some people are doing it for like this product is really good and this foundation is really good and whatever but as you said it is not just about straight hair.

**Rias:** I always feel like um [inaudible] The bit about black issues and hair and stuff and I try to focus on the political side of it because it is more into like see where Things are going and



progressing. I don't know, that aspect of your culture being talked about and when you focus on the American side... I think now I have stopped because it actually damages you

**Crosstalk**

**Tracy:** so tiring,

**Pepper:** draining

**Rias:** I need to be like helping them but there is not much you can do because you have your own problems in your own country.

**Anita:** and the problems are here also also as well but I think they do not get highlighted here

**Rias:** Yeah, it is not seen . . .

**Anita:** . . . and in certain places institutionally, it is very much worse like in America, America is more of a violent racism because of gun control and stuff like that, here the

**Crosstalk**

**Pepper:** It's so violent there

**Anita:** Yeah, I am not saying it is not violent here. It a lot of violence I agree with you

**Crosstalk**

**Pepper:** they have got this blackness in America. They have got this black community it is a thing. Black people in England in most places just...

**Sasha:** I don't know why black Americans don't see black rich people as black

Tracy, Pepper, Anita **Acquiesce**

**Pepper:** Yeah they don't

**Rias:** who, in America?

**Pepper:** yeah they don't. If you go on Twitter, everyday

**Crosstalk**

**Sasha:** you can't see black people . . . There was this interview in America she was just like, 'see you can't say all black people are black because of the ...

**Pepper:** and they thing that black history is . . . Like what we were saying about the Rosa Parks thing, American neglected her...the rest of the black

**Anita:** it is also an American point of view. Americans think of that America is the best place ever

**Pepper:** All Americans are so self-centered

**Anita:** but have you every been to America?

**Pepper:** yeah

**Anita:** Because when you go there, A lot of people were like you are very; I felt like my interaction to black and white people was very different.

**Rias:** you mean like culturally.

**Anita:** I just feel like I think the way white people responded to me and my family was nicer than other black people in general because they see another level of whiteness to you that isn't there and it is very weird.

**Sasha:** they think that you are more privileged because you have a British background

**Anita:** you're not from the ghetto and stuff

**Mod:** we have to move on because of time, this is a good discussion but we have to be time conscious.

*Do you feel watching YouTube videos changed you?*

**Tracy:** In what way?

**Mod:** In anyway

**Sasha:** it made me more appreciative of identity

**Group acquiesces**

**Pepper:** *I think that overlaps with. . . .*

**Tracy:** it has given me a lot of freedom, it has given me a lot of power

**Rias:** . . . (inaudible) some people are quite similar . . . this change has come quite soon I think.

**Anita:** it is not in your head. I feel like a lot of times you need someone to tell you, it is not in your head especially with micro aggression. if you talk to some white people, they will sometimes make you feel like you are a crazy person.

**Crosstalk**

**Rias:** it really hurt me the way they will be speaking to me sometimes. I remember someone said *nigger* and I was like I am not feeling that; it starts as aggression that is like it is not as bad and then it turns into questions and it turns into, asking questions, and then it turns into, 'oh really, is this how you really feel?'. It is stages of . . .

**Pepper:** . . . you always have to prove your humanity. I was talking to Kelechi always want to. . . She was like you always need to prove that you deserve empathy (inaudible). I feel like we keep go on about . . .

**Anita:** cuts in, sorry, sorry, do you know ...

**Pepper:** She is Nigerian ....

**Mod:** *So if you changed in anyway, how do you think these changes will last?*

**Tracy:** yeah I think it is permanent

**Rias:** permanently

**Mod:** How?

**Tracy:** like I said it has given me a lot of freedom. It has given me a lot of power in terms of knowing I have options when it comes to my hair . I no longer feel like the hair dresser is the only person that can do my hair. To me now I know I have all these tools, now I know , if it changes I know because I am paying attention to it now, I think it is a permanently change because it has given me tools to live, a quick fix

**Rias:** let's think about like this . . . I feel like the new wave that is going on is like closure to me...

**Sasha:** It is not even new. . .

**Tracy:** it is not new

**Rias:** . . . It is not new but let's say it's a new frontal

**Tracy:** it is not new but let's say it's better, techniques and hair quality is better and also

**Rias:** but it is becoming ...

**Tracy:** people can see it being done it is amazing

### ***Crosstalk***

**Rias:** don't you think everyone is now doing it it has become like a standard

**Tracy:** like a trend

People have always done that, put on wigs.

**Rias:** this is different I think,

**Pepper:** I would wear a wig for like two months and then go back to braids. It's always personal, I don't think it is. . .

**Rias:** Do you think it is a trend though

**Anita:** I do think the tools and access will always be there and that will not change. I also see what you are saying. If you look at another black trend, it goes in and out of fashion. Comes in in the 70s, goes out in the 80s, comes back in in the 90s.

### ***Crosstalk***

**Sasha:** yeah everyone is in like Afros and the bands and then Afros.

**Anita:** yeah it really does come in and out of fashion ( I say Dias feel s like YouTube is promoting a wig standard but the others feel like it is a not, it is just a thing, a trend)

### ***Crosstalk***

**Pepper:** the negotiation will change that though because it is ...

**Mod:** on that point. That is why I'm asking blackness seems to go in and out, so how would it last this time

**Pepper:** Maybe in society ...

**Rias:** from what I see though, I see a lot of people looking the same.

**Tracy:** I think that is generally though a lot of people have the passion. The hair, the body type, other people's interest. If you look at the 90s you could go, 'oh every woman has straight limp hair and has tiny thin eyebrows, wears bronzy coloured lipstick and wears wide pants. It was a 90s look. Then you had early 2000s where it was a bit more polished. It is just what happens with fashion and trends.

**Pepper:** Yeah. So, in my friendship group at home, me Masha, who is mixed race and our other friend who is white. If you ... Yeah Charlotte, my dad, now he knows, the one with blonde brown hair, he like all ...the same hair colour, goes to the same hair dresser, you could say

that about black women wearing their closures or white women in summer dying their hair blonde and then dyeing it brown. . .

I get your point about. . .

**Rias:** It is the same.

**Masha:** do you think . . .

**Rias:** I feel like do you think that it takes away, black women becoming individual and a part of . . .

**Sasha:** I felt like some black people will embrace and appreciate their hair but some will do the hair styles that others are doing.

**Rias:** You could wear closure and still damage your hair, you know what I mean. What I mean is are people being inspired to closures or is it a standard

**Pepper:** Some people want protective styles but some want a nice wig that is silky

**Tracy:** I think it is difficult for women traditionally both black and white. The way we physically look especially when we wear our hair, it is relate to how people perceive it. You believe it is normal ...I think as black omen, you can't play yourself, like you said, we live in a country that is predominantly white. Just fourteen percent of the population are black or with if minority. That. Is not even black but black plus ethnic. That is tiny, right? So basically when you want to get to a certain level with your career. You can't play yourself, so you have to look to being able to keep your identity as a black woman and reflect a new one ..you have to kind of assimilate, (this isn't twoness Dubois talks about) you have to figure out. 'Do I want this job to be a headache everyday ...

**Mod:** so how would things change if people decide not to play themselves

**Pepper :** that is the thing I think it might be a naïve ...

**Mod cuts in**

**Pepper continues:** it might be naïve but I think that I am just going to wear my braids in my office that I am starting in September, that is completely fine. I won't go in with silver but if I did, then if anyone wanted to chat to me about it I would be cross. Yeah

**Anita:** the thing is from my point of view, maybe I am jaded, I feel like inevitably, your first thing is survival. You need to survive that is your first and foremost point.

**Rias:** uh huh

I say there is a lot of quietness in this room at this point, I feel like this is the coco of the matter.

**Anita:** and I feel like...I still feel like in many ways I have gone ahead but I still feel like in university... Everything, but then you work and you are now ...your aim is where you work and people that you work with and their company (I say it seems people stay on the color line but that line has to be removed when they come to work together and that is where black people feel like they need to 'assimilate', they acknowledge they have to follow the power of the dominant group) , it reflects on you, how you work and it is easy to be it doesn't affect your finances but when you are talking about having 40k income or 80k income , do you feel like you will have your braids

**Tracy:** I will wear a wig

**Laughter**

**Anita:** and then someone goes why are you not standing up for yourself and your culture but it is like, how do I stand up for it, if I don't have my wig and I earn 80k and I can give to all these charities and I can advance and ensure that black people get employed. What am I supposed to do? And I feel like is where I am running. I am in a place where I can do this (refers to her braids) but I do know what is coming ahead. We have a peer mentors and there is one woman wo I work with and she is like when you get to a point and you have to start think, when you are at the head of a 100 -150 people, going to this executive meetings and these are people who have all gone ... Do you want your time to be projecting you team's goals which will lead to investment but do you want it to be about, how do you get your braids done? What do you want to do with your time.

**Pepper:** yeah

(The room is still, dead quiet)

**Anita:** and that is what men's ...

**Sasha:** inaudible

**Tracy:** that why is said, they will say it without saying it. That is why I said don't play yourself...

**Crosstalk**

**Mod:** it sounds like she was baiting you, time for self-care doesn't have to be time used for work

**Anita:** what I found is that a lot of ideas represented in an informal point and that is . . . And ... Is 45 year old middle class man, never interacted with some one of your race or limited interaction, so it ...I am not speaking for everyone cos other black people can have great experiences but I am just saying I am not imagining this. Other people I talk to have this same experience. .... I am talking about when you get to a 100k jobs and when you have that 5 mins, what do you want that 5 mins to be about?

**Pepper:** yeah I completely understand that and I get your experience. The reason that I might have a naïve perspective of it is because where I worked that wasn't the case those women who was on like 90k let's say was on like natural hair. She is in the society of women business and we invited her to come and speak. I think she handles the business side of the school, she is not even the most qualified person for the job . She wanted to be a teacher. . .she is not the most qualified person, She is just good at her job and she has natural hair. She is a no nonsense nanny, she gets the job done. I feel like it is depending on where you work, who you are around and one day we will be the 45 year old in the office.

**Anita:** yeah

**Pepper:** I think that is where I am looking to. Maybe in 8 years time I will be jaded as well you know what

**Crosstalk**

**Tracy:** for me personally when it comes to thinking about natural hair in workplace and how this change could come about, I think it is two pronged. First you have to understand . . . You have to play the game our system plays whether for this job, someone is hinting to you when you wear natural hair-even if it is neat in a nice bun- that that is not the professional look that they want, maybe get a weave or braids that you can tie in a way that looks more like what they want for now. Either you make the decisions and get your career or you don't make that decision. That is one option. The other way I think is to go, hard with it, and say no, I'm taking a stand, this is who I am, this is what I look like and you have to be prepared then. That is all.

**Pepper:** yeah

**Tracy:** and I don't think I can say, one or the other is better because the person quietly does what they do and gets to the top position and when you are the boss you can have your natural hair out. (and no one can fight you for your natural hair. You do it slow or do it the hard and forceful way. Whichever way you do it that is how the change comes but it is slow, it is not going to be quick

***Crosstalk***

**Pepper:** people say to my mum at work and she laughs at it. It doesn't even bother her, she doesn't see it as racist or micro aggression and she will be like oh, can you go down to the market and get me this and this. They will be like ooh Jane your hair is like a lion today and she will come back and tell me and would be like haha, yeah they said this and I was like mum if they said that to me I am dropping my things, snatching my cash back and walking away. But she doesn't even see it as rude.

**Rias:** She is from that era . . .

**Pepper:** exactly.

**Tracy:** they think they know better than we do

**Dias, pepper:** yeah, it is less sticky

Appendix 7

Appendix 7.1: Entries by Coder 1

<b><i>Vid No.</i></b>	<b><i>Video Title and date Published</i></b>	<b><i>Video Summary(S) (including description of thumbnail(T))</i></b>	<b><i>What is in the foreground (include colours)</i></b>	<b><i>What is in the background(include colours)</i></b>	<b><i>What words or phrases are used to describe hair</i></b>	<b><i>What other words or phrases jump out or appear distinct</i></b>	<b><i>What words are used to address the audience or how is the audience addressed (including tone of speaker)</i></b>	<b><i>Describe background music</i></b>
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1	Structure of Hair - Part 1 The Basics(2010)	Title Cover: Slide with orange text, pink hearts on the top left corner, big orange oval shape with dots scattered in the middle and another image next to it. Summary: The lady talks about a hair follicle at a microscopic level and what gives our hair it's colours, as well as why our hair may be dry. She also provides different solutions to fix dry hair.	The video features a lady sitting down on a set of stairs surrounded by items. She provides close ups of these items and then proceeds to make something out of it.	Stairs inside a house and a table beside the stairs with pink sheets on it.	Dry and hard to moisture, the tootsie centre, human hair is our fur,	cuticle, cortex, medulla, protective shield, overlapping shingles structure, transparent, covers and protects, the tootsie centre, melanin, intercellular cement, that's a fancy term, the mystery, fragmented, hair is our fur,	You have what we call', she speaks very instructively and explanatory in her spoken manner	The background music is what I would expect to hear during tutorial videos or video intros, it's upbeat and bright in its tone.
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2	Natural Hair: Aaliyah's Second Big Chop (2012)	<p>Title Cover: Features a lady getting a haircut.</p> <p>Summary: This is a video on a lady getting her hair shaved for a natural look</p>	<p>Two ladies, one is sitting down wearing a white shirt and the other one is stood up wearing a pink shirt whilst she is fiddling with the other lady's hair.</p>	<p>White door and it looks like white shower tiles and a glass panel on the left side.</p>	<p>grey hair, it depends on the grain, you have a cowlick, big chop, Brazilian blowout, chop the ends off,</p>	<p>how long have you been natural, why not do something short, something different, Solange Knowles, I was so afraid for the blade or the guard to fall off, I love being natural, I would recommend it to everyone</p>	<p>hi everyone, tell everyone bye, Bye guys, very relaxed tone of voice, like a conversation between friends, a bit inquisitive at the end</p>	<p>It is a fast-paced song with a serene singing voice of a lady and then a man singing. Lyrics are slightly hard to decipher other than the words 'a chocolate box' which is repeated.</p>
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3	Kimmytube Hair Growth Journey Part 1 (2010)	T: A lady smiling, wearing a black top. S: The lady speaks about her hair journey in terms of how she has been maintaining her hair, what she has been doing right and wrong and which benefitted her to allow her to grow her hair longer and healthier.	Lady showing off her hair length and comparing it to previous videos. Her hair is wet	Beige bathroom tiles with a flower design going across horizontally.	long hair, healthy hair, down their backs and to their waist, hair goals, long hair is healthy hair, hit and miss, retaining hair, better preserved, teeny weenie afro, cycle, hair damaged, shoulder level, dryness, very very dry, moisturised, it felt full, felt like straw, water is what makes your hair elastic, manageable, texturiser, straightened it for a trim, relaxed hair, wispy and flat	before and afters, progress overtime, hair growth, for black women in particular, they don't believe we can grow hair long, that's a myth, special background, hair goals, long hair is healthy hair, hit and miss, retaining hair, better preserved, no language around natural hair, teeny weenie afro, cycle, it felt full, felt like straw, water is what makes your hair elastic, texturiser, straightened it for a trim, relaxed hair, wispy and flat	you have also seen the progress of my hair, you know. It features informal speech, the lady is telling a story about her hair progress	None just her speaking
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4	3 quick everyday natural hair styles (2015)	T: Two pictures of the same woman, a side view of her in braids and a front view of her in braids. S: This video was a tutorial on different hair styles, she goes through how she applies products and how she parts her hair to show the audience how she completes her looks. She also does a get to know me part at the end of the video to interact with the audience	Lady parting her hair with moisturiser and is styling it.	corridor with a tv and other electronics	stretched hair, moisturising, separate into sections, parting in a zigzag, optional, high puffs, retro style, brush my edges, pigtail puff, formulate into a bun, sleek, comb overlook, flat twisting style, bottom part of the twist,	3 simple styles that I've been rocking, high puffs, flat twisting style	Hey, loves, you guys, very instructive in her tone, quite relaxed and friendly, doesn't use any unfamiliar terms	Sounds like carnival music, lively and upbeat
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5	How to get perfect bantu knot out results on dry natural hair: Alyssa Forever (2013)	T: A lady fixing her curly hair. S: A lady gives a tutorial on how to do Bantu knots, her overnight process and gives tips on how to prevent frizz the next day, she then proceeds to show this process till the end of the video where she shows the final results.	A lady showing off different stages to how she gets her hairstyle	Different backgrounds, white wall with a towel hanging in the background, white windowsill with blinds and a towel rack on the bottom.	frizzy, worn out, product build up, clean, repair preventing and protecting, detangle time, split ends, smooth straight, tangles, dry, nappy and ratty, smooth ends, smooth roots,	awesome things to your hair, yeah smooth those ends girl, yo!, Yes!, ends are key, loose knots, revert back to its natural curl pattern, Bam! And that's all there is to it!	unfortunately you're going to', addresses the audience directly whilst explaining what she is doing, uses informal speech	A mix between songs, all happy and loud music. Makes you feel optimistic as well when you listen to it.
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6	What does science say about afro hair? (2016)	T: An image of a girl on the left side and a series of black and white photos on the right, accompanied by a bold writing in red background. S: The lady proceeds to give an educational video on the history of African hair and provides scientific reasoning as to why it is the way it is, she uses a lot of technical formal speech that can be hard to grasp at times.	A lady speaking and explaining about the differences with hairs from different cultures such as Asian hair vs afro hair, she provides slides and microscopic photos of hair strands to demonstrate the differences	Living room background of a household	knots, damage to the cuticle, kinky hair, straight European hair, natural hair, matted, splits, breakage, black frizzled hair, willy hair, short tightly curled hair, demonic licentious and pubic, looks and feels dry, hairs shine, colour shape and thickness, kinks and curls,	natural hair community, no biochemical difference, morphology, culture, straight follicle, cross section of black hair, homosapien, race, our hair is the second most important in race identifier,	Speech is very formal and informative and uses an abundance of technical terms in relevance to the topic. 'According to', 'and thus', 'you may have, you will' addresses the audience directly.	No music identified other than the intro music which was a quick rock music.
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7	DIY: Make perfect flaxseed hair gel every time! Fool proof method (2017)	T: Features a measuring jug and a gooey mixture flowing from a hand. S: The lady gives a tutorial of how to make a consistent gel out of flaxseeds, to apply to the hair. She gives tips as well on what to use to separate the gel from the seeds using a pantyhose and a measuring jug.	A lady speaking about flaxseed	A bedroom in a household	define my hair, moisture, thick string of flaxseed mucus, mucus trail, thicken, congeal, even, smooth texture, great hold and spring back, great gel for your curls,	lazy girl way, gel consistency, too thin, too thin, not jelly enough	You guys', addresses the audience directly and is friendly in her manner of speech.	Techno intro music, and throughout the video,
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8	Mission Go: Natural (2010)	T: an image of a girl smiling at the camera. S: A video where a lady is encouraging her audience to write nice things about her friend to go natural in the comments	The lady speaking to the camera	White door panels in a household	N/A	why you went natural,	Friendly, and encouraging	Very jazzy music, makes the audience happy
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9	Top 10 foods to grow natural hair fast, healthy and long (2014)	T: An image of a girl drinking something from a glass cup, surrounded by images of different foods. S: A girl explaining the benefits to eating different foods such as avocado and salmon, how your body benefits from eating them such as protein and vitamin to help enhance healthy hair growth.	Slides of different foods and a little paragraph on its benefits	White plain background	moisturise, strengthen and nourish, hair growth, scalp healthy, hair loss, anaemia	biotin, fatty acid content,	Hello people welcome back, friendly, Educational, formal speech and uses technical terms on vitamins etc.	the readers voice is more prominent compared to the background music which is slow music with a repetitive beat.
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10	Shea butter for natural hair growth: How shea butter is made (2015)	T: An image of a lady and a bucket full of yellow stuff. S: The lady explains the difference between shea butter and Panya butter, why shea butter is yellow and why it isn't ivory, she speaks of the debate on its difference, she aims to explain the difference between them to educate it's users.	Different slides with photos related to shea butter	Plain black background	N/A	cosmetic reasons, higher demand,	Educational, and formal.	N/A
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11	4 Quick & Easy Headwrap/ Turban Styles (2015)	T: 4 different images of a lady wearing different headwraps. S: Lady gives a tutorial for how to do different headwrap styles. The video is sped up and she doesn't speak throughout the video.	The lady wearing a white t shirt and is showcasing the scarf and shows how she styles her hair using it.	Cream, brownish colour of a wall.	N/A	N/A	She doesn't really speak throughout the video, just showcases the different styles	Remix music, nightclubs sort of music, upbeat and loud
12	Shingling method for crazy defined curls: Natural hair (2016)	T: An image of a girl smiling and running her hand through her curls, with a big bold title. S: A tutorial on how she shingles her curls to define her curls	The speaker with makeup, speaking to the audience	bedroom of a household	tangle, smooth my curls, wet hair, clumped, separated, frizzy, added moisture, dry crunchy hair, roots to the ends, tangle teaser, smooth down roots, curly hair, frizzy roots, fuse together, damp, defined, volume,	rake my fingers through it, leave in conditioner, definition, my curls pop,	Explanatory, friendly, thank you guys, 'you'	Pop genre music, varied volume when she speaks the volume is low

13	Updated wash N' go routine: Natural Hair (2015)	T: An image of a lady showing off her curls, accompanied by a large white title. S: She provides a tutorial on how to detangle her curls and define them one by one. She showcases the products that she uses at the beginning as well.	The speaker is without make up and is wearing a white t-shirt.	Bathroom in the background, a white door behind her.	freshly shampooed hair, super soft, activates my curls, detangle, define each curl, shingling method, scrunch, curls form, shape and fluff, desired shape, bouncy, has a lot of movement,	and all that good stuff, coated, super soft, activates my curls,	Friendly and explanatory, "you're", directly speaks to the audience	Girly, techno beat.
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14	Watch my natural hair revert straight to curly (2015)	T: Split images, one of a lady taking a selfie and the one on the right, the same lady pulling her hair. S: She shows the process of her conditioning her hair and cleansing her scalp for her hair to revert back to curly after having it flat ironed	The lady is speaking without makeup, wearing a white vest.	Bathroom in the background, a white door behind her.	straight, twisting, big hair, curly, heat damage, deep conditioning, took the necessary steps, it isn't worth it, straggly, cleansing my scalp, hair soft, popping, luscious, no limp curls, no straight ends,	I'm happy my hair is back, my curls are popping, I define beauty	Friendly and explanatory, "you", directly speaks to the audience	Pop genre music, simple and relaxing music.
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15	Fussy kids drama free natural hair wash day: My quick painless Method (2018)	T: 3 side by side images of long black curly hair, one being washed, and large to medium text. S: A mother shows a quicker process on how she washes her younger daughter's hair and which product she has found to help her detangle her hair quicker. She explains her methods and why she chose to do it that way.	The video consists of the lady speaking without her make up with her hair in two buns. The little girl with her back towards the camera and the lady detangling and washing her hair. Lady is washing the little girls hair.	Bedroom of a household. Living room environment. Shower room.	tightly curled, looser, softness and silkiness, ton of build-up, ton of lint, detangling process, rough, wash day, dry and tangled, tangles, shed hair, lather	screaming match, work the shampoo in, massage into her scalp, evenly coated	Friendly and explanatory. 'What's up guys!'	EDM music, upbeat, girly and happy tone.
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16	How to maintain little girls natural hair: Butterfly (2012)	T: An image of a lady showcasing a little girl's braided hair. S: A mother is showing the audience how she maintains her little girl's hair naturally without products only by washing it and brushing it with a soft bristle brush.	A mother and daughter, mother is dressed up and the girl is wearing a t-shirt waiting to get her hair done.	Bathroom, shower curtain with squares on the back and a white door behind them.	co washed, detangle, frizzy, strong, spongy, curl pattern, not really curly but kind of wavy pattern, curl up, frizz,	the brush is like the devil	Friendly and explanatory and informal. Uses slang terms, yes people, until next time y'all peace	Heavy metal and rock music intro, loud static sound.
17	R: Reign: Protective style and Flat twist Updo on Natural Hair: Naturally Michy (2015)	T: 3 different images of a lady with 3 different point of views, side views and front facing views. S: A lady provides a tutorial on how to do a flat twist updo on her hair, using gel and oil.	A lady fixing her hair	Brown door panel and an entrance to another room. Cream coloured walls.	flat twisting, neat	stopping point	Friendly informal and explanatory. Hello lovelies	Hip Hop dance music, repetitive.

18	How to moisturise Dry 4C Natural Hair (ft. Q-Redew Hair Streamer) (2015)	T: An image of a lady teasing two strands of her hair on each sides whilst looking down. S: A girl shows how she moisturises her hair, whilst using a steamer to detangle and loosen her hair.	A lady without make up, wearing glasses.	Plain white wall background	4c, 4b, kinky, coarser kind, stretched, hydrating and healing, detangle, cuticles are open, thicker hair textures, wet, damp, dry, breakage, edges,	lazy natural, moisture and seal it in,	Hey guys, y'all see that, addresses audience directly, friendly, explanatory, and informal in her speech often uses slang.	Soft, low tone music
19	Heat Damage 4C Natural Hair (2012)	T: A close up image on a lady's curly hair strand. S: A lady is showing the process of her hair reverting back from straight hair to curly hair, using water. She shows some strands that has been damaged by heat.	A girl wearing make-up and a white t-shirt	Bedroom of a household	blowout, wet, straight, heat damage, shrinkage,	talk about shrinkage honey, revert, trust your gut	guys. Girl!, Informal and friendly speech, she is laughing most of the time.	Deep bass music

20	How I transitioned from relaxed to natural hair (2017)	T: Split images, a lady holding her hair smiling into the mirror at the camera, the other is a lady looking to the left whilst holding her hair. S:A girl is explaining her journey from how she used to maintain her hair, what she was doing wrong before, relaxing and straightening her hair, washing it every day and how she got to having natural hair.	A girl wearing make-up and a white top, she is sat down on a black leather sofa.	Living room of a household?	straight, wavy texture, relaxed, damaged, thickness, thicken, stronger, cleaner, natural, dry up, breaking, relaxing my hair, silky, smooth, break off, moisture, curly at the roots, straight at the ends, trim, big chops, small, chunky, loose, kinky, coily	transitioning, braid outs, twist outs, match the textures, it was like crack, protective styles,	Hey guys, thank you guys. Informal and relaxed tone of speech.	Soft piano music intro, then a remix of a rap.
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21	<p>Are you Type 4c or Type 4b? Showing the difference: Natural Hair: Wash Day Routine (2018)</p>	<p>T: an image of a girl with her hand out, images of two different clumps of hair? S: A lady shows the difference in type 4c and 4b hair with her children's hair and the difference between the right moisturising routine and air-dry routine.</p>	<p>A lady wearing heavy make-up, wearing black clothes.</p>	<p>Blue curtains and fairy lights in front of a windowsill and bed.</p>	<p>4b or type 4c hair, dry, true nature, wet, styled, fluffy, twist, straighter, knotted, coils,</p>	<p>unravel,</p>	<p>Hey guys, friendly, informal, and explanatory.</p>	<p>Relaxing soft beat music, without lyrics.</p>
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22	Extreme Hair growth regimen: Rice water update + natural hair length check (2018)	T: Two split images of a lady with short straight hair and a lady with long braided hair looking to the right. S:The lady starts to give an update on her hair growth regimen, what she is using and what she does for it such as deep conditioning and wash weekdays, as a challenge for herself.	A lady wearing make-up and jewellery.	Office desk background with a calendar and organizers.	separate and fluff, dry, softer, stronger, doesn't break off easy, elasticity improved, moisture, pick me up, extra TLC, low maintenance,	hair growth regiment, if you're trying to be Pocahontas, lazy natural, bare minimum, length check,	What's up y'all. Whatever. A bit passive in her speech sometimes. Informal and friendly tone, she speaks in a fast-paced manner	Quick soft and relaxed music and heavy drumbeat
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23	Mistakes you should not make on 4c natural hair: Causes knots & breakage #Napchat (2016)	T: An image of a girl looking to the left with a faded pink border and large bold black text next to her image. S: The lady describes her mistake that she made on her hair for it to tangle more than usual and to prevent others from making the same mistakes.	A lady without makeup, all natural and relaxed. Wearing a white t-shirt.	Her bedroom in her house.	4c hair, beautiful creation, up in a puff, twist up, curls were soaked, damp, struck up, puff tangled, dry, tangle for Tangles, contracted together, kinky hair, nappy kinky hair, stretching	who wakes up with a face full of makeup, nappy fool, you know better, , correct your mistakes immediately, moisturisation is our best friend, ends do not dry well next to each other.	Informal and uses slang in her speech 'y'all', what's up!, speaks as if speaking to a friend when addressing the audience.	EDM techno music plays in a low volume along with her speech.
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24	Braided Bantu Buns with Braids ft. Serayah: The Braid Up: Cosmopolitan (2017)	T: An image of a lady holding onto her two long braids, white background and a pink C logo in the corner. S:Quick tutorial of a model getting her hair made up into braids and then into Bantu buns. There is no voiceover in this video to explain the steps.	A model getting her hair braided and put into Bantu buns	plain white wall background	N/A	N/A	No speech, just music over tutorial	EDM and Trap music, catchy and upbeat, makes the audience happy and want to bop their head along.
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25	Silk Press on 4C Hair (2017)	T: Two images, one of thick curly hair next to smooth straight hair. S:A hair cutting and silk press tutorial in a salon, explaining the process to get a silky-smooth finish as well as advice on after maintenance.	A lady wearing make-up speaking to the camera. Model with 4C hair sat on a chair.	Blue and purple sequins in the background. A salon	coarse, stretching, as straight as possible, feather, glass, brilliant shine, silk finish, strong from root to tip,	hair with care and love, hair is weakest when its wet,	Explanatory, friendly, hey everyone, informal, speaking like with friends.	Techno intro music, and throughout the video
26	Natural Hair Update! Holy Grail Product + Styling & Defining My Curls (2016)	T: two images, one of a lady with a big thick afro and a lady with a smaller more defined afro. S: A lady defines her natural curls using her chosen products of olive oil and shea butter.	A lady wearing makeup, and a white tank top.	Living room of her household. A pink chair with a gold pillow. Brown door and the bathroom in the next room behind her.	natural, dusty, crusty and old, stink, dry, tighter, looser the curl pattern,	hair growth pill, raking it through,	Hey babes', informal and friendly. Update y'all', slang in her speech, speaking to her audience directly	Trap music, relaxing, and not too loud in compared to her voiceover.

27	How to Bantu Knot (2008)	T: An image of a girl with her arms up and the background in her household room. S: A quick tutorial on how to do a bantu knot, she explains this step by step.	A lady fixing her hair into bantu knots	two beige coloured curtains, a mirror or picture frame behind her	texture of your hair, coil, curly coil,	looks manufactured, doesn't look natural.	Explanatory, friendly and she uses simple terms to show the different steps	None, other than her speaking
28	Relaxed to natural: The big chop! (2008)	T: Big chop! In big bold pink writing, an image of someone getting a haircut. S: A video of two cousins, one is getting her first haircut since stopping in getting her hair relaxed.	Two ladies, no make-up, relaxed.	black cupboard, wooden blinds on the window and black curtains.	real hair texture, coax everyone into going natural, curl, kinky,	your curls may not pop automatically, hair goes into shock	Relaxed tone, friendly and explanatory and jokingly when speaking to each other and when explaining.	Hip hop and upbeat music, more muted in comparison to the voice of the two ladies but eventually increases when the cousin starts getting her haircut.

29	Tutorial: Signature Sleek Low Bun on Natural Hair (2015)	T: An image of a lady with make up on and her hair slicked back, and the background is indoor in her room?. S: The girl explains her signature look which is a sleek low bun look and which products she uses to keep her hair soft and smooth, and which brushes she uses to style it.	Lady with no make-up on, wearing a black top	Picture frames, and cupboard with nail polish on top. White/cream walls	grey hair, flat, so much hair, smooth through all the layers of the hair, mist my hair, stop my hair from going hard, stays soft and smooth, doesn't have the crunch or the flake, keeps my hair flat	misting my hair, signature part	Friendly and explanatory, directly speaks to the audience 'catch you guys'	soft piano intro, relaxing and then becomes a bit more pop
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30	Introduction (2008)	T: An image of a lady sat down with something in her hand, and she is looks like she is in the middle of a movement. S: A story telling of her before and after results of her hair from when she cut her hair before and currently where she has grown her hair out. She also shows the different products that she recommends, she encourages those with similar hair type to her to be happy with their natural	A lady wearing makeup, wearing a black and white patterned top. She is sat down on a brown couch.	Brown couch and a bookcase as well as a cream-coloured wall.	it wasn't permed, it was just damaged by heat, big, long if I straighten it, really really big, wavy or curly, fluffy and soft, not worry about getting it greasy, curly hair like me,	you can do it!, no fuss person, buy what I need, concoction, stay happy stay nappy, like your hair in its natural state too	Friendly and simple in her speech, informal and similar to someone telling a story. 'Hi to everybody who has curly hair like me'	None, other than her speaking
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		hair state with dedication.						
31	Protective style for hair growth retention: Crochet braid tutorial (How to) HD (2012)	T: a close-up image of someone getting their hair braided. S: A tutorial on a crochet braid and how to blow-dry and shape the hair to get the desired texture without making it look unnatural.	A girl getting her hair braid crocheted	Brown curtains, black towels with a golden and black stripe pattern.	loose ends, blunt on the end, uneven, tapered, ends to look as natural as possible, knots, looks very very natural	the smaller the amount of hair on the crochet gives you a nicer finished look	Informal and uses slang in her speech, explanatory like in a class tutorial but less formal. Now for a quick demonstration', 'as you can see'	Steel pan kind of music, upbeat and repetitive. Undertone, low volume in compared to her voiceover.

32	4C Natural hair routine: Wash Day (2018)	T: an image of a girl combing her hair, the background is a pale grey/white, there is black sleek text title next to her image. S: A girl goes through her natural hair routine, her washing and moisturising routine, ready for the next day	A girl without makeup, wearing a red shirt	Plain white wall background	stretched out, twisting my hair out, get rid of some of the kinks, very very dirty, hair will be as dry as the Sahara desert, ends of your hair will be so dry, thinning of some oils, you will break your hair, I don't damage my ends, through my damp hair, moisturise my scalp, protect your hairline	conditioner is your best friend when you're a natural hair girl. Two strand twists are the devil,	Hi guys, welcome back', friendly tone, informal and is another explanatory video explaining her hair routine.	R&B music, upbeat
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33	Can white women be in the natural hair movement? Black hair is... (2018)	T: an image of a lady wearing pink with her hair done up and she has two small braids each sides. The background is beige, there is a long white and capitalised text next to her image. S: Different ladies discuss whether white women can be in the natural hair movement or not, and them stating their point of view.	Individual women wearing make up	Brown/beige plain background	curl pattern	they all have different types of textures in their hair, maybe they don't have the deep cultural impact or roots like we do when it comes to texture but they are experiencing it on their level and that is all relative, and we still have to look at each other as women, we have experienced some hair hate, let's try to unite or hair love, feels counterintuitive, black women need to have a safe space for themselves, step outside of society's norms and love	Interview like speech, opinion based,	None, other than the speakers speaking
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						ourselves for who we are		
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34	I tried following a Caucasian's hair tutorial (Laura Lee) and wellll... (2018)	T: An image of a woman with a red afro hair next to a lady with blonde braided hair. S:She showcases the difference in hairstyle results when following a tutorial of someone with a different hair texture and whether or not it is applicable to her hair style.	A lady wearing makeup, and a white tank top.	Grey wall background	with short hair you feel like you're limited, thicker head of hair,	I don't see texture	Informal, friendly and she tries to keep things comical	Happy upbeat music
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35	Quick top knot bun on wet "natural hair" (2011)	T: A close up image of a lady with glasses looking to the side. S: A lady gives a quick tutorial on how she creates a bun when in a rush, using a wet hair and a brush and bobby pins.	A lady showing the different stages of making a bun with a wet hair	white door and walls	my hair was looking crazy, manageable, delicate, tight, loose ends,	you want your buns to be full,	Friendly and explanatory, "hey guys so", directly speaks to the audience	Jazzy and upbeat music with no lyrics.
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Appendix: 7:2 Entries by coder 2

Video No.	Video Title and date Published	Video Summary (S) (including description of thumbnail (T))	What is in the foreground (include colours)	What is in the background(include colours)	What words or phrases are used to describe hair	What other words or phrases jump out or appear distinct	What words or phrases are used to describe hair What other words or phrases jump out or appear distinct	What words are used to address the audience or how is the audience addressed (including tone of speaker)	Describe background music
1	<b>Structure of Hair - Part 1 The Basics(2010)</b>	T: A picture of a circular shape with dots in the middle. S: Lady sets up the model of a hair strand using a pipe, wires and seeds. She describes the structure and properties of hair	A lady sitting on steps. She has a rope and a hose. She is dressed in house clothes, no makeup. She manipulates the items and does a show and tell	Appears to be the downstairs of a residential home	Dry, hard to maintain moisture, roof of a home, bark of a tree, hair is fur, moisture	This thing called hair, melanin, ph balance	Dry, hard to maintain moisture, roof of a home, bark of a tree, hair is fur, moisture This thing called hair, melanin, ph balance	Explain to you, your hair, look at your fingers, you see, I like to call .Tone is explanatory and formal (like a teacher in a classroom)	Slow music made of mostly strings and low drums (causes anticipatory atmosphere)

		cuticle cortex and medulla.							
2	<b>Natural Hair: Aaliyah's Second Big Chop (2012)</b>	T: Girl manipulating another lady's hair. S: Time- lapse of hair cutting, an additional friend shows up and they argue how best to achieve the style. Subject getting her hair cut answers questions of the end result. Final pictures of the look	Two ladies, one sits while the other trims her hair. The subject getting her hair cut off occasionally raises a photo of Solange with hair cropped, she smiles widely at the finished result of her cropped head	Panels of white doors, suggesting a residential building	you have great hair- no I don't , grey hair stresses me out, big chop, Brazilian blow out horrible, big chopped for something different , I love it, may grow it out, may keep it short	we don't brush our hair, so we don't know(argument about hair grain), Solange Knowles look, nervous/scared with the clippers	you have great hair- no I don't , grey hair stresses me out, big chop, Brazilian blow out horrible, big chopped for something different , I love it, may grow it out, may keep it short we don't brush our hair, so we don't know(argument about hair grain), Solange Knowles look, nervous/scared with the clippers	hi everyone, as you can see, Friendly tone, lots of laughter and smiles, waves goodbye to the audience	Upbeat music repeating the words "chocolate box"



		with the main subject smiling.							
3	KimmyTube Hair growth Journey Part 1 (2010)	T: Girl smiling with short hair . S: hair is actually possible to grow, long hair is healthy hair	Lady combing and manipulating hair	shower bathroom	hair growth, progress over time how hair has grown, hair growth seems to be an issue for black women in particular, myth that hair can't grow, I once believed too that I couldn't grow my hair long, habit when we were relaxed, water is not the enemy	se before and after, special background in ethnicity, you know what, long hair is healthy hair, retaining length, careful technique, no hair forums, no language around hair, cut hair in 1999, texturiser, curl pattern	hair growth, progress over time how hair has grown, hair growth seems to be an issue for black women in particular, myth that hair can't grow, I once believed too that I couldn't grow my hair long, habit when we were relaxed, water is not the enemy but the cure, curls are evidence water has touched my hair. hair was wispy and flat,	people like to see before and afters, some of you	no music jus voice

					but the cure, curls are evidence water has touched my hair. hair was wispy and flat, I didn't like it.		I didn't like it. se before and after, special background in ethnicity, you know what, long hair is healthy hair, retaining length, careful technique, no hair forums, no language around hair, cut hair in 1999, texturiser, curl pattern		
4	3 Quick Everyday Natural Hair Styles   Loveisbellaaa (2015)	T: Head shot of styled hair . S: demonstration of three simple styles on short natural hair, she has a discussion about sharing with the	head shot of lady manipulating hair, seems to be wearing home clothes	living room with brown colours	styles super quick and easy , stretched or none stretched, moisturising , separate sections, high puff, cute and retro , using dark and lovely super softening butter cream,	rocking this summer, optional but that's how I like to wear this style, getting a lot of request about style, it took me a lot of practice	styles super quick and easy , stretched or none stretched, moisturising , separate sections, high puff, cute and retro , using dark and lovely super softening butter cream, smooth down my edges,	Hey, loves, bear with me, explanatory and directive tone, I hope that s helpful, I hope you guys can understand, you guys can replay the video, over and over again ,	fiesta music, island vibe

		audience her favourite things, she then share the name of her current favourite song			smooth down my edges, managing my hair so it doesn't break, gorilla gel to look more slick, flat twist, cute quick protective style		managing my hair so it doesn't break, gorilla gel to look more slick, flat twist, cute quick protective style rocking this summer, optional but that's how I like to wear this style, getting a lot of request about style, it took me a lot of practice	it wasn't hard at all, I wanted to talk to you guys about a new thing, I wanted to share	
5	How to Get Perfect Bantu Knot Out Results on Dry Natural Hair   Alyssa Forever (2013)	T: Girl with hand in luscious curly hair, S: demonstration on how to achieve a bantu knot out	girl demonstrating, occasionally products come in focus	bathroom	three-day old wash n go, product build up ,it's frizzy , worn out and ready to be washed, using a sulphate free shampoo, free to use any brand you want, detangling,	none	three-day old wash n go, product build up ,it's frizzy , worn out and ready to be washed, using a sulphate free shampoo, free to use any brand you want, detangling, awesome for your hair , none	you, you don't want frizz, thank you for watching	funky orchestra music

					awesome for your hair ,				
6	WHAT DOES SCIENCE SAY ABOUT AFRO HAIR?(2016)	T: Girl flowing hair in a living room and the other side is a photo in black and white identified to later be a microscopic picture of hair S: summary from scientific papers describing afro hair, its structure, knotting, breakage and shine	Head shot with lady talking, occasional micrographs of afro hair, illustration of afro hair shape compared to others	living room, tv, settee, occasional microscopic images of black hair, micrographs on the structure of hair	channel that helps you grow your 4b, 4c hair to longer lengths, afro hair, hair regime, no biological difference between hair of any other group and afro hair but there is difference in morphology , we all know afro hair is prone to knots,	I'm wearing a wig today, don't let that detract from what I am saying	channel that helps you grow your 4b, 4c hair to longer lengths, afro hair, hair regime, no biological difference between hair of any other group and afro hair but there is difference in morphology, we all know afro hair is prone to knots, adopt styles that reduce knotting and combing for length, keep	hey everyone, our hair, I hope you found this video helpful and informative, uses scientific language and explanation	upbeat rock and roll intro

					adopt styles that reduce knotting and combing for length, keep up protective styles, our hair wasn't as weak as we thought it was,		up protective styles, our hair wasn't as weak as we thought it was, I'm wearing a wig today, don't let that detract from what I am saying		
7	DIY   Make PERFECT Flaxseed Hair Gel EVERY TIME! Fool-Proof Method (2017)	T: Picture of a hand in gel like substance in a cup. S: demonstration of updated recipe to make flaxseed gel, the subject applies the made DIY flaxseed gel and poses with the results smiling in the	head shot of lady talking	bedroom, bed covered in white sheets, white walls, room lamp	update wash and go, lazier way of making flaxseed gel, the best gel for your hair, old wash and go, moisture, flaxseed is amazing, perfect flax seed gel every time, easy, apply to your hair and style, I have really	first uploaded my gel video in 2010, it's crazy it has been 7 years since I uploaded the first one, if you stick to the one hour or thirty-minute mark, you won't have that problem, obsessed with flaxseed gel, super even, super smooth, great hold, great gel for your curls	update wash and go, lazier way of making flaxseed gel, the best gel for your hair, old wash and go, moisture, flaxseed is amazing, perfect flax seed gel every time, easy, apply to your hair and style, I have really good definition first uploaded my gel video in 2010, it's crazy it has	What's up guys, exactly what we are looking for, 'we', here is your final product, I hope you guys enjoyed this video, and I will see you in the next one	friendly and happy giggly tone, low instrumental music, music is high after gel is produced

		camera like an ad girl			good definition		been 7 years since I uploaded the first one, if you stick to the one hour or thirty minute mark, you won't have that problem, obsessed with flaxseed gel, super even, super smooth, great hold, great gel for your curls		
8	Mission Go-Natural(2010)	T: smiling lady, head shot with loose short natural hair, S: vlogger asks her viewers to leave comments writing to her friend to encourage her to go natural	head shot of lady talking	in a room with white door frame behind		my best friend wants to go natural, she is ready to get rid of her relaxer, but she needs some encouragement, she doesn't know I'm going to do this, you guys have a good day, you guys are amazing	my best friend wants to go natural, she is ready to get rid of her relaxer, but she needs some encouragement, she doesn't know I'm going to do this, you guys have a good day, you guys are amazing	you guys write to her in the comments section and give her a little encouragement, say why you went natural	salsa music, with trumpets

9	top 10 Foods to grow natural hair fast, healthy and long (2014)	T: girl drinking water surrounded by pictures of food. S: description of the foods and their nutrient for hair growth	pictures of food and graphics of their benefits	plain	biotin for hair growth, massaging oil for growth, hair growth, red lentils stop hair from follicles, you need to have this in your diet to avoid hair loss	loaded with vitamins, packed, great source	biotin for hair growth, massaging oil for growth, hair growth, red lentils stop hair from follicles, you need to have this in your diet to avoid hair loss loaded with vitamins, packed, great source	what's up people welcome back, some of you, you, you guys. thank you for watching ad tone here	jazzy music with a beat
10	Shea Butter for Natural Hair Growth - How Shea Butter is Made (2015)	T: Indigenous African woman. S : myth busting; Yellow shea butter is not bad for hair, shea butter can be both yellow and white	images of trees, shea butter and women preparing it	same as foreground	Using yellow shea butter is bad for natural hair	desperate to learn about Yellow shea butter, address some rumours	Using yellow shea butter is bad for natural hair desperate to learn about Yellow shea butter, address some rumours	as we all know, shea butter is ivory, you need to identify , explanatory teaching tone	no music just voice

11	4 quick and easy headwrap/turban styles(short natural/hair) (2015)	T: four styles of head wraps. S: Subject demonstrates through timelapse head wrapping styles. She looks in the camera sensual as she complex styles	demonstration, neutral plain background, text, what is your favourite, comment below	neutral plain background (brown)	none	none , twa in title	none , T.W.A. in title	none	Hip hop with deep beats and rapping
12	Shingling Method for Crazy Defined Curls  Natural Hair (2016)	T: Headshot completed hairstyle with luscious curls. S: Demonstration of how to shingle but completes style off camera	head shot lady talking and manipulating hair, also showing off to the camera like a model will do in a photoshoot	bedroom in colours of brown and reddish shades	shingling method, raking method, deep conditioner, curls super defined, my curls pop, cleanse hair thoroughly to avoid build up, detangle, shingling		shingling method, raking method, deep conditioner, curls super defined, my curls pop, cleanse hair thoroughly to avoid build up, detangle, shingling you want detangled and defined curls,	as you saw, you guys, you guys put me unto this product, thank you guys for watching, active tone	hip hop songs



					you want detangled and defined curls, dry into a huge frizz ball, curly hair fuzzes together to create curls that are hard to get out when curling, curls defined, hair is soaking wet, shea moisture cream		dry into a huge frizz ball, curly hair fuzzes together to create curls that are hard to get out when curling, curls defined, hair is soaking wet, shea moisture cream		
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13	UPDATED Wash N' Go Routine   NATURAL HAIR (2015)	T: headshot with defined curls S: demonstration of how to achieve a wash n go	head shot of lady manipulating hair with voice over	house room with doors in the back	focusing on my end, working in four sections makes life so much easier, hair is drenched in water, activator cream, define each curl one by one, looks like this method takes a long time but I define my head in 20 to 30 mins, doesn't take that long compared to braid out, spritz my edges and gel them down, apply satin scarf for nice and sleek		focusing on my end, working in four sections makes life so much easier, hair is drenched in water, activator cream, define each curl one by one, looks like this method takes a long time but I define my head in 20 to 30 mins, doesn't take that long compared to braid out, spritz my edges and gel them down, apply satin scarf for nice and sleek edges, scrunch hair to help curls form, after added product, takes	calm tone, here is a closeup for you, see you all in my next video, thanks for watching	hip hop music
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					edges, scrunch hair to help curls form, after added product, takes hair forever to dry, stretched hair vs not stretched big difference, nothing special, that is it for this wash n go, bouncy, super soft, love it		hair forever to dry, stretched hair vs not stretched big difference, nothing special, that is it for this wash n go, bouncy, super soft, love it		
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14	Watch My NATURAL HAIR Revert   Straight to CURLY (2015)	T Head shot of hair style with bright blue graphics straight to curly./ S: explanation of the process of experience of straight hair, demonstration of deep conditioning using timelapse to revert hair from straight to curly, explanatory scene in the show to show how to wash	head shot of lady talking about hair	house room with doors in the back	I made it to 4 weeks with straight hair,, I never though it will last, I was enjoying not having to do my hair, I miss my curls, I'm bored with this, deep condition, black castor mask, pray for no heat damage and pray my hair will come back, this is what my hair looks like now, my ends are looking straggly , I have this smile on my face because I	avocado oil, honey, treatment mask, deep treatment mask, I'm so nervous, maybe flat ironing hair isn't worth it if you have to go through this process to revert back to curls, do it yourself liquid black soap	I made it to 4 weeks with straight hair,, I never though it will last, I was enjoying not having to do my hair, I miss my curls, I'm bored of this, deep condition, black castor mask, pray for no heat damage and pray my hair will come back, this is what my hair looks like now, my ends are looking straggly , I have this smile on my face because I don't have any heat damage, I'm so happy, my curls are popping, overall I had a good	friendly tone; Hey everybody I'm back with another video, I will be back when I'm done, if you guys will like video tutorial on that let me know in the comments , if you like my shirt check out the website, please share with anyone that would find it useful, see you guys in my next video	light piano music, followed my hair
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					don't have any heat damage, I'm so happy, my curls are popping, overall I had a good straightening experience, my hair is back I'm bad		straightening experience, my hair is back I'm bad avocado oil, honey, treatment mask, deep treatment mask, I'm so nervous, maybe flat ironing hair isn't worth it if you have to go through this process to revert back to curls, do it yourself liquid black soap		
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15	<p>FUSSY KIDS          DRAMA FREE          Natural Hair          Wash Day - My          QUICK          PAINLESS          Method (2018)</p>	<p>T:          Headshot          of kid's          hair          wetting in          shower S:          demonstra          tion and          tips of how          to wash          and          condition          fussy kid's          hair.</p>	<p>head shot          of lady          talking          about hair,          changes to          manipulat          ing kids          hair in a          living area,          then          changes          scene to          shower</p>	<p>bedroom with          bed with white          covers and          white walls</p>	<p>used to          take me          about three          hours, now          it takes me          1 hr, it is a          really fast          process,          Olivia's hair          is tightly          curled, I          wash her          hair every          two weeks          if not it gets          a ton of          build-up, a          ton of lint.,          protective          styling, dry m          tangled,          my secret          detangler is          this          amazing          kids line          from Cantu,          finger          detangle          super          quickly, two          stand twist ,          finger          detangle to          get shed</p>	<p>I shared a          wash day          routine for          Olivia about          two years          ago, since          then my          routine has          changed,          anything in          the          atmosphere          can be          absorbed into          her hair, it is          can be          interesting          process, if          you have kids          that hate to          get their hair          done or hair          that is hard to          detangle, you          are really          going to          benefit from          this video,          products a          used will be          linked in the          description          box below,          makes my life          so much</p>	<p>used to take          me about          three hours,          now it takes          me 1 hr, it is a          really fast          process,          Olivia's hair          is tightly curled,          I wash her          hair every two          weeks if not it          gets a ton of          build-up, a ton          of lint. (the          natural terms          are made          normal          through          repetition) ,          protective          styling, dry m          tangled, my          secret          detangler is          this amazing          kids line from          Cantu, finger          detangle          super quickly,          two stand          twist , finger          detangle to          get shed hair          out , this</p>	<p>Hey guys,          wanna          share with          you guys, I          hope you          guys enjoy          this video I          hope it is          beneficial to          any parents          out there,          makes my          life so much          easier, you          guys gotta          give this a          try</p>	<p>groovy          pop          music,          sounds          sometime          s          frustrated          by          positive          and light          overall</p>
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					<p>hair out ,  this method  is a life  saver, she  hates  getting her  hair  washed,  using my  favourite  felicia  leatherwo  d brush,  easiest  method I  have found  to help  wash day  fly by,</p>	<p>easier the  product is so  good, makes  my life so  much easier,  the tears the  drama, is a  lot. I cut that  step, she can  do it a lot  longer  because I  ain't got time  for it. the  whole thing  takes 40 -50  minutes</p>	<p>method is a  life saver, she  hates getting  her hair  washed, using  my favourite  felicia  leatherwood  brush, easiest  method I have  found to help  wash day fly  by, I shared a  wash day  routine for  Olivia about  two years  ago, since  then my  routine has  changed,  anything in  the  atmosphere  can be  absorbed into  her hair, it is  can be  interesting  process, if  you have kids  that hate to  get their hair  done or hair  that is hard to</p>	
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							detangle, you are really going to benefit from this video, products used will be linked in the description box below, makes my life so much easier the product is so good, makes my life so much easier, the tears the drama, is a lot. I cut that step, she can do it a lot longer because I ain't got time for it. the whole thing takes 40 -50 minutes		
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16	How to maintain little girls natural hair   Butterfly (2012)	T: head shot, mum showing off kid's long braid S: demonstration and tips of what to do with girl's hair, regiment	head shot in bathroom	scene in front of a bathroom mirror	requests to do tutorials on my girl's hair, I'm reluctant because we don't do anything, I have already shown this two years ago, the process, co-wash and deep condition, this is her hair, she does not have any chemicals, she is 100 percent natural, I always blow dry their hair no, these ponytails will be her hair style till the next time, , I will not comb	what else do I need to tell, products, I will link products, these are a day-old, and you see how frizzy they are, but we are not going to redo them, people in the natural hair community say the brush is like the devil, we do use it, all we use is water conditioner and oil	requests to do tutorials on my girl's hair, I'm reluctant because we don't do anything, I have already shown this two years ago, the process, co-wash and deep condition, this is her hair, she does not have any chemicals, she is 100 percent natural, I always blow dry their hair no, these ponytails will be her hair style till the next time, I will not comb through her hair until the next time I was it, how I freshen up	I will show you, you can see	no music, just talk
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					through her hair until the next time I was it, how I freshen up her hair on a daily basis, not creative enough to have three different regiments, we all have more regiments, moisturise, not really curly but wavy pattern , edges not completely slick but that's ok, she inherited the frizz and curls of her hair , very low maintenance, love manipulation what else do I need to tell, products, I will link products, these are a day old and you see how frizzy they are but we are not going to redo them, people		
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					manipulation		in the natural hair community say the brush is like the devil, we do use it, all we use is water conditioner and oil		
17	R: Reign   Protective Style and Flat Twist Updo on Natural Hair   Naturally Michy (2015)	T: head shots of completed style with subject smiling. S; demonstration and description using 'I' of how to achieve	head shot in front of a mirror in a living area, graphics of instruction	living area,, dim lighted	already sectioned hair, flat twist, ABC protective style series	alternating between two products, I came up with a better method for me to keep my twists neat	already sectioned hair, flat twist, ABC protective style series alternating between two products, I came up with a better method for	explanatory tone, hello lovelies, we are sectioning, see yo in my next video	groovy hip hop music

		flat twist out style					me to keep my twists neat		
18	HOW TO Moisturize DRY 4C Natural Hair (ft. Q-Redew Hair Steamer) (2017)	T: Headshot with girl showing off her unstyled hair S: : explanation, demonstration tools , products and tips on how to moisturise hair	headshot of a girl talking and manipulating hair	white neutral	moisturising , 4b 4c natural hair, you know the kinky coarser kind, if you like to maximise length retention you need to moisturise your hair, also clean your hair , braid out, I didn't sleep with a satin bonnet or pillowcase, my hair laughed in the morning, stretched, put most,	disclaimer I am no expert on haircare, no one on YouTube except they are licensed cosmetologist is an expert, whatever you are told always take it with a grain of salt n do your own research , thank q-- for sponsoring today's video, I am a lazy natural which I am trying to get cured for , I don't lie the idea of moisturising my hair multiple times	moisturising, 4b 4c natural hair, you know the kinky coarser kind, if you like to maximise length retention you need to moisturise your hair, also clean your hair , braid out, I didn't sleep with a satin bonnet or pillowcase, my hair laughed in the morning, stretched, put most, nothing stretches hair out light doing braids, sure	friendly discussion tone, hey guys, want to let you guys know , let me know what you guys do to moisturise your hair, see you in my next video	low light music

					<p>nothing stretches hair out light doing braids, sure and seal it in , hair steamer, implement steam to hair regiment, detangle, butter to seal moisture in , get the same definition, get your ends</p>	<p>a week, Q-redew, the most amazing invention ever, aloe vera juice and water for hydrating and healing hair, disclaimer, this gets hot, products mango hair butter, oil mix from curl crush</p>	<p>and seal it in , hair steamer, implement steam to hair regiment, detangle, butter to seal moisture in , get the same definition, get your ends disclaimer I am no expert on haircare, no one on YouTube except they are licensed cosmetologist is an expert, whatever you are told always take it with a grain of salt n do your own research , thank q-- for sponsoring today's video, I am a lazy natural which I am trying to get cured for , I don't lie the idea of</p>	
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							moisturising my hair multiple times a week, q-redew, the most amazing invention ever, aloe vera juice and water for hydrating and healing hair, disclaimer, this gets hot, products mango hair butter, oil mix from curl crush		
19	Heat Damage 4C Natural Hair(2012)	T: picture of head with heat damaged hair S:	girl in front with a t-shirt	bedroom with stickers on the wall	it has been four weeks I got my hair straightened, wanted you guys to see my hair revert, it doesn't smell burnt, it smells burnt, I have a lot of shrinkage,	I'm scared, oh my God I think I have heat damage	it has been four weeks I got my hair straightened, wanted you guys to see my hair revert, it doesn't smell burnt, it smells burnt, I have a lot of shrinkage, serious deep conditioning treatment I'm scared, oh my	before you ask, as you can see, you guys, as you can see, that is it guys, just trust your gut if you think it's too hot, thanks for watching	music comes in as she sprits water for it to revert, music stops

					serious deep conditioning treatment		God I think I have heat damage		
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20	HOW I TRANSITIONED FROM RELAXED TO NATURAL HAIR (2017)	T: headshot of girl combing hair S: S: discussing relaxed to natural journey	girl sitting on a couch talking, hair down, graphics, pictures of products	plain background	if I had a party I will relax my hair, wanting my hair to look a certain way, transitioning, texlaxing, dry, silky smooth, shampooing will dry out n break off, co washing often, low porosity, braid out, twist out, my hair takes long to dry, natural, big chop, doing protective styling	this will be a talking video, transitioned three to four times in my journey, don't feel bad if you relapse and go back to relaxing, do it in your own time, what I used to do, I don't advise it, shampoo once a week or every two weeks, I am trying to remember everything I did, try not to feel in school when my hair is short, trimmed my hair a lot, relaxed my hair again, at this stage I didn't feel like I need to be beautiful with long hair so I had short hair,	if I had a party I will relax my hair, wanting my hair to look a certain way, transitioning, texlaxing, dry, silky smooth, shampooing will dry out n break off, co washing often, low porosity, braid out, twist out, my hair takes long to dry, natural, big chop, doing protective styling this will be a talking video, transitioned three to four times in my journey, don't feel bad if you relapse and go back to relaxing, do it in your own time, what I used to do, I	you guys	no music
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						<p>I kept cornrows in my hair, that helped my hair grow to its maximum potential within a couple months, bought this deep conditioner, it helped me out so much, it worked like magic, it was like crack for my hair, doing my own little DIY thing, I take pixie cut, I do not recommend straightening, my hair was a really loose and wavy texture, I didn't know that, curl pattern, I wanted to share so you</p>	<p>don't advise it, shampoo once a week or every two weeks, I am trying to remember everything I did, try not to feel in school when my hair is short, trimmed my hair a lot, relaxed my hair again, at this stage I didn't feel like I need to be beautiful with long hair so I had short hair, I kept cornrows in my hair, that helped my hair grow to its maximum potential within a couple months, bought this deep conditioner, it</p>	
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						will not feel discouraged,	helped me out so much, it worked like magic, it was like crack for my hair, doing my own little DIY thing, I take pixie cut, I do not recommend straightening, my hair was a really loose and wavy texture, I didn't know that, curl pattern, I wanted to share so you will not feel discouraged,		
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21	Are you Type 4c or Type 4b ? Showing The Difference   Natural Hair   Wash Day Routine (2018)	T: girl with hair down and pictures of different hair types flanking her S: demonstrating the difference between type 4b and 4c	girl sitting in bedroom , images of hair typing chart 1a-4c, scenes in the shower, hair products	bedroom with sparkling curtains,	4b hair, 4c hair, true nature of 4c hair, feels a bit dry but softness, apply moisturiser, 4c tends to look knotted and it can really shrink, 4b hair roots stays a bit straighter compared to 4c	it is hard to tell type 4b hair from type 4c hair, I'm not a hair expert this is what I think, if I got it wrong, let me know in the comments,	4b hair, 4c hair, true nature of 4c hair, feels a bit dry but softness, apply moisturiser, 4c tends to look knotted and it can really shrink, 4b hair roots stays a bit straighter compared to 4c it is hard to tell type 4b hair from type 4c hair, I'm not a hair expert this is what I think, if I got it wrong, let me know in the comments,	hi guys,	light piano and rock music
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22	EXTREME HAIR GROWTH REGIMEN   RICE WATER UPDATE + NATURAL HAIR LENGTH CHECK (2018)	T: picture of girl pulling hair to show length S: Talks about what she does to maintain her hair . Does a length check by pulling hair against body to show how long it is	girl in the front, white shirt, flashing graphics of topics and terms	appears to be a home office with a calendar, pink paper, white table, indoor plants, arts and posters	hair growth regiment, me and my hair we have an understanding, challenge, lazy natural, do bare minimum, routine simple and basic, I don't like wash day, co-washing, deep conditioning , rice water rinses, dry, fluff, moisture, ends should be extra taken care of , protective styles, low manipulation and low maintenance, hair supplement	you gotta do what you gotta go if you gotta be Pocahontas, bought hair fertilizer from Amazon	hair growth regiment, me and my hair we have an understanding , challenge, lazy natural, do bare minimum, routine simple and basic, I don't like wash day, co-washing, deep conditioning, rice water rinses, dry, fluff, moisture, ends should be extra taken care of , protective styles, low manipulation and low maintenance, hair supplements (liquid biotin) , length check you gotta do what you gotta go if you gotta be	what's up y'all, I appreciate you, welcome back , allow me and you, it is not too late to join in the fun, let's do this, hands in one two three, team inches, talk to y'all later next time, friendly and laughing tone	low but upbeat hip pop with drums
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					s (liquid biotin) , length check		Pocahontas, bought hair fertilizer from Amazon		
23	Mistakes You Should Not Make on 4c Natural Hair: Causes Knots & Breakage #Na pChat (2016)	T: headshot of blogger with matter hair, next to graphics what 4c hair should never be like S: Narrates how she ran into problems with taking care of 4c hair	girl sitting in front of camera, camera zooms in while she feigns crying	living area	4c hair is a beautiful creation , most beautiful when you take care and love her or him, respect and accept her or him, did a water rinsing, put in flat twist, rinse, shampoo, co wash, puff, I didn't retwist, dry, not	you should never let happen to 4c hair , people that hate 4c hair don't fully know how to take care of it, when you don't do the right things hair suffer, my job didn't kick me out for wearing that so glory to God, you don't wanna let your hair get like that, you didn't	4c hair is a beautiful creation , most beautiful when you take care and love her or him, respect and accept her or him, did a water rinsing, put in flat twist, rinse, shampoo, co wash, puff, I didn't retwist, dry, not stretched and tangled, it's tangled,	tell y'all, y'all see?	hip hop music low

					<p>stretched and tangled, it's tangled, tangled because they were left to dry around each other , 4c hair can be cool but they can't be best friends, 4c hair locks into each other, kinky-coily hair, that's what our ends do, detangle, twist</p>	<p>wanna suffer, if you do that on a regular basis, you will suffer, we don't have hair that slides past each other, keep your hair stretched at all times, nothing wrong with being a lazy natural, the less you allow your hair get intertwined the more successful your 4C hair journey will be</p>	<p>tangled because they were left to dry around each other , 4c hair can be cool but they can't be best friends, 4c hair locks into each other, kinky-coily hair, that's what our ends do, detangle, twist you should never let happen to 4c hair , people that hate 4c hair don't fully know how to take care of it, when you don't do the right things hair suffer, my job didn't kick me out for wearing that so glory to God, you don't wanna let your hair</p>		
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							get like that, you don't wanna suffer, if you do that on a regular basis, you will suffer, we don't have hair that slide past each other, keep your hair stretched at all times, nothing wrong with being a lazy natural, the less you allow your hair get intertwined the more successful your 4C hair journey will be		
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24	Braided Bantu Buns with Braids ft. Serayah   The Braid Up   Cosmopolitan (2017)	T: girl holding the tails of long braids and posing. S: timelapse of girl getting hair braided with hair extensions start to finish	closeup shot of a head being sectioned, the girl in the foreground is braided, the whole braiding process is sped through including gelling and hot water curling, the subject wears as a crop top saying fire and a big silver jacket	white neutral	none	time lapse,	None, time lapse,	no words just long gazes in the camera, girls sits long when braid finishes and blows a kiss	loud hip hop or trap music, deep bass, drums and clapping
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25	Silk Press on 4C Hair(2017)	T: two pictures contrasted one showing coily hair and the other straightened hair S: shows process of straightening 4c hair	lady talking, close up shot of straightened 4c hair, products, completely straightened hair	plain purple background, hair salon	4c happens to be the tightest curl, big chop, her hair is very coarse, handle hair with care and love, comb gently from ends to root, stretch hair, straight as possible, wrap the hair for silk finish	We are going to highlight a client with 4c, you only show women with good hair ,let's get out of the habit of saying good hair, as long as it is healthy it is good, don't worry about her natural curl patter, she is going to get it back , hair came out beautifully like I knew it would	4c happens to be the tightest curl, big chop, her hair is very coarse, handle hair with care and love, comb gently from ends to root, stretch hair, straight as possible, wrap the hair for silk finish we are going to highlight a client with 4c, you only show women with good hair ,let's get out of the habit of saying good hair, as long as it is healthy it is good, don't worry about her natural curl patter, she is going to get it back , hair came out beautifully like	hey everyone	low hip hop instrumental
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							I knew it would		
26	Natural Hair Update! Holy Grail Product + Styling & Defining My Curls (2016)	T: side by side picture of girl with styled hair S: Hair update, timelapse of hair styling and hair talk	head shot while manipulating hair	living area	been natural a year, don't use hair growth pills, wash hair when it is dusty n crusty,	this Denman brush is bae, I should have got it a long time ago, shea moisture smoothy, I love that product, I bought like 18 bottles, I like styling my hair now, I think my curl pattern has gotten tighter, I'm anti frizz	been natural a year, don't use hair growth pills, wash hair when it is dusty n crusty, this Denman brush is bae, I should have got it a long time ago, shea moisture smoothy, I love that product, I bought like 18 bottles, I like styling my hair now, I think	hey babes, you see what I'm doing	hip hop instrumental

							my curl pattern has gotten tighter, I'm anti frizz		
27	HOW TO BANTU KNOT(2010)	T: head shot of styled hair. S: short demonstration	girl manipulating hair	living room with yellow curtains behind	how to section, hard parts, comb out with fingers or comb, twist	it is a whole lot of fun	how to section, hard parts, comb out with fingers or comb, twist it is a whole lot of fun	when you	no music just voice
28	Relaxed to Natural: THE BIG CHOP ! (2015)	T: picture of girl's hair being cut with graphics in pink showing big chop S: presentation of the big chop: relaxed hair cut off, timelapse then	two ladies talk about hair, scene changes to hair being cut	homestead, cabinets and stuff, living room	big chop, transitioned for a year, it got me excited, kinky, your curls may not pop because it kind of goes into shock after it is cut, make sure you condition	cousin coaxed everyone into going natural, are you mixed? I am Colombian and African American, are you 100 percent ready to big chop, I'm anxious but hair will always grow back, I'm glad this colour is	big chop, transitioned for a year, it got me excited, kinky, your curls may not pop because it kind of goes into shock after it is cut, make sure you condition every week for the curls to come, deep	hey everybody, welcome back to my channel, friendly tone, y'all write some words of encouragement	light hip hop music

		subject inspects and muses over fished results			every week for the curls to come, deep condition	still here to give it some character, ok-I like it-I guess, do you like it? Is it cute-do I look like a little boy?-, I like it, but it is going to take getting used to, it's super thick, have fun	condition cousin coaxed everyone into going natural, are you mixed? I am Colombian and African American, are you 100 percent ready to big chop, I'm anxious but hair will always grow back, I'm glad this colour is still here to give it some character, ok-I like it-I guess, do you like it? Is it cute-do I look like a little boy?-, I like it, but it is going to take getting used to, it's super thick, have fun		
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29	Tutorial  Signature Sleek Low Bun On Natural Hair (2015)	T: picture of a made-up girl (headshot) S; Shows and describes the process of making a perfect bun, at the finished result looks in camera as if looking in a mirror and smiling , graphics thanks for watching	subject (girl) made up with a bright lipstick and slick back hair do, peacock feather earrings , shot of products , manipulating hair into style	room: vanity mirror with knickknacks like nail polish, picture frames, statues, and more	lightly mist hair with water and aloe vera juice, signature parting, moisturise, use alike custard to stop my hair from going hard, then my hair doesn't have the crunch or flake,	that is what I have in that spray bottle, these three brushes save my life and create the perfect bun for me, eco styler favourite gel, using since I decided to transition , saving grace, videos I posted 10 years ago, the big secret is my Denman brush	lightly mist hair with water and aloe vera juice, signature parting, moisturise, use Alikay custard to stop my hair from going hard, then my hair doesn't have the crunch or flake, that is what I have in that spray bottle, these three brushes save my life and create the perfect bun for me, eco styler favourite gel, using since I decided to transition , saving grace, videos I posted 10 years ago, the big secret is	most of you would have noticed, as you can see, you may remember this toothbrush from videos I posted 10 years ago, that's it guys, hope you enjoyed the tutorial, catch you guys in my next video, low direct tone	light piano music, followed by light jazzy hip hop
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							my Denman brush		
30	Introduction (2008)	t: blurry picture probably a clip from video s: subject discusses how she has grown hair and products she used	subject talking to camera, shows products	living room, settee with bookshelf	I did grow it out starting 2003, I cut it because it was damaged, I don't remember doing the big chop though, it is pretty big and long if I straighten it , I have just left it alone, no flat ironing, no pressing no blow dry, I don't like having 14 different moisturiser	I get asked a lot about my hair, if you are adamant about doing what is best for your hair, you don't see it as a bad thing, you just have so much fun playing with your hair, it is really not that big of a deal, You can do it, you have a lot of videos that will help you, check 'em out, this is ahi video for those who	I did grow it out starting 2003, I cut it because it was damaged, I don't remember doing the big chop though, it is pretty big and long if I straighten it , I have just left it alone, no flat ironing, no pressing no blow dry, I don't like having 14 different moisturisers and shampoos, I	hi everybody, I will show you guys , see you guys later	light jazz

					<p>s and shampoos, I buy what I need</p>	<p>have curly hair like me, I will just be sharing tips and tricks on the things I do with my hair, if you want to straighten your hair sometimes but like your hair in its natural state-that's all I ask.</p>	<p>buy what I need I get asked a lot about my hair, if you are adamant about doing what is best for your hair, you don't see it as a bad thing, you just have so much fun playing with your hair, it is really not that big of a deal, You can do it, you have a lot of videos that will help you, check em out, this is ahi video for those who have curly hair like me, I will just be sharing tips and tricks on the things I do with my hair, if you want to straighten</p>		
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							your hair sometimes but like your hair in its natural state-that's all I ask.		
31	PROTECTIVE STYLE FOR HAIR GROWTH RETENTION: CROCHET BRAID TUTORIAL (HOWTO) HD (2012)	T: close up picture of a head with cornrows, attached with extensions . S: detailed description and demonstration of how to install crochet , with time lapse and slow motion	picture slide of crocheted hair and crochet install materials and tools, very close up shot of braided head of the subject	home curtains, plain background	nicer finished look, look a bit better, installing, brush to remove, texture looks very natural, great protective style	I was a kitchen beautician	nicer finished look, look a bit better, installing, brush to remove, texture looks very natural, great protective style I was a kitchen beautician	ok family	low beat upbeat jazzy music



32	4C Natural Hair Routine   Wash Day (2018)	T: picture of subject with long hair with graphics showing 4c hair routine. S: Timelapse of the subject's demonstration of wash routine, including tools and products used	subject manipulating hair in front of the camera	plain background (white)	natural hair routine , stretched out, twisting, product leaves hair smelling amazing, if you skip this step your hair will be dry as the Sahara desert, stay away from tips to keep it moisturised , conditioner is your best friend as a natural hair girl, finger detangle, brush lightly so to not damage ends, shrinkage of hair, moisturising , use Cantu	people will be different- but I'm sharing what best for me, she shakes hands like her hand in her head causes er discomfort, get this comb, you need it- you need it- you need it	natural hair routine , stretched out, twisting, product leaves hair smelling amazing, if you skip this step your hair will be dry as the Sahara desert, stay away from tips to keep it moisturised, conditioner is your best friend as a natural hair girl, finger detangle, brush lightly so to not damage ends, shrinkage of hair, moisturising , use Cantu it has worked for me, ponytail to minimise your hair doing things it wants	hi guys,	hip hop music (I am not my hair by Indie Arie)
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					it has worked for me, ponytail to minimise your hair doing things it wants to do on its own, seal hair, two strand knots are the devil, protect your hair		to do on its own, seal hair, two strand knots are the devil, protect your hair people will be different- but I'm sharing what best for me, she shakes hands like her hand in her head causes er discomfort, get this comb, you need it- you need it- you need it		
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33	Can white women be in the natural hair movement?   Black Hair Is. . (2018)	T: Girl subject sitting with a coiffed hair, but shot, graphics, can white women be natural? S: interview style of different women answering the question of white women in the natural hair movement	women subjects speaking	brown and plain	shift from, always been compelled to have hair that was like white hair	people are not going to like this but I do, maybe they don't have the deep cultural impact and roots when it comes to texture, let's try to unite on hair hate, not today, NHM says we need to step out of society's norms and love ourselves for who we are , feeling I want to be empowered and wear my hair texture, belongs to people who were marginalised to begin with and that group of people is not white women, we need this space with the	shift from, always been compelled to have hair that was like white hair people are not going to like this but I do, maybe they don't have the deep cultural impact and roots when it comes to texture, let's try to unite on hair hate, not today, NHM says we need to step out of society's norms and love ourselves for who we are , feeling I want to be empowered and wear my hair texture, belongs to people who were marginalised to begin with	no direct address; graphic don't forget to subscribe	no music
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						natural hair movement to be ourselves,	and that group of people is not white women, we need this space with the natural hair movement to be ourselves,		
34	I TRIED FOLLOWING A CAUCASIAN's HAIR TUTORIAL [LAURA LEE] AND WELLLLLL ... (2018)	T: picture contrasting a black subject attempting to style hair and a Caucasian subject with a finished look S: Follows hairstyling techniques of a YouTuber with	headshot of subject facing camera and manipulating her hair, on the bottom of screen, is a display that plays the tutorial that main subject follows	plain background grey	short, easy to do, my hair is textured, don't want to frizz out my hair	today I'm jumping on the bandwagon, there has been a trend that YouTubers follow other YouTubers makeup tutorial. Here you will think this tutorial will be strange or awkward. I don't see texture, well	short, easy to do, my hair is textured, don't want to frizz out my hair today I'm jumping on the bandwagon, there has been a trend that YouTubers follow other YouTubers makeup tutorial. Here you will think	hey beauties, sarcastic and disbelieving tone, also friendly sometimes	light upbeat instrumental

		Caucasian type hair, subject varies the suggestions of Caucasian YouTuber to suit afro hair. the video is a tutorial in a tutorial.				dang, I really wasn't expecting this one to work out, check out this style in my other video, this was fun	this tutorial will be strange or awkward. I don't see texture, well dang, I really wasn't expecting this one to work out, check out this style in my other video, this was fun		
35	Quick Top Knot Bun on Wet "Natural Hair" (2011)	T: headshot of subject with completed hairstyle wearing glasses S: demonstration of how to achieve a professional bun for work situations S: demonstration of how to achieve a bun	women subject manipulates hair	white plain, door in a home	not looking professional, coated with gel, brush should be used sparingly for slick back style, hair is delicate should not be pulled tight, nice and fluffy bun, tuck loose ends in, gold decorative head band	flaxseed gel, a quick n easy solution to horrendous hair	not looking professional, coated with gel, brush should be used sparingly for slick back style, hair is delicate should not be pulled tight, nice and fluffy bun, tuck loose ends in, gold decorative head band flaxseed gel, a quick n easy solution to	hey guys, that's it guys	upbeat Latina music

							horrendous hair		
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