Chasing Beautiful Hair Eurocentric Aesthetic exposed Racial Discrimination and Cultural Violence

[Author Name(s), First M. Last, Omit Titles and Degrees]

[Institutional Affiliation(s)]

Author Note

[Include any grant/funding information and a complete correspondence address.]

Chasing Beautiful Hair Eurocentric Aesthetic exposed Racial Discrimination and Cultural Violence

## Roots of black hair

For Black people, it was critical to introduce themselves to the White world and to shift these paradigms. Radicalism was required for the Black Power movement challenging perspectives about their own socio-political and cultural orientations. Black hair for African women has been an important factor in their development, and at the same time, this has caused pain for them. In Africa, black hair had made a positive impact on the development of the identity of individuals and societal functioning (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). They had to suffer from pain because of conforming the White supremacy in the United States. The sexist views about black women have been existing in American society, as Washington's pledge and negative behaviors towards black businesswoman, while these sexist remarks influenced them greatly. Based on the historical evidence, hair was a strategic mean of observation, competition, and participation. Black women slavery was one of the common activities that made the influence of females (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). They intended to use material left by the white mistress, and this material included their clothing, hair products that they have used to modify their hair, and historical portraits showed that they used to wear bandanas that were followed by agricultural and local workers did.

One of the historical perspectives was that their hair texture was important, and it weighted their opposite gender. Furthermore, skin complexion and hair texture were important to make relations. Some of the communities are deep-rooted about their hair length and textures that represented them in their communities. The 18th and 19th century was an era of hair modification of hair that was captured by architects (Tate, 2007). White people were able to exploit black people based on their hair color and textures, whereas they proved black people can be easily exploited. One of the major changes in basic assumptions among whites was headkerchief that emphasized on differentiating black people. The cultural aesthetics of blacks in white-dominated society was represented through clothing, color combinations, and garments (Patton, 2006). With the change in time, they were provided with certain opportunities, and that was a source to express their aesthetics. During this era, one of the most common trends was to straighten their hair, and this was a sign of flashiness in the Southern parts of the United States of America.

For African American individuals this was a layer during which they were able to present and introduce new styles, and they were able to remove the subtitles that were certain to black people. The supremacy of white people and their society was influential, and it influenced the opinions of the rest of society that included black people (Dash, 2006). The hair modification and aesthetics of individuals were based on hairstyling and clothing. Social comparison theory suggests that cognitive behavior and opinions of people are influenced because of other individuals and evaluations (Festinger, 1954). Black hair modification being influenced by white supremacy can be one of the examples for explaining the social comparison theory. Black people used to compare themselves with others and adopt those trends followed by the white elites for example bandanas. Black women compared themselves with the other white women and adopted the new trends and their clothing.

 African Americans used to compare themselves with whites, and this comparison included clothing, skin textures, hair length, and color. Individuals' perceptions were influenced by the collective behaviors of groups and members of society (Festinger, 1954). The perspectives about the modification of hair and skin textures were changed because of the dominance of white people in the United States. Comparison with others undermined the identity of black people, and as a result, white people were able to exploit them based on their hair color, skin textures, and clothing (Patton, 2006). This comparison was one of the reasons for the lack of confidence among black people unless they started different movements. The definitions of beauty by white people have to challenge black women throughout history.

Definitions of beauty varied from culture to culture in America, however, the definition of beauty is related to expectations. These definitions influenced people, and their identities especially among African American women. It was the psychology of black women that held different perspectives about their skin color, body images, and hair modifications. The Afrocentric and Standpoint theory helped to create an understanding of the different standards of beauty in the society of the United States of America (Musser, 2016). These suggested that all of the segments in society have contributed to setting the trends and making changes. Individual's perspectives and self-identities are changed because of the societal implications and influences, especially social identities. One of the critical to examine body appearances including hair, body image, and racial backgrounds is considered to be Afrocentric theory. Whereas, this is another source to redefine racial and marginalized beauty standard which most of the women felt. Beauty was a standard set by the elite class that was followed by the lower-class women and the color people (Bryant, 2013). However, beauty standards cannot be limited to only the society of America, China can be one of an example where beauty standards were being set with the help of their practices, and conformation of beauty standards in their patriarchal society.

Skin color and hair was one of the beauty standard set by the white people, and this was not a new trend because they have been set such standards hegemonically. These standards were problematic for American women because their hair color, and skin textures were completely different from white people. To meet such beauty standards black women were pressurized, and they had to change their appearance. To meet Eurocentric standards, they were supposed to change their physical appearance, while these changes in physic indirectly meant that "black is not beautiful"(Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly, 2018). The only way to be loved by someone else was to impress someone else. Historical evidence shows that slavery scarves were the only option to save themselves from such modifications and standards of beauty. Contrary, white beauty was not adhered to by any such standard because they were the trendsetters, and they used to introduce and define beauty trends. For white women, flat chest, hips, and buttocks were their beauty ideal, and that was reasons for warmer attentive behavior by their families.

# Modern Era

## Body Images and Women

Body image for decades has been one of the societal issues, on the other hand, beauty standards have also been set by women hegemonically. Euro-American body images can be one of the examples of body modifications and standards. Women in the past, to attain these beauty standards, they had to suffer from anorexia, breast cancer, bulimia, as well as psychological imbalances (Oyedemi, 2016). The struggle of Africans or black diaspora in both African and American societies relate to racist relegations, political revolts, and enslavement. Body images and attaining these standards resulted in different health and psychological issues among Euro American women and this was concerning issue, while black women were lesser likely to suffer from such issues (Ulmer, 2001). There were two different perspectives about the preferences of men, black women perceived that men prefer large women, whereas, white women used to perceive that men like ultra-thin bodies and they attract them more. Compared to women, men had not to modify their bodies, that is why their self-esteem was high, and they were more positive towards their body images.

 It is stated by young black women that they feel pressure when they think of body modifications to meet the beauty standards in Euro American societies. They believed that many of the risk factors of health are associated with these body modifications, and these standards were the reason for many body image issues. Furthermore, the media was also responsible to create a hype regarding these beauty standards that included hair, body image, and racial standards (Sekayi, 2003). There is a relationship between Black women with their hair that is rooted in their ages of slavery. The black community had to go through racial discrimination for a longer time in history. Glorified women in the media used to be of lighter skin, and they had straight and long hair. These were the result of both Euro American and African and American communities that made an impact and promoted beauty standards being set by the white people.

## Strategies and Challenges

In present times, these images are being presented to us with the help of media, again based on social comparison theory these make a huge impact on individuals who redefine these beauty standards(Powell, 2018). However, black women to change these beauty standards initiated to appreciate their body images and hairstyles. They started to promote their style hegemonically that helped them to showcase their creativity as well as their Black Beauty. One of the powerful movements raised by Black people is considered to be the Black Power movement, which aimed to remove all stereotypes and standards of beauty (Molloy & Herzberger, 1998). Whereas, these standards were defined by Euro Americans aesthetics. During the 1970s and 1980s, this movement dominated as a result of this, progressive changes were achieved (Koppelman, 1996). The white beauty standards became only a norm in Euro America, and throughout the past, African Americans have adopted resistive strategies. Black women throughout history have challenged the white beauty standards, and they have come up with creativity to define, and introduce black beauty that included their hair, skin tone, and their body images (Sanger, 2009). White hegemony is difficult when it comes to redefining and challenging definitions of beauty.

## Beauty Standards and Issues

White beauty standards have been problematic in terms of both physical and mental issues. It is stated that black women are more likely to suffer from these beauty standards by Europe, which includes hair, skin, and body modifications among black women.

Black women have been internalized through family systems, media, and society. Internalization resulted in the creation of self-identities, sexual behaviors, marital status, and psychological issues (Dash, 2006). European beauty standards have caused some of the damaging impacts on black women, and this resulted in self-hatred (Thompson, 2009). In short, it can be concluded that black women were prone to vulnerabilities of both mental and physical issues due to these beauty standards. They were differentiated on different platforms including education systems. While, providing more opportunities to black women may have resulted in failures starting from their early ages of development. Societal standards regarding beauty can play a vital role in the success of women to achieve better academic performances. Contrary, wrong media portrayals may also result in failures in particular to black women in academics or other spheres of life (Branchik & Davis, 2009). Therefore, it is important to consider that media, education systems, and other institutions may play an important part in the development of women especially stigmatized and segregated black women. Due to beauty standards by the European societies, self-hatred, negative thoughts about their identities, anger, and pain are caused among both black and white women because both are subjected to the notion of beauty standards.

Definitions of beauty have varied based on the time frames, and individualistic perceptions about the definitions of beauty also varied. It is observed that the beauty standards are defined by the media, informal conversations, and literature in the United States (White & White, 1995). The commercial messages are also a source to set the beauty standards and definitions. These definitions only focused on body types, because individuals, hair texture, skin tones, and body types which can be easily altered. However, the beauty standards set by Europe can be rejected which will result in psychological issues. Such rejections have negative implications in terms of the educational setting, and this may result in in-depth rooting in the psychological dysfunctions and moral and political indignation among people (Sanger, 2009). Educational platforms may help individuals with such issues, but they will have to follow the coping strategies themselves. Contrary, the resistance of aesthetic standards considered to be a process rather than an event. Schools are considered to be such platforms that are gender blind, and they are said to be race-neutral.

## White Supremacy and Market Activism

In the present epoch, schools can be used as a source that will manifest anti-Blackness. Contrary, modifying black hair is one type of racism and discrimination against black women. Black hair considered to be a source they may encourage racism, and this cannot be denied, while these black hair become an integral source of social control. White supremacy has always been dominant, and this has subjected black people to be subordinates so that white supremacists may be able to maintain a status quo. Black aesthetics in the Eurocentric context has been a huge constraint for black people and they have to suffer from pain. It is a notion that, if the hair of black people remains relaxed then it means that white people will also remain relaxed (Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly, 2018). Before the beginning of the United States Civil War, the African American elite market part emerged. The purpose of this market segment was to look for opportunities in the market for the specific color of people (Sekayi, 2003). This market segment believed that opportunities were important for the development of individuals as well as for their societies and economies. This market segment comprised of the middle, lower, and upper classes that emphasized the economic resources in terms of consumption opportunities. Regardless of the lack of opportunities made available for the middle class, their population increased rapidly in the United States of America (Fair, 2018). It is undeniable that practices in history including slavery, racism, segregation, and discrimination have been painful and anti-developmental for black people. But black people have tremendously practiced their standards and created a market place activism in different market segments.

## Discrimination and violence

Beauty standards by the Europeans have been a cause of pain for black people in the past. Beauty standards have been most challenging to them because this has resulted in violence, racism, segregation, and discrimination of black people on different market segments.

Beauty standards in terms of hair straightening are considered to be a functionality of capitalism and this capitalism is a violent system by its nature in society. In the present era, hair straightening has become a source to earn billions for the market segments. Hairdressing and straightening is not only a chemical threat, but this has also caused physical violence. As a result of this violence and discrimination, black women realized to be more powerful, and they learned to be heterosexual (Dash, 2006). However, the media sources have been portraying a racial image of black women in front of the public. Due to these media portrayals and violence, racial discrimination has increased, while, white women are being appreciated and considered to be ideal by different media sources (Versey, 2014).

# Antiracism and impacts

With the shift in parading and struggle of black people, they are being able to make changes in the definitions of the beauty standards set by the white people in the Euro America. One of the most powerful impacts may be considered to be the Black Power movement, such movements along with Afrocentric perspectives have helped people to cope with the cultural violence that promotes beauty standards and supports the definitions by white supremacy (Dawson & Karl, 2018). However, educational platforms and market places are also considered to be the sources to redefine the definitions of beauty. When it comes to cultural violence, women’s hair has been a source of punishment for them, they had to cut their hair as a punishment, and they were targeted because of their hair color (Rocha et al., 2016). However, the most common thing is that black hair has been a symbol to act against the oppression of black people. With the time passage, women of black color have learned the political definitions of beauty in the United States of America, and they have transformed their pain into a positive change by challenging white supremacy (Gillam, 2017).

# Conclusion

It is to be concluded that, white supremacy has been prominent in the United States of America. While, Black people can be considered to be underprivileged people who had to suffer from both psychological and physical pain. The reason for this psychological and physical pain was the body modifications made by the white people in the past. White people defined body images, hair, and skin color modifications. It is evident from the history that, white people enslaved black people, where they used to adopt and used the material left by the white people. White people made definitions of beauty, and they set standards for style. They believed that men get attracted by the flat body, and for that purposes body modifications were important.

While, on the other hand, Black women believed that larger bodies impress men that is why they do not need to make anybody change, and modifications including their hairs, skin, and their weight. Hair was meant to be one of the standards for the beauty of white people. For black people, black hair, and their skin texture was a cause of pain in society. The reason for this is, they were segregated and discriminated based on their skin and hair color. Racial discrimination was one of the most common issues and misbehavior of the Eurocentric society with white supremacy. However, black people were at least able to oppose white supremacy. Black Power movement is one of the best examples of resisting oppression and racial discrimination, and cultural violence's by white people. Media and market were also the sources to promote the beauty standards at that time. These promoted beauty standards and this also resulted to make changes in the hair of black women, from example making changes to straight hair from curly hair. This may have been painful because they challenged their identities. Cultural violence in the sense that, women had to go through all of the criticisms about their hair color as well as their skin textures, and this was also a reason for their disintegration. However, black women since decades have been struggling to fight back with these racial discriminations and cultural violence by redefining the standards of beauty. They have continued their identity but it is important to remember that, they also had to suffer from pain because their identities were threatened. Identity crisis in terms of black women means that they had to follow the beauty ideals being set by white women in Eurocentric aesthetics.

Branchik, B. J., & Davis, J. F. (2009). Marketplace activism: a history of the African American elite market segment. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *29*(1), 37–57.

Bryant, S. L. (2013). *The beauty ideal: the effects of European standards of beauty on Black women*.

Byrd, A., & Tharps, L. (2014). *Hair story: Untangling the roots of Black hair in America*. Macmillan.

Dash, P. (2006). Black hair culture, politics and change. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *10*(1), 27–37.

Dawson, G., & Karl, K. (2018). I am not my Hair, or am I? Examining Hair Choices of Black Female Executives. *Journal of Business Diversity*, *18*(2).

Fair, F. (2018). Subject/Object/Body: Recent Perspectives on Beauty and Aesthetics in Gender Studies. *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*, *46*(1), 215–220.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, *7*(2), 117–140.

Gillam, R. (2017). All Tangled Up: Intersecting Stigmas of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Mariana Rondón’s Bad Hair. *Black Camera*, *9*(1), 47–61.

Joseph-Salisbury, R., & Connelly, L. (2018). ‘If your hair Is relaxed, white people are relaxed. If your hair is nappy, they’re not happy’: Black hair as a site of ‘post-racial’social control in English schools. *Social Sciences*, *7*(11), 219.

Koppelman, C. (1996). The politics of hair. *Frontiers*, *17*(2), 87.

Molloy, B. L., & Herzberger, S. D. (1998). Body image and self-esteem: A comparison of African-American and Caucasian women. *Sex Roles*, *38*(7–8), 631–643.

Musser, A. J. (2016). Black Hair and Textures of Defensiveness. *Palimpsest*, *5*(1), 1–19.

Oyedemi, T. (2016). Beauty as violence:‘beautiful’hair and the cultural violence of identity erasure. *Social Identities*, *22*(5), 537–553.

Patton, T. O. (2006). Hey girl, am I more than my hair?: African American women and their struggles with beauty, body image, and hair. *NWSA Journal*, 24–51.

Powell, C. (2018). Bias, Employment Discrimination, and Black Women’s Hair: Another Way Forward. *BYU L. Rev.*, 933.

Rocha, A. R., Schott, C., & Casotti, L. (2016). Socialization of the Black Female Consumer: Power and Discourses in Hair-Related Consumption. *ACR North American Advances*.

Sanger, N. (2009). New women, old messages? Constructions of femininities, race and hypersexualised bodies in selected South African magazines, 2003–2006. *Social Dynamics*, *35*(1), 137–148.

Sekayi, D. (2003). Aesthetic resistance to commercial influences: The impact of the Eurocentric beauty standard on Black college women. *Journal of Negro Education*, 467–477.

Tate, S. (2007). Black beauty: Shade, hair and anti-racist aesthetics. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *30*(2), 300–319.

Thompson, C. (2009). Black women, beauty, and hair as a matter of being. *Women’s Studies*, *38*(8), 831–856.

Ulmer, C. (2001). Beauty Matters, and: Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, & Black Women’s Consciousness, and: The Face of Our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present. *NWSA Journal*, *13*(2), 196–200.

Versey, H. S. (2014). Centering perspectives on Black women, hair politics, and physical activity. *American Journal of Public Health*, *104*(5), 810–815.

White, S., & White, G. (1995). Slave hair and African American culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *The Journal of Southern History*, *61*(1), 45–76.