Retail Ethnography (How to Take Care for African American Hair)

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**Retail Ethnography**

**How to Take Care for African American Hair**

African American Hair is beautiful, whether it is left natural, braided or styled. There is one thing that should be kept in mind that in order to maintain healthy good hair, it needs to be taken care of. If the health of the hair is good the styling experience and results turn out great. As I have observed, African Americans usually have tighter and coiled curls with a coarse texture, and the hairstyles that they do are quite diverse and intricate. The detailing that is put in every single hairstyle is both mesmerizing and beautiful to look at. Every hairstyle looks very defined and interesting. However, unlike other hair types, African American hair needs more treatments and moisture, the reason behind being the texture of black hair (Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks & Araiza, 2016). The hair strand is much thicker than most hair types and if not taken care of properly it tends to get brittle and dry. Yes, African American hair requires extra effort but the end results are beautiful, the hair becomes very soft, silky and healthy. So, the end outcome is worth all the effort. In this paper, I will discuss all the aspects of caring for African American hair and the history behind it via thick description.

**The Stigmas Behind Natural Hair and its Ability to Grow**

As far as I have read and seen, African American men and women have faced quite a bit of struggle over the course of time based on the type of hair that they have. Through the progression of time, it is seen that there are certain set beauty standards, if an individual lives up to those standards they are said to be beautiful. Before the civil war, having African hair was said to be a disgrace. A person was deemed to be less beautiful if they had African hair, only smooth and straight hair was considered to be a mark of beauty. Prior to the civil war, the black men would crop their hair short and the women would use hair relaxants to make themselves look more representable and desirable like the whites. Good hard spent money was spent on the straightening of hair by the African American women. That all changed after the 1960s. The men grew their hair out and the women stopped using treatments to tone the natural body of their hair. Natural African hair became a political statement, it was the identity of the people of color and they wanted the world to see them for what they are (Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks & Araiza, 2016). The Afro holds a specific reference and association to the African roots. The rise of the Black Panther Party also helped many African embrace their true identity. Many notable figures like Angela Davis and Jesse Jackson started to support a full Afro. It was the time of the embracement.

Many African women and men love their box braids and they say that it protects the hair and helps it grow out naturally. There are many Africans who have started making protected hairstyles so their hair stays safe. On the contrary, there are Africans who have left their hair be in its natural glory. Africans have finally started to embrace what God gave them and started appreciating the uniqueness of it. Singer Bob Marley made a statement with his dreadlocks in the past. Actors like Whoopi Goldberg created history with her dreadlocks in the 1980s. She made it official that all Africans need to accept their natural hair and own it. Further, lately, young stars like Zendaya have taken a step ahead by rocking the dreadlock look. Regardless of the racist remarks, she got from Giuliana Rancic, she flaunted her hair and did not let anyone tell her any differently. All the people from across the globe supported Zendaya pointed out Rancic for her Shallow thoughts (Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks & Araiza, 2016). Times are changing and the stigma that surrounded African American hair is breaking away. People now spend heaps of money to maintain their hair in its natural glory.

**The Pros of having Natural Hair**

In my observation, the Natural Hair movement has played a substantial part in helping the African Americans break the stigma that clouded their hair type. It is about identifying themselves and breaking stereotypes. It all started in the early 2000s and is not coming slowly ever since its initiation. This movement helped Africans across the globe feel comfortable and happy in their skins. This was the time that the beauty standards started to change, it was not just straight and smooth hair that was beautiful anymore, every hair type was considered beautiful. The term used for the Natural hair movement is "Nappy." There was the release of movies and documentaries that also helped break the stigma, movies like "Nappily ever after” is one of the recent releases and saw great success (Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks & Araiza, 2016). It is true, people do get influenced by what they watch. In accordance with tradition, the source of the word Nappy leads back to the days of the civil war. It is intimately tied to the production of cotton in the slave plantations. The clump of cotton that forms on the top of the plant before harvesting is called a nap. This term was used to describe the hair texture because of the similarity that the African hair had with the tuft of cotton. African women and men are opting for a variety of natural hairstyles like Bantu knots, TWA, braids, twists, dreadlocks and so on. The hair relaxant industry saw a great decline after the movement, Africans have eliminated harsh chemicals from their lives.

As far as the advantages of having natural hair are concerned, there are many which are as follows:

1. There are a lot of people who are under the impression that there is no versatility when it comes to natural hair. This fact is absolutely wrong as the possibilities are endless. An individual can have a long or short afro, braids, knots, kinky hair, dreadlocks and so on.
2. The best part of going natural is that one does not have to use relaxers anymore. People feared that their relaxers will wear off if they sweat, because of this issue individuals started to avoid the gym and even partying (Huebschmann, Campbell, Brown & Dunn, 2016). With natural hair, a person can party and sweat as much as they want without any fear.
3. Further, women and men would avoid scratching their scalp as it burned. The fact that the chemicals in the relaxants are so harsh they make them think twice before scratching their head. Now, they can scratch all they want and whenever.
4. Having natural hair is quite economical as well, women and men have actually started to save up ever since they stopped using relaxants on their hair.
5. No longer does the hair needs to be exposed to harsh chemicals. Individuals can use products that are skin friendly and avoid any permanent damage.
6. The overall health of the hair improves as they remain natural. The flexibility increases and the texture becomes improved. Africans saw less to no hair fall when they opted for natural hair (Huebschmann, Campbell, Brown & Dunn, 2016).
7. The best of it all, a woman looks unique and beautiful. Accepting your natural self also boosts self-esteem. A person does not just look beautiful, they feel it as well.

**What Products to Use and What they are Good for**

To get a better insight on this I took an interview with the owner of a popular African American Salon. She said; in my opinion, there are many products that an individual has to invest in when going natural. They do not necessarily need to break the bank, they can be affordable options from the drugstore as well. Now that a person has decided to go natural they should start their hair journey by getting a good shampoo. Make sure that the shampoo that is being purchased is organic and does not contain any harsh ingredients. Secondly, since African American hair is coarse and can dry out easily it is necessary that a good conditioner and leave in conditioner is purchased. They should also be organic (Huebschmann, Campbell, Brown & Dunn, 2016). A deep conditioning mask that is all natural is required as well, which can be used once a while to hydrate and moisturize the hair.

Now that the washing part is over, it is time for the after washing hair care. A good leave-in conditioner and extra virgin cold pressed coconut oil is required to keep those curls bouncy, structured and stuff. A comb or a wet brush is the best bet to distribute the hair perfectly in the hair and end it all with a frizz control spray. After doing all these steps the hair can be left to air dry or it can be blow dried, but it is best if heat is avoided. However, if blow drying is done make sure to use a heat protect serum prior to exposing the hair to heat. Further, a good dry shampoo that can be purchased if there is an event ahead and there is no time to wash the hair. A hair detangling spray can be used so the brush smoothes out easily through the hair after using the dry shampoo. Ever since the natural hair trend started, the hair relaxant industry might have suffered a loss, but consumer consumption of various hair products has brought a rise in the purchase of hair care products (Johnson, 2016). Women and men have become very peculiar and aware of the products that they put on their hair. Whatever the case and the price tag natural products are appreciated and wanted.

**Product Usage**

The products that are mentioned above are easy to use as well according to the hair stylist I interviewed. It might seem like a hefty routine but do not get intimidated by it. It is not necessary nor recommended to follow the same routine on a daily basis, I know I will not be able to. So pick a day of the week and assign it to your hair, it can be the weekend. When showering start off by taking a dollop of shampoo on the palm, warm it up between the palms of the hand to activate the ingredients and lather the product in the hair. Gently massage on to the scalp so all the buildup from the week removes (Johnson, 2016). Wash the hair thoroughly till all the product removes. After that put on the conditioner on the ends of the night after towel drying so the product can soak up. Give it a good 5 to 10 minutes to sit in the hair then rinse it off as well. In the final step, put the hair treatment on towel dried hair again and let it sit as per instruction. Rinse it off and the washing part of the hair is over.

Now, coming to the next stuff. Come out of the shower and rub a few drops of extra virgin coconut oil or a leave-in hair conditioner on the roots of the hair. Make sure to not get any conditioner or oil in the scalp or it will get oily quickly. Use a wet brush to comb the hair and get rid of any tangles and finally spritz some frizz control hair spray. this is the part when the hair can be left to air dry or one can blow dry it depending on the choice. If that is done, make sure that a brush head is used with the blow dryer, so the hairdos do not get frizzy (Johnson, 2016). For the rest of the weekdays rock the beautiful afros and if things start to look oily, just use a dry shampoo on scalp massage a little and run a brush through them. If the hair is too tangled sprits a little hair detangle spray.

**Protective Styles and why they are Important**

I have always been intrigued and impressed by the intricacy of protective hairstyles. The way African Americans carry them is just mesmerizing. As per my observation, protective hairstyles are different than flaunting the natural hair, the hair is still natural, but it is molded beautifully in a protective hairstyle. The main purpose of the hairstyle is to conceal and protect the ends of the hair. The ends of the hair are the oldest parts of the hair strand and they need to be protected so they do not become brittle or break. The African Americans have started to tie their hair in protective hairstyles so their hair gets healthier and stays cared and guarded. There are many hairstyles like twists, dreadlocks, and braids that come in protective hairstyles. The possibilities when it comes to these hairstyles are endless (Cone, 2018). Some individuals go for a weave to further temper with the thickness and length with their hair while still protecting it.

These hairstyles are very important as they protect the hair and help it grow stronger. The hair texture, quality, strength, and length improve via these hairstyles. These hairstyles are the best bet for summer, as they help protect the hair from sun damage and humidity while keeping an individual stylish. The hair becomes less prone to breakage and the best part is an individual can have flaunted a beautiful and intricate hairstyle which flatters them. The hair stays protected and style is not compromised. A person can even support wigs and protect their whole scalp as well as the hair. There are a lot of options when it comes to protective hairstyles (Cone, 2018). Young celebrities like Zendaya and Alicia Keys have actually made the trend of protective hairstyles thrive further. Many people working in the salons claim that people come asking for hairdos just by the name of a celebrity instead of actually knowing the name of the hairstyle.

**How to Maintain Protective Styles to Avoid Damage**

Summer times ask for funky and interesting protective hairstyles. Most African hairstyles shine the brightest in spring and summers. Various twists, box braids, dreadlocks, and faux locks are one of the best ways to protect the hair from the humidity and heat damage. It is safe to say that even I at times go for something that is less fussy and passes the summer without redoing repeatedly. While protective hairstyles protect hair at the same time they can damage the hair as well, so, one needs to be careful. Consumers nowadays are said to follow patterns that they see other people doing. Make a celebrity do or follow something and the citizens mainly the youth will follow (Cone, 2018). Following are some of the dos and don’ts of the protective hairstyles by known celebrity artists.

1. A man at my local black salon said; I love the feeling of opening a loose braid. It is necessary that a person always detangles the hair with their fingers after opening a braid or taking out a weave, I always do. It will create lesser tension in the hair and they will not break. Further, using a detangling spray is a good option here.
2. Taking care of the scalp is key, make sure that all the buildup, flakes and dandruff has been removed from the hair. Hair scrubs are a great bet.
3. Deep conditioning or hair mask is very important as it will moisturize every single strand of the hair. Most African’s favorite would be coconut oil, natural yet impactful.
4. Getting rid of the dead ends can actually help the hair grow longer, it is essential to take away all the dead ends.
5. It is always good to let the hair breath, protective hairstyles can add extra tension and stress to the scalp. It is good to give the hair a chance to breathe after every protective hairstyle. Let the hair be in its natural state for a bit too.

**Trims, Stigmas Behind Them, Why they are Important**

A friend of mine from African roots said; growing up my mother would always tell me that how hair trims are key to maintain healthy hair, on the contrary, my aunt would tell me that it is a myth. This fact indeed has great stigma and doubt behind it. Well here is to burst the bubble, it is indeed a myth that hair trims will make the hair grow longer, in fact, they are just a way to make the clients rush to the parlors every few months. Payday for the hairdresser and a happy customer is the end result. However, trims might not help with the hair growth, but they do aid in keeping the hair healthy (Woolford, Woolford-Hunt, Sami, Blake & Williams, 2016). Trimming the hair helps with exposing the new healthy hair shaft and gets rid of the dead and split ends. So, one way or the other trims are important to keep the hair healthy.

**Preparations for the Salon Visit**

When going to the salon make sure that you always wash your hair prior to the visit that is what I have seen most African Americans did. Dress nicely so the service provider knows that you are here to impress, wear a little makeup too. Always tell the truth about your hair routine and keep realistic expectations. In fact, take a photo with you to show that what you want ((Woolford, Woolford-Hunt, Sami, Blake & Williams, 2016). The hairdresser is there to attend to your needs and satisfy you, listen to them but prioritize your wants.

**The Mindset Clients Enter the Salon With**

Being a client myself it is my personal experience that speaks that when a client enters a salon they start a consumer journey. It actually starts way before even entering the salon, when booking the appointment. There might be women and men who will look very confident but there is no doubt in the fact that they will be feeling intimidated and stressed. It is not easy letting the faith of your hair go in a single person's hand. Choosing the perfect hairdresser is very difficult. Things are even more complex for Africa Americans as a lot of them are not even sure that the salons will cater to their hair or not ((Woolford, Woolford-Hunt, Sami, Blake & Williams, 2016). Overall, it can be a nerve-wracking experience for the customer unless they have been regularly visiting that salon.

**Client’s Attitude towards their Stylists’ Opinions**

When it comes to African Americas, they can be particular about their grooming, but they do take the insight into the hairdresser as well. They mostly like to be in charge and are very vocal about how they want their hair. The hairdresser mostly just adds on to what slight changes can enhance the experience. However, the opinions are taken well as the hairdressers know how to deal with the African American hair, but they never imply.

**The Aftermath of an Undesired Protective Style**

As I have contemplated by looking at African Americans, there are certain things to be kept in mind when protective styling, there are chances that it can go wrong. The hairdo can cause stress and tension in the hair if it is very tight which can lead to breakage. Get It redone if that is the case and make sure that a specialist is approached. Further, in my experience the more a client tries to manipulate a protective hairstyle, the worst it gets. If per se, the protective hairdo is not up to your taste, try to put it in what they call a pineapple, or do a loose up do like a bun or a pony (Woolford, Woolford-Hunt, Sami, Blake & Williams, 2016). Excessive manipulation will ruin your hair. Further, be patient and always go to a professional to get the problem fixed instead of trying to fix it yourself.

**Why Clients Choose these Protective Styles**

In accordance with my observation, there is not just one but many reasons why the clients choose these hairstyles. They want to showcase the beauty of their heritage and culture. Other than that, the African Americans want to show that they are proud of their ethnicity and the way they look, it has political significance as well (Woolford, Woolford-Hunt, Sami, Blake & Williams, 2016). This is further to make the culture more widespread and show their youth the beauty of the African culture. It is more about showcasing strength and beauty.

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